



Co-funded by the
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
of the European Union

FACT SHEET

**MANAGING THE
EXPECTATIONS OF
REFUGEES AND OTHER
PEOPLE IN NEED
OF INTERNATIONAL
PROTECTION IN
SPONSORSHIP AND
COMPLEMENTARY
PATHWAYS PROGRAMMES**

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Managing the expectations of programme beneficiaries (whether they are refugees or other people in need of international protection) is important for the success of sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes, such as those based on education and labour opportunities. Lack of information about programme operations (e.g., where refugees will be resettled and what support they will receive) and, more broadly, about life in their destination country can produce frustration among beneficiaries and tensions with the sponsors or volunteers who support them.
- Practitioners involved in the implementation of admission programmes for refugees or other people in need of international protection have developed and tested a range of tools to help set realistic expectations. Orientation sessions held before beneficiaries depart for their destination country and after they arrive, in particular, are important opportunities to share information with beneficiaries on a number of topics, including how to navigate travel and admission procedures and what kind of support and access to social services they will have in the receiving country.
- Some sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes have involved sponsors or volunteers in the process of helping beneficiaries understand what life will be like in the destination country. In some cases, they have been encouraged to share “information packages” with information, pictures, or videos of the sponsor group members who will support the beneficiaries, the city or village where they will live, and their accommodation. Some programmes have also used digital tools (such as video calls, social media, and apps) to share details about life in the destination country and to provide information tailored to beneficiaries’ needs.
- There is a need to develop orientation activities and materials that take into consideration beneficiaries’ circumstances and needs, such as their education levels, age, family composition, previous employment, and medical or psychological needs. Involving a programme’s previous beneficiaries in information-sharing activities (e.g., through social media channels or video testimonies) can ensure a more accurate and balanced account of beneficiaries’ experiences and the challenges they may face, which can increase newcomers’ trust in the information they receive.
- Monitoring and check-in mechanisms are important to ongoing expectations management. These tools can help programme organisers identify and address potential issues related to beneficiaries’ expectations for a programme, and provide policymakers and programme designers with evidence on orientation activities’ effectiveness and ways to improve them. Combining informal feedback collection methods (e.g., based on comments by beneficiaries during or after a training) and formal monitoring tools (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, or follow-up interviews with beneficiaries) has helped some programmes get a well-rounded picture of how expectations can best be set and managed.

WHAT IS EXPECTATIONS MANAGEMENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Managing the expectation of refugees and other people in need of international protection who participate in sponsorship programmes and education or labour complementary pathways is a key element of those programmes’ success. Effective expectation management involves helping individuals and families develop a clear understanding of how a programme will work, what support and access to social services they will have, and what life will look like in their new homes—for example, whether they will settle in a big city or in the countryside, and what kind of assistance and opportunities will be available to them there.¹ Beneficiaries should also be assisted with setting realistic expectations for when and how they will transition out of the programme (e.g., when financial and other forms of support will end; how sponsors/volunteers, employers, or educational institutions will support their growing self-sufficiency during the transition; and what forms of non-programme-based assistance will be available to them after the programme).²

1 Susan Fratzke and Lena Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown: Designing Effective Predeparture Orientation for Resettling Refugees* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2019), 4.

2 Maria Belén Zanzuchi, *Supporting Self-Sufficiency: Considerations for Refugees’ Transition out of Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways Programmes* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024).

Evidence points to a number of challenges related to insufficient expectations management in sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes. For example, lack of knowledge about a sponsorship programme's operations (e.g., where beneficiaries will settle and what supports they will receive) can generate frustration among beneficiaries and tensions between them and their sponsors, hampering the settlement process and possibly even resulting in a breakdown of the sponsorship relationship.³

To mitigate those risks, government agencies, civil-society organisations, and other actors involved in these programmes' implementation have developed and tested a range of expectation management tools and practices. These include predeparture orientation programmes, prearrival video calls between beneficiaries and sponsors, informational materials, post-arrival meetings between beneficiaries and supporting organisations, and online communication channels. When designing such tools, settlement agencies and the nongovernmental organisations involved in these programmes should carefully consider what information to provide, how to convey it, and at which point in the settlement process to do this. Getting this right can help to maximise the impact of expectation management activities and the programme more broadly.⁴

