



Evaluation report of the *Agermanament Comunitari Valencià* program. Executive summary.

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Executive Summary

Program description

Agermanament Comunitari Valencià is a pilot program of the *Regional Ministry of Equality and Inclusive Policies of the Generalitat Valenciana* that was developed between 5 October 2020 and 4 October 2022. It is a reception program for Syrian refugees who have undergone a resettlement process from refugee camps in Lebanon. The pilot program is inspired by the Community Sponsorship model that started in Canada in the 1970s and has been promoted by the *Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative* (GRSI) since 2016. The pilot program is a contribution to the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) as, following the GRSI model, it facilitates the protection of refugees through a Community Sponsorship program. Its development in the Valencian Community is regulated in an agreement signed on 8 March 2021 between the *Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration*, the *Generalitat Valenciana*, through the *Vice-Presidency and Department of Equality and Inclusive Policies*, the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Spain* (UNHCR) and the social entities *Jesuit Migrant Service Spain*; *Cáritas Orihuela-Alicante*; *Cáritas Segorbe-Castellón*; and *Cáritas Valencia*. Through this agreement, 5 Syrian families, i.e. 23¹ people, were taken in for a period of 18 months, which could be extended up to a maximum of 24 months if necessary. The receiving municipalities were Alaquàs, Almassora, Calp, Cocentaina and València. The program sought to test an intervention model where the active participation of citizens, via local support groups, is key to favoring the integration of the beneficiaries and enabling them to achieve autonomy at different levels: administrative, educational, health, housing, etc. With regard to the evaluation of the program, it should be considered that during the first months, its development coincided with the containment period of the pandemic of SARS-COV-2, which conditioned the first reception. This report attempts to evaluate how this intervention model has developed and provides some recommendations for future editions of the program.

Agermanament Comunitari Valencià is associated with different care programs for refugees and, in particular, for resettled people, as is the case of the people assisted. These

¹A few months after the families arrived, a baby girl was born to one of the households, eventually bringing the number of participants to 24.

people are identified by *UNHCR* in origin and are offered resettlement in one of the countries that have previously committed to receive people under international protection, if there are any circumstances that recommend it (need for legal or physical protection, survivors of violence or torture, medical needs, etc.). The 23 people assisted at *Agermanament Comunitari Valencià* were part of the 1,200 resettled people that the Spanish government committed to take in the 2018 *National Resettlement Program*. *Agermanament Comunitari Valencià* is not the only Community Sponsorship program that has been implemented in Spain: *Auzolana II* was previously developed in the Basque Country; and subsequently, the extension of *Auzolana II* and the *Somos* program in the Autonomous Community of Navarre. These are families benefiting from international protection, all comprising a father and a mother (between 21 and 47 years of age) and their children, mostly minors (from at least one year old to 21 years old). One of the families had 4 members while the rest consisted of 5 members. It should also be added that many of the members of one of the families had spent most of their lives in Lebanon, so they had not known any other reality than that of refugees.

As for the volunteers who collaborated in the program, there were 45 people, distributed differently within each participating entity, since the average number oscillates between 6 in Almassora and 12 in Alaquàs. Most of the volunteers were women, and their work was mainly to accompany them in everyday life (such as groceries or formalities regarding administration or banks), although they also worked in management, school support, leisure, cultural mediation and computer or Spanish classes. On the other hand, each group had a technical team made up of two people from the participating entities, who coordinated the implementation of the program. Each team was assisted by an interpreter, who was very present, especially during the first months of the program, to facilitate the work of accompaniment and mediation.

The program had an initial budget of 900,000 euros divided over three years, of which 64.90%, or 584,063.91 euros, has been spent. A comparative calculation with the *National Resettlement Program* sets the amount needed to attend to these families at approximately 653,760 euros, standing for 69,696.09 euros more than the budget executed in *Agermanament Comunitari Valencià*. In general terms, none of the participating entities has exceeded 80% of the budget executed, and the one that has executed the least is *Jesuit Service to Migrants Spain*, which has used 58.15% of the budget. It is worth mentioning that this is the only entity that has managed the fostering

of two families, which has allowed them to optimise the use of the resources needed by the families.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of the program has focused on the general objectives set at the beginning, which are set out in the Agreement published in the DOGV of 31th March 2021. It has also focused on the integration process seen from a non-assimilationist point of view, and the main integration processes involved, including employment, housing, education and health, but also on the necessary external conditioning factors to be taken into account, such as legal, socio-economic, socio-cultural and linguistic factors. The ability to relate to the host society or to one of the groups that make it up, such as pre-existing migrant communities, the Syrian community, or other Arabic-speaking communities in the municipalities where they have settled, has also been assessed; finally, knowledge of the host society's territory has also been assessed.

