Practical Guide:

Mobilising Municipal Councils and Other Local Participants in the Design and Implementation of Sponsorship Programmes

December 2024

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Introduction

    a. **Context**

This practical guide on mobilising municipal councils and other local participants in the design and implementation of sponsorship programmes for individuals in need of international protection has been developed as part of the COMplementary pathways nETwork (COMET) project.

COMET is a European pilot project funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). It brings together 14 stakeholders from seven European countries and is coordinated by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia, FCEI). Through the coordination of safe pathways, this project aims to establish a transnational network to increase by 130 the number of spaces in Europe available for individuals in need of international protection who transit through the Central Mediterranean route. The project also promotes the exchange of best practice among various participants to develop and optimise shared tools and procedures, maximising opportunities for both refugees and host communities while improving the response capacities of municipal authorities and other local participants.

The participation of the Fons Català as a project partner is linked to the Món Local Refugi Campaign, launched in September 2015 with the support of over 300 municipal councils, supramunicipal bodies, and citizen campaigns. Its objective is to support a local response to the refugee reception crisis. Through its involvement in the COMET project, the Fons Català aims to promote the defence of the human rights of forcibly displaced individuals by advocating for safe pathways led by local municipalities. Within the framework of development cooperation, refugee protection must be based on principles of equality and protection, as well as shared responsibility and solidarity, not only with the affected population but also with the countries of first asylum.

The COMET project enables the Fons Català to work towards building capacities and creating opportunities to implement multi-sectoral sponsorship programmes in Catalonia, with an emphasis on a gender- and human rights-based approach. For the Fons Català, it is essential to support a decentralised reception model, as municipalities are at the forefront of delivering essential local public services. Therefore, they should play an active role in programme design, in identifying individuals to be hosted within the municipality, and in mobilising and diversifying sponsors to ensure the successful execution of projects. Localisation is a core principle of humanitarian action and solidarity, and working on how to receive individuals requiring international protection from a municipal perspective strengthens the capacities of both host communities and forcibly displaced individuals.

In the current context of forced displacement, responses must be collaborative, multidimensional, sustainable, equitable, inclusive, anti-racist, and feminist. For solutions to be effective, they must address the root causes of displacement. This requires involving communities with lived experiences of forced displacement and statelessness, as well as engaging frontline participants such as local authorities, civil society, and humanitarian and social organisations.

    a. **Objectives of the guide**

Developed by Fons Català in collaboration with the CCAR, this guide addresses the need identified during the execution of the COMET project to systematise the experience gained and provide a practical resource for municipal governments and other local participants interested in participating in sponsorship pathways for forcibly displaced individuals. This effort aligns with the overarching goal of fostering innovative and effective solutions that link local governments, civil society, host communities, and individuals with lived experiences of forced displacement in promoting legal and safe pathways for international protection.

The insights gained from lessons learned during the implementation of the COMET project and the identification of opportunities to enhance social and political advocacy for access to legal and safe pathways shape most of the specific objectives of this document. These objectives include:

- Analysing the role of various local participants in mobilising the resources to implement sponsorship programmes.
- Providing a comprehensive, practical guide for learning, development, and the implementation of sponsorship programmes supported and co-led by local governments.
- Offering information on processes and practical tools to maximise the efficiency of time and resources dedicated to sponsorship initiatives.
- Promoting the implementation of best practice for sponsorship programmes and other complementary pathway initiatives by local policymakers.
- Creating opportunities to strengthen existing local networks and establish new ones among municipal authorities, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, and communities with lived experiences of forced displacement.
- Building capacity and serving as a basic resource for local administrations to train other partners and local governments in municipal cooperation exchanges.
- Promoting peer learning, the exchange of knowledge, and collaboration among local governments across the country and Europe, host communities, programme beneficiaries, the private sector, and other interested parties.
- Extracting lessons and insights to improve support for forcibly displaced individuals.

b. Methodology and structure

This guide was prepared using a qualitative methodology aimed at incorporating diverse perspectives and ensuring the feasibility and utility of its contents. The information presented was collected by reviewing documents and reports related to the promotion of safe pathways to international protection, as well as through the analysis of practical experiences shared by the entities that make up the COMET project consortium. Interviews and consultations were conducted with relevant stakeholders, including specialists in the fields of migration and asylum. Through the coding of the gathered information, areas that can be shared as best practice have been identified, and common challenges have been highlighted. This analysis has enabled the formulation of recommendations deemed relevant for advancing the effective participation of municipal governments and other local participants in the development of safe pathway projects. These basic guidelines are intended to serve as a starting point for municipalities and other participants who would like to contribute to sustainable solutions for the needs of forcibly displaced individuals, adapting planning to fit their local context.

The municipalist approach applied in the development of this guide aims to highlight the capacity of local governments to foster collaboration among different sectors and empower all involved parties to optimise and adapt mechanisms for complementary and safe pathways. Sharing the knowledge and tools identified through the COMET project in this guide can strengthen capacities and improve the quality of local reception programmes via safe pathways for international protection.

2. Safe and legal pathways

a. Context

In recent years, Europe has become a destination for thousands of forcibly displaced individuals seeking refuge. Unfortunately, many have been compelled to opt for increasingly dangerous migration routes due to the fortification and securitisation of European borders. In 2023, the European Union (EU) experienced a rise in the number of asylum applicants, reaching a total of 1,129,800 individuals—the highest figure recorded since 2015, when the Syrian conflict erupted. This represented a 17% increase compared to the previous year. The main EU countries receiving asylum applications were Germany (329,050), France (166,880), Spain (163,220), Italy (135,820), and Greece (64,220).

Of the total number of applications, 340,225 were submitted by women, who are often more visibly subjected to violence during migratory journeys. Additionally, 41,525 unaccompanied minors applied for international protection. Over the past year, 292,985 migrants and refugees were recorded arriving in the EU through irregular means of entry, 91% of whom travelled by sea (267,000). These include three Mediterranean routes and the Atlantic route to Europe through the Canary Islands.

In response to this reality, the concept of Safe Pathways (SP) has increasingly gained traction as an essential alternative to ensure that individuals can access international protection safely through the application of the external dimension of the right to asylum. However, despite being widely promoted by international organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the EU itself, the effective implementation and expansion of safe pathways faces numerous challenges, particularly within the EU. Here, the international mobility of individuals from the Global South has been increasingly restricted in a context heavily influenced by the rise of far-right rhetoric and a shift in policies for migration management increasingly focused on deterring arrivals and criminalising migration and asylum. In 2023, the same year that record numbers of arrivals were reported, only 12,567 individuals were resettled across the entire EU.

b. Definitions of "safe pathways"

Before expanding on this section, it is important to address the terminology used in this report. Language not only describes reality but also has the power to shape and transform it. Our use of words does not merely narrate events—it is also an action, a position we take. For this reason, the term "legal and safe pathways", used by various researchers, international organisations, and EU institutions, takes on particular relevance. This concept, which lacks a universally established definition (as noted by several authors[1]) refers to mechanisms that allow refugees

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[1] Boza, D. (2024). Informe de bones pràctiques en matèria de reassentament i corredors humanitaris. Coordinació: CCAR i CER-M. CCAR, October 2024.

and applicants for international protection to reach a territory without risking their lives. However, the use of the word "legal" implies that some routes are illegal, creating a potentially morally questionable distinction.

The approach used in this guide is based on the premise that all routes are valid and that the focus should not be on the path chosen or the administrative situation it generates, but rather on the lack of institutional, safe alternatives that enable human mobility for people from certain regions seeking safety and refuge in Europe. With this perspective and the recognition of the transformative power of language in mind, the term "safe pathways" (SP) has been chosen instead of "legal and safe pathways". Besides reflecting the authors' ethical stance, this choice aims to avoid the implicit criminalisation of those who, in the absence of institutional alternatives, are forced to take other routes to ensure their survival. As performative language suggests, words not only describe the world; they also shape it. This guide seeks to foster a discourse that places the dignity and safety of migrants and forcibly displaced persons at its core.

