

# Sponsorship in the Context of Complementary Pathways

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*The **Knowledge Brief Series** is produced by the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub. The Briefs are intended to briefly summarize the global state of knowledge on topics related to community-based refugee sponsorship.*

## I. Summary

Complementary pathways are mobility options that are additional to the traditional solutions to people living in refugee or refugee-like circumstances,<sup>1</sup> including voluntary repatriation, resettlement in another country, or integration into a host community ([UNHCR 2021](#)). International interest in complementary pathways has grown in the last decade, as traditional responses prove inadequate solutions to increasing displacement. A defining element of complementary pathways is that they are able to scale. Whether by leveraging the resources of private communities or utilising non-humanitarian immigration programs, complementary pathways should have scale potential. Sharing knowledge about good practices can be a catalyst for this growth.

This knowledge brief aims to understand the evidence base, and to identify gaps and research directions that can advance the development of global, accessible, scalable, and community-supported complementary pathways, such as family reunification and humanitarian admission pathways. Three types are covered in this brief: pathways for named sponsorship, students, and workers. Each of these mobility options has its own history and its own body of scholarship. Having begun in the 1970s, named sponsorship has a longer history, and consequently provides a larger evidence base of models, outcomes, benefits, and challenges. Student and worker pathways are similarly dated, but models specific to displaced talent are relatively recent. Student pathways have grown internationally since 2014, and skilled immigration pathways since 2018.

## II. Introduction

In the last decade, the international community and regional bodies agreed on a set of goals to promote increased use of complementary pathways. These goals are captured in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016), the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018), the United Nations Human Right Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (2019), and the European Union's (E.U.) New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020), among other instruments. Notably, the UNHCR Three-Year Strategy sets a goal of 2 million people moving on complementary pathways by 2028 ([UNHCR 2019c:6](#)).

**Named sponsorship** is one of the pathways available to support more people to access international protection, over and above cases referred by UNHCR for resettlement. Named sponsorship (sometimes 'private sponsorship') refers to programs where a sponsoring individual or group may identify or 'name' someone in refugee circumstances to support through sponsorship, rather than beneficiaries being selected based on referral by UNHCR.<sup>2</sup> Named individuals are often relatives of previously sponsored families (the 'echo effect'), or others known to the sponsor community, although they may also be strangers. Sponsors have a central role in welcoming, supporting and integrating newcomers and (in some programs) have financial commitments to them. Private and community sponsorship programs are noted as a complementary pathway for admission in the UNHCR Three-Year Strategy.

**Education pathways** combine funding and opportunities to pursue tertiary education in another country, with an immigration pathway that provides protection and/or an eventual durable solution. Refugees who are selected for mobility for education purposes are described as "students" in this brief regardless of whether they access this pathway with a traditional student visa or via other pathways, such as humanitarian corridors programs. In addition to the Three-Year Strategy, other global strategies to expand education pathways are the UNHCR [Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee](#)

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<sup>1</sup> The term "refugee" is used throughout this brief to refer to people living in refugee or refugee-like circumstances outside their country of birth or citizenship, and who are in need of international protection. This term includes asylum seekers.

<sup>2</sup> "Community sponsorship" is a broad, inclusive term that here describes community-based sponsorship programs, including named programs and programs where beneficiaries are selected by UNHCR.

[Education](#) and the [Tertiary Education Strategy](#). A multi-stakeholder [Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways](#), established in 2020, sparked new resources and training such as [minimum standards](#) to support the global expansion of education pathways.

**Worker pathways** for those who are in refugee circumstances include any immigration program that selects on the basis of employment, skills, or other human capital. In this brief, we describe people who are selected to fill jobs or general skills shortages as “workers,” and the term “skilled immigration” is used instead of “labour mobility” to refer to their use of skilled visa pathways. These skilled immigration pathways may exclusively target applicants in refugee circumstances, or they may be designed to include refugees alongside other applicants, for example, through facilitating measures or accommodations that recognize displacement-related barriers to access. The global instruments outlined above have guided research and programming to expand skilled immigration as a complementary pathway. For example, by unlocking funding (i.e., E.U. ASILE Project) or by providing a normative framework for policy (i.e., Canada’s Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot). They have also instigated a global taskforce on pathways for workers, scheduled to launch in early 2022.

This brief relies on desk research and input from academics and practitioners working in or around the field of complementary pathways. The desk review captured complementary pathways literature primarily from 2018 forward. The scope of literature is global and encompasses academic papers, research by think tanks and other organizations, grey literature, and other relevant sources. Experts also provided insights into the questions posed in this brief and helped to identify planned or ongoing research, programming, and other literature. The following sections detail the current models, evidence base, benefits and challenges, and forthcoming programming for each of these three complementary pathways of focus. The brief closes with an analysis of overarching gaps in knowledge and future research directions.

### III. Complementary pathways for named sponsorship

Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program is the oldest model of named sponsorship. Sponsorship arrangements between government and religious organizations in Canada date to the aftermath of the Second World War, but it was not until the 1970s that the modern PSR program evolved during the crisis in Indochina ([Labman 2020:1-2](#)); since then, Canadians have supported nearly 300,000 people under the program ([IRCC 2021](#)). The recent growth of community sponsorship initiatives around the world has been supported by the [Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative](#), a partnership that includes the Government of Canada and the UNHCR, which assists countries to increase refugee resettlement opportunities and improve refugee integration outcomes by engaging governments, community groups, individuals, philanthropists, and businesses in resettlement efforts.

In the last decade, multiple countries have piloted and/or implemented community sponsorship programs. The design, timelines and targets of these programs differ, but the basic model underpinning community sponsorship is a “sharing of roles and costs between the government and private actors,” where the latter play “a leading role in welcoming refugees into their local communities” ([Bodeaux et al. 2019:8](#)). One study identified 14 unique community sponsorship programs that have emerged since 2016, in addition to the Canadian program ([Bond et al. 2020](#)). Not all of these programs include a naming component. Named private sponsorship programs (or programs that include a named cohort) have been or will be implemented in Australia, Argentina, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S. .

