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PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP FOR INTEGRATION:

BUILDING A EUROPEAN MODEL

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Private Sponsorship for Integration
building a European model



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief provides an understanding of private sponsorship programs (PSPs) at EU and national level, with a particular focus on humanitarian corridors as implemented in Italy and France. Its aim is to raise awareness of the benefits of PSPs (humanitarian corridors being one model of PSPs) for social cohesion and integration, and to encourage and inform the development and growth of private sponsorship programs across Europe.

Although there is no commonly agreed definition of private sponsorship, and programs continue to evolve, the concept of private sponsorship generally refers to a partnership between government and civil society where a government facilitates legal admission for participants, and shares with civil society responsibility for providing financial, social and/or emotional support to welcome and receive participants of private sponsorship schemes in local communities. Thus, private sponsorship schemes generally involve a transfer of responsibility from government agencies to private actors for a certain number of actions, depending on the specific program, ranging from identification of participants to pre-departure activities, reception, and the integration process. The extent and exact nature of responsibilities delegated to sponsors in each of these areas varies across member states, lending some flexibility to the model.

A central feature of private sponsorship programs, as developed in Italy and France, is the additionality of the instruments, requiring participants of the corridors to be admitted in addition to those entering through other government-supported admission programs, such as resettlement. Another key feature is their potential for improving the integration outcomes of its participants by providing tailor-made settlement and integration support through the engagement of local communities and sponsorship

groups, which in turns helps to improve public attitudes towards refugees and migrants.

As detailed in this policy brief, when designing a humanitarian corridors program, policy makers, public authorities, sponsorship groups and practitioners need to think about several key features, including: (i) the types of participants targeted; (ii) the types of partnership with the state; (iii) the legal status granted to participants; (iv) the requirements and coordination of actors involved in the process; (v) the pre-departure and post-arrival framework; and (vi) monitoring and evaluation of the program.

In addition, there also several key elements that are needed to foster participants' integration in the long term and to enhance social cohesion and engagement of the local community, including: (i) clearly defined roles and responsibilities of stakeholders; (ii) thorough pre-departure preparation; (iii) engagement of host community and participants in the project; and (vi) communication with the broader public.

This policy brief will go into more detail regarding all of these features, extrapolating from the humanitarian corridors experience in France and Italy, and will also discuss some of the challenges and positive findings detailed in the impact assessment undertaken over the lifetime of the project.

This publication also offers some recommendations for policy makers at the national and EU level on how they can support the development and expansion of humanitarian corridors, including incentivizing members states to implement private sponsorship programs by ensuring that such programs are well funded in the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework; encouraging the development of comprehensive integration strategies and ensuring that integration services are well funded; facilitating the exchange of promising practices and the transnational exchange

of PSP models; supporting multi-stakeholder engagement in PSPs and the training of actors involved in the process; establishing national frameworks for PSPs and supporting the research and evaluation of such programs.

By investing in the development and expansion of private sponsorship schemes in the long-term, national governments and the EU have an opportunity to contribute to global responsibility-sharing for persons in need of protection while strengthening public support for migrants and refugees by creating more welcoming communities.

INTRODUCTION

The number of persons in need of protection around the world has been on an increasing trend over the last decade. In 2019 the number of forcibly displaced persons as a result of conflict, violence, persecution, or human rights violations was 79.5 million, of which 26 million were refugees.¹ Most displaced persons remain close to home, either internally displaced or in a neighbouring country, often in protracted situations, with little hope of being able to return to their countries of origin. According to UNHCR, 85% of refugees and displaced persons are hosted in developing countries, placing a significant strain on their resources.² To ensure a more predictable and fair system of responsibility-sharing among states, the European Union has committed to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, which was adopted in 2018, and aims to improve the international response to new and existing refugee situations. Its commitment to increase the number of resettlement spaces and complementary pathways available for refugees was reinforced in the EU's new Migration Pact for Asylum and Migration, released in September 2020, which calls on EU Member States to increase resettlement spaces and implement community/private sponsorship programs with the support of EASO and EU funding.

This publication will outline one such EU-funded project on sponsorship where, faith-based actors in Italy and France have established agreements with their governments to establish humanitarian corridors and receive persons in need of protection

¹ UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/>

² Ibid.

initially admitted to their respective countries on humanitarian visas. The AMIF-funded Private Sponsorship for Integration Project (PPI) — consisting of a partnership between Diaconia Valdese (DV), the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante ("FEP"), the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy ("FCEI"), Eurodiaconia, Oxfam Italia, Confronti, Idos, Piedmont Region, and Safe Passage (UK)— aims to accompany particularly vulnerable migrants in Lebanon via humanitarian corridors towards their full and effective social, cultural and economic integration in EU societies, through the implementation of a wide range of pre-departure and post-arrival integration activities. The project seeks to incentivise the application of durable European integration practices within private sponsorship and other resettlement schemes.

The aim of this policy brief is to provide an understanding of private sponsorship programs (PSPs) at the EU and national level, with a particular focus on humanitarian corridors, and to raise awareness of the benefits of PSPs for social cohesion and the integration outcomes of its participants. With this paper we aim to encourage and inform the development and growth of private sponsorship programs (humanitarian corridors being one model of PSP) across Europe.

The publication is aimed at policy makers at European and national level, potential funders, academics, civil society organisations, and any groups interested in the development and expansion of private sponsorship programs, and humanitarian corridors in particular. It is organised into five parts, the first and second will give a brief description of PSPs and the development of humanitarian corridors in Italy and France; the third section will discuss the key components of humanitarian corridors, while the fourth section will delve deeper into the main elements needed to foster the integration of its participants. The last section will offer some recommendations for the EU and national governments going forward.

WHAT IS PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP?

Characteristics of private sponsorship

For decades, there have been calls to expand resettlement and other safe and regulated pathways for migrants and refugees to reach Europe and provide legal status. In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which proposes, inter alia, several actions to expand complementary pathways for admission.