GOOD PRACTICES

A review of existing sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes points to promising practices and tools that can be deployed before and after beneficiaries arrive in their destination country to help them develop clear and realistic expectations about the programme they are taking part in and the settlement and integration process. Such practices vary across programmes and countries, and even among actors operating within the same country, but all aim to create transparency and support beneficiaries' smooth transition to life in a new country.⁵

Develop robust orientation programmes at the predeparture and post-arrival stages

- Orientations held before beneficiaries depart for their destination country have emerged as key components of effective expectation management strategies. The main rationale for predeparture trainings is to provide beneficiaries with sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether to participate in a programme, including what participating means in the short and longer term for them and their family members. Predeparture trainings also frequently cover practical information about travel (e.g., how to navigate airport security and passport controls) and about beneficiaries' rights and responsibilities in the receiving country.⁶
- Programmes provide different types of information and levels of detail in their predeparture trainings. Some programmes, such as those for refugees settling in the Netherlands, provide information about the specific city or town in which the refugees will live, or if that is not known, about common features of receiving communities and housing situations (e.g., whether refugees are usually placed in a small town or in a city). Such information can help dispel misconceptions beneficiaries may have about their new lives and help them prepare mentally and emotionally for the transition.⁷
- The actors involved in predeparture and post-arrival orientations and the means by which they share information vary. In Belgium, Fedasil (the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) organises predeparture and post-arrival training, with interactive workshops covering topics such as how to navigate the Belgian education system and labour market. In Germany, civil-society organisations involved in the New Start in a Team (NesT) sponsorship programme provide a mandatory training for refugees on life in Germany.⁸ And in Canada, the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) has developed a tripartite agreement that lays out

3 María Belén Zanzuchi, Nadja Dumann, Florian Tissot, and Admir Skodo, [Attracting, Retaining, and Diversifying Sponsors for Refugees in Community Sponsorship Programmes](#) (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2023), 32.

4 Zanzuchi, Dumann, Tissot, and Skodo, *Attracting, Retaining, and Diversifying Sponsors*, 31.

5 Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 4; Zanzuchi, Dumann, Tissot, and Skodo, *Attracting, Retaining, and Diversifying Sponsors*, 32.

6 Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 5–8.

7 Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 10.

8 Participant comments during the transnational roundtable 'Recruitment and Retention of Sponsors for Scaling Sponsorship Programmes in Europe', organised by the Migration Policy Institute Europe in Dublin, 9 November 2022, as part of the Building Capacity for Private Sponsorship in the European Union (CAPS-EU) project.

the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in the Student Refugee Program (that is, refugee students, WUSC Local Committee sponsoring groups, and the WUSC National Office).⁹

- Tailoring orientations to the needs and circumstances of different groups, as well as to individuals' specific needs, can make them more impactful. Key factors to consider when developing orientation sessions include beneficiaries' cultural norms, literacy, and education levels. Because of the considerable diversity within beneficiary populations, some destination countries offer special sessions within a broader training programme for groups with unique needs. For example, Canada, Finland, and Norway offer special training sessions for young refugees that cover topics such as how to interact with peers at school and, if necessary, how to report bullying.¹⁰

Engage previous beneficiaries and cross-cultural facilitators in information provision

- Involving previous beneficiaries of a sponsorship or complementary pathways programme in the provision of information to new beneficiaries (e.g., through social media channels or video testimonies) can result in a more accurate and balanced account of their experiences. This can boost beneficiaries' trust in the information provided, since it comes from people with a similar background and/or who have gone through a similar admission and settlement process, and ultimately increase newcomers' capacity to handle the challenges ahead of them.¹¹
- Another option to improve the quality of the support provided is to engage cross-cultural facilitators who share beneficiaries' linguistic and cultural background. These facilitators may themselves be international protection recipients who arrived through the same or another programme, or they may have come to the country as asylum seekers, students, or to join family. Cross-cultural facilitators can act as interpreters and bridge-builders between participants and the trainers responsible for delivering orientation sessions, helping to foster trust between the two, elevate beneficiaries' concerns, and help trainers to provide a realistic impression of life in the country.¹² In France, for example, the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FEP), one of the organisations running the country's humanitarian corridor, involves facilitators in the predeparture sessions it conducts in Lebanon between new and former programme participants. Their involvement can help FEP understand key insights from the session and can point to ways to better meet beneficiaries' needs (e.g., with post-arrival services or support).¹³