#### III.1 Private sponsorship in Canada

The PSR program enables different types of community groups to sponsor people for settlement in Canada, and is impartial to family ties or human capital factors like language ability, age, or education. Named individuals may not be known to their sponsors, though the program is often used to support those with family or community ties to Canada ([Hyndman et al. 2021:1](#)). Depending on the form of



sponsorship, named individuals may need a refugee status determination (RSD) while others need only *prima facie* recognition. Sponsors commit to financial and other assistance typically for a period of 12 months. Commentators note that tension around the issue of whether places in the PSR Program should be ‘additional’ to the government’s resettlement quota has remained live since the program began ([Labman 2020:10](#)).

### III.2 Growth of private sponsorship in Argentina, New Zealand and the U.S.

Argentina’s sponsorship program, initiated in 2014, includes the ability for sponsors to name individuals for resettlement ([Bond and Kwadrans 2019:92-93](#)). To date, the program has been used exclusively to welcome Syrians, and in 2020 there were 254 sponsoring groups in 59 Argentine communities ([UNHCR 2020:3](#)). New Zealand’s program also enables sponsors to identify applicants for resettlement and requires that sponsors provide financial support for up to two years ([New Zealand Immigration](#)). The U.S. is planning to launch a private sponsorship pilot program in 2022 that will enable sponsors to identify individuals for resettlement ([U.S. Department of State 2021](#)). Recently, the U.S. government used elements of private sponsorship to strengthen the resettlement of evacuees from Afghanistan by creating a sponsorship model called the [Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans](#), which includes a naming component. Through this program, community groups will directly support the settlement of Afghans relocated to the United States under Operation Allies Welcome. The named initiatives in New Zealand and the U.S. are intended to complement the resettlement of refugees through government quotas.

### III.3 Private sponsorship in Australia

Australia’s Community Support Program enables individuals, community organizations and businesses to name and sponsor those in refugee circumstances, with preference given to those who have a job offer or a pathway to self-sufficiency, among other criteria. The cost to sponsors is estimated to be as high as \$100,000 AUD for a family of five, and sponsors provide full financial and social support after arrival. A critique of the program is that it selects on the basis of human capital factors such as age and employability, despite not constituting an additional pathway to the resettlement program ([Hirsch et al. 2019:115](#)). Places are drawn from within the Humanitarian Program, which represents Australia’s total resettlement and humanitarian admission quota. Stakeholders have argued that the inclusion of these places in the overall quota means the program does not act as a true complementary pathway. The program is currently under review by the Australian government ([Department of Home Affairs 2021](#)).

### III.4 Family sponsorship in Germany and Ireland

Germany and Ireland have sponsorship programs that are open to displaced families including immediate and extended family members ([Schmidt 2017: 27](#)). These programs have required partial or full cost commitments by sponsoring families ([Ibid: 28, 30-31](#)). Both countries also have separate community sponsorship initiatives, but these programs do not have a naming element, as beneficiaries are selected for resettlement by the UNHCR.

### III.5 Humanitarian Corridors, such as in Italy, France, Belgium and Andorra

The humanitarian corridor model originated in Italy in 2016 and has been replicated in other E.U. countries. The model matches those in refugee circumstances who have protection needs with sponsoring communities. It is a blended model of support between governments and civil society networks that engage in welcome efforts. Depending on the program, sponsors may provide financial, legal and social support ([Schmidt 2017](#)). Humanitarian corridors can be distinct from named sponsorship programs, although some individuals are selected for resettlement through humanitarian corridors on the basis of family or other ties ([Working Group of the Humanitarian Corridors Project 2019:14](#)). These programs are often created on a time-limited and quota basis ([Ibid; Sabchev and Baumgärtel 2020:39-40](#)).

## IV. Benefits and Challenges of Named Sponsorship Initiatives

With its longer history of sponsorship (+40 years), Canada is the source of the majority of empirical evidence on the longer-term outcomes for individuals sponsored through the PSR Program, often in comparison to those who move under the government-assisted resettlement program. For example, a 2020 study compared longer-term economic outcomes between the two groups over time, controlling for human capital factors ([Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020](#)). More recent studies have examined outcomes and other dynamics that sponsors experience and create ([Macklin et al. 2020](#); [Good Ginrich and Enns 2019](#); [Kyriakides et al. 2019](#)). The literature also covers key considerations and guiding principles for implementing named sponsorship programs in new contexts ([UNHCR 2019a](#); [GRSI](#)).

### IV.1 Benefits

Named sponsorship can create a sense of ‘policy ownership’ by the local community, which can then contribute to greater buy-in on immigration policy in general, and refugee resettlement in particular. In the words of one sponsor, “I’m actually having a say in the decisions that my country is making, that we’re all together making, in who is coming here and who are becoming our new neighbours” ([Lehr 2020:26 minutes](#)). Named sponsorship can also deepen empathy and trust, support positive narratives and humanize displacement ([Bodeaux et al. 2019](#); [Lehr 2020: 23-24 minutes](#); [Fratzke 2017](#); [Good Ginrich and Enns 2019](#); [Kyriakides et al. 2019](#); [Macklin et al. 2020](#)). Evidence from Canada shows that those refugee newcomers selected and supported by community sponsors have higher short term employment and earnings than others moving on resettlement pathways, up to 15 years after arrival ([Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020](#)). This advantage was evident particularly for those with lower education ([Ibid](#)). A study examining Syrians resettled to Canada between 2015 and 2017 found that privately-sponsored individuals had higher perceived physical and mental health as well as lower unmet healthcare needs, compared to government-assisted counterparts ([Oda et al. 2019](#)).

