Pathways to Protection:

Mapping visa schemes and other practices enabling people in need of international protection to reach Europe safely

ECRE

Study prepared by Claire Rimmer on behalf of ECRE, with additional material by Rachel Westerby.

March 2024

March 2024

INDEX OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMIF	The European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CARA	Council for At-Risk Academics
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Asylum Agency
EUAA RST&HA	EUAA Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network
Fedasil	Federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers in Belgium
ICORN	International Cities of Refuge Network
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SNSF	Swiss National Science Foundation
TBB	Talent Beyond Boundaries
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICORE	University Corridors for Refugees (Italy)

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Additionality

The principle of additionality requires that admission places offered by complementary pathways should be in addition to those provided via resettlement, and that complementary pathways should not be used instead of/as a replacement for resettlement.

Complementary (safe) pathways

UNHCR defines complementary pathways as 'safe and regulated avenues for persons in need of international protection that provide for a lawful stay in a third country where the international protection needs of the beneficiaries are met'. This study uses the term 'safe pathways'.

Durable solutions

UNHCR is mandated to provide three durable solutions for the refugees under its mandate: voluntary repatriation, resettlement, and local integration within a host community. For

beneficiaries of complementary pathways, resettlement is not a durable solution as such as they have already moved to a 'safe' country.

Evacuation

An emergency process to move persons at immediate risk of harm from the country of their residence to a safe third country.

Matching

Matching processes balance the needs, aspirations and capacities of those arriving on safe pathway programmes with the capacities of receiving locations and communities. For education and employment pathways, matching can also refer to ensuring suitable candidates for specific roles or courses of study.

Resettlement

UNHCR defines resettlement as the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State that has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status.

Right to asylum

Seeking asylum (requesting legal protection from persecution or harm) is a fundamental right, and an international obligation for country signatories to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (including all countries covered by this study – namely EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the UK).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1) Setting the scene for safe pathways: definitions and data

Complementary or safe pathways are a relatively new addition to global refugee protection, and a particularly new phenomenon in Europe. Here, recent years have seen implementation of a growing number of safe pathway programmes, very often small in scale. This has created a complex landscape, involving many different stakeholders working in different ways, and involving different patterns of cooperation between host, destination and first asylum countries.

As such, establishing common definitions is challenging, particularly given the necessary flexibility most programmes employ in order to succeed in their specific political and operational contexts. This study nonetheless identifies six types of pathway, showing that all safe pathway programmes include one or a combination of the six. They are as follows:

1) education,
2) labour mobility,
3) extended family members/ family unity,
4) humanitarian pathways and visas,
5) private and/ or community sponsorship,
6) and other, usually non-specific safe stay and entry options.

Mapping safe pathways in Europe is further complicated by the limited availability of information on planned and current European programmes, and lack of transparency concerning the extent to which pathways achieve "additionality", i.e. the extent to which they operate in addition to refugee resettlement and thus contribute to durable solutions for refugees. In some cases, they are rather a substitute for the – usually preferable – resettlement options.

2) European safe pathway programmes: what works?

The study identifies a number of approaches and good practices which stakeholders believe have worked well, covering the range of pathways and programmes. It also identifies examples of promising new practices in both newer and more established programmes. The most important examples of what works are as follows:

- European safe pathway programmes have taken a **flexible approach to using existing visa regimes** to facilitate admissions.
- **Issuing of humanitarian visas** has enabled entry for both humanitarian corridor programmes (including humanitarian visas for entry in order to claim asylum) and some community sponsorship and education pathway programmes. The flexibility of humanitarian visas as a tool to support refugees reaching safety is evident in measures such as those enabling visa holders with ongoing protection needs to prolong legal residency periods, such as in Poland for visa holders from Belarus. Their use has also enabled a recognition of vulnerabilities within programme criteria and adaptation of programmes, such as building in requisite support. This contrasts with more mainstream visa options such as the provisions of visas for work or study: while they are invaluable tools for establishing safe pathways for people with protection needs, they are not explicitly designed as such.
- Following the experience with humanitarian visas, the design of European pathways is witnessing more **innovative combinations of visas and support programmes**,

cognisant of the impact of visa conditions on the success of pathway programmes. In Belgium, for example, national authorities and civil society are collaborating to create a new "humanitarian visa for student reasons". The visa will include a 12-month period of supported, post-study residency in order to seek employment, boosting refugee access to longer term protection and solutions beyond the initial pathway.

- Safe pathway programmes benefit from **the mobilisation of resources and expertise from a diverse range of partners and stakeholders**, in both host and first asylum countries.
- The **establishment of humanitarian corridor programmes constitutes an important success**, and has largely been driven by the commitment and contributions of faith-based organisations and networks.
- **Private sponsorship programmes have provided opportunities to directly involve regional and local authorities** in the coordination and/or implementation of programmes.
- **Universities are particularly resourceful partners** for education pathways, bringing significant status, resources, international networks and administrative capacity, and linking beneficiaries with further study, training and employment opportunities.
- **Several European safe pathway programmes have additionally drawn on the support, status, partnerships and resources of established international networks** focused on human rights and refuge, including city and university/academic networks implementing temporary respite programmes.
- **Private and community sponsorship has successfully engaged local communities and other regional and local stakeholders in safe pathway efforts**. These programmes have been implemented as family-based sponsorship pathways, within humanitarian corridor programmes and to supplement and reinforce resettlement programmes.
- **Volunteer sponsors make significant contributions** to fundraising, finding housing and providing integration assistance (pre and post-arrival), **and community involvement can increase understanding of migration and acceptance of refugees in local communities**. Sponsoring family members have been able to bring relatives to safety for whom other routes may not have been available, albeit often with significant financial and resource commitments on their part.
- European safe pathway programmes are mobilising partners and engaging expertise **to provide appropriate pre-departure and post-arrival support** for both beneficiaries and key stakeholders. In education pathways, for example, universities make use of pre-existing administrative and support structures for international students, and engage student bodies and unions in supporting beneficiaries post-arrival.
- While very few larger scale labour pathways have been established in Europe, **those that do exist are providing dedicated, end-to-end support for employers and engaging specialist recruitment expertise.**
- **Educational pathways and humanitarian visa programmes have made promising contributions to emergency responses**, particularly in the context of evacuations following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The importance of strong global networks and partnerships for mobilising safe pathways in emergencies is demonstrated by initiatives such as the Afghan Crisis Network, and the contributions of established academic freedom and temporary respite-oriented networks in evacuations from Afghanistan via educational pathways.

European safe pathway programmes: the challenges

- With some notable exceptions, **the majority of European safe pathway programmes are in general very small**, in the sense of both small numbers of beneficiaries and narrow eligibility criteria that restrict programmes' scope. There is room for growth across pathways, and stakeholders overwhelmingly concur that **upscaling safe pathway programmes** is a key priority and major challenge for Europe going forward.

- Challenges for upscaling include the **resource intensive nature** of the large global 'ecosystems' required to implement safe pathways. While the presence of existing infrastructure for resettlement in countries of first asylum can reduce the level of investment needed to establish new programmes, targeting expansion efforts at these locations excludes many individuals in countries without this pre-existing infrastructure, and for whom safe pathways could provide access to protection.

- The design and implementation of new pathways is impacted by the requirement to **navigate mainstream immigration processes** that are not tailor-made, for the operation of safe pathways or protection more generally. Within European countries, many of which are experiencing housing supply and asylum reception accommodation challenges, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing severely limits upscaling possibilities for safe pathways.

- Individual pathways have their own specific challenges for upscaling. For more timebound pathways such as education and employment, difficulties caused by the **length of time required to bring people to safety** can limit the willingness of key partners to increase programme capacity. Private sponsorship programmes have a clear need to **diversify the range and type of sponsors** in order to expand.

- The **lack of comprehensive and comparable data** on safe pathway programmes presents challenges for evaluating and evidencing their impact, limiting both effective advocacy for their upscaling/expansion and the extent to which learning from prior implementation is able to inform sustainable future programme design and expansion.

- **Access to safe pathways** remains a core challenge for European safe pathway programmes.

- **Eligibility criteria vary widely across pathways**, and variously include vulnerability criteria, high level academic qualifications and/or work experience, language skills/qualifications, and having relatives in/other links to receiving countries.

- **Narrow eligibility criteria** restrict overall access, as in education and employment pathway programmes, which despite some promising practice tend to focus on more 'elite' demographics able to meet requirements for higher levels of postgraduate education or skilled employment. They also create practical barriers for individual beneficiaries seeking to satisfy eligibility conditions, including evidencing qualifications and experience, obtaining official documents and applying for visas (including a lack of safe passage to embassies and consulates where they are not present in countries of first asylum), and accessing the resources needed to submit applications and attend interviews.

- Although there is some evidence that specific pathways boost refugee self-agency, in particular those for education and employment, **access to safe pathway programmes is often untransparent for potential beneficiaries**. Very few safe pathway programmes provide general public information in countries of first asylum, in some cases citing security and capacity concerns, and few have open application processes. A lack of appeal or information rights for potential beneficiaries with regard

to safe pathway processes further limits both programme transparency and independent access.

- The contribution of safe pathways to providing **durable solutions for refugees** has been mixed.

- In general, programme design and implementation has tended **to focus more on getting people to Europe than planning for longer term protection** via integration and (more) permanent residence. Short-term pathways, in particular those for education, have not always designed with the flexibility to respond to beneficiaries who cannot return post-study.

- **Visa conditions for safe pathway beneficiaries vary widely,** and affect length of residence, access to rights (including if family members can join beneficiaries) and legal status. Across programmes, there is limited flexibility for beneficiaries to transfer between visa regimes in order to pursue a more durable solution. Conditions attached to some mainstream visas, such as work visas restricting beneficiaries to a specific employer/role, leave limited flexibility for programmes to respond when employment do not work out and protection needs are ongoing.

1. Introduction

This research provides a comparative analysis of many of the mechanisms that provide a safe route to Europe for those in need of international protection. It summarises recent developments and the ongoing policy debates.

Good practices and challenges in safe pathway programming are highlighted throughout the report, based on current experience. Challenges are not highlighted as being bad practice as such, but rather useful examples for policymakers and programmers to consider in the design of future programmes.

Finally, the report includes recommendations on how to increase and improve safe pathways in the future, given the growing political momentum and technical expertise in Europe.

2. Methodology and scope

This research was carried out between December 2022 and April 2023. It consisted of desk research, an information request via short survey or through ECRE members to several national authorities and 24 interviews carried out with different stakeholders at EU, national and local level. In addition, the researcher had an opportunity to meet several stakeholders and take part in discussions at the 2023 ICORN networking event in Brussels[1] and the ECRE Annual General Conference in Turin.

This research provides a comprehensive and comparative analysis of mechanisms to provide safe routes to Europe for those in need of international protection, and of current developments and policy debates in this context. The mechanisms include visa schemes, sponsorship schemes, extended family reunification (not including family reunification as per the Family Reunification Directive[2] or resettlement[3]), humanitarian corridors programmes, protection-related scholarship schemes, hybrids and all other relevant mechanisms that allow people to arrive regularly and be granted an at least initial right to reside (either while an asylum process is carried out or on another basis). It covers EU Member States plus Norway, Switzerland and the UK, and sets out key findings, and recommendations on expanding and improving safe pathways to Europe targeted toward specific stakeholders.

3. Background

ECRE has long argued that there should be an expansion in the availability of safe routes for people in need of international protection to enable them to arrive in Europe without having to undertake dangerous journeys. Despite the need for safe routes to Europe, there is little

---

[1] See, ICORN, 'The 2023 ICORN Network Meeting in Brussels - 22nd- 24th March 2023', https://www.icorn.org/article/2023-icorn-network-meeting-brussels-22nd-24th-march-2023.
[2] Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32003L0086.
[3] See European Commission, 'Resettlement and other pathways to protection', available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/resettlement-and-other-pathways-protection_en.

March 2024

available information on current and planned routes and their implementation.[4] This is partly because political priorities have been directed elsewhere, but there is also some concern among those working to expand pathways to protection that publicising practices could have negative effects. There is also a risk that countries use any expansion of safe routes to justify restrictive practices at borders. For this reason, it should be underlined that any mapping of safe routes and recommendations arising for their expanded use is without prejudice to the need to ensure that those who arrive spontaneously at borders and in-country have access to an asylum procedure. The term 'safe' routes rather than 'safe and legal' is used because it is not illegal under international, EU or national law to cross a border to seek protection.

Despite a political environment that is generally hostile towards asylum-seekers and in some cases also to refugees, countries in Europe do continue to employ a variety of mechanisms to facilitate safe pathways to Europe for people in need of protection, including both those who have undergone status determination pre-arrival and those who undergo it in-country.

Globally, in 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees called for the development of the Three-year Strategy (2019 – 2021) for resettlement and complementary pathways.[5] This multi-stakeholder strategy aimed to increase resettlement countries and spaces, and advance complementary pathways. Although it laid a good foundation, it was hampered to a large extent by the COVID-19 pandemic.[6] This was followed by "Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030",[7] the next phase of the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. Goal 2 focuses on increasing refugee access to family reunification and complementary pathways, developing a strong evidence base, and designing coordinated systems involving all relevant partners, whilst promoting refugee self-agency.[8]

Safe pathways have also been an increasing focus at EU level.[9] The European Commission has encouraged the development and expansion of complementary pathways, including via the 2020 Recommendation on legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways, and through funding such as that provided via the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund.[10] Individual countries have also

---

[4] UNHCR, Final Report Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, available at: https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Three%20Year%20Strategy%20%282019-2021%29%20End%20Report_Final%20for%20copy%20edit_final-compressed.pdf., page 3.

[5] UNCHR, Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, available at: https://globalcompactrefugees.org/compact-action/initiatives/expanding-third-country-solutions.

[6] UNHCR, Final Report Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, available at: https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Three%20Year%20Strategy%20%282019-2021%29%20End%20Report_Final%20for%20copy%20edit_final-compressed.pdf., page 3.

[7] UNHCR, June 2022, https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Third%20Country%20Solutions%20for%20Refugees%20-%20Roadmap%202030.pdf

[8] Ibid, page 18.

[9] See for example, the Commission Recommendation 2020 on legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways.

[10] See call for proposal for AMIF 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/amif-funding-call-2020-complementary-pathways-protection-and-integration_en and 2023 with a focus on community sponsorship and integration and complementary pathways linked to work: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/european-commission-opens-call-proposals-amif-grants_en.

March 2024

undertaken mapping and research into the types of complementary pathways that could be explored, including Finland[11] and Switzerland.[12]

Crises such as the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in August 2021 and the subsequent evacuation of Kabul highlight the urgent need for safe pathways. Although there has been some criticism of how the evacuation was initially handled,[13] a large number of Afghans were evacuated,[14] and more continue to leave through humanitarian admission programmes (albeit at a slower rate). For at least eight EU Member States, this was their only experience of humanitarian admissions in the period 2016-2021.[15] Evacuations did also show the limitations of current programmes, particularly in terms of an ultimately insufficient number of places, barriers to accessing protection pathways, and a lack of coordination and solidarity at times.[16]

3.1 Definitions and debates

Definitions are important. However as safe pathways are a relatively new phenomenon, at least in Europe, there is not always a one-size-fits-all definition, particularly as flexibility is often key to a pathway being able to work. Below are some of the key concepts, their definitions and current debates:

Safe routes and complementary pathways

Safe routes are often called 'complementary pathways,' meaning that they are in addition to resettlement. UNHCR defines them as "safe and regulated avenues for persons in need of international protection that provide for a lawful stay in a third country where the international protection needs of the beneficiaries are met."[17] UNHCR stresses that these programmes should be 'in addition' to resettlement programmes and "should not substitute States' obligations to provide international protection to refugees through access to asylum on their territory." [18] For others, to be counted as a 'true' safe pathway, there should be a component that means additional access routes to a safe country, not only a community support or

---

[11] Sirkku Varjonen, Amanda Kinnunen, Juho-Matti Paavola, Farid Ramadan, Mika Raunio, Joanne van Selm, Tuuli Vilhunen, Student, Worker or Refugee? How complementary pathways for people in need of international protection work in practice, Publications of the Government's Analysis, Assessment and Research Activities, 2021:60, Finnish Government, November 2021, available at: https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163604.

[12] There have been two recent reports commissioned by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) on alternative pathways to Switzerland. Sabine Blum, Andreas Brunner, Bernhard Prestel, Victor Prestel, Komplementäre Zugangswege für Menschen auf der Flucht: Ein Ländervergleich (German only) 2022; Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Voies d'admission complémentaires en Suisse : analyse du Secrétariat d'État aux migrations (SEM) (German, French and Italian).

[13] See for example, the EU Observer, 'EU countries evacuate Kabul amid chaos, panic', August 2021, available at: https://euobserver.com/world/152658.

[14] As of December 2021 it was estimated that 22,000 Afghans had been evacuated, see European Parliament Briefing, Evacuation of Afghan nationals to EU Member States, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPRS_BRI(2021)698776_EN.pdf.

[15] DE, EE, EL, ES, HU, FI, LU, PT, see EMN inform, Resettlement, humanitarian admission and sponsorship schemes, June 2023, pages 12-14. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/EMN_INFORM_Resettlement_final.pdf.

[16] IRC, Two years on: Afghans still lack pathways to safety in the EU, May 2023, https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/two-years-still-no-safe-pathways-afghans.

[17] UNHCR, 'Complementary pathways', available at: https://www.unhcr.org/complementary-pathways.html

[18] Ibid.

integration element to an existing resettlement programme, which would be more accurately referred to as 'buddy' schemes.[19]

Additionality

The principle of additionality is often supported when advocating for complementary pathways. Additionality means that the places often under complementary pathways should be in addition to resettlement, and that complementary pathways should not be used instead of or as a replacement for resettlement. This is considered the 'gold standard' for safe routes. How 'additional' pathways are can sometimes be difficult to judge because 'additionality' can be viewed in different ways. For example, it can be through additional places to a particular country, or through additional resources and services, such as providing accommodation.[20] Resettlement quotas and how many places have been fulfilled are not always transparent enough to know which arrivals are 'complementary'.[21] Many of the complementary pathways in this study, helped people arrive in Europe who had already been recognised as in need of international protection by UNHCR, but who may not have made it to Europe under resettlement quotas. In such cases, there is usually no firm red line between resettlement and complementary pathways.[22]

Some countries may have a very interesting complementary pathways such as an educational pathway, but not yet have developed resettlement.[23] This could be a concern because complementary pathways often have fewer rights attached for the individual than resettlement does, for example the right to family reunification may be restricted or absent. It can also be a positive as people have been able to access safety in Europe through another mechanism.

