

GRSI COVID Response Series: Outcomes

Global Sponsorship Call

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29 // 15:30 – 17:30 EST

57 participants from **11 countries** joined this global sponsorship call, the second in the GRSI COVID Response Series. The call was a reconvening of the global sponsorship community: an opportunity to take stock and share key learnings from the past month of workshops; hear updates around the world; and collectively explore next steps for the global sponsorship community.

Below, we outline key issues, ideas and strategies explored during the call.

1. Building community in the time of COVID

COVID has demonstrated that we are not safe unless all of us are safe. These convenings of the global network of sponsorship actors highlight the fact that we are inextricably intertwined from the local to the global. While there are endless challenges to be faced—particularly global economic decline—the time of reopening is fast approaching, and this brings with it a sense of regeneration and new beginnings. While challenging, the COVID crisis has deepened community relationships all around the world, and the sponsorship sector needs to take advantage of this momentum. While noting that we must remain sensitive to the different concerns of societies, contributors agreed that the sponsorship community needs to demonstrate an unwavering conviction to the mission of supporting refugees.

2. The political and economic considerations of COVID

While the political landscape has historically been the prime factor of uncertainty in refugee resettlement, COVID has added economic and emotional uncertainty to the mix. Conditions long taken for granted, such as 11 years of global economic expansion and record low rates of unemployment, are no longer norms.

In the short term, there is a need to focus on assisting those who cannot access social supports in their country of origin, their country of asylum, or undocumented migrants living in the global north. In the medium term, countries need to address continuing COVID infections, while also considering when and how restrictions to resettlement will be lifted. In the longer term, there will be continuing political and economic uncertainty. In particular, the world's economy has experienced an unprecedented shut down, and this is likely to have far reaching economic impacts around the world. A world in which there is 20% unemployment versus 4% unemployment creates a vastly different operating environment for sponsors, funders, and accessing economic and educational pathways to resettlement.

COVID has also demonstrated the scores of undervalued professions that have proven to be crucial to the day-to-day functioning of our societies. Contributors noted that millions of workers

in essential services in EU countries are migrants from outside the EU, and that, if even a small percentage of these roles were filled by refugees, this would be a significant outcome for refugee resettlement.

Some contributors noted that sponsorship could be an important tool in responding to the economic crisis. For example, the diversification of resettlement pathways could be used to meet labour needs in certain economies, while educational pathways to resettlement could meet the needs of universities struggling to meet international student enrollment numbers. The University Corridors for Refugee Students in Ethiopia ([UNI-CO-RE](#)) program in Italy is one example of educational pathways being successfully utilised for refugee resettlement.

3. Sponsorship is as relevant as ever

COVID has allowed many people the time and capacity to be creative in their support of community sponsorship and refugees more generally. For example, some sponsorship groups have supported refugees released from detention, while others have assisted asylum seekers in their community. Meanwhile, the global sponsorship network has been able to come together and strategize innovative steps forward. This is an important opportunity for sponsors to listen and learn from refugees who are experts in building and sustaining community in austere conditions, and from a distance.

As we shift into the second phase of COVID crisis response, sponsorship continues to be relevant in several ways:

1. Sponsorship offers valuable space to continue resettlement at a time when state resources are constrained.
2. Sponsorship is an important model of individualised and decentralised social support at a time when centralised supports are overstretched.
3. Sponsorship provides an important opportunity to share positive narratives on refugees and migration more generally.
4. Sponsorship represents an unrivaled opportunity for investigating and diversifying resettlement pathways, by meeting community needs with refugee resettlement (i.e. labour and higher education cohorts).

Next Steps

A number of collective actions for the global sponsorship community were identified:

1. Undertake capacity building during COVID, and tool-up for post-COVID mobilization activities.
2. Develop a blueprint for sponsorship in the coming new economic environment.
3. Grow the evidence base and increase data collection to showcase the benefits of community sponsorship.
4. Develop a deeper understanding of how sponsorship can counter negative migration narratives and political polarization.