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FEASIBILITY STUDY

TOWARDS A PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP MODEL IN FRANCE

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International Catholic Migration
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International Organization
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Office of the United Nations High
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(UNHCR)

The European Resettlement Network is a joint initiative coordinated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Its current project, co-funded by the European Union under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), supports the further development of resettlement and complementary forms of admission to the EU for those in need of international protection. The content and conclusions of this paper cannot necessarily be taken to represent the positions of each coordinating organisation, but serve to contribute to the debate on expanding the provision of protection-sensitive, sustainable European pathways of admission for refugees.

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I. Introduction

There are currently over 65 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, including more than 22.5 million refugees.¹ Most refugees remain in protracted displacement situations of five years or more, with little immediate hope of returning to their countries of origin.² Less than one percent of refugees are offered a third-country solution to their displacement, namely resettlement, every year.³ Faced with few other options, many refugees, often traveling in mixed flows along with migrants, risk their lives and those of their families on perilous journeys hoping to reach Europe and elsewhere to seek asylum.

In the September 2016 *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*,⁴ adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, States committed to a new era of global responsibility-sharing in the protection of refugees and migrants. The *New York Declaration* and its annexed *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework* (CRRF), call for the opening or expanding of resettlement and other complementary pathways for admission of refugees.⁵ The *New York Declaration* and its CRRF require a multi-stakeholder approach which involves “national and local authorities, international organisations, international financial institutions, civil society partners (including faith-based organisations, diaspora organisations and academia), the private sector, the media and refugees themselves”⁶ in taking shared global responsibility for finding durable solutions for the

growing numbers of refugees. As a means of achieving these goals, and in consultation with States and other stakeholders, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will develop a Global Compact for Refugees for inclusion in his annual report to the UN General Assembly in 2018, with a zero draft having already been released on 31 January 2018.⁷

In this context, the European Resettlement Network (ERN+), funded by the European Union (EU), launched a project on complementary pathways of admission to Europe for refugees. The three coordinating organisations are the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNHCR.

The project ‘*Developing Innovative European Models for the Protection of Refugees and Providing Support to New Resettlement Countries*’ reflects the urgent need to continue to find new and additional opportunities to provide protection and solutions to refugees, including those that would otherwise be in need of resettlement, while continuing to expand and strengthen resettlement programmes. As such, its scope is limited to those in need of international protection while acknowledging that other specific protection needs exist in the context of mixed flows. The three strands of the project examine higher education scholarships, humanitarian admission programmes, and private or community-based sponsorship in the EU, with due consideration for the momentum developing around the *New York Declaration*, including the Global Compact for Refugees in 2018, as well as the negotiations on a regulation establishing an EU Resettlement Framework for the admission of persons in need of international protection⁸.

1 “Figures at a Glance: Statistical Yearbook”, (19 June 2017), UNHCR, online: <<http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>> [“Figures at a Glance”].

2 See *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016* (UNHCR, 19 June 2017), online: <<http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>>; see also for example, James Milner & Gil Loescher, *Responding to protracted refugee situations: Lessons from a decade of discussion*, (Refugee Studies Centre, Forced Migration Policy Briefing 6, January 2011), online: <<https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/pb6-responding-protracted-refugee-situations-2011.pdf>>.

3 “Figures at a Glance”, *supra*.

4 *New York Declaration*, GA Res 71/1, UNGAOR, 71st Sess, UN Doc A/Res/71/1, (2017) [*New York Declaration*].

5 “Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: Delivering more comprehensive and predictable responses for refugees”, (n.d.), UNHCR, online: <<http://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>>.

6 *New York Declaration*, *supra*, Annex I: Comprehensive refugee response framework, at 16. CRRF para. 14 and NYD paras. 77-79.

7 “Global Compact on Refugees”, (2018), UNHCR, online: <<http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact>>.

8 European Commission (2016) Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union Resettlement Framework and amending Regulation (EU) 516/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council, COM(2016) 438 final, Brussels 13/7/2016 2016/ 0225 COD

This feasibility study focuses on private sponsorships as a complementary pathway for admission of refugees to the EU. It represents the second phase of a research project, which started in 2017. The study is based on, in particular: the ERN+ scoping paper ‘*Private Sponsorship in Europe: Expanding complementary pathways for refugee resettlement*’ published in September 2017,⁹ presentations and discussions at the ERN+ Church Conference in Brussels on 18 and 19 September 2017, a *Roundtable on Private Sponsorship in France* held in Paris and additional interviews with approximately 15 stakeholders representing government ministries, international organisations, refugee supporting NGOs, private associations, think-tanks, universities and others. The ERN+ scoping paper on private sponsorship provides greater detail on several existing private sponsorship programmes in Canada, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom, and can be read in conjunction with this paper.

1. WHAT IS PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES?

There is no strict definition of private sponsorship.¹⁰ The ERN+ scoping paper ‘*Private Sponsorship in Europe: Expanding complementary pathways for refugee resettlement*’ defines private sponsorship¹¹ as a public-private partnership between governments, who facilitate legal admission for refugees, and private actors, who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle refugees into the community. Private sponsorship expands legal access possibilities and is additional to government resettlement quotas and, as is the case with resettlement, provides refugees with

a durable solution through secure legal status as well as access to and enjoyment of rights consistent with international protection principles (access to permanent residency, family reunification and eventual pathways to citizenship). Private sponsorship remains a flexible concept that can be adapted to changing contexts and needs. While several programmes relied on a ‘naming’ model whereby sponsors identified the refugees they wish to sponsor, a growing number of programmes have developed and matured over recent years, including in Canada and in the United Kingdom, whereby sponsored refugees are identified and referred by UNHCR and then matched with sponsors.

Several benefits are associated with sponsorship programmes:

- Sponsorship programmes can enhance responsibility sharing by offering more protection and durable solutions for a greater number of refugees than resettlement alone. Sponsorship can offer places in addition and as a complement to existing resettlement programmes.
- Sponsorship programmes can also build welcoming communities for refugees and sponsored refugees have proven to have positive integration outcomes.
- The engagement of communities can increase awareness and positive perceptions of refugees, thus countering perceived populist xenophobic and anti-migrant sentiments.
- Sponsorship programmes can act as catalysts for the later development of new resettlement programmes in those countries where no such annual resettlement programmes are in place.
- Sponsorship can help to develop integration infrastructure and non-government settlement services as well as building the capacity of stakeholders.

⁹ The ERN+ Scoping Paper is available on the European Resettlement Network website: www.resettlement.eu.

¹⁰ Private sponsorship has predominately been associated with the Canadian experience. The Canadians have implemented a far-reaching sponsorship programme, engaging citizens across Canada to welcome almost 300,000 refugees since 1978. For more information about the Canadian private sponsorship of refugees programme (PSR), please refer to the ERN+ scoping paper on private sponsorship in Europe.

¹¹ The terms community-based sponsorship and private sponsorship are used interchangeably in this report and, as such, have the same meaning. The term “community-based” is used to emphasise how sponsorship empowers and facilitates the active engagement of individuals and communities in providing solutions for refugees through a direct role in integration outcomes.

2. EUROPEAN CONTEXT: INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Efforts by private groups and communities to ensure refugees' safe arrival, their welcome to and integration in their new country have emerged since 2015 in a number of EU Member States, although these new programmes were not necessarily 'branded' as private sponsorship programmes by the actors themselves. It is in the context of a worsening crisis in Syria and increasing numbers of deaths at sea that innovative approaches to refugee admissions have emerged and that NGOs, private citizens, diaspora organisations, religious organisations, churches and other actors have begun to engage with private sponsorship. The initiatives implemented in Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland¹² and France are described in the ERN+ scoping paper mentioned above. The pilot programmes that emerged in Europe vary substantially in objectives, actors involved, the scope of interventions and the status afforded to beneficiaries, as well as legal regulations, safeguards and responsibilities for actors involved.

Private sponsorship is also finding increasing support at the EU level. In 2017, the European Commission (EC) encouraged Member States "to explore ways to establish private sponsorship schemes where the settlement and integration support for persons in need of protection, including its related costs, can be provided by private groups of civil society organisations¹³". Recently, the Commission launched a feasibility study¹⁴ aimed at mapping existing initiatives on private sponsorship schemes in EU Member States and the Dublin Associated States. This study will be used to inform possible future national and EU-level initiatives on sponsorship schemes and as a practical instrument for policy makers, practitioners, civil society organisations and potential sponsors at all levels of their engagement. The Commission has also invited the European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

to coordinate a pilot project on private sponsorship schemes with interested Member States¹⁵.

When looking to further expand EU and/or national frameworks for developing private sponsorship, a number of underlying issues still require further clarification.¹⁶ In particular, the proposed Regulation on the Union Resettlement framework¹⁷ may influence the development and framing of future sponsorship programmes. Such framing would be particularly important with respect to defining the boundaries between what refugee resettlement is and what is not. The proposal is currently under the process of negotiation and it is impossible to comment on the direction that will be taken. It is thus unclear if refugees sponsored under private sponsorship schemes would fall within the scope of the Regulation, and would benefit in the same manner as resettlement from EC Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funding.

Overall it must be noted that the specific and varying national contexts in which private sponsorship programmes are developing are in many aspects out of the EU legislature's reach. Since the roles and responsibilities of private sponsorship programmes are divided between public and private actors, the state welfare system and the extent to which it benefits people in need of international protection is a key feature when defining sponsors funding obligations. Such systems are national

12 The Irish programme is also presented as a humanitarian admission programme. See the ERN+ Scoping Paper on humanitarian admission programmes available at www.resettlement.eu.

13 European Commission, *Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on the Delivery of the European Agenda on Migration*, Brussels, 27.9.2017, COM(2017) 558 final.

14 Ibidem.

15 Ibidem.

16 Many of these issues have been, in many aspects, explored during the ERN+ Conference "The Role of Churches and Christian Organisations in Community-based Sponsorship Programmes of Refugees in Europe: Challenges, Opportunities and Next Steps", held in Brussels on 18 and 19 September 2017. Nearly 80 stakeholders from 16 countries in Europe from Churches, faith-based organisations, civil society network, international organisations as well as five Canadian experts joined the event, which aimed to identify best practices and main challenges across existing programmes, and opportunities to scale them up. Despite the different forms private sponsorship programmes have taken across Europe, a fruitful exchange made it possible to achieve progress in defining common principles and benchmarks. See the full conference report: *The role of faith-based organisations in private sponsorship programmes*.

17 European Commission (2016) Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union Resettlement Framework and amending Regulation (EU) 516/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council, COM(2016) 438 final, Brussels 13/7/2016 2016/0225 COD, online <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs_autres_institutions/commission_europeenne/com/2016/0468/COM_COM%282016%290468_EN.pdf>.

systems and thus vary significantly across the European Union. It is for this reason that the current study focuses on one EU Member State: France, so to enable the formulation of a future programme taking account of a specific national legal context with respect to asylum and social welfare.

3. DEVELOPING PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP IN FRANCE: METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

The present report is thus a feasibility study focusing on developing a sustainable private sponsorship programme in France. The protection environment in France provides the grounds for developing private sponsorship programmes.

The present study first provides an overview of the pathways for refugee admission in France with a particular emphasis placed on the current practices involving private actors. The study then considers the feasibility of creating a more sustainable private sponsorship in France. While refugee protection and durable solutions, complementarity with other pathways, increased responsibility sharing and building welcoming communities are the primary objectives of developing private sponsorship programmes, the report strives to propose a model that can be deemed realistic for the actors involved in France. In that regard, the study takes into account the existing landscape in the field of asylum and integration, i.e. the roles of each of the actors and their capacities. Therefore, the report does not make recommendations aimed at changing the domestic legal framework but tries to underline how private sponsorship can be fully integrated into that framework.