Access

For access, it is important to note who is eligible for programmes and who selects who can benefit from them. Most programmes are through referrals, often done by UNHCR for refugees who have already been accepted for resettlement. This means that certain checks have already been done, there are partners in the first country of asylum ready to work with, and future host countries and countries of first asylum countries may already know the process, have frameworks and procedures in place etc. This may make the process known/ trusted/ simpler and more likely to get off the ground in the first place. NGO partners can also play a role in recruiting or assessing eligibility for programmes, both from the host country and country of origin or first asylum.

There can also be physical barriers to access, including: accessing embassies in other countries; contradictory requirements (e.g. need to be in a country of origin but need to apply for a visa in a neighbouring country); safe passage to apply for a visa or to leave the country; not all costs being covered in all programmes.

Ideally, refugees would also be able to access pathways directly using publicly available information and existing administrative mechanisms so they can find their own solutions – and so increase self-agency. There has been criticism that pathways are often not transparent and there is no open application process or appeal. However, given sensitivities, both for the programmes, but particularly for participants still in countries of origin or in other vulnerable

---

[19] Interview 7, ICMC.

[20] Interview 21, anonymous.

[21] Interview 4, Leila Bodeaux, Caritas Europa.

[22] Interview 2, Anne Bathily.

[23] Interview 2, Anne Bathily.

situations, it can be difficult to make recruitment for programmes too open. As one interviewee said, 'you can't advertise them in the newspaper'.[24]

There are very few programmes where individuals can apply themselves (an exception is the Polish humanitarian visa for Belarus and some of the education and employment pathways). There are questions of whether those who are most in need have access, although this question could also be posed for those seeking international protection in general. Different criteria also apply to different programmes. Some have vulnerability criteria or focus on particular groups (human rights defenders, journalists, academics at risk), while others target individuals with high level qualifications or work experienced, for highly skilled professions. For education programmes, beneficiaries need a certain level of education. Meanwhile, skills programmes/ labour pathways are still quite new and it is uncertain whether they will mainly be for occupations that have high levels of qualifications or skill shortages, or whether there will be opportunities for jobs that require medium and lower qualifications. To date, the care professions and drivers seem to have been a particular target group where there are shortages of skills.[25]

Criteria and rights
Criteria for eligibility for safe pathways differ according to the pathway as does the legal basis for entering the country (the type of visa issued).

On eligibility, several pathways select beneficiaries from the group already assessed by UNCHR as being eligible for resettlement. In the UK, for example, UNHCR selects applicants based on seven vulnerability criteria that include torture, gender, mental health and other vulnerabilities. Families are contacted by UNHCR and given a choice as to where they will go. The Home Office then matches them with a suitable area, that suits their needs, such as somewhere you can easily find a four-roomed house, or a rural area or a city that is close to a hospital etc. Having relatives in the UK is also a criterion.[26]

As has been noted, the easiest visa is to apply for is "no visa", given the many practical and security challenges that may arrive in efforts to procure a visa. This is not an option in the EU or wider Europe, where entry without a visa is not a possibility for many countries. There are some visa-free options in Europe: Russians (e.g. human rights defenders) used visa-free regimes after the outbreak of war against Ukraine to leave Russia (travelling to Georgia, Serbia or Turkey).

Visas can be specific to particular programmes, but often beneficiaries apply for a pre-existing type of visa. National governments do have flexibility in how visas are used and who is eligible. For example, Poland has recently granted humanitarian visas to admit citizens of Belarus to the country for one year, with the right to reside and work, as well as providing simplified options for legalising longer residence.[27]

---

[24] Interview 7, ICMC.

[25] For example, the UK refugee nurse support programme. See, NHS England, 'NHS Refugee Support Programme providing opportunity for a new life to skilled nursing staff', March 2022, available at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/north-west/2022/03/03/nhs-refugee-support-programme-providing-opportunity-for-a-new-life-to-skilled-nursing-staff/

[26] Interview 13, Caritas Salford.

[27] See, migrant.info.pl, available at: https://www.migrant.info.pl/Visas.html#:~:text=A%20humanitarian%20visa%20is%20issued,need%20for%20a%20work%20permit.

The type and duration of the residence permit granted upon arrival depends on the national legal framework and the status granted (e.g. refugee, subsidiary protection, humanitarian grounds).[28] Other types of visas can be work or education oriented; even tourist visas have been used in some programmes for initial entry.[29] Depending on the type of visa and status, different rights and restrictions may be attached.

'Rights-based' programmes should respect all the rights of beneficiaries and provide sustainable solutions. 'Rights' can be grouped into four distinct categories. First and foremost, the right to non-refoulement and to seek asylum. For other pathways, such as work-based pathways, for example, there is also the right to work, and the more general equality of treatment and non-discrimination, which would also apply for example to education pathways. In the context of work, this includes conditions of work and pay, trade union membership and social security rights. Thirdly, rights include access to family reunion and, fourthly, a clear path to permanent residence.[30]

Obligations or restrictions may also be specified in the programme, for example, they may include criteria on the type of work or sector a person can work in. Student visas may have restrictions on the hours an individual can work outside of their studies[31] or students may have to prove they are able to return to their home country.[32]

Durable solutions
Traditionally in international refugee protection, there are three durable solutions for people in need of international protection: voluntary repatriation; resettlement; and integration within the host community.[33] Resettlement is not a durable solution as such for beneficiaries of complementary pathways as they have already moved to a 'safe' country.

Often beneficiaries of complementary pathways are granted temporary legal access to a country and with time it is hoped they will gain a more sustainable, permanent status. [34] There are sometimes plans as to how this will happen integrated into programmes (e.g. through an application for asylum). However, sometimes there can be more of a focus on how the individual will get to Europe, through which kind of visa, rather than looking in advance at longer term solutions of integration into the host community such as long-term residence. There can be many reasons for this, including the way programmes have developed 'ad hoc', a desire to help people get to a safe country, or an unwillingness to publicise or risk programmes.

There are several short-term programmes aiming to provide 'respite' for particular groups, such as academics or human rights defenders, who want to remain in their countries but may need a period of respite for physical or mental health reasons, or to generate or maintain support networks. These short-term programmes respond to specific needs and play a useful, targeted role. For these temporary respite programmes, there is usually an assumption at the

---

[28] EMN inform, Resettlement, humanitarian admission and sponsorship schemes, June 2023, page 18. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/EMN_INFORM_Resettlement_final.pdf.

[29] For example, city programmes or scholarship programmes, and in some grass roots programmes after the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban.

[30] Zvezda Vankova, 'Work-based pathways to Refugee Protection under EU Law: Pie in the Sky?', European Journal of Migration and Law 24 (2022) 86-111.

[31] For example, the UK. Interview 11 Migration Yorkshire.

[32] For example, Switzerland. Information from survey.

[33] See UNHCR, 'What We Do', https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions.

[34] See UNHCR, 'Complementary Pathways', https://www.unhcr.org/complementary-pathways.html

March 2024

start and/or built into the programme, that people will be safe to return. In reality, it can transpire that this is not possible. It would be important in such cases for the authorities to have flexibility and provide access to more durable solutions.

As safe pathways are new, even 'longer term' complementary pathways are sometimes not clear after the initial visa/time period. For example, the first group of people who arrived in Italy on a humanitarian visa through education programmes have now graduated. They had a year to find a job. At least one person has applied for asylum as they could not find work and wished to avoid irregular status in Italy.

Labour/work visas often have other criteria/ limits, such as the type of sector an individual can work in. This can cause problems if the work placement does not work out and the person cannot find another job. There are other longer term considerations for countries of origin or first asylum, where local populations can also be in need of assistance. The risk of 'brain drain' from certain employment sectors, for example the health and care sectors, is also well-noted in the context of broader migratory movements from countries of origin/first asylum.[35]

3.2 Types of pathways

Complementary pathways may include one or a combination of the following:

Type of pathway	Example
Programmes for extended family members	Ireland: Afghan Admissions Programme
Labour mobility pathways	UK NHS Refugee Nurse Support Pilot Programme
Education pathways	EU Passworld
Humanitarian pathways and other visas	France: Humanitarian corridor
Private or community sponsorship pathways	Germany NesT programme: community sponsorship element
Other safe and regulated entry and stay options including hybrids[36]	Italy: Humanitarian corridor

(See Annex III for full mapping of pathways)

Pathways can also include wider mainstream routes that people in need of international protection are eligible to apply for, but that need adjustments to enable them to access them.[37]

3.3 Stakeholders, roles and partnerships
Complementary or safe pathways are usually partnerships between a diverse range of stakeholders with different roles and competences.

Different stakeholders involved in the process are:

---

[35] Development Aid (2021) 'Effects of brain drain in developing countries'
https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/100000/brain-drain-in-developing-countries (last accessed 19 July 2022)
[36] UNHCR.
[37] UNHCR.

Beneficiaries of safe pathways: may have already been recognised as refugees by UNHCR through the resettlement process, or may be identified as at-risk individuals by civil society or international organisations. Some programmes have more agency for potential beneficiaries in that they can apply for programmes themselves, particularly in the fields of education and work or where programmes target particular groups. Some programmes allow beneficiaries to bring family members with them.

Cities, municipalities and regions: There are different models for the involvement of cities and regions in complementary pathways. The UK uses a top-down model, with cities processing and supporting beneficiaries who have been brought to the UK through community sponsorship and other programmes (e.g. Hong Kong welcome programme). Germany has a regional model, where Laender can invite individuals themselves and design programmes with federal agreement. Cities are responsible for individuals for up to 10 years. These are some of the most successful programmes with several ongoing, including in Brandenburg.[38] Civil society actors are also considering a regional model based on the involvement of cantons in Switzerland.[39] There are several networks of cities, including ICORN whose city members provide refuge for around 25 artists and writers every year. An example legal basis for ICORN partners and other cities in Nordic countries is an agreement/MoU between the city and the government.[40] Shelter City is another growing movement of cities and organizations, including embassies, universities and high schools, and citizens.[41]

Civil society organisations: NGOs and other civil society organisations can refer individuals to specific schemes, help prepare applications, provide integration support, and initiate their own schemes in partnership with the national authorities or other institutions.

Sponsors and volunteers: community or private sponsorship programmes involve a group of volunteers or sponsors who take on a responsibility for an individual or family for a specific period of time (e.g. one year to 18 months). They provide financial and social support. Often sponsors are in charge of assisting with finding or funding accommodation. The fundraising aspect of sponsorship may feel less natural to some countries in Europe, where they expect the state to pay for social costs such as housing.[42]

National authorities: National authorities are the only stakeholders with the right to change national legislation, for example on visas, and to issue visas. There is a high level of discretionary power for authorities as to the type of programme and criteria involved. This also means that national authorities often have a certain level of flexibility with the legal basis, type of visa etc. used. There can also be different roles played by different ministries and other stakeholders at national level. For example, a Ministry of Interior may set immigration policy and legislation, even targets for numbers for complementary pathways, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be the de facto policy maker due to their role in issuing visas and providing access to embassies and appointments.

Embassies: play a crucial role in accepting applications, providing contacts and arranging meetings in countries of first asylum for programme coordinators; conducting interviews and security checks.

---

[38] Interview 9, Caritas Germany. See also, Caritas Germany, 'Admission by federal states and private sponsorship', https://resettlement.de/en/admission-by-federal-states-and-private-sponsorship/.
[39] Interview 16, Asylex.
[40] Interview 1, ICORN.
[41] Currently, there are 21 Shelter Cities in the Netherlands, Georgia, Tanzania, Benin, Costa Rica, Nepal, and the United Kingdom.
[42] Interview 16, Caritas Belgium.

March 2024

Employers: are one of the most diverse groups of stakeholders in complementary pathways. Whilst they may be keen to employ refugees and support humanitarian goals, their primary aim is to hire workers who can complement and add to their workforce. They often need workers quickly or regularly, which can be difficult with visas and complex processes. Employers would not offer support to new arrivals in the same way that a group of community sponsors would, for example. They are also bound by national legislation, in some cases to recruit from national workers before hiring from overseas. However, there is a labour shortage in several sectors in many if not all European countries. The European Commission has started to map employers' needs through the EU Talent Pool initiative.[43]

Universities: can work alone as the main founder and coordinator of a scheme,[44] having negotiated an agreement with a government to facilitate entry, or they can work together with other partners to facilitate pathways. Universities can have more resources relative to other stakeholders, including to offer scholarships, and more political freedom to provide safe spaces for example by inviting academics or students at risk.

European Commission: the EC promotes complementary pathways linked to education and work, and community sponsorship schemes designed to give civil society organisations, communities and groups of individuals a stronger, more structured role in the reception and integration of refugees arriving through legal pathways, including through funding.

The European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA): runs the EUAA Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission (RST&HA) Network, [45] composed of EU+ countries' National Contact Points and specific EU+ country experts, as well as UNHCR and IOM on invitation. Specific Working Groups, such as on Community Sponsorship, Information Provision and Monitoring and Evaluation, as well as an Expert Platform on Afghanistan, have been set up under the umbrella of the network. The network provides a place to exchange information and good practice; formulate guidelines; coordinate programmes; work on specific thematic areas. The mandate may not cover all humanitarian admission programmes, such as programmes where the beneficiary's status upon arrival is that of a student or worker.

UNHCR: plays a pivotal role in resettlement and several complementary pathways, including the identification of potential beneficiaries. UNCHR also coordinates the Global Compact on Refugees, runs a portal for educational pathway opportunities, and provides training and capacity-building for civil society and other stakeholders.

IOM: as an international organisation with a presence in many countries of origin and first asylum, IOM supports several European countries and EU Member States to implement complementary pathway programmes.[46]

Within partnerships for complementary pathways, different stakeholders have a range of potential roles:

Examples of stakeholders	Roles

---

[43] See European Commission, Have your Say, EU Talent Pool, available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13716-EU-Talent-Pool_en
[44] Interview anonymous.
[45] https://euaa.europa.eu/operations/resettlement
[46] See IOM, 'Complementary Pathways', https://eea.iom.int/complementary-pathways.

Local communities, churches, international organisations, national authorities, cities and many more.	Initiating schemes
NGOs, international organisations, national authorities.	Coordinating schemes
Community sponsors, NGOs, family members.	Fundraising
Cities, NGOs, family, community sponsors.	Assisting with applications for beneficiaries
NGOs, UNHCR, embassies, national authorities.	Providing support with the identification; verification or security checks for beneficiaries
Community sponsors, national authorities.	Providing support for travel
National authorities, local authorities, networks such as ICORN, NGOs.	Matching beneficiaries with areas to live or sponsorship groups
National authorities.	Issuing visas
Universities, community sponsors, NGOs, family.	Providing housing and integration support.

Different partners have different competencies and power. National authorities, for example, are the only stakeholders that can change legislation to facilitate pathways or agree to issue visas to admit individuals onto their territory. Many pathways are initiated by non-state actors. Universities or cities can have their own pathway and negotiate an agreement with a government to facilitate entry, but this will not be an official national programme in the same way as resettlement.[47]

Partnerships bring additional resources of all kinds, as well as supporting beneficiaries of the schemes. For example, working with UNHCR or local NGOs in third countries can help the identification and registration process for beneficiaries of complementary pathways. Partners can provide support and information for beneficiaries, in countries of origin and first asylum, or in host countries. Many programmes harness the support of volunteers who can fundraise for placements and provide a ready-made network of support and way to integrate into the local community. Involving local communities can also spread information, knowledge and a positive approach, preparing communities for the arrival of refugees – and not only those arriving through complementary pathways.

However, new pathways may mean complex procedures, as organisers navigate processes that are not tailor-made for the purpose of complementary pathways, such as education and work visas. Programmes to welcome and support beneficiaries of pathways can be resource intensive, and provide more support than for other beneficiaries of international protection who arrive spontaneously in Europe. Huge 'ecosystems' can take longer to bring people to safety, which can cause difficulties for some pathways. For example, if an employer needs to employ someone within two to three months, but it takes a year to bring someone for work, this can cause problems. Timing is also important for education pathways, as students generally have to arrive by the start of the academic year.[48]

Who does what is also important. In the UK, for example, community sponsorship groups are responsible for finding and funding housing for beneficiaries and liaising with local authorities, both of which can be time-consuming. National governments coordinating liaison with local authorities may speed up the process, particularly where local authority permission is required

---

[47] Interview 2, Anne Bathily.

[48] Interview 2, Anne Bathily.

for housing to be secured for safe pathways in their communities.[49] Finally, programmes that rely only on volunteers may lack professional knowledge or resources or be less sustainable.

Case 1: Different stakeholders (Germany)

National and other stakeholders interact in different ways in order to provide complementary pathways. One interview covered how different authorities work together in Germany, which is interesting as complementary pathways there are driven by decision-making at both federal and national level. This has provided additional opportunities but can also be difficult for newcomers to understand.

In Germany, education and integration are federal level competencies. Federal states can develop their own programmes on scholarships with permission from the national government.[50] The Ministry of Interior is responsible for legislation, whilst the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deals with administration abroad. There is a capacity issue in embassies and consulates and waiting times are a big problem for people at risk. Capacity is also limited due to the high numbers of spontaneous arrivals in Germany since 2015, including one million Syrians. This has affected embassies in countries like Jordan with high numbers of Syrian refugees, where there can also be family reunification and other applications to process. Visas are issued by embassies, and visa issuance can impact on how (quickly) policy decisions on complementary and other pathways are implemented. This makes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs de facto 'policy kings.'

The third actor is the local municipal authority that provides immigration services and has to agree to family reunification cases. The local authorities are often under-staffed. They may also have their own priorities as institutions meaning they do not always follow the guidelines of the federal government unless they are legally binding.[51] Federal states can also initiate their own complementary pathways if the Ministry of Interior agrees.

