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# PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP IN EUROPE

Expanding complementary  
pathways for refugee  
resettlement



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# Foreword

There are more than 65 million people forcibly displaced in the world as a result of violent conflict and persecution. More than 21 million of these are refugees in need of protection. With limited opportunities for voluntary repatriation and local integration, other solutions for refugees in the form of safe and legal pathways of admission to third countries represent both a vital protection tool for those who need it most and a tangible way to show solidarity and share responsibility with countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

UNHCR estimates that 1.2 million refugees worldwide will be in need of resettlement in 2018.<sup>1</sup> While the need for resettlement of Syrians remains substantial, at 40% of total projections, there are large numbers of other refugee populations in protracted displacement situations that are often overlooked, such as in Africa. Without alternatives, many refugees are choosing to move onwards in an effort to reach safety, including across the Central Mediterranean on perilous and often fatal sea journeys. There is therefore an urgent need to establish new opportunities to provide protection to displaced persons and to expand the opportunities for their safe and legal admission to countries that have the capacity to provide protection and offer the prerequisite conditions to leading productive and full lives.

In Europe, some recent progress has been made in the area of resettlement. Since July 2015, an unprecedented number of countries have voluntarily pledged to receive refugees through resettlement.<sup>2</sup> However, statistics show that Europe's contribution to global resettlement remains modest, with just 18,175 refugees resettled to the European Union (EU) and Associate Member States

in 2016.<sup>3</sup> While the EU is working towards the establishment of a Union Resettlement Framework, it remains to be seen to what extent this will lead to a tangible increase in the number of refugees resettled to Europe.

Establishing safe and legal pathways of admission to complement resettlement programmes is therefore an essential step towards securing a meaningful response to the current unprecedented global displacement situation.

The need to provide increased and complementary pathways for refugee admission is reflected in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016. Countries, including the Member States of the European Union, expressed their intention to “expand the number and range of legal pathways available for refugees to be admitted to or resettled in third countries.”<sup>4</sup> A number of forms of admission can make this goal a reality, including community-based private sponsorship programmes, scholarships and visas for students, and the expansion of humanitarian admission programmes.<sup>5</sup> Partnerships between governments, international organisations and civil society are indispensable to expand and develop such pathways, and several important initiatives are currently underway.

Over the last six years, the European Resettlement Network (ERN)<sup>6</sup> has worked to develop and strengthen resettlement programmes in Europe by connecting a variety of actors involved in refugee resettlement. Recognising the need for new approaches, since 2016 the ERN has broadened its scope of activities to include

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1 See UNHCR Project Global Resettlement Needs 2018

2 The increase in the number of EU countries running resettlement programmes is due, in large part, to the agreement of 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland in July 2015 to resettle 22,504 persons under the Conclusions of the Council of the European Union.

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3 Persons resettled to the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Eurostat data on resettled persons by age, sex and citizenship, annual data (rounded) (11/07/2017). For context, a total of 125,835 persons were actually resettled globally in 2016, with the United States of America taking 78,340 and Canada 21,838 (see UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2018).

4 United Nations New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, para 77

5 Ibid, para 79

6 [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)

research on complementary pathways of refugee admission to Europe.

**This scoping paper on private sponsorships in Europe** accompanies two parallel publications, one on humanitarian admission programmes and one on student scholarship programmes which are all published under the activities of the EU-funded **ERN+ Project: Developing Innovative European Models for the Protection of Refugees and Providing Support to New Resettlement Countries**<sup>7</sup>. As little research has thus far been carried out on the potential for complementary safe and legal pathways of refugee admission to the EU<sup>8</sup>, the aim of these papers is to advance some key considerations with respect to different complementary pathways which the European Resettlement Network identifies as having potential for development in the European context. To do this, the papers draw on existing examples of refugee admission programmes in

Europe and elsewhere to present a first exploration of new and relevant initiatives.

As the publications demonstrate, legal pathways of admission for refugees often have commonalities and can even directly intersect. As such, no one model for complementary pathways can be considered in isolation, while programme definitions vary across countries and priorities differ according to a range of political and legal factors, as well as the potential for partnerships with civil society organisations and other non-governmental actors. The publications aim to further guide discussions with a variety of relevant stakeholders, leading to more extensive feasibility research proposing recommendations for the development of such pathways in the EU.



International Catholic Migration  
Commission (ICMC) Europe



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency

International Organisation on  
Migration (IOM)



United Nations High Commissioner  
for Refugees (UNHCR)

<sup>7</sup> The three research papers are available at [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)

<sup>8</sup> One exception is *No Way Out? Making Additional Migration Channels Work for Refugees*, 2016, Elizabeth Collett, Paul Clewett, and Susan Fratzke, Migration Policy Institute

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# 1. Introduction

Written in the framework of the EU-funded European Resettlement Network project, *Developing Innovative European Models for the Protection of Refugees and Providing Support to New Resettlement Countries*, this scoping paper represents the first phase of a research project which will continue into early 2018. The project aims to explore and advocate for expanding complementary pathways for refugee admission, including private sponsorship, higher education scholarships and humanitarian admission. This paper focuses on recent refugee private sponsorship initiatives in Europe.

Under private sponsorship programmes, private actors can directly engage in refugee resettlement efforts. Under such programmes, legal access for refugees is facilitated through formal agreements between governments, who facilitate entry, and private actors bringing financial, social and/or emotional support to receive refugees in the local community. In most cases, sponsors may identify ('name') the refugees that come to their country. These are often relatives or other persons known to the community.

In Europe, private actors have engaged in private sponsorships to respond to the ongoing deaths at sea in the Mediterranean. This combines with a growing need in first countries of asylum, already under strain from hosting large numbers of refugees, and where there are increasing protection concerns.

Efforts by private groups to ensure refugees' safe arrival, welcome and integration have emerged since 2015 in a number of European countries, although these new programmes were not necessarily 'branded' as private sponsorship programmes by the actors themselves. The pilot programmes emerged in Europe and assessed in this publication vary substantially in objectives, actors involved, the scope of interventions and status afforded to beneficiaries, as well as the legal regulations, safeguards and responsibilities for stakeholders involved.

With civil society actors calling for a more active role to

play, these initiatives have led to new discussions about how responsibilities between the state and private actors in refugee admissions can be shared and defined.

Building upon initial research carried out by ICMC in the context of the "10% of refugees from Syria: Europe's resettlement and other admission responses in a global perspective"<sup>9</sup> report and on the outcomes of the webinar "Emerging Private Sponsorship Programmes in Europe"<sup>10</sup>, additional interviews with key stakeholder and some field-research were conducted starting in December 2016 in order to answer the following questions:

- 1) How can we define refugee sponsorship and what are its main objectives and characteristics?
- 2) What are the important features of a successful sponsorship programme?
- 3) What are the key challenges in designing a sponsorship programme?

These questions will guide the analysis of relevant case studies in the European context, namely: Humanitarian Corridors in Italy and France; community sponsorship in the United Kingdom (hereinafter, the "UK"), and private sponsorship for family reunification in Germany and Ireland.

This paper provides an overview of these programmes and seeks to identify some of the **key elements** that may inform existing and new programmes including: the division of roles and responsibilities between the state and the private actors, the identification and selection of sponsored persons, the time necessary to process applications, the type of status and entitlements and rights afforded to the sponsored persons, available safety-net provisions and overall programme monitoring and evaluation.

9 See ICMC report "10% Refugees from Syria: Europe's resettlement and other admission responses in a global perspective" (2015)

10 See ERN+ Webinar, 23 February 2017 "Emerging Private Programme in Europe: a new partnership between government and local communities"

The paper also looks at the various forms of sponsorship in Canada. Given Canada's long and successful history of sponsorship, a number of countries are now looking to it as a model for complementary approaches to refugee protection.

Overall, this research seeks to learn from the case studies presented, to identify common ground and best practices, but also contrasts and challenges within these experiences, assessing opportunities for private sponsorship programmes to become a more permanent feature of international protection in Europe.

## 2. A European response to increased protection needs

It is in the context of a worsening war in Syria and increasing numbers of deaths at sea that innovative approaches to refugee admissions have emerged more prominently, and that NGOs, diaspora organisations, religious organisations, churches and other actors have begun to engage with private sponsorship.

There is general consensus that the current refugee situation requires a varied 'toolbox' of instruments<sup>11</sup> to facilitate refugee legal access, beyond traditional resettlement, while more efforts must be undertaken to ensure that arrivals are accompanied by measures to welcome and integrate refugees.

UNHCR has called for such a **'toolbox' approach** since 2014, asking states to pledge half of protection places to be UNHCR-referred, in line with resettlement submission categories, and half to be offered through **alternative legal admission pathways**, including humanitarian admission, community-based private sponsorship, admission of relatives, medical evacuation, academic scholarships, humanitarian visas and labour mobility schemes.<sup>12</sup>

Notably, **Germany** has taken the lead in developing such alternative admission programmes, providing during 2013 and 2014, 35,000 places under **Humanitarian Admission**, the process by which countries admit groups from refugee populations in third countries so as to provide temporary protection on humanitarian grounds. Humanitarian Admission Programmes (HAPs)<sup>13</sup> can incorporate several different sub-programmes, such as **family reunification programmes**, which include an early

phase 'sponsorship' component, **requiring financial commitments on the part of applying relatives**, ranging from financing travel to providing for all costs related to their relatives stay and support (housing, living costs, welcome, orientation).<sup>14</sup>

Private Citizen Initiatives, NGOs, churches, universities and other actors have emerged as important actors in calling for more resettlement and other channels for the admission of refugees. In certain countries, for example, NGOs, actively **support family reunification applications**, underwriting mandatory financial commitments.<sup>15</sup> As of 2013, there are **increased cases of private sponsorships via humanitarian visas**. Private actors can play a role in identifying and referring such cases, supporting arriving refugees with housing, welcoming initiatives and legal orientation upon arrival, often co-funded by private actors.<sup>16</sup>

Although most private actors in Europe have previously considered that the **State and not private actors are responsible for receiving refugee arrivals**, this view has changed considerably in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis. Confronted with an unprecedented number of refugee arrivals, thousands of ordinary people in all European countries spontaneously responded and welcomed newcomers providing them with humanitarian assistance, including food, clothing and shelter.<sup>17</sup> Many of these initiatives have developed further into vital programmes to

11 The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and NGOS also call for a toolbox approach <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2015/legal-entry-channels-eu-persons-need-international-protection-toolbox> See also the joint statement of Christian organisations: [https://jrseurope.org/assets/Regions/EUR/media/files/Christian\\_Group\\_Recomm\\_for\\_safe\\_legal\\_paths\\_to\\_protection\\_final2.pdf](https://jrseurope.org/assets/Regions/EUR/media/files/Christian_Group_Recomm_for_safe_legal_paths_to_protection_final2.pdf)

12 ICMC Europe 10% of refugees from Syria, 2015

13 This topic is covered by ERN+ Scoping Paper "*Strengthening Humanitarian Admission to Europe for those in need of international protection*" (2017) available at [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)

14 The German HAP I and II include referrals by family members that had to cover costs for travel while a legal commitments to partially finance the costs of reception and stay was viewed positively within the pre-selection process.

15 In Switzerland, particularly the Swiss Red Cross has underwritten applications under the 2013 scheme facilitating visas for relatives.

16 See for further details: <https://www.ordredemaltefrance.org/actualites/les-actualites/solidarite/677-urgence-soutien-aux-familles-refugiees-irakiennes-a-tours.html>

17 A survey carried out among 2.300 volunteers in Germany reveals the tremendous mobilising effect of the recent humanitarian arrivals, with two thirds of respondents saying that their engagement started during 2015, and only 15% before 2014.

support refugees in their longer-term integration.<sup>18</sup> **Private initiatives mostly led by volunteers** have also stepped up to improve public opinion about refugees, offering ordinary citizens opportunities to engage with refugees.<sup>19</sup> The initiatives are countless and include offering **housing in private homes** (i.e. *Rifugiato a Casa Mia*, A Refugee in my Home, in Italy and *Refugees Welcome* in Germany, Austria and others)<sup>20</sup>, language learning mentoring programmes, **job counselling** and many more. Volunteering and other private initiatives include new groups in society and **business**, particularly in the IT sector, who have never engaged in refugee protection before and bring new approaches. Most of these initiatives rely exclusively on private resources<sup>21</sup> and are not linked with state agencies or NGOs integration practitioners, significantly expanding the integration offer. Some of these initiatives have been discussed in ICMC SHARE network report "*Building a resettlement network of European Cities and regions*".<sup>22</sup>

Since the **European Agenda on Migration**<sup>23</sup>, the European Union has further worked towards approaches<sup>24</sup> for orderly and safe migration, recognising that more legal channels must be developed to contribute to saving lives at sea while reducing irregular migration to counter human smuggling and to avoid uncontrolled refugee arrivals such as during the summer of 2015. In July 2016, the

European Commission introduced a proposal for a common **European Resettlement Framework**.

