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## Strangers to Neighbours: Refugee Sponsorship in Context

Parisa Azari<sup>a</sup>

### BOOK REVIEW

*Strangers to Neighbours: Refugee Sponsorship in Context*. Edited by Shauna Labman and Geoffrey Cameron. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020, 337 pp.  
ISBN: 978-02280-0136-2 (cloth), 978-02280-0136-9 (paper).

HISTORY Published 2023-12-13

**Strangers to Neighbours** analyzes refugee sponsorship as a unique Canadian resettlement model in which small groups of individuals and community organizations undertake the provision of financial and emotional support to refugees following their arrival to Canada. This edited volume offers a cross-disciplinary and comprehensive look at the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugee (PSR) program. The book is divided between a historical context, a section on Canadian practices of private sponsorship, an overview of the challenges in sponsors' and refugees' relations, and a comparative analysis of similar policies in other regions.

In the introduction, the editors shed light on the background and legislative foundations of refugee resettlement post-Second World War, when millions of displaced people were residing in camps and waiting to be resettled. Part 1 begins with the narrative history of Canadian immigration policy between the 1940s and 1970s when humanitarian and religious groups played a critical role in refugees' selection criteria. Beyond the Indo-Chinese movement, in Chapter 2,

Lehr and Dyck demonstrate the challenges of the "naming principle" as a characteristic of the PSR program, which allows sponsors to select refugees for resettlement. They open discussions about the sponsors' motivations and how significantly the ability to select refugees is affected by the context of family reunifications. In Chapter 3, Lenard steps away and provides an interesting normative analysis of how sponsors need to think about selecting refugees. She defends a modified scheme in which sponsors are limited to select from the most vulnerable refugees who are referred by the UNHCR for resettlement. In this scheme, the admission system for family reunification is separated from resettlement spots; thus, sponsors' contributions would be considered a matter of justice, not charity works. Finally, in Chapter 4, Bradley and Duin address two connected challenges associated with the PSR and resettlement regime: first, the neglect of responsibility towards other displaced people, including asylum seekers and internally displaced persons; and second, the prioritization of high-profile populations such as Syrian refugees, which

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causes resettlement to be framed as a strategic response rather than an ad hoc solution.

In Part 2, Chapters 5 and 6 detail findings of community-based research on the historical roots of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario and Operation Ezra as a Winnipeg Jewish sponsorship coalition for refugee support. MCC has played a substantial role in engaging local churches in refugee resettlement. Operation Ezra also assisted Yazidi refugees who were forced to flee after the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant attacks in the northern part of Iraq. Following the role of sponsorship organizations, in Chapter 7, McNally investigates the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) stream as a cost-sharing model between the Canadian government and community sponsors. She demonstrates the framework, benefits, and experiences of the BVOR program through a case study in rural Nova Scotia. In Chapter 8, Coffin-Karlin examines the role of social media postings in the engagement of Canadian private sponsors to support Syrian refugees, especially after Allan Kurdi's death went viral. She also investigates Canadian experiences in the #WelcomeRefugees movement and the Ripple Refugee Project for Syrian refugees.

Part 3 of the book insists on the social and legal challenges of the PSR program. In Chapter 9, Macklin et al. delve into sponsor-refugee relationship challenges and the "kinship analogy" in the contexts of refugees' power, independence, and autonomy from the sponsors' perspective. Following this research analysis, in Chapter 10, Kyriakides et al. focus on the transactions of worth and challenges of successful resettlement based on pre-arrival contact in interactions between a sponsor and the sponsored. Along with social challenges, in Chapter 11, Lange outlines the initiative of the Refugee Sponsorship Support Program, which offered pro bono legal assistance to support refugees and

sponsor groups. Thériault, in Chapter 12, flips the focus to the operation of judicial review and case rejections in Canada's resettlement program.

The volume's final part provides comparative studies between the Canadian PSR and other regions' sponsorship programs, including those in the United States, Australia, and Europe. In Chapter 13, Harding and Libal examine the role of community co-sponsorship groups in collaboration with resettlement organizations in enhancing interactions between refugees and local communities. Vogl et al., in Chapter 14, explore the term "**community**" in Australia's sponsorship schemes and the differences between the Canadian PSR and the contemporary Australian program recognized as the Community Support Program. In Chapter 15, Smith provides a critical analysis of understanding the export of the Canadian Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative to European Union member states' resettlement policies. He mainly focuses on the barriers and differences between the Canadian PSR model and the European political and institutional resettlement context in responding to the refugee crisis.

**Strangers to Neighbours** highlights different aspects of sponsorship programs, from their historical origins and religious coalitions' contribution to the transition procedure of refugees to potential citizens. Contributors to this volume provide legal, social, and ethical analyses of Canada's PSR experiences to draw a broader picture of the program's framework and challenges. Still, further research is required to address responsibility-sharing and the benefit of sponsorship for highly populated host countries, which face critical challenges in the governance of forced migration. As Labman notes in the conclusion, although the Canadian sponsorship program has received

worldwide attention as an innovative model, the program's sustainability and success in addressing protection needs remain unclear. The volume mainly reflects policy-makers' and sponsors' perspectives about the sponsorship pathway rather than refugees' experiences, particularly regarding the post-resettlement and resilience of sponsored refugees in coping in and with the Canadian community. When it comes to integrating sponsored refugees, considering the role of local organizations providing services such as language training, health care, and job market preparation would be an asset. More so, the book lacks an overview of other programs, including the Joint Assistant Sponsorship and Rainbow Refugee Assis-

tance Partnership programs. Nevertheless, in response to providing cohesive research and analytical literature about private sponsorship, this volume is undoubtedly an invaluable resource for scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners interested in the resettlement of refugees.

## REFERENCES

Labman, S., & Cameron, G. (Eds.). (2020). *Strangers to Neighbours: Refugee Sponsorship in Context* (337 pp.). McGill-Queen's University Press.



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