Federal states decide the budget for integration and municipalities can more or less spend it. However, the German system likes 'halfway decisions', where a programme is announced but without clarity on how it will be financed at all stages. One example is the Afghans in Crisis programme, for which it was not clear from the outset who would be responsible for funding certain aspects, such as the work of NGOs supporting integration in the community.

At the same time, these multiple actors mean that there are always checks and balances, and other ways to approach a situation if there is a delay with one stakeholder. However, you need to understand the system to be able to problem solve in this way. Another challenge in this complex landscape is the lack of digitalised systems, meaning application processes are very slow. Despite its complexity, stakeholders felt the German system generally functions very well.[52]

Good practice for programming: All programmes will be complex to a certain degree, and involve multiple stakeholders nationally, regionally and locally. The German model offers two entry points for safe pathways, with both federal and national authorities able to initiate programmes, and more than one way to approach any issues that arise.

---

[49] Interview 11, Migration Yorkshire.
[50] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.
[51] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.
[52] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.

	Challenges for programming: Safe pathways can be complex and take time. An experienced partner can help guide the process and keep all stakeholders informed.

3.4 Security

Security checks are a standard procedure for visa processes and permission to enter a country. There can be specific criteria for resettlement and complementary pathways. Given the political climate and often negative discourse on refugees, host countries engaging in complementary pathways want to show that they take security seriously and that migration is being managed credibly. Security checks can happen at the level of the embassy and/or the Ministry of Interior of the country processing the visa.

Security can also mean how to get people out of a country if they are in a dangerous situation, as well as access to travel documents where there is no consular presence and the availability of supporting documents such as marriage certificates etc.[53]

For resettlement, there are well-established procedures that are widely understood. UNHCR may receive referrals from civil society but they then apply their own security checks, and also provide training for civil society on this aspect. Referrals from UNHCR offer a certain level of assurance that guidelines are in place and there is, for example, a relatively standardised way of applying vulnerability criteria.

In complementary pathways, civil society or other partners often help applicants to gather documentation during the application process. They also work to ensure applicants understand and want to take part in the programme, and support them to prepare for the journey.[54]

Potential host countries often also use a formal or informal system of 'trusted partners' who refer applicants they have worked with (e.g. journalists or human rights defenders) or whose credentials they have checked. These relationships are often crucial to the working of programmes for host countries, as well as the individuals applying to different schemes. Partners often know the applicants and their communities and have invaluable knowledge and experience. A recommendation from a trusted organisation can often be the only way to access schemes for individuals, and can give host countries peace of mind that the individual before them is indeed at risk.[55] There can however be challenges with this system. In terms of access, an applicant needs to know who the trusted partner is and how to apply. For the 'trusted partner' there can be concerns that any problems with a placement may affect their future reputation or standing to refer.[56]

Case 2: Security vetting (Germany) --- Confidential

---

[53] Interview 21, the European Union Asylum Agency.

[54] Interview 7. Caritas Italy.

[55] Interview with KK, Afghan journalist in Pakistan awaiting a complementary pathway.

[56] Anonymous interview.

3.5 Integration support

Many programmes provide integration support in host communities that is coordinated by paid staff from civil society organisations and staffed by volunteers. In community sponsorship programmes, the community has an active role in organising placement and finding accommodation, as well as funding the initial stay of the individual or family who arrive. There is also care taken for matching where a family may have medical or other needs, to ensure they are in a location with access to a hospital or the medical treatment that they need.

Case 3: Caritas support for beneficiaries of complementary pathways, local communities and sponsors (Belgium, Italy and the UK)

Several branches of Caritas were interviewed that run support programmes for communities and beneficiaries of complementary pathways,[57] and that had examples of good practices and challenges for integration support.

Caritas Italy highlighted links between (future) beneficiaries and host communities from early in the process, meeting online and ensuring that they know each other before the beneficiary arrives, and that beneficiaries are matched with the community that can offer them the support they need, in case of medical issues, children, size of the family etc.

In Belgium, the national asylum reception agency Fedasil runs community sponsorship programmes with Caritas Belgium as an intermediary partner. Caritas Belgium highlighted intercultural mediators as a good practice for integration support. Mediators are professionals employed by Caritas as experts by experience who can also help Caritas be more aware of their own presumptions or biases. Caritas has been working with mediators since the Syrian crisis of 2015. Mediators provide peer-to-peer support for resettled refugees, who can experience frustration and isolation after arrival. Mediators run a series of thematic workshop on the first year after arrival, including topics such as housing, culture shock, the role of families and gender. It is not an integration course but more psychosocial well-being, and there are both in-person workshops and a closed Facebook page. Mediators have now been integrated into the Belgian community sponsorship model.

Caritas Salford (UK) highlighted the usefulness of having a professional organisation assist volunteer sponsorship groups. Applying to be a sponsorship group is a long and complex process with several stages, and groups have quite a high level of responsibility (including financial responsibilities - see Case Study 13). Caritas provides support, evaluation and monitoring for volunteer groups, including training and DBS (criminal record) checks.

Good practice for programming: early contact between host communities, support groups and potential beneficiaries; cultural mediators supporting beneficiaries and partners in the host country; a professional organisation able to assist and guide volunteers, beneficiaries and other partners throughout the process.

3.6 The statistics

---

[57] Caritas Belgium, Italy, Salford. Caritas Germany also gave updates on the national level in Germany, whilst Caritas Europa gave an overview of Caritas programmes and EU programmes.

March 2024

Having presented the types of mechanisms of relevance and described how they function, the second part of this study will focus on the extent of the use of these mechanism by the European countries under study: EU Member States (EUMS), Norway, Switzerland and the UK.

It should be underlined from the start that there is not a lot of data available.[58] Current systems are not designed to capture holistic information on refugees' profiles, skills and knowledge in order to facilitate their access to complementary pathways, nor to capture data on refugee admissions through existing pathways.[59]

A study by OECD and UNHCR found that overall, in 2019, Germany and Sweden, followed by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Spain and the United States, issued the largest numbers of residency permits for work, study, or family purposes to the seven populations that were likely to have well-founded cases to seek international protection (Afghans, Eritreans, Iranians, Iraqis, Somalis, Syrians and Venezuelans).[60] The number of visas issued is relevant as many people from these countries will be in need of international protection (and would be recognised as such if they applied for asylum). As has always been the case, people in need of protection may not have access to asylum or may decide not to pursue a protection specific pathway but instead find other ways to safety.

A 2022 European Migration Network (EMN)[61] 'inform' (a briefing on the situation in EMN Member and Observer countries) provides statistics on the number of people who were able to arrive safely, using humanitarian admission mechanisms, in 16 EU Member States from 2016-2021, as well as the status and residence permit granted.[62] Over half of the countries who reported had only used humanitarian admission mechanisms in the context of the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban during the reporting period, showing the importance of safe pathways as another tool for countries to help people find safety in this crisis situation. Humanitarian admission programmes were carried out in a few EU Member States for other groups such as Syrians (Austria, Belgium, France and Ireland). Germany, France and Italy were the countries who used humanitarian admission mechanisms the most by far with over 30,000 admissions reported by Germany 2016-2021 (including evacuations from Afghanistan), over 17,000 by France and over 10,000 by Italy.[63]

---

[58] For example, in their 2021 report, OECD and UNHCR note that implementing and measuring progress against the complementary pathways target will be contingent upon the development of a 'more robust' evidence base. Neither UNHCR nor OECD collect such data systematically, but aim to work together to fill gaps including through joint research, since enhanced analysis and evaluation of data related to the use of regulated and safe admission pathways by refugees will inform and assist in the development of policy and programmatic responses. OECD, UNHCR, Safe Pathways for Refugees II, OECD-UNHCR Study on Third-country Solutions for Refugees: Admissions for family reunification, education, and employment,. purposes between 2010 and 2019, page 8, available at: https://www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf.

[59] Ibid, page 10.

[60] Ibid, page 16. First family, labour and student permits granted by destination country to Afghans, Eritreans, Iranians, Iraqis, Somalis, Syrians and Venezuelans, 2010–2019.

[61] The European Migration Network (EMN) is an EU network of migration and asylum experts who work together to provide objective, comparable policy-relevant information and knowledge on emerging issues relating to asylum and migration in Europe. See, European Commission, 'Migration and Home Affairs, the European Migration Network (EMN), available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn_en.

[62] EMN inform on resettlement and humanitarian pathways.

[63] EMN inform on resettlement and humanitarian pathways.

In addition, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland and Spain reported implementing sponsorship schemes, some still in pilot phases and for mainly small numbers of people. [64]

Key challenges encountered in implementing humanitarian admission and sponsorship programmes included the fragile security situation in some countries of first asylum and a lack of housing in host countries. [65]

Education and labour routes are not covered by the EMN inform. Many people in need of protection try and find their own way to Europe without applying for a particular safe pathway, for example by using labour or education routes. The tables below show the first permits awarded in 2018-21 for six nationalities who regularly seek asylum in Europe and who have relatively high recognition rates (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela).
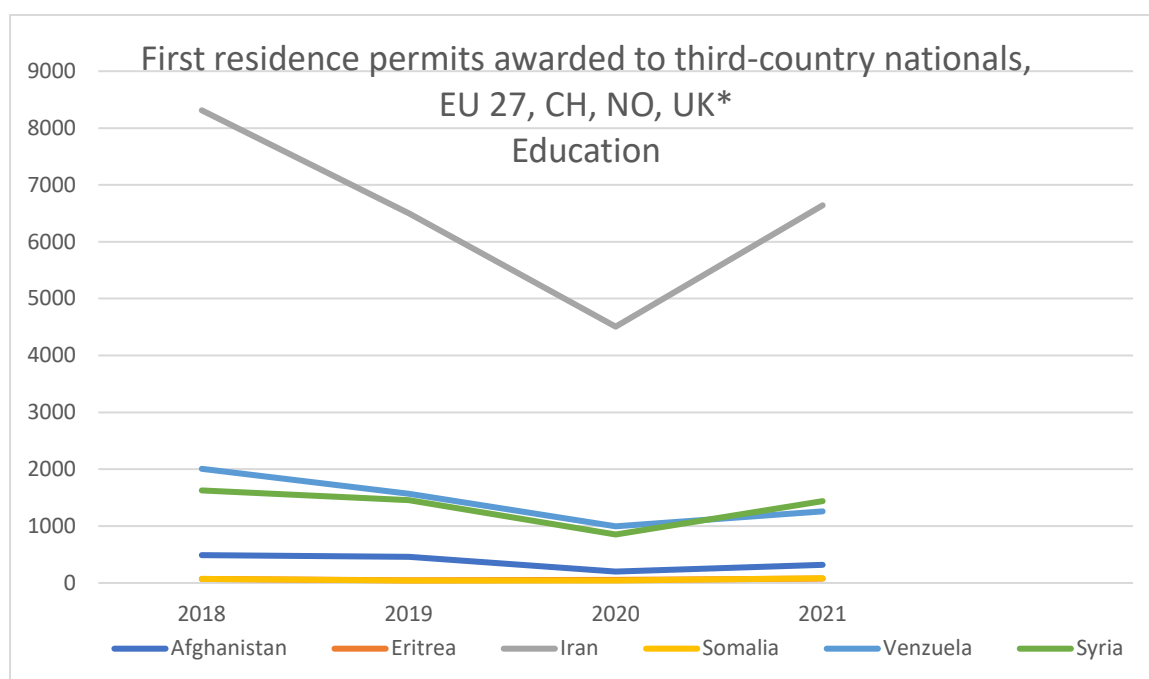
Source Eurostat: First residence permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship [MIGR_RESFIRST] *UK 2018 only

---

First residence permits awarded to third-country nationals, EU 27, CH, NO, UK*: Employment

Legend: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia, Syria, Venezuala

Source Eurostat: First residence permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship [MIGR_RESFIRST] *UK 2018 only

First residence permits awarded to third-country nationals, EU 27, CH. NO, UK* Family**

Legend: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia, Syria, Venezuala

March 2024
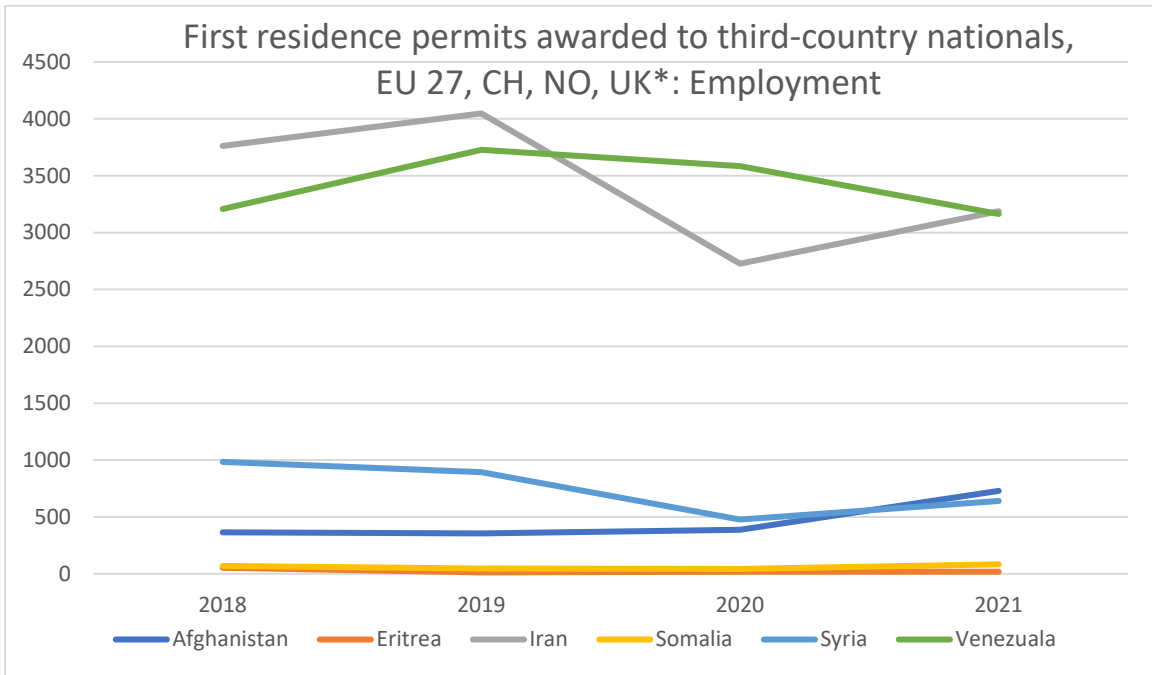
Source: Eurostat First residence permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship [MIGR_RESFIRST]
*UK 2018 only
** All visas for family reasons including marriage, family reunification and families admitted under complementary pathways.

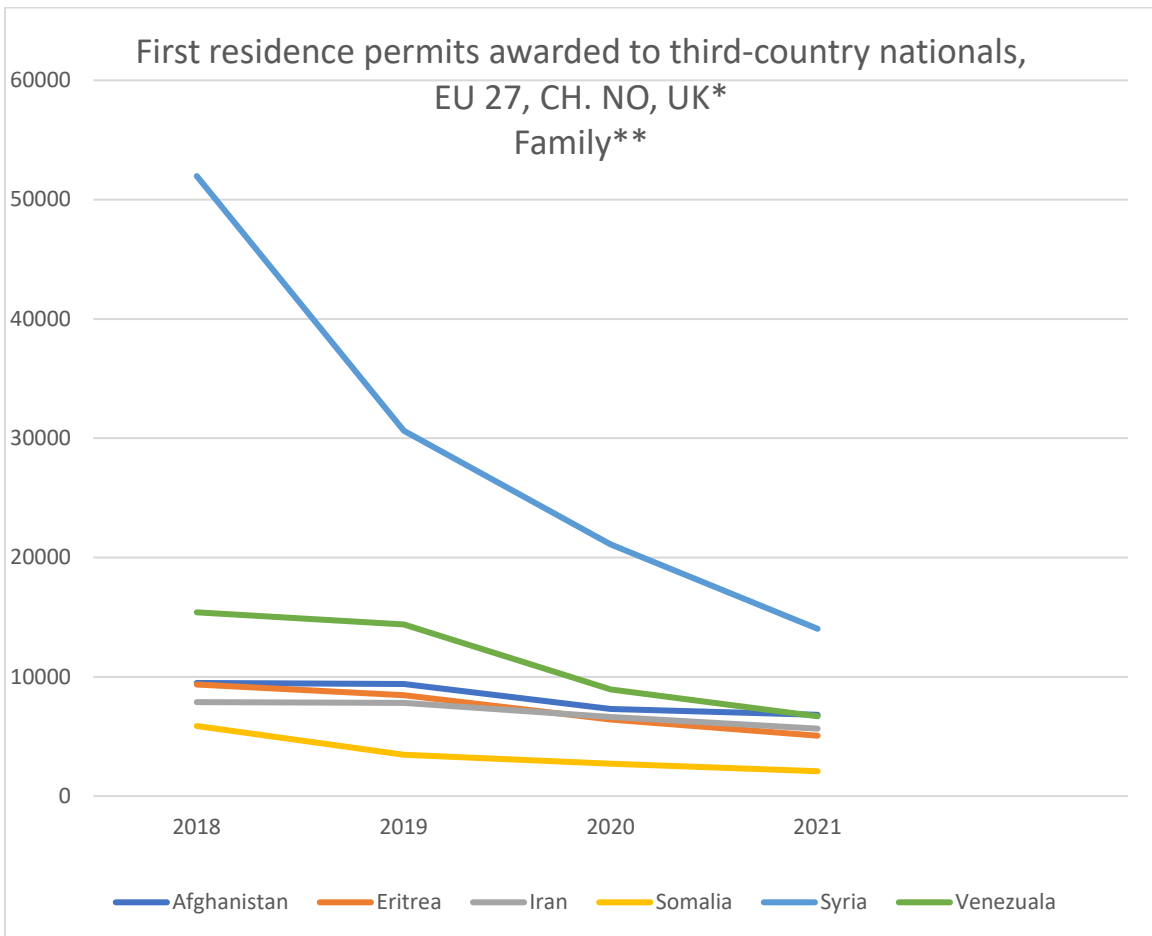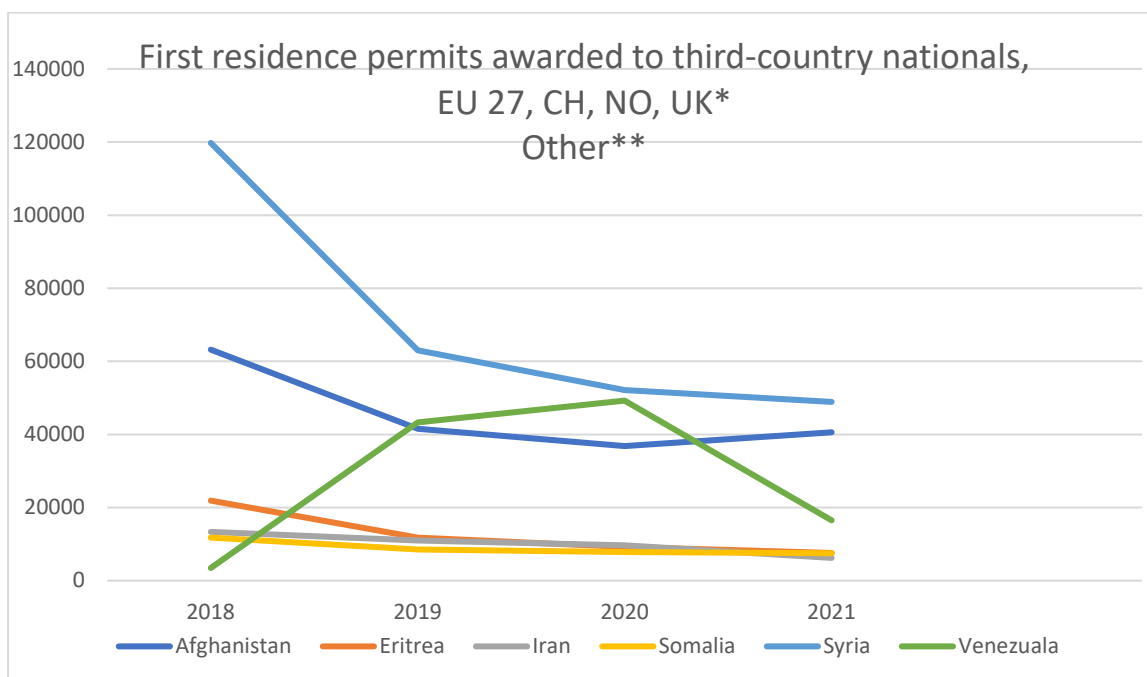First residence permits awarded to third-country nationals, EU 27, CH, NO, UK*
Other**

Source: Eurostat: First residence permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship [MIGR_RESFIRST]
*UK 2018 only
** Could include humanitarian admissions.

