Complementary Pathways

Key factors in future growth

Susan Fratzke
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Executive Summary

The number of people in need of international protection worldwide continues to rise, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimating that as of mid-2024, about 43.7 million refugees and others were in need of international protection. At the same time, the political landscape surrounding migration and refugee protection in Europe has shifted, making access to protection increasingly uncertain. This is due not only to limited government pledges of resettlement places, but also to concerns about European communities' reception capacity and housing infrastructure and to perceptions of a decreasing tolerance among publics for irregular arrivals by migrants and refugees.

While refugee resettlement remains a key mechanism for providing protection, alone it is not enough. In 2023, about 96,000 refugees departed for resettlement countries, including about 15,000 to EU Member States, falling far short of needs. Complementary pathways to protection—such as humanitarian admission programmes, sponsorship programmes, and education- and employment-based mobility opportunities—are important tools for a broader protection strategy. Since the significant influx of refugee arrivals in Europe in 2015–16, attention to and investments in establishing such additional legal pathways have increased considerably. While many initiatives have emerged at the grassroots or national level, these efforts have been bolstered by EU and global calls for further progress on this front.

Complementary pathways to protection ... are important tools for a broader protection strategy.

Complementary pathways have been instrumental in creating additional legal channels through which displaced people can move to safe host countries and have helped diversify the profiles of those being welcomed—not only based on vulnerabilities but also on skills and aspirations. They have also provided policymakers with the flexibility to respond quickly to emergencies, as when volunteer-based programmes were instrumental to welcoming people displaced by the war in Ukraine and the Taliban takeover of Kabul in Afghanistan. Additionally, these pathways have often helped address capacity concerns (for instance, around housing) and enhanced integration support offered to newcomers. However, questions remain about the sustainability and scalability of these pathways.

Sponsorship programmes and other complementary pathways have been resource intensive to operate and require strong commitment and effective coordination among the various actors involved, which can include civil-society groups, universities, employers, volunteers, and different governmental entities. The diversity of stakeholders involved in these pathways has strengthened the protection field but also presented significant challenges. Fragmentation, often linked to limited coordination between stakeholders, has meant pathways sometimes unintentionally compete with one another for attention and resources. For example, they may strive for the same limited pots of public funding from sources such as the EU Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund. Limited engagement from government stakeholders and sometimes a lack of programme visibility, combined with inefficiencies linked to duplicated efforts and missed economies of scale, have compounded the challenges of effectively scaling these initiatives.

To date, efforts to build up complementary pathways have focused heavily on enhancing the operations of individual programmes. But for these programmes to grow and fulfil their objectives, a supportive ecosystem needs to be in place, one that can help them overcome these big-picture challenges. Key elements of this ecosystem include:

- **Engagement of government as a core partner.** While complementary pathways are often led by civil-society and private partners—bringing leadership and resources that make them attractive options for expanding the protection space—government nonetheless has an important role to play in ensuring the necessary policy structures are in place to support growth. Government partners should thus be included in programme design and implementation discussions from the outset and on an ongoing basis, and they should see themselves as integral to these processes.
- **A common understanding among all parties about a programme's goals and context.** Each complementary pathway relies on a different, often highly diverse, network of actors operating in both departure and destination countries. Programme partners and other relevant stakeholders (such as ambassadors and administrative staff) should have opportunities, such as joint information sessions, early on in a programme to reach a joint understanding about its core programme goals and operations. Formal collaboration frameworks and codes of conduct, such as those used in Canada's sponsorship and educational pathways, can also help clearly define each actor's role.
- **Open communication across complementary pathways operating in the same context.** The decentralised nature of complementary pathways means that multiple programmes may operate in the same departure or destination country with little coordination. Creating formal platforms for communication and collaboration, such as periodic country-level stakeholder roundtables or communities of practice (such as those fostered by the Share Quality Sponsorship Network Plus or the national, multi-pathway roundtable in France), can help identify opportunities for coordination and facilitate the sharing of critical information.
- **Shared infrastructure across programmes.** As pathways programmes grow, there may be opportunities to generate economies of scale by developing shared infrastructure for certain operations. Front-end functions could be a good place to start, and some programmes are already utilising joint application platforms (as in the Italian and French educational corridors, where applicants can apply to multiple participating universities at once) or with candidate databases that can result in referrals to multiple programmes (such as the Talent Catalog of refugee jobseekers managed by Talent Beyond Boundaries).
- **Sustainable and diversified funding, with costs shared between government and nongovernmental partners.** Funding for complementary pathways, often via project-based grants, is typically less predictable than for resettlement programmes, which can make long-term planning and infrastructure investments challenging. Cross-programme coordination measures also generally do not have separate or substantial financial support. Strategies to address these issues include government support for programme infrastructure and collaboration, greater flexibility in some EU funds, cost-sharing mechanisms (such as small contributions by a university's students to help defray costs to refugee peers), and social impact bonds.

As policymakers and programme leaders explore ways to create efficiencies and scale up complementary pathways, it will be important to stay grounded in their core aims: to provide people who have international protection needs with a route to safety, protect them from refoulement, and support them as they restart their lives. Carefully monitoring and assessing the impact of programme changes on beneficiaries, their families, and the communities that welcome them will be essential to ensuring these pathways have the desired impact.

1 Introduction

Since the arrival in Europe of large numbers of refugees from Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere in 2015–16, policymakers, civil-society actors, and UN agencies have repeatedly called for the creation of more legal pathways for people to seek safety, to obviate the need for dangerous journeys. Yet many of these efforts have fallen short of the mark, despite the growing protection needs reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[1] The number of people admitted to EU countries through refugee resettlement was just 15,000 in 2023, and resettlement numbers across Europe have fallen year on year since 2021.[2] The decreasing availability of resettlement spaces has been the result of a number of factors, including a shortage of housing and reception places in many countries, the cost-of-living crisis, large-scale arrivals of displaced Ukrainians in 2022, and political shifts in many countries towards parties that are more sceptical of immigration. While these factors represent real constraints on protection capacity in many European countries, the need for pathways to safety for refugees and other displaced individuals remains, with irregular migration the only option for many who lack other, safer options.

Once seen as a far-fetched idea, such programmes have come to dominate the policy space in many destination countries over the last ten years.

Complementary pathways have emerged as potential options for addressing some of these challenges and ensuring pathways to safety are available for those who need them. Once seen as a far-fetched idea, such programmes have come to dominate the policy space in many destination countries over the last ten years. These programmes seek to provide new mobility pathways to refugees (and in some cases, other displaced persons) in ways that more heavily involve civil society and communities and that operate alongside traditional, UNHCR-led resettlement programmes (see Box 1). As of 2024, approximately 60 complementary pathways programmes operate globally, with around 25 of these in Europe. Together, complementary

1 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there were 37.9 million refugees and an additional 5.8 million other people in need of international protection worldwide as of mid-2024. See UNHCR, 'Refugee Data Finder', accessed 11 October 2024.

2 European Union Agency for Asylum, *Asylum Report 2024* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024), 205. Worldwide, about 96,000 refugees departed for resettlement countries in 2023. See UNHCR, 'Global Report 2023: Resettlement, Complementary Pathways and Family Reunification', accessed 30 October 2024.

pathways in the European Union have benefited thousands of displaced persons since 2014, not counting Ukrainians.[3]

In contrast to traditional resettlement, in which international organisations such as UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) lead the identification and preparation of refugee cases, complementary pathways typically rely on civil-society organisations or groups of private individuals to identify people with protection needs (sometimes supported by UNHCR) and to refer them to states for screening and admission under humanitarian visa programmes or non-protection pathways such as education or employment visas. Civil-society organisations may also be responsible for arranging programme beneficiaries' travel, housing, settlement assistance, and integration support after they arrive. In Italy, for example, organisations such as the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) work with partners to identify refugees in Iran, Lebanon, Niger, and Pakistan (previously also Libya) and to support their applications for humanitarian visas, organise their travel, and assist them after arrival in Italy.

