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Report:

Recommendations for the Design and Implementation of Safe Pathways through Municipalism

December 2024



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All documents related to the COMET project are available on its website: www.cometnetwork.eu

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1. Introduction

1.1 General objectives of this report

This report with recommendations for the design and implementation of safe pathways from a municipal perspective was prepared by the Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation, or Fons Català) and the Comissió Catalana d'Acció pel Refugi (Catalan Commission for Refugee Action, or CCAR) as part of the COMplementary pathways nETwork (COMET) project. The primary aim of this document is to contribute to reflection, action, and progress in implementing safe pathways for people in need of international protection from a municipal perspective. It is based on the experiences developed and identified within the framework of this project. Therefore, one of the fundamental pillars of this report is to use previous experiences to guide future activities by identifying lessons learned and consolidating best practice to replicate it across various regions and countries—especially those that, like Catalonia, have yet to implement safe pathways for the reception of individuals in need of international protection.

Based on this analysis, this report seeks to enhance social and political advocacy by promoting changes to public policies that facilitate the expansion and consolidation of safe pathways as a sustainable response to forced displacement. In particular, it aims to encourage municipalities to act as catalysts for global justice, addressing structural challenges such as migration and refuge from a local perspective by organising themselves into networks that allow them to share experiences, coordinate strategies, and exert political influence on a global scale. This process seeks to highlight the impact on both beneficiaries and host communities within COMET in order to establish a replicable, long-term model beyond this project.

To complement the monitoring and evaluation of the COMET project, this report focuses on analysing the role of local governments in public-private sponsorship programmes and other complementary initiatives. It includes a study of the dynamics of collaboration among various participants: civil society, NGOs, local institutions, regional and state governments, forcibly displaced individuals and migrants.

Another central aspect of this report is the development of specific recommendations to promote the implementation of safe pathways (particularly those referred to as “complementary pathways”) in collaboration with municipal authorities and other local participants. These recommendations are based on the experience gained during the implementation of the project, and they seek to strengthen positive impacts while addressing identified limitations. To this end, interviews were conducted with various participants, including partner organisations, non-governmental and faith-based organisations, community-based entities, allied and collaborating organisations, and representatives of municipal governments in Catalonia and elsewhere in Europe. These interviews sought to address both successful refugee initiatives interviewees have undertaken in recent years and challenges they have encountered.

Furthermore, this report aims to encourage municipalities to exchange knowledge and explore the possibility of establishing technical cooperation programmes to facilitate local participation in the design and implementation of safe pathways. This exchange will allow them to share

existing resources, networks, and knowledge to promote commitment to political agendas and local and international strategies.

This report also aims to provide innovative tools to address the growing challenges in the field of international protection. These tools must respond to political changes that directly affect migration and refugee policies, and highlight the benefits of active participation by local authorities in capacity-building efforts based on an approach that takes into account society as a whole.

Finally, this report seeks lessons and insights that can improve actions to support individuals in contexts of forced displacement, while also identifying any political and technical aspects that may compromise the viability or continuity of safe pathways for those in need of international protection.

1.2 State of the art: Review of the evolution of migratory policies within the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees and the European Pact on Migration and Asylum

In 2015, in response to the political and management crisis on migration in the European Union due to the conflict in Syria and the displacement of thousands of refugees, the European Commission introduced the European Agenda on Migration (EAM).¹ This was intended as an immediate response to the situation unfolding on the shores of the Mediterranean. It outlined four priorities, which hinted at a shift towards securitisation, externalisation, and border control: a path that public policies in this area have followed ever since. The priorities were to reduce incentives for irregular migration; effectively manage borders; ensure a stronger common asylum policy; and establish legal pathways, primarily for economic migration. This period played a key role in revealing the significant inefficiencies in the Dublin system,² which allocated responsibility for processing asylum applications to the countries of first entry. The system was particularly inefficient in Greece and Italy, the main recipients of land and sea arrivals. However, little progress was made in addressing these shortcomings or securing a firm commitment to relocating asylum seekers within EU member states. Furthermore, many countries resisted implementing quotas, exacerbating tensions within the EU.

Nearly simultaneously and driven by the same humanitarian emergency, in New York in 2016 UN member states agreed on the need for shared responsibility to address situations resulting from the displacement of thousands of people. This meeting led to the New York Declaration for

¹ European Commission. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. May 2015.

² Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013.

Refugees and Migrants.³ In addition to this declaration, the UN developed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).⁴ After 18 months of consultations with refugees, member states, organisations from civil society and other stakeholders, the GCR was adopted on 18 December 2018 by the UN General Assembly, with only two countries—Hungary and the United States—voting against it. The GCR aimed to improve international responses to large-scale displacement in a more equitable and predictable manner, particularly by promoting resettlement and complementary pathways. More specifically, the UN created the Three-Year Strategy (2019–2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways,⁵ which involved multiple participants. Although it established a solid foundation for expanding resettlement opportunities and complementary pathways, its progress was significantly hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then, two Global Refugee Forums (GFRs) have been held: one in 2019, and one at the end of 2023. These Forums were created to reassess and revitalise the implementation of the GCR; they sought new financial contributions, ways of improving reception and inclusion, and the establishment of safe and legal pathways. However, eight years later, those expectations have yet to be met. Safe pathways remain very limited, particularly in Europe. In recent years, various organisations—such as the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)—have highlighted the EU’s double standards regarding the GCR. While the EU explicitly supports its implementation beyond Europe’s borders, it resists applying the Compact internally. A good example of this double standard is the development of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum (EPMA) and the policy of externalising borders through agreements with countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia to impede the departure of individuals requiring international protection towards EU territory.

The New EPMA was presented in 2020 and adopted in 2024 by the European Commission (EC) under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen. This followed 25 years of deadlock in the development of EU migration and asylum policies; under pressure from member states, it sought to address the dilemma of reforming the Dublin system. Paradoxically, the same year, the EC issued Recommendation 2020/1364⁶ on legal pathways for obtaining international protection within the EU, which helped to focus on the need for progress in this area.

While the EPMA theoretically proposed a comprehensive reform to streamline and harmonise migration and asylum policies, equally distributing responsibility and solidarity among member

³ UN. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 September 2016. A/RES/71/1, 3 October 2016.

⁴ UNHCR, Global Compact on Refugees, 17 December 2018.

⁵ UNHCR. Three-Year Strategy (2019–2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. June 2019.

⁶ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1364 of 23 September 2020 on legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways.

states, the legislative package has shown a growing focus on security and border control. This narrative frames migration as a permanent “crisis”, further institutionalising the clear erosion of human rights guarantees at European borders in recent years. This is also in detriment of safe pathways which, although mentioned, have yet to be developed.

As we have seen, throughout the evolution of the EU’s migration policies safe pathways have been the greatest unfulfilled promise. Although the 2015 EAM mentions the need for safe pathways for economic migration—particularly for highly skilled workers—in practice these have been limited and unable to meet global needs.

When it comes to refugees and asylum seekers, “legal and safe” pathways are virtually non-existent. According to UNHCR data, resettlement programmes are limited and fail to offer an adequate solution for the number of individuals fleeing conflicts and persecution. This lack of safe pathways forces thousands to risk their lives on dangerous journeys instead of finding safer ways of seeking protection and a better life.

In this disheartening scenario, there is a glimmer of hope in efforts to establish effective, safe alternatives, particularly in what are termed “complementary pathways”: things like community or public-private sponsorships. While the EPMA mentions the need for safe pathways, it fails to clarify how they should be developed. In May 2024, coinciding with the EPMA’s approval, the EU adopted the Regulation on the EU Framework for Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission.⁷ Rather than a drawback, this lack of specificity can be seen as an advantage: it leaves plenty of room for creative thinking about how to make these pathways possible. This could involve national resettlement policies, or the initiative of other authorities (regional or local, for example) who can generate public policies for promoting human rights, particularly the right to international political asylum. Contributions from other participants (like municipalities, social organisations, or citizens) will also be needed. Now that EU member states have to work on a proposal for the implementation of the EPMA, it is the perfect time to advocate for the establishment of safe pathways in each member state in collaboration with all levels of government and other local participants.