Several initiatives whereby private actors identify, host and assist people in need of international protection have been implemented in France since 2014. This report takes into account the context in which current initiatives are taking place and the main challenges identified by the actors. In other words, the report aims to suggest standards to make these initiatives more sustainable and protection sensitive. Moreover, the report is based on interviews with the main actors involved.

In this respect, on 18 October 2017, the European Resettlement Network, in collaboration with the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), hosted the ERN+ roundtable in Paris focusing on private sponsorship of refugees in France. Over 20 participants joined the event, including government counterparts, international organisations, faith-based organisations, NGOs, research institutes, as well as Canadian actors involved in private sponsorship and resettlement. The roundtable aimed to encourage an open discussion on private sponsorship, through an exchange of experiences and suggestions on how to strengthen, better structure and streamline sponsorship programmes. The information and practices shared at the roundtable have, therefore, fed into the content of this report.

While this study is informed by the French context, some of the issues considered may be relevant for other EU Member States, as described in the concluding key observations. However, it is important to bear in mind that the development of private sponsorship programmes should be guided by the overall objectives of increasing opportunities for protection and durable solutions for refugees, and additional research into the individual country context where a private sponsorship programme is foreseen would be required to determine the appropriate approach and model.

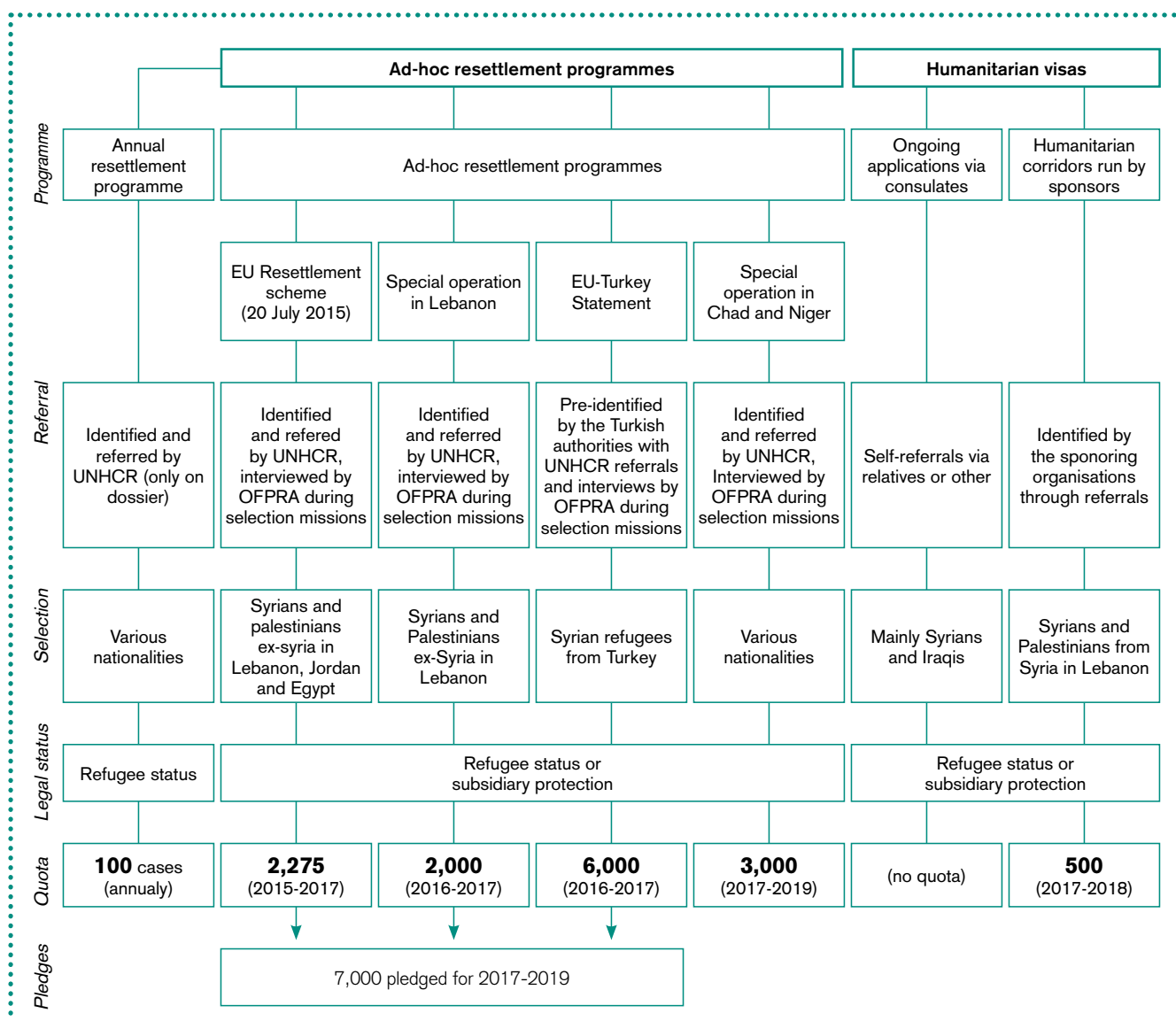
II. Complementary pathways for refugee admission in France

This section describes how complementary pathways for refugee admission in France have progressively developed. France has considerably expanded its offer of legal pathways since 2015. They are mostly ‘bottom-up’ and ad-hoc initiatives that are based on the longstanding government practice to issue long-stay visas with a view

to the recipient then requesting international protection in France. Although these initiatives have not been formalised, they provide the grounds for further developing a sustainable private sponsorship programme, complementary to the resettlement programmes, and that fully take into account the protection needs of refugees.

Table 1: Pathways of refugee admission to France

The following table shows the different pathways for refugee admission to France.



1. RESETTLEMENT ON THE RISE

France has considerably expanded its resettlement programmes. It combines a small-scale annual resettlement programme with larger scale ad-hoc resettlement admission programmes, mostly in line with the EU resettlement priorities. France was due to receive 2,275 refugees under the 20 July 2015 EU resettlement scheme and 6,000 refugees under the EU-Turkey Statement.¹⁸ Finally, France pledged to resettle 2,000 additional Syrian refugees and Palestinians from Syria living in Lebanon.¹⁹ Although the selection process and the reception conditions differ from the annual resettlement programme, all beneficiaries receive an international protection status under French law, i.e. either refugee status or subsidiary protection. It is also worth highlighting that the newly elected President Macron renewed France's commitment to European resettlement and pledged the resettlement of 10,000 refugees including 3,000 from Niger and Chad by October 2019²⁰ as part of the European Commission call for at least 50,000 places.²¹

2. HUMANITARIAN VISAS: A LONGSTANDING PRACTICE

In addition to resettlement, the French government has been delivering humanitarian visas for several decades (long-stay (national D-type) visas) with a view to the recipient requesting international protection in France upon arrival. Domestic stakeholders commonly call such humanitarian, long-stay visas: “*visas asile*”. Several hundreds of these visas are granted every year by the French consular services, albeit in a rather discreet manner. These visas are ‘D-type’ visas, i.e. the same type of visas as those issued to people coming to France for family or professional reasons. These visas can be issued to refugees, internally displaced persons or even other persons in their country of origin being persecuted and in need of protection.²² However, French legislation has not codified the criteria in respect of issuing such humanitarian visas. The Ministry of Interior Affairs can request the opinion of the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (*OFPR*) as to the applicant's need of international protection. But issuing a humanitarian visa is a discretionary practice. In other words, a person in need of international protection cannot claim a right to be issued a humanitarian visa. When they arrive in France, beneficiaries of the visa have to apply for asylum in the same way as persons who claim asylum directly on French territory outside the framework of a third country admission programme. Generally, the beneficiaries are accommodated in the transit centres located in Créteil (Paris area) and Villeurbanne (Lyon area), managed respectively by the NGOs France terre d'asile and Forum réfugiés-Cosi, before being directed to a reception centre for asylum-seekers (*CADA*).

18 As of 10 November 2017, 2,283 refugees were resettled in France under the 20 July 2015 scheme and 1,091 under the EU-Turkey statement. European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council – Progress report on the European Agenda on Migration*, Brussels, 15.11.2017, COM(2017) 669 final.

19 For an exhaustive description of resettlement programmes in France, see: Point de contact français du Réseau européen des migrations, *Programmes de réinstallation et d'admission humanitaire en France*, June 2016.

20 Le Monde, *Macron s'engage à accueillir 10 000 réfugiés d'ici à 2019*, 9 October 2017, online <http://www.lemonde.fr/immigration-et-diversite/article/2017/10/09/macron-s-engage-a-accueillir-10-000-refugies-d-ici-a-2019_5198565_1654200.html>.

21 European Commission, *Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on the Delivery of the European Agenda on Migration*, Brussels, 27.9.2017, COM(2017) 558 final.

22 Given the absence of a legislative definition, in practice, non-displaced persons are those with a specific profile which gives rise to a certain risk factor, for example journalists, human rights activists, LGTBI persons.

3. NEW KINDS OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE ACTORS: FIRST STEPS TO ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN SPONSORSHIP

Over the past years, the practice of issuing humanitarian visas has led to new kinds of partnerships between the government and private actors.²³ In 2014, faith-based organisations and religious communities, concerned about the plight of persecuted minorities in the Middle-East in light of the progress made by the Islamic State in Iraq, appealed to the French authorities to deliver humanitarian visas to members of persecuted minorities identified in Iraq by associations working there. The Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs consequently mobilised the consulates of Erbil and Baghdad to examine visa requests filed by Iraqi nationals belonging to persecuted minorities. This was based on the criteria described in an information note of August 2014: persons fearing serious threat or personal persecution who have close family in France or strong ties with France or are in a situation of specific vulnerability.²⁴ The faith-based organisations assumed the travel expenses for these persons and their reception and accommodation in France. No pre-departure assistance was provided besides the issuance of the visa. Initially, this procedure primarily concerned religious minorities in Iraq, but its coverage was quickly broadened to include Syrian nationals of any faith present in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. As a consequence, the number of humanitarian visas has sharply increased. In 2015, 1,199 Syrians and 2,031 Iraqis arrived in France within this framework. In 2016, the number rose to 4,114, with visas being issued for 2,745 Syrians and 1,369 Iraqis.

During the first months of implementation, the reception of these beneficiaries was carried out in a rather disorganised

manner despite the appointment by the Ministry of Interior of a coordinator whose role was to ensure that the beneficiaries were properly received and could effectively access the benefits they were entitled to as asylum-seekers²⁵ awaiting adjudication of their asylum claims. Initially, the housing made available was not always appropriate and there was confusion about the asylum procedure and the administrative steps that must be taken to obtain social benefits. Improvement was observed when organisations with more expertise in assisting asylum-seekers and refugees were engaged. For example, the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid (*FEP*) started coordinating a Syrian refugee reception network of around 50 groups of volunteers accommodating refugees in housing made available by them or in church parsonages and assisting them with integration support.

More Iraqi refugees who arrived in France between 2008 and 2012 used this provision to reunite with their extended family members (not eligible under the regular family reunification provisions). Hosting families encountered considerable difficulties in accessing the asylum procedures and therefore received support and legal assistance from mainstream NGOs or NGOs working in the vicinity. For instance, the Order of Malta France was alerted to the situation of Iraqi refugees by parishioners in Tours and thereafter built up an assistance programme, offering French language courses, job insertion assistance, social guidance as well as developing partnerships with local associations and organisations working for social inclusion.²⁶

The 2014 information note referenced previously thus paved the way for public-private partnership and private sponsorship in France. Private actors became more involved in the admission of people in need of international protection in France by referring cases to French consulates. The government agreed to issue humanitarian visas and the private actors offered accommodation and support, partially paid for with their own resources.