According to UNHCR, safe pathways are legal procedures that offer durable solutions for refugees and other displaced individuals in need of international protection, thus preventing them from being forced to undertake dangerous journeys. The same organisation defines "safe pathways" as mechanisms that may include resettlement programmes—the most well-established tool, targeting individuals already recognised as refugees and in vulnerable situations—or those categorised as "complementary pathways", such as humanitarian admission, humanitarian visas, or community sponsorship, which provide access to international protection. These pathways offer legal and physical security—two essential elements often absent in the journeys of many migrants and refugees to the EU, where they frequently face violence, torture, exploitation, or even death. The aim is to provide an effective and humanitarian response to displaced individuals, ensuring their inclusion in a new country with rights and guarantees. The concept of complementary pathways is still being defined and expanded. While this report does not explore them extensively, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, pathways that seek to facilitate labour mobility and family reunification are also part of this framework.[2]

Meanwhile, the EU has progressively incorporated safe pathways into its regulatory framework. Under the New European Pact on Migration and Asylum (PEMA), the EU approved Regulation (EU) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and Council on 14 May 2024, establishing the EU Framework for Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission, which replaced Regulation (EU) 2021/1147. This new legislation is a step forward in regulating the safe entry of third-country nationals or stateless persons for the purposes of international protection or humanitarian admission. However, it does not impose binding obligations on member states to accept a specific number of individuals. Therefore, states retain the discretion to voluntarily participate, including deciding on the type of admissions, priority regions, or the number of individuals they will resettle.

This reveals that the system is non-obligatory, which weakens it despite its aim to regulate and promote policies for safe entry into the EU, increase the number of resettled individuals, and strengthen the EU's contribution to international humanitarian protection initiatives. The effective implementation of safe pathways in the EU remains subject to tensions between the

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[2] For more information on complimentary pathways, see the corresponding section on the UNHCR website: www.unhcr.org

desire for community-wide coordination and harmonisation and respect for the national sovereignty of member states, a conflict that conditions progress in resettlement and humanitarian admission.

Various types of safe pathways exist; they differ in the kind of protection they provide and the specific needs they address. The main categories of safe pathways, as defined by UNHCR and the EU, are outlined below.

b.1. Resettlement

Resettlement is perhaps the most well-known safe pathway. It involves transferring a refugee from a first asylum country, where they have been registered as a refugee, to a third country that offers permanent protection.[3] UNHCR coordinates this process by identifying the most vulnerable cases that cannot receive adequate protection in the country of first asylum. Resettlement allows refugees to gain legal status in the new country, with access to basic rights such as housing, education, healthcare, and employment.

Resettlement is vital to providing a durable solution for individuals who cannot return to their country of origin or safely settle in the first asylum country. However, this pathway has historically been limited in scope. Despite efforts by the EU and UNHCR, the demand for resettlement far exceeds the number of individuals selected. According to UNHCR, only a small fraction of worldwide refugees is successfully resettled in a third country.

b.2. Complementary pathways

Complementary pathways are mechanisms used in addition to resettlement that provide safe access to international protection for refugees. These mechanisms include humanitarian visas, community sponsorship, humanitarian corridors, labour and educational programmes, and other pathways that facilitate safe international mobility. This concept has been developed in response to the need to expand opportunities for refugees in vulnerable situations, in a global context where resettlement alone is insufficient to address actual needs.[4]

The development of complementary pathways is closely tied to various international regulatory frameworks adopted in recent years to address the growing need for international protection and human mobility. These frameworks include tools such as the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016), the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018), the UNHCR Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (2019) and, at the European level, the New European Pact on Migration and Asylum, specifically the new Regulation on Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission (2024). Although these instruments have laid the groundwork for expanding safe pathways as a means to guarantee protection for forcibly displaced individuals and enable safe mobility, their implementation remains quite limited.

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[3] For more information on the resettlement pathway, see the relevant section of the UNHCR website: www.unhcr.org.

[4] For more information, see the UNHCR document *Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees to Third Countries: Key Considerations.* April 2019.

The COMET project itself is an example of an attempt to implement complementary pathways. Within this initiative, a transnational consortium of participants from Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the Netherlands has promoted employment initiatives, educational initiatives, humanitarian corridors, and community sponsorship to welcome and integrate individuals in need of international protection. As part of this project, each country has designed and developed specific programmes that have facilitated the arrival of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, some countries—such as Catalonia—have faced significant challenges that have hindered the realisation of these plans as initially envisaged.

There is no unified definition of complementary pathways, as they are still evolving and being redefined. However, there is broad consensus on the categories outlined by UNHCR. These pathways can generally be grouped under the following programmes:

Humanitarian visas: Humanitarian visas enable refugees in situations of extreme vulnerability to travel safely to another country where they can apply for international protection. These visas have been used in Europe to allow entry for individuals who cannot safely apply for asylum from their country of origin or a transit country. Examples of countries with humanitarian visa policies include France and Argentina.

France has implemented a system of humanitarian visas to facilitate the entry of refugees from conflict-affected countries such as Lebanon or Jordan, where many forcibly displaced Syrians are located. Through its humanitarian visa programme, France collaborates with humanitarian organisations to identify vulnerable individuals, such as families with dependent children or people with health issues, and ensures their safe access to French territory. Once in France, these individuals receive support from various NGOs and access to housing, education, and healthcare, which promotes quicker and more effective integration. In response to the global refugee crisis, in recent years France has expanded this system, increasing the number of humanitarian visas available.

Meanwhile, Argentina is one of the few countries in Latin America to implement humanitarian visas as part of its "Syria Programme", launched in 2014 in response to the armed conflict in Syria. This programme allows Syrian refugees and their families to obtain humanitarian visas to travel to Argentina and settle there safely. The programme also provides support through civil society and local communities to facilitate their inclusion. Its success has encouraged Argentina to explore extending humanitarian visas to other nationalities affected by conflicts and humanitarian crises, positioning the country as a regional leader in humanitarian and asylum policies.[5]

Humanitarian corridors: Another type of humanitarian pathway is what we refer to as "humanitarian corridors", which allow vulnerable individuals or groups to access a territory without needing to have been first recognised as refugees. Humanitarian corridors are characterised by their ability to act in cases of emergency and sustained vulnerability, both in countries of origin and in transit countries. One of their main features is that they are designed to accommodate groups of beneficiaries rather than isolated, individual cases.

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[5] Boza, D. (2024). Informe de bones pràctiques en matèria de reassentament i corredors humanitaris. Coordination: CCAR and CER-M. CCAR, October 2024.

These corridors are an interesting mechanism because, as highlighted by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), they are an example of legal flexibility in implementing safe routes. They are based on two main approaches: humanitarian visas allowed under Article 25 of the EU Visa Code, which ensure that beneficiaries can safely access European territory while avoiding dangerous routes; and agreements in the form of memorandums of understanding between governments, NGOs, and international organisations to manage transfer and reception. A notable example is Italy, where the government collaborates with organisations like the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI)—the coordinator of the COMET project— to facilitate the arrival of refugees from Lebanon and other conflict zones.

Educational and employment pathways: Some complementary pathways provide opportunities for individuals in need of international protection to access safe countries through educational scholarships or specialised employment integration programmes. These pathways allow refugees to receive academic training or find employment, aiding their inclusion in host countries. In Spain, the NGO ACCEM has led a pilot project in coordination with the national government to receive forcibly displaced Nicaraguans from Costa Rica through a labour mobility pathway. In this framework, a corridor was established to facilitate employment integration in the province of Valladolid in collaboration with a private company that sponsored the individuals. Similarly, various universities in Spain, including the University of Barcelona, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and the University of Lleida, have designed and implemented specific programmes for refugees with higher academic qualifications.

Community sponsorship: This guide seeks to highlight community sponsorship and dedicates a broader section to analysing it. This model involves local communities in the process of receiving and integrating refugees. Unlike resettlement, where the government assumes most of the responsibility, in community sponsorship models local communities, NGOs, and other civil society participants—including municipal governments—work together to receive refugees and help with their integration into local society. This model is inspired by the Canadian approach established in 1978, which grants local communities a fundamental role in supporting and accompanying refugees. This type of safe pathway has gained importance in several European countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Spain.

