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# Welfare Pluralism and a Policy Window in Refugee Policies: The Emergence and Proliferation of Community Sponsorship in Europe, 2013–2023

**Renata Stefańska**[1] · **Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska**[1] · **Dominik Wach**[1]

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**Abstract**
The last decade in Europe has been marked by unprecedented refugee crises. In the face of existing ineffective and insufficient refugee reception and integration systems, and the tension between more unfavourable general attitudes and restrictive refugee policies on the one hand, and calls for more humanitarian and engaged approaches simultaneously articulated in some segments in receiving societies on the other hand, the need for new tools has become even more acute. States and international institutions are looking for new measures and solutions pressured by civil society actors. Among different approaches, those related to community sponsorship (CS) developed in Canada since the 1970s have become particularly important, which reflects an emerging trend towards more welfare pluralism in receiving and supporting refugees. Drawing on the citizen hosting movement, these initiatives utilise and generate civil society engagement and can increase societies' acceptance of refugees' admission and support. This paper outlines the development of CS programmes in Europe. Three waves of development of these programmes can be observed following the refugee crisis associated with the Arab Spring in the mid-2010s, the takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine after 24 February 2022. We will explain where such programmes are established (and where they are not) and what factors influence this, including the role of policy windows, policy transfer, policy entrepreneurs, social policy models implemented in the countries in question, and political parties. The theoretical underpinning of the study is the multiple streams theory combined with the policy transfer theory and historical institutionalism.

**Keywords** Community sponsorship · Refugee integration · Refugee policy · Multiple streams theory · Policy window

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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## Introduction

In the past decade, Europe has witnessed increased numbers of people seeking refuge, accompanied by tightening borders and the declining willingness to admit refugees. The population of UNHCR-mandated refugees remaining outside their countries of origin grew from 10.5 million in 2012 to 31.6 million in 2023 (UNHCR, 2024). The first-time asylum applications in the European Union (EU) rose from around 250 thousand in 2012 to peak at over 1.2 million in 2015 to over 1 million in 2023 (Eurostat, 2024). In the case of those admitted, refugee integration systems proved to be ineffective and insufficient, showing the need for new solutions.

Among the different approaches newly adopted in Europe, those related to *community sponsorship* (CS) developed in Canada in the 1970s have become particularly encouraged by the EU (EC, 2020b). Community sponsorship can be understood as a wide umbrella term (EC, 2018b; Tan, 2021) designating various partnerships between the state and private actors in admitting and supporting refugees. The state's engagement usually includes resettlement, or more ad hoc humanitarian admission, and providing access to social security and services, while other partners provide reception and integration support.

There is terminological unclarity and incoherence regarding using the term of CS. As mentioned above, CS can be understood as a broad range of programmes encompassing programmes similar to CS. However, CS also happens to be viewed as a separate framework different than similar programmes distinguished as complementary pathways or as one form of complementary pathways.

These different meanings of CS are noticeable in the definition by UNHCR (2019a, p. 8), which says that CS "allows individuals, groups of individuals or organizations to come together to provide financial, emotional, and practical support for the reception and integration of refugees admitted to third countries". Community sponsorship can be treated both as one of "complementary pathways for admission" (*ibidem*), understood as "safe and regulated avenues for refugees that complement [state-led] resettlement" (*ibidem*, p. 5), or as "a tool to support refugees admitted through other pathways" (*ibidem*, p. 8).[1]

In our study, we adopt an approach in line with the perspective of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2024). It highlights that "community sponsorship in Europe is characterised by its adaptability and encompasses a wide range of models" (*ibidem*, p. 8), and broadly groups them into three categories: (1) CS schemes linked to admission through state-led resettlement programmes, (2) CS schemes linked to civil society-led humanitarian admission programmes (e.g. humanitarian corridors), and (3) CS schemes linked to admission through other complementary pathways (e.g. family reunification, higher education, or employment pathways) (*ibidem*, p. 9–10).

[1] UNHCR further explains that "As a pathway for admission, community sponsorship programmes allow sponsors to support the entry and stay of nominated refugees in third countries. Conversely as a tool, community sponsorship can be used as a mechanism to engage individuals and communities in the reception and integration of refugees arriving through resettlement programmes, or other pathways, such as educational pathways or humanitarian visas" (UNHCR, 2019a, p. 8).

Following the approach employed by the EUAA (2024), we refer to all these public–private initiatives targeted at refugees as CS for terminological consistency. However, to better capture the diversity of these programmes, we distinguish the following categories: (1) proper CS programmes, in which communities voluntarily support the reception and integration of refugees resettled through state-led programmes, (2) humanitarian admission programmes (HAPs) for extended family members, (3) humanitarian corridors (HCs) for the most vulnerable refugees, identified and supported by religious organisations, (4) ad hoc CS programmes for specific groups e.g. Christians, (5) higher education pathways, allowing refugees to come to study, with universities and students acting as sponsors, and (6) employment pathways, enabling refugees to come for work, with employers serving as sponsors.

Private refugee hosting initiatives such as those for Ukrainians, which we call CS-like initiatives, can also be classified under the CS umbrella if they are state-supported through facilitating host-refugee matching and/or providing financial assistance to private hosts. Recently, the term CS has been increasingly associated with initiatives that rely exclusively on providing emotional and social support by volunteers (so-called "buddy programmes") (Zanzuchi et al., 2023).

In this article, we focus on CS programmes, in which we could identify four elements: (1) *controlled arrival* of refugees in the host country (under resettlement quotas, humanitarian visas, etc.), in contrast to spontaneous arrival, (2) *private sponsors* providing assistance to refugees for a specified period of time, (3) *cooperation* of private actors *with national authorities* (not only regional or local ones), and (4) providing *housing support*[2] by sponsors. This means that we do not include in our analysis: (1) homestay accommodation for refugees,[3] even if state-supported organisationally or financially, if refugees' arrival is not managed by the state, (2) sponsor-based programmes in cooperation with only local or regional authorities, (3) sponsor-based programmes for refugees already residing in the country, if there is no direct cooperation with national authorities. We also do not take into account (4) higher education and (5) employment pathways as they are less developed.

In our analysis, we exceptionally include one CS-like programme, the British *Homes for Ukraine* (full name: Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme), because it contains all the elements of CS adopted in our study: refugees arrive from a third country on the basis of a special visa issued by the Home Office (*controlled* arrival), contingent upon having a sponsor in the UK (private sponsors) providing *housing support* for a predefined period of time, as part of a government programme (cooperation with *national* authorities). Other state-supported CS-like initiatives for Ukrainians in Europe are not

[2] In our study, we focus only on CS programmes that require sponsors to provide housing support to refugees. By doing so, we aim to ensure that our analysis does not encompass programmes offering only social and emotional support, without material assistance. This allows us to distinguish programmes resembling the Canadian model from other volunteer-based initiatives aimed at refugee integration (e.g. buddy programmes).

[3] Bassoli and Luccioni (2024) distinguish CS from homestay accommodation, where individuals host privately at homes refugees who managed to get into receiving societies. However, we notice that homestay accommodation seems to be becoming increasingly accepted as a CS-related programme during times of housing crisis.

taken into account because they do not involve *controlled* arrival from another country (Table 2 in the Annex lists programmes excluded from the analysis, while Table 1 presents those included).

Community sponsorship programmes utilise civil society's potential to support refugees. The increased interest in implementing such programmes reflects a growing trend towards *welfare pluralism* in refugee policies. In contrast to the state-centred approach and the unitary institutional welfare production model (Offer, 2023), welfare pluralism highlights the presence of a number of parts participating in the creation of goods and services pertaining to welfare and wellbeing (Skelton, 1998), involving the combination of inputs from the state, the commercial sector and the civil society. The critical account of this approach underlines a reduced role of the state in welfare provision and a larger emphasis on voluntary support, informal networks, and the market (Beresford & Croft, 1983).