BOX 1
What are complementary pathways?

This report uses 'complementary pathway' to describe any non-resettlement admission programme established or modified to provide refugees or others in need of international protection with access to a safe third country. These programmes operate independently of resettlement programmes for refugees. Because eligibility for complementary pathways is determined using criteria broader than those used for resettlement (including, for example, refugees' education or employment qualifications, family composition, and more), beneficiaries are generally not solely selected based on their vulnerability or protection needs. Ideally, complementary pathways should also offer a way for beneficiaries to eventually access permanent residency or citizenship, to provide a durable solution to their displacement. Examples of complementary pathways include humanitarian admission programmes, sponsorship programmes, and education- and employment-based mobility opportunities.

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

Complementary pathways have emerged and grown in popularity for several reasons. They promise to better engage receiving communities, promote public support for arriving refugees, and capitalise on available private resources to sustain and expand protection-based pathways.[4] There are also some forms of assistance that private community members and civil-society groups are uniquely well placed to provide, such as supporting refugees' entry into the job market or overcoming housing barriers.[5] Yet despite their promise, complementary pathways have often failed to achieve the scale needed to more effectively

3 While EU-wide data are scare, this includes up to 7,000 people in need of international protection resettled in Italy under the country's humanitarian corridor programme; about 200 students entering Italy via the education pathway (University Corridors for Refugees, or UNICORE); and about 400 entering Ireland, Belgium, and Germany via sponsorship programmes. See Comunità di Sant'Egidio, 'Humanitarian Corridors', accessed 30 October 2024; Marco Borraccetti and Mariateresa Veltri, *The University Corridors for Refugees (UNI.CO.RE) Program in Italy (2019 – 2023): Evaluation Report* (Bologna: University of Bologna, 2023); María Belén Zanzuchi, Nadja Dumann, Florian Tissot, and Admir Skodo, *Attracting, Retaining, and Diversifying Sponsors for Refugees in Community Sponsorship Programmes* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2023).

4 Susan Fratzke, *Engaging Communities in Refugee Protection: The Potential of Private Sponsorship in Europe* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2017).

5 Susan Fratzke and Emma Dorst, *Volunteers and Sponsors: A Catalyst for Refugee Integration?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

address displacement and mobility pressures. Such programmes can be resource intensive, generally require coordination of a wide range of actors, and many struggle to secure reliable funding.

Such issues suggest the need for a better ecosystem of support for complementary pathways, one that can facilitate the growth of these programmes and help them to fulfil their objectives. This report draws on lessons learnt over the course of the three-year Complementary Pathways Network (COMET) Project, which has aimed to facilitate learning and cooperation amongst civil-society partners working on complementary pathways in various European countries (see Box 2). Based on interviews in early 2024 with project partners and other civil-society stakeholders, insights shared at a May 2024 roundtable with civil-society entities involved in complementary pathways, and other sources, the report identifies several main coordination and communication needs in the field. It then offers strategies and recommendations for addressing these challenges, and in doing so, strengthening protection pathways in Europe.

BOX 2
About the Complementary Pathways Network (COMET) Project

The COMET Project, an initiative funded by the EU Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), was launched in 2021 to create a blueprint for multi-country, multi-pathway collaboration across Europe. This project brought together 14 organisations from seven countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Together, they have worked to strengthen the capacity of communities receiving newcomers via complementary pathways to develop shared tools and quality standards for different stage of the process (from refugee matching and predeparture orientation to reception and post-arrival support), and to set up or scale pathways in some of these countries. In doing so, the project has shed light on factors that can challenge or facilitate growth in this area, and on the significant value of cross-country and cross-pathway collaboration.

For more on the COMET Project, see its website: www.cometnetwork.eu

2 The Impacts of Growing Diversity in the Humanitarian Pathways Space

The humanitarian protection field has undergone significant innovation and investment in the past decade, with destination countries increasingly exploring diverse approaches to welcoming, settling, and integrating refugees and other people in need of protection. Traditionally, refugees have primarily been admitted to destination countries via resettlement or humanitarian admission programmes, which select and prioritise refugees for admission and grant status based on individuals' vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs. Complementary pathways, however, provide opportunities for refugees to travel to a destination country for education or employment, to reunite with extended family, or because they have been sponsored by a group of individuals or by a civil-society organisation.

The approximately 60 non-resettlement-based refugee pathways active as of 2024 are spread across 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and the Americas. Within Europe specifically, the number of countries offering multiple pathways for people in need of international protection has steadily increased

and now includes Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.[6] In France, for example, multiple pathways coexist, including the country's Humanitarian Corridor programme, a university corridor (UNIV'R), family reunification efforts, and soon, a labour pathway. Belgium has established a community sponsorship programme and piloted an education pathway for refugees. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom offers entry opportunities through both its community sponsorship and labour pathways programmes, as well as some opportunities for scholars and academics at risk to relocate to the country.[7] These programmes often operate in parallel to traditional resettlement programmes.

A. The strengths of a diversified field

The emergence of these programmes has produced a wider range of mobility opportunities for refugees and others in need of protection. Labour-based complementary pathways have provided displaced individuals who possess critical skills the opportunity to resume and advance their careers beyond their country of first asylum, where many—especially those without work authorisation or job prospects and those not prioritised for resettlement—are left in limbo. In the United Kingdom, for example, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) has documented more than 271 job offers made to refugees in the health-care sector between 2021 and July 2024, including the National Health Service (NHS) Refugee Nurse Support Pilot Programme and other opportunities in the field, as well as an additional 25 job offers in other sectors.[8] When these refugee professionals' accompanying family members are counted, that adds up to a total of 512 refugees relocated to the United Kingdom through labour-based mobility channels.[9] Italy's University Corridor (UNICORE) programme, meanwhile, has provided more than 200 scholarships since its inception in 2019 to help refugee students, who might lack the opportunity to start or continue a higher education programme in their country of first asylum, travel to and study in Italy.[10]

Complementary pathways, particularly sponsorship programmes, have also provided policymakers with crucial flexibility to scale up admissions rapidly in the face of quick-moving emergencies. The Homes for Ukraine programme in the United Kingdom and the Uniting for Ukraine programme in the United States, for example, have admitted more than 190,000 and 170,000 Ukrainians, respectively, through sponsorship by individuals and civil-society organisations following

Complementary pathways, particularly sponsorship programmes, have also provided policymakers with crucial flexibility to scale up admissions rapidly in the face of quick-moving emergencies.

6 The programme numbers and locations in this paragraph are based on a mapping exercise conducted for this study. Countries beyond Europe that have non-resettlement-based entry pathways for refugees include: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States.

7 The Council for At-Risk Academics, 'CARA', accessed 10 September 2024; London School of Economics and Political Science, 'LSE Scholars at Risk', accessed 10 September 2024.

8 Emma Dorst, Kate Hooper, Meghan Benton, and Beatrice Dain, *Engaging Employers in Growing Refugee Labor Pathways* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2024); National Health Service (NHS) England, 'Nursing Workforce – International Recruitment – Refugee Nurse Support Pilot Programme', accessed 6 September 2024.

9 Dorst, Hooper, Benton, and Dain, *Engaging Employers*, 11; Talent Beyond Boundaries, 'Global Dashboard', accessed 6 September 2024.

