

NesT – New Start in a Team

Working together to help refugees



Joint government and civil-society programme
for especially vulnerable refugees



By participating in the new programme 'NesT – New Start in a Team', you can help especially vulnerable refugees get settled in Germany.

What is NesT?

Around the world, millions of people have had to flee their homes, and many have ended up in countries where they cannot remain permanently. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at least 1.4 million especially vulnerable refugees urgently need to move to a country other than the one where they first sought refuge, because their life, freedom, security, health or other fundamental rights are threatened there, or there are other reasons why they cannot be expected to stay. This process is called resettlement.

Several countries accept especially vulnerable refugees for resettlement through UNHCR's programme. Since 2012, Germany has been one of them. But since there are far more refugees in need of resettlement than places for them in the current UNHCR programme, more resettlement opportunities are needed.

The new federal pilot programme 'NesT – New Start in a Team' provides such opportunities, initially for up to 500 refugees. Unlike existing government-run resettlement programmes, the NesT programme consists of a unique partnership between the government and civil society to assist and support newly arrived refugees in Germany. As in government-~~only~~ resettlement programmes, also in the NesT programme refugees are selected based on clearly defined UNHCR criteria. The host country always has the final say on which refugees it will admit; in Germany, this decision is the responsibility of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

What are the aims of the NesT programme?

NesT gives especially vulnerable refugees a new and safe way to reach Germany. Civil society sponsors help the refugees get settled in Germany, and determine where the refugees live and receive support – a role usually fulfilled by government-~~only~~ programmes. Intensive assistance from sponsors is specifically intended to achieve the following aims:

- immediate interaction between refugees and the host society,
- better participation in society in accordance with refugees' abilities and desires,
- stronger and better-trained civil society involvement,
- greater acceptance of refugees, since personal interaction between refugees and sponsors helps overcome fears, resulting in
- improved conditions for integration, which also benefits other migrants.

Who will you be helping as sponsor?

As a sponsor, you will be helping people who have fled conflict, persecution and human rights violations. UNHCR has confirmed their need for protection according to the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, among other criteria, and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has selected them for admission to Germany. For various reasons, they cannot stay in the country to which they have fled; for example, because, as mothers travelling alone with their children, they are not safe there. Resettlement can also be a solution if refugees suffer illnesses or trauma which cannot be treated in the country where they are currently living.

You can help these refugees get settled in Germany and begin new lives in freedom and safety.

What residence status will these refugees have?


Refugees who come to Germany through a resettlement programme do not have to apply for asylum. They receive a renewable residence permit initially valid for three years, and are entitled to take integration courses, receive social welfare benefits and take up employment.

They have the same legal status as refugees recognised under the 1951 Refugee Convention.



Who can participate and what do sponsors do?

Everyone can participate: institutions, associations and even groups of private individuals. To share responsibilities, these groups must be made up of at least five people, including two who serve as the lead contacts.

Sponsors will initially provide financial and moral support for the refugees. They find appropriate housing  equivalent in standard and price to the amount the social benefits office would normally cover, which ensures that refugees will not have to move out when the sponsors' support ends. For two years the sponsors share the cost of net rent, excluding running costs and heating, to be deposited in advance in a special bank account. This way, the costs borne by sponsors are clearly defined from the start.

Sponsors also provide non-material assistance for one year to help refugees participate in society. They serve as a point of contact for the refugees, and help with tasks such as visits to government offices, finding schools, training opportunities or jobs. In addition, they can facilitate local social interaction, such as in sports clubs, leisure activities or at parties. Teams of sponsors share responsibility and tasks. Each team member contributes according to their abilities and availability.

How do refugees find sponsors?

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, you first take part in a one-day information event, which introduces the programme and is organised by the Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS), ~~free of charge~~. Afterwards, in order to become a sponsor, you have to apply to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). The Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) provides the necessary documents and helps you with the application process. You can decide whether to help a refugee family or an individual.

If your application is accepted, the Federal Office proposes you a family or individual from the group of refugees selected by UNHCR, and provides you with the necessary information to contact the refugee family or individual before they arrive in Germany. You will be informed of their arrival date at least one week in advance. The refugees will spend the first two weeks at the Friedland Transit Camp near Göttingen for an orientation course and advising. This is where you will meet the refugees for the first time, under professional supervision.

Thus, there are at least three weeks from the time you are first informed of the arrival date until you meet your refugee family or individual.

Who else is involved in the programme?

The programme has many partners: the responsibility for implementing the NesT programme lies with the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI); the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration (IntB); and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). The programme is carried out in close cooperation with UNHCR, social welfare organisations and the Protestant and Catholic churches and is supported by the Bertelsmann Foundation and Foundation Mercator. The Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) was set up as a focal point for interested parties and sponsoring teams. Primarily it provides information, advises and trains sponsors.



Support for the sponsors

Would you like to help but are unsure about whether this programme is right for you? Would you like more information and support in order to participate? Are you uncertain whether and how you can interact with refugees who have lived through traumatic experiences?

The Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) will assist you with all your questions before and during the sponsorship process. People and organisations who have years of experience in working with refugees and volunteers are there to help you.

The Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) is a partner in the NesT pilot project. It is supported by Caritas Germany, the German Red Cross and the Protestant Church of Westphalia. The Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) is funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Foundation Mercator and the Protestant Church of Westphalia.



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