One of the main recommendations from all stakeholders has been the need to upscale safe pathways.

For education and employment pathways in particular we are starting from a very low baseline for many countries whose nationals are in need of protection. From the tables above on visas for education and employment, the numbers are clearly very small, particularly for citizens of Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia. Family visas are by far the greatest number and biggest pathway to Europe for citizens of Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria, although less so for Iran. Citizens of Venezuela were granted a high number of visas for employment as well as for 'other' reasons, primarily by Spain in both cases. Citizens from Iran were granted a high number of employment and education visas compared to other nationalities from a variety of countries (with higher numbers granted from the Netherlands and Denmark for employment, and from Italy, France, Sweden, Spain and Hungary for education).

In all types of pathways, therefore, there is room for growth, and as mentioned previously there are increasingly positive discussions about how to make that happen. The following sections look at different types of pathways, and challenges and good practices in this regard.

4. Pathways to protection: case studies

March 2024

The following sections take different complementary pathways in turn, looking at the various stakeholders who may be involved and the criteria that may be required to access programmes. Examples are provided of the types of programmes that are currently running, as well as if durable solutions are currently envisaged within them. Finally, case examples highlighting good practices and challenges are included for each type of pathway. The pathways that are considered are: education; employment; humanitarian pathways and visa programmes; and private sponsorship; and other hybrid programmes.

4.1 Education

Education programmes are some of the longest running complementary pathways.

Stakeholders

Universities: In the field of education pathways, universities and other higher education institutions are a key stakeholder. They can have more resources, status and leverage than other actors, and more political freedom to provide a safe space. [66] They are also structures that are already in place and that are used to dealing with international students.[67] At the same time, universities can face challenges because of their size, complexity and bureaucratic slowness; programmes may not align with academic priorities; and universities may wish to avoid controversy.[68] On a very practical level, for example, when inviting academics or students at risk, the university as a whole may have to balance its priorities and think of the impact of inviting too many individuals who may not be able to return to their country of origin and if this will affect their ability to invite other academics in future.[69] At the same time, they are uniquely placed to provide training and career advice to those who find a pathway to Europe, to help them find more sustainable solutions, should they not be able to return home after any initial placement.[70] Universities and educational institutions can also be 'collaborators' for other programmes, providing support to programmes or beneficiaries such as legal aid through legal aid clinics, training, teaching or networks.[71]

Civil society: Universities can work alone as the main founder and coordinator of a scheme[72] or they can work together with other partners, such as in the partnership with the ICORN international cities of refuge network.[73] There are also networks such as Students at Risk[74] or the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA)[75] in the UK that work to develop pathways and support institutions and beneficiaries. Student bodies, unions and student housing associations can also be involved.

---

[66] Paul Gready and Emma Jackson, Universities as Sites of Activism and Protection, Working Paper No. 14, Human Rights Defender Hub Working Paper Series, University of York, February 2023. Page 30-31.
[67] Interview 15, UNHCR regional office.
[68] Paul Gready and Emma Jackson, Universities as Sites of Activism and Protection, Working Paper No. 14, Human Rights Defender Hub Working Paper Series, University of York, February 2023. Page 30-31.
[69] Interview anonymous.
[70] Interview anonymous.
[71] Paul Gready and Emma Jackson, Universities as Sites of Activism and Protection, Working Paper No. 14, Human Rights Defender Hub Working Paper Series, University of York, February 2023. Page 4.
[72] Interview anonymous.
[73] Interview with ICORN.
[74] Interview with Students at Risk.
[75] Interview with CARA.

March 2024

UNHCR: UNHCR maintains a Scholarship Opportunities for Refugees platform which can help students "find accredited higher education academic or scholarship programmes verified by UNHCR and "pursue advanced study, skills and professional development."[76]

Criteria

For education programmes, people in need of protection can apply for regular visas for education from their country of origin or a first country of asylum that are accessible or customized for refugees, or there can be humanitarian visas or visas specifically for refugees.[77] In Europe, people in need of international protection generally apply for the first type of visa themselves, although it is difficult to know how many do this (see section on statistics).

For education, there can be strict language and academic requirements to obtain a student visa. Students need to be able to complete their studies. There may be requirements for students to have a certain amount of money in their bank account. Visas may or may not allow families to come with the beneficiary. Student visas may also mean an applicant has to prove they can return to their country of origin or first asylum before they can enter the country. For example, in Switzerland, an application for an education visa for admission of people in need of protection for education and training could fail due to the legal requirement of a guaranteed return (Art. 5 para. 2 AIG), since in many cases a return to their home country or their original country of residence could not be expected, and they would remain in Switzerland permanently. Various safeguards would therefore be necessary in this regard, such as an existing readmission agreement with the original country of residence.[78] There are some support schemes in Switzerland, such as the Scholars at Risk programme (see below).

In some ways, educational pathways can encourage refugee agency as individuals are able to search and apply for programmes themselves. They can also lead to employment opportunities, enabling refugees to work in a job or profession that is better suited to them and their interests and potentially earn more.[79] However, access to these programmes can be restrictive and potentially elitist (for the best-educated or connected individuals). Most scholarships require a certain level of academic attainment.

Refugees may have lost documentation proving their qualifications, or their qualifications may not be recognised. University fees may be another barrier. In Belgium, those with refugee status are entitled to scholarships, but a student on a complementary pathway would not be.[80]

Programmes

UNHCR's focus on educational pathways includes a Global Task Force on Third Country Education launched in May 2020.[81] The task force has produced guidelines on Minimum Standards for Complementary Education Pathways.[82] These include minimum standards on protection and safeguarding; application and admissions; integration and psychosocial support; and funding, to ensure durable solutions. The guidelines stress the importance of

---

[76] See UNHCR, https://services.unhcr.org/opportunities/

[77] UNHCR Representation for the Nordic and Baltic Countries, Complementary education pathways and the Nordic countries, page 2.

[78] Switzerland survey.

[79] Interview 22, UNHCR Baltics and Nordic Countries, regional office.

[80] Interview 17, Caritas Belgium.

[81] https://edpathways.org/

[82] https://wusc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Task-Force-Minimum-Standards-for-Complementary-Education-Pathways.pdf.

obtaining informed consent before the individual leaves their country of asylum, as well as rights including non-refoulement and legal assistance.[83]

There are also several programmes offering humanitarian visas to access education programmes, such as Italy's University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE). The current project includes 33 Italian universities, with the support of UNHCR, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Caritas Italiana, Diaconia Valdese, Jesuit Refugee Service and other partners, and is for refugees currently residing in Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.[84]

Scholars at Risk is a global network with a secretariat in New York that works with academic institutions and other partners to protect threatened scholars and promote academic freedom around the world.[85] In Switzerland, for example, Scholars at Risk has 24 member institutions. Since October 2020, the Swiss National Science Foundation has been funding stays at Swiss universities through the network as part of its Scientific Exchanges funding instrument. Applications are reviewed by the network's headquarters in New York and a suitable research institution is identified.[86]

LCC University in Lithuania provides the Middle East Scholars Programme, aimed at high-potential candidates whose education has been disrupted due to conflict. It provides an opportunity to start or continue their BA education at LCC International University. An intensive English programme is provided where needed, as well as supplemental support systems as part of the scholarship.[87]

Durable solutions

Education programmes can be life changing for individuals and lead to other pathways such as employment. However, most programmes are for short-term placements. Those seen as a protection pathway are not always designed with a clear plan of what will happen after the initial education pathway ends. The aforementioned example in Italy, where the first education pathways recently finished and at least one graduate from the programme applied for asylum after not finding work, is again relevant here.[88] As programmes such as this are new, it is not clear how asylum applications will be considered.

Case 4: Developing educational pathways (Belgium)

One criticism of educational pathways is that there is not always an automatic durable solution as part of programmes. Education programmes by their nature focus on a specific period of study, albeit there can be support for those who take part to find work, continue their studies or apply for asylum afterwards.

Belgium is an interesting example as during the design phase of its pilot education pathway a lot of consideration was given to the legislative base. Caritas Belgium has been involved in the design process alongside the authorities. The legal status being considered for refugee students aimed to

---

[83] Ibid, pages 5-6.
[84] See UNHCR platform, available at: https://services.unhcr.org/opportunities/education-opportunities/university-corridors-refugees-unicore-50 and, for example, Sapienza University of Rome: https://www.uniroma1.it/en/pagina/unicore-university-corridors-refugees.
[85] See Scholars at Risk, available at:
[86] Switzerland, survey.
[87] See LCC, Middle East Scholars, https://lcc.lt/about-lcc/middle-east-scholars.
[88] Interview with Caritas Italy.

March 2024

be as close as possible to that provided in resettlement. The visa will be called a 'humanitarian visa for student reasons' and the first arrivals are due in 2023. Upon arrival the selected student will apply for international protection.

All those selected for the programme will have been identified by UNHCR as in need of international protection, meaning if the studies do not work out it will be difficult for them to return to their country of origin. Evidencing continuation of studies in order to renew humanitarian visas can be stressful for students. The humanitarian visa will last the length of the individual's studies plus one year's legal stay to look for a job. While ideally the individual would not remain with this status, this will already mean there will be less stress as there will be no visa renewals. The programme will provide financial support from the university, including a fee waiver, and housing. There will be a monthly income from the state as a temporary solution. In the future it is hoped to develop scholarships, but at the moment scholarships through the Flemish government bursary scheme are only possible for refugees with a status equivalent to Belgian nationality. Other sponsorship models are being investigated. It is hoped that students' families will be able to accompany them in the future, but during the current pilot programme beneficiaries will be single students without families. An international protection status would also open rights to family reunification.

For the first two years, three students will come to one university each year to study a master's degree. UNHCR will undertake the first selection, and then there will be an open call by the university.

This detailed thinking about durable solutions in the context of educational pathways should be seen as a good practice.

Good practice for programming: Thinking in advance about the initial visa or status that a beneficiary of a complementary pathway will receive, the situation for their family, and what will happen at the end of any programme, in terms of status and durable solutions.

Challenges for programming: As complementary pathways are often newer, and there are different types of visas for entry, beneficiaries may not be eligible for support received by citizens of the host country, the European Union or even refugees.

Case 5: CARA[89] (UK)

The long-term experience of the UK Universities and Research Network of the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) is another interesting case study of an education pathway.

CARA's network facilitates cooperation between UK higher education and research institutions in support of persecuted and at-risk academics, and in defence of academic and university freedoms

---

[89] CARA, UK universities and research network, https://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/uk-universities-and-research-network

worldwide.[90] The network has been helping academics at risk since the 1930s and currently works with 135 UK and global universities and research institutes. There are three stages to their work.

1. Assessing eligibility to ensure the person is an academic and at risk.
2. Finding a placement among the 130 higher education institutions in the UK. There is an academic interview and the hosting university has the final say. Once a suitable placement has been found, CARA works to ensure everything is in place for the visa and pre-post arrival.
3. Supporting the individual thorough the placement and beyond. Assistance is given in professional development, English language and mentoring, and there is a webinar series on topics such as mental health and publishing. This gives the individual the best chance to succeed at their placement, and to be as competitive as possible in the market to secure a job afterwards.

The UK Universities and Research Network works with both emerging and senior academics, from PhD students onwards, sometimes master's students, which is more unusual. There are language requirements linked to the student visas, academics come on a temporary work visa. Placements are genuine research placements and eligibility is assessed during first stage checks. Language levels also depend on the placement, so scientists will not need the same language levels as those working in social sciences. The network has a partnership with the British Council to provide remote lessons to help beneficiaries prepare but there can be problems with the internet and other access issues. Applicants can be at risk and academics, but they would also need the required level of English to be eligible.

CARA works on the basis academics will return if safe to do so, or leave for a third country. In the UK there are options after studies for a graduate route visa for legal stay to find employment or a global talent visa. Several fellows have secured a global talent visa, showing the quality of the fellows and the support provided by CARA.

Placements are beneficial to the university, the individual, CARA and the UK. There were 120 fellows in 2022, one of the highest intakes in recent years, including over 40 academics from Afghanistan. Challenges include funding, as programmes are expensive, but there is a lot of awareness and goodwill at the moment and UK universities are very generous in their support.

Good practice for programming: Academics are given support both in preparing for their placement and throughout the placement itself. This includes a programme of professional development designed to give individuals the best chance to succeed, during but also after their placement.

Case 6: Education pathways for Afghans (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK)

After the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in 2021, there was an urgent need for ways to help people leave Afghanistan safely. Several stakeholders looked into education pathways, in different ways and with differing levels of success.

A 2022 working paper explored education pathways for Afghans in Germany, France, Sweden and the Netherlands. It found that since 2001 when a limited number of Afghans had been able to obtain

---

[90] CARA, UK universities and research network, https://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/uk-universities-and-research-network

scholarships for higher education abroad, the main aim of such opportunities had been capacity building as opposed to pathways to protection in another country.[91] The author highlighted the lack of a central and coherent information hub for prospective Afghan students and scholars at risk as one of the main issues. The numbers who had accessed this pathway were significantly small vis-à-vis the numbers of evacuees and those resettled in the EU via Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. The author warned against any over-emphasis on higher education as a pathway to protection as it risks creating an unfair advantage in favour of some Afghans over other Afghans, regardless of the levels of risks facing them. For instance, those with existing contacts in Europe and with substantial social and cultural capital (such as the ability to confidently communicate with Europeans in the English language) were likely to hold an advantage over those without such means. [92]

After the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, many individuals and some grassroots groups turned again to education and scholarship pathways to try and help more people leave. At least one university may have been more cautious about inviting Afghan academics due to their probable inability to return at the end of the programme, which could potentially affect the university's ability to invite others in future.[93] There was some clear success, however, including for the Afghans in Crisis network[94] which evacuated at least 30 individuals, including many with families, primarily through scholarships, as a trusted grassroots referral partner. Global Campus of Human Rights in Vienna was one of the programmes that worked with Afghans in Crisis as well as with other referral partners and universities to identify Afghans who could benefit from their scholarship programme.[95] The programme also reached out to universities in their network to see if Afghans already resettled or evacuated to Europe through other schemes could benefit from the programme, which resulted in a short-term study placement for a group of Afghan judges. They funded over 45 scholarships for Afghans to come to Europe over a two-year programme.[96] The programme was funded by the European Union. Placements were for one year. The visas used for individuals to arrive in-country were flexible depending on the country and could include tourist visas. Families could accompany the student or academic and all received a monthly stipend with additional funds for each family member to enable the family to live comfortably, depending on the country they were living in. After the year some students now wish to move to Canada or the US, others have applied for asylum. Others wish to stay in Europe but wish to join family in another EU country, which will be more difficult. Wanting to move to another country has been the main reason for the very small number of scholarships that have broken down.

A relatively large number of Afghan academics were also able to flee and find research placements with support from CARA in the UK (see above).

> Good practice for programming: In urgent or more complex situations, trusted grass roots partners can help identify potential beneficiaries for programmes. Flexible funding can allow institutions and organisations to respond quicker.

---

[91] Hameed Hakimi, ECRE Working Paper 'Higher Education in Europe: A Pathway to Protection for Afghans?,' November 2022, https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ECRE-Working-Paper-17.pdf
[92] Hameed Hakimi, ECRE Working Paper 'Higher Education in Europe: A Pathway to Protection for Afghans?' https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ECRE-Working-Paper-17.pdf
[93] Interview 19 confidential.
[94] Interview 22, Afghans in Crisis Network.
[95] See Global Campus for Human Rights, 'Afghan Scholarship Programme, https://gchumanrights.org/research/projects/afghan-scholarship-programme.html.
[96] Interview 23, Global Campus.

