

AUZOLANA II COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT EXPERIENCE

[EVALUATION REPORT]

[EXECUTIVE SUMMARY]

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AUZOLANA II: SUMMARY EVALUATION

In 2016, amid an international context heavily affected by the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the United Nations General Assembly approved the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The declaration brought forward a series of commitments which sought to facilitate the lives of migrants and refugees and to support countries of origin and host communities. The commitments resulted in the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, both approved in December 2018. This was the UN's response to several humanitarian crises which had led to the greatest displacement of people in search of international protection since the Second World War.

Among the tools set out in the Global Compact on Refugees, resettlement programmes are presented as durable solutions enabling refugees in vulnerable situations to be resettled in a safe third country where they will be supported to ensure their safety and integration in the host community. The compact also points to the need for complementary pathways which use innovative and novel approaches to boost the number of people supported in different countries.

Community sponsorship is one such durable solution for supporting and accommodating refugees, via private sponsorship groups, various organisations or entities that specifically support vulnerable people. These groups constitute the source of financial support and basic assistance for refugees following their arrival, and therefore bring high added value to the programme. In view of the added value of this instrument, the **Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative** (GRSI) was launched to promote community sponsorship as a pathway for supporting refugees who require protection, to consolidate the role of states, administrations, civil society stakeholders and individuals, and to mobilise all of these in support of refugee protection.

The Basque Government has launched the **Auzolana II** pilot community sponsorship initiative in the Basque Country as part of its commitment to refugees. The **Evaluation Report on the Auzolana II Pilot Community Sponsorship Experience**, the key points of which are set out in this executive summary¹, identifies lessons learnt and areas of improvement not just to strengthen Auzolana II but to contribute to expanding community sponsorship as an instrument for protecting refugees.

Auzolana II is the embodiment of the explicit commitment of the Basque Government to seek alternatives for the admission and integration of refugees in the region. It is the first multilevel collaboration experience for the admission and integration of refugees in Spain, and the first to directly engage organised civil society. The ini-

¹ This evaluation has examined the approach, structure and development of Auzolana II during its first year of operation. The methodology is referenced in the appendices to the final evaluation report.

tiative fits into the international web of similar initiatives supported by the UNHCR, together with the Government of Canada and other institutions, under the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI).

Patrocinio comunitario como parte del programa de reasentamiento estatal

- En la mayoría de países, el patrocinio comunitario es complementario al sistema de reasentamiento estatal. En este caso, es una iniciativa dentro del programa de reasentamiento estatal.

Una colaboración público-privada de carácter subestatal

- En la experiencia se ha desarrollado una colaboración interadministrativa, y se ha contado con la participación de actores públicos y privados, además de sociedad civil.

Impulso, coordinación y seguimiento por parte del Gobierno Vasco

- El nivel de implicación de las autoridades varía en los distintos programas. Pocas iniciativas de patrocinio comunitario cuentan con la participación directa de autoridades subestatales.

Financiación mixta

- En la mayoría de proyectos de patrocinio comunitario, los recursos son proporcionados por las entidades y/o los grupos de personas voluntarias. En este caso, el Gobierno Vasco también contribuye económicamente, y con otros recursos de apoyo.

Selección previa de las entidades

- En algunas iniciativas, la selección de las entidades participantes es posterior, una vez las mismas han expresado su interés en participar.

Un proceso de acompañamiento más largo

- En este caso, se ha optado por un programa de dos años, que abarca un periodo más amplio que otros casos de patrocinio comunitario.

Auzolana II is a pilot experience and has not increased the number of vacancies for refugees in Spain. Rather, participants were referred from the national resettlement programme. Future versions of the initiative should ensure that community sponsorship is complementary to the national system. The pilot experience also seeks to inspire other autonomous communities to develop their own community sponsorship initiatives in collaboration with the central government and their own local entities and communities.

Refugees participating in Auzolana II receive the same international protection status as those participating in the resettlement programme and have the right to join the latter if, for any reason, community sponsorship were not to function correctly. The five families selected for Auzolana II remain part of the experience and are active participants.

Thanks to the support of the Basque Government and of the entities charged with coordinating and monitoring the pilot experience – Cáritas Euskadi (in Bilbao, Andoain and Vitoria-Gasteiz) and the Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation (in Arrigorriaga and Portugalete) – five local volunteer groups (with part-time support from a trained social worker) have received and helped integrate the refugees.

The following is a summary of some of the main features of Auzolana II:

Governance. Auzolana II is governed by a collaboration agreement signed by all participating stakeholders (central government, Basque Government, the UNHCR and the sponsorship entities) and which sets out their responsibilities in each phase. The agreement is an example of inter-administrative collaboration and develops instruments for coordinating and monitoring the experience. The Monitoring Committee, established in the agreement as an instrument for coordinating the stakeholders, has operated correctly. However, the local coordination panels, which were intended to support collaborations with the host municipalities, have not been fully developed.