23 However, France is still issuing *visas asile* to persons who have no sponsors in the country. In 2016, 162 persons, who were issued *visas asile*, were accommodated in France terre d'asile transit centres. See France terre d'asile, *La lettre de l'asile et de l'intégration*, n° 81, October 2017.

24 According to the information note of August 14th 2014: «this provision is aimed at people threatened or persecuted in a personal capacity and who have close family in France or strong ties with our country or who are in a particularly vulnerable situation» (unofficial translation). The term 'specific vulnerability' has not been elaborated upon in the information note.

25 Initially, the préfet-coordinator's task was to oversee the Syrians humanitarian admission programme. The scope of action was widened to coordinate the reception of Iraqi and Syrian nationals who have been issued *visas asile*.

26 So far, this assistance programme is being self-funded by the organisation.

4. HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS: A MORE STRUCTURED PILOT PROJECT

The protocol for the humanitarian corridors, modelled on the programme in Italy, presents a new step forward in developing private sponsorship in France.²⁷ According to the protocol,²⁸ signed on 14 March 2017 between the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and five faith-based organisations (Community of Sant'Egidio, the Protestant Federation of France, the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid, the Bishops' Conference of France, Caritas France²⁹), the French government will deliver humanitarian visas to 500 refugees and persons in need of international protection from Syria and Iraq in Lebanon.³⁰

The five leading organisations, together with the support of self-funded groups of citizens and churches, are responsible for funding the programme. The costs cover airline tickets (offered at 50 percent discount by Air France), domestic transportation, accommodation, settlement and integration support. Sponsoring organisations are fully responsible for identification and selection, travel to France, as well as post-arrival reception for a period varying between 12 and 18 months. The agreement foresees a strong coordination between sponsoring organisations and the Ministry of Interior, as well as the French embassy in Beirut. Cooperation with international organisations such as UNHCR and IOM is equally foreseen. The project focuses on refugees and persons in need of international protection from Syria and Iraq in Lebanon with specific vulnerabilities (female heads of households, victims of trafficking, elderly or people with disabilities or illness) or with relatives or other links to France who can enter France with a humanitarian visa to apply for asylum.

Working with local referral networks, including churches and NGOs in Lebanon, the organisations (mainly the Community of Sant'Egidio) conduct interviews and submit a list of potential candidates for sponsorship, along with a completed visa application for each candidate, to the French embassy in Beirut. The embassy, together with the French Ministry of Interior, conduct a security check and then issue a humanitarian visa within two months. The Lebanese authorities issue an exit permit.

Upon arrival in France, beneficiaries register for asylum with the nearest *préfecture* after which they can lodge their asylum claims with OFPRA. OFPRA agreed to issue a decision within three months for applicants who arrived in France under this project. Beneficiaries of the humanitarian corridors do not have the right to work before they have status.

The church sponsors in France house beneficiaries with volunteer hosts, citizens and volunteers, and church groups offer settlement support and orientation. The sponsoring organisations have expressed a preference for hosting beneficiaries in small municipalities, where the cost of living tends to be more affordable. For social and administrative support, such as access to health-care, education, and so on, the organisers work in close collaboration with local actors. It must be noted that each partner organisation has its own model of providing support to beneficiaries. For instance, Caritas France drafted a model contract between volunteer hosts and beneficiaries defining the conditions, length and mutual responsibilities with respect to the accommodation and social and economic support. Finally, the agreement between the government and the partner organisations provides for a comprehensive evaluation of the programme at the end.

27 Since the publication of the ERN+ Scoping Paper, the Humanitarian Corridors have further expanded in Belgium with a quota of 150 refugees from Lebanon and Turkey and have been renewed in Italy, where a third protocol with the government has been signed in November 2017.

28 For further information see the press release from the five NGOs here, online <http://www.fep.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DP_Couloirs-humanitaires-France.pdf>.

29 Order of Malta – France subsequently joined the partnership.

30 By March 2018, 129 refugees arrived.

LESSONS LEARNED

The above-mentioned experiences under humanitarian visas, although not labelled as private sponsorship programmes by the actors themselves, illustrate the extent to which the commitment and initiatives of civil society can change public policies regarding asylum. They also illustrate the potential that such programmes can offer in terms of responsibility-sharing by expanding the number and range of legal pathways for refugee admission.

Finally, the French case illustrates the domestic factors that made private sponsorship possible in France. In that regard, it constitutes an interesting example for other countries. First, humanitarian visas are the cornerstone of the emerging initiatives in France. These humanitarian visas are very specific to the French legal framework. However, all states have the sovereign right to issue long-stay visas, including for humanitarian reasons.³¹ Therefore, the absence of a national framework outlining the grounds and procedures specifically for humanitarian visas should not act as a barrier to issuing visas to people in need of international protection. Second, it is important to note that the recent private sponsorship initiatives are a complementary and additional tool for accessing international protection in France. They are fully integrated within the existing protection landscape and are coherent with the asylum framework granting legal status to all beneficiaries of international protection. Third, the sponsorship initiatives are bottom-up initiatives. They would not have been possible without a strong civil society grounded in the field and with enough autonomy vis-à-vis the authorities. Mutual trust between civil society organisations and the authorities is a key pre-requisite for engaging in private sponsorship.

However, the French examples are still ad-hoc and in the pilot phase. How can we ensure the sustainability of the initiatives with the aim of creating a permanent private sponsorship programme? How can such schemes address the protection needs of refugees and ensure that they offer additional places to resettlement? How can we ensure that these pathways represent a meaningful contribution to increased responsibility sharing, and do not have a negative impact on protection environments in countries of asylum? How can the tasks of private actors involved be better streamlined? The following section will address these questions.

31 According to a study commissioned by the European Parliament, 9 EU Member States (Belgium, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland and the United Kingdom) either currently have or have had schemes for issuing national long-stay visas for humanitarian reasons. Ulla Iben Jensen, *Humanitarian visas: option or obligation?*, 2014.

III. Suggested models for private sponsorship in France and key considerations for the future

This chapter will further define the conditions for private sponsorship to ensure it provides a safe pathway to people in need of international protection, in addition and as a complement to existing resettlement programmes implemented in France. The study will then develop the roles, responsibilities and coordination of the sponsoring groups. For both issues, this feasibility study proposes models to enhance the already existing framework in France. This chapter aims to propose realistic options within the current legislation and take account of existing capacities of private and public actors that would be involved. Therefore, the study will not call for legal change or large financial support from the government that could be deemed out of reach by the domestic advocates of private sponsorship. Instead, this chapter suggests tools to ensure sponsorship fully addresses the international protection challenges and better support the beneficiaries on their path to integration in French society.

A. WHO CAN BE SPONSORED?

A TWO-TRACK SYSTEM FOR VULNERABLE REFUGEES AND FAMILY MEMBERS

When the French government started issuing humanitarian visas to Iraqi nationals in 2014, this opportunity was mainly used to provide a safe exit door for vulnerable minorities in Iraq fleeing the 'Islamic State' (IS). Progressively, this option was more and more used for extended family members of Iraqi refugees in France who hosted these family members in their homes. Simultaneously, Syrian refugees were increasingly benefiting from sponsorship. Then came the humanitarian corridors in 2017 which further formalised these earlier practices and provided a framework between the five partner NGOs and the government.

We can thus identify two tracks in the initiatives implemented in France: 1) providing complementary pathways for vulnerable refugees and 2) providing for extended family admission.

These two strands should be complementary with other pathways, particularly resettlement and regular family reunification, by offering additional places. Private sponsorship should be clearly perceived as a protection tool aiming to provide durable solutions for refugees and persons in need of international protection who are in need of third country solutions. Thus, the beneficiaries of sponsorship programmes should be eligible for international protection upon arrival in France, i.e. they should be eligible for refugee status or subsidiary protection. This may be a great challenge when identifying beneficiaries overseas but a necessary step to ensure legal status in France. Focusing on refugees who are already recognised by UNHCR should avoid the risk of legal limbo in France. Moreover, focusing the selection of refugees for private sponsorship on specific needs, as is the case with resettlement, ensures that private sponsorship remains non-discriminatory.

Moreover, private sponsorship should not be used to offset potential failures of existing legal pathways but should be implemented in a way to provide an additional responsibility-sharing mechanism with third countries hosting refugees. In that regard, target groups for each pathway should be clearly defined. Finally, one should consider the capacities of the sponsoring organisations and the French consulates to proceed with the identification and the issuance of visas. Capacity issues can be a major hurdle to broadening private sponsorship but it is unrealistic to expect the French authorities to invest a great amount of resources into this programme. The capacities of both the sponsors and the authorities should then be addressed at the earliest stage possible. From

the State perspective, the burden on the consulates can be deemed as too cumbersome when pre-determination screening is to be undertaken, which includes security checks. In the case of sponsorship of Iraqi nationals, OFPRA delivered training on refugee status determination to consulate staff in the Middle East. Considering that France has the second largest diplomatic network in the world, involving all the consulate missions would be perceived as a highly resource-consuming activity by the French authorities. The following proposed models for private sponsorship will try to address these challenges.

1. PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP FOR VULNERABLE REFUGEES: Towards a sustainable humanitarian corridors scheme

Under the humanitarian corridors programme, beneficiaries are identified and referred to the French authorities by the partner NGOs based on the criteria of vulnerability. So far, the vulnerability criteria, as a pre-condition for selection of sponsored refugees, has not been clearly defined.

It is therefore recommended to align the eligibility criteria to the ones used by UNHCR for resettlement to guard against discriminatory approaches. Therefore, a blended approach, whereby UNHCR refers refugees for private sponsorship, would have several benefits in terms of efficiency. First, it would ensure that those refugees in need of resettlement are prioritised for transfer to France in accordance with UNHCR's well established criteria and processes. Second, it would relieve the sponsoring NGOs from engaging in a time and resource-consuming task. As a consequence, it could speed up the referral process, especially when there are emergency needs for resettlement or when a first country of asylum is overburdened by the number of refugees. It would, thus, be in line with the humanitarian approach of this strand of private sponsorship. It does not mean that NGOs do not have a role to play in the identification of sponsored refugees. According to the UNHCR handbook on resettlement,³² partner NGOs can contribute to the

identification of the refugees in need of resettlement. These guidelines can aid private sponsorship and leave a door open for contributions of private sponsoring organisations when they have staff members or partnerships with NGOs in the first country of asylum as long as they comply with UNHCR criteria and established standards and procedures.

In this case, private sponsorship is an opportunity to provide protection places additional to the resettlement schemes. However, the annual resettlement scheme, whereby refugees are referred on a dossier basis, is lacking efficiency, most particularly due to the delays of the French authorities in approving the cases and issuing the visas.³³ In order to avoid the same difficulties, the capacities of the French consulates to issue humanitarian visas should be taken into account.

Therefore, this strand of private sponsorship could only be open to specific countries and/or nationalities in countries of first asylum facing pressing resettlement needs. Limiting the geographical scope of the programme would help to streamline the resources mobilised by the French authorities and to ensure swift processing. Moreover, it would support private sponsoring organisations to better prepare the reception conditions and share materials and guidelines regarding the needs of the refugees they are about to host and assist. The target group, with consideration of nationalities and/or first countries of asylum, would be decided by the private sponsoring organisations and the authorities together with UNHCR. It is suggested that the decision on the target group is to be reviewed on a regular basis in accordance with UNHCR's annual projected resettlement needs. The consultation between the private sponsoring organisations and the authorities would also decide what share of the sponsorship places would be dedicated to this sustainable humanitarian corridor.