> Challenges for programming: Flexibility for visas that allow a person into a country is not always mirrored in flexibility to change status in-country, particularly where people have been provided a safe pathway in more urgent circumstances. Where possible, think of longer-term residence options from the beginning of programmes.

4.2 Employment

Employment or labour mobility programmes are an increasing focus for many stakeholders interested in increasing safe pathways to protection in Europe. As a relatively new pathway in Europe, there have been challenges in their conceptualisation and getting them up and running.

Stakeholders

National governments: may have an interest in labour pathways due to labour shortages in many European countries alongside demographic problems. At the same time, in Europe there are already many refugees who have arrived spontaneously and governments may wish to prioritise integrating and finding work from the 'pool' of talent that has already arrived before reaching out to others.[97]

At the national level labour pathways (including regular labour migration) are currently discussed alongside supporting refugees. It is difficult to know who the lead agency or stakeholder is, as the authority in charge of labour market issues will not be the same as the authority that works on refugee issues or even on legal migration routes. It can also be difficult to find the right interlocutors to expand pathways. The European Commission has created a labour migration platform to bring together people from employment and migration ministries and to bring these policy 'silos' together. [98]

Employers: One of the major differences between employment as a pathway and other safe pathways is that individual employers are major stakeholders. This distinguishes employment pathways even from education pathways, where there are at least several larger institutions in each country who are more likely to be key players. In addition, employers are looking for employees who can fulfil a role or vacancy, so timings for recruitment and criteria for the vacancy are important. Although employers may be supportive of humanitarian aims, it is not their primary purpose.

Criteria

As with other pathways, there is a 'matching' process needed between the individual and the pathway. In the case of labour mobility pathways that matching process is linked to suitability for a particular job. There are many ways that individuals can apply for vacancies outside of labour mobility – protection-oriented – pathways, although it can be difficult for individuals to know how. Challenges for international hires include: identifying the vacancy or candidate (i.e. a lack of channels for third-country nationals and employers to meet), identifying the right

---

[97] Interview, UNHCR regional office, Nordic and Baltic office.
[98] Interview anonymous.

candidate or vacancy (transparency, comparability of skills and qualifications); barriers, administrative burdens (immigration procedures, recruitments processes, high cost of recruitment processes, etc). These challenges can be compounded for people in need of international protection who may not have access to their documents, the internet or other resources needed to apply.

Criteria for labour pathways are also included in visa requirements at the national level and can include language requirements, and restrictions on types of employment and sectors. This could be an issue for beneficiaries with protection needs, as it is unclear what would happen if someone lost their job - whether the individual would lose their residence permit, have the right to unemployment benefits or could apply for asylum if they could not return to their country of origin or first asylum. A new visa for vocational training and work in Germany, for example, includes criteria that the individual is not eligible for international protection.[99] Skill levels are also important and determine which people can access labour pathways. Higher qualifications or specific professions have been targeted where there are skills shortages, but there is a need to ensure that medium to low skilled jobs can also be accessed.

Programmes

From the European Commission side, there are several initiatives underway to encourage legal migration and attract 'talent' to the EU, such as the skills and talent package, which includes complementary pathways as well as reform of the Blue Card Directive and Long Term Residence Directive.[100] Talent partnerships aim to address skills shortages in the European Union and "to strengthen mutually-beneficial partnerships on migration with third countries", matching the skills of workers from countries outside the EU with the labour market needs inside.[101] The EU has co-funded pilot projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund through the Mobility Partnership Facility. One programme is High Opportunity for Mediterranean Executive Recruitment (HOMERe) involving Egypt, France, Morocco and Tunisia. Another is THAMM: EU Trust Fund project "Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa", involving Germany, Belgium, France, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. EU Member States could admit people in need of protection under talent partnerships as this is not excluded by the terms of the partnerships, but it would depend on the Member State and their aims and willingness when engaging in the programme,[102] rather than it being built into the programme.

Specific labour pathways for people in need of international protection are currently less developed in Europe but have been a focus for several stakeholders in recent years. The European Commission is focussing on funding these pathways via the Asylu, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) in 2023.[103] EU Member States may also need more assistance to implement labour pathways from the European Commission, as they are new. Many EU

---

[99] Interview, Caritas Germany.

[100] European Commission, 'Skills and Talent,' available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum/skills-and-talent_en.

[101] European Commission, Talent Partnerships: Commission launches new initiative to address EU skills shortages and improve migration cooperation with partner countries, June 2021, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2921.

[102] Interview 8 PICUM

[103] European Commission, 'The European Commission opens call for proposals for AMIF grants,' January 2023, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/european-commission-opens-call-proposals-amif-grants_en.

March 2024

Member States have labour shortages in specific sectors,[104] and demographic pressure as Europe is an ageing continent.

The European Commission is planning the preparation of a legislative proposal establishing an EU Talent Pool to create the first EU-wide matching tool to facilitate international recruitment. This aims to make the EU more attractive to skilled workers from non-EU countries and help employers find the talent they need.[105] The adoption of the proposal is planned for Q4 2023. The Call for Evidence providing a detailed explanation of the planned initiative is publicly available (in all EU languages) on the website 'Have Your Say' at the time of writing. At the moment all details of the EU Talent Pool are being considered and there will be an impact assessment. There have been some criticisms of the EU Talent Pool, primarily from trade unions, that the model of labour migration is designed for, and driven by, employers.[106] An auxiliary aim from the European Commission side is to make sure the EU Talent Pool works for refugees who want to come to the EU. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 'the EU Talent Pool pilot initiative' was launched in October 2022, to help those fleeing the war with securing employment in the European Union.[107]

Bilateral agreements with third countries can also play an important role. Germany is developing new agreements with third countries, such as the recent agreement with India. The German-Indian Migration and Mobility Agreement will facilitate mobility for students, trainees and professionals; joint action against irregular migration; and ensure clear procedures for forced returns. [108] On labour mobility, there seems to be a focus on human rights standards and labour rights as education and training will be provided for countries with high youth unemployment without taking away what the country needs such as nurses, doctors and engineers. Where there is a number of unemployed people in a specific sector like construction, they will be able to go to Germany for work and training, learn German, integrate and support families at home and not damage the home economy.[109]

At the moment, the UK programme to recruit nurses is the only specific labour pathway for people in need of international protection that is up and running in Europe (see case study below). In other countries, there might be ad hoc arrivals, for instance, but no labour pathway that is managed in a structural way. For now, whilst there are no labour pathways in EU Member States,[110] a new pilot programme is bringing together IOM, Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and the UK, called Displaced Talent for Europe[111] (see case study below).

---

[104] See European Labour Authority, Labour Shortages Report 2022 EURES, March 2023, available at: https://www.ela.europa.eu/en/labour-shortages-report.

[105] See European Commission, Have your Say, EU Talent Pool, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13716-EU-Talent-Pool_en.

[106] See for example the Belgian ETUC feedback on the proposal for an EU Talent Pool, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13716-EU-Talent-Pool/F3388669_en.

[107] European Commission, 'European Commission launches EU Talent Pool pilot initiative', October 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/european-commission-launches-eu-talent-pool-pilot-initiative_en.

[108] Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, 'Germany and India sign migration agreement', December 2022. Available at:
https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/EN/2022/12/migration_agreement.html.

[109] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.

[110] Anonymous interview.

[111] Displaced Talent For Europe (DT4E) | IOM Belgium and Luxembourg

Durable solutions

As with education pathways, labour mobility programmes are often not purpose-built for people in need of protection, and initial visas are usually limited to a specific role and/or time period. It is important that pathways have a long-term perspective, or that short-term 'respite' programmes have flexibility in case the individual is not able to return.

For now, people on work-based programmes cannot access all the rights attached to all work-based visas in the EU. For example, single permit visas[112] exclude those who apply for other types of protection so they have no access to the set of rights for single permits.[113]

Circular or temporary migration has many benefits but it can be counter-productive, particularly in situations where an individual cannot return to their country of origin or first country of asylum. For this reason, it is always advisable to have the possibility for long term residence built into programmes.[114]

Case 7: NHS Refugee Nurse Support Pilot Programme (UK)

As stated previously labour mobility pathways to Europe are relatively new. The UK NHS Refugee Nurse Support Pilot Programme was cited by several interviewees as one of the only labour mobility programmes that was fully operational in Europe.[115] The programme supports refugees who are qualified as nurses in their home country to restart working as a nurse for the NHS in England.[116] Partners include NHS England, the Department of Health and Social Care, Liverpool John Moores University, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), RefuAid, Reset and Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB). The programme includes OSCE examinations around six months after arrival to become fully qualified nurses, and two weeks' induction before being deployed onto wards.[117] As part of their programme, Health Education England supports candidates to register, and develop tailored development plans to transition into work within their specialist field. RefuAid provides social support, financial aid and language development support.[118]

TBB specialises in recruitment. To participate in the Healthcare Programme, UK employers must be willing to hire and sponsor displaced talent through the Skilled Worker Route, and recruit candidates who start as healthcare assistants but can move on to being registered general nurses.[119] Participants are highly skilled individuals who have been forced to flee their homes, and include

---

[112] For the list of protections, see European Commission, 'A single permit for work', available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/work/single-permit-work_en.

[113] Interview 8 PICUM.

[114] Interview 8 PICUM.

[115] ICMC, UNHCR, Zvezda Vankova.

[116] NHS England, 'NHS Refugee Support Programme providing opportunity for a new life to skilled nursing staff', March 2022, available at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/north-west/2022/03/03/nhs-refugee-support-programme-providing-opportunity-for-a-new-life-to-skilled-nursing-staff/.

[117] NHS England, 'NHS Refugee Support Programme providing opportunity for a new life to skilled nursing staff', March 2022, available at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/north-west/2022/03/03/nhs-refugee-support-programme-providing-opportunity-for-a-new-life-to-skilled-nursing-staff/.

[118] See Health Education England, 'Supporting Refugee AHP Healthcare Workers', available at: https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/allied-health-professions/increase-capacity/supporting-international-recruitment-ahp%E2%80%99s/building-understanding-international-recruitment.

[119] Talent Beyond Boundaries, 'Eligibility', available at: https://www.talentbeyondboundaries.org/talentcatalog/eligibility?&.

refugees and stateless persons.[120] To be considered for employment in the UK, 'displaced job seekers' register on TBB's Talent Catalogue, are screened by TBB, and must have a job offer from a UK employer. They must also have a 'Functional English' language ability (equivalent to IELTS 4.5).[121]

Good practice for programming: Labour mobility programmes need recruitment specialists overseas, and organisations who can support both employers and beneficiaries.

Case 8: IOM displaced talent for Europe (Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and the UK)

Apart from the UK's NHS pilot, the Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E) pilot was most often cited amongst interviewees. DT4E is a three-year project funded by the European Union that aims to enable displaced people in need of international protection in Jordan and Lebanon to connect with employers in Europe and sustainably integrate into the labour market in Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. It hopes to provide employers with access to a talent pool of more than 60,000 profiles. It promotes 'talents' that bring skills, unique perspectives, diverse experiences, and a strong work ethic.[122] It also markets the scheme as a skilled mobility pathway relevant for sectors with labour shortages, driven by employer needs. The programme provides support to produce job descriptions, and support for matching, visas and immigration, and pre-and post-departure support for both the 'talent' and the employer.[123]

Good practice for programming: DT4E provides support throughout the process for employers and job applicants, including shortlisting and interviewing candidates, visa applications and immigration processes, pre-departure training and support for employers when the new recruit arrives, relocation support and post arrival training and check-ins.

4.3 Humanitarian pathways and visa programmes

Visas are integral to complementary pathways and can both facilitate access to other programmes or can be programmes in their own right.

Stakeholders
National authorities are the only stakeholders who can set criteria for visa programmes and award or reject visas. However civil society, particularly churches,[124] has been instrumental in setting up humanitarian corridor programmes in cooperation with national authorities.

---

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

[122] IOM, 'Displaced Talent for Europe,' Displaced Talent For Europe (DT4E) | IOM Belgium and Luxembourg

[123] IOM, 'Displaced Talent for Europe,' available at: https://belgium.iom.int/displaced-talent-europe-dt4e.

[124] See for example, the Humanitarian Corridors project for more information: https://www.humanitariancorridor.org/en/homepage/

Criteria

Humanitarian pathways can be a separate complementary pathway for people in need of international protection in their own right. They can also be used to enable other legal pathways to a third country, such as community sponsorship programmes or education pathways.[125]

The easiest visa is to apply for is "no visa", given the many practical and security challenges that may arrive in efforts to procure a visa. This is not an option in the EU where entry without a visa is not a possibility for many countries. Russian human rights defenders used visa-free regimes after the outbreak of war against Ukraine to leave Russia (travelling to Georgia, Serbia or Turkey). In Serbia, a small number applied for asylum on the basis of fear of mobilisation.[126] However, most Russians who went to Serbia following the invasion regulated their stay in the country under other legally available options, including a thirty-day visa-free period.[127] It is estimated that 100,000[128]-200,000[129] Russians have registered in Serbia, including many young people under 35, who are highly educated, and work in the IT sector.[130]

The type of visa issued can be different depending on the programme. Most people at risk receive a temporary visa, for a specific time period. In Italy, for example for education pathways it is a humanitarian visa, not a student visa. There are different rights attached to visas and restrictions, including whether families can come. In the aforementioned Italian education programme in theory people have the right to invite their families. In practice, this is not possible until people have finished their studies and have residence.[131] Other programmes include the possibility to bring families along – and there is a broader definition of wider family members.[132]

Programmes

Humanitarian visas can be linked to specific programmes such as humanitarian corridors, or they can be used to enable access to other programmes such as community sponsorship or education. The main humanitarian corridors have been in France and Italy, but also Belgium and Andorra. [133] For example, the French humanitarian corridors agreement was signed between the Ministry of Foreign affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and five faith-based organisations in March 2017. The aim of the agreement was to grant 500 asylum visas to Iraqis and Syrians in need of protection in Lebanon. At the end of 2020, 556 visas had been delivered and 520 beneficiaries of the corridors had arrived in France. In 2021, the agreement

---

[125] See UNHCR, Complementary Pathways for the Admission of Refugees to Third Countries – Key considerations, April 2019, page 9.

[126] Information provided by email. For statistics see Right to Asylum in the Republic of Serbia, 2022, available at: http://azil.rs/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Right-to-Asylum-in-RS-2022.pdf.

[127] https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-emigres-belgrade-ukraine-war/32056264.html.

[128] https://n1info.rs/english/news/rts-100000-russians-and-18000-ukrainians-in-serbia/

[129] February 2023: https://www.voanews.com/a/in-pro-putin-serbia-liberal-minded-russians-seek-a-home/6949482.html.

[130] https://www.voanews.com/a/in-pro-putin-serbia-liberal-minded-russians-seek-a-home/6949482.html

[131] Interview ICMC

[132] Interview KK, Afghan journalist in Pakistan waiting to leave for France. Anonymous interview finding places for Afghans on scholarships.

[133] Referenced in OECD/UNHCR report on safe pathways II, but not covered in depth. Page 8.

was renewed for the next 3 years with the aim of granting 'asylum visas' to 600 beneficiaries of this scheme.[134]

Switzerland also has a humanitarian visa programme. The application for a humanitarian visa must be submitted in person at a Swiss diplomatic representation or consular office abroad that can issue visas. The Swiss representation abroad examines the application in cooperation with the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). A humanitarian visa allows entry to Switzerland, for which asylum can subsequently be applied for in Switzerland. The prerequisite for the issuance of a humanitarian visa and admission to Switzerland is a concrete, serious and immediate life-threatening danger to the life and limb of the person in question (Art. 4 para. 2 Ordinance on Entry and the Issuance of Visas; VEV). There is no legal entitlement to the issuance of a visa.

Two basic criteria must be met:

a) There must be an immediate, concrete and serious threat to life and limb. Mere membership of a potentially endangered group is not sufficient.

b) The persons concerned must have a close and current connection to Switzerland (e.g. close, regularly maintained and lived family relationships with relatives living in Switzerland, or a long previous stay in Switzerland with close ties to the country).[135]

The Swiss humanitarian visa programme is a good example of people at risk being able to apply for a safe pathway from their country of origin or country of first asylum. There are challenges for its implementation, however, including strict implementation of the 'close links with Switzerland' criteria and difficulties obtaining an appointment at embassies. Applicants must provide all information and evidence independently and travel to the embassy themselves. There can sometimes be no Swiss embassy in a country, creating further barriers to access.[136]

Good practice for programming: people at risk can apply for the Swiss programme themselves from their country of origin or first asylum.

Challenges for programming: access to embassies and visa procedures can be costly, and there are several practical and logistical barriers for applicants' access (this also applies to the majority of complementary pathway programmes).

Durable solutions
Like all safe pathways to Europe, longer term solutions should be built into programmes from the design stage, so there are no unclear situations that could lead to forced returns to a

---

[134] https://euaa.europa.eu/easo-asylum-report-2021/4164-community-sponsorship-programmes.
[135] Information provided by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, survey.
[136] Interview 16, Asylex.

country of origin or of first asylum for people in need of international protection. National authorities often have the flexibility to extend or provide specific criteria for certain groups under visas. The below case example from Poland is a good example of how a humanitarian visa has been simplified so that longer term stay is made easier.

Case 9: Caritas Italy

Italy has one of the longest-running humanitarian corridors, with a rich experience of working to bring people in need of protection, from different regions of the world and living in different circumstances, to Europe. As each programme has been slightly different, it also offers interesting learning for others.

The first programme of humanitarian corridors with Libya was an entirely self-financed pilot project by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and the Waldensian Evangelical Church. Its main aims included preventing risky journeys across the Mediterranean and exploitation by human traffickers, and enabling those in "conditions of vulnerability" (such as victims of persecution, torture and violence, as well as families with children, the elderly, the ill and the disabled) to enter Italy legally with a visa for humanitarian reasons, with the possibility to later file an asylum request.[137]

The fourth programme is currently being planned. Each programme takes two years. Caritas Italy plays a key role but is not the only actor. All programmes involve a specific protocol signed with Caritas, the government, the Italian Conference of Bishops and the Community of Sant'Egidio.

