



# Call Summary: COVID & Sponsorship

25 MARCH 2020

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On 25 March 2020, the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub, a partner of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), hosted a global virtual convening of sponsorship actors to exchange updates and ideas about how the sponsorship ecosystem can respond to the COVID-19 health crisis.

More than 100 participants from 15 countries joined the call. Below are key points that were raised during the call:

## Situation Pre-COVID-19

- The GRSI was actively working in over 20 countries. At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, the GRSI celebrated 11 countries who were publicly designing or implementing sponsorship programs. Hundreds of thousands of sponsors were mobilized, with numbers growing every day.

## Effects of COVID-19 on resettlement

- Joint Statement issued by IOM & UNHCR on **temporary suspension of resettlement departures** in response to restrictions in international travel & border closures.
- **Reception capacity:** Infrastructure for reception is also being challenged in the context of emergency departures which are still ongoing where possible. Need to consider what type of assistance is available to refugees on the receiving end, and ensure it remains accessible, welcoming, and compassionate.
- Because **physical access to refugees in host countries is restricted**, a number of UNHCR offices are working through backlogs and continuing to refer cases where possible but over those backlogs will run dry. Looking at remote technologies to resume interviews.

## Effects of COVID-19 on sponsorship

- The GRSI's **3 main objectives** (growing resettlement opportunities for refugees; strengthening communities; changing the narrative) remain salient in this new environment.
- The moment we are in is disorienting but also profoundly transformational. Community support will be critical to **meeting immediate needs** in the context of social distancing while also **preparing for the re-opening** of the resettlement system.

## Opportunities for response, mitigation, preservation, and growth

- Leveraging the kindness emerging in communities to build sponsorship;
- Helping to direct mobilized sponsorship efforts toward more immediate needs;



- Communicating to sponsors in waiting & maintaining interest;
- Communicating with and supporting sponsors with immediate needs relating to recently arrived refugees or sponsorships-in-progress: how to sponsor in an era of social distancing;
- Developing and delivering training remotely;
- Developing effective communications tools for sponsor mobilization;
- Questions on government capacity and practical challenges in this moment at various stages: design, pilot delivery, implementation, scaling, evaluation;
- Using time to undergo policy design & review work at the government level;
- Keeping vulnerable sponsors safe & equipped – *e.g.* supporting elderly sponsors to socially isolate while helping them adapt to technological tools they may not have been well versed in;
- Propagating positive stories about communities helping refugees; refugees helping communities; sponsorship in time of COVID;
- Keeping processing (*e.g.* refugee interviews) going using remote tools;
- Supporting refugees ready to travel but stuck – language training, helping cope with food insecurity, etc.

## Next steps

- The GRSI will prepare a workshop series to enable deeper dives into the issues and opportunities raised, and develop a web portal to enable exchange of ideas, resources, tools, positive stories, and more.