However, in practice available legal channels remain scarce and fall short in meeting needs. The July 2015 European Resettlement Scheme, foresees that European countries will resettle 22,500 refugees by the end of 2017, of which two thirds have been resettled by June 2017, a number that includes over 6,000 Syrians resettled from Turkey under the resettlement part of the EU-Turkey Statement.<sup>25</sup> In total, these 2015-2017 pledges represent approximately 6% of the 1,190,000 persons UNHCR estimated to be in need of resettlement in 2017.<sup>26</sup>

Recognising the changing attitude and the potential of private engagement, the European Commission, stated in its 2016 Communication<sup>27</sup> that '*Private sponsorship is not only a way to increase the possibilities of legal entry but also helps to raise public awareness and support for refugees, and allows for a more welcoming environment as local communities are usually involved*'. The Commission also stated its intention '*to assess ways to promote a coordinated European approach in private sponsorships*'.

With the aim of adding to the **changing views in public-private roles in refugee admission and in welcome and integration of newcomers**, it is important to come to a common understanding of what does private sponsorship of refugees mean. After an overview of the Canadian model for comparative purposes, this paper outlines recent sponsorship initiatives that have been undertaken in Europe in Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland. These initiatives are particularly instructive in understanding **how sponsorship works, the key features of a successful programme and the main challenges**. Ultimately, this paper seeks to identify opportunities for the incorporation of sponsorship programmes as more permanent features of international protection in Europe.

18 See European Website on Integration: Comparative analysis: voluntary and citizen initiatives before and after 2015 (2016): <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/intdossier/comparative-analysis-voluntary-and-citizens-initiatives-before-and-after-2015>

19 See for example Finnish Red Cross campaign "Refugees need a home": <https://www.redcross.fi/node/16512>

20 Protetto, Rifugiato a Casa Mia, A Refugee in my Home: [http://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2016-08/Depliant\\_informativo\\_2016\\_0.pdf](http://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2016-08/Depliant_informativo_2016_0.pdf) and Refugees Welcome: <http://www.refugees-welcome.net/>

21 See for example <https://techfugees.com/about/> a social enterprise coordinating the international tech community's response to the needs of refugees.

22 See ICMC SHARE network report "Building a resettlement network of European Cities and regions" (2015): [http://resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.files/Building%20a%20Resettlement%20Network%20of%20Cities%20%26%20Regions\\_SHARE%20Final%20Publication\\_0.pdf](http://resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.files/Building%20a%20Resettlement%20Network%20of%20Cities%20%26%20Regions_SHARE%20Final%20Publication_0.pdf)

23 See 2015 European Agenda on Migration [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication\\_on\\_the\\_european\\_agenda\\_on\\_migration\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf)

24 See European Commission Proposal for a Resettlement Regulation, which is currently under consideration: 13.7.2016, COM(2016), 468 final, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160713/resettlement\\_system\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160713/resettlement_system_en.pdf)

25 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170613\\_thirteenth\\_report\\_on\\_relocation\\_and\\_resettlement\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170613_thirteenth_report_on_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf)

26 UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs, 2017 <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/575836267/unhcr-projected-global-resettlement-needs-2017.html>

27 See 2016 Communication towards a Reform of the Common European Asylum System and Enhancing Legal Avenues to Europe: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0197&from=EN>

## 3. The challenge of defining private sponsorship

Although private engagement in refugee arrivals can take multiple forms, private or community-based sponsorships have mostly been associated with the Canadian experience of so-called ‘**private resettlement**’.<sup>28</sup> In this model private sponsorships refers to a **public-private partnership** between governments who facilitate legal admission for refugees and private actors who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle refugees into the community.

Simply said: **private or community-based sponsorship of refugees combine legal entry and protection with settlement support, using private means.**

Community-based sponsorship offers a tool to channel the support of **civil society actors** and coordinate civil society engagement in expanding refugee admissions, to ensure an open and welcoming environment and successful integration for new arrivals. In sponsoring a specific individual, private persons and communities become part and parcel of a refugee’s life’s journey, and their engagement is often strong and long-lasting. This **private engagement supports the refugees’ inclusion into society leading to better integration outcomes. Strong government leadership** along with civil society’s engagement, however, is pivotal for a successful private sponsorship scheme.

In the MPI “Welcoming Engagement” paper on private sponsorship<sup>29</sup>, some central features of private sponsorship programmes are identified, features that are primarily based on analysing the Canadian sponsorship programme. First, private actors assume responsibility for financial, social and emotional support **for a limited**

**time-period**; second, the individual sponsor/sponsoring organisation has the option of **identifying and choosing the person they would like to support** (so-called ‘naming’). It is also commonly understood that as a third element, private sponsorships expand legal access possibilities and are **additional to government resettlement quotas** and, as is the case with resettlement, provide refugees with a **secure status**.

While these elements are identified as some of the core elements of private sponsorship programmes, not all programmes necessarily conform to the above-mentioned elements. Also, in Canada, sponsorships remain **a flexible concept** that can be adapted to changing contexts and needs.

Canada, for example, launched a **new blended sponsorship model**<sup>30</sup> in 2013 to offer an accelerated procedure for welcoming Syrians.<sup>31</sup> For this programme, sponsors do not identify and choose (“name”) the refugees themselves, instead, sponsored refugees are identified and referred by UNHCR. The government then matches sponsors with the selected refugee(s) and shares the costs of settlement support with the sponsor. The blended programme thus opened up the possibility to offer expedited private resettlement to a large pool of refugees already identified by UNHCR, in accordance with resettlement criteria that have principle regard for protection needs. This approach facilitates refugee admission to Canada for refugees in need who may not be likely to be identified (named) by sponsors themselves, since the focus most often is on family members.

28 The Canadian private sponsorship programme is discussed extensively in section 4 of the Scoping Paper.

29 MPI (author: Judith Kumin) ‘Welcoming Engagement: How Private Sponsorship Can Strengthen Refugee Resettlement in the European Union’ December 2015

30 The Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme. See section 4

31 [http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/media/bvor-welcoming-syrian-refugee-process-en.pdf?\\_ga=2.6776373.606055638.1504340889-2119884363.1504340889](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/media/bvor-welcoming-syrian-refugee-process-en.pdf?_ga=2.6776373.606055638.1504340889-2119884363.1504340889)

With respect to the emerging European sponsorship programmes discussed in this report, we will see variations in the above-mentioned core elements. Nevertheless, considerable progress is being made in Europe, in developing public-private partnerships that facilitate legal admission for refugees and working towards clearer frameworks to divide roles and responsibilities between governments, facilitating legal access and private actors, providing financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle refugees into the community. The ongoing initiatives, however, offer a first evidence base for further defining private sponsorship programmes, setting some minimum standards while maintaining flexibility to adapt to the specific legal context of each country.

## 4. Private sponsorship models: Canada

For more than 40 years, the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees programme (PSR) has engaged citizens across Canada to welcome **almost 300,000 refugees**.<sup>32</sup>

In total, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) facilitates **three types of resettlement**: The Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) programme - Canada's national resettlement programme; the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Programme; and the newer Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme - which was launched in 2013.

PSR allows for sponsorship through **three types of sponsors**: 1) Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs): incorporated organisations which have signed agreements with IRCC to sponsor multiple people each year; 2) Groups of Five (G5s): groups of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents; and 3) Community Sponsors (CSs): community groups that sponsor individuals once or infrequently.

In recent years, about **46 per cent of all refugees resettled to Canada were privately sponsored**.<sup>33</sup> The government set a ceiling for refugees that can be sponsored annually.

Sponsors engaged in PSR and BVOR alike often tend to be **affiliated with faith-based organisations**. For example, 75% of SAHs (outside of Quebec) are either religious institutions (churches, primarily) or faith-based NGOs<sup>34</sup>; Ethno-cultural associations and immigrant-services organisations, also play an important role.

Universities have also acted as sponsors. The World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (an SAH)<sup>35</sup> has, for the past 35 years facilitated and supported **student-to-student sponsorship**, enabling young refugees to enter Canada and access university education as permanent residents.<sup>36</sup>

The 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) regulates who can be sponsored and how they are selected. Sponsors can 'name' the refugee they wish to sponsor. Refugees must be recognized as refugees by UNHCR (including prima facie recognition) or by their country of asylum. SAHs may also sponsor individuals who are not 1951 Convention refugees, but who "are seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict," known as Country of Asylum refugees. Though not a programme requirement, many sponsors bring (extended) family members to Canada: roughly **90% of PSR arrivals are 'family-linked'**.<sup>37</sup>

The entire **process** has traditionally taken up to three to four years and can be relatively complex for independent groups. Sponsors must submit an application including **detailed settlement plans for the first 12 months**. Potential sponsors submit applications to IRCC, which then forwards the refugee application to the relevant **visa office overseas**; refugees are then interviewed by IRCC and undergo security and medical checks after which a visa is granted. Since 1988, the IOM has been implementing the Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) programme. It provides pre-arrival orientation sessions which are offered to all sponsored refugees in their native language and free of charge. IOM also organises for sponsored refugees' travel. Canada has an immigration loan programme, which is offered to refugees and

32 <http://www.refugeehub.ca/single-post/2017/06/27/PRESS-RELEASE-Global-Initiative-Brings-Canada%E2%80%99s-Refugee-Sponsorship-Model-to-the-World>

33 Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs, 2016 (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP): <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/resettlement.asp>

34 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/list-sponsors.asp>

35 See for further details <https://srp.wusc.ca/>

36 This topic is covered by ERN+ Scoping Paper: "Higher Education Scholarship Opportunities in the European Union as a Pathway of Refugee Admission" available at [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)

37 [http://www.hhrmwpg.org/opinion/unintended-consequences-of-canada-s-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-program\\_102](http://www.hhrmwpg.org/opinion/unintended-consequences-of-canada-s-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-program_102)

which usually covers the cost of the required medical exams, travel and other related expenses. During the first 12 months after arrival, sponsors must provide **income support and settlement services**, while the government provides access to health care and education. The sponsorship is aimed at helping the refugee to be self-sufficient, though they are able to access the public welfare system once the sponsorship period ends after 12 months. Although the sponsorship obligation ends after one year – relations between sponsors and sponsored refugees usually persist beyond that period and often indefinitely. The total cost of sponsoring a refugee for one year is estimated at \$ 12,600 Canadian dollars (approx. € 8,805) for one person and \$ 29,700 CAD (approx. € 20,755) for a family of five. This amount is comparable to the amount the Canadian government spends on assistance to refugees arriving through the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) programme.<sup>38</sup>

A new blended sponsorship model - **the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme** – was launched in 2013 which deviates from the regular PSR programme. For the BVOR, UNHCR identifies and refers refugees rather than the sponsor naming the refugee. The government then matches sponsors with the selected refugee(s). Instead of providing 12 months of settlement support, the costs of BVOR sponsored refugees are shared. The government covers six months of income support while the other six months are covered by the sponsor.<sup>39</sup> Canada also shares responsibilities with private organisations in the **Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) programme**, a blended programme under Canada's national resettlement programme (GAR). Through JAS, vulnerable refugees requiring special assistance are matched with sponsoring organisations, and they receive income support from the government, as well as social and specialized services.

38 Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs, 2016 (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP):

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/resettlement.asp>. Thirty eight percent of refugees sponsored through PSRs report knowing at least one of Canada's official languages, which is somewhat higher than refugees sponsored through GARs (26%, respectively).