The quota of places is split between different stakeholders on each programme. The first three programmes had the following quotas:
1. Caritas (facilitated 300 places) and Italian Conference/ Comunita (200) over 2 years;
2. Caritas (facilitated 350 places) and Italian Conference/ Comunita (250) over 2 years;
3. Caritas (300) and Italian bishops (200). Other partners including UNHCR will manage the other places. Making 1200 Afghans and additional numbers of partners over 3 years.

For the third protocol or programme, Caritas is partnering with Pakistan. There are some partners from Iran but a smaller number as it has not been as easy or safe to work in Iran. The third protocol will last for three years.

Practically, the Caritas role is as follows:

Firstly, presentations are made to institutions dealing with refugees in specific countries. When bringing Eritreans to Italy, for example, Caritas dealt with the Ethiopian authorities. Visa permits were released by the government. It was relatively easy to work in Africa. Beneficiaries were mainly in camps that UNHCR runs. Caritas met with UNHCR and UNHCR gave a list of people it had not been possible to resettle as the resettlement list had been shortened.

Criteria were based on vulnerability, such as single women with young children, people with injuries but who could work (for example, people who had broken bones for which it was possible to get proper assistance in Italy). Caritas not only partnered with UNHCR, but also with local and international NGOs, as UNHCR does not always work with the individual.

There are usually three interviews per person. If a family is being interviewed it is good practice to try to understand the woman's view and not just the head of the family. There have been cases of violence or abuse where just women and children have been moved.

When the first list of potential beneficiaries is more or less ready then Caritas starts to check on reception possibilities with local Caritas offices in Italy. There are 220 offices in Italy so a wide local network to draw on. 80% of Caritas offices are involved in reception. There is a matching exercise,

---

[137] http://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/6338/first-african-refugees-to-italy-via-humanitarian-corridors.

for example, if there is a need for a house for eight or nine persons. If a child needs a hospital for a particular illness.

Caritas then starts to facilitate Skype or Zoom calls with the host community to show them the apartment and introduce them to volunteers. Volunteers do not provide professional services.

There has been increased involvement by the Italian government as the programmes have progressed, and in the third programme government the government is paying for flights and pre-departure medical tests.

The third programme is different to other programmes as there can be requests from family members in Italy, and family members help as in Canada. Caritas does an initial check to identify individuals and collect the paperwork. Then the contact person liaises with the Italian Embassy. It is the Embassy that has contact with the Pakistani authorities and who take fingerprints for the visa to Italy. The documents are transmitted to the Pakistani authorities for an exit permit to leave the country. Medical procedures are undertaken to leave Pakistan.

Caritas prepares all the documentation, which is sent to the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Foreign Affairs in Italy. Documents are discussed and there is a final security check, before the departure is agreed. The process can be a lot quicker than resettlement.

Reception structures in the third programme have also involved families who have invited family members, and they provide accommodation and do a lot of Caritas' work. Family related pathways are quicker than previous programmes. Matching is not as much work. Those arriving under the third programme are often not recognised by UNHCR because they are not the only group who can refer or request for an individual to come.

Upon arrival the beneficiaries apply for asylum. Most have received refugee or subsidiary status from the start of the programme. Their situation is known by the local offices of the Ministry of the Interior. They know that five people from Afghanistan are coming and they will apply for asylum, so they anticipate it. It is an accelerated procedure. All the documentation is already in the system, they are registered and have had a medical check. The fast-track procedure takes three to four months.

Good practice for programming: This programme has diverse stakeholders who have been able to identify and refer potential beneficiaries. Referrals can be made by Caritas in cooperation with UNHCR or local NGOs in third countries, or by UNHCR directly. The most recent programme has allowed Afghans in Italy to refer family members. 'Named' or family referrals can ease matching, extend family unity possibilities for refugees and migrants in Europe, and diversify the pool of community sponsors for safe pathway programmes.

Good practice for programming: An experienced partner (here being Caritas) supports potential beneficiaries and stakeholders throughout the process, ensuring there is a good 'matching' between the beneficiary and their new community that takes into account any special needs. Relationships between beneficiaries and host communities are developed early, before departure. The different needs of individual members of the family are taken into account, including via a gender sensitive approach and specific attention for medical needs, amongst others.

Case 10: British National Overseas Visa and Hong Kong Welcome Scheme (the UK)

Quite a different approach was taken by the UK for the UK British National Overseas Visa scheme for Hong Kongers.

Since January 2021 the UK has been implementing a special scheme for residents of Hong Kong to move to the UK after protests and unrest in Hong Kong in the summer of 2020. The scheme is a humanitarian route but in terms of criteria and rights it works more 'like a work route minus skills'[138] in the UK context. There is no limit on the number of eligible applicants who can apply as an assessment was done ahead of time concerning the maximum number of people who would arrive.

Applicants receive a British National Overseas visa.[139] Not everyone is eligible - only those Hong Kongers who chose to retain ties to Britain prior to the handover to China in July 1997, as well as their family members. There is a wider definition of family members for applicants for the British National Overseas Visa, which can include adult dependents including parents, children and brothers and sisters. When you apply for the first time, family members will need to apply for the same visa as you, for either: 2 years and 6 months; or 5 years. After this time, applicants and their family can extend their visa and after five years can apply to live in the UK permanently.[140]

The visa itself is relatively inexpensive (£180 for 2 years and 6 months; or £250 for 5 years). However, the health surcharge is not insignificant (£1,560 for each adult for 2 years and 6 months; £3,120 for 5 years; or £1,175 for each child for 2 years and 6 months; £2,350 for 5 years). You will also need to show you can support yourself and your family for the first six months.[141]

The visa scheme was announced in the summer of 2020 but opened in January 2021. Those who arrived earlier were given leave to work and stay called 'leave outside the rules' at the border by officers, if they indicated they would apply for the visa later.

The visa launched in January 2021, and was expanded in November 2022 to allow younger people whose parents had retained links to apply without their parents. Their parents may have had links to Britain prior to 1997 but their children did not independently. However, their parents may not have wanted to move or had different politics or were concerned about protests. Young people could switch from a student visa and apply from inside or outside Hong Kong.

---

[138] Interview 11, Migration Yorkshire.
[139] https://www.gov.uk/british-national-overseas-bno-visa
[140] https://www.gov.uk/british-national-overseas-bno-visa/living-permanently-in-the-uk.
[141] https://www.gov.uk/british-national-overseas-bno-visa/how-much-it-costs .

The visa is different from a humanitarian visa as there is no recourse to public funds (NRPF), which differs from those who arrive to be with their family or through resettlement. For NRPF healthcare there is an NHS surcharge which is paid as part of the visa, but there are no benefits unless the person is at risk of destitution or is destitute. In this case there can be a request for the NRPF to be cancelled and the local authority can house them in the meantime.

The Hong Kong welcome programme started in April 2021. It provides integration support but is different to other groups. There are eight regional welcome hubs in England and one in each devolved nation. Migration Yorkshire has an online information hub in two languages.[142] The hub acts as a bridge between different services and stakeholders and Hong Kongers and is funded to run any activities needed for the provision. A lot of services are devolved so it is different in different regions and cities. In Yorkshire access to legal advice has been provided by Citizens Advice.

The main challenge has been training and access to English language classes. All migrants are restricted for education and training for the first three years as funding is residency based. This restriction has been waived for refugees and those arriving on humanitarian routes but not for Hong Kongers. Instead, money was allocated to local authorities for English language provision. The funding is retrospective – local authorities can claim it back once they have spent it but have to pay quite a lot of money up front. This has worked relatively well where there is in-house adult education provision. Some devolved budgets such as London and West Yorkshire waived the residency criteria for all students including Hong Kongers. Funding for English language tuition is a challenge, however, as individuals think they can access tuition but not all local authorities engage.[143]

Good practice for programming: There is no limit to the number of people who can apply. Criteria for applicants were also relaxed at a later stage to allow more and different categories of applicants to apply than originally intended (here being the children of Hong Kongers with retained links to the UK.)

Good practice for programming: There is a wider definition of 'family member' that can include adult dependents (parents, children and brothers and sisters).

Good practice for programming: There is a clear pathway to long term residence built into the programme.

---

[142] Migration Yorkshire, Hong Kong Hub, available at: https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/hong-kong-hub
[143] Interview 11, Migration Yorkshire.

Challenges for programming: The programme does not provide financial support to beneficiaries unless they are at risk of destitution (although they have the right to work from day one). There is a relatively expensive charge for healthcare pre-arrival. 'No recourse to public funds' in the UK can limit some education and training possibilities. Whilst flexible, differentiated access and funding for services (such as language tuition for specific groups) can be confusing for beneficiaries, and complex for local authorities and other stakeholders to navigate and administer.

Case 11: Humanitarian visas (Poland)

Another interesting case of the use of humanitarian visas is in Poland, where a humanitarian visa programme for people who cannot return to their country has been used widely since 2022 to apply favourable conditions for Belarusians at risk of persecution to enter Poland. Other nationalities can apply, but in practice the overwhelming majority are Belarusians. For example, in 2022 there were 26 485 applications for the humanitarian visa and 24,000 were issued to Belarusians, whilst 1 500 people from Belarus were denied a visa.[144]

Beneficiaries of the visa are granted either a Schengen visa, or a national visa on humanitarian grounds which is free of charge. Since 1 January there has also been a reduced fee for any kind of visa for Belarusians, reduced from 80 to 30 euros.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) can issue the visa. Applications can be made at the Polish consulate in Belarus, but the application is sent to the Polish MFA to provide a 'better service' due to the high number of applications. If granted, a Schengen visa is for 90 days, and a national visa up to one year.

In 2022, there was an offer for the prolongation of humanitarian national visas with a temporary residence permit for 3 years. This was a one-time possibility but with minimal formal requirements. Applicants needed to fill in application, and send a photo and copy of their passport with their visa. There was no insurance, housing or registration requirement.

Temporary residence permits have been available since April 2022. There is also an option for Belarusians who get the temporary residence permit to apply for a Polish travel document. Previously there were problems with the high level of proof needed for applications and it was difficult to get documents from the Belarus Embassy. However, this is much simpler.

The scheme also includes sur place applications for the humanitarian visa from the territory of Poland from the MFA. This was only valid from May 2022 to May 2023 for those who:
1. Came on a humanitarian visa
2. Were in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 (living there legally)
3. Were a Polish business harbour programme participant.

All of these groups can get an MFA humanitarian visa.

There is also a work visa of up to one year with the possibility to apply for a temporary residence permit. Applying for temporary residence is generally a more complex procedure but again there is

---

[144] Statistics provided by the Polish government.

a possibility for a sur place application the from MFA in Poland if the individual is a driver in international transport.

At the moment a temporary residence permit or decision to work can take up to two years. Due to the war in Ukraine there are no deadlines as the authorities are over-burdened. The authorities have introduced simple requirements for work permits for Belarusians so it may be quicker, but the impact is not yet known. What we do know is that there is a simplified visa process that has provided a simple and relatively quick route to up to four years' legal stay in Poland with the right to work, predominantly for citizens of Belarus.

Good practice for programming: The criteria for applications are flexible and include sur place applications. A comparatively high number of visas (24 000) were issued within a year, showing that simple programmes can be upscaled.

Good practice for programming: The programme provides for longer term stay (up to four years) with simplified application processes.

4.4 Private sponsorship

Caritas and ICMC have identified three types of community-based sponsorship programmes: —family reunification-based sponsorship, humanitarian corridors and resettlement-based sponsorship.[145] Humanitarian corridors are discussed above with the case study from Italy a good example of providing support from local communities, the church and in some cases families, upon arrival.

It can be difficult to call some community sponsorship programmes complementary pathways, as they only provide additional integration support for people arriving through resettlement. In other cases, it can be difficult to tell how many of the places are complementary and how many are usual resettlement places, especially when information about quotas is not transparent (see earlier discussion on 'additionality'). [146] EMN has concluded that community sponsorship schemes are a way to further support beneficiaries, not a separate pathway, but more part of other resettlement or humanitarian admission programmes.[147] However, as sponsorship programmes do often offer additionality in some form, they are considered separately below.

Stakeholders
EUAA: has established a working group in support of EU Member States in this field.

Local communities: play a large role in private sponsorship. They can initiate schemes, fundraise for them, find housing and provide important integration assistance both pre and post arrival. In the UK there was an acknowledgement that local community sponsor groups can often be older, white retired citizens, and that to increase community sponsorship it would

---

[145] https://www.icmc.net/resource/fostering-community-sponsorships-across-europe/
[146] Interview Caritas Europa.
[147] EMN inform, Resettlement, Humanitarian Admission and Sponsorship Schemes, June 2023. Page 17, here

be important to widen that group. Including families in 'named' sponsorship may contribute to diversifying sponsors and helping maintaining family unity.[148] Involving local communities is also considered to increase understanding and acceptance of migration and refugees in local communities.

Family members: play a key role in extended family reunification programmes. Family members are obviously committed to bringing family members to be with them, and often provide housing, financial support and their knowledge as a bridge between the two countries and cultures. National legislation can work against extended family reunification, for example where there are requirements for income or living space attached, although standards for reception are equally important. 'Named' programmes where individuals legally residing can invite family members to join them are very much in demand.

Cities and regions: can also be communities who 'sponsor' beneficiaries of complementary pathways, as can regions such as the German Laender. In the UK, because of the devolved nature of service provision, there are regional hubs to help coordinate between the government, local authorities and communities.

Sponsors or volunteers: also play a vital role in providing support for community sponsorship programmes. Several stakeholders noted that programmes should not be solely volunteer driven and that there is a need for paid professional staff to assist and guide processes. As above, there can be a lack of diversity amongst sponsors, with a tendency in some countries for sponsors to be older people who are white and live in more rural areas.[149]

Criteria

As with other programmes, criteria apply depending on the organisation that is managing the pathway, as well as on applicable national criteria. For those beneficiaries who come to Europe after being chosen for resettlement by UNHCR, the UNHCR criteria will apply. In Germany, it has been reported that the New Start in a Team (NesT) programme does not consider refugees with close ties to Germany who may need less integration support. For opposite reasons, individuals with special medical needs, unaccompanied minors or severely traumatised individuals are not considered, given their high needs and burden on the sponsor group.[150] During the matching process other criteria are relevant depending on the sponsor group and their offer (e.g. special skills, location etc), and this process may vary. [151]

Housing is an issue for all safe pathways, as there is a strain on reception capacity in many EU Member States as well as in the UK. Sponsors are often expected to provide housing, which can be for up to 18 months. Standards for accommodation are important as are checks by authorities. There are different schemes but it is important to know who is responsible for paying which bills, how it is ensured that standards are acceptable, and that beneficiaries are safe and secure.

Few countries offer extended family reunification as a specific, advertised pathway. In some countries it may help to have a relative in the country. Often relatives would like to invite named family members where there are family links. This can attract people to sponsor who would

---

[148] Interview Caritas Salford.

[149] Interviews with Caritas Salford and Caritas Belgium.

[150] EMN inform, Resettlement, Humanitarian Admission and Sponsorship Schemes, June 2023. Pages 18-19. Add link.

[151] EMN inform, Resettlement, Humanitarian Admission and Sponsorship Schemes, June 2023. Pages 18-19. Add link.

not usually be sponsors for such schemes. One example is the Irish-Afghan admission programme (now closed) that received 528 applications in 2022, a condition of which was having an Irish or Afghan relative in Ireland. The sponsor also had to show they had the space and means to support all successful beneficiaries from the date of their arrival in Ireland until they were able to support themselves, as well as to pay for all travel to Ireland for beneficiaries.[152]

Programmes

Programmes can be mixed. Germany's NesT programme, for example, has a regular resettlement component in addition to aiming to admit up to 200 additional refugees from countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Kenya, Libya and Jordan. This additional group will be supported by mentoring groups in 2023.[153] The programme focuses on vulnerability, and those who arrive under the complementary pathway have a different legal status. The authorities fund a coordination unit that includes Caritas, UNHCR and other voluntary groups.

Mentors are obliged to find and fund living space for the family. Support is both financial and social and should last for at least a year. If there is a single woman from South Sudan with three to four children, around 20 volunteers will help find them an apartment, complete paperwork and fund the apartment for a year. Activities are funded by the government. The coordination unit helps with the background checks, for example to ensure beneficiaries are not being trafficked. Extended family can invite people to come but this is closely monitored.[154] While progress on community sponsorship in Germany has been welcomed, the programmes remain very small by comparison to main government-run pathways. [155]

Durable solutions

Support programmes for complementary pathways and resettlement are often intensive, and provide beneficiaries with far more assistance than that received by spontaneous arrivals. In Italy there was a suggestion that knowledge of the support provided for a year could deter people from moving on to other EU countries in the first year after arrival, otherwise known as 'secondary movement'.[156]

Maintaining family unity is one of the keys to helping people in need of international protection find a durable solution. 'Named' programmes offer people who have already settled in Europe another way to bring family members to join them, particularly those outside the scope of traditional family reunification.

There are also benefits for the local community in terms of improved understanding of migration and integration and building more welcoming communities for the future.[157]

---

[152] Irish government, Department of Justice, The Afghan Admission Programme Information Page, available at: https://www.irishimmigration.ie/the-afghan-admission-programme-information-page/#living.
[153]

https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/AsylFluechtlingsschutz/ResettlementRelocation/Resettlement/resettlement-node.html;jsessionid=FF0B3D8690C59A0F69FA65A2981B4BE8.intranet661
[154] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.
[155] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.
[156] Interview 6, Caritas Italy.
[157] Interview 6, Caritas Italy.

March 2024

Case 12: A regional model (Germany)

There are several different models for sponsorship. Germany has a regional model, where Laender can invite individuals themselves and design programmes with federal agreement. All federal states used to have their own programmes for Syrians. Hesse federal state has announced humanitarian admission for Afghans with family ties. These are some of the most successful programmes with several ongoing, including in Brandenburg.[158] Relatives could also be invited to travel to Germany and there was a wider scope than in traditional family reunification, meaning cousins could also be invited. Cities offer to take financial and legal responsibility for beneficiaries for ten years as part of the programme. Federal states are responsible for integration so programmes can start when the Ministry of Interior has agreed them. These programmes have been run for many years and are judged by stakeholders to have really made a difference, with family ties paramount.[159]

Good practice for programming: Cities and regions can be sponsors or even initiate programmes, as in Germany. In this case, they take long term responsibility for beneficiaries, as well as providing wider options for family reunification.