At EU level, since the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration in 2015, the EU has recognized the need to develop additional regular entry channels for people in need of protection.

Thus, while resettlement remains one of the most important tools at states' disposal to meet the protection needs of refugees, complementary pathways provide an option through which European member states, together with civil society, can scale up their contribution to international protection efforts.

Far from replacing resettlement or other routes to migration, complementary pathways provide additional avenues for refugees to access international protection and, more generally, regular routes to migration. They are not intended to substitute states' obligations to provide international protection to refugees. Rather, by facilitating safe entry to the EU, they offer migrants an

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alternative to unregulated and dangerous onward movement, whether or not they are seeking asylum.

Sponsorship programs typically support complementary path-



ways, including humanitarian admissions programs. However, sponsorship can also be used to facilitate some resettlement schemes, such as in the UK.³ Note that there is a debate in some quarters regarding the use of the terms “private sponsorship” and “community sponsorship.” Some consider the latter to be a sub-category of the former but the recent Commission Recommendation on legal pathways to protection in the EU⁴ uses these terms interchangeably. For consistency, we will use the term “private sponsorship” throughout this document.

Although there is no universally agreed definition of private sponsorship, and programs continue to evolve, the concept of private sponsorship generally refers to a partnership between government and civil society where a government facilitates legal admission for participants, and shares with civil society responsibility for providing financial, social and/or emotional support to welcome and receive participants of private sponsorship schemes in their local community.

³ For UK example see <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/uk-community-sponsorship-scheme>

⁴ C(2020) 6467 final at (26), footnote 13

Thus, private sponsorship schemes generally involve a transfer of responsibility from government agencies to private actors for a certain number of actions, depending on the specific program, ranging from identification of participants to pre-departure activities, reception, or the integration process. The extent and exact nature of responsibilities delegated to sponsors in each of these areas varies across member states.

Despite the great flexibility of the model and its different declinations across member states, private sponsorship schemes tend to share the following common objectives:

- Increasing the number of admission places available to persons in need of international protection;
- Facilitating regular and safe admission for groups who might otherwise have turned to traffickers and people-smugglers;
- Offering durable solutions and better integration prospects for participants through direct involvement of civil society in pre-departure preparation and post-arrival support;
- Enhancing community engagement and improving public attitudes towards refugees and migrants.

Humanitarian Corridors as One Model of PSP

Humanitarian corridors operating in Italy and France represent a flexible model of private sponsorship, even differing from each other in some respects. The memoranda of understanding or protocols signed with each government list the overall responsibilities of the parties and establish that the sponsors support the overall

integration of participants. In the case of France, it is explicit that this task must be carried out in collaboration and coordination with public authorities. Under both schemes, sponsors provide accommodation, support in accessing language courses and general upskilling as well as social and cultural integration. They are also responsible for assisting with asylum applications.

Humanitarian corridors operating in Italy and France are extremely flexible as to the duration of sponsors' responsibilities. In Italy, the sponsor is responsible for the participant for a maximum of two years. However, since the objective is to ensure integration, the duration can be longer or shorter as required. In France, according to the protocol, the duration is theoretically for one year, but, in reality, the average duration of support is closer to two years.

A central feature of private sponsorship developed in Italy and France is the additionality of the instrument, meaning participants in the corridors must necessarily be admitted in addition to those entering through other government-supported programs. Thus, Italian and French humanitarian corridors should always be complementary to resettlement and other admission channels.

HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN EUROPE:

THE CASES OF FRANCE AND ITALY

Origins and growth of humanitarian corridors:

a brief description

In Italy, the humanitarian corridors pilot program was established in December 2015 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Waldensian Board along with the Italian Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs. The Italian humanitarian corridor mechanism is based on Article 25 of EC Regulation n. 810/2009 of 13 July 2009 (Community Code on Visas). This permits Member States to issue visas with limited territorial validity for, among others, humanitarian reasons. The original Italian protocol applied to persons who have fled conflicts (including, for example, Syrians, Palestinians and Iraqis) currently residing in Lebanon and, separately, provided for the possibility of, among others, Syrians transiting through Morocco.

IN 2019, THE ITALIAN HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS PROGRAM RECEIVED THE UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD FOR EUROPE

This is a multi-stakeholder mechanism, which sees faith-based organizations working in partnership with the relevant ministries of the Italian government to offer lasting solutions for persons in a situation of acute concern. Following the success of the 2015-2017

pilot, which saw the safe and legal admission of 1,000 vulnerable migrants and refugees to Italy from Lebanon, a second protocol was agreed with the Italian government to permit a further 1,000 vulnerable migrants and refugees to come to Italy over the period



2017-2019. Negotiations for a third protocol with wider geographical reach to include other third countries, although delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, are about to be signed as at the time of drafting the present document.

There has been widespread recognition of the value of the mechanism as an example of good practice. In 2019, the Italian humanitarian corridors program received the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award for Europe.

The success of the program has spawned legacy corridors to France, Belgium, Andorra, San Marino and from

further departure countries besides Lebanon, such as Ethiopia, Niger and Jordan.

Following the experience of the Italian program, in March 2017, a coalition of five French faith-based organisations (The Federation of Protestant Churches in France, the Federation of Protestant NGOs in France, Caritas France, the Bishops' Conference of France and Sant'Egidio Community) signed an MoU with the Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs to sponsor 500 persons, mainly Syrians, living in refugee camps in Lebanon. The project achieved this objective in October 2020 after facing implementation delays related to the covid-19 pandemic. Negotiations for a second protocol are ongoing.

Positive findings and challenges of humanitarian corridors

An Impact Assessment⁵ undertaken over the lifetime of the project provides detailed information about the benefits and challenges of the programs studied. The overall conclusion of the Impact Assessment is that humanitarian corridors are confirmed as an example of best practice in relation to participant safety during departure and arrival, and integration processes.