10 Borraccetti and Veltri, *The University Corridors for Refugees (UNI.CO.RE) Program*.

the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia.[11] More recently, Canada and Iceland have opened programmes to allow citizens and permanent residents with extended family in Gaza, who would otherwise likely lack a path out of the embattled area, to apply to sponsor those family members' admission, including covering their transportation and subsistence costs.[12]

These and other complementary pathways have also enriched the field in other ways, including:

- **Reaching refugee populations under-represented in traditional resettlement programmes.** Traditional resettlement actors such as UNHCR may have limited familiarity with or ability to reach certain populations such as LGBTQI refugees, who may face additional persecution by fellow refugees if their identity becomes known in refugee camps, or Palestinians, who are not under UNHCR's mandate.[13] By engaging nontraditional stakeholders with greater access to such populations in the identification and referral of refugees, complementary pathways have in some cases expanded the profiles of people able to access protection. For instance, the organisation Rainbow Railroad has supported protection efforts in Canada and Argentina by discreetly identifying and referring LGBTQI refugees for admission and providing them with LGBTQI-sensitive support after their arrival in the destination country.[14] Italy's Humanitarian Corridor programme, meanwhile, has enabled the identification of vulnerable individuals in Lebanon, including some who have not been recognised by UNHCR as refugees.[15]

- **Expanding safe pathways to displaced individuals not otherwise eligible for resettlement.** Displaced individuals may not match squarely with the traditional profile of someone in need of resettlement. Because of their skills or education level, for example, they may not be considered among the most vulnerable and, thus, not prioritised for resettlement, but they may be able to qualify for work or study opportunities in a destination country. Or, people displaced by a sudden, unexpected emergency situation, such as the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021, may not fit into one of the resettlement priority groups many destination countries set a year or more in advance. Complementary pathways, thanks to their greater flexibility and multistakeholder involvement, were crucial to the swift evacuation of Afghans in need of protection. For instance, Italy's Humanitarian Corridor, which was established in 2016, was adapted shortly after the fall of Kabul to accept Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, a change driven by the advocacy of faith-based organisations.[16] Additionally, university stakeholders in the United States, Japan, and various European countries introduced

11 UK Government, 'Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme Visa Data', accessed 10 September 2024; U.S. Department of State, 'Welcoming Ukrainian Nationals to the United States', accessed 10 September 2024.

12 Government of Canada, 'Crisis in Gaza: Special Measures for Extended Family', updated 11 September 2024; Icelandic Directorate of Immigration, 'Applications for Palestinian Family Reunification No Longer Given Priority', updated 10 March 2024.

13 As a further example, lack of referral partners (often, local nongovernmental organisations) with connections to and ability to refer internally displaced individuals to resettlement actors initially hindered efforts to expand resettlement from Central America. See Susan Fratzke and Andrea Tanco, *Humanitarian Pathways for Central Americans: Assessing Opportunities for the Future* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

14 Rainbow Railroad, 'How We Work', accessed 23 October 2024; Rainbow Railroad, 'Empowering LGBTQI+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Argentina', accessed 14 October 2024.

15 Irene de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero, *Corridoi Lavorativi: How Caritas Italiana Is Using an Existing Humanitarian Corridor to Pilot a Labour Pathway to Italy* (Ottawa: Pathways International, 2024).

16 Lisa Zengarini and Linda Bordoni, 'Humanitarian Corridor Provides Safe Passage to Afghan Refugees', Vatican News, 24 November 2022.

scholarship programmes specifically for Afghan students, offering complementary avenues of protection through study visas.[17]

- **Complementing the support available via destination-country reception and integration systems.** Rising living costs and housing crises in many destination countries have caused some to limit the number of refugees they resettle. But when refugees can be supported by friends, family, or civil-society organisations, as can be the case in complementary pathways, this can allow governments to consider more for admission. For example, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, private individuals and civil-society groups played a crucial role in expanding reception capacity and support for displaced Ukrainians. In the United Kingdom, hosts offered accommodation in private homes for an initial six-month period through the Homes for Ukraine programme. Similarly, programmes such as Families Welcome Families in Spain and HIAS Europe's Welcome Circles helped increase reception capacity and protection opportunities for this group.[18] And in Ireland, following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, the government sought support from potential sponsors and civil-society organisations to maximise the number of Afghan nationals the country could receive via its humanitarian admission programme, given the strain on accommodation capacity and the need to also meet existing commitments under the country's traditional resettlement programme.[19]

B. New actors, growing complexity, and coordination challenges

While beneficial in many ways, this growing diversity has also made the humanitarian protection field much more complex. Unlike traditional resettlement and humanitarian pathways, in which UNHCR, destination countries, and IOM identify, select, transport, and support the settlement of refugees, complementary pathways rely on a wider network of actors. Depending on the destination country and programme, this may include civil-society organisations and/or groups of individual sponsors and volunteers, in addition to traditional resettlement actors. The new actors take on a variety of roles, often with multiple stakeholders participating (to different degrees) in the selection, matching, predeparture preparation, and post-arrival integration of programme beneficiaries (see Figure 1). For instance, faith-based organisations played a leading role in the Italian Humanitarian Corridor's introduction, operationalisation, and even funding (see Box 3).[20] Nonreligious organisations also sometimes play a role (such as Forum Réfugiés in France), as do local or regional authorities (such as in the regional sponsorship programmes in Spain and the Länder-level family reunification programmes in Germany) and international organisations (such as IOM and UNHCR). Educational institutions are similarly instrumental in education-based complementary pathways, as are employers in labour-based pathways.

17 Global Campus of Human Rights, 'Networking and Outreach', accessed 10 September 2024; Afghans in Crisis Network, 'Our Story', accessed 10 September 2024; Pathways Japan, 'Japan-Afghanistan Language School Pathways', accessed 10 September 2024; Qatar Scholarship for Afghans Project, 'Partnership', accessed 10 September 2024; Susan Fratzke and Emma Dorst, 'Filling the Gap: Capturing Innovations from Crisis Response in Afghanistan and Ukraine' (unpublished working paper, Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