Named sponsorship contributes to program sustainability by creating an ‘echo effect.’ Many sponsors will sponsor again, and those who have been sponsored also sponsor, as transnational ties across families and sponsoring communities grow. This trend has been observed among sponsors who participate in sponsorship first under Canada’s Blended Visa Office Referred Program (a non-named program, which works with refugee referral organizations like UNHCR to identify resettlement-eligible refugees for sponsorship). These sponsors then switch to named sponsorship (the PSR Program) in order to support extended family members of the initial family they sponsored ([Hyndman et al. 2021](#); [Macklin et al. 2018](#)). Naming can also be an important avenue for family reunification, often amidst limited options.

### IV.2 Challenges

Across national programs, individuals and sponsors have noted the costs of sponsorship as a challenge ([Amnesty International 2020:7](#)). Administrative complexity is also a common issue, including regular or unreported program changes, which can cause delays ([Canadian Council for Refugees 2019](#); [Nancarrow Clarke and Marlow 2021](#)). Long processing times are a feature of some named programs, and over time there may be changes to the resources and cohesion of sponsorship groups, or the wellbeing of sponsored individuals ([Manzanedo 2019:2](#); [Pohlmann and Schwiertz 2020:7](#); [Canadian Council for Refugees 2020:2-3](#); [American Immigration Council 2021:5](#)). Other issues that research has identified include a lack of definition in roles and responsibilities between sponsors and government agencies, which can cause confusion around levels and duration of support ([Schmidt 2017:37](#)), and imperfect oversight mechanisms ([Lenard 2020:61](#)). There can be significant differences in settlement outcomes depending on the characteristics of sponsors. A recent study in Canada observed differences between refugee newcomers supported by family-linked and non-family-linked sponsors, each carrying unique benefits and challenges ([Krause 2020:15-21](#)).

The principle of additionality holds that private or named sponsorship programs should be additional to, and not a replacement for other government-assisted resettlement and humanitarian commitments that prioritize cases in need of urgent protection. The lack of additionality in some named programs has drawn criticism from stakeholders globally ([Amnesty International 2020](#); [Pohlmann and Schwiertz 2020](#); [Canadian Council for Refugees 2020](#); [Bodeaux et al. 2019](#); [Lazarus et al. 2019](#)); [Hyndman et al. 2017:56, 59](#); [Schmidt 2017](#)). Finally, the policy settings of named sponsorship programs are diverse and can overlap with other models of sponsorship, family reunification, student, and worker pathways. The lack of a common framework can impact replication and advocacy efforts ([Schmidt 2017](#)).

### IV.3 Opportunities for expansion

Research indicates that innovative funding mechanisms could drive the expansion of named sponsorship by offsetting the high costs of some programs. For example, in Berlin, a sponsorship crowd-funding initiative to reduce costs for core sponsors who are family members has engaged new community members as participants in its family sponsorship program ([Fluechtlingspaten Syrien](#); [Pohlmann et al. 2020:2-3](#)). Another idea explored in the Australian literature is the use of financial incentives such as income tax deductions for sponsors ([Hirsch et al. 2019:112](#)). Better systems for monitoring and evaluation can aid expansion by offering decision-makers an evidence base to build programs, confidence in named sponsorship models, and data to drive improvements ([Beirens and Ahad 2020:2, 4](#)). Some argue that adding metrics and benchmarks in policy for named or private sponsorship might support the expansion of the model while preserving UNHCR-referred mobility (Smith 2020).

Knowledge hubs have a role in expansion. The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative offers fact sheets, guidebooks, and a [workbook for policy makers](#). National knowledge hubs include [Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia](#), the [Refugee Sponsorship Training Program](#) in Canada and [Reset](#) in the U.K.. Collaboration across knowledge groups can influence supportive policies and programming ([Phillimore and Dorling 2020:11](#)).

### IV.4 Forthcoming programming and pilots

As noted above, the U.S. plans to launch a private sponsorship pilot in 2022. In the last year, Finland released a feasibility study on community sponsorship and recommended a pilot. Naming does not appear under consideration in the Finnish study, but the government noted “civil society’s more fixed participation in integration could also support increasing the refugee quota” ([Finnish Government 2021](#)).

## V. Complementary pathways for students

Education pathways include initiatives that work to remove legal, administrative, and physical barriers that limit refugee access to traditional education-based mobility pathways, like study visas, and those that combine educational opportunities with other pathways for refugees that fall outside of resettlement, such as community sponsorship or humanitarian visas. They can be implemented by academic institutions, NGOs, governments, or a combination of these. The [Student Refugee Program](#) in Canada was implemented by World University Service of Canada (WUSC) in 1978. Until recently, the international use of education pathways to expand opportunities for protection in third countries has been limited, although new pilots have begun to emerge globally since 2014.

Most existing initiatives focus on bachelor and master’s degree programs, but other initiatives engage vocational education and training (VET) institutions and traineeship and apprentice programs, to help expand durable solutions. The International Center for Migration Policy Development argues that linking VET to complementary pathways should be further explored as an opportunity to increase protection spaces and meet the skills needs of a receiving country ([Wagner and David 2019](#)). Special initiatives that recognize student skills and talents beyond academic excellence, like WUSC’s new

sports-linked program for refugees — Olympians — can also be leveraged and expanded to mobilize new and non-traditional actors, and increase tertiary education pathways for displaced students. Doctorate and post-doctorate programs such as [Scholars at Risk](#) and the [Council for At Risk Academics](#) in the U.K. leverage commitments from university communities and provide durable solutions to academics, but typically utilize skilled pathways rather than student pathways, and are often excluded from discussions about education pathways.