Positive Findings

Key findings of the Impact Assessment include the following:

- Participants typically endeavour to establish themselves in the host country with an attitude oriented towards trust in the future;
- Participants are positively inclined to dialogue and multi-cultural exchange, while keeping alive traditional cultural and religious ties;
- Humanitarian corridors contribute to a significantly productive and diverse social fabric through their integration processes;
- As an ecumenical initiative, humanitarian corridors provide

⁵ Private sponsorship for integration Project, Impact Assessment of Humanitarian Corridors Program: Primary Achievements in Italy and France, 2020. https://www.eurodi-conia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/impact-assessment_amif_ppi_hc.pdf

a platform for dialogue and co-operation between different religious associations;

- There is a multi-stakeholder synergy between organisations conceiving the programs, national institutions giving it the green light, INGOs facilitating the process, and civil society organisations (a) identifying participants and (b) delivering reception and integration support;
- Humanitarian corridors have received support from across the political spectrum and have been successfully implemented in different political contexts;
- By deconstructing “fear of strangers,” such programs can raise awareness about asylum seekers within the host society and contribute to a shift in perspective;
- Such programs also contribute to social cohesion by integrating migrants with the local population and, in the case of the French program in particular, connecting locals themselves through their involvement in the program.

Other positive features identified by the organisations delivering the programs include the following:

- Flexibility enables the humanitarian corridors model to adapt to different national contexts and involve diverse organisations;
- Adjusting numbers to suit each context and involving multiple stakeholders fosters sustainability and buy-in;
- Inclusive eligibility criteria, beyond the parameters of the 1951 Geneva Convention, reflect a twenty-first century geopolitical context;

- Humanitarian corridors procedures can be faster than those for resettlement and may therefore be of particular benefit for those in very urgent need of admission;
- The strategy of gradual integration, beginning with appropriate pre-departure preparation and ongoing support throughout, enhances prospect of effective social cohesion.

Challenges

Key challenges identified by the Impact Assessment include the following:

- Many participants experience significant difficulties during the pre-departure process, tempered by a high degree of appreciation for the availability and competence of program staff.
- Of the sample interviewed, more than half the participants in the Italian program were disappointed with respect to the expectations they had before leaving, an issue subsequently addressed by improved PDO and post-arrival procedures.
- Finding work is a key priority but is lacking for most participants. Whilst program staff help participants to find work, public employment agencies are often found to be inadequate. This is compounded by problems associated with the recognition of academic and professional qualifications. This has a fundamental impact on the ability of participants to transition to autonomy.
- A minority of participants with a negative view of the programs has been consistently observed. Ideally, humanitarian corridors should develop even more flexible tools to assist individual cases so that nobody is left behind.

- Future programs should ensure minimum standards and quality control, while preserving the dimensions of flexibility, innovation and creativity that have characterised the programs implemented so far.

Other challenges identified by organisations delivering the programs include the following:

- A flexible framework can lead to uncertainty (for both participants and sponsors) as to sponsors' responsibilities, duration and consequences should sponsorship break down. Clearer delineation may therefore be beneficial.
- A flexible framework may foster an excessive transfer of responsibility from government to civil society, whereby states relinquish responsibility, laid down in the EU asylum acquis, for reception and integration of beneficiaries of international protection.
- Contrary to resettlement programs, humanitarian corridors have no clear official link with the Italian National Refugee Reception System (SAI/SIPROIMI/SPRAR), a particular concern given that reception of participants in humanitarian corridor programs might require extended support due to the vulnerable nature of this target group.
- Participants have access to full social benefits in both Italy and France, as asylum seekers and then as refugees, but the benefits available in Italy are meagre. In France, during the first months before participants are registered and start receiving asylum seekers' benefit, citizen committees provide financial support; in Italy, that financial support will potentially be needed for much longer.

- In Italy and France, private sponsorship schemes such as humanitarian corridors are currently regulated by private ad hoc arrangements between government and a few civil society organisations. Were it instead regulated within a national legal framework it could be open to civil society in general.
- Delivering humanitarian corridors is extremely costly and cannot, in general, be funded by civil society organisations alone. Provision of funding (both nationally and at an EU level) would significantly assist such programs to be delivered.

DESIGNING A HUMANITARIAN

CORRIDORS PROGRAM

We can extrapolate various guidelines for designing a humanitarian corridors program from the experience of those managed by FCEI and FEP in Italy and France respectively. The concept of humanitarian corridors is far from rigid: such programs can and should adapt to fit the cultural, legal and political context of the host countries concerned.

Target Participants

As the name suggests, humanitarian corridors typically target those who require humanitarian assistance, a group which may include – but will not be limited to - those who meet the strict criteria which define a “refugee” under the 1951 Geneva Convention. In the case of the programs studied, participants have, in the case of Italy, either a prima facie claim to refugee status or proven “vulnerability” and, in the case of France, a prima facie claim to refugee status/international protection and proven vulnerability.

Under both protocols, “vulnerability” takes into account personal circumstances, age, sexual orientation and state of health, e.g., victims of trafficking and people with disabilities or serious medical conditions, circumstances which clearly exacerbate the already difficult situation of displaced people.

Likewise, both in France and Italy, additional considerations include the availability of individuals or organisations to support participants, and the existence of familial or social links in the host country, limiting the likelihood of secondary movement.

The twin bases of prima facie refugee status and proven vulnerability are designed to ensure that those accessing the programs are those most in need. In the programs studied, referrals are, in some cases, made directly by UNHCR and, in all cases, a careful assessment is made by program staff to establish sufficient evidence that base criteria are met. All candidates are, in addition, screened and cleared by relevant consular authorities prior to departure.

Types of Partnerships with the State

Partnership between the state and civil society is key to the success of humanitarian corridors programs. At minimum, state participation will be required to ensure legal entry into the host country for participants through the grant of visas. This is the primary role discharged by the state in the programs studied. Indirect state support will also potentially arise from the rights flowing from the visas granted: variously, access to education, healthcare and other benefits.