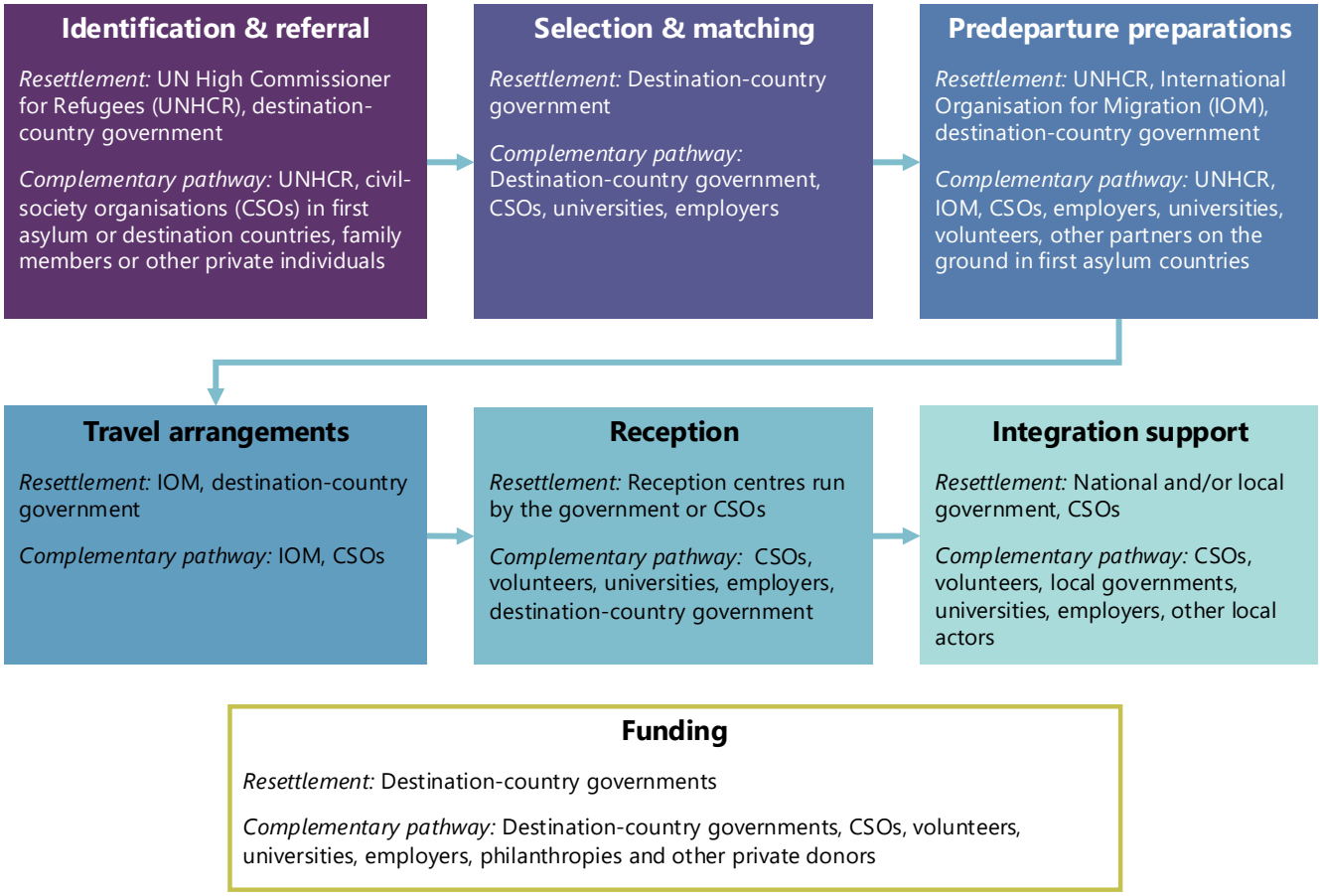
18 Susan Fratzke, Viola Pulkkinen, and Emma Ugolini, *From Safe Homes to Sponsors: Lessons from the Ukraine Hosting Response for Refugee Sponsorship Programmes* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2023).

19 Irish Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth, 'Irish Refugee Protection Programme', updated 26 July 2024.

20 de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero, *Corridoi Lavorativi*.

FIGURE 1

Actors involved in each stage of traditional resettlement vs. complementary pathways



Source: Author illustration.

This complexity can make it challenging for complementary pathways to grow and achieve economies of scale. In programmes where individual civil-society organisations, rather than a large government entity or international organisation, manage the identification, selection, transportation, and settlement of beneficiaries, this can result in the creation of multiple structures for managing these processes. Complementary pathways programmes can also find themselves competing for the same pool of financial resources or volunteers, decreasing the incentives for them to collaborate. In addition, because responsibility for a programme is fragmented among many different actors—mostly within civil society—it can be challenging to muster the political capital to secure changes to and implementation of policy measures necessary for the programme to function, such as ensuring consular officers apply appropriate waivers or flexibility when screening programme beneficiaries' visa applications. Without sufficient political buy-in, civil-society organisations may also lack the diplomatic capital to undertake negotiations on issues such as obtaining exit visas for displaced persons in their departure countries.[21]

21 Participants comments during the private online roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration for Scaling Complementary Pathways', organised by the Migration Policy Institute Europe as part of the Complementary Pathways Network (COMET) Project, 21 May 2024.

Some fragmentation and duplication are likely a necessity, particularly when one destination country has multiple pathways with varying procedures and beneficiary profiles (such as education, labour, and sponsorship programmes).[22] But in other cases, insufficient communication and coordination structures, and lack of funding for them, are at the root of the challenge.[23] These issues have implications for the reach and scalability of complementary pathways. Despite progress, the majority of these programmes remain small in scale and face persistent challenges to their sustainability. Creating the conditions for programmes to fully leverage the benefits of their multistakeholder structure, while mitigating its challenges, will be critical to future programme growth.

BOX 3
Multistakeholder involvement in Italy's Humanitarian Corridor from Lebanon

The Italian Humanitarian Corridor that facilitates the movement of people with protection needs from Lebanon to Italy exemplifies the multistakeholder engagement that is characteristic of complementary pathways. This programme is facilitated through memoranda of understanding between the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI), the Italian Ministry of Interior, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this pathway, FCEI collaborates with local stakeholders in Lebanon to identify refugees and others in need of protection. FCEI then screens the referrals, selects potential candidates, and matches them with Italian host communities, coordinating with local partners to assess the capacity of and opportunities available in a community and how those match up to the needs of newcomers. Those selected and matched with a host community travel to Italy with a humanitarian visa (issued by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), after which they apply for asylum (the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior).

Before programme beneficiaries travel to Italy, FCEI works with local stakeholders in both Lebanon and Italy to ensure they and their host communities are adequately prepared. FCEI manages predeparture orientations for programme beneficiaries in coordination with the team in Lebanon, works with UNHCR to secure travel documents for them, and arranges their flights. In Italy, FCEI identifies local volunteers to support newcomers and offers trainings and other forms of support to ensure the host community is prepared to receive them. Upon arrival, FCEI often partners with other Italian organisations, such as Mosaico (a refugee-led organisation) and Refugees Welcome Italy, to assist with the newcomers' integration and to monitor their experiences.

Source: Author interview with representative from FCEI, 14 May 2024.

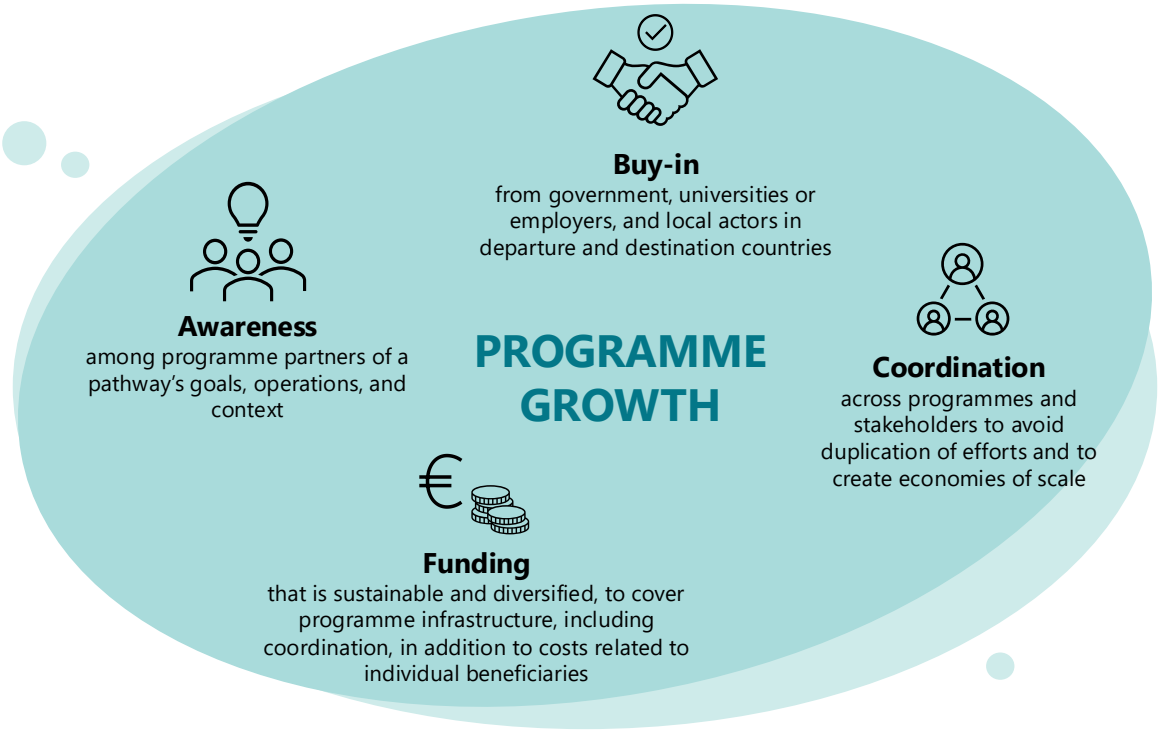
3 How to Build a Supportive Ecosystem for Growing Complementary Pathways

To flourish, complementary pathways need a supportive ecosystem of policies and programmatic infrastructure that allows them to effectively obtain and maintain buy-in from key stakeholders, create shared understanding of programme goals and operations, and secure the resources to engage in long-term programme building and planning. Such an ecosystem would also foster communication and collaboration between different actors and pathways, enabling them to create synergies (see Figure 2).

