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Framing Community Sponsorship in the context of the UK's hostile environment

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Abstract

The launch of the private sponsorship scheme, Community Sponsorship (CS), allowing individuals to resettle refugees in the UK, seems to be in contrast with the government's approach towards immigration aimed to implement the hostile environment policy. Using frame analysis, this research looks at the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framings used by policymakers in parliamentary debates related to CS to understand how the scheme and the hostile environment coexist. The findings show how the used frames allow the government to manage refugee resettlement more as a tool of migration management rather than exclusively as a tool of international protection, and how this strategy implements the UK's hostile environment.

Key words

Community Sponsorship, frame analysis, hostile environment, migration management, refugee resettlement

Introduction

In 2015, Theresa May announced the Community Sponsorship (CS) scheme, "to allow individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support

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refugees directly” (*The Independent*, 2015). Concomitantly, she remarked the UK’s commitment to reduce immigration and asylum claims, implementing the ‘hostile environment’ policy (*The Independent*, 2015; Kirkup and Winnett, 2012). Looking at the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framings used by policymakers in parliamentary debates related to CS, this article examines the apparent contradiction between these policy goals: a renewed commitment towards refugee resettlement via CS and the pledge to make the UK a hostile environment for migrants.

The article locates the CS debate in the context of different approaches to refugee resettlement and the more recent turn towards civil society’s involvement in resettlement, globally and nationally. Subsequently, features of the recent resettlement policies are linked to the broader analysis of the neo-liberal states. Following the methodology section, findings are presented according to the adopted frame analysis focusing respectively on diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framings. Finally, it argues that apparent diverging policy goals can be reconciled if one considers that policymakers have been operating CS more as a tool of migration management than as a tool of international protection, and have mobilised the commitment towards ‘vulnerable’ refugees to legitimise and reinforce more restrictive immigration control over asylum seekers and refugees outside CS.

Resettlement as a durable solution for refugees

Resettlement, one of three ‘durable solutions’ for refugees, alongside voluntary repatriation and local integration (UNHCR, 2007: 186), is “the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them” (UNHCR, 2011: 3). Resettlement should be an additional tool for protecting refugees and a way of burden sharing and solidarity demonstration with countries of first asylum (Milner, 2003). Despite the recent increase in countries operating resettlement, there is still a wide gap between refugees waiting and the available places (UNHCR, 2019a).

While states do not have any obligation to resettle refugees, in-country asylum claims are prescribed by the 1951 Refugee Convention (Labman, 2011). Regardless of the ways through which individuals set foot in a country asking for asylum, protection should be guaranteed. States “shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees” (UNHCR, 1951). However, some governments have started using resettlement as a tool of migration management instead of international protection, opposing it to in-country asylum claims (Milner, 2003). The development of resettlement programmes seems to be justified by the states’ desire to maintain control of their borders, selecting who and how many refugees are allowed entry and

wrongly assuming that the offer of resettlement places reduces the voluntary arrivals of asylum-seekers (Hashimoto, 2018). While resettlement offers a solution to a small group of people, other displaced individuals are framed as 'undeserving', although under international law they are entitled to the same protection recognised to resettled refugees. 'Deserving refugees' are presented as those who wait patiently in refugee camps and do not 'jump the queue' by travelling, often undocumented, for asking asylum (Labman, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2019). The narrative of deserving resettled refugees and undeserving refugees travelling undocumented is clearly reflected in the UK's New Plan for Immigration, which will process asylum claims according to the way an individual enters the country and will limit the ability to live and settle in the UK to individuals who, although recognised in need for protection, travelled without documents (Home Office, 2021).

Additionally, in selecting the refugees to be resettled, governments adopt criteria which create further distinctions and a hierarchy of 'deservingness' amongst those waiting in refugee camps. UK resettlement schemes prioritise some refugees over others according to their 'vulnerability', a highly problematic concept. Firstly, "Situations of vulnerability are not fixed and will change over time with changing circumstances" (IDC, 2016: 2–3). Furthermore, "visa regulation and border controls produce situations that, in fact, increase migrants' vulnerability to abuse and exploitation" (Andrijasevic, 2010: 45). Focusing only on vulnerability also undermines situations' complexity and denies individuals' agency, while refugees may deliberately choose to comply with the expected vulnerability to access services (O'Higgins, 2012).