32 UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011.

33 ICMC, SHARE Project, *La réinstallation des réfugiés en France : état des lieux et voies d'améliorations*, June 2015.

2. PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP FOR EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS

Private sponsorship is often used for admission of extended family members.³⁴ However, it should not substitute access to fair and efficient family reunification pathways but it should rather be complementary to the regular family reunification framework which focuses on nuclear family members. According to French law, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are entitled to request a visa for their spouse and underage children.³⁵ Unlike other categories of foreign nationals, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are not obliged to fulfil requirements related to their income and sufficient accommodation to apply for family reunification. The procedure and the criteria are the same as those applying to third country family members of French nationals.³⁶ But these requirements do not apply to a relative outside the nuclear family members for whom there is no legal pathway to admission in France. Private sponsorship can be a useful tool in this circumstance, but this criterion should be articulated with a protection criterion. Indeed, private sponsorship should first and foremost be guided by protection considerations. Thus, one should make a distinction between the family connections, which are a ground for naming the beneficiaries of sponsorship, and the needs for international protection, which are the selection criteria for issuing a visa. The following considerations will try to propose what could be the criteria for selection based on needs for international protection.

A first eligibility criterion for sponsorship would be the need for international protection as recognised by the UNHCR. This strand could be restricted to refugees whose protection has been granted under articles 6 and 7 of the UNHCR statute. Provided that refugee status under articles 6 and 7 of the UNHCR statute is recognised by French law,³⁷ no extra determination process by French authorities would be needed except for security checks.³⁸ A second eligibility criterion could be the specific vulnerabilities of the extended family members resulting in protection concerns in the country of asylum. This criterion would be assessed by UNHCR.

The identification would start with an application from relatives in France. Current experience illustrates that family members in France are not equipped to host their relatives and do not have the capacity to guide them through the maze of administrative procedures and to provide integration services. Therefore, the application would be sent to private sponsoring organisations. They would have the responsibility to check the eligibility criteria with UNHCR before sending the application to the authorities. Private sponsoring organisations would also be in charge of finding a local group in the vicinity of the relatives in France. The local group would coordinate and manage the welcoming, hosting and assistance of the beneficiaries of the private sponsorship programme.

The role and composition of private sponsoring organisations and local groups, hereafter called accredited NGOs and sponsoring groups, will be further developed below.

34 For example, in Canada, around 90% of the arrivals through the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugee programme (PSR) are extended family members. See ERN+ scoping paper on private sponsorship.

35 Article L.752-1 of the Code governing the entrance and residence of foreign nationals and the right to asylum (*CESEDA*).

36 However, in practice, reunification of family members of refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection takes months, sometimes years, because of the complexity to establish family links in war-torn countries and of the diverging practices of French consulates. In any case, community-sponsorship should not be used to bypass family reunification. It is recommended that the French authorities ensure that family reunification procedures take into due account the specific situation of refugees.

37 Article L.711-1 of the Code governing the entrance and residence of foreign nationals and the right to asylum (*CESEDA*).

38 Although it can be a major restriction with regard to the scope of private sponsorship, it would be an incentive, at the same time, to the opening up of private sponsorship pathways to refugees living in any country of the world with less consideration on the capacities of the French consulates to issue visas.

PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP FOR EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY

The first steps to engage communities in sponsorship in France applied to Iraqi nationals who were still in their home country. While this practice does not contribute directly to the responsibility sharing principle, it proves useful to provide an escape door for persons who are in danger in their country. However, the criteria needs to be better framed and brought in line with the grounds for international protection in France and more considerations should be taken considering the geographical scope and the target groups of this practice to ensure it is not used in a discriminatory manner.

Although there are grounds to elaborate on the practice to deliver humanitarian visas to people who are still in their home country, this feasibility study has been prepared in the framework of the European Resettlement Network+ project “Developing innovative European models for the protection of refugees and providing support to new resettlement countries”. As such its scope is limited to those in need of international protection. Similarly, while acknowledging that specific protection needs exist for people in their country of origin, more particularly for internally displaced persons, for the reasons noted above and in line with the direction set out in the *New York Declaration* and the annexed *Comprehensive Refugee Responses Framework* (CRRF), the scope of this feasibility study is confined to a discussion of the feasibility of private sponsorship for “persons in need of international protection”.

VISAS AND LEGAL STATUS IN FRANCE

Once the eligibility criteria have been checked by the French authorities, including security checks, and as soon as accommodation has been secured by the sponsoring organisations, the French authorities can issue a humanitarian visa. As mentioned above, the humanitarian visa is a leave to enter French territory in order to request international protection. It means that the recipients of private sponsorship will have to apply for asylum upon their arrival to France.

OFPPRA is an independent administrative body. OFPPRA is the only institution, together with the appeal court (CNDA) that can decide whether an asylum-seeker can be granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. The law guarantees OFPPRA's independence. It cannot receive instructions from the authorities on individual asylum cases.

The paradox of the French resettlement programmes is that resettled refugees have to make an asylum application when they arrive in France. According to the law, OFPPRA cannot make a decision on the refugee cases overseas. It is a factor of confusion, stress and disappointment for resettled refugees. Moreover, this situation delays the integration process until a residence permit as refugees or subsidiary protection beneficiaries is provided. The increasing involvement of OFPPRA in the selection missions, particularly under the EU resettlement schemes, is a way to bypass this hurdle and to undertake the determination interview in the country of first asylum. Selected refugees are then issued with the refugee decision upon arrival in France but from a legal point of view the decision is taken on French soil.

This paradox also applies to private sponsored refugees. Under the current initiatives, beneficiaries have to fill an asylum application under the same conditions as persons who claim asylum directly on French territory outside the framework of third country admission programmes. So far, most asylum applications of private sponsored refugees have been decided in priority by OFPPRA, which takes approximately three months.

Table 2: Proposed programmes of private sponsorship in France

The following table summarises the proposed models of private sponsorship described above.

Strands	Extended Family Members	Vulnerable Refugees
Target group	Refugee extended family members in country of first asylum	Vulnerable refugees in country of first asylum - Determined annually on the basis of protection needs; - Limited to applicants in specific countries and/or of specific nationalities;
Referral	Sponsoring organisations based on an application by family members in France	- Identification by UNHCR with partner organisations; - Referral by UNHCR
Selection criteria	- Refugees under UNHCR mandate; - Specific vulnerabilities assessed by UNHCR; - Security check	- Refugees in need of resettlement; - Security check
Visa	Long-stay visa with a view to requesting international protection in France (humanitarian visa)	
Legal status	Refugee status according to Art. L.711-1 CESEDA	Refugee status or subsidiary protection
Target numbers	Target number to be defined by sponsoring organisations and the authorities on a regular basis	Target number and countries to be defined by sponsoring organisations and the authorities on a regular basis

Considering that making an asylum claim is an unavoidable step under French law, the selection criteria are fundamental to ensure a predictable determination phase. The sponsorship models proposed above aim to avoid limbo situations by suggesting that the eligibility criteria relate either to refugees under the UNHCR mandate or to applicants referred by UNHCR. In cases where OFPRA does not confirm the UNHCR determinations, the authorities have the possibility to issue a discretionary leave to remain for humanitarian reasons unless the privately sponsored person is a threat to public safety. In that case, though, the rights and benefits are below those granted to refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries, in particular when it comes to eligibility for the subsistence financial allowance (*RSA*).

BEFORE DEPARTURE: PREPARING SPONSORED BENEFICIARIES

The pre-departure phase is a decisive step linking in with a privately sponsored beneficiary's future life in France. In the field of resettlement and like most resettlement countries, France contracted with IOM to deliver pre-departure orientation and assistance to facilitate travel to France, including medical checks, to ensure refugees are fit to travel. Pre-departure orientation is delivered via an information leaflet available in French, English, Arabic and Russian,³⁹ while for the Syrian caseload, IOM has produced an information video. A pre-departure orientation session is offered when groups are to be resettled.

In Canada, pre-departure assistance to refugees is also carried out by IOM for resettled and privately sponsored refugees alike. An extension of the contract between France and IOM to privately sponsored refugees could be considered. However, one should wonder who would

³⁹ According to the actors, the information leaflet needs to be updated. A separate leaflet was drafted for Syrian refugees. A video was also produced for Syrians.

pay for the extra-cost of extending pre-departure services to sponsored refugees. For example, the Canadian government pays for IOM services. If the French authorities would not agree to pay for this service, the cost would be borne by the sponsors. It might be an excessive burden and alternatives should be looked at.

First of all, sponsoring NGOs could produce their own pre-departure information materials, more particularly about the location of settlement and the sponsoring groups. The links between the beneficiaries of private sponsorship, the sponsors and the family already living in France are an asset for a more seamless transition between the pre-departure phase, the initial reception phase and a life in France. When sponsoring NGOs have a representative in the country of first asylum or a partner organisation there, the latter can complement this information. Based on its expertise with pre-departure information, IOM could work closely with sponsorship groups to provide guidelines on the material and the messages delivered to sponsored refugees.

Sponsors can also use already existing information materials. For example, France produced a 60-page brochure collecting useful information on life in France for immigration candidates.⁴⁰ A recent report by a member of the Parliament on the reform of the integration policy suggests developing online French language teaching.⁴¹ The report also mentions that the Ministry of Interior is currently working with *l'Alliance française* on online language trainings. All these tools, which are targeted to immigration candidates for family and professional grounds, could be usefully used to prepare sponsored refugees for their new life in France.

Considering the differences in the integration perspectives amongst EU Member States, more information should be delivered to beneficiaries of private sponsorship about their right to move within the EU. More particularly, they should be informed that they cannot settle in another Member State until they comply with the criteria set out in the EU long-term residence Directive.

⁴⁰ The brochure is available in French, English, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian and Turkish, online <<https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Accueil-et-accompagnement/Le-livret-d-information-Venir-vivre-en-France>>.

⁴¹ Aurélien Taché, parlementaire en mission auprès du ministre de l'intérieur, 72 propositions pour une politique ambitieuse d'intégration des étrangers en France, February 2018.

B. BECOMING A SPONSOR:

REQUIREMENTS, COORDINATION AND DIVISION OF ROLES BETWEEN SPONSORS AND OTHER ACTORS

1. Creating refugee-supporting sponsoring groups under the supervision of accredited NGOs

Private sponsorship is a 'bottom-up' initiative. The groups of individuals who show interest in hosting and assisting refugees are the core element of this kind of programme. Nevertheless, the groups need to be supervised and to fulfil several requirements to ensure that the refugees are received in adequate conditions. Established NGOs could play a central role in providing a framework for quality private sponsorship and can be held accountable for the implementation of private sponsorship programmes.

1.1. THE CENTRAL ROLE OF ACCREDITED NGOS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

Governments play an important role in setting the framework for and ensuring that basic requirements and financial capacity are met. In countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom, governments must determine which organisations or groups are eligible to become accredited sponsors. However, the French asylum department at the Ministry of Interior Affairs has limited capacities in the context of an overstretched asylum system, increasing resettlement programmes and financial constraints. If the asylum department has to carry out the eligibility scrutiny for each group of sponsors, it might, at best, slow down the validation process or, at worse, dissuade the asylum authorities from engaging in private sponsorship.

A more flexible approach can rely on a close and trusting relationship between the authorities and established NGOs. NGOs would sign an accreditation agreement with the authorities and be accountable for the eligibility and financial capacities of groups of volunteers at the local level. The accreditation criteria would rely on the

NGOs past experience with assisting asylum-seekers and refugees, their capacity to coordinate and offer support to groups of volunteers across the territory, and their administrative capacity to report on the implementation of the sponsorship programme. The authorities would have to make an assessment to ensure the NGOs fulfil these criteria.

This model would be similar to the Canadian model whereby Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) work closely with so-called constituent groups (volunteers who actually provide services to privately sponsored refugees). The NGOs would provide information, guidelines and support to the groups of individuals, who, in turn, are the ones that are responsible for providing accommodation and settlement services to the refugees during a specified period of time. As of today, and like in Canada, most NGOs are faith-based organisations who have a large network of volunteers and parishioners and are, thus, well embedded into the community. However, this model should be opened up further to other organisations, provided they have the capacity to supervise groups of volunteers in the field. This issue will be explored later on in the study.