22 Author interview with representative from UNHCR Italy, 19 April 2024.
23 Author interview with representative from Fons Català, 23 March 2024.

FIGURE 2

A supportive ecosystem for scaling up complementary pathways



Source: Author illustration.

Research and investment in the humanitarian pathways space has, to date, largely focused on how to enhance the operations of individual programmes, such as by better managing beneficiaries' expectations, connecting predeparture and post-arrival support, and training nontraditional stakeholders to take on greater roles.[24] These procedural aspects are important to the sustainability and well-functioning of complementary pathways, but alone they are not enough to achieve greater programme scale. Having a supportive ecosystem in place, one that brings all the necessary puzzle pieces together, will be equally critical and help address the coordination and cooperation gaps that exist across pathways, foster and sustain connections between actors, reduce competition, and achieve economies of scale.

This section suggests a set of guiding principles for creating such an ecosystem.

1. Integrate government stakeholders into programmes as core partners

While the ability to delegate some of the functions (and costs) of protection programmes may be appealing to governments, a completely hand-off approach to complementary pathways can backfire by undermining their ability to obtain necessary resources and function effectively. It is thus important that a destination-country government view itself, and be treated by other programme actors, as an integral partner in implementing a complementary pathway programme.

24 For example, some of these subjects were the focus of earlier work in the COMET Project. See the Migration Policy Institute Europe, 'EU COMET Network Fact Sheets Share Useful Insights about Making Complementary Pathway and Refugee Sponsorship Programs More Effective' (press release, 28 August 2024).

The importance of governmental engagement can be seen in its absence. The experiences of COMET Project partners working to establish or maintain complementary pathways in the Netherlands and Spain illustrate this clearly. In Spain, political instability and the pending formation of a new government caused delays in the introduction and implementation of a regional sponsorship pathway in Catalonia. This is despite initial agreement between the then-leading Catalan political party and the national government before the start of the project in 2021.[25] In the Netherlands, government directives to reduce the number of international students seem to have affected the country's implementation of an education pathway, discouraging universities from participating due to fears of inadequate support from government authorities.[26] Additionally, political changes and uncertainty can affect the stability of existing programmes, as seen in Germany, where upcoming elections and potential policy shifts threaten the stability of resettlement programmes and sponsorship initiatives.[27]

Governments are also critical to securing the policy changes needed to scale up complementary pathways. Much of the focus to date has been on implementing these programmes within existing legal frameworks, but these frameworks were often not designed with the circumstances of displaced people in mind and can create barriers to their admission. To make meaningful progress, additional changes are likely to be needed in many countries, to address issues such as displaced individuals' difficulties obtaining certain travel documents, the need for an exit visa from certain departure countries, and difficulties having foreign-earned credentials recognised in the destination country.[28] Organisations involved in complementary pathways have also pointed out that the field is often disconnected from conversations about how to address labour market shortages and how to make the most of work-based legal migration channels.[29] Government can play a key role in bringing these discussions together.

Much of the focus to date has been on implementing these programmes within existing legal frameworks, but these frameworks were often not designed with the circumstances of displaced people in mind and can create barriers to their admission.

Even where civil society or other private actors are in the driver's seat, it is thus critical that government be brought in as a stakeholder in the design, implementation, and operation of these programmes. This can be done in several ways. For example, civil-society organisations working to implement the UNIV'R education corridor in France mentioned that engaging UNHCR was crucial for getting government buy-in for the pathway.[30] Government representatives are also included in the stakeholder roundtable organised by civil-society organisations in the country, helping to create a regular channel for communication. For projects funded by the EU Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), implementing partners have indicated that having a country's government sign on to proposals as a partner has been a valuable tool

25 Author interview with representative from Fons Català, 27 March 2024.
26 Author interview with representative from Justice & Peace Netherlands, 18 April 2024.
27 Author interview with representative from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, 8 April 2024.
28 Author interview with representative from UNHCR Geneva, 17 July 2024; Samuel Davidoff-Gore, *The Mobility Key: Realizing the Potential of Refugee Travel Documents* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2024).
29 EU-Passworld, 'A European Approach to Labour and Education Pathways Underpinned by Sponsorship' (workshop report, October 2023).
30 Author interview with representative from Forum Réfugiés, 27 March 2024.

for securing their buy-in.[31] Including complementary pathways as part of EU Member States' pledges under the EU Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework, in addition to resettlement places, would be another way to signal government commitment to a complementary pathways programme, including internally.

BOX 4
Cultivating support from private partners

Government is not the only actor whose buy-in is needed for complementary pathways to succeed. These pathways rely to a great extent on the active involvement of private partners—whether volunteers, employers, or universities, depending on the specific pathway—in welcoming and integrating newcomers, often with the support of civil society.

However, securing commitment from a first set of employers or universities to participate in pilot labour and education pathways, respectively, is often a difficult step. Some programme implementors emphasise the importance of engaging with these stakeholders from the very beginning, such as in the development of the project agreement (for instance, for EU-funded projects). Once that is established and the pilot can act as a proof of concept, it may be easier to build momentum, as long as sufficient investments are made in promotional materials and storytelling activities to give programmes more visibility. This could be done, for example, by identifying and supporting champions for these programmes—such as past beneficiaries, sponsors, universities, or employers—who can help craft a compelling narrative, disseminate targeted information to key audiences, and address their peers' concerns and inspire engagement. In the case of labour pathways, for example, employer associations, industry bodies, and chambers of commerce could be encouraged to share information about these opportunities and to disseminate information about employers' experiences with hiring displaced talent—strategies that have proven useful in addressing employer concerns and building confidence in a programme. Engaging community members in providing post-arrival integration support can also help spur university and employer engagement, for example by limiting their roles and sharing responsibilities.

Sources: Participants comments during the private online roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration for Scaling Complementary Pathways', organised by the Migration Policy Institute Europe as part of the COMET Project, 21 May 2024; author interview with representative from FCEI, 14 May 2024; author interview with official from UNHCR Niger, 16 May 2024; author interview with official from UNHCR Geneva, 17 July 2024; author interview with representative from Mosaico, 27 March 2024; author interview with representative from Refugees Welcome Italy, 2 April 2024; author interview with representative from Pathways International, 19 April 2024; Emma Dorst, Kate Hooper, Meghan Benton, and Beatrice Dain, *Engaging Employers in Growing Refugee Labor Pathways* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2024); comments by participants in the EU-Passworld final conference, September 16 2024.

2. Establish a common understanding early on among partners regarding programme goals, communication modalities, and contextual knowledge

A single complementary pathway may involve a diverse range of stakeholders—from civil-society organisations operating in departure and destination countries, to universities or employers, to government authorities, local communities, and social service providers. Many of these actors may not be familiar with the terminology or policy details of programmes for refugees and other people with protection needs (e.g., what benefits come with a particular status, how to obtain waivers for documents that displaced individuals might not have, or how programme beneficiaries may differ from traditional student or worker populations).