1.3 Context and importance of municipalism in promoting safe pathways for people in need of international protection

Municipalism, understood as a strategic approach aimed at providing greater autonomy to municipal governments and decentralising public administration, plays a key role in initiatives that promote the development and implementation of safe pathways to access international protection. Municipal councils are on the front lines when it comes to responding to the needs of communities, and they have the capacity to identify challenges, mobilise resources, build bridges and partnerships among diverse stakeholders, and implement innovative solutions that are, above all, adapted to local realities.

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework, and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1147.

Furthermore, municipal governments provide the most direct, broad, and accessible institutional spaces for democratic participation. Through these spaces, town councils are better positioned to understand local challenges and implement more transformative social policies. Municipal actions, therefore, hold strategic value, enabling local governments to extend their impact beyond state or regional policies. This can lead to tangible changes for forcibly displaced persons as well as host communities, fostering greater equality and social cohesion at the local level.

In a European context characterised by social, political, and economic challenges and a growing hostility in the management of migration and international protection, the diminishing resources, funding, and political will to implement more inclusive migration policies is concerning. This has led to the fragmentation of efforts to promote transnational cooperation that can ensure equitable and effective access to resettlement and other safe pathways for people in need of international protection. However, local governments can play a key role in counteracting this trend by fostering partnerships and collaborations between the private sector, public administrations, academia, host communities, and the forcibly displaced persons who make use of these programmes.

In the process of developing the COMET project, a significant gap has been identified in the existing analysis of the involvement of local authorities in promoting safe pathways, designing the various stages of implementation, and identifying and mobilising collaborators at the local and supramunicipal levels. In most observed experiences, local administrations have been seen as an external resource for service reception programmes using safe pathways, which are usually managed by communities made up of volunteers, NGOs, and other social entities. However, particularly in the case of sponsorship pathways, it is necessary for municipalities to play an active role in reception groups. Municipalism and the intrinsic integration of public administrations in the design and implementation process allow for the development of models based on principles of respect, equality, international solidarity, and shared responsibility between public and private participants.

Local governance offers a unique opportunity to expand the reach, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of sponsorship programmes and other safe pathways, as it can offer support in the provision of adequate resources. Local councils have specialised knowledge in areas such as access to housing, employment, social services and education, which gives them a key role in building comprehensive reception systems. Through their own structures and in collaboration with other participants, they can promote cultural exchange activities and the inclusion and social cohesion of new arrivals. The participation of local authorities in the implementation of safe pathway programmes can have a positive impact not only socially and politically but also economically, as it provides the opportunity to diversify sources of funding.

Furthermore, the creation of spaces for municipal cooperation enables other councils to identify and collaborate with relevant partners in projects involving safe pathways and the dignified reception of individuals in need of international protection, improving common learning processes and understanding between participants. This also makes it possible to address current user needs more efficiently, enhancing the quality of reception programmes.

Therefore, as an essential principle for humanitarian action and solidarity, municipalism can be considered key in the implementation, expansion and stabilisation of complementary pathways in general and community or public-private sponsorship programmes in particular. Active participation by local councils contributes to the development of migration models that are fairer, more sensitive, humane, efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective, which can be replicated and inspire improvements in the state and regional systems that are also established in the GCR. In this context, it is essential that municipalism not only play a role in the reception of migrants and refugees through safe pathways, but that local governments also lead the way in openly denouncing the lack of commitment and solutions from the state and the European institutions they are a part of.

1.4 Methodology

This report 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 promoting the effective participation of municipal governments and other local partners in the development of safe pathway projects. These recommendations—organised into actions on local, regional, national, and European levels—are intended to serve as a starting point for advancing collective efforts towards sustainable solutions for forcibly displaced individuals.

The municipalist approach applied in the development of this report aims to highlight the capacity of local governments to foster collaboration among different sectors and empower all parties involved to optimise and adapt mechanisms for complementary and safe pathways.

2. The COMET project

2.1 Project description and objectives

The COMET project is a pioneering initiative aimed at creating a European network of legal and safe pathways for individuals in need of international protection who are in situations of extreme vulnerability along the Central Mediterranean route. It primarily focuses on those who are in transit, stranded, or have been returned or evacuated to Niger. Funded by the 2020 Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (101038560 — COMET — AMIF-2020-AG), COMET brings together 14 organisations from seven European countries.⁸ Its goal is to address the

⁸ The project consortium is composed of the Associazione Frantz Fanon (AFF), Associazione MOSAICO – Azioni per i Rifugiati, Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen (EKvW), Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament

fragmentation of efforts to implement safe pathways; through transnational cooperation and structured exchanges among various stakeholders, it also seeks to increase reception and inclusion capacity, creating opportunities for 130 forcibly displaced individuals.

COMET builds on the recognition of the emerging heritage of complementary and safe pathways in Europe and the potential to develop a strengthened, sustainable, and optimised system through a multilateral approach, shared resources, exchange, and learning. The project promotes partnerships among various stakeholders, including government participants at all levels, NGOs, faith-based organisations, academia, grassroots organisations, and groups formed by individuals with lived experience of forced displacement.

The safe pathways developed, negotiated, and/or implemented⁹ through the project in the participating host countries—Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the Netherlands—include humanitarian corridors, community sponsorship programmes, university corridors, and other educational pathways. These initiatives incorporate the development of minimum obligatory standards, procedures, and shared, quality tools¹⁰ as essential for all network experiences and project phases. This includes pre-departure training and orientation, post-arrival guidance, and a reception process targeting both the beneficiaries as rights-holders as well as the host communities and other parties involved. These shared standards, activities, and collaborations seek to foster an inclusive and supportive environment that ensures mutual understanding and cultural sensitivity.

Although the need for international protection serves as a starting point, the project encourages users to be viewed from a broader perspective so that they can be better adapted to the programme and maximise their potential. Through the meaningful participation of individuals

(FCCD), Forum Réfugiés, INTERSOS, Justice and Peace Netherlands (JPNL), Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPIE), Proactiva Open Arms (POA), Refugees Welcome Italia (RW-I), Reset UK, and UNHCR Italia. It is coordinated by the Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia (FCEI). Only initiatives relevant to this document will be analysed in detail. Further information on the work of consortium members can be found on the COMET project website (www.cometnetwork.eu) and the websites of participating organisations.

⁹ Work Package 3 of the approved COMET project proposal (101038560 — COMET — AMIF-2020-AG), “Implementation of Pathways,” aims to negotiate the implementation of six different pathways to Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the Netherlands, with the objective of creating spaces for an additional 130 individuals.

¹⁰ Work Package 2 of the approved COMET project proposal (101038560 — COMET — AMIF-2020-AG), “Development of Common Standard Operating Procedures and Tools”, aims to foster cooperation among project partners through the systematic exchange of information about the legal and political context in both countries of departure and host countries. It also seeks to establish common standard operating procedures and standards for both the pre-departure and post-arrival phases.

with lived experience of forced displacement at every stage, COMET aims to develop a holistic, structured process for pairing refugees with their host community. This approach takes into account not only specific protection needs but also geographic preferences, family connections, skills, and capacities. To this end, the project places strong emphasis on ongoing dialogue and the management of expectations, seeking to truly connect each person with a pathway and a host community.