39 [http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/media/bvor-welcoming-syrian-refugee-process-en.pdf?\\_ga=2.6776373.606055638.1504340889-2119884363.1504340889](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/media/bvor-welcoming-syrian-refugee-process-en.pdf?_ga=2.6776373.606055638.1504340889-2119884363.1504340889)

## THE CANADIAN PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES (PSR) PROGRAMME

**Implementation period:** Since 1978 (ongoing)

**Legal basis:** 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

**Annual Resettlement Numbers:** Approx. 46,000 persons in 2016 (approx. of which 18,800 of those privately sponsored and over 4,000 BVOR)

**Who can be sponsored?** Persons with refugee status according to the 1951 Geneva Convention, or those who “are seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict”

**Selection:** Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in missions abroad

**Entry visa:** Convention Refugee Abroad Class or Country of Asylum Class visa

**Residence permit:** Refugee status offering permanent residency, with pathway to citizenship)

**Identification/referral:** Sponsor

**Who can sponsor?** Faith-based, humanitarian or ethno-cultural organisations and private persons, businesses

**Responsibilities of the sponsor:** 1 year financial responsibility and settlement support (for cases in need for special support this period can be extended)

UNHCR in particular has welcomed the BVOR programme and promotes this approach in Europe, given that the referral procedure ensures access to resettlement under private sponsorship arrangement for refugees who need it most.

In late 2015, Canada announced plans for **the emergency resettlement of 25,000 Syrians** by February 2016. The Canadians more than reached their goal, with 29,817 Syrians arriving at more than **300 Canadian communities** between November 2015 and September 2016, including 54% under the government resettlement programme, 36% under the Private Sponsorship Programme and 10% through the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme. Further commitments were made in 2016 to resettle an additional 25,000 Syrians in 2017, and to clear the backlog of Syrian refugee private sponsorship applications. This represents a **125% increase in refugee admissions to Canada** from 25,085 arrivals in 2013-2014 up to 56,500 arrivals in 2015-2016 (as of September 2016).<sup>40</sup> The Syrian programme has demonstrated the capacity for sponsorship applications in Canada to be processed faster than has previously been typical.

A few elements have made the PSR programme successful throughout the years: it is relatively **accessible**, with broad eligibility criteria; it offers refugee status and a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship; roles, responsibilities and rights are clearly-defined; and it maintains the principle of **'additionality,'** such that sponsored refugees are admitted *in addition* to the national resettlement quota.

A crucial benefit of private sponsorship is the **benefits in terms of integration outcomes**<sup>41</sup>. A 2016 evaluation of Canada's resettlement programmes shows that

a key benefit of the PSR is the contribution to both **long-term integration as well as public support for refugee protection**.<sup>42</sup> Sponsored refugees have been noted to have better integration outcomes than government resettled refugees. Sponsorship offers an opportunity to directly engage with the resettlement process and, as a result, it builds **welcoming communities** and directly contributes to long-term integration efforts; it also provides an important opportunity to reframe the migration debate, generating public support for refugee protection. The same evaluation has shown that **slow processing times** are a major challenge in the Canadian programme. As of November 2016, there were 45,000 persons for whom PSR applications were in process, including 6,400 applications that had been waiting for more than 3 years.<sup>43</sup>

The Canadian Government invests considerably in **ensuring quality sponsorships**. The IRCC, therefore, funds the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP)<sup>44</sup> to support sponsors and provide training and information on the process. Other groups, such as the SAH Association and the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), also provide training, networking and support for potential sponsors.<sup>45</sup>

Settlement support is also monitored by local IRCC offices, which can declare a **sponsorship 'break-down'** if sponsors are unwilling or unable to continue their duties as sponsors. In such cases, provincial or municipal social assistance programmes offer a **safety-net** of income-support to the refugee. Still, critics note that a lack of intensive monitoring can result in sponsors who are unprepared, and sponsorship relationships characterized by dependency and paternalism. Training for, and monitoring of, sponsors is thus important in order to ensure that norms of conduct are not violated,

40 | It also represents a 116% increase in arrivals through the PSR programme, from 11,400 PSR arrivals in 2013-2014 up to 24,590 PSR arrivals in 2015-2016 (as of September 2016). See Refugee admissions to Canada, 2011-2016: [open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/4a1b260a-7ac4-4985-80a0-603bfe4aec11](http://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/4a1b260a-7ac4-4985-80a0-603bfe4aec11)

41 <http://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/resettlement/hyndman-payne-jimenez.pdf>

42 See also on better integration outcomes of privately sponsored refugees <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/may-2016/the-two-solititudes-of-canadas-syrian-refugee/>

43 Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR): <http://ccrweb.ca/en/private-sponsorship-refugees-2017>

44 See <http://www.rstp.ca/en>

45 See, for example, the Refugee Sponsorship Toolkit designed by CCR: <http://ccrweb.ca/en/psr-toolkit/home>, or the registry of sponsors for information sharing and data collection in Ottawa, designed by local organisation, Refugee 613: <https://www.refugee613.ca/pages/register-your-sponsorship-group>

that refugees are aware of their rights and that relationships are properly balanced.<sup>46</sup>

Despite some challenges, the Canadian sponsorship programme can be considered a 'golden standard' – not only in its scale, but also in its **comprehensive approach to refugee protection**. PSR expands government resettlement capacity, as it is based on additionality to the governments resettlement programme, and the responsibilities of sponsors and of the government are clearly defined; it is also relatively flexible in its eligibility criteria, and it offers a durable solution to refugees.

While it needs to be recognised that models cannot necessarily be transposed easily from one country to another, much can be learned from the Canadian experience. Building on its successes and experiences, the Canadian government, together with the University of Ottawa, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundation (OSF) and the Radcliffe Foundation, therefore launched the **Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI)** at the end of 2016, with the goal of sharing Canada's experience in refugee sponsorship and supporting the adoption of similar models in other countries. The GRSI has recently launched a website<sup>47</sup> and will be launching a **Community Sponsorship of Refugees Guidebook and Planning Tools** to give local public servants, NGOs, community organisations and politicians the tools they need to advocate for and build a unique and sustainable system in their own countries.

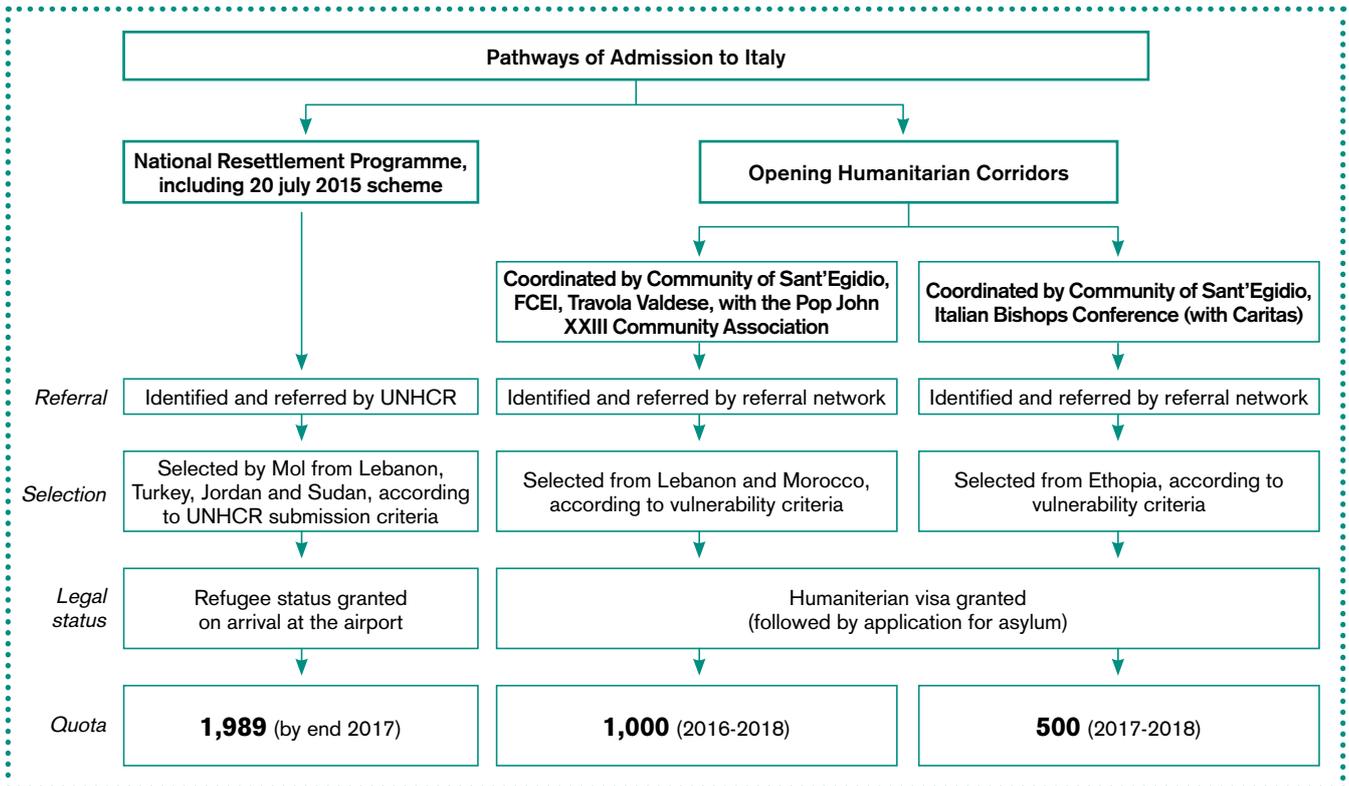
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46 <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2017/04/04/private-sponsorship-not-panacea-for-refugee-integration-researchers>

47 Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative: <http://refugeesponsorship.org>

# 5. The Humanitarian Corridor

## 5.1. THE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDOR PROGRAMME IN ITALY



The Italian churches' coalition leading the Humanitarian Corridors programme has played an important role in increasing opportunities for safe pathways to Europe, demonstrating the potential of civil society to work in partnership with government agencies for refugee protection.

The Humanitarian Corridors pilot programme was established in December 2015 through a **Memorandum of Understanding** (MoU), signed by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches (FCEI), and the Waldensian Board along with the Italian Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs. The agreement foresees the authorization of 1,000 transfers under a pilot programme. The programme **is in addition to the Italian government resettlement programme**. The

Humanitarian Corridors Programme got off the ground quickly and has as of August 2017, thus within 1.5 years, admitted almost 90% of the 1,000 quota. Almost all refugees are Syrians arriving from Lebanon. Although the MoU foresees that 150 of the 1,000 quota would be transferred from Morocco, this component has not been realised.

The Humanitarian Corridors programme is **funded through Italy's '8 x 1,000'** (*otto per mille*) system in which taxpayers contribute a compulsory 0.08% of their annual income to charities or faith-based organisations of their choice. The organisations involved in the programme finance the programme via this contribution. The first phase of the Italian programme was defined in close coordination with the Italian Government and

## HUMANITARIAN CORRIDOR: FIRST EXPERIENCES AND REFLECTION

In 2016, approximately 540 Syrian men, women and children arrived to Italy through the Humanitarian Corridors programme. Below are some of their reflections.

Beneficiaries of the programme reported being **thankful** to have arrived to safety in Italy: "We're grateful for the programme. I don't want to go anywhere else. We escaped from Syria to Lebanon. And then from Lebanon to Italy. Enough is enough! We don't want to escape anymore." *Naser, age 32*

A number of beneficiaries also expressed concern about a **lack of clarity** with regard to both the terms of their sponsorship and to the public social assistance that will be available to them after the sponsorship period ends: "For me, there's a lot of fear, uncertainty; it feels like the terms are always changing. We want a road, a path to know where we're going. We want things to be clear." *Feras, age 29*

Not surprisingly, beneficiaries also expressed differing opinions about their experience, highlighting the importance of supporting individuals according to their specific needs and desires, especially when it comes to **settlement and integration**: "They helped us with everything: housing, money, Italian classes, legal help. Then they started telling us to go do things on our own – and, at first, I didn't want to. But then I got used to it; I started thinking, maybe it's actually better if I go by myself!" *Hanan, age 22*

Programme organisers also noted the challenge of striking a **balance in order to promote self-sufficiency in the long term**: "We can help but we will not always be here. Hospitality is not forever. The most important thing is to give them tools to go on alone. We don't want to treat them like children! They are people who had normal lives before. We want them to be independent as soon as possible, and they want that too. The Humanitarian Corridors project should be a tool to help you breathe a bit when you arrive - a resting island. It's an opportunity to concentrate on your future - which is better for people than becoming too dependent." *Elisabetta Libanore, Turin Humanitarian Corridors Coordinator, Diaconia Valdese*

\*names have been changed

has focused on bringing vulnerable people in Lebanon to safety and preventing dangerous sea journeys; as such, the respective sponsoring organisations have each taken different approaches to both pre-departure selection, and post-arrival reception. In Lebanon, the sponsors worked with their own referral networks of NGOs and churches in order to identify (name) the persons to be sponsored who are selected according to vulnerability criteria. UNHCR was consulted as part of the identification process, which was helpful in terms of ensuring that selection was undertaken based on vulnerabilities (and on a non-discriminatory basis) and that protection sensitivities in the country of asylum were considered as part of the process. Programme organisers note that, while asylum processes have been quite straightforward in the case of Syrian refugees, sponsoring of refugees of other nationalities may be more complex, requiring additional scrutiny and safeguarding.