Despite the burgeoning literature on CS, little is known about the factors explaining why CS programmes have emerged in some countries but not in others (cf. Phillimore et al., 2022a, 2022b, in press), whereas such efforts have been made with regard to conventional refugee resettlement policies (Beirens & Fratzke, 2017; Lutz & Portmann, 2022). The few studies that partially address this issue include Smith's study (2020) examining Canada's attempts to export its CS model to European countries and transnational policy transfer explored by Tan (2021) and Bertram et al. (2020).

We address this gap by analysing both external factors—such as the three major refugee crises in the twenty-first-century Europe, one resulting from the Arab Spring, particularly the war in Syria, one from the crisis in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, and the other from the full-scale war in Ukraine – and country-specific factors, such as social policy models and the political standpoints of governments. We also show the key impact of policy entrepreneurs operating at both national and supranational levels. Drawing on multiple streams theory combined with policy transfer theory and historical institutionalism, we examine the emergence and development of CS in Europe in relation to the following five expectations: (1) CS programmes are more likely to be established during or as a result of refugee crises which open policy windows of opportunity, (2) the introduction of CS programmes is particularly inspired by the other countries' experience, (3) policy entrepreneurs, such as faith-based actors, play a crucial role in initiating CS programmes, (4) CS programmes are least likely to be introduced in countries with the social democratic social policy model, and most likely in countries with the liberal social policy model, and (5) CS programmes can be established in different countries regardless of their governments' political leaning.

## Theoretical Frames of Analysing CS in Europe

The emergence and development of CS in Europe can be seen through the lens of multiple streams theory combined with, policy transfer theories and historical institutionalism, and linked to major refugee crises, opening the policy windows of opportunity. Therefore, in this theoretical part of our paper, we engage with the following six core concepts employed in our analysis: multiple streams theory, policy

windows, policy transfer, policy entrepreneurs, social policy models, and political parties.

### Multiple Streams Theory and Policy Windows

Significant changes, based on political transfer or uniquely created, occur in specific conditions. This can be analysed with the help of Kingdon's (2014[1984]) multiple streams theory, constituting the reference frame in our analysis. This theory identifies three major elements: (1) a problem stream, (2) a policy stream, and (3) a politics stream. The problem stream is related to identifying and defining issues as problems needing policy intervention. The policy stream focuses on different solutions being proposed, developed, and analysed by various actors. These proposals can originate from abroad through policy transfer (Herweg et al., 2018; Lovell, 2016). The politics stream primarily includes changes following elections, shifts in public sentiment, and advocacy campaigns by interest groups. When these three streams come together, a significant change can happen as the policy window opens. According to Kingdon (2014[1984]), policy windows are opportunities and propitious political happenings for policy entrepreneurs to utilise these circumstances, such as government changes, renewals of enabling legislation, or shifts in partisan or ideological balances to draw attention to particular problems and push their proposals.

As Rosenthal and co-authors (2001, p. 10) highlight, policy windows may occur during or after crises: "…crises may accelerate social and political change, that they bring latent forces of changes into the open, that they may very well function as policy windows (Kingdon, 1984), helping to reconstruct the policy or social agenda". At times of uncertainty and disequilibrium, changes to established structures can be made. Therefore, crises can be seen not only as something unwanted and dysfunctional but also as an opportunity for change. As Hart and Boin (2001, p. 39) note: "during or in the immediate wake of crises, key institutional constraints that militate against non-incremental reforms are temporarily relaxed. Crises serve as a potential springboard for efforts to < punctuate > the tenuous equilibrium of routine policymaking in different ways". The changes in extraordinary situations are facilitated by the focus of otherwise divided attention on a certain issue, the acceptance of more risky policy solutions, the consolidation of support and political credit for leaders, and the possible concentration of usually more dispersed power and decision-making (Hart & Boin, 2001).

In this section, we have focused on the problem stream and crises as focusing events, which may open policy windows. In the following sections, we explore three selected aspects of the remaining two streams. First, we examine policy transfer within the policy stream, as it may provide policy entrepreneurs with potential policy proposals. Then we turn to social policy models, which help policy entrepreneurs and policymakers evaluate feasibility and viability of different policy solutions. Lastly, we focus on political parties as a central element of the politics stream.

## Policy Transfer and Policy Entrepreneurs

Recurrent refugee crises are prompting an interest in learning from other countries' experiences among policymakers as they seek tested solutions to address emerging problems (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Policy transfer can be defined as "a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc., in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in another time and/or place" (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 344). Although employing existing solutions is often seen as better and easier than creating new ones, policy transfer cannot be done automatically without adapting to local contexts (Bertram et al., 2020; Rose, 1991; Smith, 2020).

Rose (1991) distinguishes five forms of policy transfer which can be useful for analysing CS programmes: (1) copying—implementing the programme existing elsewhere, (2) emulation—applying an existing programme in another place after local adjustments, (3) hybridisation—developing a programme based on two already existing ones, (4) synthesis—developing a programme using elements from three or more different programmes, or (5) inspiration—creating a new programme based on existing ones. Policy transfer can be either voluntary or coercive (usually indirectly); bottom-up, inspired by receiving communities, or refugees themselves, or top-down, influenced by governments or international organisations (van Selm, 2023).

An important role in transferring policies is played by policy entrepreneurs who not only stimulate interest in the possibility of policy transfer but may also participate in the implementation of transferred solutions. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) identified such main actors as elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats and civil servants, pressure groups, experts, transnational corporations, consultants, think tanks, supra-national governmental and non-governmental institutions.

The question is how actors can bring and deliver changes being embedded in institutions under regulative, normative, and cognitive pressures (Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Introducing divergent changes requires specific characteristics, including cognitive capacities to take a reflective approach towards practices and imagine alternatives, certain levels of capital and resources, and a position within an institutional field allowing for a certain degree of agency. It is difficult for central actors (usually dominant and resource-rich) to envisage, want, and implement changes "because institutionalised arrangements and practices structure cognition, define interests and, in the limit, produce actors' identities" (Maguire, 2008, p. 674), while those who may imagine and desire changes are frequently located at the periphery and not rich in power and resources.

Sometimes, a way to convince political decision-makers to implement specific policies can be for policy entrepreneurs to propose starting with pilot programmes, which, if successful, may be scaled-up (Nesti et al., 2024). By participating in pilots—that is, using the strategy of "leading by example"—policy entrepreneurs demonstrate their "genuine commitment" to change, showcase the feasibility of their proposals, and persuade risk-averse policy-makers (Mintrom, 2019, p. 318–319). Pilots help test and prepare the institutional and organisational settings (Sager & Gofen, 2022) in the event of a decision to expand the programme nationwide. However, pilots may also serve as "an exercise in early implementation rather than an opportunity to review the appropriateness of the policy" (Ettelt, et al., 2015, p. 321).

## Social Policy Models

Social policy models differ in how they view the roles of the state, the market, and the family, which reflects their different attitudes towards the idea of welfare pluralism. Consequently, they may influence different levels of acceptance and feasibility of CS programmes.

The best-known classic typology of social policy models by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) distinguishes three welfare regime types in wealthy Western countries: liberal focusing on freedom (also called Anglo-Saxon or residual), conservative emphasising solidarity (also called continental or corporatist), and social democratic based on equality (also called Nordic or Scandinavian). In the liberal model, the market plays a crucial role, with significant contributions from private donors and charities, while the state's role is limited to supporting the most vulnerable. In the conservative model, the family plays a major role, while the state's role is subsidiary. In the social democratic model, the state's role is central, while the role of non-state actors remains marginal. Currently, the social policies closest to the liberal model in Europe are found in the UK and Ireland, to the conservative model in Germany, Austria, Belgium, and France, while to the social democratic model in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland (Golinowska, 2018; Szarfenberg, 2009; Zgliczyński, 2017).