The state's role could be wider still. In the cases of Italy and France, the state does not presently take any responsibility for accommodating participants whilst they remain within the program. However, the model does not exclude such a possibility. Use of state-run facilities could be offered, as could funding to support civil society to discharge the responsibility of finding and maintaining accommodation for participants, as well as for integration projects.

Types of Legal Status for Participants

In contrast to most resettlement initiatives, in the case of the programs studied, refugee status is not granted to participants prior to departure, irrespective of whether a prima facie case can

be established. Instead, applications for international protection are made only on arrival in the host country.

In the interim, participants are provided with a humanitarian visa, the basis for which can be found in article 25 of the Community Visa Code.⁶ This gives EU member states discretion to issue visas with limited territorial validity on humanitarian grounds.

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Post-arrival, participants make a formal application for international protection via the host country's standard asylum procedures. In a majority of cases, refugee status is granted. Other available options in the programs studied include subsidiary protection⁷ and, in the case of Italy, "permessi di soggiorno per casi speciali" ("special cases" permits).⁸ Different rights will be conferred depending on the le-

⁶ Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code).

⁷ See Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted.

⁸ Special cases permits substituted the previous, wider-ranging humanitarian protection permit upon entry into force of Decree Law 113/2018. Whereas humanitarian protection had a two-year duration, was renewable and could be converted into a labour residence permit, special cases permits had a one-year duration and allowed access to the labour market but could not be converted in any kind of permit of stay. In October 2020, a new Decree Law modified the provisions of the previous law de facto restoring the humanitarian protection permit, now called a special protection permit.

gal status granted in the host country. Regardless of the type of permit available, it is essential that participants be provided with clear information about the application process, the evidence required, likely timelines and the practical effect of issue and refusal. It is equally important, both for the long-term future of participants and for the credibility of the program, that a careful assessment is made of the likelihood of such applications succeeding before a candidate is recommended for participation.

Actors Involved

The “multi-stakeholder approach” is a much-vaunted feature of humanitarian corridors programs. Two broad categories of partner are essential, namely, government and civil society. INGOs may also be involved in providing identification, assessment and logistical support.



The civil society category may include NGOs, faith-based organisations, community groups, individuals and the private sector. Who discharges each role, and to what extent, is likely to vary from program to program. In every case, however, the following aspects must be covered:

identification, assessment, preparation (of participants and host communities), transport, accommodation, language tuition, education, support into work, legal, practical and psychological support, integration, fund-raising, advocacy, and governmental liaison.

Actors involved should have a clear understanding of the scope of their roles and be capable of discharging those roles for significant periods of time. Humanitarian corridors are not a “quick fix” solution. Whilst the ultimate goal is self-sufficiency for each participant, that is unlikely to happen during a period of months or even years.

Stakeholder Coordination and Division of Responsibility

A Memorandum of Understanding between the relevant government ministries and principal civil society actors underpins each of the programs studied and clarifies the broad division of responsibility between these partners. The MoU provides for ongoing communication between these partners; in practice, this takes place primarily in the pre-departure phase of each corridor as the eventual list of participants and arrival logistics are finalised.

Ongoing communication between the various civil society actors is, however, equally important both to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that all bases are covered for each participant throughout the duration of the project.

Pre-Departure System

The pre-departure system can be divided into distinct phases:

- Referral / identification
- Assessment / screening
- Preparation

In the programs studied, potential participants may be identified by program staff or by way of referral from UNHCR, other INGOs and NGOs operating in the country of first asylum. The careful assessment by program staff which then follows involves consideration of any relevant paperwork and up to three in-depth

interviews, at least one of which is likely to be carried out in the candidate's home.

A “corridor” will typically comprise a group of 35 to 70 participants at any one time. The draft list for each corridor is scrutinised by local consular authorities and by the relevant ministries within the host country who will undertake security checks, screening and their own interviews with potential participants. Governmental authorities in the country of first asylum and host country have the final say as to who may participate.

In the programs studied, participant preparation is undertaken by FCEI and FEP program staff and by trained counsellors in the country of first asylum. This includes provision of information regarding the host country, culture, legal process and the program itself, as well as psychological support and preparation. Orientation sessions for individuals and groups are supplemented by written material.

Program staff physically accompany participants to consular appointments (where possible) and on the journey to the host country.

Post-Arrival System

Immediately on arrival, participants are fingerprinted and subject to final screening before being accompanied to their accommodation. In the programs studied, accommodation is currently provided via civil society organisations rather than the state. Housing is typically autonomous, although some participants are housed with families or in a dedicated reception centre.

Participants are closely supported, either by professional case-workers or by citizen committee volunteers. Regular interaction

and review is vital to ensuring the success of the program and managing the expectations of participants. Whilst the program's duration can be flexible according to the needs of each participant, the target is self-sufficiency. Exit from the program is, ultimately, inevitable.

Intensive tuition in the language of the host country is provided to all participants, as is schooling for children and support into work for adults. Support will be needed for participants to navigate legal, social and healthcare systems. Cultural adaptation is rarely straightforward, either for participants or for host communities. However, as developed below, integration is at the heart of humanitarian corridors programs.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Monitoring and evaluation and learning is fundamental to ensuring the quality of any program and to stimulating its improvement. In the case of Italy, thanks to support from MPI in the context of the EU-FRANK project, a pertinent set of indicators permits progress to be tracked and evaluated through record-keeping and direct feedback from beneficiaries and staff.

The existing tool monitors pre-departure orientation, travel and the post-arrival experience (including integration) at two points, namely, at six and eighteen months after arrival. Given the multi-dimensional nature of integration, a broad range of factors needs to be monitored including resources, such as education and healthcare; opportunities for work and leisure; and broader concepts like social mixing.