The creation of a hierarchy of 'deservingness' amongst people waiting in refugee camps further implies that vulnerability is not associated with the condition of being in a camp. To this extent, camps are a solution for the governance of "unwanted migration flows" (Sigona, 2015: 5), allowing governments to delay large-scale interventions, while offering a safe place to some individuals whose situation is presented as 'exceptional'. In depicting a state of exceptionality for some refugees over others, the government has "an occasion for the refinement and enhancement of state power" (Honig, 2009: 126).

Community-led (rather than state-led) initiatives have started to be seen as possible alternatives to the UNHCR durable solutions for refugees. For example, 'sanctuary cities' and unofficial refugee camps across Europe, such as 'the Calais Jungle', despite their miserable conditions, "show how communities can be formed and sustained by migrants and concerned citizens working together" (Cohen and Van Hear, 2017: 499). Behind the validity and sustainability of the durable and alternative solutions, "to rethink solutions, we must first understand how the international community has chosen to frame the 'refugee problem'" (Long, 2014: 476). It is in the dichotomy between resettlement as a tool of migration management and as a tool of international

protection that this paper analyses how CS is framed given the UK's hostile environment.

Resettling refugees in the UK

The UK runs three main resettlement programmes in collaboration with UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (Wilkins, 2020). The most long-standing scheme is the Mandate, which allows refugees from any country to apply if they have 'close' family members in the UK able to provide accommodation and support (UNHCR, 2018). The Gateway Protection Programme, instead, started in 2004 to resettle annually 750 refugees in 'protracted displacement', meaning that a refugee has been staying in a host country for at least five consecutive years (UNHCR, 2020: 24). However, "the average length of stay in these states of virtual limbo is now approaching 20 years" (Loescher and Milner, 2011: 3).

The latest pathway, the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), introduced in 2014 only for 'vulnerable' Syrian people and then extended to include some non-Syrian nationals, aims to the resettlement of 20,000 people by 2020. Some VPRS refugees can be sponsored by community sponsorship groups, through CS. Sponsors need to raise £9,000, find a house to accommodate the family for two years, and develop a detailed plan showing how they will provide support. In 2020, all the resettlement schemes, except the Mandate, have been incorporated into one 'global resettlement scheme', still managed with UNHCR and focused on the criteria of vulnerability to select refugees, but extended beyond the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Wilkins, 2020). The new global scheme has a quota of 5,000 refugees for the first year, with the CS's resettled families in addition to it (Wilkins, 2020).

The role of civil society in refugee resettlement

Since 1995, UNHCR, governments and NGOs meet annually at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement "to discuss policy directions on resettlement and steer efforts to enhance the use of resettlement" (UNHCR, 2011: 51). NGOs were included to recognise their role as a partner in resettlement and to guarantee effectiveness and transparency (UNHCR, 2011). The involvement of civil society has been intensified recently and the shift from state-led to community-led organisations for refugee resettlement has become a global trend. In 2016, the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants has promoted a *multi stakeholder approach*, including "civil society partners, the private sector, the media and refugees themselves" (UNHCR, 2016a: 13). The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative was launched to promote private resettlement

schemes worldwide (UNHCR, 2016b). In 2019, the first Global Refugee Forum was held and civil society was invited to share solutions and practices, including private sponsorship programmes (UNHCR, 2019b). Globally, the participation of organisations such as UNHCR in resettlement seems to have extended the migrant management outside states' borders, while, nationally, the communities' involvement has seen the government's withdrawal of responsibilities for refugees (Dajani, 2020). Ashutosh and Mountz (2011) claim that states use IOM to control immigration and limit the arrival of asylum seekers in the country, organising and classifying migrants in refugee camps and detention centres.