In this regard, some Spanish autonomous communities have developed pilot sponsorship programmes that have proven successful after their initial phases, despite limitations on the number of people hosted. One notable example is the SOMOS community sponsorship programme in Navarra, implemented by the General Directorate of Migration Policies since 2021. Based on collaboration between the government of Navarra, the central government, municipalities like Tudela, and civil society, this programme provides citizens with the opportunity to directly participate in hosting refugees from countries like Lebanon. The San Francisco Javier Civil Foundation, headquartered in Tudela, coordinates the project with the support of local groups of voluntary sponsors who offer financial assistance, psychosocial and social support to help refugee families integrate into the municipality.[6]

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[6] For more information on the SOMOS programme, see *Resolución de 23 de abril de 2024, de la Secretaría General Técnica, por la que se publica el Convenio con el Gobierno de Navarra, el Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados en España, el Ayuntamiento de Tudela y la Fundación Civil San Francisco Javier, para desarrollar en la Comunidad Foral de Navarra un Programa de Patrocinio Comunitario en materia de acogida e integración de personas beneficiarias de protección internacional*. Published in BOE 105, 30 April 2024.

Another notable case is the Auzolana II programme in the Basque Country, a pilot initiative launched in 2019 by the General Secretariat for Human Rights, Coexistence, and Cooperation of the Basque Government. This programme has received five Syrian families who came from Jordan, hosting them in various municipalities such as Bilbao, Arrigorriaga, Portugalete, Andoain, and Vitoria-Gasteiz. In these municipalities, groups of local volunteers work with organisations such as Cáritas and Fundación Social Ignacio Ellacuría to facilitate the families' reception and integration, providing them with housing, cultural and linguistic orientation, and help finding employment. Auzolana II is also considered an educational and awareness-raising tool, as it actively involves Basque citizens in the reception process and helps combat existing prejudice against migrants and forcibly displaced persons.[7]

Throughout the COMET project, several challenges related to community sponsorship have been identified. One of the main challenges is ensuring that sponsors remain committed in the long term, as the integration process can be demanding and require significant financial and human resources. To address this issue, programmes have implemented mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and support for sponsor groups, providing them with legal guidance, training in psycho-emotional management, and resources to facilitate cohabitation. Coordination with public institutions is also essential to ensuring that individuals and families involved in the programmes have access to basic services such as registration, healthcare, and schooling for minors, avoiding excessive bureaucracy that could delay or complicate their integration process. A key aspect in the development of community sponsorship is the active participation of local communities in providing emotional, social, and material support. This fosters mutual understanding and intercultural recognition, helping to reduce prejudice, combat stereotypes, and promote long-term social cohesion.

In Catalonia, there are other interesting experiences where projects have been implemented to temporarily relocate at-risk human rights defenders through public-private collaboration. One example is the Catalan Programme for Human Rights Defenders (Programa Català de Persones Defensores de Drets Humans, or PCPDDH),[8] which aims to offer protection and comprehensive care for human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk due to their advocacy activities. This is achieved through temporary six-month stays in Catalonia and support for their return. The initiative is promoted by the Government of Catalonia and led by the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD). The collaborating entity is CCAR, which manages the programme's operational and budgetary aspects. Another key partner is the Sant Cugat City Council, which provides financial and technical support to the project, as one of the reception facilities is

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[7] For more information on the Auzolana II programme, see *Resolución de 14 de julio de 2023, de la Secretaría General Técnica, por la que se publica la Adenda de prórroga al Convenio entre la Dirección General de Integración y Atención Humanitaria, la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco, el Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados y las entidades sociales Cáritas Diocesana de Bilbao, Cáritas Diocesana de Vitoria, Cáritas Diocesana de San Sebastián y Fundación Social Ignacio Ellacuria, para desarrollar en Euskadi una experiencia piloto de patrocinio comunitario Auzolana II en materia de acogida e integración de personas beneficiarias de protección internacional.* Published in BOE 174, 22 July 2023.

[8] For more information on the PCPDDH, see the relevant section of the website of the Government of Catalonia: www.cooperaciocatalana.gencat.cat

located in the municipality. Additionally, various Catalan organisations play an active role by presenting HRDs as candidates.

In this regard, in addition to providing financial support, once the HRDs have been selected the municipality participates in coordination spaces with ACCD and CCAR, as well as with the supporting organisations that are part of Catalonia's grassroots social and organisational network. The municipal government also plays a key role in expediting access to all municipal resources to facilitate the HRD's reception throughout their stay, from assistance with administrative procedures to more recreational activities and networking with the social and community fabric of the municipality.

Another innovative initiative in Catalonia involving the reception of individuals in need of international protection is the Oportunitat500 project.[9] This initiative was driven by the Associació de Micropobles de Catalunya (Association of Micro-Villages of Catalonia) as part of the Support Programme for the Implementation of Active Employment Policies (SOC - MICROMUNICIPIS). Its primary aim was to promote the reception and inclusion of migrants and refugees in municipalities with fewer than 500 inhabitants in Catalonia, fostering their sustainable settlement and gradual integration. The project is based on two main pillars: the employment of participants through work contracts and training, and their social inclusion in local communities.

This pilot project is particularly interesting due to the collaboration between various participants and the decentralisation of reception efforts. Key participants include the Associació de Micropobles de Catalunya, which was responsible for coordinating and overseeing the project's execution. At the government level, the Directorate General of Migration, Refuge, and Anti-Racism of the Government of Catalonia (DGMRA) provided technical support and connected with territorial services, while the town councils of the small municipalities offered housing and employment. NGOs also contributed by identifying and preparing the refugees. Notably, the protagonists played an active role by proposing themselves as candidates to take on this new challenge. Finally, the Public Employment Service of Catalonia (SOC) was another crucial participant, as it provided the funding for the project.

The Oportunitat500 project also faced several challenges during its implementation, particularly involving the mobilisation of participants, ensuring their effective integration into local communities, and the sustainability of the model. One of the main difficulties was overcoming preconceived notions about rural life. Many migrants and refugees interested in the programme held stereotypical views of small villages, often associating them with a lack of job opportunities or basic services. This made it challenging to attract potential participants, especially those from urban backgrounds. Furthermore, the professional and personal expectations of some individuals raised questions about the project's sustainability, particularly regarding long-term employment and opportunities for professional growth.

In terms of community integration, another significant challenge was building strong connections between participants and the local communities. Despite efforts to foster social cohesion, initial resistance was observed in some cases among the local population, driven by prejudice or a lack of understanding of the refugees' circumstances. This required substantial

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[9] For more information on the project, see the corresponding report: Associació de Micropobles de Catalunya. Sectorial d'Atenció a les Persones. Projecte Oportunitat500. September 2023.

investment in guidance and awareness-raising activities to overcome these barriers and ensure a harmonious coexistence. At the same time, structural limitations in small municipalities (such as a lack of suitable housing or basic services) posed an additional challenge for town councils and social organisations involved in the project.

Another challenging area is the job market. In some cases, there was not a complete match between the professional profiles of the participants and the specific labour needs of the small villages; this limited opportunities for employment. Furthermore, in some cases, the need for more specialised technical training for certain jobs further delayed the integration process. Finally, a structural challenge has been the continuity and sustainability of the project. The heavy reliance on public funding, primarily from SOC, creates uncertainty about the programme's long-term viability. Despite these challenges, the project has shown a strong capacity for fostering collaboration between various stakeholders, adapting to the circumstances, implementing innovative strategies, and promoting positive narratives about life in small villages.

3. Identification of key participants

a. Governments

States: In this section, Spain is used as an example of the role of state governments. In this context, the central government plays a fundamental role in defining, managing, and supervising safe pathways, particularly regarding resettlement via its National Resettlement Plan (PNR). Nevertheless, in recent years it has also begun participating in the development of pilot projects for complementary pathways such as labour mobility corridors, community sponsorship, and evacuations. Various ministries, general directorates, and service directorates hold significant responsibilities concerning the regulation of the state system of reception and international protection. Key participants include the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (MISSM), specifically the Sub-Directorate General for International Protection Programmes of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the Directorate-General for the Management of the Reception System for International and Temporary Protection (DGGSAPIT).

Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is involved in managing and issuing visas, including humanitarian or limited territorial validity visas, under Article 25 of the European Visa Code. It also handles the necessary documentation and facilitates the safe transfer of refugees to Spanish territory. The Ministry of the Interior participates through the Directorate-General for International Protection (DGPI), responsible for processing and managing procedures related to international protection, statelessness, and temporary protection. The Directorate-General of Police handles initial identification processes. The Ministry of the Interior also oversees the functions of the Office of Asylum and Refuge (OAR), manages institutional representation in national and international organisations, ensures interministerial coordination, and enforces legislation such as the Dublin Regulation (EU 604/2013). The DGPI processes international protection, statelessness, and temporary protection cases, including border applications, and chairs the Interministerial Commission for Asylum and Refuge (CIAR).

All three ministries play an essential role in resettlement plans and maintain agreements with UNHCR and the IOM, as well as with participants from other countries involved in resettlement and complementary pathway programmes. They also manage bilateral and multilateral agreements enabling the implementation of these pathways.

Regional governments: The role of regional and autonomous governments is illustrated here using Spain as an example. Depending on their assigned roles and institutional powers, some programmes managed by autonomous communities or regional governments are developed within the framework of resettlement obligations signed by the state, leaving little room for additional contributions. This can restrict regional governments to secondary roles. For instance, in initiatives led by the Basque Country and Navarra, the refugee selection process has primarily been managed by the central government and UNHCR, with limited involvement from the autonomous communities during this initial phase. Autonomous communities such as Catalonia, through its Directorate-General for Migration and Refuge (DGMR) and the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD), can play a vital role in implementing safe pathways—but at present, this is inevitably done in collaboration with the central state. Under the current distribution of powers, autonomous communities can assume a significant role from the outset by deploying Catalonia's cooperation efforts in various countries of origin and transit for migrants and refugees. These efforts take advantage of relationships with bilateral and multilateral organisations and continue through the reception and inclusion phases, ensuring that beneficiaries receive the support they need through social services and other resources. Another key participant in Catalonia that depends on the DGMR is the Committee for the Reception of Refugees (CAPR), established in 2015 as an advisory, participatory, and coordinating body between Catalonia's public administration and the social entities and organisations working on the reception of individuals in need of international protection. Given its mandate, CAPR should play a pivotal role in structuring initiatives such as community sponsorship, as it brings together a range of participants.[10]

Municipalities: Local administrations are responsible for providing most of the essential services that facilitate the reception and inclusion of individuals hosted through safe pathway programmes, such as access to registration, education, healthcare, or housing. Additionally, they are tasked with coordinating resources at the local level, often collaborating with NGOs and other organisations to ensure that the needs of migrants and refugees are adequately met. As a result, municipalities are key participants in the implementation of reception and social inclusion policies.

Municipal governments also play a role in organising community activities that help break down cultural barriers and foster coexistence between forcibly displaced individuals and local communities. As outlined in this guide or the report Recommendations for the Design and Implementation of Safe Pathways through Municipalism,[11] developed as part of the COMET project, local administrations have the capacity to participate in the development of complementary reception and inclusion programmes alongside state initiatives. They may also implement specific programmes for the temporary relocation of human rights defenders, including language support, labour and training advice, and social, legal, and psychosocial assistance. These programmes are crucial to ensuring successful pathways for individuals in need of international protection and other vulnerable groups. In the case of Catalonia, municipalities have become indispensable on the global stage due to their ability to address local needs directly. Participation in networks such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Ciutats Defensores dels Drets Humans (Cities Defending Human Rights), and the European

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[10] For more information on the functions of the CAPR, see *Acord GOV/151/2015, de 22 de setembre, pel qual es crea el Comitè per a l'Acollida de les Persones Refugiades*.
[11] *Recommendations for the Design and Implementation of Safe Pathways Through Municipalism*. Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament, 2024.

Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) clearly demonstrates how municipalities collaborate by sharing resources and best practice to tackle common challenges from a local perspective and with a global outlook.

Supramunicipal entities: Supramunicipal entities are institutions that are often overlooked when designing or implementing safe pathways. In the case of Catalonia, entities such as regional councils (*consells comarcals*), provincial governments, or the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona fall under this category. These institutions can play a crucial role, particularly in the establishment of humanitarian corridors or public-private sponsorship programmes, by coordinating resources, supporting municipal governments, and ensuring a coherent and sustainable implementation of these policies on a broader territorial level. One of the main roles of supramunicipal entities is territorial coordination, acting as an intermediary between municipalities and the Government of Catalonia to manage shared resources such as housing or social services, optimise efforts, and improve the effectiveness of actions.

Moreover, supramunicipal entities are responsible for managing services that can have a significant impact on the reception of migrants and refugees, such as transport, occupational training, or planning housing, which are essential for social and economic inclusion. They can also manage specific infrastructures like reception centres or training facilities that serve multiple municipalities within the same region. Additionally, they play an important role in providing technical and administrative support to municipalities, including coordination with specialised NGOs and training municipal staff involved in these initiatives.

Another notable role of supramunicipal entities is political representation and advocacy. These institutions can act as intermediaries between municipalities and the Catalan or Spanish Government, ensuring that the needs of municipalities are taken into account in regional and national policies. They can lead regional awareness-raising initiatives to encourage the involvement of civil society, promote participation in public-private sponsorship programmes, and organise training activities and spaces for dialogue to involve local groups, businesses, and the general public.

Finally, supramunicipal entities can play an important role in financial and logistical support, as they can co-finance municipal or regional projects, ensure resources for the initial reception and inclusion of the individuals using the pathways, and channel European or regional funds to support local initiatives. All of this can be institutionalised through master plans and annual plans for international cooperation, where human mobility is one of the strategic areas, and where they establish lines of action for safe pathways.

b. NGOs

NGOs play a central role in the implementation of safe pathways, providing a combination of specialised technical, financial, and human resources to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of programmes, as well as to complement and expand the capacities of municipal, regional, or central governments. From a human rights-based perspective, they ensure that individuals receive comprehensive care that not only covers their basic needs but also promotes their effective inclusion once the project is over.

As a result, NGOs play a crucial role in ensuring that individuals in need of international protection not only have access to basic services such as housing, healthcare, or education, but

also receive personalised care. They provide legal, social, and psychosocial support to address the emotional impact of forced displacement, helping individuals manage grief, trauma, and the stress that often accompanies these experiences. This support places a strong emphasis on personal empowerment, promoting the autonomy of individuals in their new environment.

At the same time, they assist with access to employment and training opportunities, which are key to social and economic inclusion. Through collaboration with local businesses, educational institutions, and programmes, they work to offer itineraries for accessing employment that are based on individuals' interests and skills. They also promote language and cultural training activities, recognising the importance of these elements in facilitating the transition and fostering a sense of belonging to the new community. Networking with civil society is another fundamental area of their work. NGOs encourage the active participation of citizens in the reception process, primarily through volunteering. Another key aspect is their capacity to coordinate and act as a link between public services and community initiatives. Finally, they carry out awareness-raising activities with the public and other institutions to combat prejudice, stereotypes, and different forms of racism, contributing to the construction of a more inclusive society. For example, Catalonia has a significant number of associations and organisations specialising in the defence of the right to asylum and in providing legal, social, employment, and psychosocial support to individuals in need of international protection.

c. Civil society

In the community or public-private sponsorship model, civil society and local groups play a fundamental role as the principal figures welcoming and supporting programme participants. This approach encourages the active involvement of communities in the shared responsibility of providing opportunities for social inclusion and employment, beyond governmental or institutional intervention.[12]

Nevertheless, this kind of involvement by civil society in Spain has been limited in comparison to countries such as Canada. Local groups, formed by members of civil society, are responsible for providing comprehensive support to programme participants, including social and emotional guidance to facilitate adaptation to their new environment. They also assist forcibly displaced families in accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, and vocational training, as well as helping with administrative procedures, securing housing, and providing logistical support for everyday activities. Similarly, local groups actively work to strengthen social cohesion between newcomers and the host community through networking initiatives. An important aspect of community or public-private sponsorship is the shared responsibility of funding part of the support provided to refugees. Local groups often raise funds through private donations or solidarity campaigns, which are used to provide housing, cover basic needs, and finance training. These funds complement resources that may be provided by government institutions or NGOs.

