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Complementary pathways are safe and regulated avenues that complement resettlement programmes by providing a lawful stay in a third country where international protection needs are met. They are additional to resettlement and do not substitute the protection afforded to refugees under the international protection regime. Programmes are diverse by nature and can benefit refugees in a variety of ways depending on their specific objectives.975

Humanitarian admission programmes are complementary pathways to international protection through which a country, following a referral from the EUAA, UNHCR or another relevant international body, admits third-country nationals or stateless persons from a third country to which they have been forcibly displaced to the territory of the Member State. The selected refugees are granted international protection or a humanitarian status under national law which provides them rights and obligations equivalent to those of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, which are defined in the recast QD, Articles 20 to 34.976Different practices prevail at the national level in the implementation of these programmes and new developments emerged in 2023.

In December 2023, the Italian Ministry of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation signed a new memorandum of understanding with the National Institute for the Promotion of the Health of Migrant Populations (INMP), UNHCR, the Community of Saints Egidio, Federation of Evangelical Churches and ARCI to admit 1,500 refugees living in Libya over a 3-year period. The agreement is a continuation of a previous one, but with the addition of 500 more beneficiaries.977

With the continued security situation in Afghanistan, EU+ countries continued to admit Afghan nationals who were evacuated from Afghanistan or had fled to neighbouring countries, such as Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye.

As a general trend in the EU, countries transitioned from emergency-led evacuations to mainstreaming various programmes, including resettlement, humanitarian admissions, humanitarian corridors, humanitarian visas and family reunification programmes. Nonetheless, evacuation operations continued to be used by some countries.

As in previous years, the highest number of Afghans were resettled through the German Federal Admission Programme for Afghans, which has been implemented since October 2022 and intends to admit 1,000 Afghan nationals per month.[978]Ad hoc programmes were also introduced in 2022 and 2023 by some German landers, for instance the Hessian State Admission Programme (LAP) which came into force in June 2023 for the family reunification of Afghan nationals already living in Hesse.[979]Similar programmes were also launched by the Free State of Thuringia (until December 2023),[980]the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen[981]and the Land of Berlin which introduced a joint programme for the family reunification of Afghan, Syrian and Iraqi refugees with relatives in Berlin (valid until December 2024).[982]

Co-financed by AMIF, in May 2023 Italy initiated a new pilot project, Work Corridors, to transfer Afghans under the EU Passworld Project. The humanitarian corridor was carried out in collaboration with Caritas, which was responsible for the identification of beneficiaries, their transfers and the provision of material reception in Italy; and Consorzio Communitas, which acted as a contact point with companies, job training and tutoring.[983]

In France, the UNIV'R pilot project was extended in 2023 to include non-French speaking refugees and Afghan refugee women. This pilot project was launched with UNHCR and the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) in 2022. It aims to provide higher education to refugees students who are under the protection of UNHCR in a third country. French authorities underlined that the programme had so far benefited 38 refugee students and had been well received by all stakeholders.

Community sponsorship programmes

Community-based sponsorship programmes are gaining ground as an alternative to support refugees arriving to EU+ countries. This type of programme allows individuals, private companies and organisations to directly engage in the financial, emotional and practical support of refugees who are resettled in their communities.[984]

In January 2023, the Finnish Red Cross launched a community-sponsored pilot project to promote the integration of refugees who have arrived in municipalities as quota refugees. The European-funded project, which does not add an additional quota, aims to improve outcomes by involving communities in the integration process of resettled refugees. The programme will run until the end of 2025. Around 15 municipalities in Finland have already been involved.[985]

Alongside the Community Sponsorship programme, which has been running in Belgium since 2020, Fedasil launched in 2023 an initiative to find new partners to provide reception support, including housing, to resettled refugees. These new partnership models are open to any non-profit association, city or municipality with experience in welcoming refugees. Various partnerships were signed in 2023, and the process of finding new partners continued in 2024. [986]

In France, the Humanitarian Corridors in Lebanon with faith-based organisations (Sant’Egidio and Federation d’Entraide Protestante) have been maintained in 2023 despite some operational challenges due to the security situation in Lebanon.

After its 3-year pilot phase, the Neustart im Team (NesT) programme in Germany became permanent as of January 2023.[987]The programme is in addition to governmental humanitarian admission programmes, which offered up to 200 places in 2023, with increases planned for subsequent years. The NesT programme is based on support provided by sponsorship groups (consisting of at least individuals) who jointly finance and provide accommodation, as well as non-material settlement and integration support to refugees participating in the programme.[988]

BAMF's Research Centre published its evaluation of the pilot phase of the NesT programme in June 2023.[989]The evaluation focuses on the recruitment and schooling of sponsors, the matching process between refugees and sponsoring teams, the first year after arrival in Germany, and the relationship between refugees and sponsors. Positive findings included the high commitment of sponsorship groups to support refugees and the willingness of most refugees to participate in the programme despite its voluntary nature. Challenges were also identified, such as the provision of housing by sponsorship groups and the long waiting periods for sponsorship groups up to the arrival of the refugees.

A multi-stakeholder pledge was announced at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. The pledge will contribute towards an increase in the number, scale and diversity of community sponsorship programmes which are implemented globally and will enhance refugee integration through strengthened communities.[990]Several EU+ countries were a part of this commitment, for instance the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR) through the programme ComUnidade[991]and the Irish government which pledged to continue supporting community sponsorship programmes with civil society organisations, such as Open Community, the Irish Red Cross, the Irish Refugee Council and Nasc.[992]

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