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FACT SHEET

APPROACHES TO MATCHING IN SPONSORSHIP AND COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS FOR REFUGEES AND OTHER PEOPLE IN NEED OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

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SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The viability and long-term sustainability of sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes depend, in part, on achieving a good fit between the characteristics and preferences of arriving beneficiaries (whether refugees or other people in need of international protection) and the supports and services available in the communities where they settle, including those provided by their sponsors, hosts, or employers.

- Some new approaches to matching in Europe and North America rely on the idea that, to the extent possible, integrating individual beneficiaries' preferences into decisions about their placement in a specific city, local community, or with a certain sponsor group will produce better programme and integration outcomes.

- Responses to humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine suggest the importance of establishing multi-stakeholder coalitions that include sponsor groups, civil society, and refugee-led organisations, and that tapping their experience and expertise can result in more effective matching criteria and sustainable procedures. Such coalitions can also be a way to engage transnational affinity groups present in host societies (e.g., LGBTQI+ communities, human rights defenders, ethnic or conational organisations) in order to expand protection opportunities and ensure more targeted matching of specific refugee groups.

- Digital tools can help optimise match quality, reduce barriers to scaling programmes (by speeding up matching and making the process less staff-time intensive), and ensure accountability through digital records. To date, most matching is still done by hand, though technology may be used to create databases that store and sort data on potential beneficiaries and that can be searched for potential matches. However, some sophisticated initiatives use preference-matching algorithms to help allocate beneficiaries to localities where they are more likely to find employment and integrate successfully.

- Scaling the use of digital tools, particularly those based on algorithmic models, would require a programme's implementing actors to establish guiding principles to ensure transparency and accountability and set clear obligations to maintain high-quality data and guarantee data protection.

- Embedding well-designed monitoring into the design and implementation of matching mechanisms is key to evaluating their operations and improving match quality. In addition, systematic data collection in the context of matching procedures—including of participants' baseline data and administrative data (e.g., on local employment rates and housing availability)—offers an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base on the longer-term impacts of sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes.

WHAT IS MATCHING?

In the context of refugee resettlement and complementary pathways of admission (including those based on education and labour channels), matching is a systemised process that determines the placement of beneficiaries with sponsors, host communities, or employers (depending on the programme type). The matching criteria used may involve consideration of the attributes, needs, and preferences of individual beneficiaries along with the capacities and preferences of sponsors and receiving communities.[1]

Matching can be done in various ways and can support different types of refugee placement and settlement processes. For example, matching can facilitate beneficiaries'placement with employers and educational institutions in the context of labour or study pathways.[2] Or, in community sponsorship programmes, it can be used to connect beneficiaries with sponsoring groups willing to take on certain financial and legal responsibilities for them.[3]

1   Craig Damian Smith with Emma Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters: Improving Outcomes in Refugee Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2023).
2   See, for example, Talent Beyond Boundaries, *Hiring Displaced Talent in Canada*, accessed 13 January 2024; World University Service of Canada, *The Student Refugee Program. Guide for Local Committees* (resource document, August 2020).
3   See, for example, Government of Canada, 'Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program', updated 5 January 2024.

High-quality matching can have numerous benefits. It can help enhance integration and social cohesion in the receiving community and ensure programme sustainability.[4] It can also help establish more direct links between beneficiaries and service providers or volunteer organisations that can address their specific needs. Effective involvement of government agencies, civil-society actors, and volunteers in the design and implementation of matching systems can help reduce gaps and duplication of integration services, by ensuring targeted responses to complex needs and vulnerabilities.[5]

MATCHING MODELS

Resettlement, sponsorship, and complementary pathways programmes use different models to facilitate the matching of programme beneficiaries with receiving communities, sponsors, or employers. Most matching to date has been done by hand, though an increasing number of programmes are exploring ways to use digital tools to support decision-making.[6]

Matching by hand

- In most resettlement and sponsorship programmes in Europe, the United States, and Canada, government officials or civil-society organisation staff match beneficiaries and receiving communities or sponsors by hand. This manual screening and assessment of large numbers of beneficiary profiles can be very targeted and effective, but it is usually also time and resource intensive.