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[12] For more information on volunteer participation in sponsorship pathways, see the technical report developed within the COMET project: Cortinovis, Roberto. *Supporting Volunteer Engagement in Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways for Refugees and Other People in Need of International Protection.* Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024.

In Catalonia, civil society is often organised to support and accompany refugees, asylum seekers, and rejected asylum applicants through the Mentorship Programme of the Catalan Refugee Programme (PM-PCR).[13] This programme operates across Catalonia, employing mentoring techniques in various provinces and regions. Its primary goal is to build bridges between people connected to international protection who are interested in being mentored, and members of the local community interested in becoming mentors. This collaboration seeks to enhance the integration and well-being of mentees through weekly meetings. From the beginning of the mentoring process, members of civil society who become mentors are tasked with supporting mentees in language learning, job integration, expanding their social networks, and establishing connections within their local area, typically over a period of eight to twelve months. The mentor's role is to create a space for the exchange of knowledge and active listening, sharing resources about the local environment. It is important to note that the PM-PCR complements the support mentees receive from NGOs, and mentors are expected to provide guidance from a position of empathy and emotional support. The core focus of mentoring is the collaborative effort between mentors and mentees to strengthen skills, resources, and overall well-being. Mentors are also committed to receiving support from mentoring professionals and maintaining open communication, sharing any doubts or challenges that may arise during the mentoring process. Mentoring professionals provide assistance, supervision, and support to mentors to ensure effective guidance within the framework of social mentorship. Support is provided at various levels—weekly, monthly, and quarterly—to discuss the mentor-mentee relationship in depth, address challenges, and create opportunities for evaluation. Networking between the CAPR, administrations, organisations responsible for welcoming and supporting individuals linked to international protection, mentees, and mentors is essential and should be strengthened.

d. The private sector

Catalonia boasts a broad and well-established private sector capable of significantly contributing to the implementation of safe pathways, complementing the efforts of the public sector and civil society. The involvement of the private sector can take various forms, from creating employment opportunities to providing financial support and collaborating with inclusion programmes, as well as offering social, community, and workplace guidance. In this context, the private sector encompasses entities ranging from private companies to banks and federations.

One of companies' most significant roles is promoting employment and economic inclusion. They can facilitate access to the job market for individuals in need of international protection through vocational training programmes, direct hiring, and employment grants. A notable example is the collaboration between the NGO Accem, the Spanish Government, and a private company in the province of Valladolid to implement a labour mobility pathway. This programme not only offered job opportunities but also provided training adapted to fit the needs of the local market, enabling effective labour integration for individuals requiring international protection.

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[13] For more information on this mentorship programme, see the relevant section of the website of the Government of Catalonia: www.gencat.cat.

The private sector can also act as a sponsor in resettlement and community sponsorship programmes. Businesses or banks can contribute financial resources to complement public support, address specific needs, or assist with the transportation of individuals to host countries.

e. Individuals with lived experience of forced displacement

Refugees and migrants must play a leading role in their own reception and inclusion processes, acting as key agents in the implementation and success of safe pathways. Far from being mere recipients of protection, they actively contribute to the development of host communities, exercising their rights and participating in the creation of a more inclusive and equitable society. Therefore, from a human rights perspective it is essential that refugees contribute their insights and expertise to the design, evaluation, and improvement of programmes. Their experiences and specific needs serve as a mould for adapting initiatives to ensure that they address real contexts and challenges. As a result, their involvement in consultation spaces or feedback processes is indispensable and critical for enhancing the effectiveness of programmes such as public-private community sponsorships.

Forcibly displaced individuals also play an active role in the social and economic dynamism of host societies. By participating in the labour market, joining community networks, or engaging in projects, they help build more resilient societies, sharing knowledge gained through their life experiences and contributing to cultural diversity. These actions are not merely responses to their needs, but also expressions of their capacity to positively transform their surroundings and strengthen programmes. It is even more valuable if individuals from diverse origins or with migrant backgrounds participate in groups that support resettled individuals. Examples like the Auzolana II programme demonstrate that the active involvement of forcibly displaced persons in the design and implementation of programmes not only enhances the effectiveness of these initiatives; it also empowers these individuals as rights-holders and agents of change. Therefore, their role should not be limited to their inclusion in host societies but should extend to participation in all phases.

4. Efficient resource management for community sponsorship programmes co-designed and co-developed by local governments

In designing and implementing safe pathways for individuals in need of international protection at the municipal level, effective coordination concerning the management of financial resources is required between local public administrations, supramunicipal government institutions, social entities, community-based organisations, faith-based groups, and the private sector. The development of safe pathways in various local European contexts demonstrates that diversifying funding opportunities is essential to ensuring the sustainability and cost-efficiency of projects while reducing potential dependence on funding streams that could compromise their continuity in the face of changes in the positions of institutions or individuals involved.

To ensure proper resource management, it is important to understand possibilities and limitations related to fundraising, mechanisms to ensure sustainability, and tools for monitoring and evaluation. Addressing these factors allows municipalities to establish public-private partnerships for the effective implementation of reception programmes for individuals requiring international protection through sponsorship pathways.

a. Fundraising and resource mobilisation

After conducting an initial analysis of the various parties involved and their roles in the local and supramunicipal context, a crucial next step is to establish strategic alliances with those who can contribute not only to the implementation of programme actions supporting beneficiaries, but also to finding new collaborators and financial resource streams. Promoting economically sustainable models requires recognising that a collaborative process is key to transforming municipal finances.

Experiences from the COMET project highlight the positive participation of faith-based organisations, businesses, sports federations or clubs, educational institutions, and civil society in forming the group driving the implementation of the programme.

Faith-based organisations, whose missions include values such as justice, solidarity, and the goal of serving vulnerable individuals, are well-placed to align their objectives with international obligations to protect forcibly displaced people. They can allocate their own resources to support these individuals, including facilitating access to safe pathways from initial host countries where they often already have teams or communities that can assist in identification, selection, and relocation efforts. Consequently, the role of faith-based organisations extends beyond financial support, as they can also provide material resources and human capital, optimising the funds available for phases involving sponsorship programmes. However, their involvement can also raise concerns from a municipal perspective, particularly regarding neutrality and public perception. To address this, collaborations must be clearly defined in agreements specifying the objectives and limitations of their role, ensuring an inclusive strategy and a neutral participation that respects diversity.

Mobilising **local sports federations or clubs** can also be an effective strategy for raising funds and acquiring resources to implement sponsorship pathways. Their many members and outreach capabilities can help to raise awareness and engage a diverse audience. Using their facilities, clubs and federations can host activities and fundraising campaigns with specific goals, involving individuals with lived experience of forced displacement to ensure that these actions are inclusive and intersectional.

For both sports clubs and the private sector in general, corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a vital role in encouraging participation. Through CSR, businesses can enhance their reputation as stakeholders committed to human rights, development, and community inclusion. Municipal governments can strengthen public-private partnerships by engaging **local businesses** in the design of sponsorship programmes. Besides providing financial support, these businesses can assist beneficiaries in their training and employment integration, run awareness campaigns through existing business networks, and offer access to their services. Involving businesses may also pose challenges, but municipalities can explore incentives (such as tax benefits or other advantages) while raising awareness of the positive economic and social impacts their involvement can generate. Beyond local businesses, opportunities should also be explored for funding from **development banks** or other innovative sources, which can offer direct and flexible financing for actions related to sponsorship pathway implementation.

Additionally, there are significant opportunities to secure funds through participation in **European or international funding calls**. Programmes such as the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); European Social Fund Plus (ESF+); Erasmus+, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme; or Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees (GCF) can provide resources for reception and support through sponsorship pathways for individuals in need of international protection, as well as providing resources for technical support. By participating in consortia, these funding mechanisms offer opportunities to exchange experiences, learn, and develop skills critical to successful programme management. However, engaging in European funding calls requires that gaps in the implemented model be clearly identified, as well as a clear identification of which expenses can be funded. It is also essential to define activities precisely and outline the resources they require.

b. Sustainability

Municipal participation in sponsorship pathways for individuals in need of international protection should not be seen as a project with an expiration date, but as a long-term commitment to promoting and guaranteeing the right to asylum for forcibly displaced communities. Strategic planning and institutionalising actions by embedding them into public policies that enable the implementation of these programmes are key to ensuring their sustainability.