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) have identified initiatives in 22 countries, and more are being explored in countries that have developed or are developing community sponsorship schemes for students, including the U.S. and New Zealand ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:34](#)). In some countries, for example Canada and Japan, there is more than one education pathway initiative, each using a different legal pathway. On occasion, initiatives are more global in scope, such as those offered by United World Colleges and Jusoor. Many of the current opportunities worldwide are captured in the [UNHCR Scholarship Opportunities for Refugees](#) database.

Much of the current literature discusses education pathways as one option for expanding complementary pathways or examines general barriers affecting access to higher education opportunities more broadly. Because most education pathways were only launched in recent years, analysis and evaluations have focused on Canada's 40-year-old Student Refugee Program. Recent literature has concentrated on education pathway initiatives for Syrians in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Policy and practice recommendations for receiving countries of refugee students primarily target European countries, although there is an emphasis on access and integration for students already there. Literature on higher education for students in Africa and other regions outside of MENA is often focused on local options instead of mobility options. As pilot initiatives conclude and education pathways continue to grow, more program evaluations are anticipated. These nascent initiatives in different countries present opportunities for further research to identify best practices and policies towards the growth and scale of education pathways.

## V.1 Key considerations and standards for program design

UNHCR offers specific guidance for designing education pathways broadly ([UNHCR 2019a](#); [UNHCR](#)) and specific to some nationals, for example, students from Syria and Iraq ([UNHCR 2015](#)). While the latter was created in response to the crises in the Middle East, it offers suggestions and a checklist for program design and implementation that are relevant to third country education programs more broadly. The [Minimum Standards for Complementary Education Pathways](#), developed by the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, and a [report](#) by WUSC, UNHCR and UNESCO, provide best practices and additional program design guidance and standards related to access, academic admission, funding, integration and psychosocial support, and transitions to employment.

## V.2 Access and student identification

Several reports identified barriers that displaced students must overcome in order to access higher education in a third country (Arar, et al. 2019; [UNHCR 2016](#); [Global Education Monitoring Report Team 2018](#), ([Lowe 2019](#)). Lack of information is identified as a key constraint, and recommendations include developing better communication channels and digital tools to match student profiles and skills with existing opportunities, similar to the Talent Beyond Boundaries Talent Catalog ([UNHCR-ESSA 2021:5, 41](#)). However, academics like Genevieve Barrons have pointed out that while online tools are helpful to those who have access to the internet, overreliance on online formats disadvantages populations who are less digitally connected ([Barrons 2018](#)). The task force further advocates for “ensuring accessibility of application for all students” and “promoting opportunities through channels that are known by and accessible to refugees” ([Global Task Force:5](#)).



In many contexts, displaced youth help to promote postsecondary opportunities among their peers, for example, by using social media to create awareness and offer encouragement ([Dahya and Dryden-Peterson 2016](#)), though little has been written about how refugee-led initiatives and peer support improve awareness and access. Refugee-led initiatives like the [Tertiary Refugee Student Network](#) and the Refugee College Guidance Counselors (RCGCs), and numerous informal efforts also promote opportunities and mentor students through application processes ([TRSN 2021:7-11](#)). While UNHCR has played a critical role in promoting initiatives and identifying students, in order to achieve the scale that is articulated in the three-year strategy, students must be able to apply directly to opportunities and institutions on their own ([Global Education Monitoring Report Team 2018:152](#); [Fratzke et al. 2021:44](#)). Still, much of the literature focuses on coordinated initiatives and highlights that the involvement of an implementing organization facilitates university admissions offers and contributes to the success of these pathways ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:51](#)).

### V.3 Admissions and credentialing

The [Recommendation on Recognition of Qualifications Held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation](#), adopted by the [Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee](#) in 2017, and the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education](#), adopted in 2019, “requires that refugees be given a fair assessment of their qualifications, even in the absence of full documentation” (Kohlenberg & Loo 2020:31). Many credentialing organizations have since created guidelines and resources to support postsecondary institutions to recognize the credentials of students who have missing or incomplete documentation. Others have created tools like [The European Qualifications Passport](#) and UNESCO’s [Qualifications Passport](#), and initiatives like WES’s [Gateway Program](#) and [Article 26 Backpack](#). However, most countries and institutions have yet to operationalize these conventions and guidelines ([Streitwieser and Unangst 2018:17](#)).

Another challenge related to admissions is access to language testing and proficiency in the language of instruction. Initiatives or institutions that offer flexibility on minimum language requirements and those that integrate language instruction into their program, as in Germany and Mexico, are among documented best practices (Wolf 2019a:4; [Wolf 2019b](#); [DAAD 2020:12; 39](#)). Free language courses and testing offered to refugee populations through initiatives like British Council’s [LASER](#) project in the Middle East and [Duolingo](#) have also helped to improve access to language learning and accreditation.

### V.4 Integration and social support

Literature suggests that integration of refugee students into higher education is especially successful when there is collaboration, and a “whole of institution” commitment to inclusion ([Arar 2021](#)). Another enabling factor for integration and creating welcoming campuses is the use of peer-support models (McKee, et al. 2019; [Plasterer 2010](#); Petersen 2012; Wong and Yohani 2016; [Global Education Monitoring Report Team:152](#); [Schmidt 2017:17](#); [Proyecto Habesha 2019: 9](#)). A 2018 tracer study commissioned by WUSC of its Student Refugee Program examines the impact of the youth-led initiative on both refugee participants and student volunteers, and suggests that such models equally benefit host-community volunteers ([Ghomeshi and Hyman 2018:44](#); Petersen 2012:119; [Abdo & Craven 2018](#)). However, literature stresses the need for adequate resources on campus to support the unique needs, including psychosocial supports, of refugee students and the student volunteers who support them ([WUSC 2017:27](#); [Ghomeshi and Hyman 2018:42](#)).