31 Participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'.

This uneven prior knowledge can hinder effective programme implementation and engagement.[32] For example, if local service providers, landlords, or administrative workers are not familiar with the status or rights held by beneficiaries of complementary pathways programmes, this can interfere with beneficiaries' ability to access core services such as housing or education. Similarly, nontraditional partners such as universities and employers bring their own views, vocabulary, and culture to pathways collaborations. Their expectations of how programmes should be operated may differ from those of programme leaders and what is realistic, for example in terms of how long an application process should take, what should be expected of applicants, and what responsibilities they should have as programme partners. These differences in communication styles or expectations can at times impede the effective exchange of information or make it difficult to establish trusting relationships. Conversely, when all programme stakeholders are well-informed and operating based on the same information, they are more likely to actively engage and complementary pathways are more likely to yield better outcomes.[33]

One way to address this issue is to provide all programme partners with open, accessible, and accurate information about the programme early on as well as information targeted to their distinct needs. In the United Kingdom, for example, civil-society organisations involved in the community sponsorship programme have played a crucial role in offering detailed guidance and training for local authorities, outlining how the programme operates, their responsibilities, and available funding.[34] In Belgium, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) has hosted meetings with local authorities to increase awareness about the country's sponsorship programme and to explore opportunities for collaboration, for instance through identifying available housing or local stakeholders willing to engage in the programme.

Sharing information about programmes in countries of departure is also key. Most programmes rely on partnerships with organisations working on the ground in these countries to identify or share information with potential applicants. For instance, Lebanese civil-society organisations working with FCEI as part of the Italian Humanitarian Corridor programme have played a crucial role in identifying potential participants, sharing information with them around how the corridor works, and helping them establish realistic expectations before their arrival in Italy.[35] Including departure-country partners early on in programme coordination is thus also critical.

Setting collaboration frameworks that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved can also help to create common expectations.[36] Codes of ethics or conduct, or similar agreements signed by all parties, have helped some programmes formalise expectations for these parties, clearly define responsibilities, and ensure a shared understanding of roles. Such agreements are used, for instance, in Canada's sponsorship programmes and educational pathways to delineate responsibilities and set

32 Zanzuchi, Dumann, Tissot, and Skodo, *Attracting, Retaining, and Diversifying Sponsors for Refugees*.
33 Participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'.
34 Reset, 'For Local Authorities', accessed 6 September 2024.
35 Author interview with representative from Forum Réfugiés, 27 March 2024.
36 Author interview with representative from the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe, 13 June 2024; author interview with representative from Pathways International, 19 April 2024.

boundaries.[37] These frameworks can also help programme stakeholders avoid duplication of efforts, prevent misunderstandings and conflicts, and facilitate smoother cooperation.

3. Diversify funding mechanisms to cover the range of costs associated with a programme

Complementary pathways can be costly to establish. Expenses directly related to a programme's beneficiaries can include the costs of visa and immigration procedures, international travel, tuition fees, relocation and living costs, language tests or learning, medical coverage, and other integration services. These programmes generally require civil-society organisations or private partners, including employers or universities, to cover many of these travel and integration support costs.

While private funding for complementary pathways is often seen as an important means by which such programmes add capacity to the existing refugee protection system, relying on a single source of private funding can put a programme in a precarious position.

While private funding for complementary pathways is often seen as an important means by which such programmes add capacity to the existing refugee protection system, relying on a single source of private funding can put a programme in a precarious position. One way to diversify and make a programme's funding more sustainable is by taking a collaborative, cost-sharing approach. This can be done through community levies, such as the small contributions collected by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) from students as part of their registration fees to help fund scholarships for refugee students.[38] Donations from foundations and private donors can also play an important role in funding these programmes, as was the case with the Shapiro Foundation for the Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot in Canada. Moreover, in-kind support has sometimes been offered by specific organisations—for instance, Miles4Migrants collects donations of airline miles and Duolingo has occasionally provided fee waivers for refugee language tests.[39]

Beyond cost-sharing models, some stakeholders involved in complementary pathways are exploring other innovative methods to cover costs for refugees, with the potential to support programme scalability. One such idea is social impact bonds, which provide upfront funding to test interventions, with repayment contingent on proven success. A Refugee Impact Bond was launched in 2021 to finance vocational, entrepreneurship, and other resilience-building trainings for refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, for example. These bonds have also been tested in Belgium and Finland.[40] Loans with favourable terms or microcredit

37 Author interview with representative of the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, 29 November 2023; Canadian Council for Refugees, 'Code of Ethics', accessed 4 October 2024; María Belén Zanzuchi, *Supporting Self-Sufficiency: Considerations for Refugees' Transition out of Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways Programmes* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024).

38 Susan Fratzke et al., *Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: Opportunities for Growth* (Brussels and Geneva: Migration Policy Institute Europe and UNHCR, 2021); World University Service of Canada (WUSC), 'Students in Canada Vote "Yes!" to Refugee Resettlement', accessed 14 October 2024.

39 Fratzke et al., *Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*, 56–58; Duolingo, 'How Duolingo Supports Refugees', accessed 14 October 2024; Duolingo, 'Our Commitments to Helping Refugees', accessed 14 October 2024.

40 Tihomir Sabchev, Irene de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero, and Hannah Gregory, *Financing Complementary Education Pathways for Refugees: Existing Approaches and Opportunities for Growth* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Refugee Hub, 2023); Refugee Impact Bond, 'The Refugee Impact Bond', accessed 14 September 2024.

can also be used to help refugee students and workers who might otherwise struggle to access traditional funding cover their application fees, visa costs, relocation, and other expenses that have sometimes proved challenging to waive. In some cases, universities or other entities have provided zero-interest loans to help refugees seeking to study or access vocational training, such as the Pay It Forward programme.[41] In other cases, refugees can be referred to government and nonprofit microloan schemes, as TBB did with Canada's Immigration Loan Program.[42] Employer-sponsored education pathways have also been discussed as a potential option for attracting funding for such programmes, though concerns remain about employers' willingness to make upfront investments without guaranteed outcomes.[43]

4. Provide dedicated funding for programme infrastructure and operations, including coordination

In addition to investments linked to individual beneficiaries, complementary pathways require considerable investments in the infrastructure they need to operate, including in the mechanisms and processes for selecting, referring, and preparing beneficiaries for travel. Establishing coordination structures between pathways and partners also comes with costs, and covering these will be necessary for increasing pathways' scalability.

Yet funding for complementary pathways is often less predictable than for resettlement programmes, which can make these types of infrastructure difficult to maintain and make long-term sustainability a challenge.[44] In Europe, AMIF project funds are an important source of financial support for many pathways programmes. But while project funds provide a considerable and needed injection of cash, they also come with downsides. Project-based funding often requires complementary pathways actors to compete against each other to secure funding, reducing incentives for collaboration. It can also lead to the creation of duplicated structures in destination countries, by funding multiple separate programmes with similar goals in a single country.[45] Moreover, AMIF project funding is time-limited and tied to pre-set programmatic priorities, meaning that there is little assurance of future funding to support a pathway's continuation after the project period ends.

These challenges are, however, surmountable. At the national level, governments could consider supplying financial support for programmatic infrastructure that can be used across multiple pathways, such as referral systems or coordination capacity, while continuing to rely on programme partners to pay direct operating or sponsorship costs for individual cases. This would allow governments to continue to benefit from the cost-sharing advantages of sponsorship and other complementary pathways programmes, while also ensuring pathways partners have some security to invest in long-term infrastructure. In the United States, for example, the State Department has provided funding to the Community Sponsorship Hub to serve as the central coordinating entity for its Welcome Corps programmes, which include private sponsorship, education, and labour pathways.[46]

41 Social Finance, 'Pay It Forward', accessed 19 September 2024; Sabchev, de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero, and Gregory, *Financing Complementary Education Pathways*.
42 Dorst, Hooper, Benton, and Dain, *Engaging Employers*.
43 Sabchev, de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero, and Gregory, *Financing Complementary Education Pathways*.
44 Author interview with representative from Fons Català, 23 March 2024; Fratzke et al., *Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*.
45 Participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'.
46 Community Sponsorship Hub, 'Home', accessed 10 September 2024.