As a result, in the short and medium term, COMET coordinates the transnational implementation of safe pathways and expands reception capacity in the participating European states for individuals who have been forcibly displaced along the Central Mediterranean Route. In the long term, and in line with the priorities of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration¹¹ and the provisions of Recommendation (EU) 2020/1364, COMET facilitates the development of a European model that encourages collaboration, exchange, and learning¹² to support ongoing advocacy for the expansion of safe pathways for individuals in need of international protection through just and sustainable policies. One of the added values of the actions planned as part of the project is their European and global impact. It not only contributes to the objectives and international obligations of EU member states, but also shows solidarity with first-reception countries and supports international resettlement and humanitarian admission initiatives, thereby reducing the risks associated with unsafe routes.

The integrated model offered by COMET involving multiple existing and developing pathways makes use of their unique features and functionality within specific political and cultural contexts to enhance local experiences and act as a multiplier for sustainable solutions in managing the impacts of migration and diversity. To this end, it attempts to build inclusive, cohesive, dynamic, resilient, feminist, and anti-racist societies.

The COMET pilot action responds to European political imperatives and incorporates positive practices that are meant to be replicable. To support scalability and ensure sustainability, COMET includes specific indicators and collects data through continuous evaluation¹³ to create a robust base of evidence. Through reports, guidelines, and analyses, it generates knowledge

¹¹ UN. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2018. A/RES/73/195.

¹² Work Package 5 of the approved COMET project proposal (101038560 — COMET — AMIF-2020-AG), “Networking and Exchange of Best Practices”, aims to build and strengthen collaboration among partners through the creation of an experience-sharing network. This network seeks to develop a knowledge repository and improve the implementation practices of complementary pathways.

¹³ Work Package 4 of the approved COMET project proposal (101038560 — COMET — AMIF-2020-AG), “Integrating a Tradition of Evidence-Based Programming and Policy Development for Complementary Pathways”, aims to monitor the implemented programmes, develop monitoring and evaluation tools, and strengthen the base of evidence for improving and optimising policies that promote safe and complementary pathways.

that can inform future policies and programmes for safe migration and international protection pathways.

Both in its design and through each of its phases, the COMET project integrates an approach focused on human rights and the wellbeing of families and minors, while also applying a gender perspective to all its actions. It does so to ensure not only the right to international protection, but also to safety and human dignity, and to efficiently address specific needs for protection. Furthermore, COMET uses an approach centred on the forcibly displaced individuals, focusing on their potential, expectations, skills, and aspirations, and avoiding their categorisation merely as beneficiaries of the implemented pathways. The formation of a diverse consortium based on a multi-stakeholder approach ensures a participatory process in which project partners contribute to mutual learning, the optimisation of resources, inclusive decision-making, and improved governance. Finally, to ensure long-term sustainability, COMET adopts a bottom-up approach, valuing local experiences to enable the viable planning of actions and offering an integrated model that demonstrates the feasibility of coordinating diverse pathways and creating synergies among them.

2.2 Case studies: the role of local government and other participants in the design and implementation of different pathways

In line with the objective of increasing admissions of individuals in need of international protection through safe and complementary pathways (both new and existing), the following section analyses the experiences implemented or proposed in the five potential host countries participating in the project. To better understand the role of local administrations and to avoid duplicating information collected for the project evaluation, this section uses a qualitative approach. Through semi-structured interviews with representatives from local administrations, social, non-governmental, and faith-based organisations managing the project, volunteers, beneficiaries, and other allied institutions, this section examines the collaborations established, as well as the limitations and opportunities of programmes implemented in Asti, Turin, Clermont-Ferrand, and Schwerte. These findings are further complemented by local efforts in The Hague and various Catalan municipalities. All interviews were digitally recorded in compliance with confidentiality and data protection standards and were analysed to extract key insights.

2.2.1 Germany: Resettlement and community sponsorship

Since 2019, as an alternative to the state resettlement programme, the German government launched a community-sponsored pilot programme for refugees in situations of vulnerability called Neustart im Team (New Start in Team, or NeST).¹⁴ The programme sought to increase the number of admissions beyond the quota established by the government, facilitating entry and

¹⁴ For more information about the NeST project and testimonies from beneficiaries and the host community, consult the information available on the COMET project website: www.cometnetwork.eu

granting a three-year residency permit in accordance with Article 23 (4) of the Residence Act.¹⁵ It prioritised vulnerability or the need for protection as key criteria in the identification and selection processes for beneficiaries.

The Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen (Evangelical Church of Westphalia, EKvW)¹⁶ is the COMET partner organisation responsible for managing the NeST in collaboration with various participants at both the state and local levels. The Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, BMI) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) are the political institutions responsible for the programme. As with other resettlement contexts, the selection of beneficiaries is carried out by UNHCR in the first asylum countries, which then refers the cases to the relevant state authority (in this case, the BAMF) for approval to participate in the NeST programme and be matched with a host community.

To carry out this pairing process and implement the programme itself, NeST involves social organisations through what are called “Civil Society Contact Points” (Zivilgesellschaftliche Kontaktstelle, ZKS), which act as intermediaries between the authorities and the volunteer mentors from the host community, providing them with training, capacity-building, guidance, and support. Additionally, the ZKSs identify and mobilise new collaborators to expand the support network and maximise the resources available for hosting.

In the NeST programme in Schwerte (in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia) it is worth noting the collaboration between different participants, which was established through the local asylum working group. This collaboration has played a key role in mobilising volunteers and providing support during the hosting process. A local working group enables the necessary contacts to be made with service providers, relevant institutions and authorities to address specific needs and offer an appropriate support environment for the people being hosted in the municipality.

Among the best practices of the programme implemented in Schwerte, the collaborative and personalised approach stands out; it contributes to a sustainable and replicable hosting model. Specifically, the participation of the local hosting group in the selection process, sharing information about potential profiles, reaching consensus on choices based on identified vulnerabilities, aligning them with available resources, and taking part in pre-arrival orientation, has been crucial in identifying and anticipating the specific needs of programme beneficiaries and initiating a relationship of trust among all parties from the outset. The diversity of

¹⁵ Gesetz über den Aufenthalt, die Erwerbstätigkeit und die Integration von Ausländern im Bundesgebiet 1) (Aufenthaltsgesetz - AufenthG), § 23 Aufenthaltsgewährung durch die obersten Landesbehörden; Aufnahme bei besonders gelagerten politischen Interessen; Neuansiedlung von Schutzsuchenden.

¹⁶ The Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW) is a public-law corporation and a member of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). It participates in the COMET project with the aim of promoting the reception of individuals in need of international protection through the community sponsorship pathway as part of resettlement in Germany.

experiences and knowledge among the individuals who make up the sponsoring group is key to optimising processes and ensuring efficiency in accessing services and resources. Networking also enables an effective participatory structure during the procedure, ensuring that all involved parties can contribute ideas and participate in decision-making.

The role of local authorities in the model implemented in NeST has been defined and adjusted during the implementation process. Failing to include the local authority in the asylum working group can lead to specific challenges arising from a lack of understanding about the programme and the particular status of the sponsorship and resettlement according to which the beneficiaries are hosted. A lack of awareness within local administrations about the various pathways to international protection and complementary hosting programmes may require additional coordination and interventions by regional or state authorities to ensure that beneficiaries have equal access to rights and services, as specified by the programme's legal requirements. These limitations may include access to employment assistance or financial, educational, and social services. The involvement of local administrations can help avoid delays in administrative processes, erroneous decisions, or reliance on private funds from volunteers to cover beneficiaries' needs.

Of the many lessons learned from the NeST experience within COMET that is especially worth mentioning is the need to improve communication and dialogue with local authorities and institutions through periodic meetings, or even the inclusion of a representative of the local administration in the hosting working group. This allows challenges to be addressed collaboratively and local administrative procedures to be adapted to the needs and realities of those hosted under the programme.

The participation of local administrations must extend beyond the provision of public services, as it can play a crucial role in how hosted individuals adapt to the environment and form a network. Local authorities must recognise the hosting groups as vital participants in the process of integrating beneficiaries and providing the institutional support needed to make their efforts more effective and sustainable. The responsibility for hosting and supporting beneficiaries cannot be entirely delegated to civil society, as the resources and tools available to authorities can help involve more stakeholders and create more sustainable solutions.