Ferrera (1996) identified an additional Southern model (also known as Mediterranean or clientelistic), relevant for Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, which is characterised by the significant role of regional governments in social policy and selective, unevenly distributed support. These countries were previously classified under the conservative model due to their social benefits based on "Bismarckian" insurance (Golinowska, 2018) and the crucial role of family (Zgliczyński, 2017). However, this classification stopped applying after health care started to be financed from taxes.

Some authors have proposed distinguishing the Central and Eastern European social policy model (e.g. EASPD, n.d.; Rotaru, 2009) or the post-socialist model (Hajighasemi, 2019). Lauzadyte-Tutliene and colleagues (2018) differentiate between the Central European model, closer to the traditional ones, including Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, and the Eastern European one, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania. Golinowska (2018) questions such the categorisation, arguing that the countries in this region implement diverse social policies, forming various hybrids of classic models.

Based on the aforementioned characteristics of social policy models, it can be expected that states representing the social democratic model, which highlights the central role of the state and is thus less committed to welfare pluralism, will be the most reluctant to introduce CS programmes. In contrast, states aligned with the liberal model, which places greater emphasis on non-state actors, are likely to be more receptive to such programmes.

## Political Parties

Political parties are key actors in shaping immigration policies[4] (Hampshire & Bale, 2015; Perlmutter, 1996), and, therefore, play a central role in the adoption of CS programmes. The role of ruling parties is crucial, as they have a decisive voice in passing laws in parliament and adopting government policies that do not require parliamentary approval. Community sponsorship programmes often operate without the need for new legislation, but rely instead on "a combination of political will and administrative creativity" (Bond & Kwadrans, p. 95). For example, existing refugee resettlement legislation and infrastructure frequently suffice (*ibidem*). However, opposition parties can still play a role by politicising these issues and mobilising voters against them (Seeberg, 2013). Given that refugee policy is a highly divisive issue (de Wilde et al., 2019; Hooghe & Marks, 2018), it is easily contested, and can make the implementation of CS particularly challenging in an unfavourable party environment.

There is a widespread perception that left-wing parties are more committed to international solidarity and universal human rights (Natter et al., 2020) and tend to pursue more liberal immigration policies than right-wing parties (de Haas, 2023), which is supported by some studies (e.g. Akkerman, 2015; Schultz et al., 2021). However, others show more ambiguous relationships between immigration policies and political ideologies. According to Natter et al. (2020), both right-wing and left-wing parties implement restrictive immigration policies. Lutz and Portmann (2022) show that refugee resettlement policies follow the same pattern, with both left- and right-wing parties supporting admissions within resettlement programmes. Therefore, the significant role of political ideologies of parties in power in the introduction of CS may be overestimated.

One possible reason for these ambivalent findings may be internal divisions within both left- and right-wing parties regarding immigration. On the right, tensions exist between conservative culturalists and economic liberalists, while on the left, between cosmopolitan humanitarians and economic protectionists (Natter et al., 2020; Perlmutter, 1996). As the costs of refugee reception and integration in CS are largely borne by sponsors, some right-wing parties, especially those representing free-market positions, can be open to CS as a solution that transfers part of the state's responsibilities to the private sector.

For left-wing parties, CS is likely to resonate more with cosmopolitan humanitarians, who advocate universal hospitality and solidarity beyond borders. These initiatives which engage local communities in welcoming and integrating refugees align with core values of inclusivity and shared responsibility – fundamental to cosmopolitanism. Therefore, when groups favouring a restrictive approach to refugees do not dominate ruling parties, whether on the right or the left, the chances of adopting CS increase.

Another view is that the presence of anti-immigration radical right parties in parliament, and particularly in government, may discourage other parties, especially

[4] Most research on political parties has focused on their stances on immigration in general, but we refer to these studies in this section, as they are likely to be relevant to refugee policies, including CS, as well.

moderate right-wing ones (Abou-Chadi, 2016), from adopting more open refugee policies. Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) indicate that mainstream parties tend to adopt more restrictive positions when anti-immigration parties gain popularity. However, this accommodative strategy, aimed at limiting the success of radical right parties (Meguid, 2005), is not always effective (Abou-Chadi, Cohen & Wagner, 2022). Also, tough rhetoric does not always translate into strict policies (Czaika & de Haas, 2013; Lutz, 2021), and the impact of such parties may be exaggerated (Gessler & Hunger, 2022), particularly regarding the openness of admission policies (Lutz, 2019). Therefore, the presence of radical right parties in government or parliament may not always be an obstacle to more welcoming refugee policies.

Recently, the left–right divide has become less relevant, and political ideologies responding to globalisation—cosmopolitanism advocating open borders, and communitarianism favouring closed borders[5]—are gaining importance (Koopmans & Zürn, 2019). Analysing the emergence of CS in Japan, Kalicki (2019) demonstrates that it can serve as a pragmatic compromise to mitigate the liberal-democratic paradox of refugee admission. This paradox involves two main tensions: the first between "the right of in-migrants to immigrate and the right of political communities to restrict their entry and settlement" (*ibidem*, p. 355; see also Akakpo & Lenard, 2014; Hollifield, 1992), and the second between citizens who wish to exercise their freedom by voluntarily sponsoring refugees and those who oppose refugee admissions (Kalicki, 2019).

The implementation of CS programmes is voluntary. This makes it even more interesting to ask why some governments pursue such policies. Reasons include bolstering their reputation and showcasing their commitment to humanitarian values (Beirens & Fratzke, 2017). Especially as such programmes can provide states with a humanitarian alibi, allowing states to appear open to refugee resettlement while simultaneously still restricting asylum seekers' access to their territories (Lutz & Portmann, 2022; van Selm, 2004, 2020). In this sense, they may even function as "a political tool in service of anti-immigration policies" (Berneri, 2024, p. 73).

## Methodology

Our analysis of CS programmes in Europe was based on desk research through extensive web search and the review of academic literature. Using the Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases, we have created a corpus of 182 texts, identified on the basis of the presence of keywords "community sponsorship", "refugee sponsorship", and "private sponsorship". The articles identified in the mentioned databases were supplemented by relevant positions from their references. The publication dates span from 1981 to 2023, with only 25 published prior to 2015 and focused on CS in Canada, USA, and Australia. Out of the remaining 157 texts, 53 constitute our main point of reference as related to the European context.

[5] Beyond traditional communitarianism, one can also distinguish inclusive communitarianism, which is more open to immigration and refugee resettlement, focusing on fostering a feeling of home among both current residents and newcomers (Neiman, 2023).

We have produced a special matrix to extract information on programmes, the circumstances and outcomes of their introduction, including the model of CS, the context of its emergence, the advantages and challenges of CS. Separately, we have created a comprehensive framework for collecting and analysing data on particular CS and CS-like programmes in different countries (not only European) through extensive desk research and web search (including academic literature, grey literature, websites, transcripts of parliamentary debates, press, and social media). In this case, our matrix of analysis included information about programme (including aim, initiators/implementers, timeframe, funding, legal base, statistics, and additionality), multiple streams approach data (about the problem stream e.g. whether and how CS was related to the crisis, the political stream e.g. what political party/coalition has introduced CS, public attitudes, policy entrepreneurs, policy window), the involvement of religious organisations, policy transfer, social policy model, the characteristics of sponsored individuals (including legal status, nationality, and other eligibility criteria, who nominated/selected/assessed eligibility, admission process, travel, and pre-departure preparation), the characteristics, responsibilities, and rights of sponsors (such as eligibility criteria, financial, and other responsibilities).

