

ASK THE EXPERT
POLICY BRIEF

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Integration outcomes of recent sponsorship and humanitarian visa arrivals

INTEGRATION





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The **Ask the Expert Policy Briefs** are **highly informative tools** proposed in the framework of the ReSOMA project. They tap into the **most recent academic research** on the 9 topics covered by ReSOMA and map it out in a way that is **accessible to a non-academic audience**. By doing so, the briefs introduce the **policy-relevant research** conducted by researchers with different approaches and perspectives on the same topic.

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Ask the Expert Policy Brief

Integration outcomes of recent sponsorship and humanitarian visa arrivals

By Zeynep Kaşlı

Alternative legal channels in Europe as well as research on their effectiveness seem in its infancy. As summarized in our [first brief](#), the effectiveness, fairness and in general integration outcomes of existing alternative channels are disputed. In general, there remains a gap between fast and effective refugee resettlement through alternative pathways and achieving transition into labor market and wellbeing of individuals and households.

This brief is a summary of our interview and written exchange with two key experts in asylum reception in Europe: [Prof. Dr. Birgit Glorius](#) Professor of Human Geography, from Technische Universität Chemnitz, Principle Investigator of the Horizon 2020 [CEASEVAL](#) project; and [Prof. Dr. Hannes Schammann](#), Professor of Migration Policy Analysis, from University of Hildesheim, the author of a recently published report on European refugee politics.

In the light of recent developments in this field and their own research, we asked Prof. Glorius and Prof. Schammann to comment specifically on the relationship between alternative visas and integration, the effectiveness of alternative channels and what role the EU could play in that regard, and on what issues need further research and feedback from different stakeholders.



What are the key features of private sponsorship and alternative channels for the integration of refugees and humanitarian visa arrivals in the destination society?

Glorius and Schammann both agree that private sponsorship is potentially a constructive process from longer-term integration perspective, as it entails involvement of more societal actors from the very beginning. They highlight that especially local stakeholders play quite important roles, such as NGOs, employers and property owners as well as municipalities, starting from but certainly not limited to initial reception. Therefore, the process depends very much on different actors' willingness to cooperate which can be fostered with good planning of the coordinated efforts and implementation of support programs. To achieve that, they both pinpoint the necessity to give more power to municipalities on the reception process, such as the decisions on whether the local integration infrastructure and migration biography of the given municipalities can accommodate individual needs and preferences of a specific newcomer. This is considered a key factor in achieving longer-term positive reception and integration outcomes on the locality and to avoid secondary movements.

While Schammann mentions that the UK private sponsorship scheme has recently become an example for Germany, Glorius stress that Europe overall is not doing very well on these kinds of resettlement schemes on a global scale. In this regard, the family reunification schemes in German is a novel and important alternative

path for arrival and integration. It a form of private sponsorship and in theory an effective way of integration since a family member would know the needs of newcomers' the best, care for them and would try to smoothen the path for them.

How can they be 'operationalised' by local, regional and/or national policy makers?

Both experts underline the role of cooperation among all the relevant actors, starting from the individual applicant, their local consultant networked with all related state institutions and the civil society, and bureaucrats in relevant institutions. So far, private sponsorship has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it required individual solidarity and active participation of (former) refugees and migrants, and, on the other hand, the existing practices have put the full responsibility and risk of the process on refugees' shoulders. Many applicants and state agents have criticized the current family reunification scheme for asylum seekers under subsidiary protection for its complicated application process and lack of cooperation and coordination across municipalities and state institutions. They mention especially the strict and short deadlines for application from the submission of financial guarantees to the actual relocation after the approval of an application and the hardships in physically reaching the embassies in countries of origin or transit. For such practical reasons, it has not so far reached the much-contested annual quota of 12000 persons.