Finally, it is important to emphasise the need for local authorities to work directly with beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of hosting projects. If beneficiaries are involved in decision-making, their experiences can be used to shape personalised responses and reduce the burden of administrative processes, particularly in vulnerable cases such as single-parent families, where priorities may differ from those identified by the administration or mentor groups. Establishing clear, accessible, and effective communication channels can reduce difficulty accessing information and prevent errors that may negatively impact the situation of the hosted individuals.

These considerations can be addressed through training for public officials and partner entities. Working with cultural sensitivity and understanding the realities of individuals in need of international protection not only gives local administrations tools to foster social cohesion and the effective inclusion of hosted individuals at the municipal level; it also enables them to commit to fair, compassionate, and sustainable public policies. By considering the welcoming

spirit observed among the German community in programmes like NeST, local authorities can play a key role in transforming existing local policies and advocating at the state level for more welcoming approaches.

The experience in Schwerte shows that there is a lack of supportive public policies, which means that the sponsorship programme relies heavily on informal and personal connections rather than formal cooperation between institutions. This type of formal cooperation would improve the capacity to respond to individual needs and ensure more equitable support.

2.2.2 Catalonia: Resettlement and public-private sponsorship

In 2023, the Fons Català presented a proposal to the relevant authorities: the possibility of implementing a public-private sponsorship pathway to host 10 individuals who were in Niger and in need of international protection in Catalan municipalities, within the framework of the National Resettlement Programme (PNR). This proposal had the support of the Fons Català's partner municipalities: the Sant Boi de Llobregat City Council and the Santa Coloma de Gramenet City Council. Applied to the context of Catalonia, the project sought to address the specific resettlement needs of individuals in situations of vulnerability, such as displaced women in Niger who were either alone or with dependent individuals, and who were mostly from the Horn of Africa.

CCAR has played an active role in the implementation proposed in Sant Boi de Llobregat, a municipality historically committed to defending human rights—particularly those of refugees. CCAR has over 20 years of experience in supporting and integrating individuals in need of international protection through complementary programmes, as well as the temporary relocation of human rights defenders in Catalonia. In 2009, in collaboration with CCAR and with support from the Office for the Promotion of Peace and Human Rights of the Government of Catalonia, the Sant Boi de Llobregat City Council launched the foundational initiative for the Programa de Protecció de Defensors de Drets Humans (Programme for the Protection of Defenders of Human Rights). Lasting two years, this project sought to address the relocation needs of human rights defenders who were under threat. Later, Sant Boi became one of the most active municipalities behind the Ciutats Defensores dels Drets Humans (Cities Defending Human Rights) project alongside the Fons Català and CCAR.

In 2015 Sant Boi declared itself a Refugee City, and in early 2016 it introduced its first Refugee Reception Plan. This plan outlined two main areas of action: the first focused on countries of origin and transit, while the second focused on reception efforts within the city. Building on this mandate, in 2017 Sant Boi launched a complementary reception project in collaboration with CCAR for individuals applying for international protection who fell outside the scope of the national programme. This initiative targeted forcibly displaced individuals in particularly vulnerable circumstances and/or at grave risk of social exclusion. It remains active today, and seeks to provide a safe space tailored to fit the needs of five applicants. Beneficiaries are supported by specialised professionals until they achieve autonomy. At the same time, the project conducts awareness-raising activities aimed at the general public and schools in particular, and it participates in various city networks and spaces. The goal is to adopt a holistic approach, engaging citizens in discussions about the rights of refugees and migrants from a

global justice- and human rights-based perspective. The aim is to combat stereotypes, rumours, discrimination, racism, and the criminalisation often faced by forcibly displaced individuals.

The reception framework and all complementary support services were made available to the COMET project to address the needs of the individuals to be resettled. This aligned with the mandate of the municipal reception plan and linked it to the external dimension of asylum rights and the challenges faced by individuals in transit. The aim was to make full use of a project that had been implemented for years, with established working practices and territorial coordination to facilitate the reception and integration of the incoming individuals.

The proposal on the roles of the three most relevant participants in the implementation of the project in the municipality identified the Sant Boi City Council as a facilitating entity in the access to municipal services and resources for COMET beneficiaries on equal terms. This included ensuring that the beneficiaries were officially registered as inhabitants. The council also committed to participating in meetings, activities, and awareness-raising events related to international protection and complementary pathways within the municipality.

Regarding the hosting entity, CCAR committed to providing suitable housing that met living standards and with a sustainable rent for five beneficiaries over a guaranteed period of 12 months. CCAR would also be responsible for providing information and guidance on the international protection process, as well as professional support and comprehensive social and legal guidance for the programme's users, aimed at helping them achieve the necessary autonomy. The activities also included integrating beneficiaries into existing language-learning and employment-integration programmes, as well as managing and justifying financial support to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, there was a provision for referring users to external psychosocial support services if CCAR could not directly provide them.

Lastly, the Fons Català committed to overseeing the project and specific activities, including coordinating the meetings and activities of the monitoring committee. As part of the proposal, the Fons Català would act as an intermediary between the beneficiaries, the hosting entity, and the local administration at all stages of project implementation, ensuring that all parties were informed of relevant details on beneficiaries' profiles and pathways. Regarding financial support for funding the project, the Fons Català would arrange and manage the instruments required to provide an adequate budget based on the number of people hosted in each municipality and each beneficiary's degree of vulnerability.

During the design and adaptation phase for the implementation of the project in Catalonia, one key element considered was the emphasis on community work and networking, which aligns with CCAR's working methodology and the resources and technical coordination spaces that the municipality has provided in the implementation of previous projects.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the implementation of COMET in Santa Coloma de Gramenet was that it was articulated through the municipal space La CIBA, a centre for women's resources, innovation, and feminist economics inaugurated in March 2020. This public facility is dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through various services and programmes, including specialised support for women recovering from gender-based

violence. La CIBA also works using a community- and training-based approach, offering holistic support within a space that serves as a meeting point for women from diverse backgrounds. This aspect was regarded as an innovative feature in supporting the beneficiaries of the proposed pathway, most of whom were women. In recent years, La CIBA has become an example on both a national and European level in implementing public policies aimed at achieving real gender equality and driving social transformation through a feminist perspective.

Within the framework of the COMET project and through La CIBA, the City Council of Santa Coloma de Gramenet provided a team of professionals from various disciplines (including social workers, legal experts, psychologists, and childcare educators) who offered comprehensive support and follow-up for the beneficiaries. This multidisciplinary support was designed to address the specific needs of each individual or family unit, ensuring an inclusive and respectful integration process. The proposal also included housing for each individual or family unit as well as shared spaces (such as communal kitchens, dining areas, laundry facilities, and recreational spaces). This approach sought to foster a welcoming and functional environment that encouraged coexistence and well-being. Additionally, the plan included educational and training resources to promote personal and professional development, as well as supplementary services for minors such as access to childcare facilities to support a work-life balance. Through this initiative, the Santa Coloma de Gramenet City Council integrated the COMET project into its 2022-2026 Master Plan for Cooperation, Human Rights, and Global Citizenship. It offered a cutting-edge project like La CIBA, drawing on the expertise and operation of a space that is at the forefront of public policies in comprehensive support and guidance for women.

A key aspect of the implementation of the COMET project in Catalonia was that both of the city councils involved took advantage of existing programmes and projects, thereby enhancing efficiency and optimising resources. This approach contributed to the greater sustainability of the project in the medium and long term.

Unfortunately, the proposal for a public-private sponsorship model to host forcibly displaced individuals in Catalonia as part of the COMET project was hindered by a lack of agreement among the relevant authorities to enable decentralised reception programmes under the PNR. In this context, the absence of coordination spaces that included the participation of local governments posed significant challenges to the sustainability of both the COMET project and related municipal initiatives. For example, the programme implemented by the City Council of Sant Boi de Llobregat and CCAR was halted to accommodate the sponsorship pathway proposed by COMET.