Promoting entities. The promoting entities in Auzolana II were involved from the outset via a closed selection process. Future versions should ideally use an open process which sets out the eligibility requirements and exclusion criteria. Each institution could have its own agreement, with provisions to ensure that all meet a set of minimum requirements. A handbook for the sponsorship entities could be a good way of improving the identification and selection process.

In this first version, the sponsorship entities (Cáritas Euskadi and the Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation) have met the requirements around experience, specific knowledge, broad support and proximity to the host community. They also met the minimum criteria in relation to human and financial resources and housing availability for the participating families.

Local support groups. The sponsorship entities have looked after training for volunteer groups and supported these to coordinate and manage all their community sponsorship activity. A volunteer handbook could help strengthen the project. Likewise, the know-how and experience of groups that have already participated should be exploited. Future versions should consider what requirements may be placed on volunteers and the option of a signed volunteer commitment to guarantee and formalise their participation.

The groups have been supported by a part-time trained social worker. The group members are from the local region and have a variety of profiles (sex, age, education, profession, etc.). This has facilitated and enriched the internal dynamics of the groups and their interaction with the families. Volunteers are key to the success of any community sponsorship project. Any space or instrument that strengthens their commitment, draws upon their experience or offers them support should be explored and improved.

Process. Auzolana II comprises a first phase prior to the arrival of the refugees and a second phase which implements the various community sponsorship actions.

Pre-arrival, at point of origin. The participating families should be properly informed at the point of origin about their participation in a community sponsorship programme, including information about the benefits and the challenges they may face. Pre-arrival orientation courses should be adapted for participants of community sponsorship. As far as possible, detailed information should be provided about the host municipality. This helps manage expectations and alleviates some of the

worries that are inherent to any process of resettlement. Prior communication between the volunteer groups and the participants should be encouraged, wherever possible (EMN 2016).

Pre-arrival, in host community. The local support groups receive information and basic training about community sponsorship. It would be interesting to explore complementary training (intercultural skills, for example) which could support their work. The local support groups receive basic information about the refugee families. This should be improved to enable tailoring of the group composition and of priority actions for when the families arrive.

Reception, accommodation and integration. Reception of the refugees at the airport constitutes the first meeting between the local support groups and the families. Professional translators should be involved in the reception and initial accommodation process to ensure that dialogue and trust are established as soon as possible.

From that point on, the volunteers take charge of helping, supporting and facilitating the participation of the refugee family in their new community and in assisting them with all day-to-day matters. This includes administrative matters (registration on the local register of residents, residence permits, health card, etc.) as well as access to services (education, health, professional training, etc.) and leisure spaces (local knowledge, activities, etc.). The local support groups in Auzolana II have been highly engaged and have organised themselves, with the support and collaboration of social work professionals, to assist and address the needs of the refugee families at all times. Despite the huge impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experience, the local support groups have shown a commendable capacity for adapting and finding resources to successfully overcome this uncertain situation.

In Auzolana II, host communities have mainly been prepared via the local support group and its core network of contacts, which is usually broad. However, work should be done to consolidate interaction between the community sponsorship initiative and local authorities, social entities in the municipality and local people in general. Awareness-raising and providing information about asylum and refuge, conflicts or human rights, and generating discussion spaces which foster empathy, solidarity and respect for fundamental rights, are also objectives of community sponsorship programmes.

Beyond Auzolana II. Community sponsorship seeks to facilitate and strengthen the autonomy and freedom of the refugee families so that they can become an active part of their communities as soon as possible. It is therefore essential to include elements which facilitate this autonomy from the outset, and to seek alternatives in the event that full autonomy is not reached by the end of the project.

Figure 1. Auzolana II: summary evaluation

General questions	Considerations
Strong institutional commitment driven by the General Secretariat for Human Rights, Coexistence and Cooperation of the Basque Government.	Turning the initiative into a structural programme.
Strengthening the public message around protection of the right to asylum and of the human rights of refugees.	Improving information about, and visibility of, the experience.
Pilot experience to complement the national resettlement programme.	Vacancies for refugees in the pilot were subtracted from the national programme. This should be rectified so as to align with the definition of sponsorship as a complementary pathway.
Hybrid community sponsorship system. This is a feature of the pilot experience.	The Basque administration's involvement makes it a key driving stakeholder and a nexus between the central administration and social entities.
Design of the community sponsorship programme in the Basque Country	Good planning of the initiative in terms of defining objectives, processes, stakeholders, resources and identifying needs relative to community sponsorship.
Inter-administrative cooperation	Good cooperation between the central and Basque administrations. The municipalities have improved dialogue, participation and collaboration with respect to town halls.
Public-private initiative	The social commitment of various stakeholders has been strengthened. Could explore the possibility of supporting initiatives taken forward by other autonomous communities (replication) and increasing the number of social stakeholders involved.
Advance selection of social entities to promote community sponsorship.	Advance selection has ensured the participation of entities with experience, resources and support, all of which are key to successful community sponsorship. If replicating the model, an open selection process should be undertaken with minimum requirements for the sponsorship entities to prevent problems and improve transparency.
Consolidating procedures and adapting instruments to take the pilot experience further.	Requires a different administrative approach if the programme becomes structural.