Table 3: The roles of the accredited NGOs

- Signing an agreement with the central authorities;
- Approving the eligibility and financial capacities of the private sponsoring groups;
- Approving the eligibility of the private sponsorship applicants for extended family members;
- Gathering available places and matching them with private sponsorship applications (extended family members or UNHCR referrals);
- Forwarding private sponsorship applications to the authorities;
- Sharing information about the outcome of the application with the private sponsoring groups;
- Providing support and guidelines to the private sponsoring groups.

1.2. BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR PRIVATE SPONSORING GROUPS

It is important that the volunteers are not alone in facing the responsibility of hosting and assisting refugees. Taking into account the circumstances in France, and to ensure a broad network of support that is sustainable, it would be advisable that the private sponsoring groups should be composed of at least 10 French citizens or permanent residents with a clear division of roles among the members of the groups. One member of the group should be appointed as a community coordinator and another one as a “trustworthy third party” who acts as the main contact person with the privately sponsored persons. This proposition is inspired by the guidelines drafted by Caritas France under the humanitarian corridors project.⁴²

Additional criteria for becoming an eligible sponsoring group might be envisaged. Some minimum requirements would prevent the sponsors from being overburdened and exhausted. On the other hand, requirements that are too stringent might deter individuals from engaging in such activities and excessively limit the number of potential sponsors.⁴³ The suggested criteria are the following:

- **Legal capacity and liabilities:**

Legal capacity is a prerequisite to housing insurance contracts. It also facilitates purchasing on behalf of the group and engaging expenses on behalf of the group. Two options are open to sponsoring groups in France. First, they can register as an “*association*” under French law. The second option would be to legally affiliate the group to an accredited NGO. The volunteers would then act as a local representation (*section* in French) of this NGO.

⁴² Caritas elaborated on the guidelines developed by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) France. Since 2011, JRS-France has been coordinating a network of groups of citizens that host asylum seekers across France. For a description of JRS-France Welcome programme (only in French), online <<http://www.jrsfrance.org/jrs-welcome-refugie/>>.

⁴³ Fratzke, Susan, *Engaging Communities in Refugee Protection: The Potential of Private Sponsorship in Europe*. Brussels : Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2017.

- **Commitments and duties:**

It is of the utmost importance that groups are fully aware of what they are committing to. NGOs who sign an agreement with the authorities on private sponsorship programmes should draft a charter defining basic ethical requirements (privacy, non-discrimination based on any grounds, voluntary support...), the duties of the sponsors and the rights of the sponsored beneficiaries.

- **Settlement plans:**

The sponsoring groups should establish a settlement plan describing how they are planning to host and provide support to the refugees and a partnership plan with refugee-assisting NGOs and other relevant actors in the vicinity. The settlement plan should foresee the duration of accommodation and support efforts.⁴⁴

- **Financial capacity:**

The sponsoring group must demonstrate they have sufficient resources to provide refugees with accommodation and support.⁴⁵

- **Obtaining municipal consent:**

As such, the French institutional framework does not require the local authorities' approval to host a foreign national within their constituency. Nonetheless, recent domestic debates have highlighted the role of local elected representatives in welcoming migrants and refugees, particularly to engage municipal services and to inform the local population about the arrivals of newcomers. The State now requires non-governmental service providers to obtain municipal consent when opening a reception centre for asylum-seekers, and reception centres and facilities for refugees and resettled refugees. NGOs have reported that convincing municipal authorities has been a challenge. One could consider that imposing the same requirement for groups to engage in a local private sponsorship initiative could further impede the development of

local programmes. However, for the sake of consistency with the state-funded reception system, this option should not be avoided.

1.3. COORDINATING PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES: CREATING A NATIONAL COORDINATION BODY

As described above, accredited NGOs should play a key role in the overall management of private sponsorship programmes. The second tier of coordination should address the harmonisation of practices and requirements among the NGOs involved in private sponsorship. Coordination among the NGOs is already a challenge and a prerequisite for a better-structured sponsorship programme. The Canadian SAH association is a relevant model for France. It provides materials, training for private sponsor organisations and acts as the main focal point with the Canadian authorities. A French coordination body of accredited NGOs should be a forum of dialogue not only for NGOs implementing private sponsorship but also for NGOs who have a long experience of working with refugees and who have knowledge about State funding, diaspora communities and human rights, such as Amnesty International. UNHCR and IOM should contribute to this coordination by providing their expertise on global protection and implementation challenges. More particularly, UNHCR has a role to play in informing the process to ensure that the geographical priorities of private sponsorship programmes, ultimately decided upon with the French government, are in line with global resettlement priorities.

1.4. REACHING OUT BEYOND FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Churches and faith-based organisations have been successfully advocating for private sponsorship in France as shown through the signature of the Humanitarian Corridors agreement. So far, they remain the main actors of private sponsorship initiatives since they can rely on a network of parishioners' groups who provide accommodation and assistance.⁴⁶

44 The Humanitarian Corridors programme stipulates a duration of settlement support varying between 12 and 18 months.

45 An evaluation of the costs of sponsorship will be developed further down.

46 Faith-based organisations have a prominent role in private sponsorship in most countries. There are few examples of secular organisations acting as private sponsors nonetheless. See for instance Citizens UK who created a Foundation for community sponsorship of refugees, online <<http://www.sponsorrefugees.org/>>.

Table 4: Mission and tasks of a French coordination body of accredited sponsorship NGOs

Missions	Tasks
Negotiating with the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing criteria, target numbers and target countries for private sponsorship; - Ensuring 'complementarity' with resettlement.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drafting an ethical charter for sponsoring groups together with the accredited NGOs; - Double-checking basic requirements and financial capacities are met in cooperation with accredited NGOs.
Guidelines, support and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drafting a handbook with guidelines and procedures for the sponsoring groups; - Providing models of by-laws for groups wishing to register as an organisation, providing models of accommodation contracts; - Assisting sponsors in drafting their resettlement plans; - Online and in situ training programmes; - Hotline for private sponsors.
Safety net	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing emergency funding in case of unexpected expenses; - Acting as a mediator between refugees and sponsors in case of litigation; - If mediation fails or when the private sponsorship relationship breaks down, looking for other available accommodation within the private sponsorship network or negotiating with the authorities to include the refugees in the state-funded reception system.
Focal point with the authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collecting and transferring details of the private sponsoring groups; - Informing of capacities in the private sponsorship network and the private sponsorship applications; - Organising a yearly conference with the authorities and the NGOs; - Drafting a yearly activity report on private sponsorship in France.
Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing toolboxes to private sponsors to raise funds at local level (organising fundraising events, communication materials for local businesses and crowd-funding...); - Applying for private and public funds to support its activities.
Outreach and awareness- raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing toolboxes, communication materials, guidelines for organising events; - Campaigning, disseminating press releases; - Reaching out to potential new sponsors.

There are very few attempts at expanding private sponsorship beyond faith-based organisations in France. The activist group *Urgence homophobie* has managed to advocate for humanitarian visas and to host gay individuals fearing death in Chechnya. The role of the national coordination of private sponsorship NGOs would be to support and better structure these kinds of initiatives in order to expand the scope of private sponsorship in France. LGBTI and women rights organisations are among the organisations that could have an added value considering the level of gender-related persecutions in several countries. Likewise, NGOs such as Reporters Without Borders (*RSF*) or the House of Journalists (*Maison des journalistes*) have a longstanding record of protecting persecuted journalists either by referring them to the authorities for humanitarian visas or by hosting them in Paris.

Universities can be an additional actor in sponsorship. A Scholars at Risk programme (*PAUSE*) was created in January 2017 under the coordination of the *Collège de France*. The aim of this programme is "to protect and welcome academics and intellectuals coming from countries where they cannot work and where their life and the ones of their family is at risk because of the political situation". The academics are welcomed in French universities and receive a scholarship. This programme cannot be labelled as a private sponsorship initiative *per se*, with most of the funding provided by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, most of the academics were already in France when they joined this programme.⁴⁷ However, it illustrates that universities are institutions that can be involved in

⁴⁷ For example, the programme is supporting several Turkish academics who could not go back to Turkey following the failed coup in 2016.

supporting refugees, as has also been the case in Canada.⁴⁸ Higher education opportunities for refugees as a pathway to solutions in Europe is the subject of an ERN+ paper which is published alongside this study on private sponsorship.⁴⁹ French universities have recently set up a network of focal points in charge of improving access to higher education for migrants and refugees. This network, together with students' groups and unions, could be relevant partners for private sponsoring groups.

Therefore, there are several groups that could be brought into the realm of private sponsorship in one way or another. Indeed, participating in private sponsorship can be envisaged in different ways. If these groups do not have the resources and the capacity to provide accommodation and assistance to refugees, they can still act as a liaison between potential privately sponsored persons with the accredited NGOs in France and the coordination body.

1.5. THE ROLE OF REFUGEE ORGANISATIONS

Refugee community organisations and ethno-cultural associations could be willing to sponsor fellow citizens and extended family members in need of international protection. In that respect, refugee organisations could be part of private sponsorship in different ways. They could become accredited NGOs, coordinating and supporting groups of volunteers in the communities. Where capacity does not allow, refugee organisations could ensure connections between the refugees and the accredited NGOs in order to support the private sponsorship of extended family members.

FORIM is the largest platform of migrant organisations in France. It brings together more than 700 organisations and strives to deliver institutional and financial support to migrants. FORIM could be a partner for developing private sponsorship in France. However, FORIM's member

organisations are mostly composed of people coming from Western and Northern African countries who also represent the largest immigrant groups in France. Recently arrived refugees, such as Afghans, Sudanese or Syrians, whose relatives might still be in need of international protection, are not well represented within the FORIM membership. The structuring of new diaspora organisations is the main objective of FORIM. Engaging refugee communities in private sponsorship could then be an opportunity to better support refugee organisations and, as a consequence, ensure they have a stronger voice in the asylum debate in France.

2. The division of roles and responsibilities between sponsors and other actors

2.1. THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SPONSORING GROUPS

Considering the national context with respect to the rights and benefits of refugees and based on the experience in countries such as Canada and the UK, the list of responsibilities of sponsors could be as follows:

- Meeting the refugees at the airport and transferring them to the location of settlement;
- Providing a warm welcome and orientation to their new location of settlement;
- Providing housing, clothing and basic household goods upon arrival;
- Supporting access to international protection and to a residence permit;
- Supporting the enrolment of children in schools;
- Supporting access to medical and social services;
- Supporting access to rights and benefits;
- Supporting refugees to register for integration programmes that they are eligible for, including language training;
- Supporting refugees towards employment and self-sufficiency;
- Supporting refugees to apply for social housing or to access permanent housing in the private market.

⁴⁸ The World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Programme (an SAH) has, for the past 35 years, facilitated and supported student-to-student sponsorship enabling young refugees to enter Canada and access university education as permanent residents.

⁴⁹ See www.resettlement.eu for the European Resettlement Network's publications on student scholarship programmes as complementary pathway initiatives for refugees to arrive safely in Europe.

Table 5: State benefits accessible to private sponsored refugees

The following table describes the state benefits accessible to private sponsored refugees.