The viability of this public policy depends on the active and effective participation of all participants, including those mentioned above. This collaboration fosters shared responsibility, trust, and adaptability among the parties involved. The multidisciplinary teams formed to carry out these actions should work from an intersectional perspective. Training the members of these working groups so they can, in turn, train new collaborators creates a sustainable system that reduces costs and the strain on intermediary parties. Encouraging participation through recognition and incentives can provide opportunities to implement long-term programmes.
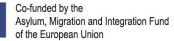
This necessary stability can also be achieved through fiscal decentralisation, promoting multiannual local calls for funding, and designing co-financing models and mechanisms involving public, private, and community sectors. Local public administrations can also provide technical support to other stakeholders involved in implementing the sponsorship pathway, adapting this support to each participant's specific role. It is essential that these mechanisms place civil society and beneficiaries at the centre, ensuring that the identification of needs and capacities is accurate. This approach also enables the design of more effective community engagement and awareness campaigns, ensuring lived experiences are shared with respect, understanding, and commitment from all parties.

One of the primary challenges identified in experiences with sponsorship pathways across Europe is securing and maintaining long-term housing; this can jeopardise programme continuity. In certain local contexts, municipal administrations may have the authority to promote inclusive housing access policies or act as intermediaries between landlords or estate agencies and tenants. They can create specific and innovative incentives in collaboration with other partners to ensure dignified, stable, and affordable housing.

Finally, sustainability can also be enhanced by centralising social, legal, administrative, training, and health resources and services in a single location, following the concept of a one-stop shop. This approach allows for the sharing of resources and costs, optimising processes for identifying needs, assessing capacities, and resolving issues efficiently.

c. Monitoring and evaluation

Incorporating monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into the design and implementation of sponsorship programmes is essential to ensure transparency, efficiency, and accountability. To transform the promotion of safe pathways and dignified reception into municipal public policy, local authorities must standardise processes and include mechanisms for adaptation to address deviations in actions, impacts, or resource management. It is therefore necessary for public administrations—in collaboration with other stakeholders involved in co-designing and co-developing programmes—to identify key variables and indicators to measure the fulfilment of objectives and the outcomes achieved.

Effective management of sponsorship programmes must provide safe and inclusive spaces for sharing updated information, identifying risks, and agreeing on mitigation and adaptation strategies. These spaces should also be accessible, enabling meaningful participation from all parties—particularly individuals with lived experience of forced displacement—through digital tools and interpretation services. A collaborative approach in this context facilitates learning and drives improvements in the implemented model, which can later be replicated in other settings.

5. Comprehensive guide for implementing a sponsorship pathway for individuals in need of international protection at the municipal level

This section aims to provide a practical summary of the actions needed to enable municipal governments, as key participants in the processes of including migrants and refugees at the local level, to effectively participate in the design and implementation of sponsorship programmes for forcibly displaced individuals. This guide outlines concrete steps for execution, incorporating an intersectional approach and fostering collaboration between different participants.

a. Regulatory requirements

A local authority interested in promoting an initiative to implement a complementary pathway such as sponsorship must take into account the legal framework in which it operates. For example, in Spain, it is necessary to consider the country's specific approach to complementary pathways and the jurisdiction and functions of the autonomous Government of Catalonia.[14]

As mentioned above, community sponsorship, understood as a complementary pathway, should represent an additional effort to fulfil resettlement commitments, which in Spain are outlined in the National Resettlement Programme (PNR).[15] The PNR is governed by a protocol established collaboratively by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation; the Ministry of the Interior; and the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (MISSM) with the

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[14] The information provided is based on the regulatory framework in force in December 2024.

[15] In keeping with *Ley 12/2009, de 30 de octubre, reguladora del derecho de asilo y de la protección subsidiaria. Disposición Adicional Primera. Reasentamiento. Jefatura de Estado*. Published in BOE *263,* 31 October 2009*.*

support of UNHCR and IOM. This protocol defines the criteria for selecting the individuals to be resettled, recognising international protection, transferring refugees to Spain, and managing the reception programme under the MISSM. However, complementary initiatives led by municipalities and Autonomous Communities—such as Navarra, the Basque Country, or the proposed deployment of the COMET project in Catalonia—are framed within the PNR. This limits the additionality of the pathway, and makes dialogue with the central government essential.

Although Catalonia lacks full jurisdiction in matters related to asylum and refugees, it plays a significant role in the reception and integration of refugees, particularly in facilitating access to social services. Additionally, although it is now obsolete, Catalonia has an instrument in the Plan for International Protection in Catalonia (PPIC), approved by the Catalan Government in January 2014.[16] This strategic document highlighted the Catalan Government's intention and commitment to various aspects, such as "channelling initiatives to improve the legal framework for international protection and statelessness; educating society in general and, more specifically, public employees, who can be informed about this Plan; providing resources and funding for reception activities; and collaborating with the state in hosting resettled and forcibly displaced individuals." In section 4, the PPIC commits to "carry out the necessary institutional and political negotiations with the state to be consulted in advance of decisions by the Council of Ministers determining the annual resettlement quota" and to "collaborate with the state in hosting resettled individuals by distributing and accommodating a proportional share of the quota of resettled individuals in Catalonia as determined annually by the Council of Ministers; this collaboration should be conducted through collaboration agreements." The document also takes into account how, in cases of mass influxes of individuals, the Government of Catalonia will plan emergency reception in collaboration with social service departments, NGOs specialising in international protection and reception, international organisations, and local authorities in order to contribute to efforts by the international community. In 2015, this plan already addressed key elements such as intergovernmental coordination and collaboration with non-governmental participants, which are emphasised in this guide.

Furthermore, initiatives passed by the Catalan Parliament—such as Resolution 797/XI[17] on support for safe pathways to asylum and freedom of movement—reinforce the need to advance in this direction, aligning with the objectives of the COMET project. This resolution explicitly mentions the need to collaborate with local authorities and explore mechanisms like resettlement to accommodate unaccompanied minors seeking international protection.

Meanwhile, the current DGMR of the Department of Social Rights has responsibilities including coordinating with the EU and international organisations promoting migrants' human rights, promoting the strategic planning and implementation of migration and refugee policies, and collaborating with municipal administrations to ensure effective reception and support for displaced individuals.[18] The Advisory Council on Refugee Reception (CAPR), linked to the DGMR,

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[16] *Plan for International Protection in Catalonia*. Directorate General for Immigration. Ministry of Social Welfare and Family. Government of Catalonia, 2015.

[17] *Resolució 797/XI del Parlament de Catalunya, sobre el suport a les vies legals i segures d'accés al dret d'asil i sobre l'exercici del dret a la llibertat de circulació, adoptada al Ple del Parlament, sessió 40, 27.07.2017, DSPC-P 77*, published in BOPC 487.

[18] *DECRET 320/2024, de 17 de setembre, de reestructuració del Departament de Drets Socials i Inclusió.*

serves as a coordinating body between administrations and social entities, establishing mechanisms for harmonising and monitoring the execution of reception plans.

Therefore, a Catalan municipality that wants to pilot a public-private community sponsorship project must first create spaces for coordination, collaboration, and proposal development through the CAPR and, by extension, the DGMR. An important step will be to reach an agreement with the DGMR on their role in providing technical support and organising joint coordination efforts with other key participants. Within the current framework, the DGMR would coordinate with the Directorate-General for the Management of International Protection Systems (DGGSAPIT) under the MISSM to negotiate including the project within the PNR framework or as an effort in addition to resettlement.