At the EU level, changes to AMIF financing could make EU funding more supportive of programmes' long-term sustainability and aid in the creation of economies of scale. In addition to project-based AMIF funding, Member States also receive a lump sum for every refugee admitted through a resettlement or humanitarian admission programme, but refugees admitted on non-humanitarian visas (e.g., for work or study) are not explicitly included. To make this funding more accessible to complementary pathways, the fund's rules could be adjusted to allow states to receive such lump sums for complementary pathways participants as well, with a portion of this funding used to support infrastructure costs incurred by civil-society actors across programmes. This could help create more predictability around capacity. AMIF could additionally require collaboration and coordination across funded programmes based in the same country or operating the same type of pathway, with a certain portion of project budgets reserved for cross-project collaboration. A coordination platform or meet-and-greet for funding recipients, such as those sometimes held by private foundations for their partners, could facilitate the building of connections between programmes. This is something that the EU Horizon fund has increasingly focused on in recent years, with the aim of enhancing the impact of EU investments by promoting synergies between funded projects that share the same topic. This includes incentivising joint workshops, knowledge exchange, the development and adoption of best practices, and collaborative communication activities.[47] At the country level, funding pots could similarly be designed and distributed on the condition that different stakeholders work together.

5. Create forums for effective cross-pathway communication and exchange among actors working in the same space

Often, a diversity of actors serve different complementary pathways within a single country. For example, multiple organisations may work within a single departure country to identify refugees or other displaced people eligible for sponsorship, study, or work programmes in different destination countries. And within a single destination country, a variety of actors may be involved in supporting separate work, study, or sponsorship programmes. Each may have their own relationships with departure- and destination-country governments, local governments, and local and international organisations.

Yet these many actors all operate within the same programmatic universe and overarching policy framework. Creating forums to support greater coordination and exchange of information is thus critical.[48] Several tools can be useful for addressing this challenge. First, programmes operating within a single country could designate an organisation to take the lead and to coordinate the various stages and actors involved in the pathways.[49] This leadership can bring much-needed focus and coherence to processes. Within the UNICORE programme in Italy, for example, UNHCR has taken on this role. Similarly, UNHCR coordinates between the various education corridors operated in France by different civil-society partners, which has helped set some common standards and led to joint advocacy efforts.[50]

47 Evdokia Bairampa, 'How to Start the Collaboration with Your Sister Project(s): A Short Guide for Communication Managers', Trainings, 5 April 2023; European Commission, 'Horizon Europe, Work Programme 2023-2025, 4.Health' (European Commission Decision C [2024] 2371, 17 April 2024).

48 Participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'; Marisol Reyes and Gabriella D'Avino, with Gabriela Agatiello and Anna Coulibaly, *Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Community Sponsorship Programmes in Europe: Key Lessons from Share's Quality Sponsorship Network's Cross-Country Evaluations* (Brussels: ICMC Europe and SHARE Network, 2023), 6.

49 Author interview with representative from ICMC Europe, 13 June 2024.

50 Author interview with representative from Forum Réfugié, 27 March 2024.

Another strategy is to hold roundtables that regularly bring together relevant stakeholders (including policymakers, practitioners, and private actors) to facilitate dialogue and the exchange of concerns and ideas among partners operating in the same or similar contexts. Roundtables can also be used to create feedback loops between different stages of a single programme. Such convenings can take place at the national or international level. In France, for example, national roundtable meetings bring together complementary pathways and resettlement stakeholders and act as a space for exchange among the country's protection programmes.[51] The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe's Share Quality Sponsorship Network Plus has also worked to set up national communities of practice that bring together stakeholders working on complementary pathways in the same country to facilitate peer learning and to strategically plan the future of protection pathways in their countries.[52] In the medium to long term, greater coordination and communication between pathways programmes could also lead to better programmatic alignment. Courses offered under education pathways could, for instance, better align with labour market needs to ensure that refugee students can transition to work and integrate into the host-country labour market.[53]

At the cross-country level, collaboration and communication between complementary pathways can similarly foster peer learning, strengthen advocacy efforts, and cultivate greater buy-in for these types of programmes. For example, many COMET Project partners have recognised the initiative's value as a tool for building a trusted international community.[54] The network has not only provided a platform for discussing common challenges but also offered a sense of solidarity, reassuring partners that they are not alone as they face similar issues. In Italy, where multiple participating organisations are based, the project has also enhanced the internal community of stakeholders working on pathways and fostered further collaboration, such as through designing new predeparture orientation and post-arrival settlement and integration support tools, based on insights and experiences gathered from different actors. Within the field of sponsorship, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) has played an important role by fostering peer learning and capacity building, while promoting and supporting the adoption and scaling of sponsorship programmes worldwide.[55] The Global Task Forces for Labour and Education have aimed to play a similar role by setting up a community of practice for each of these pathway types, facilitating peer learning and joint advocacy efforts.[56]

6. Develop shared infrastructure for front-end processing to create economies of scale

Information sharing and peer learning can be valuable ways to improve programme alignment and effectiveness, but in some contexts, there may be potential to go a step further by building out

51 Author interview with representative from Synergies Migrations, 25 April 2024.
52 Author interview with representative from ICMC Europe, 13 June 2024. See also ICMC Europe, 'Share Projects: Quality Sponsorship Network (QSN) Plus', accessed 14 November 2024.
53 Author interview with representative from the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI), 14 May 2024.
54 Author interview with representative from FCEI, 14 May 2024; author interview with representative from Mosaico, 27 March 2024; author interview with representative from the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), 2 April 2024; author interview with representative from UNHCR Italy, 19 April 2024; participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'.
55 Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 'Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative', accessed 19 September 2024.
56 Author interview with representative from ICMC Europe, 13 June 2024; Government of Canada, 'Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility', accessed 14 October 2024; Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, 'Who We Are', accessed 14 October 2024.

infrastructure that can be shared across programmes. One of the primary opportunities for this is in creating shared infrastructure for the front-end functions of pathways programmes operating in a single context, the tools by which potential beneficiaries are identified, processed, and assisted with travel planning. A lack of coordination in these predeparture stages can both lead to duplicated investments and, perhaps more importantly, cause confusion among programme candidates, who may not be able to distinguish clearly which programme is best for their situation, profile, and needs.

A more ambitious strategy is to create common systems for candidates to submit applications and for generating referrals to various pathways operating out of a single departure country.