The need for coordination spaces at all stages, including the involvement of municipal authorities, has been identified as crucial for structuring initiatives of this nature. A lack of information and transparency in multi-level governance can create distrust among different stakeholders, leading to demotivation and a sense of resource loss, particularly among municipal governments.

2.2.3 France: University corridors

As part of the COMET project, a university corridor for individuals in need of international protection has been implemented in Clermont-Ferrand, France.¹⁷ This pathway integrates access to higher education and community support into its inclusion model, involving collaborative efforts by Forum Réfugiés¹⁸ (a COMET partner organisation), Clermont-Auvergne University (with which Forum Réfugiés has been working since 2019), the City Council's Department of Social and Urban Development (Direction du Développement Social et Urbain, DDSU), and UNHCR support. The Clermont-Ferrand model also incorporates backing from private companies and foundations—such as the Clermont-Auvergne University Foundation, the Michelin Foundation, and the Crédit Agricole Foundation—to ensure project sustainability and effective inclusion processes. Additionally, partnerships have been established with the Francophone University Agency (Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, AUF) and various government authorities, including the Directorate General for Foreigners in France (Direction Générale des Étrangers en France, DGEF).

As a university corridor initiative, Clermont-Auvergne University has played a pivotal role in the project's success. Notably, it has coordinated with departments such as International Relations and Student Life, which already possesses tools to address the needs of international students—including refugees. This networked approach allows for the use of existing structures, avoiding the need to create new ones and optimising resources. The university is strongly committed to ensuring participants' academic success, offering not only specific resources and support but also clear information on their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for residence and employment in France.

Some of the challenges and lessons learned from this pathway include the selection of beneficiaries based on their ability to complete the studies they pursue, as well as providing support during the process of applying for international protection. Post-graduation guidance, (particularly after completing a master's degree) and access to paid internships and the job market also pose challenges. These issues are not unique to programme participants but are shared with students in general. Additionally, there is a lack of local opportunities in the sectors related to the fields of study pursued by beneficiaries. Finally, access to housing remains a significant challenge, aligning with obstacles identified in other regions. Through partnerships with AFEV and CROUS residences, programme participants have been provided with affordable housing solutions via community collaboration, though this remains a concern for the phases following the initial reception.

¹⁷ For more information about the university corridors in Clermont-Ferrand, including testimonials from participants and the host community, visit the COMET project website: www.cometnetwork.eu

¹⁸ Forum Réfugiés is a non-profit organisation founded in 1982 that organises actions in France and internationally to uphold the right to asylum and support refugees throughout their reception and inclusion process. Within the framework of the COMET project, Forum Réfugiés is responsible for implementing the university corridor pathway from the Central Mediterranean Route to France.

The participation of the Clermont-Ferrand City Council is organised within the Territorial Reception and Integration Contracts (Contrats Territoriaux d'Accueil et d'Intégration, CTAI), which enable municipalities to implement actions complementing the national reception framework. Through this contract, the DDSU of Clermont-Ferrand has taken on a strategic role beyond direct financial support, fostering participation from its associative network to promote social cohesion and international solidarity through community development, cultural exchange, and addressing prejudices. The involvement of local government from the outset ensures that processes for selection, preparation, arrival, and inclusion are conducted efficiently, with appropriate responses for emotional, financial, and practical challenges. Some of these challenges can be addressed by simplifying administrative procedures, developing educational projects for social inclusion, or forging agreements with the private sector to facilitate access to internships.

The synergy between the local administration, civil society organisations, academia, and the private sector in the implementation of the programme in Clermont-Ferrand has been key to its success. The model highlights the value of decentralised collaboration, where various local participants lead and implement solutions adapted to the needs and capabilities of both the participants and the host communities. In this regard, it is important to facilitate coordination and monitoring spaces to assess needs in real time, adapt interventions, and promote collective learning. These spaces should also be participatory for the hosted individuals themselves, enabling peer support and empowering participants towards greater autonomy.

Nevertheless, within the framework of COMET this collaborative approach has not yet been institutionalised, as its implementation depends on the goodwill of the parties who have so far made the project possible. This reliance on the commitment and time of specific individuals, along with the evolution of regional and local policies and budgets, presents challenges that weaken the project and limit its sustainability and continuity. Internal processes—such as allocating places in study programmes and providing participants with personalised inclusion plans—need to be formalised. Difficulties in securing support from other levels of government and the absence of a formal framework divide efforts and hinder long-term, comprehensive planning.

The implementation of the university corridor in Clermont-Ferrand has enabled local participants to establish connections with other cities and stakeholders, facilitating the exchange of methods and approaches for developing university corridors. This has increased interest in replicating the model and transforming it into a permanent pathway. Nevertheless, the influence of more restrictive migration policies affecting reception rights at the European level and France's particular social and political context could generate tensions and debates regarding the programme's implementation despite its humanitarian nature. Such hostility has a direct impact on participants and their integration process. For this reason, it is essential to carry out awareness-raising and cultural exchange activities that reinforce a positive narrative about the programme's importance and that help expand support networks. Projects like COMET, grounded in a human rights and non-discrimination approach, are critical because they help combat stereotypes and exchange knowledge, skills, and experiences that enrich host communities and support their development. In the long term, the goal is to establish a permanent university pathway.

2.2.4 Italy: Humanitarian corridors and educational pathways for unaccompanied minors

Two types of safe pathways to Italy have been developed within the framework of the COMET project: humanitarian corridors and an educational pathway for forcibly displaced unaccompanied minors. Since 2016, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, (Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia, or FCEI),¹⁹ the coordinating entity of the COMET project, has been working on the co-development of humanitarian corridors in Italy. This has led to a fruitful collaboration between faith-based organisations and government administrations. The Italian experience has made it possible to scale up this model of safe pathways and dignified reception in other countries, expanding both the number of departure countries and of host countries. Within the framework of the COMET project, its aim is not only to coordinate and facilitate the co-design of methods, tools, guidelines and procedures, but also to implement a humanitarian corridor to work towards the goal of admitting and supporting 130 people through complementary pathways.

INTERSOS,²⁰ an organisation that is part of the COMET consortium, has operational teams in various countries along the Central Mediterranean Route. In recent years, it has initiated a pilot mechanism to provide a safe pathway for unaccompanied minors in need of international protection, linking this with the opportunity to continue and complete their formal and post-compulsory education. Its goal within COMET is to offer opportunities for unaccompanied minors through this pilot pathway, which combines educational corridors with community sponsorship.

For the purposes of this study, the focus will primarily be on the information provided by the various parties involved in implementing the educational pathway for forcibly displaced, unaccompanied minors—Pagella in tasca²¹—in the municipalities of Turin and Asti. This approach is particularly innovative, as it provides a safe pathway for a group that is usually excluded from access to complementary pathways despite their high level of vulnerability.

¹⁹ The FCEI is an organisation founded in 1967 that promotes cooperation between Italian protestant churches. Its mission includes a commitment to justice and peace, and among its objectives are the implementation of activities involving solidarity, charity, social health, and the protection of fundamental rights for people in vulnerable situations, particularly refugees and migrants. The FCEI has participated in numerous European projects promoting safe pathways and dignified reception for individuals in need of international protection. Its work as part of the Humanitarian Corridors consortium received the Nansen Refugee Award in the Europe regional category in 2019.

²⁰ INTERSOS is a non-profit founded in 1992 that carries out actions in various countries to respond to crises and humanitarian emergencies and to empower different entities and society in general in the promotion of international solidarity and justice. Recognised at both the national level in Italy and internationally, INTERSOS holds consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

²¹ For more information on the Pagella in tasca project and testimonials from beneficiaries and host communities, see the COMET project website: www.cometnetwork.eu.