Tailor information tools to beneficiaries' needs and circumstances to help them form realistic expectations about life in the receiving community

- To help beneficiaries bridge the gap between expectations and reality, some programmes have sponsors share detailed information about what awaits them upon arrival. For example, the community sponsorship programme in Ireland encourages sponsors to share "information packages" that contain information on the members of the sponsor group who will support the beneficiaries as well as pictures, videos, or information on the city or village where beneficiaries will be located and on their future accommodation.¹⁴
- Sponsorship programmes have used a variety of digital tools (such as apps, social media, and podcasts) to provide information and help manage the expectations of both beneficiaries and sponsor or volunteer groups. In Ireland, the organisation Open Community has developed an app in five languages for refugee families in the country's community sponsorship programme, containing information about life in Ireland (e.g., its welfare system, education, and housing).¹⁵ In Canada, the organisation Refugee 613 has launched various groups in the messaging app Telegram to provide refugees with information about settlement services and life in Canada.¹⁶

9 World University Service of Canada, '[Tripartite Agreement for the Student Refugee Program](#)' (agreement, April 2024).

10 Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 26.

11 Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 33.

12 Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 27.

13 Participant comments during the CAPS-EU roundtable 'Recruitment and Retention of Sponsors'.

14 Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, [Building Blocks of Community Sponsorship: Guidebook and Planning Tools Based on Canada's Model and Emerging Programs around the World](#) (N.p.: Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 2022), 58; participant comments during the CAPS-EU roundtable 'Recruitment and Retention of Sponsors'.

15 The Open Community, '[Swift Integration App](#)', accessed 5 April 2024.

16 Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, '[Refugee 613 Information for Life in Canada](#)' (information sheet, 2022).

And in Italy, the refugee-led organisation Mosaico and the civil-society organisation Frantz Fanon supported the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) in refining its podcasts for refugees and other people in need of international protection participating in the Italian humanitarian corridor programme that features the experiences of previous beneficiaries and information about settling in Italy.¹⁷

Establish monitoring and check-in mechanisms to identify and address issues stemming from poor expectation management

- Regular monitoring and evaluation of predeparture and post-arrival orientation practices can give policymakers, programme designers, and trainers valuable insight into whether those orientations are meeting their intended objectives. In doing so, it can help a programme's organisers address issues as they emerge and provide an evidence base for efforts to refine a programme's information provision activities.¹⁸
- Feedback can be collected either informally (e.g., observations of trainers, comments by beneficiaries during or after a training session) or through formal monitoring tools (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, or follow-up interviews). Some programmes use a mix of approaches, and they may gather feedback either at a particular point in time or on a rolling basis. In Belgium's Community Sponsorship programme, Caritas Belgium has a phone-based help desk that refugees and sponsors can call with concerns; this enables the programme to identify and address tensions and misunderstandings between refugees and sponsor groups.¹⁹

RESOURCES

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This fact sheet was prepared by the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe) as part of the Complementary Pathways Network (COMET) project. Its author is Roberto Cortinovis, Associate Policy Analyst at MPI Europe.

The COMET project received funding from the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union. All project documents can be found on the COMET project website: www.cometnetwork.eu

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¹⁷ Migration Policy Institute Europe analyst interview with a representative of Mosaico, 27 March 2024.

¹⁸ Fratzke and Kainz, *Preparing for the Unknown*, 30.

¹⁹ Participant comments during the CAPS-EU roundtable 'Recruitment and Retention of Sponsors'.