The role of civil society in the UK

In 2010, the UK introduced the Big Society idea to give “communities more power and encouraging people to take an active role in their communities” (Prime Minister's Office, 2010), increasing the transfer of responsibilities from the state to volunteers. Vickers (2012) sees the role of volunteers and community organisations as a mediator between the state and oppressed groups. The Big Society, launched after the 2008 financial crisis, was harshly criticised because it turns “to ordinary citizens to shoulder the burden”, instead of a strong state response (Kisby, 2010: 485). Comparably, the government responded to the so-called refugee ‘crisis’ looking at community organisations in supporting refugees and avoiding taking direct responsibilities, implying that “primary responsibility for society's problems did not lie with the government, but rather with the community” (Kisby, 2010: 487). Fleischmann (2019: 64) further remarks how the introduction of government programmes and initiatives for volunteers is used by the state “to (re)gain control and power over the conduct of committed citizens”. Although “civil society activities (. . .) were more flexible and prompt than those of other actors” in coping with asylum seekers' arrivals, burdening responsibilities on volunteers can create physical and psychological distress, especially for untrained people (Simsa, 2017: 85).

These above-highlighted consequences of involving civil society in welcoming refugees can also be found in CS. Without denying volunteers' valuable work, through CS, the state not only moves the responsibility for refugees to civil society, but also “governs and regulates who gets to stay and who gets to be cared for, and how” (Dajani, 2020: 10).

CS in the neo-liberal era

The recent implementation of resettlement policies, including community-led initiatives, a *multi stakeholder approach* and a mixed economy system of

refugee care involving state, private and not-for-profit organisations, can be recognised in alignment with the neo-liberal state model. Notably, some core elements of neo-liberalism - devolution of authority, privatization, managerialism, and workfare – identified by Benson (2016) are also present in the CS formulation. The transfer of responsibilities to civil society and the employment of NGOs and community groups for the provision of refugee services is consistent with the logic of neo-liberal states, which in such processes of authority's devolution and privatisation retain their sovereignty power through the management of "the capacity and potential of individuals and population as living resources" (Ong, 2006: 6). Volunteers are crafted "to serve as worthy citizens", they not only live without relying on the state's support, but also contribute actively to lift the burden of vulnerable people from the state (Erickson, 2012: 167).

Sponsoring groups, in charge of supporting refugees to reach their independence, further implement the state's workfare approach, seeking "to subjectify the admitted refugees as active citizens" (Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020: 504). Finally, this research's findings show that in proposing CS as a solution, the UK government avoids acknowledging the refugee problem in its complexity and therefore implement a managerialist approach which "takes a reductionist view of social life, and it uses the lens of policy and procedures to simplify the experiences and interests of those displaced" (McDonald-Wilmsen and Webber, 2010: 146).

Methodology

The research analyses the transcriptions of the UK parliamentary debates related to CS which are public, free and easily accessible through the Hansard website. Using the keyword 'Community Sponsorship' in the Hansard's search engine, forty-two documents between January 2014, when VPRS was launched, and 2020 were selected. For the years 2014 and 2015, the keyword 'refugee resettlement' was also used as CS was not officially instituted.

Frame analysis is adopted to analyse the identified documents. Goffman (1986: 21) refers to frames as "definitions of a situation" through which individuals make sense of the world around them, "rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful". Constructing meaning, *framing*, is an ongoing process impacted by different elements depending on the socio-cultural context (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Schön and Rein used frame analysis to explore policymaking processes, inviting policy researchers "to focus on the substantive issues with which policy makers deal, the situations within which controversies about such issues arise, the kinds of inquiry carried out by those practitioners" (1994: 193). Jørgensen and Thomsen, for instance, studied how determined policy problems

and solutions are “grounded in different problem-setting stories rooted in different frames resting on different assumptions” (2013: 248). Constructing a frame which can then be ‘generally acceptable’ or ‘plausible’ is further a key dimension of statecraft which allows a party to obtain consensus with the electorate over other parties (Bulpitt, 1986: 21–22). The introduction of the Big Society in policy agenda, for instance, can be seen more like the way through which the Conservative party has tried to justify in an acceptable frame cuts to the social welfare (Hattersley and Hickson, 2011).