Case 13: The role of communities: Caritas Belgium and Caritas Salford, UK

In Belgium, the national asylum reception agency Fedasil runs community sponsorship programmes. Caritas Belgium is an intermediary partner, and supports hosting groups providing housing and technical support. Caritas helps prepare, select, train, monitor, evaluate and check on the volunteering process, and with the support of intercultural mediators ensures that the year of support runs well. Groups are asked to engage for one year. The group pays the cost of housing, including rental costs before arrival. At the end of the year, the family can fall back on the welfare system and the sponsor group's responsibility becomes more social. Housing has been provided in private housing and not co-housing. This is partly because the community will already have made decisions that might be controversial for beneficiaries before they arrive and sharing a house creates the risk of additional challenges to resolve. The programme asks a lot from volunteers from the beginning, which affects capacity.

In the UK, community sponsors support individuals and families identified by UNHCR. The sponsor application process is long and complex, and support is provided by Caritas Salford. Groups need a resettlement plan, including £9000, identified accommodation and local authority consent. Consent from the local authorities can take time – from two days to two months.

The stages of the sponsorship scheme are as follows: 1) a quick one page application on the plans for the year; 2) the Home Office matches the sponsor group with a family from the resettlement pool; the group is provided with profiles, numbers of family members who will be coming and any medical issues; 3) the group has four months to prepare an in-depth plan and fundraise; 4) the group submits a stage 2 application; 5) From this stage it takes two to four months for the family to complete the procedure in their country of origin or first asylum and to arrive.

---

[158] Interview 9, Caritas Germany. See also, Caritas Germany, 'Admission by federal states and private sponsorship', https://resettlement.de/en/admission-by-federal-states-and-private-sponsorship/.
[159] Interview 9, Caritas Germany.

That is eight months if all is done quickly. In addition, there are DBS (criminal record) checks for sponsors and training to complete. Some groups struggle to find accommodation, especially for larger families. In both cases, that sponsors are not paid by the government was identified as a reason why some groups do not want – or are unable – to engage, as they may not have resources to cover even the limited expenses that arise.

Once families arrive they have a year of intensive support, while also being encouraged to live as independently as possible. Caritas provides advice, monitoring and evaluation for both the family and the sponsor group. The community has to make sure they have accommodation for two years and that it is in place before the family arrives. A lot of interest is from sponsors in rural areas and small towns, where it can be harder for families to settle. Most sponsor groups are wealthier citizens who are often retired.

Good practice for programming: Community sponsorship programmes can be complex, time-intensive and involve a lot of responsibility for community sponsors. Experienced partners can support host communities and beneficiaries. Housing is ready for families in advance. Families receive help and support, but at the same time are encouraged to become independent.

Challenges for programming: Community sponsors are often retired and/or from more rural areas, which are not necessarily locations where families can most easily integrate or find the services they need (e.g. hospitals).

Case 14: Cities of refuge (Sweden)

Cities have a long-standing tradition of providing refuge. As providers of on the ground assistance and services post-arrival, they are important stakeholders.

ICORN is an international membership organisation for cities, municipalities, county councils or regions which are places of refuge offering temporary shelter for persecuted authors, journalists, bloggers, photographers, curators, artists, actors, directors etc. Temporary residencies normally last for two years.[160]

In Sweden, for example, each city of refuge has a coordinator and accepts responsibility for the guest writer/artist's housing and scholarship/grant during the city of refuge residency. The total annual budget may vary from city to city, depending on the cost of rented housing, whether the guest writer/artist is bringing someone with them, or if the coordinator's working hours are included in the city of refuge budget. Because of the legal basis for the residence permit, beneficiaries are not

---

[160] ICORN, The handbook for Swedish cities of refuge, available at: https://www.kulturradet.se/globalassets/start/i-fokus/internationellt/internationellt-dokument/the-handbook-for-swedish-cities-of-refuge-.pdf.

allowed to work but may start their own business. Family members who are also granted a visa may also do so.[161]

During an ICORN Networking event in March 2023, the head of the Swedish Migration Service gave a short presentation about the Swedish Memorandum of Understanding with Swedish cities who invite and sponsor artists and writers. He described the legal basis for cities of refuge in Sweden as "legal creativity", as there is no specific programme included in law. Chapter Five of the Aliens Act details the circumstances when a residence permit may be granted - if the alien can sustain themselves "in another way" or "with means of support other than employment."[162] The cities of refuge programme was consolidated from there. A coordinator was appointed for this work by the government in 2011.

Good practice for programming: Different stakeholders (here being cities) using flexibility already present in national legislation to provide supportive and safe pathways.

Good practice for programming: An experienced partner (here being ICORN) coordinates and supports both host cities and individual beneficiaries, from the pre-departure phase.

Challenge for programming: A non-tailored, mainstream visa means that residents on the programme cannot work, although family members can.

One challenge for governments in relation to safe pathways is the broader view on safe passage. It is not possible to say that all IDPs and refugees should have safe passage to Europe. There are two questions that a government asks when they talk about safe and legal pathways: who and how many. The answer to those questions is a government's resettlement quota programme, which is a political decision. Sometimes when something specific happens countries want to bring more people. For example, when Kabul fell a lot of countries gave visas to specific people, for example those with connections to that country. There can be problems with longer term stay because a visa means a visit. In order to stay for longer, a residence permit for a longer period is required. Residence permits can be granted at ministerial level if decisions are taken to prioritise some cases over others, which is in itself sensitive and may generate ethical dilemmas or even legal challenges.

"We found the paragraph. We are using it. We have a stamp of approval. We created a programme. It is running but not so well as it has not been adapted for this purpose. If you come you can't work. There are problems with families. Problems with a passport as it is a

---

[161] ICORN, The handbook for Swedish cities of refuge, available at: https://www.kulturradet.se/globalassets/start/i-fokus/internationellt/internationellt-dokument/the-handbook-for-swedish-cities-of-refuge-.pdf.
[162] Aliens Act (2005:716), Chapter 5(5)(2). See Government offices of Sweden, available at: https://www.government.se/government-policy/migration-and-asylum/aliens-act/.

normal visa. There is nothing about refugees in this paragraph although it is about people being persecuted. It has not been adapted for the cause. The best thing would be a solid programme by law. A paragraph designed for this. Sweden has been working on it a long time and we know how it would look but tactically this stamp of approval is weak and then you would have to go to the government and parliament and pass a law. There would be lots of questions. Why these and not these? How compatible is it with the visa system etc. In English there is a saying, let sleeping dogs lie. In Sweden, we say do not awaken the bear that is asleep. Maybe we shouldn't awaken this bear or at least probe it carefully before we do. At least a programme is working. If we try to make it perfect things can go horribly wrong. We think it is important. We have great cooperation with ICORN. If we do anything else we will sit down with you. Continue as always. We are happy and proud to be working with you."[163]

---

[163] ICORN networking event, presentation by Mikael Ribbenvik Cassar, the Director General of the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) since June 2017.

March 2024

5. Key Findings

Safe pathway programmes

1. **Complementary or safe pathways are a valued additional tool to help increase safe arrivals to Europe, that should not replace resettlement programmes or access to asylum for those arriving under their own steam.**

   UNHCR stresses that complementary pathways should be 'in addition' to resettlement programmes and "should not substitute States' obligations to provide international protection to refugees through access to asylum on their territory."[164]

   There is a risk that countries use expansion of complementary pathways and resettlement to justify restrictive practices at borders. This research uses the term 'safe' routes (rather than the 'safe and legal' terminology that is sometimes employed) in order to emphasise that it is not illegal to cross a border in order to seek protection, and that those who arrive spontaneously either at borders or in-country are entitled to access an asylum procedure.

   The principle of additionality means that places offered via complementary pathways should be in addition to resettlement, and that complementary pathways should not replace resettlement.

   See section 2 'Background' and section 3.1 'Additionality'.

2. **The landscape is complex: there are many different schemes and programmes for safe pathways to Europe, with different stakeholders working in different ways in host countries and first countries of asylum.**

   Complementary pathways are a relatively new addition to global refugee protection, and the number and scope of pathway schemes has grown since the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees called for their expansion alongside resettlement.

   They are usually implemented by partnerships that include a diverse range of stakeholders, each of whom has specific competences that are exercised differently depending on their role within a partnership. Schemes also operate within the specific legal frameworks provided by host countries and countries of first asylum, meaning that aspects such as identification, eligibility, visa type, rights-based approaches and long-term perspectives for beneficiaries vary widely.

   See 3.1 'Definitions and debates' and Annex III for a full mapping of pathways.

3. **With notable exceptions in Italy, Germany and Poland, the majority of schemes are very small, in the sense that very small numbers of people are able to benefit and/or that eligibility criteria mean the scope of schemes is somewhat restricted.**

   Complementary pathway programmes in Europe are relatively new, and many are currently being implemented as pilot initiatives with small numbers of beneficiaries. Although the global focus on complementary pathways since 2018 has encouraged states to establish new

---

[164] UNHCR, 'Complementary pathways', available at: https://www.unhcr.org/complementary-pathways.html

schemes, factors such as COVID-19, changing security circumstances in many countries of asylum, and a lack of housing in receiving countries have impeded progress.

Programmes also have different eligibility criteria, with some focusing on specific vulnerability criteria, particular groups such as human rights defenders, or individuals with high level qualifications or work experience, for highly skilled professions. These requirements and those attached to specific visas can act to restrict access to pathways for persons in need of international protection.

See 3.6 ´Statistics' and 3.1 'Definitions and debates'.

4. **Most safe pathway models are resource intensive, financially but also in terms of preparation, support and management.**

   New pathways often entail complex procedures, as those designing them navigate mainstream immigration processes that are not tailor-made for complementary pathways, such as education and work visas. The large global 'ecosystems' required to implement pathways are also resource intensive, and the length of time required to bring people to safety can cause difficulties for more timebound pathways such as education and employment.

   See 3.3 'Stakeholders, roles and partnerships'.

5. **Many programmes are hybrid, i.e., a mix of different types of pathways with elements of humanitarian visas and education or community sponsorship. For example, the Italian humanitarian corridor also has elements of community sponsorship.**

   Complementary pathway programmes may include one or aspects of several pathway types, including labour, education, humanitarian visas, schemes to admit extended family members and community/private sponsorship pathways. They may also make use of existing mainstream immigration routes, particularly for labour and education pathways, or develop pathways specifically for those in need of international protection.

   See 3.1 'Definitions and debates' and Annex III for a full mapping of pathways.

6. **There is a lack of transparency around numbers, who is counted, the risk of double counting etc., which can lead to confusion around which pathways truly have 'additionality'.**

   There is very limited available information on current and planned safe routes to Europe for those in need of international protection, and on how they are implemented.[165] Additionality can sometimes be difficult to judge due to a lack of transparency concerning resettlement quotas and arrivals and a lack of data on complementary pathways overall. 'Additionality' is also defined differently in different national and programme contexts (i.e.: additional places, or additional resources and services in receiving countries). The fact that many pathways are new, involve multiple stakeholders and have developed in an ad-hoc manner to suit

---

[165] UNHCR, Final Report Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, available at: https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Three%20Year%20Strategy%20%282019-2021%29%20End%20Report_Final%20for%20copy%20edit_final-compressed.pdf., page 3.

specific situations, also limits the availability and comparability of monitoring and evaluation data.

See section 3.1 'Additionality' and 3.6 'The statistics'.

Expanding and scaling up safe pathway programmes

7. **The main shortcoming identified was scale. Many stakeholders think that pathways need to be scaled up and that this needs to be done quicker.**

   One of the main recommendations from all stakeholders has been the need to upscale safe pathways. Many pathways, in particular those for education and employment, are starting with very small numbers of places. While stakeholders welcome recent progress on sponsorship schemes, these programmes remain small relative to national resettlement schemes implemented by national authorities.

   See 3.6 'The statistics' and 'Case 15: Relocation for Afghans after fall of Kabul'.

8. **There is firm interest in expanding safe pathway programmes and political will to do so, at both EU and national level.**

   The EU has consistently supported and encouraged Member States to adopt and expand safe pathway programmes. At national level, the increasing number of countries implementing safe pathway programmes, and the increasing number of programmes themselves, indicates both firm interest and political will amongst national authorities and their stakeholders. The good practices and common challenges generated by these programmes provide a useful base from which stakeholders can build their capacity to upscale existing initiatives and implement new programmes.

   See 3.6 ´Statistics' and 5 'Pathways to protection: case studies'.

Access to safe pathways

9. **Access is a key question, both in terms of who can benefit and who selects beneficiaries. There is a lack of information and transparency on available pathways and procedures for beneficiaries, albeit that limiting public information can sometimes be necessary for security reasons.**

   Access to most complementary pathway programmes is through referrals, often done by UNHCR or also by NGOs in the field. Aside from some labour and education pathways, and similarly to resettlement, complementary pathway schemes commonly lack open routes via which individuals can make independent applications to access them. There are also no rights of appeal in cases where an independent application or an identified case is not selected as a beneficiary. Both these elements have in some cases led to criticisms that programmes are inaccessible and/or lack transparency.

   However, given sensitivities both for programmes and (particularly) for participants still in countries of origin or in other vulnerable situations, making application, identification and selection processes for programmes too open and/or public may present security concerns.

   See 3.1 'Definitions and debates'.

10. **Programmes rely on national legislation for visas. There are often provisions already in law, and national legislation can be very flexible where there is political will. The choice of visa can influence the durable solutions available to the beneficiary of the programme at a later stage, as can restrictions on transferring between visa regimes.**

    Visas can be specific to particular programmes, but often beneficiaries are required to apply for a pre-existing type of visa. National governments have flexibility in how visas are used and who is eligible. The type and duration of the residence permit granted upon arrival depends on the national legal framework and the type of status granted by entry visas (e.g. refugee status, subsidiary protection, humanitarian grounds). Other types of visas can be work or education oriented, and tourist visas have been used in some programmes to facilitate initial entry.

    Visas for complementary pathways are generally temporary, and the type of visa and status affect rights and restrictions for beneficiaries, including for example access to long-term residence and their ability to bring family members with them.

    Many programmes currently do not start out with a durable solution 'built-in' in terms of status/long-term residence. There are often restrictions on beneficiaries changing between visa types/ permissions to stay.

    See 3.1 'Definitions and debates' and 3.3 'Stakeholders and partnerships'.

11. **There are relatively few programmes that provide 'sur place' options for applications, although humanitarian visas and labour visas have in some cases been extended to those of specific nationalities who are already in host countries (notably for Belarusians in Poland).**

    The case of Belarusians in Poland is the only complementary pathway scheme in Europe identified by this research that provides a 'sur place' application option.

    See Case 11: Poland: humanitarian visas.

    ## Communities involvement

12. **Schemes often involve local communities in host countries, and are seen to increase understanding of migration and the integration process, and promote acceptance in host communities. Increased reception support may have the potential to reduce secondary movement**.

    Many complementary pathway schemes involve local communities in host countries providing reception and integration support, as individual volunteers or as part of volunteer sponsor groups for sponsorship pathways or schemes involve elements of community/private sponsorship. The involvement of local communities has benefits for improved understanding of migration and integration amongst receiving communities, and for building more welcoming communities for the future.

    Beneficiaries being aware of intensive reception support provided in the immediate period after arrival can deter people from moving on to other EU countries post-arrival, otherwise known as 'secondary movement'.

    See 4.4 'Private sponsorship'.

13. **Most models provide integration assistance on arrival as well as pre-departure support, both of which are seen as good practices and key for the success of programmes. Assistance and support are expensive, however, and there is a risk of creating two-tier support systems that disadvantage those arriving spontaneously.**

Programmes to assist, welcome and support beneficiaries of pathways can be very resource intensive and provide more support than for other beneficiaries of international protection who arrive spontaneously in Europe. Numbers of spontaneous arrivals may also affect national authorities' engagement in specific pathways. In Europe, for example, there are already many refugees who have arrived spontaneously, and governments may wish to prioritise employment schemes and assistance for this existing 'pool' of talent before reaching out to others in countries of first asylum.

See 3.3 'Stakeholders and partnerships' and 4.2 'Employment'.

14. **A general lack of housing, affecting both complementary pathways and other, similar programmes, is an obstacle for programmes in many countries**.

A lack of housing in receiving countries affects programmes for persons in need of international protection across the board, including complementary pathway programmes. Where a programme is unable to source suitable housing, beneficiaries are often unable to travel to the receiving country, or may spend significant periods in temporary accommodation post-arrival. Some programmes seek to make use of the specific local knowledge of volunteers and sponsor groups to find accommodation, but these stakeholders still struggle to find appropriate accommodation (especially for larger families).

See 3.6 'The statistics, 4.4 'Private sponsorship' and 'Case 15: Relocation for Afghans after fall of Kabul'.

15. **Volunteer sponsors provide excellent and intensive support for new arrivals, as well as fundraising for accommodation and other support. Sponsor groups can lack diversity, and the need for long-term commitment and action, particularly in terms of fundraising and finding housing, can limit those who wish to be involved.**

Local communities play a significant role in private sponsorship, by initiating schemes, fundraising for them, finding housing and providing important integration assistance both pre and post-arrival. Local community sponsor groups are often older, white retired citizens, and expanding community sponsorship requires broadening the pool from which sponsor groups are drawn. that group. Including families in 'named' sponsorship schemes may contribute to diversifying sponsors.

See 3.3 'Stakeholders and partnerships', 4.4 'Private sponsorship' and Case 13 'Caritas Belgium and Caritas Salford, UK: community role'.

Case 15: Relocation for Afghans after fall of Kabul (Europe-wide)

There were many different approaches to the evacuation from Kabul and the provision of resettlement and complementary pathway opportunities. EU institutions and EU member states and others stepped up and made commitments to help Afghans at risk to access protection pathways to Europe, including humanitarian admissions and other complementary pathways.