Reflections are also drawn from the experiences of the humanitarian corridors coordinated by the FCEI and its collaboration with other project partners, such as Associazione Mosaico – Azioni per i Rifugiati and Associazione Frantz Fanon.

Among the best practices identified in the development and implementation of this project is the creation of specific reception structures or teams focused on supporting users, and on coordinating and cooperating with various municipal departments and organisations managing migration and international protection projects. To maximise their effectiveness, these teams must be interdisciplinary, involving professionals from social, psychological, and legal fields. In the case of the municipalities of Turin and Asti, for instance, the municipal authority has primarily participated through social policy departments, specifically those dedicated to the care of unaccompanied foreign minors, which have multidisciplinary teams. In this context, the social assistance and education team has been responsible for raising awareness about the project, supporting users, and identifying and selecting host families. One factor that has been key to the programme's success is close collaboration with these host families to identify needs and facilitate procedures related to accessing educational services, literacy and language learning, vocational training, recreational activities, and emotional and social support.

Coordination between municipal departments and third-sector organisations such as INTERSOS, the Diocese of Turin, and its pastoral office for migrants has also been essential. This collaboration has optimised available educational and social resources, mobilised volunteers and potential host families, and united efforts within the project in general.

For the public administration, adapting municipal services—both in terms of resources and time—has been necessary to adequately meet the specific needs and expectations of the hosted group. This includes handling processes related to the legal procedure for applying for international protection, administrative tasks, and participation in social and cultural activities. To this end, municipal services must recognise the potential of each individual and understand that each case requires a tailored approach that provides personalised responses to the specific circumstances of users—in this case, minors—to ensure an effective inclusion process.

It is crucial to recognise that the benefits of the project extend not only to its users, but also to the host community. Municipal participation in the project goes beyond simply facilitating the implementation of complementary pathways and ensuring access to housing. Structural inclusion by integrating users into existing spaces is key to breaking down barriers and providing meaningful support. Projects of this nature play an important role in raising awareness among host communities about the situation of people in need of international protection, the conflicts that cause forced displacement, the importance of international solidarity, and the shared responsibility of multiple participants in guaranteeing the protection of human rights. Incorporating participation in projects promoting the right to international protection into municipal strategy and public policy enables the creation of stronger, more sustainable collaborative networks and more optimised planning.

Institutionalising participation in such projects can help address the limitations identified during the project's implementation phase. When a project on humanitarian corridors is considered public policy, civil society may feel more secure, supported, and motivated to play a more active role. This could increase the number of families willing to host minors or the amount of housing

offered to users at affordable rental rates. It would also reduce the burden on non-governmental and civil society organisations, which play a significant role in accompanying beneficiaries. To adopt this position, municipalities must organise regular training and awareness-raising activities, enabling host communities to better understand their role in hosting people in need of international protection and in designing and implementing safe pathways. Informative and awareness-raising sessions can also help identify new collaborators and expand available resources. Although external funding is necessary for project implementation, it is important for municipal budgets to include these initiatives in the long term to ensure their continuity and the involvement of local authorities.

One obstacle to be remedied is the difficulty with bureaucratic procedures, particularly regarding the continuity of support and protection for users who are minors transitioning into adulthood. These processes can be exacerbated by a lack of information, transparency, rapidity, and coordination in the responses from the different administrations involved.

Finally, the experience of Italian municipalities also highlights the lack of spaces for the exchange of technical information where municipalities involved in the project can share best practice and lessons learned with other local and supramunicipal authorities. Limited human and financial resources for this purpose hinder participation in informative and training meetings, which are seen as capable of enriching the work carried out by local, state, and international administrations, while also fostering the transformation of public policies.

One of the best practices implemented in the municipality of Turin (which has been incorporated as a broader strategy within the COMET project) is the collaboration between municipal authorities and grassroots organisations formed and/or led by individuals with lived experience of forced displacement. Drawing from the challenges experienced by its own members upon arrival in Italy and in accessing the reception system and international protection, the Mosaico - Azione per i Rifugiati organisation²² seeks to transform this experience into social capital by supporting newly arrived individuals and advocating to reshape public narratives about refugees in Italy. Initially, Mosaico created information points that, over time, have evolved into spaces for social mediation in collaboration with local authorities. Its relationship with municipal institutions is open and cooperative, and they work together to identify and resolve challenges.

An innovative aspect of this collaboration is the creation of a centralised service centre for refugees and migrants, the Spazio Comune. Located in a municipal building, it offers health,

²² Mosaico - Azione per i Rifugiati (Mosaico - Action for Refugees) is a socially promoted, apolitical and non-partisan association founded by a group of refugees in Turin in 2006. Its aim is to support other migrants, both applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. Mosaico created and developed the OASI project, which provides support and guidance in accessing information and services available in the local area. Within the framework of the COMET project, Mosaico supports consortium members in orientation activities conducted prior to users' arrival, provides tools for social inclusion in host communities, and facilitates intercultural mediation and the management of expectations during the reception period.

administrative, and legal services. This approach prevents the fragmentation of available resources and the associated logistical difficulties, helping to reinforce the sustainability and effectiveness of the implemented programmes. Based on the “one-stop-shop” concept, Mosaico’s initiative in Turin has been replicated in other cities with the support of UNHCR.

Mosaico’s guidance towards empowerment and its advocacy work are based on recognising users as rights holders. Its experience-based approach allows for the development of effective solutions and advocacy for more inclusive, fairer policies for refugees. In this context, the importance of listening, empathy, and trust are key to creating safe and confidential spaces where not only can urgent issues be addressed, but long-term support can be provided to break the cycle of vulnerability.

Mosaico’s initiatives include awareness-raising activities, efforts to provide forcibly displaced individuals with access to education and support during their academic journey, assistance with bureaucratic procedures, emergency support during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the creation of a mobile app providing information on available municipal resources, the promotion of safe spaces for women, psychological and intercultural mediation support, advocacy at the European level through participation in regional networks, and the establishment of bridges for communication between displaced communities and public administrations at various levels. Mosaico also offers training and capacity-building in intercultural mediation for users interested in these roles.

Finally, within the framework of COMET and specifically regarding collaborations among various participants and municipal authorities in the context of the pathways implemented in Italy, it is important to highlight the importance of entities providing users with psychological and psychiatric support. The Frantz Fanon Association,²³ a partner organisation in the COMET project, offers free psychological counselling, psychosocial support, and cultural and ethno-clinical mediation to individuals with lived experience of forced displacement, migrants, and survivors of human trafficking. It also supports healthcare services, administrations, and teams working in the system of international protection reception and social inclusion through supervision, guidance, and training.

The experience of the Frantz Fanon Association reinforces the idea of the need for collaborative work with local authorities. From the perspective of its actions, such collaboration is essential to ensure a proper distribution of resources and an integrated and coherent institutional response. This includes creating spaces for reflection and continuous improvement to adjust public policies and existing services to meet users’ real and current needs. This way, besides simply addressing their urgent requirements, users’ long-term well-being is promoted.

Furthermore, collaboration with local administrations allows organisations like the Frantz Fanon Association—which rely heavily on donations and their own funds—to develop more sustainable models for intervention. The Association has worked with administrations at various levels,

²³ Founded in Turin in 1997, the Frantz Fanon Association is made up of psychologists, psychiatrists, cultural mediators, educators and anthropologists. Its aim is to develop clinical interventions in the field of mental health for migrants and refugees.

including departments focused on unaccompanied minors or immigration, to address the lack of resources and limitations in access to public mental health services for migrants and forcibly displaced individuals. This collaboration extends beyond the provision of services to include advocacy on the social and political importance of these services. Public administrations often have a limited understanding of the realities and challenges faced by forcibly displaced and migrant individuals, which can lead to policies or actions that are disconnected from current needs and, therefore, ineffective.