We analysed CS programmes based on the partnership of national authorities with private actors. Only programmes involving the controlled arrival of people in need of protection from another country were selected for the analysis. This resulted in the exclusion of CS-like programmes aimed at Ukrainians fleeing the war except for UK's *Homes for Ukraine*, as it was the only one that included all the CS elements adopted in our operational definition presented earlier in the introduction to the article: (1) *controlled arrival*, (2) *private sponsors*, (3) cooperation with *national* authorities, (4) providing *housing support* by sponsors. Programmes based on cooperation with only local or regional authorities, as in the case of the *Federal Länder Sponsorship Scheme* in Germany, were not included. We also did not include the HCs in Andorra and San Marino – the former because it does not require sponsors to provide accommodation (Berneri, 2024), and the latter due to a scarcity of publicly available information on this programme (Table 2 in the Annex). In total, 19 programmes were selected from Austria (1), Belgium (2), Czechia (1), France (1), Germany (2), Ireland (3), Italy (1), Poland (1), Portugal (2), Slovakia (1), Spain (1), Switzerland (1), and the United Kingdom (2) (Table 1 in the Annex).

To identify social policy models in European countries, we relied on the relevant literature, particularly the classic studies by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999), and more recent ones by, in particular, Golinowska (2018), Lauzadyte-Tutliene et al. (2018), Szarfenberg (2009), or Zgliczyński (2017). Esping-Andersen's typology does not take into account the dynamic changes in social policies of various countries, which are increasingly deviating from classical models and taking hybrid forms (Golinowska, 2018). In this study, however, we took into account the tradition from which each country's policies originated (except Switzerland, which underwent a major change, see Obinger et al., 2010), assuming the important role of path dependence and policy feedback (Pierson, 1993, 2000; see also Nesti & Graziano, 2024) in their continued functioning, as highlighted in historical institutionalism. To categorise the social policy models of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries not included in Esping-Andersen's analysis, we used the categories proposed by Lauzadyte-Tutliene et al. (2018).

For the analysis of the role of political parties, most data was obtained from the *Comparative Political Data Base* (CPDS) (Armingeon et al., 2023), which allowed the examination of the ideological composition of governments that initiated CS programmes. Based on that, we could identify right-wing, left-wing, and centrist parties within these governments and determine the dominant ideology of these governments (Table 1 in the Annex). Additionally, the political party families that made up these governments and parliaments were established, including the identification of radical right parties (Table 1 in the Annex). The CPDS data was complemented with information from the *Chapel Hill Expert Survey* (CHES) database (Seth et al., 2022), which included details also on parties' positions on immigration policy and multiculturalism. To further verify the labelling of parties as radical right, the *PopuList 3.0* data (Rooduijn et al., 2023) was consulted.

## Emergence and Development of CS in Europe

### Refugee Crises and Policy Windows as Facilitators

As a result of three major refugee crises in Europe pertaining to the Arab Spring and its aftermath, particularly the resulting war in Syria, the takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the full-scale war in Ukraine, problem, policy, and political streams came together, creating a policy window for new solutions. While prior to 2013, CS did not exist in Europe, in the period 2013–2023, in total, 20 programmes emerged in 15 countries, including 7 proper CS programmes and 5 HCs for vulnerable refugees organised by faith-based communities, usually first as pilots and then made continuous, 5 HAPs with elements of extended family sponsorship, and 3 in an ad hoc form. After the full-scale invasion of Russians on Ukraine in 2022, we could observe the further increase and diversification of CS-like programmes in a limited form, exemplified by UK's *Homes for Ukraine*. To date, we have identified 18 European countries implementing such programmes. The further parts of our analysis focus on 18 programmes from the former group and one, *Homes for Ukraine*, from the latter (see the Methodology section).

Not all refugee crises that impacted Europe, such as those resulting from the wars in former Yugoslavia or Chechnya in the 1990s, led to the adoption of new CS programmes in Europe. This aligns with the multiple streams theory, which highlights the crucial role of policy entrepreneurs and politicians. The mere occurrence of a crisis that opens a policy window is not enough for policy change; it must be appropriately framed by policy entrepreneurs as a problem in a problem stream to gain attention from policymakers and viable solutions need to be presented in a policy stream (Herweg et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2014[1984]).

Policy window openings may occur not only in relation to the problem stream but also the politics stream, for example, with a change to a more pro-refugee government. Sometimes, a policy window may open when a government seeks to enhance its credibility in the eyes of international partners. For example, the Italian government, initially reluctant to the idea of HCs for vulnerable migrants, ultimately changed its stance. This shift was partly motivated by the need to improve

its standing within the EU amid growing criticism over its migration policy in the context of mounting migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea (Berneri, 2024).

During policy window openings, related to the above-mentioned refugee crises in Europe, social mobilisation occurred, including faith-based groups, to support resettling refugees from conflict zones. This was evident both during the 2015 migration crisis, the 2021 Afghan refugee crisis, and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

As van Selm (2020, p. 149) points out, governments are less likely to resettle refugees "when there is significant vocal public opposition to their arrival". In this context, it is worth noting that according to Eurobarometer surveys conducted in 2015 i.e. at the height of the refugee crisis, out of the 12 EU countries analysed, in 9 the percentage of people agreeing with the statement that their country "should help refugees", exceeded, usually significantly, the percentage of those who held the opposite view (EC, 2015). Support for Ukrainian refuges was even stronger, with a majority of citizens in every EU country backing the idea of "welcoming in the EU people fleeing the war" in Ukraine (EC, 2022). Moreover, research indicates that people tend to be more supportive of and/or less opposed to CS compared to other refugee admission pathways (Hryciuk-Ziółkowska et al., 2024; Tryl & Surmon, 2022).

### The Key Role of Policy Transfer and Policy Entrepreneurs

The concept of CS[6] originated in Canada in the late 1970s and has since been the subject of numerous studies. Despite its long history and recognition as a "success story" in engaging local communities to integrate refugees (Elcioglu, 2023; Reynolds & Clark-Kazak, 2019), it took more than three decades for similar programmes to emerge in Europe. The idea of transferring the Canadian model[7] to other national contexts officially appeared during the UN Summit in September 2016 when representatives of the Canadian government, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundation, and academics from Ottawa, announced the formation of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI). In addition to GRSI, EU, international organisations, NGOs, especially faith-based ones, churches, and sometimes migrant communities played an important role as policy entrepreneurs in promoting the idea of CS.

Building on the bold goals set for the GRSI, including increasing refugee resettlement, improving their integration, strengthening host communities, and promoting a "welcoming culture" (GRSI, n.d.), the initial plan assumed "exporting" the Canadian model to other countries (Smith, 2020), dealing with the migration crisis at that

[6] Refugee sponsorship programmes are typically called private sponsorship in Canada, and community sponsorship in Europe (Tan, 2021).

[7] Canada has developed three different CS programmes: (1) the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR), launched in the 1970s, for resettling refugees nominated by sponsors who bear most of the costs of their admission, (2) the Blended Visa Office-Referred programme (BVOR), launched in 2013, for refugees nominated by UNHCR where the costs of admitting refugees are shared between sponsors and the government, and (3) the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS), launched in 1979, for refugees with special needs, financed from government sources, while sponsors are responsible for providing non-material integration support (McNally, 2023).

time. Initially, the idea was welcomed by both the EU and the United Nations, which encouraged states to implement this model, referring to it in the *Global Compact on Refugees* (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019; Reyes-Soto, 2023). However, due to problems with managing migration in Europe and rising anti-immigration sentiments, GRSI had to limit its actions from transferring the Canadian model to other countries to "providing training, capacity-building, and technical support" (Smith, 2020, p. 286). It became clear that the policy transfer could not take the shape of directly copying the Canadian model.