Italy uses the provisions of the **EU-Visa Code**<sup>48</sup> to facilitate legal entry to its territory. Those admitted to Italy via humanitarian visas through the programme must apply for asylum on arrival and undergo an interview with the Territorial Commission before being granted refugee status. As has been reported by the sponsoring organisations, those who applied for asylum through the Humanitarian Corridor programme have been benefiting from expedited decision-making on their asylum applications ensuring applicants of a secure status as soon as possible.<sup>49</sup>

Per the Humanitarian Corridors MoUs, after arrival in Italy, sponsored persons are provided with **financial, legal and social support** by sponsoring groups for a period of time that is not formally defined, but ranges between 1 and 2 years. As an initiative of faith-based organisations, the programme relies on a **wide network of advocates and volunteers** for settlement and integration support. In practice, each sponsoring organisation provides reception according to its respective capacities. FCEI and Diaconia Valdese (the social organisation of the Waldensian Board), for example, have

## HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN ITALY

**Implementation period:** 2016-18

**Legal Basis:** Article 25 of the EU Visa Code allows for Member States to grant visas with Limited Territorial Validity for humanitarian reasons

**Number of persons:** 1,500

**Annual Resettlement Numbers:** 989 persons to be admitted through the national resettlement programme (2015-2017). Sponsored persons are admitted in addition to these 989.

**Who can be sponsored?** Persons residing in Lebanon, Morocco or Ethiopia meeting the programme's vulnerability criteria (RSD not required)

**Entry visa:** Humanitarian visa

**Residence permit:** Sponsored permits apply for asylum on arrival

**Identification/referral:** Sponsors

**Who can sponsor?** Church communities that have signed an MoU with the Italian government

**Responsibilities of the Sponsor:** Travel, accommodation, living costs, integration support.

<sup>48</sup> Reg. 810/2009: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009R0810&from=en>

<sup>49</sup> Thus far, every person admitted through the Humanitarian Corridor programme has been granted international protection status.

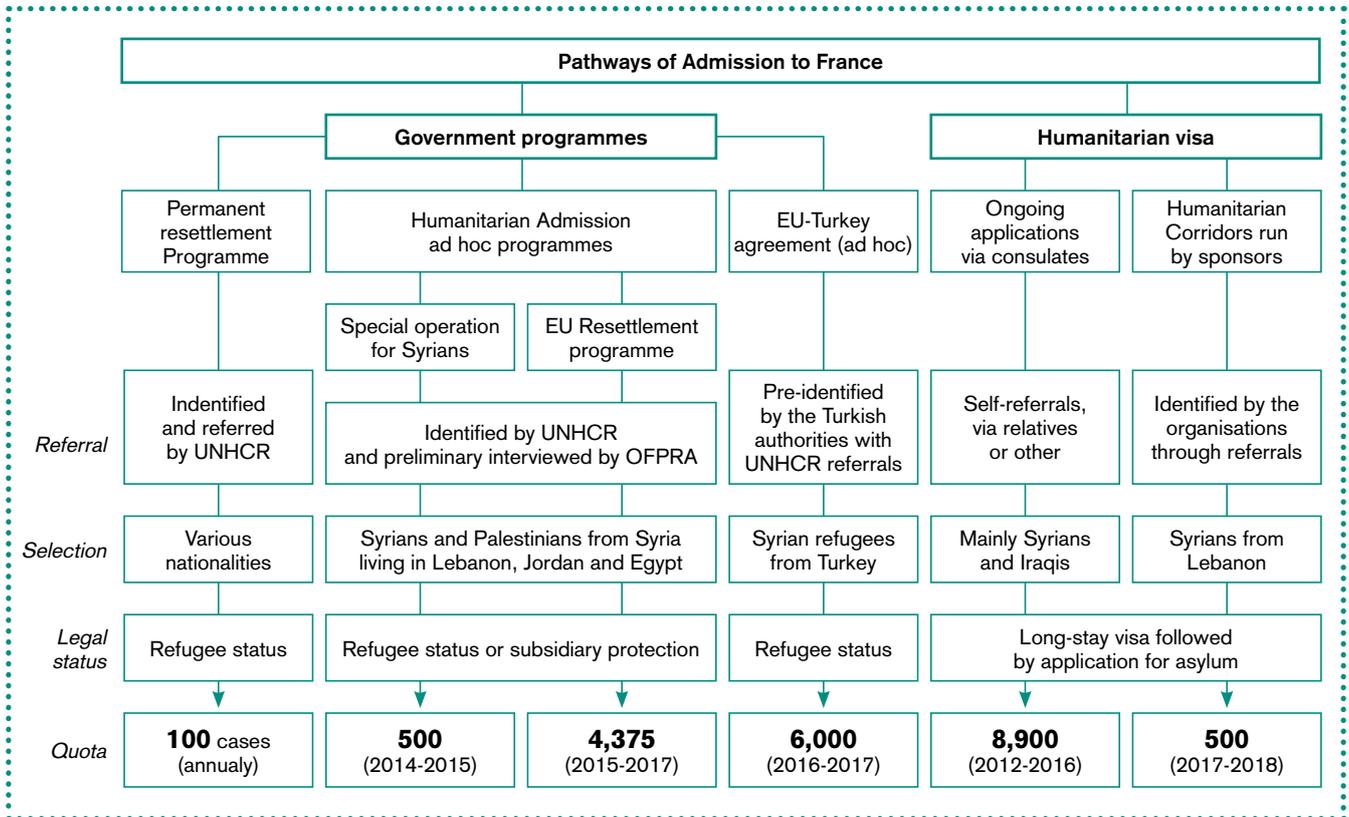
primarily hosted sponsored persons in rented flats, with the sponsoring organisations covering the cost of rent and utilities. Sant'Egidio, for its part, has mostly relied on its vast network to accommodate sponsored persons in church housing, as well as in the homes of private individuals who volunteer their homes. The parameters of the pilot Humanitarian Corridors programme (i.e. the length of time of sponsorship, the amount covered by sponsors, types of accommodation, settlement services to be provided) vary, **each organisation developing their own respective systems** within this more flexible framework. One issue that should be addressed over time is that there is some lack of clarity on how long sponsors will provide settlement support, and to what extent public social assistance will be available to sponsored persons when the sponsorship period comes to an end.

Following this successful result of the first phase, a new MoU was signed in February 2017 for a second phase of the Humanitarian Corridors programme which will be coordinated by the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Italian Bishops Conference, along with Caritas Italy.

The **second Humanitarian Corridor programme** is expected to start autumn 2017 and end in 2018 and aims to admit **500 Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese refugees** who are located in refugee camps and urban areas in Ethiopia. This new programme will expand the scope of the programme beyond its initial focus on Syrian refugees, and respond to the lack of legal pathways for refugees from Africa, many of whom engage in dangerous land and sea crossings via Libya. Several visits to the sponsoring organisations Sant'Egidio and Caritas Italy have already taken place, to consult with the Ethiopian Government, through the National Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) and international organisations IOM and UNHCR on the ground in order to **define the procedures for selection and transfer**. In view of challenges with managing experiences of beneficiaries, encountered earlier, Caritas Italy and the Community of Sant'Egidio will carry out pre-departure Cultural Orientation sessions to be carried out with the assistance of cultural mediators who will hereafter prepare reception in Italy.

Reception and integration will be ensured by Caritas Italy. It is foreseen that refugees will be accommodated through its existing *Rifugiato a Casa Mia* (A Refugee in My Home) programme. Caritas has extensive experience in offering structured integration support to vulnerable refugees and has also provided support to resettled refugees over recent years, using volunteers to complement professional case work support. Refugees will also be placed in smaller local communities that can often offer a soft landing to refugees.

## 5.2 THE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS PROGRAMME IN FRANCE



As is shown in the chart above<sup>50</sup>, France has considerably expanded its offer of legal pathways of refugee admissions, combining annual resettlement, ad hoc resettlement under the EU Resettlement Programme and EU Turkey agreement, Humanitarian Admission Programmes (HAPs) and humanitarian visas. France also issued large numbers of humanitarian visas for asylum purposes (so-called “*visa pour asile*”). These visas are issued at the discretion of the French government and included 4,200 visas issued to Syrians and 4,700 to Iraqis in the period 2012-2016. Since 2012, 421 of the refugees arriving under these humanitarian visas<sup>51</sup> received settlement support and legal assistance offered by private actors led by the Order of Malta (dioceses, family and local networks as well as local authorities)

and paid for with private resources<sup>52</sup>, effectively, a private sponsorship arrangement.

Following the experiences of the Italian programme, in March of 2017, a **coalition of five faith-based organisations in France signed a MoU**<sup>53</sup> with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development to sponsor 500 persons who have fled Syria (including Palestinians) or Iraq and who currently reside in Lebanon – Humanitarian Corridors France. These organisations are the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Protestant Federation of France (FPF), the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid (FEP), the Bishops' Conference of France, and Secours Catholique-Caritas France.

50 This table has been compiled on the basis of the EMN First focussed study 2016 Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Programmes in France and interviews with stakeholders.

51 [https://www.ordredemaltefrance.org/images/pdf\\_a\\_telecharger/actualites/CP\\_CCARCO\\_29.10.2014.pdf](https://www.ordredemaltefrance.org/images/pdf_a_telecharger/actualites/CP_CCARCO_29.10.2014.pdf)

52 [https://www.ordredemaltefrance.org/images/pdf\\_a\\_telecharger/Documents\\_institutionnels/rapport-activite-2016.pdf](https://www.ordredemaltefrance.org/images/pdf_a_telecharger/Documents_institutionnels/rapport-activite-2016.pdf)

53 [http://www.protestants.org/index.php?id=23&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=3846&tx\\_ttnews%5Byear%5D=2017&tx\\_ttnews%5Bmonth%5D=03&cHash=ada9707504](http://www.protestants.org/index.php?id=23&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=3846&tx_ttnews%5Byear%5D=2017&tx_ttnews%5Bmonth%5D=03&cHash=ada9707504)

## HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN FRANCE

**Implementation period:** 2017-18

**Legal Basis:** Long-stay national visa art. R311-1 and R311-3-1 of Code of Entry and Residence of Aliens and Right to Asylum (CESEDA)

**Number of persons:** 500

**Annual Resettlement Numbers:** France pledged to resettle 2,375 persons under the July 2015 scheme, in addition to 2,000 Syrians from Lebanon by the end of 2017, in addition to 6,000 Syrians from Turkey via the EU-Turkey agreement. Sponsored persons are admitted in addition to those resettled.

**Who can be sponsored?** Persons residing in Lebanon, meeting the programme's vulnerability criteria (Refugees Status Determination (RSD) not required)

**Entry visa:** Visa D (long-stay visa)

**Residence permit:** None, sponsored permits apply for asylum on arrival

**Identification/referral:** Sponsors

**Who can sponsor?** Faith-based organisations that have signed an MoU with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Responsibilities of the Sponsor:** Travel, financial liability and settlement support for one year

The French Humanitarian Corridors pilot programme, resembles the Italian programme in many ways, including a flexible framework for both selection and post-arrival reception. In July 2017, the first 5 families (for a total of 16 persons) have arrived in France and have been welcomed by and hosted in five French small municipalities.<sup>54</sup>

As is the case with the Italian the programme, the objective of the sponsoring organisations is to offer additional opportunities for refugees to legally reach France by providing financial and emotional support to refugees after their arrival in France. The project is funded by the five leading organisations together with the support of self-funded groups of citizens, churches, local networks and local authorities. The costs cover travel (offered at 50% discount by Air France), accommodation, settlement and integration support.