After completing the political negotiation process—whether bilaterally between the Government of Catalonia and the Government of Spain or through coordination forums with autonomous communities—a memorandum of understanding or agreement would be signed between the Secretariat of State for Migration (SEM) of the MISSM, the DGMR of the Catalan Government, a non-governmental organisation (as the holder of the sponsorship agreement), the local authority implementing the pathway, and, where appropriate, other supramunicipal entities. These agreements typically involve UNHCR or other relevant international organisations. The agreement will explicitly outline the commitments of all parties, detailing their roles, timelines, participant profiles, and project schedules.

b. Steps for designing and developing programmes

1. Identification of possible collaborators

The first step to ensuring a collaborative and intersectional approach in designing and implementing a sponsorship pathway at the municipal level involves identifying potential local collaborators. Mapping social organisations, community-based groups, local businesses, educational institutions, and various administrative departments can provide the department proactively initiating this initiative with key information and contacts it can use in the next steps.

2. Diagnosis

The second step should include an analysis of the municipal context to identify both needs and local capacities. This diagnosis should be conducted collaboratively; for instance, through community consultations and by applying analytical models designed to assess internal and external weaknesses as well as strengths and opportunities. This analysis will also serve as the foundation for developing mitigation and adaptation strategies.

3. Co-design of the sponsorship model

After completing the mapping process and identifying potential collaborators, a working group should be established to co-design the sponsorship model to be implemented in the municipality. This guide recommends opting for a public-private sponsorship model that includes active participation from local authorities. The chosen model will define the responsibilities of each party involved. Additionally, the model should incorporate operational protocols for each stage of the implementation process and include a proposal for personalised support plans for the programme's beneficiaries.

4. Formalising the collaboration

After identifying collaborators and choosing the sponsorship model, it is essential to institutionalise the intersectoral and interinstitutional working group responsible for managing the programme. This formalisation can take the form of an agreement or memorandum between the parties involved, which should include a proposal for the organisational structure and should define the roles and activities to be carried out by each party. It is crucial for this structure to be rooted in the principle of meaningful participation by individuals with lived experience of forced displacement, so that they are represented in a way that enables them to contribute not only to discussions but also to the planning of activities and decision-making across all phases of the programme.

5. Scheduling phases and planned activities

Once the collaboration agreement has been formalised, it is important to establish a clear timeline for executing the actions outlined in the co-designed model. This schedule should include the various phases of the project, the estimated execution time for each, deadlines for implementing activities linked to each phase, a description of the activities to be carried out, as well as indicators for evaluating its success, the individual or entity responsible for the execution and/or supervision of the programme, and the products for the specified activities. Given the collaborative nature of these models, which involve multiple participants, municipalities must be mindful of potential barriers to information access that some parties may face. Therefore, tools should be provided to make task management and information access possible in an inclusive and respectful manner.

6. Financial planning

In parallel with activity and phase scheduling, a detailed description of the financial resources required for each action must be prepared. It should identify which sources of funding will be utilised and how they will be allocated. This planning should also identify potential challenges or gaps, allowing for the design of specific fundraising initiatives. In this context, it is important to connect with potential collaborators who can offer financial support and technical assistance for properly managing and reporting funds. Strengthening municipal technical and financial capacities will enable the implementation of more robust practices and will improve the quality of the services provided.

7. Implementation

The implementation phase of sponsorship projects includes all planned stages, such as the mobilisation of host communities, the identification and selection of programme beneficiaries,[19] matching them with host municipalities[20] while considering factors to maximise their

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[19] For more information on the assessment of candidates for pathways implemented within the COMET project, see the document *Checklist of Key Factors for Candidate Assessment*. COMET, 2023.

[20] For more information on the matching process, see the technical report produced within the COMET project: Cortinovis, Roberto. *Approaches to Matching in Sponsorship and*

opportunities, prior orientation,[21] relocation, access to housing, post-arrival contextualisation and orientation activities[22] for both beneficiaries and diverse support groups, administrative support, the co-development of goals for individualised social and employment inclusion plans, providing access to services, networks, and planned activities such as language learning or psychosocial support, process monitoring, planning for their transition beyond the programme,[23] intercultural and awareness-raising activities, and the communication of results. It is a good idea to create a checklist of all planned actions, agreed upon by the working group during the planning phase to ensure effective organisation and monitoring of all related activities.

In this context of implementation, individualised work plans for persons requiring international protection are a key tool for planning, documenting, monitoring, and evaluating the programme's actions to foster autonomy during their time within the programme. These plans should be co-created between the beneficiary and the professional team of reference, based on a diagnostic assessment and periodic reviews, with realistic, flexible, and measurable objectives. The plans must include a participatory evaluation to check the progress achieved, as well as the inclusion of a gender perspective, intersectionality, and a human rights approach to effectively address areas such as training, employment, socio-family relations, community integration, housing, and health.

8. Evaluation

The actions planned during the implementation of sponsorship programmes must be integrated into the timeline of phases and activities, ensuring mechanisms for monitoring, feedback, and evaluation are in place to identify and address challenges jointly and efficiently. Therefore, regular sessions with all participants should be scheduled to check progress using agreed-upon indicators, extract learning, and deliberate mitigation or adjustment strategies where needed. Under the COMET project, a specific technical sheet has been developed to clarify the key aspects of monitoring and evaluating sponsorship and complementary pathways for refugees and others requiring international protection.[24]

Complementary Pathways for Refugees and Other People in Need of International Protection. Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024.

[21] For more information on the comprehensive approach to identification, matching, and pre-arrival orientation activities for users of safe pathways implemented within the COMET project, see the documents *Pre-Departure Framework*. COMET, 2023, and *Checklist of Existing Pre-Departure Activities*. COMET, 2023.

[22] For more information on common post-arrival activities for users of pathways implemented within the COMET project, see the documents *Post-Arrival Framework*. COMET, 2023, and *Checklist of Existing Post-Arrival Measures*. COMET, 2023.

[23] For more information on the process of transitioning out of sponsorship programmes, see Zanzuchi, Maria Belén. *Supporting Self-Sufficiency: Considerations for Refugees' Transition out of Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways Programmes*. Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024.

[24] Zanzuchi, María Belén. Fact sheet. *Monitoring and Evaluation in Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways for Refugees and Other People in Need of International Protection*. Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024.

c. Incorporating intersectionality and a gender perspective

The situations, experiences, and needs of forcibly displaced individuals are diverse and influenced by factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion. Discrimination can be multifaceted and overlapping, impacting these individuals' development and inclusion processes. To ensure that policies promoting sponsorship pathways for those in need of international protection are genuinely inclusive and equitable, municipal governments, in collaboration with other participants, must address this diversity and the resulting inequalities through an intersectional and gender-focused approach. This strategy allows municipalities to play a transformative role in developing solutions that are effectively contextualised to the multiple vulnerabilities faced by programme beneficiaries. It also reinforces the municipal role in promoting international solidarity, social justice, human rights and, especially, the right to asylum, contributing to the creation of more welcoming, tolerant, and cohesive societies.

To ensure that public policies are innovative, inclusive, and fair, it is essential to integrate intersectional and gender perspectives through at least three actions:

1) **Diagnosis**

   Conduct a study of the forcibly displaced community targeted for the sponsorship pathway to identify specific needs, establish priorities, mobilise necessary resources, and develop an accompaniment plan. Mapping potential groups of beneficiaries could include women, individuals with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, elderly persons, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and others in vulnerable situations. This approach ensures that access to the safe pathway being promoted is grounded in the principle of equality.

2) **Identification and mobilisation of local resources**

   The aim of the initial diagnosis is to understand which groups are in vulnerable situations and what responses and solutions can be provided locally, either directly by the local government or in collaboration with other stakeholders. It is important to identify existing resources for addressing specific needs and potential barriers, as well as which services are lacking or could limit access to certain groups. This will allow for the development of a strategy that is respectful of diversity and that provides effective solutions.

   In this regard, it is a good idea to identify and use pre-existing tools such as the document *Reflexions i propostes per a la incorporació de la perspectiva feminista interseccional a l'acollida a Catalunya* (Reflections and Proposals for the Incorporation of an Intersectional Feminist Perspective in Reception Practices in Catalonia) by the Almena Feminist Cooperative.[25] This resource provides guidance for civil society, organisations, and professionals working in the field of support for

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[25] Alexanian Meacci, Amanda and Sore Galleguillos, Maritza. *Reflexions i propostes per a la incorporació de la perspectiva feminista interseccional a l'acollida a Catalunya*. Almena Cooperativa Feminista, April 2023.

migrants and forcibly displaced individuals, drawing on the experience of Formación y Capacitación (FOCA) on the Mexico-Guatemala border.