In Norway and Sweden, the situation was mainly dealt with through changing criteria or increasing resettlement numbers in existing resettlement programmes.[166] However, nine EU Member States implemented humanitarian admission programmes for the first time during these evacuations.[167]

The German programme was particularly significant, offering to relocate 12 000 people from Afghanistan per year for 3 years – meaning a total of 36 000 people to be offered a pathway to Germany. NGOs are able to refer people to the programme where they are aware of Afghans at risk based on their occupation; gender; sexual orientation; religion. People must have experienced political violence prior to application, which for many women, for example, can be difficult to prove. It is still unclear where evacuations end and humanitarian admissions begin. Of the 36 000 included in the scheme in total over the three years, potentially 5 000 were part of the initial evacuations. However, the numbers on the scheme are still very high, making it one of the largest complementary pathways in Europe. The programme also included many 'newcomers' and diaspora organisations in referral processes. There are over 60 stakeholders involved in its work, including two diaspora organisations and NGOs that have worked in Afghanistan or with Afghans in Germany. This has opened pathways as more organisations are involved, which was considered very positive. There were some security issues highlighted, however, concerning potential beneficiaries of the programme, leading to it being temporarily paused at time of writing and to negative attention in the press.[168]

In another example in The Netherlands, there is no policy in place for humanitarian admission schemes. However, under the EU 2021-2022 Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Programme, the Netherlands transferred specific categories of Afghan nationals following the Taliban's seizure of power. At the national level, these transfers were not considered humanitarian admission schemes, but they operated in such a way that they fulfilled the criteria of humanitarian admission in the context of the EU 2021-2022 programme. The Netherlands pledged 3,159 arrivals which it fulfilled entirely (and exceeded).[169]

Meanwhile, the UK ran several different programmes. Programmes started in April 2021 with the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)[170]. Originally it was for those who had supported the UK government in Afghanistan, but it was expanded and adapted in August 2021 when the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) opened.[171]
ACRS has several pathways:
1.	Those evacuated en masse in August 2021.
2.	Those resettled through UNHCR referrals.
3.	Civil society pathway for particular groups. In the first year this mainly covered guards from the British embassy, British council staff and ex-Chevening alumni.

Numbers of arrivals are unclear, but there had been a total of 6,235 ARAP grants and

---

[166] UNHCR regional office.

[167] EMN inform on resettlement and humanitarian pathways.

[168] https://www.cicero.de/aussenpolitik/bundesaufnahmeprogramm-afghanistan-scharia-richter-baerbock-auswartiges-amt

[169] Information provided by the Netherlands.

[170] See, UK government, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-information-and-guidance.

[171] See UK government, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme.

6,292 ACRS Pathway 1 grants of indefinite leave to remain as of May 2023.[172] There have been serious problems with accommodation for the UK programme, with many arrivals living in temporary hotel accommodation for several months.[173]

Overall, despite the efforts of many countries, a recent report has found that nearly two years on, these efforts remain vastly insufficient, and many promised admission schemes have yet to materialise at scale.[174]

Good practice for programming: The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban was a catalyst for action, prompting EU institutions, Member States and other countries to step up and make commitments to help Afghans at risk access protection pathways to Europe. Pathways included humanitarian admissions and other complementary pathway programmes. For several countries, these were the first complementary pathways that they had developed. The importance of complementary pathways was recognised by many stakeholders at all levels – from governments to family members and grassroots groups.

Challenges for programming: Despite the urgency of the situation, admission schemes remained small and are often time limited.

---

[172] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data.

[173] The Independent, Thousands of Afghan refugees to be evicted from Home Office hotels with no offer of housing, April 2023, see https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/afghan-refugees-hotels-eviction-home-office-b2327022.html.

[174] IRC, Two years on: Afghans still lack pathways to safety in the EU, May 2023, https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/two-years-still-no-safe-pathways-afghans.

6. Recommendations

National authorities

- Incorporate consideration of long-term durable solutions for persons in need of international protection within programme design, especially with regard to the type of visa provided for beneficiaries within specific pathways and further stay/residency options for beneficiaries when an initial residency period is over.
- Ensure safe pathway programmes are rights-based throughout, from the right to seek asylum, and access family reunification, through to protection against discrimination, access to employment rights and protections on the same basis as the general population in receiving countries, and possibilities for long-term residence when an initial residency period concludes.
- Ensure places provided on complementary pathway programmes do not take the place of or reduce those provided via national resettlement commitments. Provide transparent and timely public data on safe pathways and resettlement to evidence additionality.
- Assess the feasibility of pathways not yet being implemented in specific national contexts and implement pilot schemes where feasible. Include in pilots clear plans to scale up pathway programmes using pilot outcomes.
- Make clear, transparent and time-bound commitments to scale up existing complementary pathway programmes, particularly those currently implemented as pilots, and invest as needed in systems and infrastructure.
- Consider legislating for a specific national humanitarian visa for international protection, for use across a wide range of complementary pathways, that provides simplified pathways to long-term residence and family reunification rights equivalent to those attached to resettlement.
- Provide options to access safe pathway/humanitarian visas 'sur place', particularly where this would provide protection and regularisation options for significant numbers of persons in need of international protection who are resident on the national territory.
- Facilitate cooperation and joint coordination across relevant national ministries, oriented toward anticipating challenges and developing actions to mitigate them. Involve a wide range of relevant stakeholders in these cooperation structures, including local and regional authorities, civil society organisations and grassroots organisations (including diaspora groups).
- Include stakeholders involved in identification of beneficiaries for safe pathways in countries of first asylum in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national programmes.
- Consider extending aspects of good practice from community sponsorship programmes, to further engage local communities in safe pathway programmes and promote a welcoming environment for those seeking international protection via other routes.
- Ensure the design and operation of labour mobility programmes act as a conduit for better standards on labour rights for migrant workers across the board, in relation to access to workplace protections, family unity and social inclusion, including pathways to settlement.
- Avoid imposing narrow or additional eligibility criteria for safe pathway programmes that may unduly restrict access and/or result in preferential treatment for specific groups.

European Commission

- Continue to support the exchange of experience and good practices at EU level, involving a wide range of relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, civil society organisations and grassroots organisations (including diaspora groups).
- Create and resource accessible ways to obtain the views and experiences of beneficiaries of safe pathway programmes, and ensure these are incorporated into programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Continue to provide lump sum AMIF funding to Member States for arrivals under complementary pathway programmes, alongside resettlement.
- Expand AMIF lump sum funding to include safe pathway programmes coordinated by civil society actors, rather than solely those coordinated by national authorities.
- Facilitate cross-Directorate coordination and cooperation on education pathways, to expand the pool of universities and educational institutions willing to engage in safe pathways.
- Improve transparency and accountability through regular, timely and accurate reporting on arrivals via different safe pathways within the EU.

International organisations

- Continue to advocate at national and European level for expanded safe pathways to Europe for persons in need of international protection.
- Provide good practice examples and advice and input on programme design to national authorities with an interest in implementing new programmes or expanding existing pathways.
- Continue to assist national authorities to implement safe pathways to Europe, including by maintaining flexibility via referrals of those deemed eligible for resettlement to safe pathway programmes.
- Expand cooperation with stakeholders with existing local infrastructure/presence in countries of first asylum that help new programmes to be established and/or existing programmes to be scaled up.
- Expand cooperation with stakeholders in countries of first asylum that can provide additional identification capacity for safe pathway programmes, including by offering capacity-building assistance and support.
- Facilitate sharing of good practice amongst stakeholders within and across safe pathway programmes, and make information on good practices available to stakeholders not yet involved in implementing programmes but with an interest in doing so.

Civil society organisations

- Continue to advocate for expanded and improved safe pathways to Europe, at national and European level.
- Actively participate in activities to share good practice on complementary pathways, including by sharing relevant tools and resources.
- Expand/establish cooperation with diaspora and grassroots organisations in countries of first asylum, to improve understanding of the needs of beneficiaries and publicise programme opportunities to a wider pool of potential beneficiaries.
- Expand/establish cooperation with grassroots and diaspora organisations in receiving countries to create a more diverse pool of sponsors to support safe pathway programmes.

7. Civil society advocacy strategies: recommendations for development

European level

Strategy: Advocate for a common European definition of 'additionality' and make Member State access to EU funding for safe pathway programmes conditional on adherence to it.

Target: The European Commission defines 'additionality' in the context of safe pathways, and does not provide funding to Member States for safe pathway programmes that do not provide additionality according to the agreed definition.

***

Strategy: Advocate for the European Commission to provide regular, timely and accurate reporting on arrivals under safe pathway and resettlement programmes operated by Member States.

Target: The European Commission publishes quarterly data on arrivals via safe pathway and resettlement programmes, that refer to quarterly periods no more than six months prior to the reporting date.

***

Strategy: Advocate for common European standards for access to durable solutions and guarantees of rights for persons in need of international protection via safe pathways.

Target: The European Commission agrees common European standards for access to durable solutions and guarantees of rights within safe pathway programmes, and does not provide funding to Member States for programmes that do not adhere to them.

National level

Strategy: Advocate with national authorities to include durable solutions as an indispensable element of programme design for safe pathways, including by providing examples of good practice in this regard from other programmes and/or countries.

Target: National authorities publish durable solutions impact assessments for all new and/or expanded safe pathway programmes.

***

Strategy: Promote engagement in safe pathway programmes amongst employers and universities, including by providing programme and practice examples and facilitating contact with peer stakeholders already involved in such programmes. Link interested employers and universities with national authorities as part of wider advocacy to establish/expand safe pathway programmes.

Target: National critical masses of employers and universities willing to engage in advocacy with national authorities to establish/expand labour and education complementary pathway programmes.

***

Strategy: Promote private/community sponsorship to a broad range of grassroots and community-based stakeholders, including diaspora and migrant and refugee-led and diaspora organisations. Include targeted information on safe pathways and capacity-building

support, and link potential sponsors with peer stakeholders already involved in such programmes.

Target: An expanded, more diverse pool of potential individuals and groups willing to engage in safe pathway programmes.

***

Strategy: Ensure the views and experiences of beneficiaries of safe pathway programmes are collated and made available to national authorities to inform programme design.

Target: National authorities explicitly address the views and experiences of former and current safe pathway beneficiaries in the design of new and/or expanded safe pathway programmes.

***

Strategy: Advocate for national authorities to publish regular, timely and accurate reporting on arrivals under national safe pathway and resettlement programmes.

Target: National authorities publish quarterly data on arrivals via safe pathway and resettlement programmes that refer to quarterly periods no more than six months prior to the reporting date, and provides the same to the European Commission.

***

Annex I: List of Interviews

- Afghanistan and Central Asian Association, UK.

- Afghans in Crisis Network, Spain.

- Anne Bathily, independent consultant on migration.

- Association for Legal Intervention, Poland.

- Asylex, Switzerland.

- CARA (Council for At-Risk Academics)

- Caritas Europe.

- Caritas Belgium.

- Caritas Germany.

- Caritas Italy.

- Caritas Salford, UK.

- Human rights lawyer from Belarus (currently in Lithuania).

- EUAA, Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission (RST&HA) Network.

- European Commission.

- Global Compass, Student at risk programme.

- ICMC.

- ICORN (cities of refuge).

- International Rescue Committee.

- KK, Afghan refugee awaiting humanitarian visa to France.

- Migration Yorkshire.

- PICUM.

- UNHCR Geneva.

- UNHCR Representation for the Nordic and Baltic countries (UNHCR RNB).

- Zvezda Vankova, Lund University.

Survey information received from the Netherlands; Poland; Switzerland.

Other information:

Presentations and questions during ICORN networking event in Brussels in March 2023 and the ECRE Annual General Conference in June 2023.

Annex II. Bibliography

Caritas Europe and ICMC Europe, *Fostering Community Sponsorship Across Europe*, 2019, available at: https://www.caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Share-publication-2019-EN.pdf

Commission Recommendation (EU) 2017/1803 of 3 October 2017 on enhancing legal pathways for persons in need of international protection (notified under document C(2017) 6504), available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1803&from=EN.

Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1364 of 23 September 2020 on legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways, available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a028193e-03ad-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1/language-en.

ECRE, AIDA Database, available at: https://asylumineurope.org/.

ECRE, Protection in Europe, Safe and Legal Access Channels, 2017, available at: https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Policy-Papers-01.pdf.

ECRE and others, *Time to get resettlement moving!* 2021, available at: https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Joint-NGO-Statement-Time-to-Get-Resettlement-Moving.pdf.

EMN

EUAA, *Asylum report 2022*, available at: https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-knowledge/asylum-report.

European Commission, *Fifteenth Report on Relocation and Resettlement*, 2017, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0465.

European Commission, *Final report, Study on the feasibility and added value of sponsorship schemes as a possible pathway to safe channels for admission to the EU, including resettlement*, 2018, available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1dbb0873-d349-11e8-9424-01aa75ed71a1.

European Migration Network [EMN], *Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Programmes in Europe – what works?* 2016, available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/page/emn-publishes-eu-report-resettlement-and-humanitarian-admission-programmes-europe-what-works_en.

European Parliament Briefing, Resettlement, EU Framework, 2019, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/589859/EPRS_BRI(2016)58985 9_EN.pdf.

European Parliament, *Humanitarian Visas, European Added Value Assessment Accompanying the European Parliament's legislative own initiative report (Rapporteur: Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar)*, 2019, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/150782/eprs-study-humanitarian-visas.pdf.

European Resettlement Network [ERN], *Expanding Solutions for Refugees: Complementary Pathways of Admission to Europe*, 2019, available at:

March 2024

https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/ERN%2BFinal-Study-A-strategic-assessment-of-expanding-complementary-pathways-of-admission-to-Europe.pdf.

European Resettlement Network, *Humanitarian Admission Programmes in Europe - Expanding and Increasing Pathways to Protection*, 2018, available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/ERN%2Bscoping-paper-Humanitarian-Admission-Programmes-in-Europe.pdf.

Fratzke S, Belen Zanzuchi M, Hooper K and others*, Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, Opportunities for Growth*, UNHCR and the Migration Policy Institute, September 2021, available at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpie-unhcr_global-mapping-refugee-pathways-final.pdf

Humanitarian corridors*, Humanitarian Corridors: implementation procedures for their extension on a European scale*, : https://www.humanitariancorridor.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/REPORT_ENG_WEB.pdf

Migration Policy Institute [MPI], *Scaling up Resettlement in Europe: The Role of Institutional Peer Support*, 2018, available at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/scaling-refugee-resettlement-europe-role-institutional-peer-support.

Migration Policy Institute [MPI], *Using Evidence to Improve Refugee Resettlement: A monitoring and evaluation road map*, 2020, available at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/refugee-resettlement-monitoring-evaluation-road-map.

OECD, UNHCR, *Safe Pathways for Refugees II, OECD-UNHCR Study on Third-country Solutions for Refugees: Admissions for family reunification, education, and employment,. purposes between 2010 and 2019*, available at: https://www.oecd.org/migration/UNHCR-OECD-safe-pathways-for-refugees.pdf and https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/UNHCR%20Safe%20Pathways%20for%20Refugees%20II%20Web-version001.pdf

OECD, UNHCR, Safe Pathways for Refugees III, OECD-UNHCR Study on Third-country Solutions for Refugees: Admissions for family reunification, education, and employment,. purposes between 2010 and 2019, available at

Sirkku Varjonen, Amanda Kinnunen, Juho-Matti Paavola, Farid Ramadan, Mika Raunio, Joanne van Selm, Tuuli Vilhunen, *Student, Worker or Refugee? How complementary pathways for people in need of international protection work in practice*, Publications of the Government's Analysis, Assessment and Research Activities, 2021:60, Finnish Government, November 2021, available at: https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163604.

Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Voies d'admission complémentaires en Suisse : analyse du Secrétariat d'État aux migrations (SEM) (German, French and Italian).

UNHCR *Family Reunification*, December 2018, https://www.unhcr.org/neu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/10/Familiestogether_20181203-FINAL.pdf

UNHCR, *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook and Country Chapters*, 2018, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/resettlement/4a2ccf4c6/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-country-chapters.html

March 2024

Annex III: Overview of key complementary pathways in the EU, Norway, Switzerland and the UK

Country	Community sponsorship	Education pathway	Employment pathway	Extended family pathways	City based programmes	Humanitarian or other visa
AT		Global campus for human rights (placements across Europe – now ended)				
BE		EU Passworld (pilot) The Global Platform for Syrian Students in Belgium	DT4E Jordan and Lebanon (pilot)		ICORN member city	
BG						
CY						
CZ						National humanitarian scheme for internally displaced persons in Iraqi Kurdistan (now closed- see EMN inform) National humanitarian scheme for persecuted and vulnerable persons from Belarus (now

					closed - see EMN inform)
DE	NEST – New Start in a Team additional 200 places in 2023.	Scholars at Risk		Federal level programmes for Syrians eg Berlin	ICORN member city	Afghans at risk
DK					ICORN member city	
EE						
EL						Evacuation programme for Afghan women (now closed)
ES	Pilot with the Basque Country; the Generalitat Valenciana; the Autonomous Community of Navarre (see EMN inform)	Afghans in Crisis network			ICORN member city	Operation Antigone evacuation from Afghanistan (see EMN inform)
FI					ICORN member city	
FR		UNIV'R project			ICORN member city	Humanitarian corridors 2016-2022 (see EMN inform) visas for asylum
HR						
HU						
IE		EU Passworld (pilot)	DT4E Jordan and Lebanon (pilot)	Afghan admissions programme (now closed)		
IT	Yes, supporting the humanitarian corridor programme.	University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE) in Italy EU Passworld (pilot)		Protocol 3 of the community sponsorship programme with		Humanitarian corridor

				Caritas Italy and partners		
LT		Middle East Scholars				Humanitarian visa – LT Embassy Minsk
LV						
LU						
MT						
NL					ICORN member city	
PL					ICORN member city	
PT		The Global Platform for Syrian Students in Portugal	DT4E Jordan and Lebanon (pilot)			
RO						
SE					ICORN member city	
SI					ICORN member city	
SK					ICORN member city	
CH						Humanitarian visa from a Swiss embassy or consulate
NO					ICORN member city	
UK		CARA Council for At-Risk Academics	DT4E Jordan and Lebanon UK NHS refugee nurses		ICORN member city	Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas Visa