To uncover the policymakers’ framing process during the CS parliamentary debates, frame analysis is adopted, looking at the core framing tasks as presented by Benford and Snow (2000):

- Diagnostic framing, which focuses on the problem identification and its attributions
- Prognostic framing, which regards the solutions’ articulation
- Motivational framing, which considers rationales for engaging and vocabularies for motive

Analysis

Findings are presented according to the Benford and Snow’s frame analysis approach (2000). Firstly, the diagnostic framing introduces how policymakers identify the problem behind the CS’s launch and its attributions. Subsequently, attention is given to the proposed solutions and their articulation to the framed problem. Following this prognostic framing, the research highlights the logical basis for civil society’s engagement in CS provided by policymakers - the motivational framing. The word government is used as singular; however, the analysed parliamentary debates cover a period, between 2014 and 2020, which has seen the change of six UK governments. Nevertheless, a certain continuity in governance is given by the fact that the leadership has been in the Conservative Party’s hands.

The ‘exceptional’ problem: Diagnostic framing

This section analysis how policymakers frame the ‘refugee problem’, establishing what constitutes an issue to be solved. Reading the parliamentary debates that lead to the development of CS, the emerging diagnostic framing limits the problem to narrow categories of people and situations, framed as ‘exceptional’ and unrelated to global challenges of migration and displacement. Consequently, while a restricted group of displaced people is presented by policymakers as ‘deserving’ help because of their constructed

exceptionality, most refugees and asylum seekers are depicted outside the framed problem.

Firstly, in the analysed parliamentary debates the presence of people living in refugee camps does not seem to constitute an issue. Praising the living conditions in refugee camps, policymakers tend to normalise life in a camp, framing it as a long-term solution rather than as a problem. Noteworthy, speaking of Zaatari, the sizeable Jordanian camp, Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con) stated:

Zaatari is remarkably well run and the quality of life for its resident population is comparatively very good. (. . .) Zaatari has a greater sense of permanency (. . .). Achieving that quality of life should be reflected in the management of camps all over the world (HC Deb, 22 July 2014).

Presenting camps as places where refugees can have a good quality of life, “questions of citizenship and individual rights can be diminished, superseded and rejected in the process of claiming an extension of power by the sovereign” (Sigona, 2015: 5) which decides who is deserving and undeserving of being offered a solution like resettlement. Additionally, framing the refugee problem as exceptional, while normalising refugee camps allows the government to delay an immediate response and justify the lack of large-scale interventions.

In the constructed diagnostic framing, policymakers focus almost exclusively on Syrian refugees and particularly on Syrian children, whose situation is presented as exceptional compared to all displaced people worldwide. The surge of people fleeing Syria’s civil war alongside an escalation in the number of individuals dying while crossing the Mediterranean Sea attracted public and political attention especially after the image of the Syrian child Alan Kurdi’s dead body went viral in 2015. Nevertheless, limiting the problem to specific contexts and people underestimates the complexity and the nuances of the reasons why people migrate (Crawley et al., 2018). The depicted problem’s exceptionality then serves the government to justify anti-immigration policies “to distinguish carefully between economic migrants and genuine refugees” (*The Independent*, 2015). For instance, Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) frequently mentioned the erroneous declaration of Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission, stating that 60% of people arriving in Europe have no reasons for claiming asylum (HC Deb, 27 January 2016, HC Deb 16 March 2016). In reality, 90% of the arrivals were “from countries gripped by war or emerged from a wider regional conflict”, but “If the individual is not Syrian then Frontex assumes the person is an irregular migrant” (Nielsen, 2016). Framing the problem just as a Syrian one means that the reality is misrepresented and the asylum claims of non-Syrian nationals unrecognised before being processed.

The simplification of complex refugee issues reflects a managerialist approach that does not recognise displacement as the main problem to solve, but relativises and subordinates the problem to the state's economic and political interests (McDonald-Wilmsen and Webber, 2010). A clear example is provided by the difference in treatment offered to resettled refugees and those refugees who claimed asylum in the UK. The latter, once they are granted refugee status, has twenty-eight days to be independent from the Home Office's Asylum Support (UK Visas and Immigration, 2019). This so-called 'move-on' period leaves them at risk of homelessness and destitution (HC Deb, 4 March 2020). On the contrary, each refugee resettled through CS, in addition to the volunteers' support, must also have £200 up-front cash provided by the sponsor group (HM Government, 2018). The denial of an up-front cash grant to refugees who claimed asylum in the UK depicts these people as less deserving than those resettled. To this extent, the government's employ resettlement as a tool of migration management, classifying "refugees as legitimate – if small and controlled numbers – or illegitimate – if traversing the asylum process", further implementing a two-tier system of international protection which distinguishes between deserving and undeserving refugees (Karyotis et al., 2020: 16).