The methodology used for the evaluation comprises different techniques, which have been implemented in parallel in order to obtain an overall picture of the initiative: on the one hand, the analysis of the documents generated by the program, such as the quarterly reports of the entities or budget items executed. On the other hand, it also comprises 47 semi-directed interviews both with the technical team that has participated in the program (8 people); civil society and volunteers (19 people); and with the beneficiary families (21 people). These interviews were conducted between October and November 2022, that is, after the end of the program. In the case of the beneficiary families, a sociologist was able to conduct the interviews in classical Arabic to facilitate communication. Group and participative dynamics have also been carried out with all the agents involved in the program, in the framework of one of the coexistence days held in June 2022.

Milestones achieved

Labour and Housing

As far as families are concerned, most of them have managed to have one of their members in paid employment. Only one family managed to have both adult members in employment. Four of the families were living in rented accommodation at the time of the end of the program, while one was in transition, looking for a new place to live after

leaving the home where they had been initially accommodated. One of the families had even considered the idea of buying a house in the host municipality.

Training/education

All the adults have received Spanish classes, as well as training adapted to their professional profile and needs, while the minors have been incorporated into infant, primary and secondary school classrooms, and have had access to normalised schooling, although their adaptation needs have been addressed through the deployment of the necessary resources.

Health

In addition, all families were integrated into the Valencian health system. A large majority of the beneficiaries have received dental care, mostly in private clinics.

Social inclusion

In terms of their social integration, the help of volunteers has been fundamental to foster families to understand basic issues: from how a bank works, how to pay with a credit card, what products to buy in shops or what commitments an employment contract entails. In relation to the economy, a fundamental task has been to transmit the fundamental concepts of financial management within the family, such as the control of expenses, the need to save or the importance of comparing prices.

Constraints and problems

However, the program has also encountered obstacles and problems. On the one hand, one of the beneficiary families has experienced a process of separation due to gender violence, which has meant a change of roles in the family, in which the older son has been forced to assume the role of main provider of income, although he has been rejecting the various job offers that have been offered to him.

Cultural constraints

On the other hand, cultural and gender conditioning factors have made it difficult for women to enter the labour market, as they see that both the *hijab* and the implications of some of the possible jobs (handling alcohol, pork products or night-time working hours) represent a barrier that is seen *a priori* as insurmountable.

External constraints

On the other hand, there are external conditioning factors, such as those posed by the municipality in which they are established. In some cases, the size of the municipalities has facilitated the insertion of families, especially in small or medium-sized municipalities. In the case of the family that has settled in Valencia, on the other hand, this has been a problem, given the difficulty in establishing a significant community network in their environment (neighbourhood, parents of students, etc.) and also in finding an affordable housing solution. In the case of Calp, there is also the difficulty of finding a tenancy in an environment where tourist renting makes it difficult to access housing for three months and makes the annual rent more expensive. Finally, an added difficulty has been obtaining a driving license. At least one member of each family has tried to get a driving license, but in two years only one of the five families has managed to do so. Without a license, it is difficult to find a job in sectors in which the men participating in the program have previous experience, such as construction, renovation or carpentry. Moreover, in urban environments such as Calp, poor communications have been an additional problem encountered by the family, for example, in reaching the reference hospital in Dénia.

However, the overall assessment of the program is positive.

From an administrative point of view, the three objectives initially set have been met:

- The Community Sponsorship model has been implemented as a host program.
- It has proven to be a feasible initiative to address resettlement commitments.
- It has been possible to validate a vehicle for mobilising civil society in favour of the inclusion and support of refugees.

From an economic point of view, it has meant a lower outlay of economic resources than would have been the case if these families had been received in the state resettlement program, largely due to the work of volunteers and the control of expenses carried out by the organisations.

From a social point of view, the program has facilitated the weaving of links between the beneficiary population and the volunteers and their social networks, as well as providing an informal but effective support mechanism for everyday life.

Some recommendations from the fieldwork and participatory mechanisms should be taken into account for future editions of the program. In particular, the following actions, among others, should be undertaken to the extent possible:

- Prepare families before resettlement takes place.
- Study the characteristics of the municipalities where the beneficiary families will settle in order to assess their suitability.
- Facilitate that each entity can manage more than one family.
- Extend the initiative to a larger number of families.
- Provide specific training, both for volunteers and the team of interpreters, on the reality of the families they will be supporting.
- Integrate the teaching of Valencian into the curriculum.
- Incorporate psychology specialists for beneficiary families and also for local teams if necessary.
- Actively involve local administrations in the initiative.
- And to incorporate as far as possible the beneficiary families as mentors of future fostered families in the *Agermanament Comunitari Valencià* program.