Concerns about legal status post-graduation, culture shock, pressure to support family, past trauma, discrimination, and xenophobia are among the contributing factors which can impact mental health and integration, and culturally and contextually appropriate services are essential ([Wolf 2019b](#); [DAAD 2019:39](#); [Stoerber 2019:34](#); [Fratzke, et al. 2021:37](#)). Managing expectations and cross-cultural training for participating institutions, volunteers, and refugee students are crucial to improving settlement and support experiences ([Wolf 2019b](#); Wolf 2019a:108; [Shankar, et al. 2016](#); Korn, Manks and Strecker 2014; [Schmidt 2017:17](#); [Abdo and Craven 2018](#)).



## V.5 Funding education pathways

Papers by MPI and ERN+ identify sources and methods of funding, as well as expenses covered by various initiatives ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:56-57](#); [Schmidt 2017:11](#); [Smit 2018:13-15](#)). The task force further defines the expenses beyond tuition that should be included in education pathway opportunities, such as application fees, other academic expenses, and living costs ([Global Task Force 2021:6](#)). Most initiatives rely on tuition fee waivers and in-kind commitments by institutions, which have incentivized other donors to contribute to additional, non-academic expenses ([WUSC 2017:20](#)). Government funding has helped to launch initiatives, but MPI notes that continued funding “is likely to come up against the constraints of public budgets, which could limit further growth” ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:58](#)).

In contrast, student levy models, such as those employed by WUSC and ISOW, and the Yes Levy proposed in the [Lisbon Call to Action to set up a Rapid Response Mechanism](#), have been identified as a means to provide sustainable and predictable funding for education pathways, and as a best practice for cost-sharing and generating widespread support and buy-in from the student body ([Schmidt 2017:16-17](#); [Smit 2018:13](#); [Rebulica Portuguesa 2019:2, 11](#); [Fratzke et al. 2021:101-102](#)). The benefits notwithstanding, some question the transferability of such funding schemes to other contexts ([Smit 2018:32](#)). Others highlight that initiatives that currently rely on private donations face challenges with sustainability and predictability ([Wolf 2019b](#)). A proposed funding model that merits further exploration is the use of cross-border loans to fund education (and other) pathways. The UNHCR is currently developing a pilot cross-border loan solution to support access to education, including opportunities in third countries ([The Humanitarian Innovation Program 2021](#)).

## V.6 Policy challenges

MPI has examined the various legal frameworks that could be utilized to facilitate education pathways globally, and explores the advantages and disadvantages of using legal pathways that are meant for refugees, employing regular study visa channels, or creating an adapted student visa for refugees ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:40-49](#)). WUSC, the International Center for Migration Policy Development, and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) have explored the benefits of using a community sponsorship model to mobilize universities and expand opportunities for protection ([WUSC 2017:14](#); [Coulibaly 2021](#); [IRAP, et al. 2021:6](#); [IRAP 2020:86](#)). Some experts are concerned that community sponsorship places fall under a country’s refugee protection infrastructure and therefore may not create additional opportunities (Labman, 2020).

Another concern is that dependence on an intermediary or settlement agency can be much more resource-intensive, which can limit scale ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:44](#)). In contrast, the use of student visas are additional to resettlement, can allow for autonomous access, and has potential for scale if adapted to remove barriers, but concerns regarding safeguarding and protection, the associated documentation requirements, and higher costs associated with this pathway exist ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:44, 46, 66](#)). Given the range of possible benefits and challenges, a cross-cutting point of agreement in the literature is the need for models that suit distinct policy environments.

## V.7 Forthcoming programming and pilots

Higher education communities and governments in all parts of the world have been exploring how education pathways can be leveraged to create protection spaces. Much of the literature focuses on opportunities to pilot or scale initiatives in Europe and North America, although some have addressed the potential to build upon interest in Asia. MPI provides a landscape review of four continents, with recommendations for potential expansion ([Fratzke, et al. 2021:59-92](#)). The commitment by the U.S. to pilot community sponsorship and expand complementary pathways has spurred the development of recommendation documents, and education pathways are expected to emerge ([Niskanen 2020](#), [IRAP 2020](#), [CWS 2021](#)). Similarly, ERN+’s [scoping paper](#) and [feasibility study](#) suggest options in Europe. Emerging initiatives include those developing for Afghan students in the [U.K.](#) and elsewhere, DAAD’s

new [Leadership for Africa](#) initiative, and France's new University Corridors initiative. While there is very little documentation about efforts to expand pathways in [Latin America](#), [Oceania](#), and [Asia](#), there have been national and regional convenings of higher education communities to explore education pathways in these regions. Additionally, there are calls to build upon nascent community sponsorship and skilled immigration pathways initiatives ([Fratzke, et al. 2021](#); [IRAP 2021](#); [Coulibaly 2021](#)).

## VI. Complementary pathways for workers

The current dominant model is an existing skilled immigration pathway that is paired with facilitating measures or accommodations. Examples are Australia's [Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement](#) pilot program, Canada's [Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot](#) (EMPP), and the U.K.'s [Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot](#). In each case, applicants are in refugee circumstances outside the destination country at the time of applying. They access skilled visas that are available to other international talent but within a unique framework.

Another model is an immigration route accessible by those within a country's borders. In some cases, applicants may be at some stage of an asylum determination process and may be eligible based on their employment, skills or other human capital. This is also called a 'lane change' policy, and is in use in Germany and Sweden among other countries. Applicants can choose between an asylum process or an employment-based pathway, an option offered by South Africa to Zimbabwean applicants.

A further model, not yet in practice, is a skilled immigration pathway designed and operated exclusively or primarily for applicants in refugee circumstances. A source for this theoretical model is the literature on adapting 'skills partnerships' for use between a destination country and a source country hosting a displaced population ([Khan and Dempster 2019](#); [Alboim and Cohl 2020](#)).