Financial aid before recognition of international protection	Access to the financial allowance for asylum seekers (<i>ADA</i>)	For example, a family of two adults and two children receive 27.80 per day
Financial aid after recognition of international protection	Access to the mainstream subsistence allowance (<i>RSA</i>)	For example, a family of two adults and two children receive 1,127.24 per month .
Health services	Access to free health care insurance (<i>CMU</i>)	
Housing	Access to social housing after recognition of refugee status under the same conditions as French nationals Access to other supporting measures (<i>APL</i>)	Due to a shortage of social housing in large cities, particularly Paris, access to social housing can take several years.
Integration support	Access to the national integration programme (<i>CIR</i>)	This programme includes: A two-day cultural orientation training on principles, values and institutions of the French Republic, life in France, access to rights and benefits, access to labour and self-entrepreneurship; Up to 200 hours of free language training aiming at reaching level A.1 of the common European framework of reference for languages.
Other benefits	Access to family benefits and support for the most disadvantaged persons on an equal footing with French nationals	

The duration of the private sponsors responsibilities can vary depending on the pace of the refugees' integration, i.e. to what extent do the refugees have access to a permanent housing and are self-sufficient. The path to integration is a complex process. The personal situation, including past traumatic experiences, and the local environment play a role in how fast a refugee can be self-sufficient.

Refugees coming to France through the resettlement programmes are accommodated and supported by state-funded service providers for a year. The resettlement programmes provide an appropriate benchmark to define the duration of the responsibilities within private sponsorship initiatives. In case the refugees are not yet self-sufficient within the year, support could be handed over to mainstream social inclusion actors. Partnerships with social inclusion actors are further developed below. On the other side, the end of the sponsorship period does not usually mean the end of any relationship between the refugees and the sponsors. Experiences with the current initiatives in France illustrate that the groups of sponsors usually maintain contact with the refugees after he or she has left the accommodation provided by the sponsors.

2.2. STATE SUPPORT TO PRIVATELY SPONSORED REFUGEES

In France, all privately sponsored refugees have access to social benefits on an equal footing with asylum-seekers before international protection is granted and with other refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries after international protection is granted. Equality of rights was raised as a fundamental issue by NGOs over the course of the roundtable and consultations carried out for this study. In other words, NGOs would not agree to participate in private sponsorship if refugees arriving through this pathway were not able to have the same access to benefits as resettled refugees and persons who claimed asylum directly on French territory outside the framework of a third country admission programme.

2.3. THE COSTS OF PRIVATELY SPONSORING REFUGEES

Accommodation (rent and furniture) is the main cost private sponsorship groups would have to deal with. Accommodation is usually secured in the private market. The price of rent can vary widely from one region to

Table 6: Main expenses related to the private sponsorship of refugees

The following table shows the main costs and expenses related to the private sponsorship of refugees.

Expenses	Comments
Pre-departure expenses (exit visas, pre-departure orientation, pre-departure health assessments)	
Travel to France and expenses related to the transfer from Paris airport to the place of settlement	Investigate possibilities to expand the agreement with Air France to all sponsored refugees ; investigate possibilities of an agreement with the railway company (<i>SNCF</i>) for domestic travel
Settlement expenses (furniture, food, clothes...)	Reference can be made to the settlement expenses granted to asylum-seekers relocated from Greece and Italy (€330)
Yearly cost of a suitable accommodation in the city of settlement according to standards required for family reunification	Standards required for family reunification include that sponsors should be able to demonstrate they have secured accommodation for one year either via a lease contract or a certificate that accommodation is at the privately sponsored refugee's disposal, specifically in order to host him or her, and is free of charge
Daily expenses (food, electricity, local transportation, leisure, telephone, internet...): Private sponsors might need to provide additional support for incidental expenses and to bridge administrative delays	
Sponsors might need to provide emergency medical expenses upon arrival in France before the refugees are granted free health insurance	In addition to potential emergency medical expenses, sponsoring groups would be advised to have an agreement with a local doctor for a health check upon arrival
Interpreter and translator	Volunteer interpreter either within the private sponsorship community or via a diaspora organisation can aid daily communication

another. Therefore, the expected cost of accommodation should be estimated according to the area where the groups are planning to host the privately sponsored refugee.⁵⁰ When refugees receive the *RSA*, they are expected to contribute to the rent. Their contribution should not exceed 30 percent of their income. The size and the suitability of the accommodation can also impact upon the cost of the rent. Refugees are entitled to intimacy and to be provided with adequate space and facilities to live in comfort. Therefore, hosting privately sponsored refugees in sponsors' homes would be an inappropriate solution in most cases. In that regard, standards applicable to family reunification can be used as a reference point.⁵¹ The French legal framework divides the territory into three zones according to the cost of housing and foresees the minimum size

accordingly.⁵² For example, in areas where there is no pressure on housing, the minimum size of accommodation should be 28 square metres for a household of two persons, plus 10 square metres for each additional family member. Moreover, the law states that housing should meet requirements of appropriate housing as defined in French legislation.⁵³

Most of the daily expenses of the private sponsored refugees can be covered by social benefits. The sponsors would only have to provide cash support incidentally. However, further financial support might be needed to bridge administrative delays in the payment of benefits. For example, the financial allowance for asylum-seekers is usually paid one or two months after the registration of the asylum application. Likewise, private sponsors might have to cover emergency medical expenses upon arrival before the state medical insurance is available.

50 In 2017, the average rent per square metre was €11.50 but it was down to €6.50 in Haute-Loire and up to €30.80 in Paris.

51 Third country nationals have to fulfil several requirements to apply for family reunification, including a certain level of income and appropriate housing. These requirements do not apply to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

52 Article R. 411-5 of the Code governing the entrance and residence of foreign nationals and the right to asylum (Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile – *Ceseda*).

53 Décret n° 2002-120 du 30 janvier 2002 relatif aux caractéristiques du logement décent.

Table 7: Partnerships with state-funded service providers

The following table explores the possibilities of partnerships with state-funded service providers.

Who	What	Where
Reception platforms for asylum seekers (<i>PADA</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organising appointments for applying for asylum; - Informing about the asylum process; - Translating the asylum form to French. 	At the <i>département</i> level
Reception centres for refugees (<i>CPH</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to partnerships signed with mainstream welfare services; - Guidance and counselling on integration opportunities at local level (access to social rights, housing...). 	At the <i>département</i> level
NGOs' integration programmes (ex.: Forum réfugiés-Cosi, France terre d'asile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Face-to-face integration support to refugees; - Guidance and counselling on integration opportunities (access to social rights, housing...). 	Various geographical areas, but predominately in larger cities
France terre d'asile's <i>RELOREF</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tools, handbooks and advice on integration of beneficiaries of international protection. 	Nation-wide

2.4. ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH STATE-FUNDED SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE FIELD OF ASYLUM AND INTEGRATION

The responsibilities of private sponsors do not differ much from the tasks of social workers in the state-funded asylum reception system. According to their terms of reference, reception centres for asylum-seekers (*CADA*) assist asylum-seekers within the asylum procedure,⁵⁴ supporting access to social rights, the mainstream welfare system and charity organisations. For those granted international protection, integration support and accommodation in a reception centre for refugees (*CPH*) can be provided. As of December 2017, there were 40,450 places in *CADA* and 2,207 places in *CPH* across the territory, including in small cities and rural areas.⁵⁵ Moreover, France is funding projects dedicated to accommodate and assist refugees who have been resettled. Like *CADA* and *CPH*, they are implemented by non-governmental service providers.

To what extent can this asylum and integration infrastructure benefit privately sponsored refugees? Unfortunately, there is little room for cooperation. The French reception system is built upon the principle that accommodation as well as legal and social assistance

should be delivered as a “package”. It means that legal and social work staff in reception centres do not have a responsibility towards asylum-seekers and refugees that are not hosted in these centres. Moreover, following financial cuts, these facilities are subject to high pressure and have few resources to offer services beyond their terms of reference.

Nonetheless, some facilities are entitled to deliver services to asylum-seekers and refugees living outside the state-funded accommodation scheme. At the asylum stage, reception platforms for asylum-seekers (*PADA*) provide information to asylum-seekers who are not accommodated in a reception centre.⁵⁶ There are 30 platforms across the country under the responsibility of the French Office of Immigration and Integration (*OFIGI*). They are usually managed by NGOs. At the integration stage, *CPHs* have recently been entitled to undertake a mission of local coordination in the field of integration of beneficiaries of international protection. In other words, *CPHs* should develop partnerships with all the local actors working on integration and social matters. These partnerships should benefit all refugees at the local level even if they are not accommodated in the *CPH*. Moreover, large NGOs, such as France terre d'asile and

⁵⁴ It includes supporting asylum seekers before *OFPRA* and informing them about legal aid at the second instance.

⁵⁵ With the exception of Corsica and overseas territory. 2,000 additional places in *CADA* and 2,000 additional places in *CPH* are about to be opened in 2018.

⁵⁶ According to the terms of reference, the services delivered to asylum seekers who are not in a reception centre are quite limited: explanation about the asylum form, some assistance to fill out the administrative part of the asylum form, translation in French of the applicant's departure story. Moreover, *PADAs* are a compulsory step to have an appointment at *the préfectures* in order to apply for asylum.

Table 8: Services provided to refugees, including privately sponsored refugees, by actors in the field of social inclusion

The following table explores the possibilities of partnerships with different actors in the field of social inclusion.

Who	What
<i>Préfecture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring access to the asylum procedure and to the residence permit; - Exchange of driving licence.
Municipal service for social action (<i>centre communal d'action sociale</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appointing a social worker; - Accessing the subsistence allowance; - Sharing information on the social benefits refugees can access.
Health services (<i>caisse primaire d'assurance maladie</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessing health insurance; - Appointing a reference doctor in the city; - Developing partnerships for mental health issues.
Schools and universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enrolling children at schools; - Developing partnerships to ensure effective inclusion into the educational system (extra support outside school hours); - Organising meetings between refugee parents and French parents; - Registering refugees at university.
Job agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registering refugees at the job agency; - Access to vocational training; - Developing partnerships with local companies (job fairs, career workshops, internships...); - Developing partnerships with local youth missions (<i>missions locales</i>) for refugees under 25 years old.
Social housing agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying opportunities for social housing for refugees; - Developing partnerships with organisations in charge of supporting refugees when accessing social housing.
Charity organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organising social events and leisure activities with the refugees; - Facilitating volunteering opportunities for refugees; - Providing clothes and other goods.

Forum réfugiés-Cosi⁵⁷ are implementing programmes offering support to refugees in their integration process. These programmes are open to all refugees within a limited geographical scope (Paris and Lyon). Besides face-to-face assistance to refugees, the France terre d'asile's programme *RELOREF* provides tools, handbooks and advice with regards to access to social benefits, social housing and access to the labour market. The tools and handbooks are made available to all the actors working with refugees in France.⁵⁸

Settlement plans should establish how the private sponsorship groups are planning to implement partnerships with PADAs, CPHs and integration programmes

of larger NGOs by means of meetings, guidance on individual cases and, eventually, access to the services delivered by these NGOs. However, one should bear in mind that these services are under-resourced and, as a consequence, overstretched. This is a major hurdle for developing far-reaching partnerships and bridges between the sponsors, sponsored refugees and the state-funded NGOs.

An inter-ministerial delegate for the reception and integration of refugees was appointed in January 2018. He is in charge of providing support to the Ministry of Interior with regard to the definition, the coordination and the evaluation of the refugee reception and integration policy. The appointment of this delegate may be an opportunity to better coordinate French services to refugees and to ensure sponsored refugees have better access to these services.

57 For instance, Forum réfugiés-Cosi's programme *ACCELAIR* and France terre d'asile's programme *CAPJ* provide integration services to refugees respectively in Lyon and Paris.