3) **Planning actions**

Based on the diagnosis and identification of available resources, the next step is to plan the specific actions to be carried out during the project implementation period. For each group and identified need, concrete proposals for activities should be included. These actions should aim not only to facilitate an effective process of social inclusion but also to optimise the resources allocated, ensure efficient use of services, guarantee participation in safe spaces, and reduce the risks of existing discrimination and exclusion.

d. **Training and capacity-building through technical municipal cooperation**

When designing and implementing sponsorship pathways for individuals in need of international protection at the municipal level, it is essential to incorporate municipal cooperation. Promoting the exchange of knowledge, best practice, lessons learned, and challenges between municipalities provides key tools to empower local governments and collaborating parties, ensuring that projects are more effective and sustainable.

Allocating resources to create spaces and participate in exchange networks represents a long-term investment that can optimise the implemented programmes and enhance responses to the needs of forcibly displaced communities hosted by municipalities. In this way, municipal technical cooperation can serve as a strategy to develop models of local participatory governance that institutionalise the promotion of safe pathways.

Municipal cooperation enables staff from various departments involved in implementing sponsorship pathways to acquire the skills needed to design inclusive and intersectional policies, manage quality projects, streamline existing bureaucratic processes, improve intercultural communication, and conduct awareness-raising and advocacy activities using a holistic approach. These efforts address training, employment integration, housing access, emotional well-being, and opportunities for social, cultural, and political participation.

As such, the training of technical staff must address the diverse and relevant topics related to participation in sponsorship pathways. This includes not only specific training on participants' profiles and the legal frameworks for international protection and access to human rights, but also on intersectionality, conflict resolution, managing expectations,[26] the creation of operational protocols, intercultural communication and mediation, emotional support, social and employment guidance, the meaningful participation of individuals with lived experience of forced displacement, the efficient management of financial resources, and designing awareness-raising campaigns, among others. Through the exchange of information, experiences, and expertise among municipalities, synergies are created that can help address common challenges, find joint response strategies, optimise the use of existing resources, avoid

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[26] For more information on the management of expectations, see the following fact sheet prepared within the context of the COMET project: Cortinovis, Roberto. *Managing the Expectations of Refugees and Other People in Need of International Protection in Sponsorship and Complimentary Pathways Programs*. Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024.

unnecessarily reduplicated efforts, and promote collaborative initiatives for social and political advocacy.

e. Creation and participation in networks for cross-sector collaboration

For the municipal technical cooperation described in the previous section to be effective, it is crucial to recognise that exchanges cannot be confined solely to other municipal governments or to a single geographic context or type of participant. This implies the need to promote spaces for inter-institutional and cross-sector coordination and exchange. Dialogue and working spaces created with the perspectives of multiple participants are useful for addressing the diverse needs that may arise during the development of sponsorship programmes. Such collaboration fosters shared governance models that strengthen solidarity and social cohesion.

Establishing networks and working groups at the local level as one of the first steps in designing and implementing sponsorship pathways is foundational to promoting multisectoral alliances. These alliances should include municipal, state, and regional authorities, the private sector, educational institutions, faith-based organisations, community-based organisations, and individuals with lived experience of forced displacement. However, it is equally important to scale up the participation of these local working groups to international networks, which can enhance developed resources and provide access to new opportunities for funding and training. Participation in these regional or international networks can be based on the general objective of promoting safe pathways such as sponsorship schemes, or on thematic areas identified as relevant during the design of the programme and support processes to promote inclusion. To achieve this, it is important to conduct an initial assessment of existing networks, such as Moving Cities, Eurocities, the Share Network, or ALDA, and to evaluate the opportunities and capacity of the working group to meet the obligations involved before applying to join the relevant network or association.

6. Conclusions

This practical guide offers a valuable resource for mobilising municipalities and other local participants in the design and implementation of safe pathways, specifically sponsorship programmes for refugees. It is divided into two main sections: the first provides an overview of the conceptual and methodological framework, while the second focuses on offering practical guidance. The guide addresses important areas such as identifying key stakeholders, resource management, regulatory requirements, and the importance of integrating gender and intersectional perspectives. Additionally, it highlights best practices that demonstrate the value of multilevel collaboration among various administrations and the active involvement of civil society, NGOs, the private sector, and forcibly displaced persons.

Within the framework of the COMET project, as outlined in detail in the report *Recommendations for the Design and Implementation of Safe Pathways through Municipalism*, it is evident that municipalities have become indispensable participants on the global stage. This is due to their ability to respond directly to local needs while simultaneously addressing global challenges such as migration and refugee management, particularly from the perspectives of reception and inclusion. One of the primary objectives of the guide is to show how committed municipalities have the opportunity to lead structural change in addressing forced displacement through a dual system: offering innovative reception policies and local responses and, externally, driving innovative initiatives connected to development cooperation and humanitarian action in

countries of origin, transit, and first reception. In this way, local governments are encouraged to become proactive participants in the implementation of safe pathways. Leading such initiatives not only strengthens social cohesion and reception policies, but also promotes human rights and international solidarity from a glocal perspective.

Moreover, due to their proximity to local communities, municipalities are uniquely positioned to adapt policies and programmes to the specific needs of their territories. This adaptability enables them to design decentralised, tailored, and sustainable reception models that are significantly different from standardised or centralised approaches. As demonstrated, sponsorship programmes also enhance institutional capacities for resource management and the development of more inclusive public policies. In this regard, municipalities become key interlocutors for regional, national, and European institutions, placing them in a highly relevant position of soft power within increasingly decentralised governance systems. Furthermore, these safe pathways hold significant potential for the social, labour, and educational inclusion of refugees. The active participation of civil society through support groups facilitates social and community networking, which is highly beneficial for both refugees and the host society, fostering mutual understanding and enrichment.

As noted in this guide, it is essential to incorporate technical cooperation among local governments to encourage municipalities to exchange knowledge, best practice, lessons learned, and challenges. This cooperation provides key tools to train local governments and other collaborating parties, ensuring that projects are more effective and sustainable.

Leading these processes also involves addressing significant challenges, such as the lack of initial resources, the need to coordinate diverse participants who may have differing objectives or timelines, and difficulties linked to bureaucratic hurdles, as seen in the implementation of the COMET project in Catalonia. Nonetheless, these challenges can be overcome through strategic planning, the formation of alliances, and the active coordination and participation of all participants from the early stages of the project, facilitated by the institutionalisation of spaces for coordination and exchange.
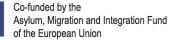
Secondly, but equally important, this guide aims to encourage municipalities to lead initiatives for the implementation of safe pathways. For this reason, a more practical section has been designed to help easily identify the most relevant participants and the steps that need to be taken by local public administrations to structure these initiatives. Emphasis has been placed on the idea that a municipalist approach—grounded in proximity, collaboration, and active citizen participation—can shape alternative scenarios and drive initiatives that prioritise the human rights of migrants and refugees. This is especially critical at a time when other government bodies are retreating or shifting towards more conservative stances. The practical focus of this guide seeks to translate the theoretical principles outlined earlier into concrete actions, offering municipalities an operational tool. This practical dimension simplifies the implementation of programmes by providing clear guidance on essential aspects such as planning, resource management, and action monitoring. Harnessing the transformative potential of municipalities is, therefore, essential for promoting and strengthening the implementation of sustainable, safe pathways grounded in collaboration and the exchange of best practice.

Additionally, the guide seeks to project a forward-looking vision, highlighting the importance of efficient resource management, the incorporation of gender perspectives, intersectionality, and the training of local participants. It underscores the need to establish mechanisms for inter-

institutional coordination to optimise available resources and address identified structural challenges, such as access to housing work in the medium and long term. In this regard, the guide not only identifies best practice, but also offers concrete recommendations adaptable to different territorial contexts. The aim is for municipalities to take advantage of their adaptability and proximity to develop sustainable, replicable complementary pathways tailored to the specific needs of their communities. Hopefully, this guide will help to strengthen local governance, providing the information needed to effectively implement a safe pathway for all interested municipalities—particularly through the community sponsorship model.

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