In the case of France, the existing tool monitors a wide range of indicators related to socio-professional integration and administrative effectiveness, including access to housing, access

to work and vocational training, access to social benefits, French language level and duration of asylum procedures.

FEP also organises quarterly meetings which brings together caseworkers, citizen committees and sponsored participants in each region. They give the opportunity to citizen committees and participants to provide direct input on the project and difficulties encountered. This feedback mechanism has led the project team to identify common difficulties such as access to employment, housing and mobility, and to provide fact sheets on those topics, available in French and Arabic, for participants and citizen committees. This is part of the continuous learning process in addition to the evaluations conducted in 2018 and in 2020 with the support of the AMIF.

KEY ELEMENTS NEEDED TO FOSTER MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS

Although the respective sponsorship schemes in France and Italy may differ in certain elements, both have developed specific modalities to foster participants' integration and social cohesion. They are both useful in supporting the design of new private sponsorship schemes and informing migrant integration policies in general.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder

Notwithstanding that responsibilities are differently shared depending on the member state context, it is still possible to draw general recommendations from the humanitarian corridors experience to foster refugee and migrants' integration. There are two main principles: 1) tasks should be clearly divided according to each stakeholder mandate, expertise and means; and 2) respective roles must be clearly explained to all stakeholders, in particular to the participants of the project.

In addition, it is very important to keep the same level of services between participants of private sponsorship programs and other asylum seekers. Participants may otherwise feel less considered

than other asylum seekers, undermining their willingness to participate in the program. Further general recommendations include the following:

- **State and local authorities'** responsibility is of utmost importance: it must ensure private sponsorship participants receive the same services and benefits as other asylum seekers. Although private sponsorship programs are built on civil society organisations and volunteer involvement, they should not substitute member states' responsibilities relating to international protection. State and local authorities should provide the same benefits to private sponsorship participants and other asylum seekers, unless specifically specified in the agreement with civil society. For example, in the case of French humanitarian corridors, housing is currently provided by civil society organisations and citizen committees. In the case of Italian corridors, housing is currently provided by civil society organisations.

Key services fundamental to the integration of participants should be managed or financed by the state: the provision of language classes as soon as possible, vocational training and access to health care and psychosocial support.

- **Caseworkers** play a key role in orientating the participants and ensuring they have access to their rights. They can be appointed by organisations which are part of the project or identified in the local network. As social work professionals, they should be in charge of supporting participants in their asylum claim and administrative procedures. They can also facilitate access to autonomous housing and to employment. Participants can be hosted in rural or semi-rural areas which are sometimes far away from dedicated services for asylum seekers and refugees; caseworkers must ensure participants can access their rights there also.

- **The host community** can play a key role in supporting social integration, by introducing participants to their new environment and guiding them in their new host country. The involvement of citizen committees is paramount for integration. Members of those committees should focus as much as possible on friendly interactions and cultural exchanges, tasks not requiring a professional expertise. In that sense, their role should be dissociated from social workers' responsibilities.
- **Participants** are at the centre of the project. They are primarily responsible for their own integration pathway, their asylum claim and administrative procedure. A risk related to volunteer support is that it undermines the autonomy dynamic of the participants if all the procedures and the requests are conducted by the volunteers or social workers without informing and involving the participants.

Once roles and responsibilities are clearly divided, it is important to inform all stakeholders and ensure that this division of responsibilities is well understood. It can be done through several means:

- **Briefing sessions** before the departure and again upon arrival in the host country are essential to explain roles and responsibilities to each stakeholder.
- Whilst the MOU signed between the state and the civil society organisation in charge of the project implementation is fundamental, it can also be useful to develop **agreements between stakeholders** at local level. For instance, within the French humanitarian corridors, two formal agreements specify the responsibilities of each party in relation to housing and to administrative and social support. They are signed by the participants, the local committees and the social workers.

Thorough pre-departure preparation

According to the European Commission, “*Providing support to third country nationals at the earliest possible moment in the migration process has proven to be an essential feature of successful integration. A starting point, whenever feasible, is pre-departure and pre-arrival measures targeting both those arriving from third countries and the receiving society.*”⁹ This is precisely one of the strengths of humanitarian corridors; it allows specific thorough pre-departure preparation.

At host community level, it is essential to prepare the ground for future integration, fully informing all the stakeholders well in advance, and obtaining their agreement as to how, for example, local authorities will participate. Briefing the local committees is very important, intercultural relation training can be provided, and roles and responsibilities should be clarified.

In the first country of asylum, before departure, participants can be subject to anxiety, stress and unrealistic expectations. For instance, a survey conducted among participants in the Italian humanitarian corridors found that a majority of respondents felt

PRE-DEPARTURE ACTIVITIES ARE IMPLEMENTED TO PROVIDE REFUGEES WITH INFORMATION ON THE COUNTRY OF ACCOMMODATION AND HELP THEM BUILD REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals, 2016. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0377>

that not all their pre-departure expectations were met once settled in the host country.¹⁰

A number of activities can be implemented during pre-departure in order to provide refugees with information on the country of accommodation, help them build realistic expectations about their new life, make them aware of their rights and their duties, and equip them with language and other skills, including.¹¹

- **Psychosocial support** and stress management: In the humanitarian corridors program, before each transfer, the participants attend sessions about stress management, and learn new mechanisms to deal with stress such as breathing techniques. Psychologists also raise inter-cultural issues with them. According to participants' feedback, this session helps them to release stress and anxiety before departure.