The evidence base on skilled immigration pathways for displaced talent includes mapping and analysis of current admissions, populations of focus, skills data, policy opportunities and challenges, and pilot projects in use or development ([TBB 2017](#); [Lawrie et al. 2018](#); [Song 2018](#); [Brizar 2019](#); [TBB 2019a](#); [Smith and Wagner 2021](#); [Higgins and Brizar 2020](#); [OECD and UNHCR 2021](#); [Fratzke et al. 2021](#)). There are project evaluations ([TBB 2019b](#); [TBB 2020](#); [IRCC 2020](#); RefugeePoint - unpublished), as well as feasibility studies of programming within a national or regional context (Migration Institute of Finland - forthcoming; [Fratzke et al. 2021](#)) and for a specific population (TalentLift and FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance - unpublished).

The geographic scope in the literature is primarily focused on destination countries with pilot projects or targeted policies, such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Sweden, and the U.K., and in source countries linked to pilot projects or targeted policies such as Jordan, Kenya and Lebanon. There is some analysis on opportunities in Asia and the Pacific and South America, and literature in development focused on regional and national pathways in the E.U. Below is a selection of noteworthy topics and findings in the literature.

### VI. 1 Policy environment in destination countries

An analysis by MPI highlighted the following countries for growth or expansion of skilled immigration for displaced talent based on flexible immigration systems that offer permanence or longer-term entry: Australia and New Zealand (Asia and the Pacific); the U.K., Ireland, Finland, and others (Europe); and Canada, the U.S., and Mexico (North America) ([Fratzke et al. 2021](#)). There are few detailed, country-specific analyses but those available highlight administrative flexibility and pathways to permanence as key ingredients ([Lawrie et al. 2018](#); [Song 2018](#); [TBB 2020](#)). Limiting factors in destination environments include a preference for temporary or circular mobility, oversubscription of pathways, and international workers' ineligibility for social assistance and integration measures ([Fratzke et al. 2021](#)).

## VI.2 Policy environment in source countries

There is limited analysis on the link between source country policies and skilled immigration access by displaced talent, but there are insights in literature on policies that impact domestic job opportunities. For example, a study analyzing policies in four African countries in the context of transitions from higher education to employment noted that, in Kenya, limits on freedom of movement mean people can't travel "to find work that is commensurate with their skills and experience" ([WUSC 2019](#)). Limited local job opportunities may significantly limit international job opportunities if people cannot use or grow their skills and experience. Research by Alexander Betts and the Refugee Economies project provides a comparison of enabling or restrictive policy environments for displaced talent in African countries ([Betts et al. 2021](#); [Betts 2021](#)).

## VI.3 Guiding principles and eligibility

A report providing preliminary analysis of Canada's Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot outlined guiding principles for Canadian and global programming, including additionality, access to permanence, and gender balance ([IRCC and UNHCR 2019](#)). Other identified lessons were the importance of developing pilots alongside the private sector, and shifting the lens of policy makers from vulnerability to human capital potential. Another analysis explored eligibility rules in pathways adapted or designed for displaced talent, and how these may link to policy objectives. The authors noted, "if a policy intends to meet primarily economic growth objectives, eligibility criteria related to immigration status may be more open, but criteria related to skills and employment may be more selective," whereas a protection-first objective may merit stricter immigration (refugee) status criteria, but apply flexible skills criteria ([Wagner et al. 2019](#)).

## VI.4 Reducing irregular migration

Triandafyllidou et al. examined the link between enhanced regular migration pathways and falling irregular migration ([Triandafyllidou et al. 2019](#)). They found complex evidence of people being diverted from their original migration path, but exploring other irregular channels. In a separate study, Bither and Ziebarth analyzed what would happen if the Western Balkan Regulation in Germany met its aim of reducing the number of asylum claimants from six Balkans countries, and likewise concluded there was an uncertain relationship between regular migration pathways and a reduction in irregular migration ([Bither and Ziebarth 2018](#)). However, a global evaluation conducted by Talent Beyond Boundaries found that 48% of respondents in one survey who engaged with a skilled immigration solution were less likely to consider an irregular journey ([TBB 2020:121](#)).

## VI.5 Outcomes of pathways for applicants in-country based on employment, skills or human capital

Some EU countries have implemented pathways to regularize an applicant's status during their asylum process, called a 'lane change' policy, based on economic criteria. For example, Germany extends a short-term 'tolerated' status for the purpose of vocational training or employment to asylum seekers facing a return order; in some cases, individuals may then access a residence permit on employment grounds ([Handbook Germany 2021a](#); [Handbook Germany 2021b](#)). France and Spain also extend regularization tied to economic factors. However, the fact that relatively few EU countries have developed these policies indicates that the bloc is "avoiding" the topic of regularization as it explores complementary pathways ([Gonzalez Beilfuss and Koopmans 2021:11](#)). There is little evidence on outcomes and efficacy of these types of lane change policies, but benefits may include greater willingness by companies to invest in hiring and training despite a person's ongoing asylum claim, and an overall reduction in legal uncertainty ([Ibid:29-30](#)).



One variation is the South African pathway called a dispensation which is developed for certain nationals as need arises. While this pathway was created for skills needs and not for protection, in practice it has served as an alternative to asylum for Zimbabweans who may apply either for refugee protection or for the dispensation program ([Khan and Rayner 2021](#); [Carrera, et al. 2021](#)). The dispensation program does not afford Zimbabweans protection to non-refoulement under refugee laws, but it offers a far longer period of stay — four years compared to an asylum seeker permit of three to six months ([Khan and Rayner 2021:27](#)).

## VI.6 Benefits

A key benefit of complementary skilled immigration pathways is the increase in choice and opportunity to people living in refugee circumstances, who have historically had few options to achieve livelihoods and security. At their best, skilled immigration pathways offer an alternative for those with the skillsets needed in a new country. This program typically provides the largest entry point to a country, and represents the largest opportunity among national immigration programs for people in refugee circumstances. Skilled immigration pathways can provide incredible mobility speed, relative to traditional resettlement. For example, skilled visas offered under the U.K.'s Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot can be processed in a little as five days.