The value of CS has been recognised also by the European Union. The *Study on the Feasibility and Added Value of Sponsorship Schemes* (EC, 2018b) recommended EU institutions promoting it through 'soft' measures, by encouraging and providing support. The European Commission committed to supporting private sponsorship (EC, 2018a), which was followed by special funding within the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), which not only enabled the promotion of the idea of CS and capacity building, but also the implementation of pilot projects. Also, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (EC, 2020a) encouraged the development of a European CS model, and in 2024, the European Union Agency for Asylum issued *Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship* (EUAA, 2024).

The UK Community Sponsorship Scheme is the most similar to the Canadian one compared to others implemented in Europe. The UK Home Office introduced it in 2016 as part of the already existing Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPRS).[8] The inspiration came from the Canadian model with the civil society organisations, mainly faith-based, playing a pivotal role in introducing it (Phillimore et al., 2022a, 2022b; Reyes-Soto, 2023). In July 2016, the CS scheme was officially launched at Lambeth Palace, with the Archbishop of Canterbury welcoming a family to live in a house in the grounds of the palace. This policy transfer did not rely on direct usage of the original model, but required adjustments to local circumstances, so it may be called emulation. The relative success of the UK programme, which could be seen as more suitable for the European context, encouraged other European countries to consider expanding their resettlement schemes, not only by drawing on the Canadian ideas but also on the British experience (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019).

The policy transfer of CS in Ireland also did not follow a simple copying method. The role of capacity-building provided by GRSI experts is undeniable; however, some elements of the British model are also visible. The first official pilot programme, *Community Sponsorship Ireland* (CSI), was developed in 2017–2018 and was based on the resettlement scheme, resembling solutions known from the UK. However, the impetus for the idea came from local NGOs, including the Red Cross and other organisations associated with the Refugee Council and UNHCR (GoI, 2023; Nasc, 2023), with the important assistance of GRSI providing expertise based on both UK and Canadian programmes (GRSI, 2018). The Irish case resembles the

[8] When the VPRS programme was closed in 2021 and the CS programme became independent, the principle of additionality was introduced, meaning it began to cover refugees outside of the resettlement quota to which the state had committed (Berneri, 2024).

most hybridisation way of the policy transfer because of combining elements of programmes from two different places.

Particularly interesting from the policy transfer perspective is the German model. The incorporation of CS elements could be seen already in the HAP Syria programme, mentioned later in this section, and the regional *Federal Länder Sponsorship Scheme* (FLSS), both of which started in 2013. However, these programmes were not solely based on the "private sponsorship" programmes from Canada but substantially drew inspiration from German family reunification policy (Grote et al., 2016). Only later, Germany introduced the *Neustart im Team* (NesT) programme, an additional solution to the resettlement programme (BAMF, 2023), abandoning the family connections requirement. It was modelled on the Canadian and British schemes but also drew inspiration from German local projects such as "Save me" or "Start with a Friend" (Bathke, 2022), and implemented in cooperation with German Caritas Association, the German Red Cross and the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (Tissot et al., 2024). In Germany, it was the Ministry of the Interior, not civil society organisations, that first proposed this nationwide programme (Berneri, 2024). The pilot NesT programme introduced in 2019 became permanent in 2023. This case proves that policymakers, depending on the existing context, can use several ways of policy transfer or even combine elements of different programmes to construct a new policy. Such an approach resembles the synthesis type of CS policy transfer.

The examples of the UK, Ireland, and Germany show that although policy transfer does not usually take the form of copying, the new programmes still can resemble the original one. One example is the HCs adopted by Italy, France, Belgium, and, on a smaller scale, Andorra and San Marino (Ambrosini & von Wartensee, 2022; ICMC, 2022; Sulewski, in press). The idea was proposed by Pope Francis and later implemented by faith-based organisations, including the Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio, in response to the tragic events in the Mediterranean Sea during the 2015 migration crisis, but inspiration taken from the Canadian model also played a role (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020; Ricci, 2020). The main concept behind HCs is to facilitate legal immigration to safe countries by issuing humanitarian visas to the most vulnerable refugees, supported by religious, usually Christian, organisations acting as "principal sponsors" and local groups and volunteers acting as "subsidiary sponsors" (EC, 2018b; ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019).

The first such programmes were implemented in Italy, initially introduced as pilot projects, and were based on several memoranda of understanding between representatives of the Italian government and faith-based organisations (Ricci, 2020). The idea of HCs came to life at a specific moment. Given shifting public opinion, and calls for stricter border management, the proposed solution seemed to be a good alternative to saving the lives of endangered people while simultaneously combating traffickers and enabling support without overwhelming the state budget (Ambrosini & von Wartensee, 2022). In Italy, the policy transfer of HCs was not directly implemented based on Canadian experiences, so that it can be categorised as inspiration at best. Only some aspects of the Canadian model were used as a loose inspiration to fit the specifics of the Italian context. However, the Italian example started a further

policy transfer to France and Belgium – with the promoting role of the Community of Sant'Egidio (Berneri, 2024) – which can be described as copying.

The example of Belgium, with two different models – the HC model implemented separately from the existing pilot CS programme[9] since 2020 (Fedasil, 2023) – demonstrates that policy transfer can have various forms and sources, and can change over time, depending on the vision of the new policies, and the local contexts. These factors prove that it is challenging to categorise policy transfer in relation to national models, which are sometimes multi-paths, dynamic, and complex. Similarly, in Portugal, two distinct CS programmes have been implemented. The first, launched in 2015, targeted asylum seekers under the framework of intra-EU relocation (EC, 2018b). The second, introduced as a small-scale pilot in 2023, initially targeted UNHCR-designated refugees but later shifted to refugees nominated by sponsors (Berneri, 2024). This latter initiative was "inspired by the Canadian experience and the movement of other countries that adopted it, namely in Europe" (UNHCR, n.d. a), making it an example of a synthesis form of policy transfer.

In Europe, an important role in policy transfer is also played by the EU, the European Union Agency for Asylum or the AMIF fund (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019; Tan, 2021). Thanks to the financing through AMIF projects that promote the idea of CS and capacity-building (Radjenovic, 2021), some countries decided to implement pilot programmes e.g. Spain in the Basque region (Cortina, 2019), and later in Valencia and Navarra (Share Network, n.d.), or study the potential for introducing such programmes e.g. Sweden and Finland (Tan, 2020; Turtiainen & Sapir, 2021). Others, through projects like the Share Network, have the opportunity to learn from countries more advanced in CS (Haugen & Hallström, 2022). Such a complex setting makes it even more difficult to track how the policy transfer of CS takes place in Europe. Although the Canadian model, with the significant role of the GRSI, is the original inspiration for CS, European countries often prefer to draw on examples from their neighbours rather than from distant countries, operating in a different context.

It is challenging to identify the inspiration from other countries behind the HAPs for extended family members established after the Arab Spring outbreak, when institutionalised efforts to transfer CS did not yet exist. Their emergence was the result of actions by policy entrepreneurs, for example, in Germany, where "members of the federal parliament, churches, civil-society organisations, the UNHCR, and the Syrian community [urged] to admit Syrian refugees" (Grote et al. 2016, p. 15). Within these programmes, residents of Austria, Ireland, Germany, and Switzerland could sponsor their relatives from Syria or Iraq (ERN, 2018). The latest programme of this kind, the Afghan Admission Programme, was launched in Ireland in 2021 and expired in 2022. HAPs were established in response to ongoing refugee crises, and were not intended to serve as permanent programmes.