Pre-arrival	Considerations
Successful selection and creation of the group of sponsors, mainly due to their link with the sponsorship entities.	<p>Ensuring diversity of profiles (ages, sex, training, etc.), prioritising residence in the host region, and assessing knowledge of languages (of origin).</p> <p>Exploring the requirement for a long-term commitment by the volunteers, and which requirements can be stipulated.</p>
Prioritising and consolidating training on admission and community sponsorship for volunteers.	<p>Improving prior training and exploring complementary training (intercultural skills, countries of origin, etc.).</p> <p>The Basque administration should prepare a handbook to support volunteers</p>
Planning of services: preparing and identifying needs.	Good identification of needs and good distribution of work areas (among the local support groups).
Planning of services: areas of improvement.	<p>Exploring the provision of more specialist services with the local administration and other entities in the region.</p> <p>More emphasis on issues concerning equality between men and women.</p> <p>Foster actions to disseminate and raise awareness about community sponsorship, asylum and refuge, and about human rights in general.</p>
Information and interaction at the point of origin.	<p>Better information at point of origin to refugees about community sponsorship – stressing its added value – and about the host society.</p> <p>Facilitate at least a first contact between the volunteers and the refugees before they arrive.</p>
Arrival and initial accommodation	Considerations
Provision of services: areas of improvement	<p>Improve the information that the sponsorship entities receive about the refugees.</p> <p>Ensure the provision of professional translation services when the refugees first arrive.</p>
Housing	Monitor the availability of flats in the host region as this may determine the ability of the participants to remain there (and may impact their integration and inclusion).
Support and monitoring mechanisms for volunteers.	Create spaces for dialogue around expectations, doubts and other considerations for groups of volunteers. Exploit the know-how of people who have taken part in Auzolana II for future versions.

Integration and inclusion	Considerations
Provision of services: Good planning in the various work areas.	<p>Actions around educational support, administrative support, health support, language training and professional training were implemented correctly.</p> <p>Key role of volunteers. Care should be taken to avoid overloading volunteers and to improve communication and connections with existing public services in the region.</p>
Provision of services: areas of improvement.	<p>Explore the possibilities for in-year registration for specific courses (particularly languages).</p> <p>Improve collaboration with local public services (career support, for example).</p> <p>Incorporate continuous evaluation mechanisms.</p>
Strengthen refugees' social networks.	Look beyond the sponsorship entities and volunteers. Facilitate social interaction for refugee families based on their interests (PTAs, leisure, etc.).
Support their autonomy beyond Auzolana II.	Strengthen instruments to ensure autonomy is reached. Link with other social support programmes (income support).

Figure 2. Key questions when comparing a community sponsorship programme: Auzolana II

Lasting solution	Does the programme afford permanent protection and a means of raising awareness among local people?
Settlement needs	Does the programme meet the specific needs of refugees?
Perspective of the refugees	Do the refugees themselves have a positive experience of the programme? Assesses the ability of the programme to preserve refugees' dignity and help them achieve their goals, its capacity to reestablish the social roles they had prior to the conflict and to foster positive relationships with sponsors and the host community.
Integration outcome	Is the outcome of the programme better, the same or worse than for other government programmes to support refugees? The clearest benefit of community sponsorship is that it facilitates better integration and inclusion in the host society so that refugees become self-sufficient as quickly as possible.
Resettlement of vulnerable refugees	Does the programme help to resettle the most vulnerable people?
Scale	How many refugees can be resettled through the programme?
Complementarity	Does the community sponsorship programme replace the government resettlement programme? Community sponsorship is a complementary instrument that does not substitute national resettlement programmes.
Public opinion and welcoming communities	Does the programme promote positive public opinion and strengthen community acceptance of refugees and of the concepts of asylum and refuge?
Civil society mobilisation	Does the programme effectively mobilise diverse residents and communities (generalist, specific, etc.)?
Sustainability	Is there sufficient interest from sponsors and from the government to sustain the programme in the long term?
Efficiency of the process	Is the process clear, efficient, fair and transparent? Bureaucratic delays, rejections of private sponsors or lack of transparency in granting international protection status are some of the matters that should be examined in this sense.
Guarantees	Are there sufficient guarantees when it comes to protecting refugees and holding sponsors accountable? Ongoing monitoring of public authorities is necessary to prevent controversies, given the increased interest in these sorts of programmes and the growing number of sponsors.
Experience of sponsorship groups	Do the sponsorship groups or individuals receive sufficient support and training to enable them to exercise their role again?
Family reunification	Does the programme help to reunify separated families? Programmes with this specific objective have been established in Canada, Germany and New Zealand.
Global context	Does the programme focus on 'high profile' populations at the expense of other refugees? There is a risk that community sponsorship programmes may under-serve other people in need of international protection, creating disparities between the services provided by these programmes and others.

Application of the McNally 2020 model for Auzolana II.