Collaboration has also been established with the private sector, specifically banking services, which have helped strengthen the financial framework that supports the organisation's activities. It is essential to understand that the initiatives carried out have a positive impact not only on the target population, but on society as a whole. For this reason, the Frantz Fanon Association also prioritises participation in international projects and networks that enable constructive dialogue, experience-sharing, mutual learning, and training among diverse stakeholders. Institutionalising these spaces for dialogue and collaboration as part of the strategies of municipal or regional governments helps formalise communication and channels for referral, enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of the services provided.

Similar to Mosaico, the experience of the Frantz Fanon Association highlights the value of the cultural mediation approach, which allows for a change in participatory structures so that they are led by the rights-holding users themselves. It also underscores the need for institutional structures to be more flexible in adapting to demands—particularly in addressing the bureaucratic burden that can accompany these processes, which may result in frustration and gaps in the quality of services provided.

2.2.5 The Netherlands: Community sponsorship and educational pathways

In the framework of the COMET project, the partner organisation Justice and Peace Netherlands (JPNL)²⁴ aimed to implement an educational pathway for people in need of international protection, similar to the French model involving university corridors. Although at the beginning of the project there was interest from government entities, educational institutions, and social organisations in developing complementary educational pathways for international protection, the challenges linked to changing political contexts have made it impossible to negotiate the implementation of this pathway in the Netherlands.

Nevertheless, JPNL's experience with community sponsorship pathways through the Samen Hier network has provided key insights for better managing reception processes through safe pathways for international protection. This includes recommendations for more effective participation by local governments in collaboration with citizen support groups that accompany

²⁴ Founded in 1968, Justice and Peace Netherlands is an NGO whose mission is to defend human rights and social justice through the promotion of committed and welcoming local communities. Through its actions, it fosters collaboration between multiple stakeholders to carry out awareness-raising and advocacy activities, as well as to develop projects for the protection of forcibly displaced persons and human rights defenders, such as Samen Hier and Shelter City.

users in their social and labour inclusion processes, as well as other key participants such as non-governmental organisations, educational centres, and the private sector.

Therefore, the lessons learned from JPNL highlight the need to offer spaces for participation and collaboration among various participants for the joint design and implementation of proposals for safe pathways. These collaborative working groups must include both public and private participants and ensure a multidisciplinary and intersectional approach, taking advantage of the expertise of entities specialising in asylum and inclusion, as well as individuals with lived experience of forced displacement. Members of these intersectoral groups must have clear information about their responsibilities and access to training resources in order to carry out their assigned tasks. The programmes developed should also incorporate effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that, when necessary, allow for adjustments to both the objectives and specific activities. Flexible methods enable more individualised support, recognising users as rights holders.

Experiences like JPNL's reinforce the idea that support provided by municipal governments in the implementation of programmes can go beyond ensuring access to local public services. In addition to participating in the logistics of reception programmes (such as access to housing, social services, and employment support) and providing assistance with administrative procedures, public administrations are crucial to establishing alliances between different levels of government and other local participants to promote inclusive, intersectional, and sustainable projects, enriching both the users and those helping to support the reception process.

3. Recommendations for promoting safe pathways for refugees from a municipalist perspective

The previous sections have included analyses of experiences from various COMET project partners and other entities involved in promoting decentralised reception programmes and implementing safe pathways for people in need of international protection. Based on these analyses, the following recommendations are provided to guide municipal governments' participation in similar initiatives. The recommendations are organised according to where they are to be carried out: on a municipal, regional, national, or international level. Although this list of recommendations is not exhaustive, it aims to address the challenges and barriers identified in the examples observed and to make the most of the capacities and opportunities offered by a municipalist approach. This approach emphasises an integrated framework and coordination among diverse stakeholders, including governments, organisations from civil society, and people in need of international protection. These recommendations take into account perspectives based on gender, intersectionality, and human rights, placing users at the centre to promote programmes and pathways for accessing international protection that are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.

3.1 Recommendations at the municipal level:

- Institutionalise the participation of local government in reception networks. Advocate for collaboration with organisations from civil society as a public policy priority to promote programmes for dignified reception through safe pathways.

- Allocate specific budgets and resources. Dedicate municipal resources to international protection programmes, ensuring that municipal services are accessible to all residents, including those who are vulnerable due to their status as refugees or asylum seekers.
- Ensure that different areas of municipal government are effectively coordinated to ensure the efficient management of budget allocations so that actions supporting reception and the promotion of safe pathways do not detract from international cooperation policies.
- Establish clear guidelines and mechanisms for monitoring, transparency, and accountability when implementing public policies related to reception through safe pathways, beyond the timelines of the project carried out in the municipality.
- Guarantee that resources allocated to reception programmes and safe pathways for international protection are used ethically and with respect for the rights and well-being of beneficiaries at every stage.
- Implement local frameworks that are adaptable and flexible. Simplify bureaucratic processes, taking into account the specific circumstances of those accessing safe pathways and decentralised reception programmes. Ensure unrestricted access to local rights and services such as registration, healthcare, education, and vocational training.
- Conduct a thorough analysis to identify existing and potential participants, resources, and networks at the municipal level.
- Design strategies to mobilise relevant stakeholders, establish long-term strategic alliances, and define clear roles and specific objectives.
- Collaborate with social entities, specialised NGOs and civil society to support individuals requiring international protection. Use their experience and expertise to facilitate access to housing, education, language learning, and social and labour integration.
- Ensure accessible, transparent, and efficient communication channels among the parties involved, including interpretation services and digital tools.
- Design and provide training in international protection, reception, intercultural skills, and intersectionality for personnel and collaborators.
- Diversify sources of funding through shared plans involving public and private participants.
- Work closely with the private sector and academic institutions to identify opportunities for vocational training and employment integration. Adapt programmes to identify needs and opportunities presented by new technologies. Identify potential incentives for businesses and academic institutions to participate in safe pathway programmes.
- Encourage the active involvement of civil society in the reception and inclusion of individuals requiring international protection through mentorship programmes.
- Promote local awareness-raising activities for cultural, educational, and social inclusion, fostering coexistence and social cohesion.
- Incorporate intercultural mediators to help manage expectations and reduce cultural tensions.
- Help to reshape narratives on migration in collaboration with affected communities by promoting spaces for dialogue and exchange between the host community and individuals accessing safe pathways and reception programmes. Help to prevent further

social and political polarisation by working to better transmit these individuals' positive impact on local and international development.

- Foster the active and meaningful participation of individuals and communities with lived experience of forced displacement in the design of public policies and all phases of project implementation. Ensure they have decision-making capacity.
- Include provisions for financial and non-financial incentives to encourage community participation.
- Address the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups of forcibly displaced individuals such as unaccompanied minors, women, single-parent families, and/or individuals from the LGBTQI+ community, ensuring their access to adequate services and promoting their autonomy.
- Include mental health support as an integral part of guidance programmes, recognising emotional well-being as essential for progress in other areas of social and labour integration

3.2 Recommendations at the regional level:

- Create and participate in spaces for the exchange of knowledge and best practice with other municipalities and supralocal entities through municipal cooperation.
- Establish supramunicipal communication and collaboration channels to enable more effective management of projects for the reception of individuals in need of international protection through safe pathways.
- Cooperate with the regional administration to ensure that local realities are taken into account in the design of their reception and international protection policies.
- Ask for access to training and financial resources to strengthen local capacities for participation in all decision-making spaces.
- Increase municipal involvement by expanding and ensuring the continuity of budget allocations to lead complementary initiatives from a decentralised management perspective.
- Promote changes to regional legislation to ensure that it fully protects the rights of forcibly displaced individuals.