Glorius suggests that cooperation necessitates more involvement of local actors in countries of settlement and actors with discretionary power. This means softening of the legal procedures and regulations on social assistance, which impede local authorities to use their discretion on a case-by-case basis. In a similar vein, to increase the decision making power of local authorities as well as applicants, in their recent [policy brief](#), Schammann and his colleagues suggest a **new municipal relocation mechanism** that guarantees human rights standards, considers individual preferences and allows the persons seeking protection a selection of suitable municipalities through an algorithm-based matching process. Schammann also stresses the new NeST programme in Germany, government and civil-society joint sponsorship program that starts in spring 2019. The programme builds on the experiences gained in Canada and the UK and relies on group of sponsors meaning at least five people committed to helping one individual or family settle by providing practical and financial support. How it will work in practice is yet to be seen. However as the experience of family reunification scheme shows, institutional and structural support is of great importance in the application process to begin with.

What can the EU do to foster such legal pathways?

Experts suggest both political and institutional measures that could be taken at the EU level. One of the findings of the CEASEVAL project is that the EU reception directive had very limited impact on the harmonization, meaning that national systems are even more divergent than before the crisis. While at the moment humanitarian visa pathways are a matter of national decision, it is also observed that some cities and even some rather small towns may sometimes be more advanced than their national authorities in welcoming refugees and yet they need political support to be realize their plans.

As a first step, Glorius suggests that a declaration of intention by the EP on the necessity to open humanitarian visa pathways in all member states. This would give the European Commission the signal to engage in supporting those pathways with their own competencies and their national contact points. For example, visa procedures are something that every applicant, every municipality and every state is struggling on their own and, if they could be united, they would have stronger capacity to share their expertise and enact pressure on their national governments to make sure those alternative visa pathways are open and work smoothly. However, for such interventions to be politically legitimate, an EU-level political declaration of intention is essential.

At the institutional level, experts underline the necessity to improve multi-level cooperation and especially cooperation between EASO, EU institutions, IOM, UNHCR,



ECRE and other organizations and governmental actors. For example, one way to obtain documents from host country without putting persons at risk, or easier ways to obtain travel documents would be embassy representatives visiting the camps instead of individual applicants having to go to the embassy. This means, institutions must get more responsibility than leaving it all to individuals. Schammann briefly evokes the concrete suggestions they make in their report regarding how the EU can support municipalities and local communities willing to work on legal pathways and implementation of CEAS:

Simpler access to EU funds through:

- One municipality, one application
- Simplified co-financing
- One-Stop-Shop for advising municipalities.

Giving the municipalities more of a say by:

- Strengthening the Partnership Principle
- Establishing an EU body to mediate the disputes between national and local authorities.

What are the major issues on this topic that need further research for more sustainable and effective policies in this field? Related to that, what issues require further feedback from national or local stakeholders, namely policy actors, NGOs and practitioners?

- Knowledge on the positive and negative experiences of long-term integration is still scattered. How did the problems come about and how are they solved?
- According to stakeholders, what does a locality need to be open for receiving asylum seekers?

- What kind of information do the stakeholders need in advance to prepare for the newcomers?
- How can we establish a more efficient cooperation between the EU, national and local level as long as there is no EU-wide consensus about a common asylum system? How would a flexible multiple-speed EU asylum system look like to be effective?
- Which organisations are able to support the legal pathways in which way and how can they work together? (starting from EASO, UNHCR, NGO's, ECRE going down to grassroots level)

In sum, the points that are repeatedly highlighted by the experts are the urgency to provide political and structural support to the local communities and organizations and municipalities willing to take more active roles for the integration of private sponsorship or humanitarian visa arrivals. More discretionary power and legal flexibility at the local and regional level of governance are key for more cooperation across state institutions. This will democratize the process, give more room for civil society actors to get directly involved in integration processes from the beginning and contribute to socially cohesion at all levels.

ReSOMA

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ReSOMA - Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum

is a project funded under the Horizon 2020 Programme that aims at creating a platform for regular collaboration and exchange between Europe's well-developed networks of migration researchers, stakeholders and practitioners to foster evidence-based policymaking. Being a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), ReSOMA is meant to communicate directly with policy makers by providing ready-to-use evidence on policy, policy perceptions and policy options on migration, asylum and integration gathered among researchers, stakeholders and practitioners.

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