The same difficulty applies to the short-term ad hoc CS programmes that emerged in CEE countries, specifically Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia (EC, 2018b). These programmes were exclusively for Christians from Syria and Iraq, possibly inspired by

[9] Adopted as a fulfilment of a pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum (UNHCR, 2019b).

the European Commission's relocation programme, which these countries refused to join. They might have aimed to demonstrate their willingness to help refugees, albeit on their own terms. In both cases, the programmes were the result of grassroots pressure, including from faith-based organisations e.g. Estera Foundation in Poland or Pokoj a Dobro, led by priest Peter Brenkus, in Slovakia. Interestingly, in Poland, the resettlement programme for Syrian Christians was strongly advocated also by individual MPs from the then-opposition right-wing Law and Justice party (Sejm RP, 2015), but before the migration crisis became a politicised issue in Poland. These programmes were emergency-driven and not intended as a permanent solution, nor were they typical pilot projects. However, in Poland, the resettlement was to be repeated, but this did not happen due to secondary movements of refugees. As a result, the first phase of the programme effectively served as an unsuccessful pilot.

The *Homes for Ukraine* scheme, introduced in March 2022, was established in response to growing pressure and demands from various policy entrepreneurs. The UK Home Secretary highlighted that preparing the programme was "a national effort involving charities, businesses, and communities, particularly the diaspora community", who were "willing to make this scheme happen", and that the scheme had been specifically requested and developed in collaboration with the Ukrainian diaspora and ambassador (Commons Chamber, 2022a). Calls for a stronger response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis were also voiced by politicians, including Conservative MPs (M, 2022; O'Connor & Lee, 2022). The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations said that the programme was inspired by British experiences with resettling refugees (Commons Chamber, 2022b).

As shown in the above analyses, most CS programmes began as pilots, often then becoming permanent solutions, as in Italy or Germany, and spreading to other countries. In some cases, however, they were discontinued, particularly in CEE countries, due to refugees moving to other countries.

## Social Policy Models as Barriers and Enablers of CS Implementation

The influence of social policy models is particularly evident when examining countries that have refrained from implementing CS programmes. Among these, countries with the social democratic model of social policy—in which the state plays a central role and the role of civil society is marginal—stand out. These countries, namely Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, have not yet introduced CS programmes, although feasibility studies focusing on them have shown that there is potential for such programmes (Tan, 2019, 2020; Turtiainen & Sapir, 2021; UNHCR, n.d. b). However, they are not driven by a reluctance to accept refugees from culturally distant countries. On the contrary, they are among the top five European countries in terms of the openness of their refugee resettlement policy and the average number of resettlement admissions per year (Lutz & Portmann, 2022).

Community sponsorship programmes appear to contradict the fundamental values of the social democratic model, especially equality and universalism

(Esping-Andersen, 1999). Stakeholders express doubts about whether programmes involving private individuals can be effectively standardised, thus eliminating differences in the level and quality of assistance (see e.g. Tan, 2020; Smith et al., 2024). Interestingly, findings from expert interviews assessing the feasibility of CS in Sweden revealed that scepticism surrounding its establishment is primarily expressed by civil society representatives rather than by representatives of state institutions safeguarding their prerogatives (Tan, 2020). Their attitude stems from the fear that the state may withdraw from its commitments in the area of refugee integration, potentially leading to their privatisation. These concerns are rooted in "the deeply-held expectation that integration is squarely the responsibility of government institutions" (*ibidem*, p. 17).

However, CS programmes are not unimaginable within a social democratic model. Both Sweden, Finland, and Denmark have introduced initiatives resembling CS, some of which involved cooperation between public authorities and civil society (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2024). The Red Cross, Save the Children, and the Church of Sweden implemented a state-funded project in which they were responsible for organising the hosting of unaccompanied minors from Syria in private homes for a symbolic charge (Laxén, 2024; Tan, 2020). In 2023, four Swedish municipalities (Danderyd, Strängnäs, Mora, and Sjöbo) launched pilot CS programmes. However, they differ significantly from typical CS models, as volunteers do not take on any responsibilities, neither financial nor in terms of commitment duration. Their role is to accompany refugees and support their social integration within the local community (Laxén, 2024; Zanzuchi et al., 2023). In Finland, the Red Cross, in cooperation with non-state partners, is implementing the "Community-Sponsored Integration" project, co-financed by the AMIF fund. According to the project's website, state authorities are not involved in the project (Finnish Red Cross, n.d.). As in Sweden, this initiative operates more as a "buddy programme" than a typical CS (Zanzuchi et al., 2023).

Community sponsorship programmes have also not been implemented in countries with the Eastern European social policy model.[10] The most likely explanation is the lack of political will, insufficient mobilisation of policy entrepreneurs, and the lower financial capacity of both the governments and societies in these countries. Even if the state is relieved of funding integration assistance, it still has to provide expensive social services, including education or healthcare (Smith, 2020). Moreover, according to the *European Values Survey*, societies in these countries are among the most concerned that migration may strain their countries' welfare systems (Halman et al., 2022).

The CS scheme, on the other hand, appears to fit well the liberal social policy model, which envisions that private and NGO actors should play the most active role in social policy. Indeed, CS initiatives have emerged and are best developed in countries with this model, notably in Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, and the UK and Ireland in Europe. Although this model assumes that the state should provide

[10] Interestingly, a pilot CS is set to be established in Lithuania in 2026 under a project co-funded by the EU's AMIF (IOM Lithuania, n.d.).

only limited financial support for social policy interventions, it does not mean that the costs of refugee integration are covered solely by private sponsors. For example, in the Canadian BVOR programme, the costs are split almost equally between the state and the sponsors (Macklin et al., 2018). In the UK, the sponsors' financial commitments are even less burdensome. They need to secure a minimum amount of funding (£9,000) to support refugees at the start; however, many services and benefits for refugees are provided by the state (Phillimore & Reyes-Soto, 2019). In general, countries with the liberal social policy model implemented proper CS schemes (UK, Ireland), but also a private sponsorship scheme for extended family members (Ireland).

The conservative and Southern social policy models, in which family, church and social networks play a significant role, also do not seem to be at odds with the idea of CS. Although the state has a stronger position compared to the liberal model, this position is founded on the subsidiarity principle, which allows ample room for civil society initiatives. Countries representing these social policy models have implemented both sponsorship programmes for extended family members (Austria, Germany, Switzerland), proper CS (Germany, Portugal, Spain), and HCs (Italy, Belgium, France).

Initiatives resembling CS were also launched in countries representing the Central European social policy model. However, they were short-lived, targeted only Christians from Syria and Iraq, and were not continued. Among the reasons for the failure of these programmes, one can mention the relatively low wealth of these states compared to affluent Western European states, more reluctant attitudes toward refugees, and the underdeveloped and less prosperous civil society. Additionally, due to the underdeveloped social services and benefits, these countries were not seen as attractive to resettled refugees, many of whom chose to continue their journey to the West (EC, 2018b).

## Ideological Diversity of Governments Adopting CS

It is difficult to find any significant regularity in terms of the ideology of the political parties forming the governments that have adopted CS in Europe (Table 1 in the Annex). They have been implemented by governments with dominant right-wing, left-wing and centrist parties alike: from the all-right government of David Cameron's and Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in the UK, through Angela Merkel's "grand coalition" government of CDU, CSU and SPD in Germany, to the all-left populist government of Robert Fico's Smer-SDP in Slovakia or António Costa's Socialist Party in Portugal. Interesting is the case of HCs in Italy, which have been introduced and continuously extended by various government coalitions since 2015 (Berneri, 2024). However, surprisingly in relation to common expectations, governments dominated by right-wing and centre parties outnumbered those dominated by left-wing ones.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the data concerning the families to which these parties belonged. Governments, encompassing both conservative, Christian Democratic, liberal, agrarian, socialist, green and radical left parties, initiated CS programmes. Liberal, Christian Democratic, and socialist parties predominated. The presence of socialist parties among them demonstrates that even parties emphasising

the state's central role in refugee integration policy, sometimes do not oppose the significant involvement of NGOs and private individuals in policy implementation.