Sponsoring organisations are fully responsible for identification and selection, travel to France, as well as post-arrival reception for a period varying between 12 and 18 months. As is the case with the Italian programme, the parameters for pre-departure identification and selection, as well as post-arrival reception are not clearly specified in the programme's MoU. The MoU foresees a strong coordination between sponsoring organisations and the Ministry of Interior, as well as the French embassy in Lebanon. The programme focuses on **persons with specific vulnerabilities** (female heads of households, victims of trafficking, elderly, or people with handicaps or illnesses) or with **relatives or other links to France** with can enter France with humanitarian visas to apply for asylum.

Working with local referral networks including churches and NGOs in Lebanon, the organisations (mainly Sant'Egidio community) conduct interviews and submit a list of potential candidates for sponsorship, along with a completed visa application for each candidate, to the French embassy in Beirut. The embassy, together with the French Ministry of Interior, conduct a security check, and then, according to the MoU, must issue a visa D

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.lavie.fr/solidarite/initiatives/couloirs-humanitaires-les-premieries-familles-accueillies-en-france-06-07-2017-83483\\_815.php](http://www.lavie.fr/solidarite/initiatives/couloirs-humanitaires-les-premieries-familles-accueillies-en-france-06-07-2017-83483_815.php)

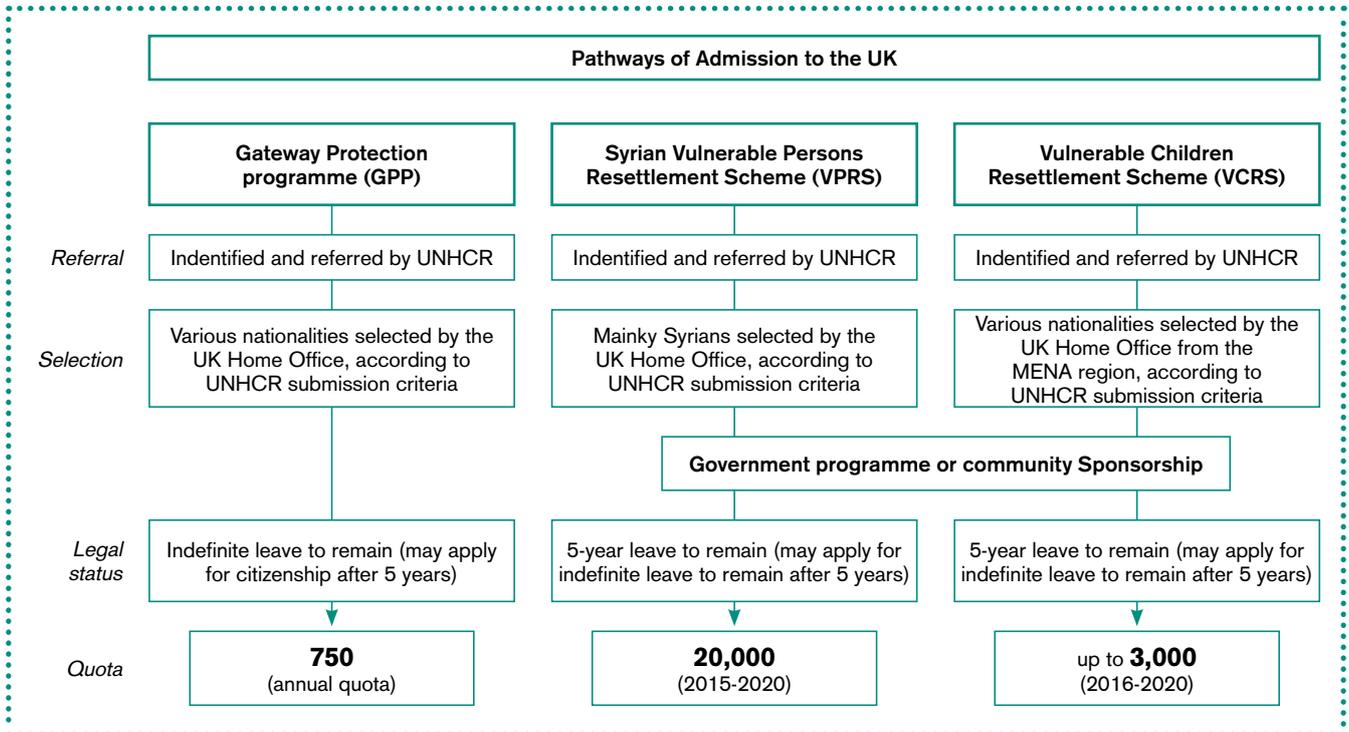
(or a rejection) within just two months. The Lebanese authorities issue an exit permit.

The '**Visa D**' enables beneficiaries to apply for asylum upon arrival in France. This visa **is a long-stay visa** previously also used under the Humanitarian Admission Programmes (HAPs) in France. Applications are therefore required to be processed within tight deadlines.

Within 15 days after arrival in France, beneficiaries obtain a permit to stay and register for asylum with the nearest prefecture after which they can lodge their asylum claims with the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA). OFPRA issues a decision within three months. Beneficiaries of the humanitarian corridors do not have the right to work before they have status.

The church sponsors in France, as in Italy, **house beneficiaries with volunteer hosts**, private citizens, volunteers and church groups offer settlement support and orientation, organised in teams and in collaboration with social workers. This ensures professional coordination of networks and teams aimed at social and economic inclusion. Sponsors have also expressed a preference for hosting beneficiaries in small municipalities, where the cost of living tends to be more affordable. Attention is also drawn to an environment that can foster refugees' autonomy including access to public transportation, better employment opportunities, and the presence of interpreters. For social and administrative support, such as access to healthcare, to education, and so on, the organisers work in close collaboration with local authorities in France. For instance, part of the accommodation consists of apartments rented by the city hall to groups of volunteers. Volunteer hosts and beneficiaries must **sign a contract** defining the condition, length and mutual responsibilities with respect to the accommodation and to the social and economic support, though the specific duties and requirements are not specified in the initial planning of the programme and, therefore, are left to the discretion of partner organisations. Indeed, each organisation has its own model of contract. Finally, the MoU provides for a **full evaluation** of the programme, a clear strength in its design.

## 6. Communities as sponsors in the United Kingdom



As is shown in the chart above<sup>55</sup>, the UK offers different legal pathways, combining an annual resettlement programme (the Gateway Programme), with two Humanitarian Admission Programmes: the Syria Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and (HAPs) and the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS).

The **UK Full Community Sponsorship Scheme**<sup>56</sup>, was set up in response to advocacy by community groups such as Citizens UK and the National Refugee

Welcome Board.<sup>57</sup> The scheme was created in 2016, enables admission under the government's resettlement pledges related to the Syrian conflict: to receive 20,000 refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict under the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)<sup>58</sup> and 3,000 vulnerable children and families from MENA through the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). As of June 2017, 8,535 Syrian refugees, identified by the UNHCR, had been resettled to Britain with the support of IOM under the VPRS and 280 children under the VCRS.

The UK sponsorship scheme, created through a Ministerial Arrangement under the UK's 2010 Equality Act, **shares responsibilities and clearly defines**

<sup>55</sup> This table has been compiled on the basis of British Home Office data and inputs from [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn-studies-28a\\_uk\\_resettlement\\_national\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn-studies-28a_uk_resettlement_national_report_en.pdf). The UK also operates the Mandate Refugee Scheme (see here: <http://www.unhcr.org/40ee6fc04.pdf>). Numbers are low under this programme and there is no quota

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship>

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.citizensuk.org/full\\_community\\_sponsorship\\_of\\_refugees](http://www.citizensuk.org/full_community_sponsorship_of_refugees)

<sup>58</sup> Previously the VPRS programme was available to Syrian nationals only, though the criteria were expanded in July 2017 to include non-Syrians fleeing the Syrian conflict.

**roles** between the government and civil society, as well as ultimately offering a durable solution for refugees. It does not create additional spaces for admission beyond those already envisaged under the VCRS and VPRS. The Government has recently announced, however, that the VPRS will now include refugees of all nationalities who have fled the conflict in Syria to neighbouring countries.<sup>59</sup> This would imply that Iraqi, Palestinian and Kurdish minorities who sought refuge in Syria before the conflict who had to flee again can now be helped. Mixed nationality family groups would thus also become eligible.

The UK sponsorship scheme has gotten a slow start, focusing on building capacity and ensuring partnerships and quality in its initial phase with a view to scaling the scheme in the future.<sup>60</sup> The first Syrian refugees under the new Community Sponsorship programme arrived in Manchester on the 9th November 2015. The sponsoring charity was Caritas Diocese of Salford and the host community was the parish of St. Monica's in the Diocese of Salford.<sup>61</sup> As of July 2017, ten communities sponsors have received 53 refugees. Organisers of the scheme predict that the numbers will grow steadily over time.

The UK scheme is quite similar to the Canadian Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR) programme. Sponsors do not have the option of naming refugees they wish to sponsor. **UNHCR identifies and refers refugees** to the UK authorities, and IOM provides pre-departure and movement support. The Home Office will then select those refugee(s) suitable for the sponsorship scheme and match them with appropriate sponsors where they are available.

The application to be a UK sponsor is currently restricted to registered charities, which signs a declaration of commitment that is limited to a 12-month period. Sponsoring

59 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/refugees-of-all-nationalities-fleeing-syria-are-now-eligible-for-resettlement-in-the-uk>

60 Several tools have been developed, which are available online. See, for example, application form for potential sponsor: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/627711/application\\_approval\\_community\\_sponsor\\_july\\_17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627711/application_approval_community_sponsor_july_17.pdf) or a guide for potential sponsors elaborated by the Home Office: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/626810/Community\\_sponsorship\\_guidance\\_for\\_prospective\\_sponsors\\_July\\_2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/626810/Community_sponsorship_guidance_for_prospective_sponsors_July_2017.pdf)

61 <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/14-july/news/uk/rudd-pledges-more-help-to-settle-syrian-refugees>

## UK FULL COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

**Implementation period:** Ongoing, since 2016

**Legal Basis:** Programme was created through a Ministerial Arrangement under paragraph 1 (d) of Schedule 23 to the Equality Act 2010

**Number of persons admitted:** 53 (as of 19 July 2017)

**Annual Resettlement Numbers:** 750 persons through the national resettlement programme, plus 3,000 vulnerable children and families from MENA ("VCRS" 2016-2020), plus 20,000 refugees in the MENA region displaced by the Syrian conflict ("VPRS" 2015-2020). Sponsorship takes place under both the VCRS and the VPRS.

**Who can be sponsored?** UNHCR referrals from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey, meeting the programme's vulnerability criteria

**Entry visa:** 6-month entry visa (Leave Outside The Rules)

**Residence permit:** 5-year leave to remain (may apply for indefinite leave to remain after 5 years)

**Identification/referral:** UNHCR

**Who can sponsor?** Registered charities, Community Interest Companies or religious organisations accredited by the Home Office

**Responsibilities of the Sponsor:** Financial and settlement support for year one. Responsibility to secure housing for two years.

organisations must submit a detailed sponsorship plan and have robust safeguarding policies in place, in order to be approved as sponsors by the UK Home Office<sup>62</sup>. Community groups who sponsor a family must guarantee £ 9,000 (approx. € 10,200) is available. Sponsors secure suitable and affordable accommodation (for two years), provide initial orientation and facilitate access to social welfare services. The UK government pays for a considerable part of the costs of sponsorship, including accommodation, **limiting the personal risk for sponsors**. The Government covers costs for the first year and gradually reduces support over the following four years, to £ 1,000 per person in the last year.

**Local authorities** also play an important role in the UK programme, as the sponsoring charity must first obtain approval from its respective municipality. Sponsors and local authorities consider and jointly agree on the allocation of refugees according to the capacity to host. The programme provides for a **safety-net**, comprising pre-defined roles for the municipality and state in cases in which the sponsorship is discontinued. Sponsored refugees are granted leave to remain for 5 years, during which they are entitled to apply for housing benefits and job seeker allowances. As other resettled refugees, sponsored persons have **access to welfare benefits and assistance**, including health insurance and a housing allowance.