58 For more information on *RELOREF*, online <<http://www.france-terre-asile.org/accueil/etablissement/projet-europeen-reloref-reseau-pour-l-emploi-et-le-logement-des-refugies>> *RELOREF* is funded by the French authorities and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

2.5. ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH ACTORS IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

Private sponsors can work together with many actors operating in the mainstream field of social inclusion. For instance, the Order of Malta set up a local steering committee in the region of Tours. The steering committee brings together local actors such as the *préfecture*, social housing agencies, the family benefits agency (*CAF*), the local authority (*département*) and the job agency (*Pôle emploi*). This steering committee has been successful in improving the situation of Iraqi refugees, particularly in the granting of social housing. Private sponsorship groups can replicate this good practice but they will need to adjust the functioning of the steering communities to both the local realities and the number of private sponsored refugees received. Indeed, the low number of private sponsored refugees might hinder the mobilisation of local actors. Experiences with resettlement highlighted⁵⁹ it was easier to engage the local actors when groups of resettled refugees are received rather than isolated cases. Private sponsors should consider more flexible ways to engage local actors than regular meetings. If the objective of such cooperation is to ensure integration is progressing well, it should also aim at preventing secondary movements of private sponsored refugees to large cities and envisage permanent settlement in the initial place of reception. In that respect, cooperation with cities is important considering they are in charge of social housing and local social inclusion. They also have an important role to play in creating a positive environment for sponsorship.

3. Developing private sponsorship: looking for available funding

Expanding private sponsorship in France is also a matter of resources for both the private sponsorship groups at the local level, accredited NGOs and the national coordination body.

3.1. PRIVATE FUNDS FOR PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

The NGOs participating in private sponsorship initiatives and the groups of volunteers receiving the refugees

are financing their activities from their own resources, including through the church collection. The groups of volunteers could reach a wider group of citizens to contribute to the costs of private sponsorship.⁶⁰ This contribution can occur in different ways such as fund-raising events,⁶¹ crowd-funding through the internet,⁶² and so on. Public donations are particularly efficient at the local level where donors have the feeling of providing practical assistance to refugees rather than to make a statement about refugee policy. Furthermore, donors might have the possibility to meet the refugees hosted in their communities.

Traditionally, the private sector has not been strongly involved in immigration and asylum issues because of the politically-sensitive nature of these topics. Nonetheless, since the so-called refugee crisis, private companies are increasingly contributing to addressing the needs of refugees. Although the level of support remains limited,⁶³ companies' private funding represents opportunities for private sponsorship actors, either for supporting the national coordination or for providing additional funding to groups of volunteers at the local level. Moreover, the contribution of private companies is not only financial. Companies are increasingly involved in skills sponsorship (*mécénat de compétences*), whereby staff members directly offer their professional skills in the implementation of activities of charity organisations.⁶⁴ Finally, partnerships with private companies can help to improve successful integration of private sponsored refugees into the labour market.

Like private companies, the contribution of philanthropic foundations in the refugee field has never been prominent

59 SHARE Project, *La réinstallation des réfugiés en France: état des lieux et voies d'améliorations*, June 2015.

60 For example, in Berlin, around 4,000 citizens have signed up to be sponsors by donating €10 per month, which contributes to a dedicated « sponsorship pool » to support applications.

61 The group « Urgence homophobie » organised two cultural events with famous musicians and actors to raise funds.

62 Newly created refugee-assisting NGOs have been using more intensively crowdfunding platforms since 2015 as an alternative way to support their activities. 233,8 million euros have been collected in France in 2016 through crowdfunding (+40% compared to 2015).

63 Grants are usually below €20,000. Some companies are however contributing at a larger scale. For example, BNP Paribas launched a support plan allocating 8 million euros for refugee-assisting organisations in Europe. The EDF Foundation granted €90,000 for 10 projects assisting refugees in France in 2017.

64 For example, Adecco or the railway company (SNCF).

Table 9: Private funding opportunities

The table highlights what activities could be supported by these private donors at the local and at the national level. This list of funding opportunities is not exhaustive but illustrates that private funding could be a tool for enhancing sponsorship.

Category of private funding	Category of private funding	Examples
Public donation	Contributing to the costs of sponsorship at the local level.	Church collection, fundraising events, crowd-funding platforms...
Private companies	- Contributing to the costs of sponsorship at local level; - Contributing to national coordination body's activities; - Skills sponsorship and partnerships to improve access to labour market.	Total, BNP Paribas, Adecco, Axa, EDF, Sodexo....
Philanthropic Foundations	- Contributing to national coordination body's activities; - Contributing to the costs of sponsorship at local level.	Fondation de France, La France s'engage...

in France. But here again, the focus on the situation of refugees in Europe has had a positive effect on the involvement of philanthropic foundations. For example, *la Fondation de France*, the largest philanthropic actor in the country acting as an umbrella organisation for more than 800 foundations, created a specific programme in 2015 to address the needs of migrants and refugees. This funding programme primarily aims at changing public attitudes towards migrants, better networking among NGOs and raising awareness on migration. Private sponsorship fully meets these priorities. *La France s'engage* is another opportunity for developing private sponsorship in France. *La France s'engage* was a State initiative launched by President François Hollande awarding a label to the most innovative projects for the betterment of the society.⁶⁵ Today, it is a public-private partnership registered as a foundation whose aim is to identify and to assist innovative actors in the field of public mobilisation.

3.2. PUBLIC FUNDING TO SET UP MAIN STRUCTURES

The authorities are the largest funders for NGOs in the field of asylum, integration and social inclusion. Private sponsorship does not mean that the authorities should not financially support the key actors involved. For example, in Canada, the government provides grants to the Sponsorship Agreement Holders association and funds

the training programme for sponsors' groups. There are a couple of public funds that could be looked at in France. In 2016, the Ministry of Housing launched a pilot call for proposals to finance projects of "citizen accommodation" for refugees, which aimed to provide accommodation for refugees in people's homes with social assistance by NGOs. Eleven projects were selected, with a target of 1,400 refugees hosted by French citizens.⁶⁶ This is a positive example of innovative funding to support citizen mobilisation towards refugees and can be perceived as a model for a support fund specifically addressing private sponsorship projects.

Local authorities can also play a role in financially supporting private sponsorship activities as part of their social inclusion competences. Local authorities such as *régions* and cities already grant some funds to refugee-assisting organisations. The city of Paris has been very supportive of projects of citizen accommodation run by Singa, Samu social and the Paris Diocese. However, support by local authorities is often subject to political turmoil. State funding is usually more sustainable but it has several limitations. First of all, public funding is complex to manage and requires high-level administrative and reporting capacities. Secondly, access to public funding is very competitive in a context of financial constraints and increasing needs.

⁶⁵ For example, the Foundation's label and financial support was instrumental for the development of the refugee-assisting organisation Singa.

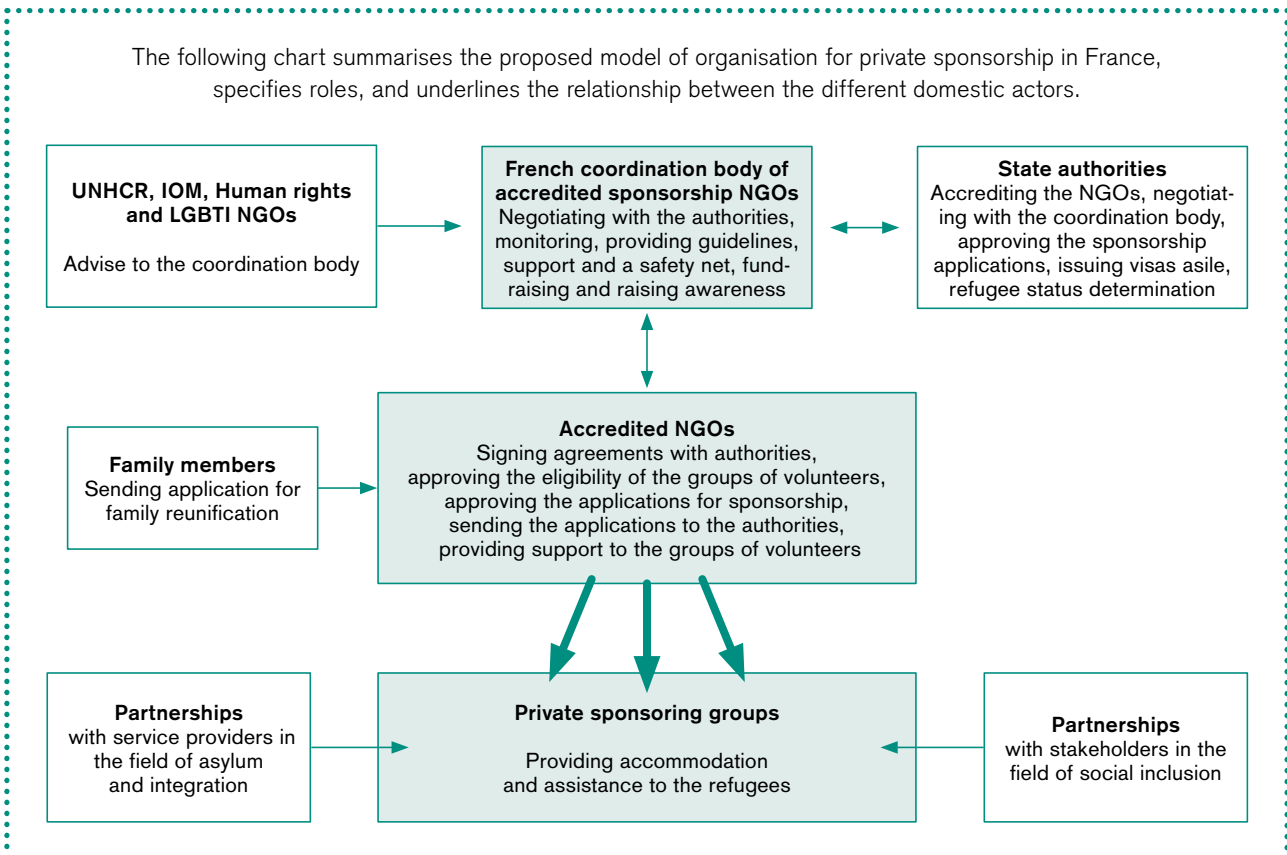
⁶⁶ Refugee-assisting NGOs receive a lump sum of €1,500 for each hosted refugee. For more information, online ><http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/favoriser-l-hebergement-citoyen-des-refugies-chez-les-particuliers-emmanuelle-cosse-annonce-les-resultats-de-l-appel-a-projets>>

Table 10: Public funds available

The following table presents a few existing public funds that could be suitable and whose priorities could be relevant for supporting private sponsorship activities.

Funds	Priorities	Geographical scope of the projects	Responsible authorities	Accessing procedure
National policy for reception and assistance to newly arrived foreigners (programme 104)	Social and professional inclusion; language and civic training; better structure, make more professional and coordinate the actions of integration actors	National and local projects	Ministry of Interior Affairs (Directorate for the reception and assistance of foreigners and for nationality) at the national level; <i>préfectures</i> at the local level	Annual call for proposals at the national level ; funds granted by the <i>préfectures</i> at the local level
Asylum, Migration and Immigration Fund (integration actions)	Preparing settlement in France from the country of origin; supporting reception, assistance and integration of third country nationals; supporting coordination and capacity building of actors; developing monitoring and assessment tools at the local levels	National and local projects	Ministry of Interior Affairs	Annual call for proposals
Fund for the development of associative life (<i>fonds pour le développement de la vie associative</i>)	Training for volunteers in NGOs in order to improve their skills, to increase long-term volunteering and to renew the board members of NGOs	National and local projects	Ministry of Education at the national level; regional directorate for youth, sport and social cohesion at the local level	Annual call for proposals

The following chart summarises the proposed model of organisation for private sponsorship in France, specifies roles, and underlines the relationship between the different domestic actors.



IV. Conclusion:

KEY OBSERVATIONS FOR OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Innovative practices of private citizens and groups welcoming refugees in Europe have emerged in the context of the so-called 2015 refugee crisis. Confronted with an unprecedented number of refugee arrivals, thousands of citizens across European countries spontaneously responded and welcomed newcomers, providing them with humanitarian assistance, including food, clothing and shelter. Refugee reception is traditionally a competence of centralised governments in most EU Member States. In that regard, private sponsorship could be perceived both as a shift and a challenge in the refugee protection system. Private sponsorship still has the task of demonstrating that it can enlarge the protection space in Europe while not being used as a means to alleviate governmental responsibility towards refugees. Likewise, private sponsorship is indicative of the strength and the level of autonomy of the civil society in a country.