Interestingly, we identified two governments with radical right parties adopting CS programmes: in Switzerland in 2013, where the government was co-formed by the Swiss People's Party, and in Belgium in 2017, where the regional New Flemish Alliance, considered a borderline case of a far-right party (Rooduijn et al., 2023), was part of the government. The fact that such parties do not necessarily act as a constraint on the creation of CS programmes is also suggested by the presence of radical right parties in the parliaments of almost every country in Europe that has introduced a CS programme, at the time of their adoption, except Ireland, Portugal (only in 2015), and Germany (only in 2013).[11]

Moreover, governments with parties advocating restrictive immigration policies and opposing multiculturalism have also initiated CS programmes. These parties with strict standpoints on immigration included, unsurprisingly, radical right, and conservative parties (such as the Conservative Party in the UK), but also Christian Democratic (e.g. CDU in Germany) and, which is particularly counterintuitive, socialist ones (e.g. Smer-SPD in Slovakia).

The broad spectrum of political parties involved in introducing CS may suggest that these initiatives are not inherently controversial and may be acceptable to parties representing diverse ideological profiles. Sometimes, however, the political climate is not conducive to the introduction of programmes welcoming refugees. For example, in 2022, the Law and Justice government in Poland adopted a generous policy towards Ukrainian refugees, providing, among other measures, financial support for private hosts of refugees. This same government had rejected the establishment of HCs for vulnerable refugees from Syria (Mikołajczyk & Jagielski, 2022), despite strong advocacy from the Catholic Church authorities, with whom it maintained positive relations throughout its tenure. Arguments against it included the lack of social acceptance for admitting refugees from culturally distant countries, difficulties in verifying refugees on security grounds, and a preference for providing financial support on-site (cf. Półtorak, 2018). Also, in Sweden—a country renowned for its open refugee policy—a political climate recently has favoured restricting rather than extending refugee protection (Tan, 2020).

Community sponsorship programmes seem not to provoke significant political conflict when the scale of refugee admissions is small or does not increase the number of refugees admitted under an existing resettlement quota, which is further facilitated by the fact that their implementation initially often takes place in the form of geographically and time-limited pilot projects. Another potential explanation is that it is not always necessary to enact new legislation to implement CS initiatives. Therefore, their introduction may not always be preceded by an extensive political debate. Additionally, CS schemes are often introduced in response to grassroots pressure and top-down influence from international organisations such as UNHCR (van Selm, 2023), rather than being promoted by specific parties in national parliaments.

[11] Poland could be added to this list as it is subject to controversy whether the Law and Justice can be classified as a radical right party (see e.g. endnote 6 in Hutter & Kriesi, 2022).

The counterintuitively high number of governments with right-wing parties, or even all-right governments, that have established CS suggests that this solution may sometimes be attractive to them. One plausible interpretation is that in a situation of global pressure during refugee crises, right-wing parties, less focused on human rights than on security issues, may agree to more manageable (controlled, small-scale) forms of admitting refugees—ones in which individuals are vetted by state authorities for security concerns before their arrival in the country. These lead to more organised refugee arrivals, making them a more politically acceptable solution. Opening up to such programmes may legitimise concurrent restrictions on asylum seekers' access to their countries. D'Avino (2022, p. 336) demonstrated in her analysis of UK parliamentary debates on CS how the government utilised the programme "more as a tool of migration management rather than exclusively as a tool of international protection". Additionally, the introduction of CS can be seen as a small concession to those willing to host refugees. This was the case in the UK, where Theresa May, in a speech at the Conservative Party congress in October 2015, announced plans to introduce a CS programme for Syrian refugees. In the same speech, she announced a reduction in asylum claims on UK territory and the deportation of "bogus" refugees, framing it as "an approach that combines hard-headed common sense with warm-hearted compassion" (EIN, 2015).

## Conclusions

The emergence and proliferation of diverse CS programmes in Europe indicate a growing trend towards implementing a welfare pluralism approach to refugee policy. Why have these programmes appeared in some countries but not others? We examined it from the perspective of multiple streams theory combined with policy transfer theory and historical institutionalism.

We demonstrated the role of three refugee crises in Europe resulting from the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, the takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the war in Ukraine to open a policy window which allowed for the introduction of new solutions. This was consistent with our first expectation. However, since not all migration crises led to the spread of CS, and these programmes did not expand to all countries even during these crises, it is clear that the crises themselves, as triggering events, are not sufficient for the successful adoption of such programmes. This highlights the crucial role of agents of change, particularly policy entrepreneurs on the one hand, and political decision-makers on the other.

Our second expectation—that the spread of CS across Europe was significantly driven by drawing on examples from other countries—was also validated. However, this was not a straightforward copying of the Canadian experience but rather an emulation or adaptation inspired by experiences of more than one country. This led to a considerable diversity of CS programmes in Europe.

We have shown the pivotal contribution of policy entrepreneurs, including international alliances and organisations, especially GRSI, EU and UNHCR, local NGOs, faith-based institutions, migrant communities and private individuals in initiating and implementing CS, which confirms our third expectation. Although top-down influencing, such as that by UNHCR, the EU or sometimes by national governments, can support the spread of the idea of CS, the successful implementation of these programmes requires bottom-up

engagement. The involvement of churches and faith-based organisations has proven particularly important, as they were viewed as credible partners by state authorities, due to their well-established structures, networks of parishioners, resources, and experience in providing aid. Their role was visible in almost every CS, particularly in HCs.

Also, in line with our fourth expectation, CS programmes were the least present within the social democratic model of social policy, based on the principle of the state's central role in providing services and benefits of equal standard for all. The initiatives existing there that are referred to as CS are actually limited to the so-called buddy programmes. However, CS programmes were also unpopular in Central and Eastern European countries, particularly those with the Eastern European model of social policy. This may be attributed to the lack of political will, the lower financial capacities of these countries and their societies' greater reluctance towards culturally different immigration, perceived as a burden on the welfare state. Moreover, many refugees do not perceive CEE countries as destination countries, which resulted in the earlier-than-planned discontinuation of ad hoc CS programmes in Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia. Interestingly, social democratic parties were often part of governments adopting CS programmes, which suggests that the influence of traditional social policy models outweighs the ideology of governing parties. Another noteworthy observation is that not only low-income countries refrained from implementing CS, while wealth was a good predictor of traditional refugee resettlement programmes (Lutz & Portmann, 2022).

As anticipated in our fifth expectation but contrary to popular belief, CS programmes were not solely adopted by left-wing governments. The significant involvement of right- and centre-dominated governments in their implementation during the 2015, 2021 and 2022 migration crises suggests that this type of refugee reception—organised and with a predefined scale—appears to be a compromise solution acceptable to governments of diverse ideological leanings and able to reconcile the conflicting pressures from both inside and outside the country during the refugee crises (opposition against an open-door refugee policy from an often substantial part of society, on the one hand, and calls for greater openness to refugees from some parts of society, humanitarian organisations, some left-wing politicians, international organisations and EU, on the other). In this way, political parties effectively overcome the liberal-democratic paradox Kalicki (2019) wrote about.