The UK programme is currently in the **early stages of implementation**. Integral to the success of the model is the role of volunteers. Volunteers can go beyond assisting refugees through the resettlement and integration process by taking responsibility for the process itself and its desired outcomes. To do this properly, volunteers need to become full partners in every stage of the process pre- and post-arrival through the development of inclusive policies, funding for coordination, and tools to manage and support volunteers.<sup>63</sup>

Initial feedback from stakeholders has noted that the accreditation process and strict conditions hampers the ability of the programme to attract a wide variety of sponsors. Organizers of the programme also cite steep learning curves for potential sponsors and for local authorities (who must approve the sponsorship before the application is submitted). The concept of sponsorship in the UK is new and takes time to develop. To support this development, the the Syrian Resettlement Programme Team, consisting of the UK Home Office, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Department for Communities and Local Government in cooperation with IOM, provides preparatory workshops for community sponsors to build sponsor capacity.

In addition, the Home Office hosted a series of road shows across the UK in order to promote the Community Sponsorship scheme, to raise awareness and educate the community regarding the programme and to share examples from the Canadian experience of Community Sponsorship. The road shows were supported under the GRSI programme and included Canadian dignitaries and senior representatives from the Home Office Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Directorate, as well as leading voices on community sponsorship in the UK.

In conclusion, it can be observed that although the programme is young, it has invested considerably in building a framework and an infrastructure for both government and private sponsors to develop a sustainable high-quality private sponsorship programme. Currently, the UK programme does not provide a net increase in resettlement places though it is, of course, possible that this may change in the medium-term.

62 <https://www.irinnews.org/feature/2017/06/19/so-your-country-isnt-keen-resettle-refugees-are-you>

63 Building a Resettlement Network of European Cities and Regions. International Catholic Migration Commission and SHARE December 2015 Page 47

# 7. Relatives as sponsors: Germany and Ireland

Refugees separated from their family members often resort to smugglers, embarking on dangerous land and sea journeys to be reunited with their family. Both Germany and Ireland have established sponsorship programmes for family members to expand legal access for refugees with family ties. The programmes have provided **additional legal access** beyond the scope of the rights of third-country nationals under the EU Directive on family reunification<sup>64</sup> since they were **open to extended family** (such as siblings and grown children) in addition to the so-called ‘core’ family members (spouses and minor children).<sup>65</sup>

## 7.1 GERMANY

Germany operates different programmes to offer admission to refugees<sup>66</sup> and has significantly expanded protection places over the last 5 years. Since 2012, Germany has engaged in a small-scale resettlement programme operated in conjunction with UNHCR now reaching 500 persons per year. To resettle refugees under the EU resettlement programme and EU Turkey Agreement this number has been increased to 1,600 persons in 2016 and 2017. During 2013 and 2014, Germany provided **20,000** places, under its **Humanitarian Admission**

**Programmes (HAPs)**<sup>67</sup>, an umbrella term that incorporates several different sub-programmes, **including UNHCR identified and referred cases and family reunification programmes**. IOM supported the implementation of the Humanitarian Admission Programmes for those referred and identified by UNHCR with pre-departure health assessments, pre-departure orientation and movement assistance. The HAPS aim at simplified, time efficient refugee identification, referral and processing to provide humanitarian access under **3 year temporary residence permits** (with options to extend). These family reunification opportunities include a type of **‘sponsorship’ component**, requiring a financial commitment on the part of applying relatives.<sup>68</sup>

An additional programme, the **German Regional Admission Programmes (Landesaufnahme-programme)**, opened in July 2013; most were closed by December 2016, though the programmes in a few regions are still ongoing in 2017.<sup>69</sup> By mid-2017, around **23,000 persons have been admitted under such programme**. The programme is based on section 68 of the German Residence Act and allows German citizens or residents who had Syrian relatives affected by the war to act as full sponsors for their family members. The programme is administered separately by the German Länder (regions), with regulations varying somewhat in each of the respective Länder. The high number of applications has, however, created considerable challenges

64 Council Directive 2003/86/EC.

65 The EU Directive on the right to Family Reunification regulates the right of third-country nationals to be reunited with family residing outside the European Union. Third-country nationals with a residence permit valid for one year or more and with a prospect for permanent settlement are eligible for reunion with core family where conditions relating to the ‘sponsor’s’ financial situation, and the relative’s integration prospects are fulfilled (Art.6-8). Persons recognised as refugees have a right to reunion with core family (spouses and under-age children) without fulfilling the conditions under Article 6-8, as long as they apply for reunion within the first three months after having been recognised as refugees.

66 The Admission Programme for Beneficiaries of Protection from Syria, its neighbouring Countries, Egypt and Libya (HAP Syria): [http://emn.ie/media/04\\_EMNConference\\_ResettlementGermany\\_Grote\\_15.12.161.pdf](http://emn.ie/media/04_EMNConference_ResettlementGermany_Grote_15.12.161.pdf)

67 See EMN focus-study Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Programmes in Germany: [http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/EMN%20Study%20RST%20and%20HumAdmis\\_%20GERMANY%20ctry%20report2016.pdf](http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/EMN%20Study%20RST%20and%20HumAdmis_%20GERMANY%20ctry%20report2016.pdf).

68 Humanitarian Admission Programmes are extensively covered by ERN+/IOM Scoping Paper “Strengthening Humanitarian Admission to Europe for those in need of international protection” available at [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)

69 Brandenburg extended the programme until September 2017. The Berlin, Hamburg and the Schleswig-Holstein programmes have been renewed until the end (November or December) of 2017, and the Thuringia programme has been renewed until the end of 2018. The Berlin programme has also been expanded to include Iraqis, and the Thuringia programme has been expanded to include stateless Syrian Kurds.

## GERMAN REGIONAL ADMISSION PROGRAMMES

The Regional Admission Programmes were run in 15 out of 16 regions in Germany.

**Implementation period:** Since 2013

**Legal basis:** Regional Admission Programmes were based on section 68 of the Residence Act, which allows for a declaration of commitment (*Verpflichtungserklärung*) made by the sponsor.

**Number of persons admitted:** Open-ended (21,500 visas granted by end 2015)

**Who can be sponsored?** Syrians, residing in Syria or neighbouring countries, with family in Germany.

**Entry visa:** Entry on humanitarian grounds

**Residence permit:** 2 year renewable residence permit

**Identification/referral:** Sponsors

**Who can sponsor?** German citizens or residents who have family links to the refugee. – applications have been underwritten (co-sponsored) by NGOs and citizens groups.

**Responsibilities of the Sponsors:** Travel and full financial liability for 5 years- except for healthcare.

for both the families and for German missions abroad (in particular in the countries neighbouring Syria) which are charged with the visa applications process and issuing visas.<sup>70</sup> Staff capacities are strained and waiting periods for processing applications can be as long as one and a half years in certain diplomatic missions.

Persons sponsored by relatives under the German Regional Admission Programmes are admitted on **humanitarian grounds and offered a 2-year renewable residence permit**. To be eligible, applicants must provide proof that they can cover all costs relating to their relatives' travel and stay in Germany and sign a **binding declaration of commitment** (*Verpflichtungserklärung*) to account for all expenses linked to their relatives' travel and stay (including housing, income and social services). The cost of sponsorship (and the amount required to prove financial ability to sponsor) is determined separately by each of the *Länders*; initially, sponsorship involved all expenses. However, in 2014, the programme was amended to require the *Länder* to bear the **cost of medical care**. Sponsored individuals are also eligible to register for integration courses (though the fee must usually be paid by the sponsor) and university, as well as pre-school and compulsory primary and secondary education. **Initially, this obligation on the part of the sponsor was indefinite**. However in 2016, the federal legislator introduced **a time limit of five years** for all declarations of commitment declared after the enforcement of the Integration Act, which was adopted in July 2016, whereas the time limit for previously declared obligations was determined to be three years, starting with the date of the enactment of the new law.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> See EMN Germany report 'Family reunification of Third Country Nationals on Germany' available at: [https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Publikationen/EMN/Studien/wp73-emn-familiennachzug-drittstaatsangehoerige-deutschland.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Publikationen/EMN/Studien/wp73-emn-familiennachzug-drittstaatsangehoerige-deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)

<sup>71</sup> The programme is based on Article 23(1) /Article 68 Residence law. Article 23(1) grants *Länder* governments the right to grant residency to groups of persons from a specific country for humanitarian reasons, independent of national programmes. *Länder* governments are free to set individual quotas, reception conditions and other programme aspects but need consent from the federal government. Article 68 is the legal basis for the sponsor's declaration of commitment.

## ONGOING UNCERTAINTY FOR SPONSORS

### Three years into sponsorship under the German Regional Admission Programme

In 2014, Bassam\*, a man living in the North Rhine Westphalia region, signed five declarations of commitment to bring his parents and three siblings to safety. Bassam is currently in the third year of his sponsorship:

**For the first eight months after their arrival, my family moved into my apartment and I was responsible for their financial support.** Ever since my family's applications for asylum were approved, they have received welfare support and have attended language, and integration classes. My parents are struggling to integrate which I think is connected to their age, but they are slowly adapting. All three of my siblings have made great progress in learning German. My younger brother is looking for a traineeship, and my sister got a job at a bank and is financially independent. She was very involved in the local church community, helping other new arrivals, which helped her to learn German very quickly.

I was unable to sign declarations of commitment for my older brother's wife and two young children. In the end he decided to come by himself, hoping he could apply for family reunification, but it has now been two years since he last saw his family and despite the help of a lawyer we have been unable to find a way to reunite them. While I am glad that my family is safe, there has been a lot of uncertainty for us over the past three years. **We assumed, and were told, that once my family's applications for asylum succeeded, I would be relieved of my duties as a sponsor.** This August, the highest administrative court decided that the declaration of commitment would bind a sponsor regardless of the outcome of an asylum procedure. I am worried because this means that the job-centres who currently provide the financial support for my family can **ask me to repay all their expenses, which is € 900 per month per person.** Over the course of five years, this adds up to incredible sums. Although my family has the right to work, five years of full financial commitment is too long for a private person to handle.

Based on my own experience and from what I have learned from other persons who have signed declarations of commitment to bring their family to safety, I would recommend that if there were a similar programme in the future, **the rights and duties linked to sponsorship should be made very clear.** Most importantly, the financial commitment for family members should be **limited to a realistic timeframe and amount.** Judging from my own family's experience, it is also of great importance for sponsored individuals to be able to apply for family reunification for those who were unable to come to Germany through the original sponsorship. If a private sponsorship programme were to take into account the real perspective of families, these aspects would be indispensable.

\*name has been changed. This interview is a follow up of an earlier interview conducted in the context of the 10% of Refugees From Syria: Europe's resettlement and other admission responses in a global perspective (ICMC Europe, 2015, p. 47)

Many **sponsored relatives have reportedly applied for asylum after arrival** in order to obtain a more secure legal status, to gain access to social welfare and family reunification, and thus relieve sponsors of major financial responsibilities.

In August 2016, the German Federal Administrative Court decided that **a successful asylum application would not relieve sponsors of their financial commitments**. According to the decision, when welfare payments are made to persons who are granted refugee status, **sponsors can be held responsible to return such payments to the state**.

The case of Bassam\*, a Syrian sponsor who was interviewed by the researchers during the course of 2017, (see textbox) illustrates the profound financial and emotional challenges experienced by some sponsors navigating this system, especially in light of the recent Court decision.

**Broader communities, including churches, non-governmental organisations and private citizens**, have stepped in to relieve sponsors of heavy, and often unrealistic, burdens. In some of the German Regional Programmes, **official ‘co-sponsorship’** was permitted, allowing a second signature on the declaration of commitment by a civil society actor that agrees to be legally liable for the costs linked to sponsorship.