This feasibility study suggested a model for France aiming at offering added value for the reception system in France while ensuring complementarity with other pathways for refugee admission. Private sponsorship takes place within a specific national context. What is relevant for France will not necessarily be relevant for another EU country. Although EU legislation tries to harmonise asylum policies in Member States, it does not intervene into the domestic implementation choices made by States nor does it impact the mainstream social welfare system. However, the main outcome of this study is that the scope of private sponsorship and the division of roles between private and public actors should be clearly defined in order to be sustainable and effective in addressing refugee needs. This outcome applies to France and other countries alike. The following observations highlight key considerations that could guide the development of private sponsorship programmes beyond France.

DEFINING THE BENEFICIARIES OF PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES

The suggested model of private sponsorship for France elaborates on the existing practices of private-public partnerships to identify and welcome sponsored persons in need of international protection. Contrary to other EU Member States, ad-hoc initiatives in France target both vulnerable refugees and extended family members. Clearly defining the beneficiaries of both strands of private sponsorship ensures complementarity with resettlement and family reunification schemes.

The humanitarian corridors scheme seems to have become an attractive model in Europe. Created in Italy, it is now implemented in France and Belgium. The suggestions made in this study aiming to improve this scheme and to ensure it properly addresses the protection needs of refugees are relevant for Italy, Belgium and other countries wishing to start a similar programme. More particularly, UNHCR should be granted a greater role in the identification of sponsored refugees. UNHCR's engagement ensures that private sponsorship programmes provide places to refugees in need of resettlement and, where additional to existing resettlement quota, can contribute to increasing global responsibility sharing in accordance with objectives of the *New York Declaration*. Moreover, UNHCR has developed expertise and guidelines when it comes to the selection of refugees who are most in need. Therefore, a "sponsored resettlement" model, which has also been termed as a "blended" approach to sponsorship can be an incentive for new private sponsorship programmes since sponsors are not required to engage in the delicate and resource-consuming task of identifying beneficiaries.

Private sponsorship is often used for admission of extended family members. It can be useful to provide a safe pathway and relieves the fears of family members living in the EU, particularly in countries hosting large refugee communities. Nonetheless, the eligibility criteria for sponsorship should be clearly restricted to people in need of international protection with specific vulnerabilities as assessed by UNHCR. A non-discriminatory approach that is guided by specific needs contributes to ensuring that selection practice for third country solutions does not have a negative effect on the overall protection environment in countries of asylum. Moreover, private sponsorship should not substitute family reunification pathways. Unfortunately, resettlement, humanitarian admission programmes and private sponsorship are too often used to bypass restrictive or inefficient family reunification schemes for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Whereas restrictions on family reunification are being implemented in several EU countries, promoting private sponsorship for extended family members should be done alongside national and EU-wide advocacy campaigns to fully guarantee the right to respect refugees' family life as enshrined in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

THE USE OF EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO FACILITATE SPONSORSHIP

The longstanding practice of the French government to issue long-stay visas with a view to the recipient then requesting international protection in France (humanitarian visa or "*visa asile*") has been the cornerstone of national private sponsorship initiatives. It provides the basis for further developing and structuring these practices into a protection-sensitive and sustainable programme. On the other hand, humanitarian visas do not allow status determination prior to arrival. In that regard, the British and Canadian models offer more guarantees for a secure status upon arrival. The absence of a humanitarian visa in other countries' legal framework should not prevent Member States from issuing visas to beneficiaries of private sponsorship programmes. The Italian authorities deliver humanitarian visas according to the Schengen Code, while the UK and Germany allow entrance on a discretionary basis. One should not forget that EU Member States still have the sovereign right to issue long stay visas, which are not governed by EU law. However, refugee status determination prior to travel coupled with the granting of secure legal status at the point of arrival is preferred since it ensures that private sponsorship is indeed a pathway to international protection.

Administrative capacity to issue a visa can be an important impediment for private sponsorship even if organisations like IOM can assist States. Even France, whose consulate network is one of the largest in the world, would find it too resource consuming to open up opportunities for private sponsorship worldwide. Therefore, in order to avoid a backlog and long delays, sponsorship could be restricted to specific countries based on an agreement between the sponsoring organisations and the government, with the advice of UNHCR regarding international protection needs and geographical priorities.

ENSURING PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP IS A PATHWAY TO INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND A DURABLE SOLUTION

Private sponsorship should be a pathway to international protection. In that regard, the French protection system is a positive model. It does not grant different protection status and rights to refugees who have entered the country through different channels. The “same status, same rights” approach has several benefits. It provides to all permanent residency, security and a potential pathway to citizenship. It ensures transparency and avoids discrimination among refugees who have the same protection needs according to the Geneva Convention and the EU Qualification Directive.⁶⁷ Granting different rights to refugees according to the pathways for admission would create unnecessary confusion and complexity within the protection system. Finally, it would create separate protection systems within one country and would fail to ensure bridges between sponsors and other actors working on asylum and social inclusion.

Given the record numbers of displaced persons globally and the challenges for refugees to attain durable solutions, private sponsorship should ideally be used as a means to offer a durable solution to refugees in need of resettlement. Ensuring the granting of a protection status in line with international and EU standards sets out the pathway to citizenship through permanent residence, leading to a durable solution.

⁶⁷ Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted

DEFINING THE ROLE AND BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF THE SPONSORS: COORDINATION IS KEY

Community engagement is one of the main benefits of private sponsorship programmes. Whilst the success of sponsorship relies on bottom-up initiatives, groups of citizens should not be left to face, by themselves, the tasks of welcoming, hosting and assisting refugees. In France, like in other European countries, NGOs traditionally play an important role in the refugee reception system. This existing expertise should be used to support and provide detailed guidelines and a safety net to sponsoring groups. NGOs are in the best position to set down and monitor criteria for sponsoring groups. In other words, NGOs should be given a central role in the management of private sponsorship. Moreover, coordination between these NGOs would be necessary to address the harmonisation of practices and consistency of the sponsorship programme. Therefore, private sponsorship could be an opportunity to strengthen NGOs in many European countries.

The role of the authorities influences what is expected from the sponsors. Naturally, governments play an important role in setting the framework for and ensuring that basic requirements for adequate reception are met. Private sponsorship does not mean the government should not support the coordination of the programme, including the training of the sponsors. But while many European countries are facing financial constraints, EU funds, particularly the AMIF, can be of great help and act as a leverage to start private sponsorship programmes and to rally additional support.

Finally, sponsored refugees should have access to education and social benefits, including free health insurance and state integration support. This is another way for the State to share the cost of sponsorship with the sponsors while ensuring the sponsored refugees are properly assisted on their path to integration. However, social benefits granted to refugees and even to nationals vary widely from one Member State to another. The lack of social support for the most disadvantaged people can be an impediment to implementing and further developing private sponsorship programmes.

CREATING AN ALLIANCE OF SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

If the sponsoring groups, the NGOs and the authorities have the most responsibility in private sponsorship, other actors can be usefully involved to broaden the network of supporters. There are many ways to be involved in private sponsorship without taking the full responsibility to host and assist a refugee. Universities, students' groups, local authorities, refugee diaspora and private companies can contribute and help the sponsors to provide a welcoming environment. Similarly, the corporate sector, philanthropic foundations and citizens can be requested to participate in the cost of sponsorship.

It is also of the utmost importance that links are clearly set up with the asylum reception and integration systems in order to avoid double standards in the services provided to refugees to the furthest extent possible. However, the recent increase of refugee arrivals in Europe and the lack of investment in the reception systems in many European countries may impede partnerships between overstretched service providers and the sponsors. In that regard, private sponsorship should be perceived as an opportunity for creativity and experimentation that can have a positive impact on the overall asylum and integration system.

CREATING MUTUAL TRUST BETWEEN PRIVATE ACTORS AND THE GOVERNMENT

Finally, private sponsorship requires a good level of communication and mutual trust between the sponsors and the authorities. Unfortunately, several governments in the EU have been critical of the role of civil society organisations and have been trying to restrict their scope of action. Indeed, the political environment is not favourable for refugee-assisting organisations while immigration is increasingly polarising European societies. But private sponsorship is an opportunity to reverse that trend. It proves that many citizens – and voters – do not have a clear-cut opinion on immigration and that there is still a community of refugee supporters in Europe. It is also an opportunity for a renewed dialogue between NGOs and the authorities and for defining how they can better work in partnership.

As already mentioned, this feasibility study suggested a model of private sponsorship for France. However, from the perspective of the study launched by the European Commission on the feasibility and added value of sponsorship schemes in the EU and the pilot project to be carried out by EASO, this study has also sought to underline that civil society holds part of the solutions to address the increasing global protection challenges.

List of acronyms

ADA:	<i>Allocation pour demandeur d'asile</i> (Allowance for Asylum Seeker)
AMIF:	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CADA:	<i>Centre d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile</i> (Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers)
CAF:	<i>Caisse d'allocation familiale</i> (Family Benefits Agency)
CESEDA:	<i>Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile</i> (Code Governing the Entrance and Residence of Foreign Nationals and the Right to Asylum)
CIR:	<i>Contrat d'intégration républicaine</i> (Republican Integration Contract)
CMU:	<i>Couverture médicale universelle</i> (Free health insurance)
CNDA:	<i>Cour nationale du droit d'asile</i> (National Court for Asylum Law)
CPH:	<i>Centre provisoire d'hébergement</i> (Reception Centre for Refugees)
EASO:	European Asylum Support Office
ERN:	European Resettlement Network
EU:	European Union
FEP:	<i>Fédération de l'entraide protestante</i> (Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid)
FORIM:	Forum des organisations de solidarité internationale issues des migrations
ICMC:	International Catholic Migration Commission
IDP:	Internally Displaced Person
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
MPI:	Migration Policy Institute
OFII:	<i>Office français de l'immigration et de l'intégration</i> (French Office of Immigration and Integration)
OFPRA:	<i>Office français de protection des réfugiés et des apatrides</i> (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons)
PADA:	<i>Plate-forme d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile</i> (Reception Platform for Asylum Seekers)
PAUSE:	<i>Programme national d'aide à l'accueil en urgence des scientifiques en exil</i> (Scholar at Risk Programme)
PSR:	Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugee Programme
RSA:	<i>Revenu de solidarité active</i> (Subsistence Allowance)
RSF:	<i>Reporters sans frontières</i> (Reporters without Borders)
SAH:	Sponsorship Agreement Holder
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Glossary

Asylum seeker(s) or applicant(s)	Person(s) seeking international protection, whether recognition as a refugee, subsidiary protection beneficiary or other protection status on humanitarian grounds.
Délégué interministériel chargé de l'accueil et l'intégration des réfugiés	Inter-ministerial delegate for the reception and integration of refugees.
Préfecture	Town in which the administration of a department is located/State representation at the local level.
Préfet	Governor of an administrative area.
Refugee status	Status granted to persons who fall within Article 1(A)(2) 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugee as amended by the 1967 Protocol.
Relocation	Transfer of an asylum seeker in clear need of international protection from one European Union Member State to another under Council Decisions (EU) 2015/1523 or 2015/1601, concerning transfers from Italy or Greece.
Subsidiary protection	International protection status granted to persons who do not qualify for refugee status but are at risk of serious harm in the country of origin. The term is defined in Directive 2011/95/EU.
Visas asile	Falls within the broader spectrum of long-stay visas (known as type D visas) and are issued by the French consular services with a view to the applicant, once in France, applying for asylum.

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