In the exceptionality frame, the problem of refugees is presented not only as limited to a restricted group of people as clearly separated to all other forced migrants, but also as restricted to a selected category of Syrian refugees, "the most vulnerable of the vulnerable" (HC Deb, 29 January 2014). In developing resettlement policies, policymakers decide who would benefit from it and therefore contribute to defining refugee vulnerability. "Ineligibility grounds create an instrument of greater migration management control to member states rather than preserve the humanitarian character of resettlement" (Bamberg, 2018: 9). The policymakers' role in constructing a hierarchy of vulnerability and deservingness is evident even regarding refugee children. For instance, following the clearance of the Calais Jungle camp, only a strictly-defined category of unaccompanied children was allowed to be resettled to the UK. The established eligibility criteria include that all the not Sudanese or Syrian children above twelve years of age must have been at high risk of sexual exploitation (Home Office, 2016). The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill) claimed that "(t)he threshold that we have put in place is based on overall grant rates for the year ending June 2016, and the nationalities that have a grant rate of 75% or higher are the Sudanese and the Syrian" (HC Deb, 16 November 2016). The statement evidences the denial of unconditioned right to claim asylum, while, through resettlement, the government selects who deserves refuge using disputable criteria, without clarifying how these are measured. For instance, not only it is not provided "an explanation of why those [children] at risk of trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery are not to be included as well" (HC Deb, 16 November 2016), but it is also

unclear how the risk of sexual exploitation was assessed. The Minister for Immigration affirmed, indeed, that the main basis “is gender, as we know that girls are more likely to be victims of sexual exploitation”, but he then contradicted himself claiming that “In terms of sexual exploitation, that is gender-neutral” (HC Deb, 16 November 2016).

Another example of how the government uses the criteria of vulnerability to limit and select refugees eligible for resettlement is in relation to pregnant women. In a debate about VPRS, Lord Scriven (LD) (HL Deb, 7 June 2018) raised the issue of the 35-week period from when refugees are accepted on the scheme to when they arrive in the UK. Most airlines do not allow women after week 37 of pregnancy to fly (NHS, 2018), therefore the 35-week period of waiting is a major obstacle especially for the resettlement of pregnant women. This government’s approach recalls the European Volunteer Worker Scheme (EVWs), which allowed the UK to recruit labourers from the European refugee camps after WWII. “In the most obvious example of the instrumentalism of the UKs approach to this refugee migration, EVWs with medical needs – including pregnant women – were returned to displaced persons’ (DP) camps” (Vo, 2010 in Long, 2013: 14–15). Regarding pregnant women, Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con) claimed:

Cases that involve a pregnancy will be prioritised only where the UNHCR categorises them as urgent or as an emergency (HL Deb, 7 June 2018).

The statement further confirms that the government avoids taking any official responsibility of the refugee selecting process outside the country, which, in this case, is shifted to UNHCR. It is evident that the UK policies, such as the 35-week processing period, contribute to the exclusion of some individuals from relocating based on conditions that are not assessed upon their refugee status. Consequently, these political strategies can be seen as one of the ways of implementing a hostile environment, making it more difficult for migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, to arrive in the UK. Griffiths (2014: 1996) claims that “the imposition of waiting, always with a glimmer of hope for eventual change, is part of the technique of control that sustains the marginality and compliance of undocumented migrants”.

To conclude, policymakers frame the ‘refugee problem’ as exceptional, regarding a determinate group of people and a geographical area. If from one side, this diagnostic framing allows some refugees to be offered a place in the UK through resettlement, on the other side, it creates not only a distinction between deserving and undeserving asylum seekers, but also a hierarchy amongst the same refugees, adopting disputable criteria such as vulnerability. Through the exceptionality frame, resettlement is employed by the government more as a tool of migration management rather than exclusively as a tool of international protection.

Solution: 'Putting the cart before the horse': Prognostic framing

The UK government proposed solution to the 'refugee problem', framed as exceptional and limited to selected individuals, is to stop the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees both in Europe and in the UK. The strategy, perfectly in line with the enforcement of the hostile environment policy, is implemented through different channels, including the management of resettlement.

Firstly, when the UK's work done to help refugees is questioned in the parliamentary debates, the government always remarks the amount of money spent in the MENA region. It is constantly and erroneously repeated that the British financial contribution to the Syrian crisis is the second largest in the world and that the UK has done more than any other European countries in helping refugees. Resettlement is just one way through which asylum seekers can find refuge. If the number of people who have received a positive decision following an asylum claim inside the country is considered, it is observable that other countries have granted asylum to more refugees than the UK (Table 1).

In remarking the UK's help in the MENA region, the government also frames resettlement as a solution opposite, instead of complementary, to the provided financial support. Emphasising the importance of humanitarian assistance abroad underestimates resettlement as a durable solution and implies the impossibility of refugee movement, even through resettlement. This adopted strategy demonstrates how "refugees' protection has become a sedentary pursuit, with refugees expected to remain in fixed locations" (Long, 2013: 21). Granting resettled individuals refugee status instead of permanent residence as Canada does is another demonstration that the government does not consider resettlement as a durable solution. Consequently, the launch of VPRS and CS seems to be guided less by a government's genuine intention of helping refugees and more by the pressure of external actors, such as charities and community groups as well as global organisations like UNHCR, which urged states to offer resettlement places (Chulov and Grant, 2014).

Table 1. Positive decisions on asylum applications in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020).

<i>Country</i>	<i>Total number of people granted asylum</i>		<i>Resettled refugees</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per million of population</i>	
UK	25950	390	5610
Italy	31010	515	1355
France	42120	630	5600
Spain	38525	820	not available
Germany	116230	1400	4890

In establishing resettlement schemes, the government does not step back from its intention of creating a hostile environment, but finds a way to implement that policy, while developing a narrative that depicts the UK as a welcome and generous country for refugees. This strategy can also be deduced by the government's decision of not running VPRS under the UNHCR programme, but in parallel, which was justified by Theresa May's claim:

We wanted to create a scheme [VPRS] that gives us greater flexibility and enables us to focus clearly on the issues on which the Government as a whole have been focusing, particularly women and girls at risk and preventing sexual violence (HC Deb, 29 January 2014).

The focus on a humanitarian response based on a narrative of asylum seekers' vulnerability places the solution on the necessity to distinguish between deserving and undeserving refugees. Consequently, "this would seem to create a self-reinforcing discourse of control in which alternative discourses of asylum become increasingly marginalised" (Squire, 2008: 255). The decision to maintain national flexibility in managing resettlement programmes enables the government to decide its own strategy in selecting individuals to be resettled, to avoid engaging in a more global coordinate initiative, to shift responsibility to external actors, promoting, at the same time, a narrative of a welcome country. For example, when David Cameron, announced the intention of resettling 20,000 refugees by 2020 claiming that:

In doing so, we will continue to show the world that this is a country of extraordinary compassion always standing up for our values and helping those in need (HC Deb, 7 September 2015).

Yvette Cooper MP noted how the target was limited compared to other European countries' commitment and to previous British responses to similar situations such as the Kindertransport and the Vietnamese boat people (HC Deb, 8 September 2015).

Even the more recent 'global resettlement scheme' shows a decrease in the UK commitment to resettling refugees. Although CS's resettled refugees are now additional, the established target of 5,000 refugees for the first year already matches and in part is lower than the total number of refugees resettled every year since 2016, as is shown in Table 2.

It is further interesting to note the low number of refugees resettled through the Mandate scheme, which allows a settled individual in the UK to sponsor refugee family members. Arguably, such small figures are in accordance with both the government decision to deny unaccompanied refugee children to sponsor family members and to refuse the possibility of naming refugees to be resettled through CS. In a parliamentary debate, when the

Table 2. Number of people resettled in the UK (Home Office, 2020).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Year ending		Change (latest year)	
							Mar 2019	Mar 2020	Number	%
VPRS	143	1194	4369	4832	4407	4408	4328	4030	-298	-7%
VCRS	--	--	31	539	688	489	687	416	-271	-39%
Gateway	630	652	804	813	693	704	762	512	-250	-33%
Mandate	13	19	8	28	18	11	19	10	-9	--
Tot. Resettled	786	1865	5212	6212	5806	5612	5796	4968	-828	-14%

Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes) was questioned about the possibility to nominate individuals for the scheme, she replied:

it is important that we continue to work with the UNHCR to ensure that it is the most vulnerable people who are resettled here (HC Deb, 15 July 2019).

From the government's response and policy implementations, there emerges a strategy that can be defined using the words that Stuart C. McDonald MP adopted in a parliamentary debate on the removal of individuals who have sought asylum in Europe:

They have been told not that we have considered their asylum claim and found it unsuccessful in law, but simply that we have decided it is inadmissible, and that they should go to Turkey and have their claim considered there. From our point of view, that was putting the cart before the horse (HC Deb, 22 March 2017).

The same critique can be addressed to how the UK has used resettlement schemes to select and manage refugees' arrival, without looking at individual cases, but establishing disputable criteria in the name of a constructed vulnerability and addressing the resettlement responsibilities to third actors. Consequently, local authorities, framed by the government as the main obstacle to the development of a wide resettlement scheme, can be considered a huge part of the solution, instead of the problem, of the UK approach of limiting the refugees' arrival. For instance, across the parliamentary debates, the government frequently addresses the fault of a limited resettlement process to local authorities.

This commitment to resettle refugees involves not only central government but the work of local authorities and local sponsorship groups (HL Deb, 19 July 2017).

However, such statements are often denied by other members of the parliament who remark how the work of local authorities is instead hindered by the government:

My local authority (. . .) has not received the number of children it either offered to take or was told by the Home Office it would receive, because the Government have dragged their feet (HC Deb, 16 November 2016).

Uncoordinated and bureaucratic resettlement processes set by the government serve to avoid responsibilities and limiting the arrival of refugees, including through CS. For instance, Lord Dubs (Lab) pointed out that:

many people who welcome the idea of community sponsorship have said to me that the scheme in this country is too bureaucratic and that we just cannot get it organised (HL Deb, 25 April 2019).

The CS's evaluative further notes that both volunteers and refugees are overwhelmed by the number of documents needed to be filled (Phillimore et al., 2020). Sponsor groups "would like to see the Home Office provide more information about different resettlement schemes to local authorities especially regarding roles and responsibilities" (Phillimore et al., 2020: 15).

The highly bureaucratic and uncoordinated government's approach to resettlement contributes to implementing a hostile environment for refugees and asylum seekers even before they arrive in the UK. The responsibility and the blame are then often shifted to external actors. A clear demonstration is given by the Dubs Amendment which in four years resettled only 480 unaccompanied refugee children from Europe to the UK and is now ending (Bulman, 2020). According to the Secretary of State, the minors should have been relocated to the UK "as soon as possible" (UK Visas and Immigration, 2017), the blame for the process' delay has been attributed to local authorities and their limited capacity (HC Deb, 10 May 2016). However, the councils' offer of 1,400 places for refugee children has been ignored, limiting the number of resettled minors (Townsend, 2019).

Therefore, while it is recognised that the development of programmes, such as CS, offers a possibility for some refugees to settle in the UK, the government established limits in which these schemes operate, also implement the hostile environment policy. "The implication here is that the state has not withdrawn to devolve power to local communities, but externalised its responsibility for service delivery by placing the burden of failure onto others" (Milbourne and Cushman, 2012 in Gibson, 2015: 49).

Motivation from the bottom: Motivational framing

Reading the parliamentary debates on CS, it is not possible to find clear evidence of the government willingness to motivate civil society in supporting refugees. The scheme seems more the response to a constant pressure made by individuals and organisations expressing a desire to help and a dissatisfaction of the government actions in responding to the situation. Remarkably, when the idea of a private sponsorship was first advanced, the response of the Minister of State, Home Office (Lord Bates) was negative.

The Home Secretary is meeting with NGOs and we are talking to them and to church groups and faith groups about setting up a similar community sponsorship scheme, but perhaps not for people in urgent need of attention. That might not be appropriate, as it could not give the care they need (HL Deb, 17 December 2015).

Consequently, years after the establishment of CS, the work of local communities has been often recognised and praised by government officials. In 2018 the Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes) claimed:

[CS groups] are often best placed to help and are incredibly supportive, providing a network that enables refugees to make friends they can turn to for support in times of crisis (HC Deb, 24 October 2018).

However, positive references to CS are often expressed during debates in which the government's actions to support asylum seekers and refugees are contested. For instance, the above statement is made during a debate where the government was questioned about the asylum seekers' right to work, which in the UK is denied unless individuals have been waiting for their asylum to be processed more than twelve months and show that they have no fault in the delay, and even then employment opportunities are very restricted (Home Office, 2019). It appears that, through CS, the government moves the attention from its migrant hostile policy to the more positive activism brought up by community groups in supporting newcomers and shifts its responsibility of looking after refugees to civil society. Simultaneously, the government takes the merits of the work done by community groups to develop a positive narrative in which "the UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it" (HC Deb, 24 October 2018). To illustrate, when during a debate on CS, Baroness Barran (Con) was asked about the government's measure to collect information about the scheme's outcomes to grow the programme, she replied, "The Home Office has commissioned an independent evaluation that is being carried out by the University of Birmingham" (HL Deb, 25 April 2019). In reality, the research was not commissioned by the Home Office, but Citizens UK and the Methodist Church initially asked the University of Birmingham to conduct an evaluation

on CS “with a view to ensuring their efforts supporting a refugee family were as effective as possible” (University of Birmingham, 2020).

In the parliamentary debates, there are no government statements which motivate an increase of the civil society involvement through initiatives such as CS, apart from a recognition of the valuable role played by organisations and individuals in helping refugees. However, there are constant remarks from MPs to the government, before and after the CS’s launch, of the presence of people in the UK showing solidarity to refugees and asylum seekers.

(T)here was no shortage of compassion and practical remedies being offered, and every time it is the Government who are not stepping up to the plate (HC Deb, 20 June 2019).

It is possible to conclude that there are no efforts from the government to invite individuals to take collective actions in supporting refugees, but there are quite strong motivations arising from the bottom up, from civil society to the state. Even the creation of a government website ‘Help Refugees in the UK’, presented as a way through which individuals could help refugees, operates through a bureaucratic approach, in that “Offers of help made by members of the public in all non-pilot areas will be considered centrally by the resettlement programme team before being passed on to local authorities” (HC Deb, 19 July 2016). The process in which the website works allows the government to control and manage the civil society’s offers of help, but leaves to local authorities the responsibility to ensure the use of resources and, therefore, respond to refugee issues.

Finally, it is arguable that the government does not aim to motivate civil society in collective and coordinate actions to facilitate the arrival and the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers, but the CS’s launch is just an answer to the policymakers’ necessity of “to harness the generosity of the British people” (HC Deb, 23 January 2017).

Conclusion

This article has explored how CS, a resettlement programme allowing ordinary people to resettle refugee families, is framed in the context of the UK’s hostile environment policy. Parliamentary debates on CS, collected through the Hansard website, between January 2014 and March 2020, are analysed using Benford and Snow (2000)’s frame analysis approach.

A diagnostic framing, focused on the problem identification and its attributions, is identified and it is argued that policymakers frame refugees as an exceptional problem, regarding a determinate group of people and a geographical area. Consequently, the government uses this exceptionality to

distinguish between deserving and undeserving refugees, adopting disputable criteria such as vulnerability. The attention on the prognostic framing then shows that the policymakers' solution is to manage and limit the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, even through resettlement programmes, creating bureaucratic and uncoordinated processes and shifting the government's responsibility for refugees to external actors. Regarding the motivation framing, findings show that policymakers do not provide rationales for engaging in supporting refugees, it is, instead, civil society which presses governments to take action. In conclusion, it is argued that resettlement is used more as a tool of migration management rather than exclusively as a tool of international protection. The result is that, although CS can positively impact the lives of some refugees, the policymakers' approach to the scheme further implements the hostile environment because it is adopted to limit and select 'deserving' individuals and to shift the government's responsibility for refugees to civil society.

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