¹⁰ Given the peculiar dynamics underpinning humanitarian corridors programs, the risk of fostering unrealistic expectations among participants is always present. In response, thanks to the funds of the PPI AMIF project, the French and Italian programs set up some specific "corrective actions" to rebalance expectations and responsibility among different actors involved. Besides classic pre-departure orientation, two-day psychological counselling sessions run by mental health professionals (mainly clinical psychologists, psychotherapists and stress counsellors) were started with the aim of helping participants to develop realistic expectations of their migration project, and equipping them with the skills needed to have a smooth transition into their host countries and to adapt to their new culture without giving up their own. Such counselling has proved to be extremely useful, having a significant impact on participants' real understanding of their migration project and on their levels of post-arrival proactivity. The survey conducted in the context of the PPI AMIF project was unfortunately not able to assess the outcomes of the psychological counselling as it involved participants who left Lebanon before the implementation of this specific action.

¹¹ See Recommendations from the Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals, 2016.

- **Information about the project and the specifics of hosting:** participants should be properly briefed on the project, its specificities and living conditions in their future host country. This should include information on the reception team, the different kind of services, and the asylum process. If possible, providing details about the exact location where they will be hosted, with visual material (videos, photos etc.) is strongly recommended.
- **Building realistic expectations:** The amount of information people can assimilate while living in precarious conditions and preparing for departure is very low. Sharp and concise information should focus on the main topics: housing, working conditions and livelihood, school and studies. In the case of the French humanitarian corridors, the project team developed short videos to inform about housing and livelihood.
- **Introduction to the language of the host country:** The main idea is for beneficiaries to start to learn the language basics: within the French corridors a simple form of support was developed, relatively user friendly and operating without internet thanks to an offline program. This service is provided to the people participating in the program at least two months before they travel. Within the Italian corridors, basic Italian classes are carried out before departure, and a free mobile application specifically developed for Arabic speakers aiming to learn Italian language and culture is made available to participants.

Involvement of host community and participants in the project

Originally, European civil society commitments to host refugees was often a response to member states' reluctance to give migrants safe reception worthy of the European values. From 2015, in France, *"thousands of citizens, generally gathered in local committees, have*



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*expressed the wish to help migrants, providing accommodation, food, clothes, as well as leisure, language learning, legal aid."*¹² Humanitarian corridors build on this existing network of solidarity, originating from a bottom up approach; the initial engagement comes from local committees, civil society and religious organisations rather than state inclination.

Even though the reception system now strongly relies on governmental policies and the involvement of professional caseworkers in supporting the participants in their administrative and asylum claim procedures, it is also recommended that the project be built

around local community involvement. In the humanitarian corridors model, by providing housing and support to the participants through each step of their integration path, **local committees can be the first interface between the participants and their new environment.** They help both hosted people to understand their

¹² Agier et al. (2019) Hospitality in France: Political and Personal mobilizations, pp. 7-8.

new host country's culture and the host community to understand the participant's background and culture. Thus, they facilitate integration of participants by three different means:

- providing them with knowledge and understanding of their new host country's culture
- creating a supportive network, locally rooted
- enhancing the conditions to change the perception of migrants in the local community

Indeed, whilst national administrations have strict timelines, with limited possibilities for action by volunteers and teams in charge of the program, institutions at a local level are more open to alternative arrangements made, in particular, by means of network activation. In the evaluation of the French humanitarian corridors, the city of Orthez citizen committee founder disclosed, for example, that she has her: *"Own networks, and the fact to be in a small town certainly helps... E.g., a local official from the Education State department asked me [a refugee's family] incomes. My word was enough, no need to prove it by any paper..."*¹³

The more involved local groups are, the better the chance of changing local perception of migrants. According to another study conducted on the French humanitarian corridors¹⁴ *"When asked about the involvement of the Host groups, the ¾ of host groups responded that the involvement of their group in the current project also changed positively their relatives' perception of foreigners in general. There*

¹³ Impact Assessment, p.116

¹⁴ When citizens host refugees, key findings and recommendations from the survey of the humanitarian corridors project, 2019. https://ppiproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/When-citizens-host-FEP-Digest_Couloirs_humanitaires_En-2019.pdf

are numerous testimony on the impact of local committee's involvement on local perceptions.“ One of the main achievements of the project here is represented by the fact that, at the beginning, local people were not enthusiastic at all, there were also oppositions... Now, reluctances have disappeared. It's magic!” (Citizen Committee member in Lhuis).¹⁵

Furthermore, involvement of the local population not only facilitates integration of participants and changes perception of migrants, it also, *“especially in rural areas, seem[s] to promote a new social cohesion, both by trying to integrate beneficiaries to the local population and by connecting locals themselves through material tasks and solidarity with welcomed persons.”*¹⁶

Local committees can play their integrating role only if they are well trained and prepared. It is important to spend time shaping each committee, trying to build on existing mobilisation. In the case of France, the humanitarian corridors reception system relies on regional civil society organisations that are very well connected with the local context. Their knowledge of local dynamics allows the identification of individuals motivated by welcoming refugees. Giving the opportunity to existing committees to testify about their experience in welcoming refugees can also be a very powerful source of motivation for new committees to engage in the project. It is also essential to obtain the agreement and support of local authorities.

In addition, it is important to equip committees with the right tools and knowledge. Awareness-raising or training sessions on intercultural relations and on asylum rights and procedures can be very helpful during the pre-arrival phase.

¹⁵ Impact Assessment, p.118

¹⁶ Ibid, p.119

The process of claiming asylum and access to autonomous housing is lengthy and difficult; the difficulties encountered by the participants and the amount of support needed can be exhausting and undermine the long-term commitment of volunteers. In order to strengthen their sustainability, it is recommended that large committees with a minimum number of 20 persons be formed, able to share the burden of supporting tasks between members. It is important to provide individual housing to the participants. If participants are hosted at a reception family home, it can be a great source of exchange and sharing but also very tiring for both the host family and those hosted. The experience of humanitarian corridors also shows that a diversity of committee members in terms of socio-economic or religious background will help to support acceptance of refugees in the host community.

According to the European Commission action plan on the integration of third country nationals, their involvement in the design and implementation of integration policies is essential to improve their participation and their integration outcomes.¹⁷ However it is subject to different difficulties; those who have recently arrived in their new host country do not always have a good command of the language and have social concerns, as well as those related to the asylum procedure.¹⁸ Thus creating the conditions for their participation is essential.

¹⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals, 2016. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0377>

¹⁸ Bilong Sophie, Summary–Migrant and Refugee Participation: Approaches to Rethinking Integration Policies, Études de l’Ifri, Ifri, May 2020.

It includes:

- **learning their new country's language** as soon as they can; language classes must be accessible from day 1, and in the meantime, translation must be provided.
- **understanding all administrative and legal procedures related to the integration pathway;** this knowledge is the first step to empowerment.

At project level, participants must be able to express remarks and recommendations relating to implementation of the activities. For example, in the French program, quarterly meetings take place in each region, gathering local committees, hosted families and the national team. They give the opportunity to participants to express their needs and allow many essential adjustments. In addition, they can also address their remarks or issues directly to the caseworkers in charge of their region. They can rely on social workers' mediation in the case of issues with the local committee.

Participants must also engage with internal and external project evaluation; in France and Italy, participants were the main respondents of the Impact Assessment conducted in 2020.

The involvement of former project participants and, more broadly, refugees and migrants as members of local committees, is also recommended. It strengthens the link between the committees and the hosted families.

Finally, participants should also be able to raise their voice and advocate for themselves in relation to authorities and public opinion. For instance, one of FEP's members, la Cimade, recently conducted an advocacy campaign jointly designed with refugees and migrants. The people involved were trained on giving speeches and are able to relate their own experiences to a collective analysis.

Communication with broader public:

messaging and narrative

The assessment of the French project conducted in 2020 demonstrates that outside the first circle of support, relations with the local community can be difficult.¹⁹ In the sample questioned, the majority of respondents described their neighbourly relations as “difficult or slightly difficult.” This underlines that, even with the involvement of a strong local committee, acceptance by broader public opinion is essential for refugee integration; however, it can be difficult to find a peaceful and calm method to communicate on migration issues which are often subject to a very polarized debate.

The most convincing and powerful messages are given by the refugees and the volunteers supporting them. Humanitarian corridors can provide venues to refugees to express their story and their integration pathway, and to volunteers to explain the benefits they gain in engaging with refugees. Videos and internet articles are tools used by the project to communicate the reality of the successful integration of refugees in local communities. Local media can also play a great role in explaining the project to the local community. They can often reach an audience that is sometimes reluctant to welcome new migrants.

The way governments at all levels communicate about private sponsorship programs and their benefits can also be integral to

¹⁹ Impact Assessment, p.123

the success and continued support for the program. Championing of private sponsorship by trusted leaders can lead to stronger support from different sectors of society, as has been the case in the Italian case with the humanitarian corridors program, which has garnered widespread support from politicians of different sides of the political aisle.²⁰

²⁰ See statements by Pope Francis at <https://diplomatie-humanitaire.org/en/pope-welcomes-the-initiative-humanitarian-corridors-for-refugees/> and The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at https://www.agi.it/estero/migranti_di_maio_modello_gestione_flussi-6688925/news/2019-12-06/; SIR - Servizio Informazione Religiosa at <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2020/7/29/migranti-del-re-vice-ministro-esteri-attiviamo-subito-i-corridoi-umanitari-europei/>

CONCLUSIONS

France and Italy's experience with humanitarian corridors has demonstrated their potential to increase global responsibility-sharing for persons who have been forcibly displaced — in accordance with the Global Compact on Refugees — while also strengthening support for refugees at community level and playing an important role in creating more welcoming and cohesive societies. A crucial benefit of these types of private sponsorship programs in France and Italy has been their better performance in integration outcomes, which is important at a time when 70% of European citizens are expressing a need for investment in the integration of migrants.²¹ As the PPI project Impact Assessment²² and other studies produced by the SHARE²³ network have shown, private sponsorship programs can facilitate the social and professional integration of migrants as well as increasing awareness and understanding of refugees and the challenges they face. Creating encounters between newcomers, citizens and civil society and governmental actors working on the ground helps to break down communication barriers between people from different backgrounds and can also be a catalyst for more tolerant and inclusive communities.²⁴

²¹ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of Immigrants in the European Union, April 2018. https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2169_88_2_469_ENG1Notes

²² Private Sponsorship for Integration Project, Impact Assessment of Humanitarian Corridors Program: Primary Achievements in Italy and France, 2020. https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/impact-assessment_amif_ppi_hc.pdf

²³ Part of the European Resettlement Network (ERN), the **SHARE Network** promotes partnerships for refugee inclusion in local communities across Europe

²⁴ ICMC Europe and Caritas Europa, Fostering Community Sponsorships Across Europe, 2019. <https://www.resettlement.eu/news/share-publication-fostering-community-sponsorship-across-europe>

National governments and the European Union have an opportunity to propagate these positive outcomes within their countries and across Europe by further investing in private sponsorship programs and supporting the creation of integration frameworks modelled on their experience, which promote the inclusion and long-term integration of newcomers. The bespoke approaches taken in France and Italy demonstrate the concept's potential for adaptation to diverse national and cultural contexts. By supporting the creation and scaling-up of sponsorship programs across Europe, the EU would contribute to expanding durable solutions for those who are forcibly displaced and show solidarity with host countries in the global south which host the majority of the world's refugees. The following section will outline recommendations for national governments and the EU on how they can support their creation and expansion.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- The overall experience of private sponsorship in general and humanitarian corridors in particular has been reviewed as positive and beneficial for the long-term inclusion of its participants. We therefore **recommend that national governments develop and expand private sponsorship programs**. At the same time, governments should **ensure that private sponsorship programs are additional to resettlement programs already in place** and increase the number of spaces available for regular entry.
- **Ensure that clear guidelines and agreements are in place outlining** (i) the sponsorship group and participant relationship and the roles and responsibilities of each; (ii) the relationship between the state and the sponsorship agreement holders; (iii) the coordination structure between the different CSOs participating in the program; (iv) the target participants and types of legal status granted upon arrival; (v) the type of support granted by the state towards the participants and sponsors during the pre-departure, reception and integration phase.
- **Ensure that private sponsorship programs, post-arrival integration plans and organisational frameworks complement** mainstream state-funded service provision, rather than replace it.
- **Ensure that national and local authorities provide adequate and sustainable financial and practical support to CSOs and local communities involved in private sponsorship programs.** Funding for mainstream

and tailored services for migrants and refugees in the areas of health, education, housing, employment, and community programs is crucial for the long-term integration of refugees; national governments' recovery and resilience plans should therefore ensure that these services are adequately funded in the years to come.