In Berlin, for example, *Fluechtlingspaten Syrien*, a non-profit organisation, recruited co-sponsors (who are not related to sponsored refugees) to co-sign applications and reached a wider group of citizens to contribute to the costs of sponsorship of relatives.<sup>72</sup> Syrian families can apply to the organisation to seek support for their sponsorship application. Around 4,000 Berlin citizens have signed up to be sponsors or ‘godparents’ by **donating €10 per month, which contributes to a dedicated ‘sponsorship pool’ to support applications**. This support covers air travel, the acquisition and financing of housing, living expenses, and language and integration courses for arriving relatives. The organisation not only facilitates family reunification sponsorship

but, through volunteers, provides language support and social orientation. As of July 2017, 197 applications have been supported by the Berlin initiative. The sponsorship crowd-funding initiative can be considered one of the most innovative local citizenship initiatives currently being implemented, tapping into grassroots engagement to expand legal pathways. Another organisation, *Thuringer-Fluechtlingspaten* Syrian, also operates a similar model in Thuringia.<sup>73</sup>

## 7.2 IRELAND

Ireland operates an annual resettlement programme. Some 766 persons were resettled to Ireland between January 2011 and November 2016, and an additional 260 refugees are to be resettled in 2017. The majority of refugees resettled since 2014 have been of Syrian origin. To provide a new safe legal route to enter and reside in Ireland for family members of Syrian nationals living in Ireland and of naturalised Irish citizens of Syrian origin, Ireland established the **Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP)** in addition to its resettlement programme, which ran for a **six-week period** in 2014 (from 14 March to 30 April 2014.)

The SHAP allowed Irish citizens of Syrian origin or Syrian residents in Ireland to sponsor the admission and stay of relatives with **specific vulnerabilities** through declarations of commitment. As in the German programme, sponsored persons were admitted on humanitarian grounds and were offered a 2-year renewable residence permit. However, requirements and regulations for renewal have been reported to be unclear and often difficult to meet including, for example, holding a valid Syrian passport. Under the Irish programme, sponsors were responsible for full support, as the sponsored person was **not eligible for social welfare**. However, SHAP beneficiaries had the right to seek and enter employment. Sponsors were allowed to submit applications for up to four persons, prioritising two; in total, 308 applications were submitted, and **119 persons were**

72 <https://fluechtlingspaten-syrien.de/>

73 <http://thueringer-fluechtlingspaten.de/aktuelles/>

**granted permission to enter Ireland.** A number of arriving persons have applied for and been granted asylum in order to secure access to increased assistance.

SHAP was a once-off programme and it will not be renewed. There are at this moment no immediate plans to run another private sponsorship scheme in Ireland. SHAP is monitored internally for the purposes of establishing those who will potentially apply for renewal. UNHCR Ireland has been in contact with SHAP sponsors and beneficiaries and is reviewing some aspects of the scheme.

UNHCR and some NGOs are advocating for a new version of SHAP to run alongside other legal avenues to be established, e.g. student visas.<sup>74</sup> The Irish NGO Nasc initiated the 'Safe Passage' campaign<sup>75</sup> in late 2016, calling for a follow-up programme which would offer additional support to Syrians and would address some of the challenges identified. The proposed programme would allow for '**co-sponsorship**', in which Syrian residents of Ireland who apply as **sponsors can partner with private citizens, religious organisations, NGOs or community groups, who would offer financial backing to support the sponsors.** Such a programme could benefit from the experiences and best practices developed in co-sponsorship under the German programme (see above).

## IRISH SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN ADMISSION PROGRAMME (SHAP)

**Implementation period:** March-December 2014 (Applications were open from 14 March to 30 April 2014. Decisions were issued around December 2014)

**Legal basis:** Based on ministerial decision (Ministry of Justice), not legislation

**Number of persons admitted:** 119 have been granted permission although it is not confirmed that all have arrived.

**Annual Resettlement Numbers:** 2014 quota: 90, the 2015-16-17 quota was 520 annually for these three years.

**Who could be sponsored?** Syrians, residing in Syria or neighbouring countries, who fulfil the SHAP vulnerability criteria (RSD not required), and who have family in Ireland

**Entry visa:** Entry on humanitarian grounds  
**Residence permit:** 2 year renewable residence permit ( requirements for renewal are not specified)

**Identification/referral:** Sponsoring relatives

**Who can sponsor?** Irish citizens of Syrian origin or Syrian nationals legally residing in Ireland, who have family links to the refugee

**Responsibilities of the Sponsors:** Travel, full financial liability for the duration of the stay, where beneficiaries are not self-sufficient (i.e. through work)

<sup>74</sup> See EMN report on Ireland [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/14a\\_ireland\\_resettlement\\_national\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/14a_ireland_resettlement_national_report_en.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Safe Passage campaign: <http://www.nascireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SHAP-2-Proposal-FINAL.pdf>

## 8. Other Private Sponsorship Initiatives in Europe

As in Canada, European sponsorship initiatives have until now been promoted particularly by faith-based communities and church communities, thanks to their Christian mission, their established experience in humanitarian work, their long-standing relations with national governments, and their extensive social networks. Following Pope Francis' call<sup>76</sup> for Christian communities to contribute to the protection of forced migrants, and specifically for every religious community in Europe to provide sanctuary to refugees, an ecumenical coalition of church groups under the leadership of the Community of Sant'Egidio successfully advocated for the establishment of a Humanitarian Corridors Programme in Italy and in France.<sup>77</sup> Sant'Egidio has also promoted the concept in other European countries, including in Belgium, Poland and Spain. Beyond the Community of Sant'Egidio, other faith-based groups have been involved in refugee sponsorship, for example, the Order of Malta in France with respect to the 500 Christian Iraqi programme, facilitating humanitarian visas to Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Iraq. The programme focused on ensuring family reunification with relatives in France.

Also, Poland and Slovakia have looked into private sponsorships over the last years, as was reported by the European Migration Network (EMN).<sup>78</sup> Inspired by the Italian Humanitarian Corridors, a Dutch coalition of organisations<sup>79</sup> have formed a working group to prepare a proposal to increase the Dutch resettlement quota by

offering 100 private resettlement spaces to be sponsored by civil society during 2018-2019. Cases would be identified and referred by UNHCR and be selected under the regular resettlement procedure carried out by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) in collaboration with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (COA). This so-called "blended approach" is similar to the one taken in Canada's BVOR programme, and the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme.<sup>80</sup> Housing would be ensured by local authorities within their annual commitments. NGOs would offer settlement and integration support in collaboration with local municipalities.

76 May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, take in one family" see [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/06/pope\\_asks\\_all\\_european\\_parishes\\_to\\_take\\_in\\_a\\_refugee\\_family/1169953](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/06/pope_asks_all_european_parishes_to_take_in_a_refugee_family/1169953)"

77 <http://www.santegidio.org/pagelD/11676/langID/en/Humanitarian-Corridors-for-refugees.html>

78 Slovakia received 149 internally displaced persecuted Christians from Iraq under a Humanitarian Admission Programme, carried out by Slovakia in December 2015. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn-studies-00\\_resettlement\\_synthesis\\_report\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn-studies-00_resettlement_synthesis_report_final_en.pdf)

79 Humanitas, Justice and Peace, Kerk in Actie, PAX, Raad van Kerken, Sant'Egidio-Nederland and VluchtelingenWerk Nederland

80 See section 4 'Private sponsorship models: Canada' and section 6 'Communities as sponsors in the United Kingdom'

## 9. Engaging new actors in sponsorship partnerships

This overview of European sponsorship experiences has shown the powerful role played by families, registered charities, churches and the broader community in partnering with national governments to sponsor refugees. However, other actors also have enormous potential to engage in private sponsorship and expand legal channels for refugees.

**Local municipalities and cities can play an important role in facilitating and advocating for sponsorship**, even in cases where national governments are resistant to refugee admission programmes. Indeed, cities can advocate for sponsorship in much the same way that some cities have been advocating for resettlement, more broadly. For example, the ‘Save Me’ campaign, launched in Munich, led to some 51 City Council decisions between 2008 and 2013 in favour of resettlement to cities across Germany.<sup>81</sup> More recently, the Solidarity Cities Initiative, launched in October 2016 by 23 mayors and vice-mayors of the EURO CITIES network to support cities in reception and integration of refugees, has called for city governments to pledge to receive relocated refugees.<sup>82</sup> Smaller municipalities have significant potential to engage with private actors in local sponsorship programmes by offering public spaces or buildings that can be developed to host refugees via social enterprises or other public private partnerships.

There is also the potential to explore the involvement of **private companies** in European sponsorship. A few companies have acted as co-sponsors, or have contributed some of the services linked to sponsorship. The above-mentioned *Fluechtlingspaten Syrien* organisation in Berlin and Thuringia has also tapped into local businesses to provide financing. In the French and Italian

Humanitarian Corridors programme, the airlines Air France and Alitalia covered all or part of the airfare of sponsored persons. Broadly speaking, private sector entities are largely untapped resources and could contribute to future private sponsorship efforts.

**Universities** can also be important partners for private sponsorship. As described in section 4 of this report on Canada, there are successful examples of universities that can facilitate and support **student-to-student sponsorship**. Several university actors in Europe, like the University Assistance Fund (UAF) in The Netherlands, already support refugee students with loans obtained from private donations to pursue higher education<sup>83</sup>. Universities can be important partners in private sponsorship programmes by raising awareness, advocating for refugee protection places, mobilising student volunteer networks, and offering support to integration. There are many examples of faculties’ specialised departments offering psychosocial services, interpreters and language courses. Although these actions fall short of sponsorship (unlike in the Canadian case), they can demonstrate **the commitment of educational actors and student networks to support refugee arrivals**. Given the space for private sponsorship initiatives, this commitment has the potential to go even further, supporting students to access both education and integration.<sup>84</sup>

81 A City Says Yes! Reflections on the Experiences of the Save Me Campaign to Promote Refugee Resettlement in Germany: [http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/ICMC\\_SaveMe\\_SinglePages.pdf](http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/ICMC_SaveMe_SinglePages.pdf)

82 Solidarity Cities official launch: <http://solidaritycities.eu/home#publications>

83 The Dutch University Assistance Fund (UAF) See <https://www.uaf.nl/english>

84 This topic is covered by ERN+ Scoping Paper: “Higher Education Scholarship Opportunities in the European Union as a Pathway of Refugee Admission” available at [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)



# 10. Conclusions and lessons learned

Over the past years, several different admission schemes, including private sponsorship programmes, have emerged facilitating safe and legal access to Europe. These have significantly expanded protection for refugees on a temporary or permanent basis. As a result of these programmes, more refugees are being admitted than under national refugee resettlement programmes alone.

Since 2013, whether through family links, faith-based organisations, or more structured community frameworks, private sponsorship has been developing in Europe. Private actors have assumed new roles in supporting admission, welcome and integration of refugees. Under these new frameworks, responsibilities are shared between the state and private actors. The approach towards and regulation of current sponsorship programmes that have emerged vary considerably with regard to eligibility and selection of sponsored persons, legal status granted, as well as rights of sponsored persons and responsibilities of sponsors.

These examples show that private sponsorship is indeed feasible and that there is significant potential to further develop programmes that complement and add to government resettlement efforts on a permanent basis.

## Comparative overview of Private Sponsorship Initiatives in Europe

The following table provides an overview of the main features of the programmes discussed in this paper.

| Country Programme                       | Italy: Humanitarian Corridors   | France: Humanitarian Corridors  | UK: Community Sponsorship   | Germany: Regional Admission Programmes  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agreement/ Legal Basis                  | MoU between faith based organisations with Ministry of Interior and Foreign Affairs | MoU between faith based organisations with Ministry of Interior and Foreign Affairs | Based on Ministerial Arrangement under the Equality Act                         | Based on the Residence Act, allowing for declaration of commitment by sponsor |
| Sponsors                                | Faith-based organisations and churches  | Faith-based organisations and churches  | Registered charities, religious organisations or community interest companies   | Citizens or residents of Germany with family links to the sponsored person    |
| Selection (identification and referral) | Identified by sponsors through churches, NGOs and UNHCR referral networks           | Identified by sponsors through churches, NGOs and UNHCR referral networks           | Identified and referred by UNHCR  | Identified by sponsor (family link required)                                  |
| Entry Visa                              | Humanitarian visa (EU visa code)  | Visa D (long-stay visa)   | three months visa, followed by Biometric Residence Permit                       | Entry on humanitarian grounds   |
| Legal Status                            | Application for asylum upon arrival   | Application for asylum upon arrival   | 5-year of humanitarian protection (pathway to citizenship)                      | 2-year renewable residence permit   |
| Sponsorship Duration                    | 1-2 years on average  | 1 year on average   | 1 year  | 5 years   |
| Support provided by Sponsors            | Travel, accommodation, living costs, integration support                            | Travel (50% with AirFrance), accommodation, living costs and integration support    | Financial and settlement support + responsibility to ensure housing (1-2 years) | Travel, accommodation and living costs  |
| Volunteer Involvement                   | Varied level of involvement, depending on the region                                | High level of involvement, they can organise themselves in groups                   | Volunteers are involved under the leadership of the sponsors                    | Occasional involvement  |

## SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

Thanks to the lessons learned to date, seven main observations emerge that could support the development of sustainable private sponsorship programmes in Europe:

### 1. Working towards a common understanding:

Private sponsorship frameworks must be further defined while allowing for flexibility.