- In resettlement and community sponsorship programmes, matching between beneficiaries and receiving communities or sponsors is usually conducted by a governmental agency and is typically driven by a specified set of criteria, such as the availability of settlement services, beneficiaries' medical needs, and/or the presence of family members or ethnic, cultural, and religious communities in the receiving community.[7]

- In education and labour complementary pathway schemes, educational institutions or employers often work with nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to screen potential matches. Matching considers how well beneficiaries' skills and characteristics align with education or job placement opportunities and, in some instances, their preferences for certain opportunities.[8]

Matching using digital tools

- Over the past decade, some governmental and nongovernmental organisations have experimented with ways to better leverage technology to support matching, but recent responses to large-scale displacement from Afghanistan and Ukraine have brought these efforts into the mainstream. Digital tools are increasingly being used to improve the efficiency, sophistication, and quality of matching.

- Digital technology has been used to create databases that store and sort information on potential beneficiaries, which can be searched to identify and match possible candidates for sponsorship or other complementary pathways opportunities. For example, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), an NGO that specialises in connecting refugees to international job opportunities, manages a Talent Catalog of displaced individuals with skills in a variety of fields. TBB staff in host countries help match these individuals with employers in North America and Europe who express an interest in hiring displaced people, assist in the hiring process, and help newly hired refugees acclimate to living and working in a new country.[9]

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4   Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *From Fear to Solidarity: The Difficulty in Shifting Public Narratives about Refugees* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

5   See Allies for Refugee Integration, *Intentional Connections for Welcoming Communities: Improving Settlement for Privately Sponsored Refugees in Ontario through Settlement-Sponsor Collaboration* (Toronto: Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and Refugees 613, 2021).

6   This and the next section draw in part on information from an earlier Migration Policy Institute Europe publication: Smith with Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters*. That policy brief's analysis was conducted within the framework of the Building Capacity for Private Sponsorship in the European Union (CAPS- EU) project and was based on a review of 16 established and emerging resettlement and complementary pathways programmes in Europe and North America, comparing populations, matching procedures, and outcomes.

7   See, for example, in the case of Canada's resettlement programme: Government of Canada 'The Matching Centre', accessed 13 January 2024. On the United States' Refugee Admissions Program, see U.S. Department of State 'U.S. Refugee Admissions Program: Reception and Placement', accessed 13 January 2024.

8   Relevant examples include Canada's Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot, the World University Service of Canada's Student Refugee Program, and Italy's University Corridors project.

9   Talent Beyond Boundaries, 'Connecting Refugees with Jobs Internationally', accessed 13 January 2024.

- Some community sponsorship and hosting programmes, such as the United Kingdom's Homes for Ukraine, have developed online platforms to facilitate matching.[10] Through these platforms, sponsors and refugees take an active and direct role in the matching process by making more organic connections, expressing their preferences, and discussing expectations. The suggested matches are then reviewed and approved by staff of trusted NGOs or responsible government authorities.[11]

- The most sophisticated initiatives use preference-matching algorithms that suggest matches of beneficiaries with sponsors or communities based on pre-defined criteria. For example, algorithms employed by the U.S. Welcome Corps' programme[12] as well as the Berlin Governance Platform's Re:Match pilot[13] incorporate the preferences of both refugee participants and sponsor groups or municipalities on a set of considerations, such as household composition, vulnerabilities or health needs, and culture and language knowledge.[14]

GOOD PRACTICES

Innovations in matching that have emerged in recent years, including in response to the Afghan and Ukrainian crises, offer valuable evidence on the benefits of well-designed matching mechanisms and best practices for ongoing and future sponsorship and complementary pathways initiatives. These lessons include:

Invest in thoughtful matching mechanisms as a central element of sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes

- Evidence from past and ongoing initiatives points to the added value of effective matching for scaling sponsorship and complementary pathways programmes, streamlining procedures, and improving settlement support.[15] Yet, most existing programmes do not use systematised matching criteria or protocols. Taking a more deliberate, evidence-informed approach to matching could help improve outcomes for beneficiaries, sponsors, and programmes overall.

- There is no one-size-fits-all matching model. Government agencies and other key stakeholders involved in refugee admissions should carefully consider which model is the best fit for a programme and how the model could be tailored to the specific characteristics of the programme, its target populations, and the broader policy context.

- Investing in effective communication between a programme's implementing actors and government stakeholders about matching criteria is crucial. Collaborating upfront and securing buy-in from relevant government stakeholders (such as those involved in the admissions process) are key steps to guaranteeing the feasibility and effective implementation of the programme's matching model.

- There is a need for targeted investments to explore opportunities to improve matching mechanisms' effectiveness and scalability. Important areas include ways to better leverage digital technologies and to boost engagement of beneficiaries and refugee-led organisations.