- **Foster social cohesion by facilitating training and support for sponsoring groups and preparing refugees and host communities for their arrival.** In addition, governments should support actions that encourage engagement between refugees and hosting communities. As integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation between migrants and host communities, frequent interaction between beneficiaries of international protection and residents in their hosting communities is key for effective integration.
- **Supporting and promoting actions and projects that encourage intercultural dialogue, community engagement** through sports and cultural activities, shared forums, and the development of spaces that promote these types of interactions between persons in need of protection and the resident community is essential for the success of private sponsorship programs and the effective integration of its participants.
- **Support the participation and empowerment of migrants, migrant-led organisations and civil society in the formulation, governing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation** of private sponsorship programs and integration policies through funding, training, and capacity-building as well as by promoting their involvement in multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Governments **should support high quality and ongoing training for sponsoring groups**, including the management of expectations, inter-cultural dialogue and the training of volunteers.

- **Establish a national framework for private sponsorship.** To increase the number of potential sponsors, member states should support the development of a national framework that would provide guidance on the formation of sustainable sponsorship groups and which would clearly state the rights and duties linked to sponsorship, including the type of support expected by the sponsor and volunteers involved and the financial commitments expected of sponsorship groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU

- **Incentivise member states to implement private sponsorship by funding them in the 2021-2027 MFF.** In order to ensure the success of private sponsorship programs and expand their use by member states, the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF) should include adequate and sustainable funding that is specifically dedicated for the promotion, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of such programs, accessible not only to state actors but also to civil society organisations and local authorities.
- **Ensure that integration services for migrants are well-funded.** Ensure that integration and social inclusion of refugees and migrants is well-funded through instruments like the AM(I)F, the ESF+, and the Regional and Development Fund and that this funding is accessible to migrant and refugee-led organisations and other CSOs working with migrants. Adequate funding is key to ensure social cohesion and ensure the success of private sponsorship programs.
- **Encourage the development of comprehensive integration strategies in member states.** The European Commission should encourage all member states to develop comprehensive national strategies for the reception and integration of refugees and migrants, identify best practices and support the exchange of knowledge between member states. Member states' national integration strategies should guide the policies and actions that are implemented across different policy fields in areas such as health, education, employment, housing, culture and others to facilitate the inclusion of refugees and migrants. These national strategies should consider and allocate roles not only for governmental actors at the

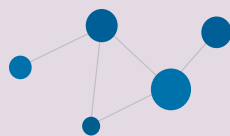
national, regional and local level, but also for social partners and civil society actors.

While recognising that social inclusion policies fall under the competence of member states, the European Commission could make use of policies and coordination mechanisms such as the new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, the European Integration network which brings together representatives of national public authorities working on integration, as well as the various EU funding instruments that support integration, to incentivize the development of social inclusion strategies that cut across all relevant policy sectors.

- **Facilitate the exchange of promising practices and the transnational exchange of private sponsorship models.** We urge the European Commission to encourage the exchange of promising practices in private sponsorship through instruments like the European Integration Network, the European website on Integration, the European Migration Forum, through study visits, and by funding and supporting the scaling-up of promising projects on private sponsorship such as the humanitarian corridors in Italy and France. Transnational exchange on different sponsorship models and their benefits and challenges can help interested parties learn from each other's experiences and adapt their programs to their own national and local contexts. We also encourage the European Parliament to similarly give a platform to positive examples and knowledge sharing.
- **Support multi-stakeholder engagement in private sponsorship programs.** Through funding and guidance on private sponsorship, the European Commission should support the development of multi-stakeholder engagement in private sponsorship schemes, ensuring that a wide range

of actors are taking part including: governments at the national, regional, and local level, civil-society and faith-based organisations, refugee and migrant-led organisations, and international organisations like the UNHCR. The European Commission could also assist in strengthening collaboration among actors interested in becoming involved in private sponsorship programs, including local governments and the private sector.

- **Support the training of actors involved in private sponsorship programs.** The EU and national governments should support high quality and ongoing training for sponsoring groups, including the management of expectations, inter-cultural dialogue and the training of volunteers. The EU and governments need to invest in supporting sponsors and provide comprehensive training and information on the sponsorship process.
- **Support and encourage research and evaluation of private sponsorship programs.** Future private sponsorship programs can learn from the experiences of previous programs that have already been tried and tested, which is why the EU should continue to invest in the monitoring and evaluation of private sponsorship programs like humanitarian corridors to ensure that future programs are successful and program quality is maintained. With EU and national government support, civil society, governments and researchers can work together to set up evaluation mechanisms that are built into the sponsorship programs and which allow for continued improvement of the programs.



Private Sponsorship for Integration
building a European model



EUROPEAN
UNION'S ASYLUM,
MIGRATION AND
INTEGRATION FUND

The PPI project seeks to ensure that migrants arriving in Italy and France via humanitarian corridors are accompanied towards their full and effective social, cultural and economic integration through the implementation of a wide range of pre-departure and post-arrival activities. A second aim is to raise awareness about the benefits of sponsorship programs for the integration of its participants and to encourage and inform the development and growth of PSPs across Europe.