### 2. Complementarity:

Different legal pathways should be further streamlined to avoid confusion about status and entitlements.

### 3. Roles and responsibilities:

Sponsors and government agencies should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and the duration of sponsorship should be outlined in advance.

### 4. Additionality:

Sponsorship should be additional to existing resettlement commitments, resulting in a net increase in protection places and/or additional opportunities for specific nationalities not currently benefiting from resettlement within national quotas.

### 5. Secure solutions:

Sponsorship programmes must ensure a long-term outlook taking into account the future rights and prospects of beneficiaries.

### 6. Addressing risks:

Sponsors should be adequately screened and monitored, and safety-nets should be put in place to protect refugees in the event that sponsors are unable to meet their commitments

### 7. Ensuring quality and sustainability:

Private sponsorship programmes should include planning frameworks, stakeholder coordination, monitoring and evaluation

## I. WORKING TOWARDS A COMMON FRAMEWORK

### PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES MUST BE FURTHER DEFINED WHILE ALLOWING FOR FLEXIBILITY.

There is no commonly agreed definition of private sponsorship to guide and mobilise governments and private actors. With different private sponsorship initiatives emerging, there is a need to work towards a commonly understood definition to provide for a common framework.

In the context of extending legal pathways to Europe, private sponsorship of refugees could be understood as

**A public-private partnership between governments who facilitate legal admission for refugees and private actors who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle refugees into the local community.**

Several **blended approaches** would fit under the above definition. Blended approaches can ensure different ways of allocating responsibilities among actors and various cost-sharing arrangements, as well as ensuring that refugee referrals for private sponsorship programmes are conducted in a protection-sensitive way that also focuses on refugees who are most in need of resettlement.

These have been successfully implemented in Canada, both under government resettlement programmes and under private sponsorship programmes, with one notable example being Canada's Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme. In Europe, **blended models have emerged that could be further developed.** Government administered programmes (humanitarian admission and humanitarian visas) have introduced private sponsorship components. Likewise the UK private sponsorship programme includes UNHCR referred cases and government matching funding for settlement support.

## II. COMPLEMENTARITY

### **DIFFERENT LEGAL PATHWAYS SHOULD BE FURTHER STREAMLINED TO AVOID CONFUSION ABOUT STATUS AND ENTITLEMENTS.**

Complementary legal pathways and approaches (HAPs, targeted admission programmes for family reunification, targeted private sponsorship programmes) can significantly increase resettlement numbers and ensure safe and orderly admission. However, different programmes now offer different residence titles, with different entitlements to social welfare and other support measures.

It is important to streamline various programmes to avoid confusion, ensure transparency and avoid discrimination among the same refugees groups.

**Actors and beneficiaries should be well informed about different procedures, criteria and legal consequences.**

**Preferably beneficiaries should already be informed of the status granted at the pre-departure phase in order to manage expectations.**

## III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

### **SPONSORS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SHOULD HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE DURATION OF SPONSORSHIP SHOULD BE OUTLINED IN ADVANCE.**

To further develop private sponsorship schemes, roles and responsibilities between public and private actors must be clearly defined. Several components must be taken into account:

- **Agreement/legal basis**

The pilot initiatives in Italy and France have worked on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), formalising in broad terms the cooperation between government and sponsors, with few details with respect to implementation. Also the German Residence Act offers a very broad framework to facilitate entry, while longer-term implications are undefined. The United Kingdom has invested more in developing a solid framework to define sponsorship roles and responsibilities.

**There is a need for formal sponsorship agreements which strike a balance between offering flexibility and clearly defining mutual obligations and implementation frameworks.**

- **Legal access**

Legal access of sponsored refugees is provided by governments through different visa arrangements, including humanitarian visas (France and Germany), the EU visa code (Italy), or a three-month entry visa followed by Biometric Residence Permit (the UK).

**Cooperation with consulates, asylum authorities, UNHCR and IOM is vital to ensure expedited processing in addition to handling of visa applications of sponsored refugees.**

### • Identification, referrals, selection and pre-departure arrangements

A central feature of private sponsorship is that individuals or sponsoring organisations have the option to **identify and choose the person they would like to support** (so-called “naming”). This applies particularly to relatives who want to sponsor their (extended) family members.

**Groups of individuals, diaspora organisations, NGOs and churches, can contribute to costs and ‘co-sponsor’ applications and share financial responsibility across a broader base. Co-sponsorship can significantly reduce the liability of family members and engage a wider group of citizens and organisations in providing financial and settlement support.**

Under the French and Italian pilot initiatives, the **sponsoring organisations identify the beneficiaries** themselves in cooperation with local (development) organisations, although in most cases coordination has been established with UNHCR and IOM.

**Since there are large numbers of refugees without a durable solution that either have clear and pressing protection needs or are in protracted situations, blended models inspired by Canada’s BVOR programme, where UNHCR identifies refugees who are matched with sponsors, can be considered more widely.**

**Selection criteria for private sponsorship should reflect the relatively broad categories of national schemes, including vulnerability criteria.**

**Pre-departure cultural orientation should be implemented more widely to manage expectations and inform refugees about arrival, reception, status, entitlements and integration aspect.**

### • Settlement support and duration of the sponsorship

Settlement support offered by sponsors and private citizens constitutes an **integral part of private sponsorship**. The terms of settlement support must be defined in a realistic manner. The experience of the German Länder programme, for example, has shown that the wide scope and duration of obligations led to unreasonable financial burdens on sponsors, since sponsored refugee relatives could not benefit from the rights and entitlements offered to recognised refugees. Settlement support roles, responsibilities and costs can be **shared by varied actors**, possibly combining (local) governmental resources with those offered by private citizens, religious organisations, NGOs and/or community groups.

Discussions on long-term planning of sponsorship programmes should ideally **include all stakeholders** who are likely to be responsible for support after the sponsorship period ends. Ensuring accommodation can be a major challenge and certain initiatives have offered accommodation in family homes.

**Objectives of settlement support and the extent to which this promotes independence should be further developed.**

**Programmes that target persons with specific vulnerabilities and needs should ensure professional support services while accommodation should comply with certain minimum standards.**

**Volunteers engaging in settlement support should be properly trained and coordinated.**

• **Broadening the support basis of private sponsorship**

Local municipalities, cities, diaspora groups, universities, and private corporations in particular have a great deal to offer to expand sponsorship initiatives.

**Models which engage new actors under various type of responsibility and cost-sharing arrangements, must be further developed, taking into account best practices. These can considerably broaden community support and buy-in. Specific approaches must be developed in smaller municipalities and engage new actors in offering adequate support structures.**

**IV. ADDITIONALITY**

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**SPONSORSHIP SHOULD BE IN ADDITION TO EXISTING RESETTLEMENT COMMITMENTS, RESULTING IN A NET INCREASE IN PROTECTION PLACES AND/OR ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPECIFIC NATIONALITIES NOT CURRENTLY BENEFITING FROM RESETTLEMENT WITHIN NATIONAL QUOTAS.**

Central to successful incorporation of private sponsorship within the wider protection framework is that private sponsorship places are in addition to those offered under government programmes, thus resulting in a net increase in protection places. The German, Irish, French and Italian sponsorship programmes have all successfully added to government resettlement efforts, while the UK sponsorship programme is actually part of the government’s national resettlement quota.

Although existing initiatives primarily focus on Syrians, the second phase of the Italian Humanitarian corridor initiative has now included Eritrean, Sudanese and Somali refugees residing in Ethiopia to address the rapidly increasing protection needs along the migratory road to the Central Mediterranean.

**In a pilot phase, private sponsorship initiatives can be established as part of resettlement quota numbers but eventually, once established, should add to resettlement numbers.**

**In countries that do not yet have resettlement programmes in place, private sponsorship can ensure community engagement, build integration capacity and raise awareness of refugee protection, leading to the further expansion of protection places.**

**Additionality can also imply offering access to nationalities not included under the geographical priorities of resettlement programmes. Widening the scope of nationalities offered resettlement would respond more effectively to UNHCR Global Projected Resettlement needs.**

## V. SECURE SOLUTIONS

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### **SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES MUST ENSURE A LONG-TERM OUTLOOK TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE FUTURE RIGHTS AND PROSPECTS OF BENEFICIARIES.**

The humanitarian purpose of sponsorship programmes should always be kept at the forefront and ensure protection against *refoulement* (forced return to a place where the sponsored person life or freedom might be threatened). A long-term perspective should be reflected in the status of, and residence permit granted to, the sponsored person. While the Italian and French models foresee granting sponsored refugees formal refugee status linked to a clear framework of rights and entitlements, the German programme does not provide a clear pathway to citizenship. This has important implications for the sponsored person: without a long term view, refugees are faced with uncertainty at best, and ultimately risk losing protection after their initial permit expires.

**The legal status of sponsored refugees should take long-term protection considerations into account and provide access to permanent residency, family reunification and eventual pathways to citizenship.**

## VI. PROVIDING FOR SAFETY NETS

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### **SPONSORS SHOULD BE ADEQUATELY SCREENED AND MONITORED, AND STRUCTURES SHOULD BE PUT IN PLACE TO PROTECT REFUGEES IN THE EVENT THAT SPONSORS ARE UNABLE TO MEET THEIR COMMITMENTS.**

With the exception of the U.K., European initiatives have not envisaged official screening of sponsors to ensure that they have the financial capacity and human resources to implement sponsorship initiatives. In the UK, applications to become a sponsor are restricted to registered charities which must prove financial capacity and a settlement plan as pre-conditions for approval by the UK Home Office. In France and Italy, there is no such formalised procedure. The programmes have emerged after the intensive advocacy efforts of organisations and negotiations with the government.

Screening and monitoring of sponsors is essential, especially in early pilot phases, in order to sustain programmes over the longer term. This will ensure buy-in and support from both civil society and government actors.

**A well-functioning programme requires pre-arranged screening and monitoring of sponsors to avoid unforeseen (financial) risks that have damaging effects on sponsors and/or sponsored persons.**

**Sponsorships occasionally break down and safety net mechanisms should be available in the event that a sponsor withdraws or is not able to fulfil their commitments.**

## VII. ENSURING QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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### PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES SHOULD INCLUDE PLANNING FRAMEWORKS, STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Resettlement programmes are based on close cooperation and partnerships between governments and established, experienced actors such as UNHCR, IOM, NGOs, local authorities and other stakeholders such as local refugee service-providers. These actors offer decades of experience and it is essential to maintain their support and technical expertise. Private sponsorship initiatives can learn from frameworks and experiences developed under national resettlement programmes, particularly with respect to planning, coordination and linking pre-departure arrangements to post-arrival.

Combining innovative practices implemented under sponsorship programmes with the experience of traditional resettlement actors will allow civil society, the private sector and local and national governments across Europe to develop successful programmes across the board.

With different legal channels in place operating side-by-side, there is considerable need for multi-stakeholder coordination, including actors that are involved in the different programmes, to avoid overlaps, explore synergies and exchange best practices.

Quality sponsorships should be an objective from the outset. Such an approach would require the development of online tools and training to build a sponsorship community, which can work as a solid foundation for scaling-up schemes in the medium and longer term. The French and the Italian programmes envisage evaluation at the end of their programmes. Mid-term evaluations and feedback among practitioners can be used to improve settlement experiences at an even earlier stage. Ongoing initiatives should also consider tools developed under the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), which offers the possibility to strengthen capacity under this framework.





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