Skilled immigration pathways can also provide rights and entitlements such as a pathway to permanence, family accompaniment, and social services. These benefits vary by country, but some countries do provide human-centred skills visas that reduce concerns around exploitation and vulnerability of applicants from refugee circumstances who move for work. Adaptations to existing skilled immigration pathways model a new equity approach focused on reducing displacement-related barriers ([IRCC 2021](#)). An equity approach, which has been applied in national skilled pathways in Australia, Canada and the U.K., has the potential to scale across all national programs, and to benefit other disadvantaged groups, for example those who face similar documentation or financial barriers due to other factors such as poverty or internal displacement.

Use of skilled immigration pathways can change narratives on displacement to include talent and potential. Some first-person accounts demonstrate the power of this narrative change on individuals: people who engage with job and skilled immigration opportunities have recounted the positive impact on their personal confidence and dignity ([TalentLift 2021](#); [TBB 2020](#)). Recruiters, policy makers and civil society supporters can also undergo a change in perceptions.

## VI.7 Challenges

A review of the literature reveals several potential risks. Although there is general consensus within civil society and UNHCR that there should be a clear separation between resettlement and complementary pathways, there is a risk of mixing employment, skills or human capital criteria in eligibility criteria for resettlement and other humanitarian pathways. Australia's Community Support Program is a prime example of the risk of mixing criteria, because it integrates employer choice into its selection requirements ([Hirsch et al. 2019](#)). A related risk of is the reduction of resettlement and other humanitarian pathway space if governments consider the use of skilled immigration as a replacement for resettlement numbers, instead of as a complementary route to protection.

Ideal conditions include a pathway to permanence and citizenship, family accompaniment, and access to social services such as healthcare and public education ([Alboim and Cohl 2021](#); [Smith and Wagner 2021](#)). However, rights and entitlements for skilled immigrants vary significantly by country, and some may provide weaker rights and entitlements for refugee newcomers, which increases the possibility of exploitation and vulnerability after arrival. A further concern in the literature is that women face greater barriers to access than men. This may result from cultural or social factors that prevent women from paid work or work outside the home, reducing their competitiveness for international jobs and skilled visas. Another factor may be the greater availability of skilled immigration pathways within

sectors in which men are more represented, such as tech, manufacturing and other skilled trades ([TBB 2020](#)). The governments of Australia and Canada have introduced policy changes that recognize the disadvantage of often years-long displacement, for example, increasing the age limit of a principal applicant (Australia) and extending the timeframe for eligible work experience (Canada). But some piloting governments have yet to address barriers that limit equity and scale ([Chen et al. 2021](#); [Alboim and Cohl 2021](#)), including the requirement to demonstrate temporary intent when applying for work permits, or the sole eligibility of a spouse and children. The latter can disproportionately exclude women with caregiving responsibilities for parents, siblings or extended family members. Efforts to implement pilots or proof of concept programming have been resource-intensive because of visa costs and staffing costs, as typical models involve case work to support individuals through the recruitment and relocation processes ([Fratzke et al. 2021:9](#)).

## VII. Trends

### VII.1 Forthcoming programming and pilots

Among the recipients of the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) grants are the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) and Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB). The programming by both organizations may be a source of further operational lessons and impact data in this field. Talent Beyond Boundaries is also exploring the feasibility of supporting skilled immigration for displaced talent in Indonesia and India.

UNHCR teams in Canada, Colombia, and Peru are pursuing pilots in collaboration with the non-profits TalentLift in Canada, Cuso International in Colombia (CIC), and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in Peru which can provide lessons on the use of skilled immigration pathways for displaced talent in Latin America.

### VII.2 Forthcoming literature and research

Forthcoming studies on named sponsorship include:

- a four-year research project led by Jennifer Hyndman and Kathy Sherrell examining sustainability of private sponsorship in Canada;
- a longitudinal study, SyRIA.lth, examining differences in long-term physical and mental health among those supported by named or unnamed forms of resettlement in Canada;
- an EU AMIF study on the use of humanitarian corridors towards growth and scale in Europe;
- an OECD analysis of how digital communication channels were used during the pandemic to inform and support migrants and refugees, which may include insights on communication between sponsors and sponsored individuals;
- an evaluation on community sponsorship by Karen Smith and Carol Ballantine of University College Dublin.
- The University of Ottawa Refugee Hub is also leading a qualitative research project investigating the operation and purpose of settlement planning tools and knowledge assets that support the settlement of refugee newcomers arriving through the PSR Program in Canada (2021-2023), as its contribution to the AMIF-funded Sustainable Practices in Integration (SPRING) Project.

Various mapping studies, reports and research projects are underway covering both education and worker pathways:

- A UNHCR mapping of current education and worker pathways aims to provide a detailed picture of how these pathways work in practice, and how they could be replicated.
- UNHCR has commissioned a study on finance mechanisms that will examine the potential of cross-border loans to address barriers to financing immigration, with findings expected to apply to pathways for workers, students, and family reunification.