Mainstream the use of digital tools to support efficient and effective matching

- Digital tools offer ways to speed up traditionally time- and resource-intensive matching procedures. By taking a data-driven approach, they can also lead to better experiences for beneficiaries and receiving communities. However, unless carefully designed, such tools can end up replicating biases present in some manual matching systems, potentially leading to discriminatory outcomes.[16]

- Digitally assisted matching models entail collecting, storing, and analysing large amounts of data about potential beneficiaries, sponsors, and receiving communities. As such, it is important to ensure transparency around how data is being used and to set out clear guidelines to secure informed consent for the use of personal data.[17]

10   UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities, 'Guidance. Staying Safe Online and in the UK: Homes for Ukraine', updated 16 January 2023.
11   Share Network, 'Resettlement & Community Sponsorship across Europe' (booklet, Share Quality Sponsorship Network, 2023).
12   Welcome Corps, 'Frequently Asked Questions', accessed 13 January 2024.
13   Re:Match, 'About Re:Match', accessed 13 January 2024.
14   Pairity, 'Current Projects', accessed 13 January 2024; Brian Zumhagen, 'How an Innovative Algorithm Helps Ukrainian Refugees Find New Homes', HIAS, 15 December 2022.
15   Smith with Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters*, 16.
16   Smith with Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters*.
17   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *General Policy on Personal Data Protection and Privacy* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2022).

- Algorithmic matching tools and other technical innovations should be designed to increase both operational efficiency *and* the well-being of people eligible for resettlement or complementary pathways. To date, algorithms are being used to match people already in the resettlement pipeline with appropriate placements, not to decide who is resettled. They should not be used to privilege economically or socially 'desirable' individuals, to the detriment of protection or vulnerability considerations.[18]

Leverage the expertise and resources of transnational affinity groups

- Matching mechanisms that involve the participation of transnational affinity groups and tap into their resources can make it possible to support broader categories of displaced people and engage new segments of society in protection pathways.[19] This could include, for example, groups for human rights defenders, LGBTQI+ communities, or diaspora groups comprised of refugees' conationals.

- Developing or expanding specialised matching initiatives involving additional affinity groups can help connect beneficiaries with sponsors and volunteers who share an identity or background and can provide more appropriate support, as well as broadening resettlement to include nontraditional actors. For example, Rainbow Railroad (an organisation working to expand protection pathways for LGBTQI+ refugees) helps match refugees with sponsors in receiving countries.[20]

Incorporate the voices of people in need of protection and engage refugee-led organisations

- Incorporating beneficiaries' input into matching processes has the potential to improve the effectiveness of sponsorship and complementary pathways, to the benefit of both beneficiaries and receiving communities. Matching models can enhance beneficiaries' agency by integrating their preferences into the placement process, alongside the capacities of receiving communities, sponsors, and settlement agencies. Some programmes give beneficiaries the ultimate say in their settlement decisions by asking for their consent for specific matches.[21]

- Involving refugee-led organisations and individual beneficiaries (e.g., as advisors) in the design and implementation of matching procedures can strengthen protection programmes. Doing so from the outset would allow a programme to gather beneficiaries' experiences, perspectives, and expertise on key issues such as what constitutes a good match and how to effectively communicate with target populations.[22]

Strengthen data collection and monitoring and evaluation

- Most resettlement, sponsorship, and complementary pathway programmes do not collect data that would allow for comparative analysis on topics such as the relationship between matching procedures and settlement outcomes. Building an evidence base on this and other critical issues will be important if programmes are to expand and additional governmental and nongovernmental actors are to be involved in providing support to beneficiaries.

- Incorporating monitoring as a structural component of matching tools and collecting participants' baseline data and administrative data (e.g., census data on local and regional employment rates or housing availability) can strengthen analysis of programme outcomes and point to potential programme improvements. In addition to helping to ensure high-quality matches, such data can be used to measure longitudinal impacts as monitoring continues over the life of a programme.

- Setting evaluation criteria that include specific questions and indicators to measure the outcomes of matching tools based on a well-defined theory of change is key to identifying implementation gaps and improving the effectiveness of matching procedures. Establishing the theory of change and related evaluation criteria at the outset of a programme has significant advantages over attempting to do so at the end of a programme, which is often more costly and challenging.

18   Smith with Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters*, 10.
19   Smith with Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters*, 15.
20   Rainbow Railroad, '_What We Do_', accessed 13 January 2024.
21   Smith with Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters*, 13.
22   Uwezo Ramazani, _Building Meaningful Refugee Participation into Protection Policymaking_ (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

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- Fratzke, Susan et al., *Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: Opportunities for Growth* (Geneva and Brussels: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2021).

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- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Operational Guidance on Complementary Pathways for Admission to Third Countries', accessed 13 January 2024.

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