3.3 Recommendations at the state level:

- Create opportunities for collaboration with state authorities to expand complementary pathway initiatives, ensuring the active participation of local authorities in their design and implementation.
- Negotiate the allocation of adequate and sustainable financial resources to local and regional governments for the implementation of reception programmes and safe pathways.
- Increase the resources allocated to safe pathways, particularly through programmes such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). Ensure sustainable funding that is adapted to meet the needs of each region and decentralised to the municipal level.
- Improve coordination between local, regional, and state governments to ensure programmes are efficient and aligned with real needs. This includes assigning clear

responsibilities at each level and establishing joint coordination spaces from the outset of the individuals' arrival.

- Advocate for the simplification and acceleration of the process of applying for and granting entry and residence permits to individuals using safe pathways.
- Reduce the bureaucracy associated with resettlement and complementary pathway programmes, such as documentation requirements for visas, work permits, and medical authorisations.
- Collaborate with NGOs, civil society, and/or faith-based organisations to establish humanitarian corridors that guarantee safe access to European territory for individuals in situations of extreme vulnerability.
- Participate in prior orientation activities for individuals accessing safe pathway programmes, and provide up-to-date information about local resources and programmes to ensure that the matching process is effective and maximises inclusion opportunities for beneficiaries.
- Collaborate with other regions to promote more training opportunities for labour market integration in specific, strategic sectors.
- Ensure that safe pathways do not replace but rather complement territorial asylum procedures.
- Ensure that complementary pathways serve—as their name indicates—as a mechanism that complements resettlement quotas, helping to amplify efforts in this area.
- Develop humanitarian visa programmes to enable individuals with international protection needs to apply from their country of origin or current location. This includes establishing clear and simple procedures for obtaining humanitarian visas.
- Participate in spaces for dialogue and decision-making on the implementation of the European Pact on Asylum and Migration, ensuring coherence with local capacities and needs.
- Advocate for the transformation of legal frameworks to allow for greater autonomy for municipal governments in programmes for accompanying refugees arriving through safe pathways.

3.4 Recommendations at the international level:

- Participate in networks and spaces for collaboration among municipalities from various countries to share and replicate best practice and address common challenges in a coordinated manner.
- Invest in international cooperation projects with the first-reception countries of forcibly displaced individuals to better understand their situation and provide more effective responses.
- Promote agreements between relevant institutions to ensure an equitable distribution of responsibilities and compliance with international obligations, particularly those outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- Prioritise vulnerable groups—including women, children, and members of the LGBTQI+ community—over groups selected solely based on specific labour profiles.
- Advocate for an approach to migration management that is based primarily on solidarity and grounded in a gender-based perspective and in respect for human rights.

- Demand clear and ambitious annual resettlement commitments aligned with global needs identified by the UNHCR.

4. Conclusions

In a global context marked by the rise of forced displacement and increasingly restrictive migration policies, municipalities are emerging as key players in defending the right to international protection and promoting safe pathways. This report aims to highlight the importance of municipalism as an agent of change due to its ability to drive innovative initiatives in hosting and refuge, focusing on actions that aid people who are in need of international protection or who are in vulnerable situations in their countries of origin, transit, and first reception.

Through the experiences of the COMET project, as well as examples from Germany, Catalonia and Spain, France, Italy, and the Netherlands, it has been demonstrated that local governments, using the principle of localisation (essential in humanitarian responses and solidarity), can play a pivotal role in implementing complementary pathways, particularly through public-private community sponsorship schemes. Their proximity to citizens, understanding of local needs, and ability to mobilise human and economic resources make them indispensable participants in ensuring access to fundamental rights and full social and labour inclusion for forcibly displaced people over the medium and long term.

In this regard, it is essential that municipalities not only support these initiatives but lead their development, integrating them as a fundamental part of local public policies and engaging beyond merely providing access to social services.

Nevertheless, the political commitment to developing these initiatives must involve the collaboration of multiple participants, including regional, national, and supramunicipal government institutions. It is therefore necessary to formalise collaboration agreements and create coordination spaces before, during, and after implementation to monitor and evaluate programmes and to ensure that they have efficient and effective outcomes with positive impacts on the targeted groups. Furthermore, the continuity of these programmes must be guaranteed to avoid reliance solely on political will or temporary funding. This makes it essential to advocate at the institutional level while also exploring innovative ways of securing funding—such as through civil society or the private sector, as outlined in this document.

Throughout the analysis, the crucial importance of collaboration among the various participants involved in the reception and inclusion of individuals in need of international protection has also become evident. The COMET project, in particular, has demonstrated the untapped potential of synergy between public administrations (local, regional, and national), civil society organisations, and the private sector. The shared experiences included in the report provide a range of positive practices that can inspire municipalities in Catalonia and beyond. While the implementation of the COMET project in Catalonia has faced obstacles, it has also shown that some Catalan municipalities already have a long history of implementing complementary programmes for hosting, temporary relocation, or social and labour integration, where the involvement of multiple participants has been critical.

All the experiences described confirm the importance of a collaborative and personalised approach to supporting programme participants. Some projects, such as NeST, have demonstrated the essential role of the active involvement of civil society through what they term a “local hosting group.” This group also participates in the selection process, sharing information on potential profiles and agreeing on choices based on identified vulnerabilities and available resources. Their involvement facilitates the identification and anticipation of the specific needs of programme participants, while also helping to build trust from the outset.

However, several challenges to take into account have also been identified. First, the sustainability of programmes is a significant issue, as the long-term availability of financial and human resources is key to ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of municipal initiatives. It is essential to secure strong commitments from autonomous communities like Catalonia, and to explore new funding avenues—including public-private collaboration—to diversify resource sources.

Second, the social and labour inclusion of refugees is a complex process requiring sustained effort from all stakeholders. Municipalities must develop comprehensive strategies that ease access to registration, housing, education, healthcare, and the job market. Furthermore, it is essential to actively combat the prejudice and discrimination that persist in our society. Partnerships with established local entities advocating for refugees’ rights can be of enormous value. Also noteworthy is the collaboration of municipal authorities with grassroots organisations led by individuals with lived displacement experiences, as seen in Turin. This approach, embedded within the COMET project, takes advantage of the knowledge and expertise of displaced individuals to design more effective policies and programmes based on real needs.

The COMET project has underscored the value of decentralised collaboration, with local participants leading and implementing solutions shaped to meet the needs and capacities of both refugees and host communities. As a result, it is essential to create spaces for coordination and monitoring involving national and regional administrations, municipalities, and other relevant local participants. These participatory spaces, which must include the refugees themselves, allow for the real-time assessment of needs and the adaptation of interventions, while also encouraging collective learning.

Despite the successes noted, this report also highlights the need to institutionalise the collaborative approach it advocates throughout its analysis. The current dependence on individual commitment and the evolution of state, regional, and local policies and budgets poses challenges to long-term sustainability. As a result, this report would like to emphasise the importance of embedding these initiatives within a stable framework that protects them from shifts in political or economic priorities.

In conclusion, this report calls for the mobilisation of local participants and their active involvement in implementing safe pathways that are complementary to asylum policies for individuals in need of international protection who arrive by their own means. It stresses the need for a transversal approach to protecting refugees and asylum seekers, one that integrates internal and external perspectives into municipal public policies on hosting and cooperation. As mentioned, municipalities’ proximity to citizens, their knowledge of social networks, and their

ability to mobilise resources make them catalysts for change, capable of generating synergies and delivering effective responses.

Ultimately, this report not only highlights the importance of municipalities in hosting refugees, but also seeks to propose opportunities for building a broader, sustainable, and rights-based hosting model grounded in principles of shared responsibility and inter-institutional cooperation. This analysis reveals the need to increase decentralisation in the management of migration and asylum policies, providing municipalities with more resources and powers, fostering innovation in financing mechanisms to ensure that programmes are sustainable, and strengthening inter-institutional coordination for more collaborative action.

Only through coordinated and strategic actions at the municipal level can we build cohesive and inclusive societies where human rights become a tangible reality for all, especially for forcibly displaced people.

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