Working across programmes to develop and share common procedures and case preparation tools would help address these challenges. The COMET Project, for example, has developed common procedures and checklists for candidate identification and matching in the pathways operated by project partners.[57] Partner organisations have indicated that, while many of the tools have required some adaptation to fit within individual contexts as well as buy-in from relevant stakeholders, they have been valuable for formalising front-end processes and facilitating the set-up of new pathways.[58]

A more ambitious strategy is to create common systems for candidates to submit applications and for generating referrals to various pathways operating out of a single departure country. Pooled referrals have been used by the Italian UNICORE and French UNIV'R education corridors, for which UNHCR helped streamline applications by setting up a webpage and application form for each corridor that candidates can use to apply to the different courses and universities involved in the programmes.[59] In the UK labour pathway for refugee nurses, the NHS has acted as a bridge between candidates and hospitals, facilitating group hiring and achieving significant savings—up to 40 per cent in some cases—particularly in terms of the staff time involved in recruitment, immigration, and relocation processes.[60] At the European level, some stakeholders have even recommended creating a 'Gate to Europe'—a single system to screen and refer candidates to the most suitable complementary pathway across participating EU Member States.[61] For instance, the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante team in Lebanon screens candidates for both the Italian and French humanitarian corridors, suggesting matches based on each person's profile and how it may fit with the destination-country context.[62] More broadly, TBB has built a Talent Catalog in which displaced professionals can create a profile and be referred to different labour pathways, a promising model that could be scaled up further.[63]

57 COMET Project, 'Documents', accessed 14 October 2024.
58 Author interview with representative from FCEI, 14 May 2024; author interview with representative from UNHCR Italy, 19 April 2024; author interview with representative from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, 8 April 2024; author interview with representative from Refugees Welcome Italy, 2 April 2024; participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'.
59 Alessia Perricone, *Summary Report, Working Group 2: Identification, Referral, and Matching in the Context of Labour and Education Pathways* (N.p.: ICMC Europe, SHARE Network, Refuge Point, and Caritas Italy, 2023).
60 Author conversation with representative from the NHS, 11 September 2024.
61 EU-Passworld, 'A European Approach to Labour and Education Pathways'.
62 Author interview with representative from the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante, 24 May 2024.
63 TBB, 'Am I Eligible to Register on the Talent Catalog?', accessed 15 September 2024; Dorst, Hooper, Benton, and Dain, *Engaging Employers.*

Such systems can reduce the burden on candidates applying for scholarships or employment by allowing them to fill in an application once to be considered for multiple opportunities within or across countries. They can also lead to better matches by ensuring candidates are considered for a range of pathways for which they could be eligible (factoring in, for instance, specific needs, family members in different countries, and skills)—potentially lowering secondary movement and boosting satisfaction among both refugees and the employers, educational institutions, or sponsors with which they are paired.[64] While such tools are often envisioned as static platforms (where applicants scroll through a long list of programmes), advances in AI and other technological tools could make them more tailored and interactive. For example, a chatbot could be used to collect targeted information from applicants, asking further questions and soliciting more information about particular experiences or qualifications, where relevant. Algorithmic matching could then be used to generate potential pathway matches and recommend next steps that are specific to the applicant's situation. Matching algorithms have already been deployed in the U.S. refugee sponsorship programme, for example.[65]

Greater front-end coordination could also lead to other opportunities for programmes to collaborate to meet the specific needs of particular cases, including at later stages in a programme. Candidates who have a strong skills profile in a sector with plentiful job opportunities but lack a necessary qualification could, for example, be referred to an education pathway first to complete their qualification and then be referred on to an employment pathway.[66] For study or employment pathway candidates with particular needs, such as traveling with accompanying family members or having specific psychosocial or housing needs, a link could be made between the education or labour pathway and a sponsorship support network in the destination country to help meet those needs.[67] The EU-Passworld and Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E) projects have been piloting different policy approaches to connecting education and labour pathway beneficiaries and their families with wrap-around welcome and integration support provided by sponsorship groups. EU-Passworld project partners, for example, have been testing the extent to which increasing receiving communities' engagement in skills-based pathways can make those programmes more sustainable and scalable.[68]

Creating a common system for front-end operations would not be without challenges, however. UNHCR, for example, has noted that complementary pathways programmes operate with a great deal of diversity in terms of their processing modalities and timelines.[69] The window of time in which candidates or a coordinating actor can submit cases to one destination country or programme for consideration may not overlap with the submission window for another, for example. For common front-end infrastructure to result in efficiency gains, these structures would thus likely need to be accompanied by a greater level of alignment of processes across countries and pathways. One way to address this could be to appoint an EU-level coordinator to oversee complementary pathways operations within a specific departure country,

64 Author interview with representative from Mosaico, 27 March 2024.
65 Craig Damian Smith and Emma Ugolini, *Why Matching Matters: Improving Outcomes in Refugee Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2023).
66 Participant comments during the roundtable 'Enhancing Multistakeholder Collaboration'.
67 Author interview with representative from CCME, 2 April 2024.
68 EU-Passworld, 'A European Approach to Labour and Education Pathways'.
69 Author interview with representative from UNHCR Italy, 19 April 2024.

coordinating selection and departure processes for the various pathways active there. The European Union Asylum Agency could be well placed to take on this role, for example.[70]

4 Conclusions

Complementary pathways have proven themselves to be vital components of the refugee protection field, and their importance is only likely to grow in the coming years. Over the last decade, significant attention has—rightfully—been given to setting up programme operations and refining the support these pathways offer displaced individuals. These early efforts have served as valuable proof of concept and highlighted areas for further improvement. Yet after years of rather small programmes, the focus is now shifting towards scaling these initiatives up and making them more sustainable.

Building a supportive ecosystem for growing complementary pathways will require strong collaboration among governments, civil society, and private actors. This can be done by engaging governments as core partners from the start of a programme to ensure necessary policies are in place and to cultivate political buy-in, fostering a shared understanding of a pathway's goals among all stakeholders, promoting open communication across programmes operating in the same context, and developing shared infrastructure to create economies of scale. It will also be important to think strategically about how to distribute programme costs—including for infrastructure and coordination mechanisms—more sustainably between government and nongovernmental actors.

Though not without challenges, particularly in a continually shifting political landscape, building this supportive ecosystem can enhance programme coordination, streamline operations, and secure greater impact. A well-coordinated network of complementary pathways promises to not only lighten operational burdens but also to enable programmes to grow more sustainably, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for both displaced individuals and their host communities.

The lessons learnt from programmes to date, regardless of their size, offer invaluable insights into the type of robust ecosystem needed to support the expansion of these pathways. As discussions about scale continue, however, it will be important to stay grounded in their core purpose: providing a route to safety for people with international protection needs. No matter their nature or scale, complementary pathways must continue to safeguard refugees from refoulement and offer them a real opportunity to restart their lives. As they expand, it will be critical to closely monitor programmes and assess how changes made to boost scalability are affecting the people these programmes are meant to serve and the communities that welcome them.

Though not without challenges, particularly in a continually shifting political landscape, building this supportive ecosystem can enhance programme coordination, streamline operations, and secure greater impact.

70 Author interview with representative from CCME, 2 April 2024.

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Acknowledgments

This report is part of the Complementary Pathways Network (COMET) Project, which aims to develop a blueprint for complementary pathways in Europe by creating common tools and quality standards for matching, predeparture orientation, reception, and post-arrival support, and by building the capacity of receiving communities. Other COMET Project research and tools can be found at: www.cometnetwork.eu

COMET received funding from the European Union's Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2020 call, under the grant agreement 101038560. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The European Commission and the European Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

The authors thank their Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and MPI Europe colleagues Hanne Beirens for her insightful comments, guidance, and feedback; Lauren Shaw for her excellent edits; and MPI Europe intern Deborah Romano for her research assistance. The authors are also grateful to the COMET consortium partners for their support and to the many stakeholders who shared valuable insights in interviews that informed this research.

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Design: Sara Staedicke, MPI
Layout: Liz Hall
Cover Photo: iStock.com/Hispanolistic

Suggested citation: Fratzke, Susan and María Belén Zanzuchi. 2024. *Complementary Pathways: Key factors in future growth.* Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe.

Migration Policy Institute Europe is a nonprofit, independent research institute that aims to provide a better understanding of migration in Europe and thus promote effective policymaking. MPI Europe provides authoritative research and practical policy design to governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders who seek more effective management of immigration, immigrant integration, and asylum systems as well as successful outcomes for newcomers, families of immigrant background, and receiving communities throughout Europe.

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