- The ASILE Project, by a consortium coordinated by the Centre for European Policy Studies launched in December 2019, aims to identify promising practice in international protection to inform the EU's implementation of the Global Compacts. ASILE released a policy brief on preliminary findings of the first 18 months of research, which examines some work and other residence permits as alternatives to asylum in host countries (Carrera, et al. 2021), and other analyses are forthcoming.
- The Migration Institute of Finland has conducted a global mapping of education and skilled immigration pathways, with preliminary analysis of their transferability in Finland, and is expected in late 2021.
- With a focus on education pathways, there is a forthcoming report by the Initiative on U.S. Education Pathways for Refugee Students with policy and detailed program design recommendations.
- An article examining the WUSC model makes the case for education pathways in Australia (Killiakova et al., forthcoming).
- CARITAS Italy will conduct a first evaluation of the Unicorn initiative in Italy, expected in early 2022.
- A HIRES evaluation will link pre-departure and post-arrival VET and workplace-led private sponsorship and employment.
- Training modules are under development by the Global Task Force.
- Talent Beyond Boundaries is planning an interim impact evaluation on its global work and a scoping paper on the potential use of EU pathways and the Blue Card by applicants in refugee circumstances, planned for mid-2022.
- Gavin Brockett from the International Students Overcoming War (ISOW) initiative is studying enabling factors for education pathways, the role of student leaders in supporting education pathways, and a comparison between student visas and refugee protection visas.
- The UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) has an ongoing research project on recognition, validation and accreditation practices and flexible learning pathways for migrants and refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab region and Southeast Asia.
- WUSC will commission research on the contribution of higher education opportunities to the refugee education pipeline (retention, enrolment, success rates).

### VII.3 Overarching knowledge gaps and research directions

The pathways and initiatives that support named sponsorship, students, and workers as a complementary solution to resettlement have many shared characteristics. They share a similar history, beginning with pioneering countries or programs, followed by international replication, and resulting in a cascade of unique models. They also share a form of 'naming' or selection that is not wholly determined by UNHCR or governments, but by families, community groups, universities and colleges, and employers. A role in selection decentralises ownership, engagement, awareness, and accountability. This offers immense benefits but also some challenges. The visa pathways underlying these solutions can overlap — for example, pathways for students encompass community sponsorship programs and student visas.

The commonalities across these pathways are behind some of the observed knowledge gaps in the research and literature, with particular gaps in the following areas:

- Program evaluations that are conducted externally and made publicly available. This is understandable given that many international initiatives have only been developed quite recently. Moving forward, implementers should allocate time and resources to evaluations as part of regular programming. Government pilots should be externally evaluated and include analysis of resources. There is limited documentation around government staff time and resources, and therefore little understanding of comparative costs among mobility solutions and other solutions.



- Longitudinal studies examining economic and social outcomes for those who move. Longitudinal studies are limited and mostly focused on countries with longstanding programs. A related gap is a lack of success measures besides economic outcomes, such as feelings of belonging and attachment, and other social inclusion measures. Moving forward, broader longitudinal studies are needed to fully measure impact.
- Analysis of policy environments in source and destination countries that catalyze programs and supporting ecosystems. Overall, there are more analyses of destination than source policy environments, despite the significant impact of source country realities on mobility opportunities — i.e. local access to education, work rights, freedom of movement, and banking. Analyses typically focus on a single policy dimension, such as skilled immigration policies, rather than examining the characteristics of an open or inclusive policy environment that is supportive of varied complementary pathways. In addition, the literature on policy environments is heavily focused on mobility from low-income to high-income countries, overlooking the opportunity space in middle-income countries, regionally and internationally.
- Research on the role of informal networks within displaced communities in access to pathways, including access to student and skilled immigration pathways outside coordinated initiatives. An express goal of complementary pathways design is to enable more autonomous access by people living in refugee circumstances (UNHCR 2019c:24). However, there is little research on the mechanisms and networks within displaced communities that support greater access — particularly to student and skilled immigration pathways. More consistent and quality data is needed on the number of people accessing these pathways and the ways they do so independently.
- Analysis and articulation of ethics for supporting groups including sponsors, education institutions, employers, and civil society. Some organizations and international networks have developed guiding principles and program frameworks, but there remain normative and practical gaps in guidance. There is a particular need for ethical guidance for those implementing programs, and for displaced people using such programs (Wolf 2019b). As complementary pathways evolve and are replicated and the policy space opens up, more people will take part in designing new pathways, and new ethical questions will emerge. Existing knowledge hubs, new communities of practice, and displaced communities can help shape ethical program design.

#### VII.4 Further research directions

The following ideas for research directions are specific to each pathway, address additional knowledge gaps to those identified above, and are drawn from recommendations either in the literature or in expert interviews.

##### **Pathways for named sponsorship:**

- Investigating the use and impact of new tech-enabled platforms designed to support sponsorship such as Pairity.
- Exploring how sponsorship programs across jurisdictions influence the development of others and which elements are replicated (Phillimore and Dorling 2020).
- Impacts of reduced administration, i.e. temporary exemptions to administrative requirements, towards an understanding of how to reduce complexity for sponsors and sponsored newcomers.
- Exploring the roles and impacts of family in sponsorship, which can be ‘invisible’ in official sponsorships, their outcomes, and the impacts on them (Krause, 2020:12-13).
- Perspectives and engagement of Indigenous communities as sponsors, settlement actors, and stakeholders.

##### **Pathways for students:**

- Feasibility of education pathways in promising areas such as Latin America, Oceania, Asia, and parts of Europe.
- Comparative analysis of third country solutions versus developing tertiary education solutions in host countries (Wolf 2019b).

- Exploring how students in various geographies and contexts (urban versus camp) access third country education pathways or experience barriers to access.
- Investigating how small-scale education pathways and initiatives can lead to systems change at national and institutional levels.
- The impact of applying credential evaluation guidelines and tools on opening access to scholarships and immigration pathways.

**Pathways for workers:**

- Better quality and standardized skills data across source countries to understand potential within certain displaced populations, source countries, and regions.
- Data on the interest and willingness of employers to hire from the displaced talent pool; and (national) data on the sectors facing skill shortages that already rely on international recruitment or align with available skilled immigration pathways.
- Tools for policy makers on designing inclusive skilled immigration policies and programming that address current challenges, i.e. consular discretion versus non-discretionary approaches in visa application processing.
- The relationship between skilled immigration opportunities and other phenomena such as reducing irregular migration and upskilling in source countries.
- The impact on companies and teams, including various ways of measuring the return on investment from this form of international recruitment.

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