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4.16.4 Community Sponsorship Programmes

While resettlement continues to be the most important method for countries to provide protection to refugees in vulnerable situations, community sponsorship programmes have expanded in the last years as a new pathway to protection. Under these programmes, local communities and civil society organisations work together to provide resettled refugees with support in all administrative and integration procedures, such as access to rights, health care, schooling, language learning and job integration.

Since 2015, there has been significant interest in community-based programmes in Europe, with several pilot and permanent programmes being implemented. Some countries continued with already-established initiatives; however, only a few refugees were resettled in 2020, for instance only six refugees arrived under the Irish Community Sponsorship programme and three refugees as a part of “New start in the team – NesT” programme in Germany.

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 were delivered and 520 beneficiaries of the corridors arrived in France. In 2021, the agreement was renewed for the next 3 years with the aim of granting asylum visas to 600 beneficiaries of this scheme.

Other countries launched new schemes in 2020, such as the new community sponsorship programme in the *Comunidad Valenciana*, managed by the Spanish Secretary for Migration with the collaboration of the regional government and local civil society organisations.[1261]

Many countries have implemented evaluations of the participation of local communities in the integration of resettled refugees. For instance, in Finland, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Employment and Economy launched an initiative to evaluate the role of communities in integration activities carried by national authorities to resettled refugees.[lxxi],[1262] The evaluation is part of a study which will be completed by May 2021 and the results of which will help to develop possible future pilot projects. Likewise, the UNHCR Representation for the Nordic and Baltic Countries published an assessment of the possibility to develop a community sponsorship programme in Sweden and analyse the challenges and potential benefits of these programmes.[1263]

[lxxi] Currently the involvement of communities in the integration of resettled refugees consists of selecting groups of five people from the community who will support groups of refugees with administrative procedures, language courses, health assistance and other practical arrangements, for a duration of one to two years.

[1261] Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations | Ministerio de Inclusion, Seguridad Social y Migraciones. (2020, October 20). *La secretaria de Estado de Migraciones cierra el acto inaugural del programa de reasentamiento de refugiados por Patrocinio Comunitario en Valencia*. https://prensa.inclusion.gob.es/WebPrensaInclusion/noticias/inmigracionemigracion/detalle/3918

[1262] Ministry of the Interior | Sisäministeriö. (2020, December 3). *Yhteisöjen roolia kiintiöpakolaisten kotoutumisen edistämisessä selvitetään - Sisäministeriö [Role of communities in promoting integration of quota refugees to be investigated]* . https://intermin.fi/-/yhteisojen-roolia-kiintiopakolaisten-kotoutumisen-edistamisessa-selvitetaan

[1263] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (February 2020). *A Study on the Potential for Introducing a Community Sponsorship Program for Refugees in Sweden: Scoping report prepared for UNHCR's Representation for the Nordic and Baltic Countries* . https://www.unhcr.org/neu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/12/UNHCR-Study-on-Community-Sponsorship-Program-in-Sweden.pdf

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