The analysis showed that in most European countries, CS programmes were initially implemented as pilot projects or temporary measures, adapted to local circumstances. This approach enabled policy entrepreneurs to promote policy changes while allowing decision-makers to make less risky choices, testing new solutions and cooperation with civil society stakeholders, with the option to withdraw from them later. Such a cautious strategy may have contributed to the spread of this approach in refugee policy across Europe.

In this article, we did not explore all the factors that may have influenced the adoption of CS in Europe. One important factor to consider could be migration regimes. This topic warrants deeper investigation in future research. It would also be beneficial to consider in the future a wider literature review using a broader set of keywords acknowledging the development of different complementary pathways as our study is based on the occurrence of "community sponsorship", "refugee sponsorship", and "private sponsorship" being the most established and general terms employed in texts when our analysis was conducted.

## Annex

**Table 1** Community sponsorship programmes in Europe, 2013–2023, included in the analysis[a]

| Country | Type of the programme | Timeframe | Social policy model | Faith-based actors involved in advocating/implementing CS | Government composition[b] | Radical right parties in government | Radical right parties in parliament |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | Humanitarian Admission Programme | 2013–2015 | Conservative | + | 3 | – | + |
| Belgium | Humanitarian Corridor[c] | 2017–2018<br>2021–ongoing | Conservative | + | 1, 3 | + – | + + |
| | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2020–ongoing | Conservative | + | 3 | – | + |
| Czechia | Ad hoc Community Sponsorship | 2016 | Central European | + | 3 | – | + |
| France | Humanitarian Corridor[c] | 2017–ongoing | Conservative | + | 2 | – | + |
| Germany | Humanitarian Admission Programme | 2013–2016 | Conservative | n.d.[d] | 2 | – | – |
| | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2019–ongoing | Conservative | + | 3 | – | + |
| Ireland | Humanitarian Admission Programme | 2014 | Liberal | n.d.[d] | 2 | – | – |
| | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2017/2018–ongoing | Liberal | + | 2 | – | – |
| | Humanitarian Admission Programme | 2021–2022 | Liberal | n.d.[d] | 2 | – | – |
| Italy | Humanitarian Corridor[c] | 2016–ongoing | Southern | + | 4, 2 | – | + |
| Poland | Ad hoc Community Sponsorship | 2015 | Central European | + | 2 | – | – + |

**Table 1** (continued)

| Country | Type of the programme | Timeframe | Social policy model | Faith-based actors involved in advocating/implementing CS | Government composition[b] | Radical right parties in government | Radical right parties in parliament |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Portugal | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2015–2018 | Southern | + | 1 | – | – |
| | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2023–ongoing | Southern | – | 5 | – | + |
| Slovakia | Ad hoc Community Sponsorship | 2015 | Central European | + | 5 | – | + |
| Spain | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2018-ongoing | Southern | + | 4, 5 | – | + |
| Switzerland | Humanitarian Admission Programme | 2013 | Conservative | n.d.[d] | 2 | + | + |
| United Kingdom | Proper Community Sponsorship | 2016–ongoing | Liberal | + | 1 | – | + |
| | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | 2022–ongoing | Liberal | + | 1 | – | + |

[a]Community sponsorship programmes implemented at a local or regional level or without the involvement of state authorities were not included. Humanitarian corridors in Andorra and San Marino were also excluded, as accommodation in Andorra is provided by the state rather than the sponsors (Berneri, 2024), and due to the scarcity of publicly available data for San Marino

[b]1—hegemony of right-wing (and centre) parties, 2—dominance of right-wing (and centre) parties, 3—balance of power between left and right, 4—dominance of left-wing parties, 5—hegemony of left-wing parties (Armingeon et al., 2023)

[c]In the analysis we have considered all humanitarian corridors established in a country and/or their extensions, but in this table, they are treated as one humanitarian corridor programme

[d]No data

*Source*: own elaboration based on various sources, including the CPDS database (Armingeon et al., 2023)

**Table 2** Community sponsorship programmes in Europe, 2013–2023, not included in the analysis[a]

| Country | Name of the programme | Type of the programme | Controlled arrival | Cooperation with national authorities | Private sponsors | Providing housing support by sponsors |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andorra | **Humanitarian Corridor** | Humanitarian Corridor | + | + | + | – |
| Austria | **Nachbarschaftsquartier** website (eng. Neighbourhood Quarters) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Belgium | **#PlaceDispo** webiste (eng. #FreeSpot) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Croatia | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| | **Hrvatska za Ukrajinu** website (eng. Croatia for Ukraine) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Czechia | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| | **Naši Ukrajinci** website (eng. Our Ukrainians) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Denmark[b] | **Venner Viser Vej** (eng. Friends Show the Way) | Buddy Programme | –/+ | – | + | – |
| | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine (in some municipalities). | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Finland[b] | **Yhteisölähtöinen kotoutuminen** (eng. Community-Sponsored Integration) | Buddy Programme | + | – | + | – |

**Table 2** (continued)

| Country | Name of the programme | Type of the programme | Controlled arrival | Cooperation with national authorities | Private sponsors | Providing housing support by sponsors |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| France | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| | **Pour l'Ukraine** website (eng. For Ukraine) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Germany | **Federal Lander Sponsorship Scheme (FLSS)** | Humanitarian Admission Programme | + | – | + | + |
| | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | – | + | + |
| | **Helfende Wände** website (eng. Helping Walls) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Ireland | **Accommodation Recognition Payment Scheme** (also called Financial Contribution for Hosting Temporary Protection Beneficiaries Scheme) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Italy | **#OffroAiuto** website (eng. #IOfferHelp) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Latvia | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Lithuania | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Netherlands | **Samen Hier** (eng. Together Here) | Buddy Programme | –/+ | – | + | – |

**Table 2** (continued)

| Country | Name of the programme | Type of the programme | Controlled arrival | Cooperation with national authorities | Private sponsors | Providing housing support by sponsors |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moldova | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Poland | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| | **Pomagam Ukrainie** website (eng. I help Ukraine) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Romania | **50/20 Programme**. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| San Marino[c] | **Humanitarian Corridor** | Humanitarian Corridor | + | + | + | + |
| Slovakia | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine. | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| | **Pomoc pre Ukrajinu** website (eng. Help for Ukraine) | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Spain | **Familia Necesita Familia** (eng. Family Needs a Family) - a pilot family hosting programme | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |
| Sweden | **Ideelt flyktingstöd** (eng. Voluntary Refugee Assistance) | Buddy Programme | + | – | + | – |

**Table 2** (continued)

| Country | Name of the programme | Type of the programme | Controlled arrival | Cooperation with national authorities | Private sponsors | Providing housing support by sponsors |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Switzerland | No name. Financial compensation for providing private accommodation and food for people displaced from Ukraine (in some cantons). | CS-like Programme for Ukrainians | – | + | + | + |

[a]Without taking into account higher education and labour pathways

[b]These are not government projects but are co-financed by the government

[c]Humanitarian corridor in San Marino, although meeting all the criteria of the operational definition, was not included in the analysis due to the limited availability of publicly accessible data on this programme

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**Data Availability** This article is based on desk research, literature review, and publicly available databases, including Comparative Political Data Base, Chapel Hill Expert Survey and Populist 3.0. The database describing CS-like programmes for Ukrainians is available at https://copocsproject.eu/research-outputs-community-sponsorship-and-cs-like-programmes-for-ukrainians. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

## Declarations

**Ethical Approval** The research project received the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw (KE-1/2022).

**Informed Consent** Not applicable.

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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## Authors and Affiliations

**Renata Stefańska**[1] · **Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska**[1] · **Dominik Wach**[1]

✉ Renata Stefańska
r.stefanska@uw.edu.pl

Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska
akazlowska@uw.edu.pl

Dominik Wach
d.wach@uw.edu.pl

[1] Faculty of Sociology, Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland