Report on the State of Civil Society 2023/2024

Displacement in Europe

CIVIL
SOCIETY
FORUM

The Civil Society Forum is a network of non-governmental organisations working across Wider Europe. Our vision is to build a civil society beyond borders across the entire continent. Established in 2011 as a bottom-up, non-partisan civic initiative, the Forum serves as a platform for joint activities, common positions, support, solidarity, and civic influence on policy- and decision-making at the (inter) governmental level. The Civil Society Forum aims to build bridges between civil societies, based on shared values of pluralistic democracy, rule of law, human rights, social and climate justice.

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Contents

Glossary

This glossary contains key terms and definitions found throughout the report. Where necessary, the terms are elaborated further in the relevant chapters.

Term	Definition
Civil society	Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities. A civil society organisation is an organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens. Examples of such organisations include social partners (trades unions and employers' groups), non-governmental organisations (e.g. for environmental and consumer protection), and grassroots organisations (e.g. youth and family groupings). (Source: European Commission)
Common European Asylum System (CEAS)	The Common European Asylum System sets out common standards and co-operation to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system – wherever they apply. It is based on three main pillars: efficient asylum and return procedures; solidarity and fair share of responsibility; and strengthened partnerships with third countries. (Source: European Commission)
Displaced persons	Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either across an international border or within a state, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters. (Source: International Organisation for Migration)
Displacement	The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters. (Source: International Organisation for Migration)
Dublin Regulation	A Regulation of the European Union that determines which member state is responsible for the examination of an asylum application. Its objective is to ensure quick access to asylum procedures and that no member state should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility. The Dublin Regulation forms a key part of the CEAS. (Source: European Commission)

EU-Turkey deal (2016)	A statement of cooperation between EU member states and the Turkish government, which states that Turkey would take any measures necessary to stop people travelling 'irregularly' from Turkey to Greece; that anyone who arrived on Greek island 'irregularly' from Turkey could be returned there; and that for every Syrian person returned from the islands, the EU would accept one Syrian person who had been waiting in Turkey. In exchange, Turkey received 6 billion Euros. (Source: International Rescue Committee)
Fourth Geneva Convention	This Geneva Convention protects the rights of civilians in areas of armed conflict and occupied territories.
Gender	Socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men. (Source: European Commission)
Gender equality	The state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender. It's not only women who are affected by gender inequality—all genders are impacted, including men, trans and gender-diverse people. Equality in gender means that women's, men's, trans people's and gender-diverse people's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their assigned gender at birth. (Source: European Commission)
Gender mainstreaming	Gender mainstreaming is a strategy towards realising gender equality that involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programs, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination. (Source: European Commission)
Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, persons violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border. (Source: International Organisation for Migration)
LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer)	Persons who are attracted to others of their own gender (lesbian, gay) or any gender (bisexual); whose gender identity and/or expression does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth (trans, non-binary); who are born with sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definition of male or female (intersex); and whose identity does not fit into a binary classification of sexuality and/or gender (queer). (Source: European Commission)

Refugee (mandate)	A person who qualifies for the protection of the United Nations provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in accordance with UNHCR's Statute and, notably, subsequent General Assembly's resolutions clarifying the scope of UNHCR's competency, regardless of whether or not they are in a country that is a party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol – or a relevant regional refugee instrument – or whether or not they have been recognised by his or her host country as a refugee under either of these instruments. (Source: United Nations)
Refugee (*prima facie*)	Persons recognised as refugees, by a state or the UNHCR, on the basis of objective criteria related to the circumstances in their country of origin, which justify a presumption that they meet the criteria of the applicable refugee definition. (Source: United Nations)
Refugee (as per the 1951 Refugee Convention)	A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Source: International Organisation for Migration)
Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)	The Temporary Protection Directive defines the decision-making procedure needed to trigger, extend or end temporary protection. It was adopted following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and triggered for the first time in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. (Source: European Commission)

List of Abbreviations

CEAS - Common European Asylum System
CSO - Civil society organisation
EC - Council of the European Union
ECtHR - European Court of Human Rights
EP - European Parliament
EU - European Union
EUAA - European Union Asylum Agency
OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN - United Nations
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

PREFACE

Unprecedented times?

Marcus Chavasse

This report, a regular publication of the Civil Society Forum e.V. (CSF), is the result of an almost year-long effort and was conceived against the backdrop of huge waves of westward migration from Ukraine as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. Accordingly, it takes a thematic look at the complex topic of displacement in Europe and the role of civil society in alleviating the consequences of flight on displaced persons. It presents an overview of the situation of displaced persons since 1945 as well as a deep dive into the specific experience of displaced women and members of the LGBTIQ community – an under-researched area where change is paramount to ensuring the safety of vulnerable groups. Engaging snapshots of civil society organisations (CSOs) give the perspective from the ground, on the basis of which we present policy recommendations to improve the overall situation for displaced persons and the organisations working to support them.

The research of the CSF aims to provide a picture of the state of civil society at a certain time. In 2023, displacement is one of the pervading narratives and realities: CSOs are working more and more with displaced people, even if they hadn't before, and many human rights defenders and civil society actors from Ukraine and Russia have become displaced themselves. The report does not only focus on the most recent refugees, but deals with all those coming to Europe, by choice or otherwise, who face a multitude of challenges en route, upon their arrival, and often many years after arriving. By concentrating on the work of CSOs in this field, we hope to paint a vibrant and honest picture of where we stand in late 2023 and early 2024: what have been the successes and failures so far? What does the situation of CSOs look like on the ground? How far have we come and, importantly, what work still needs to be done?

We often hear that we are living in unprecedented times, but even before the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015, the ongoing mass migration of people fleeing war and persecution in the Middle East and North Africa since then, and the displacing effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, large-scale migration events were not uncommon in Europe. These events remain significant, and not just for civil society: they continue to inform political decisions, personal opinions and everything in-between across the continent, and have undoubtedly contributed to the rise of right-wing populism over the last several years. Authors Liam Haller and Aurelia Streit take this historical perspective into account in Chapter 1 by looking at almost 80 years of legal and political developments since the end of the Second World War, via the Cold War, the Yugoslav Wars and the growing complexity of the legal situation of refugees, up to the events of the 21st century. In examining phenomena such as 'Fortress Europe', migrants as political tools, and the "double standards" of the EU, this whistle-stop tour looks critically at European policy and sets the scene for the following chapters, which look deeper at the modern-day realities for displaced people and the CSOs that work with and for them.

Not everyone is created equal: some suffer particular hardships that are specific to their group, or the way they define themselves. In Chapter 2, Gordana Grujičić and Milana Lazić look at the gender dimension of migration, and how women and members of the LGBTIQ

community experience migration in a different way to other groups. Their wide-reaching chapter explores many aspects of this dimension, from the specific problems faced by vulnerable groups to the particular challenges CSOs face in this area. This is not to lessen the hardships that other groups suffer – often it is men who experience more violence on the long roads to Europe and when they arrive; and all migrants suffer some kind of discrimination – but in emphasising these often-under-reported stories and the vital work of civil society in providing safe spaces and comfort for victims of harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence, we hope to open up the discourse and shed light on a more sensitive and nuanced area of an already very complex topic.

Where official policy does not suffice, civil society often steps in to fill the gaps and provide vital services to people in need. In chapter 3, Robin van Berlo presents captivating case studies of a wide range of CSOs working directly with migrants and displaced persons on the European continent. She maps the working environments and challenges of a shrinking civic space in many countries, and lets the employees of these organisations speak for themselves. Not only do the CSOs come from a breadth of countries, such as the Netherlands, Turkey, and Lithuania, but their work also focuses on different aspects of the process of migration: some are 'first responders', based in countries with an external EU border, while others focus on the future by facilitating integration and offering legal help. What is clear from this chapter is the crucial role that civil society plays across the board, despite the system often working against them.

Finally, we present specific policy recommendations compiled by the editor of the report, Ivana Ćirković, grouped into recommendations for CSOs, local and national governments, and EU institutions. It is hoped that these groups will take these recommendations on board in order to improve the situation and begin to alleviate some of the issues highlighted in the pages of this report.

As with the previous reports published by CSF, the focus of this report lies firmly on CSOs and their experiences. In late 2023, the authors carried out interviews with CSO leaders, activists and volunteers which formed the basis of their chapters (especially Chapters 2 and 3). Additionally, the authors attended a conference organised by the CSF in Warsaw in November 2023 with the same focus as the report. There, around 150 civil society actors gathered to discuss urgent topics related to displacement, and the authors carried out more interviews and gathered information for their chapters. The authors themselves all represent the younger generation of civil society researchers and, where possible, worked in pairs to broaden the scope of their chapters. This report marks the end of an eight-year period and will be the final report published by CSF in this format. Research into the state of civil society in Wider Europe will continue in different formats, coordinated in part by the Forum's Expert Group on Civil Society Research.

The research that makes up this report is thought-provoking and timely; the testimonies presented do not even scratch the surface of the work being done by civil societies across Europe and the world to help displaced people. Whether we are living in unprecedented times or not, it is obvious that the role of civil society is as necessary as it has ever been.

INTRODUCTION

Displacement in Europe: how to think about the future?

Ivana Ćirković

Throughout European history, displacement has consistently emerged as a divisive political topic. Its recurrence can be attributed to various factors such as armed conflicts and wars, political transformations, and shifting economic prospects. Historically, Europe witnessed extensive displacement resulting from the Second World War as people sought refuge and as rebuilding efforts took place. The collapse of the Iron Curtain, civil war in Yugoslavia and the breakup of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century led to substantial migrations within continent as Eastern European countries underwent political and economic transitional processes of democratisation.

The current social landscape has been profoundly shaped by globalisation and technological advancements, making information and resources more accessible and influencing the scale and speed of modern movements. The interconnectedness of global topics like climate change, political instability and economic disparity further distinguishes contemporary displacement trends from those in the past (Milanovic, 2018). While past displacements were driven by different causes, the sheer volume and diversity of migration in recent years sets it apart.

The 21st century has brought an unprecedented number of asylum seekers to Europe including ones from conflict zones in the Middle East and Africa, as well as migrations within and throughout Europe (ibid.). A seismic shift occurred with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, fundamentally altering and reshaping the existing framework and introducing entirely new standards, decisions, and responses to the discourse.

The EU and other European countries have been actively formulating and enacting policies aimed at controlling undesirable migration and addressing the challenges posed by displaced persons. These policies include the establishment of physical border fortifications, extensive surveillance measures, and the imposition of carrier sanctions on transporting individuals lacking valid documents. Despite the commitment to combat human trafficking, the isolationist policies of EU member states serve as a basis for contemporary captivity (Engler, 2017). In spite of assurances from political decision makers regarding the expansion of legal migration channels, substantial progress in this direction remains inadequate. Furthermore, the current state of migration to, and within, Europe has initiated huge polarisation and mistrust, leading to the rise of nationalist, anti-migrant political parties and extremely hostile public sentiment. State reactions to migration often reflect distrust, nationalism and xenophobia, framing migration as a national security issue (Maccanico et al., 2018).

While the Dublin Regulation represents an attempt at a coordinated response to displacement within the EU, challenges like the uneven distribution of refugees, strained resources, and political disagreements persist, emphasising the complexities involved in addressing the displacement crisis at the European level (Tsourdi, 2018). The overall response to this influx has been the emerging concept of 'Fortress Europe', aimed at preventing unwanted

migration through isolationist policies characterised by the militarisation of border control, restrictive visa policies, and the increased criminalisation and detention of migrants. Between 2012 and 2022 the budget of the EU border agency Frontex rose from €85m to €754m (Guardian, 2023).

Beyond these concerns, there are reservations about the effectiveness of costly isolationist measures. Historical evidence suggests that the continuous expansion of 'Fortress Europe' has not successfully halted irregular arrivals, despite the substantial investment of billions of Euros (Engler, 2017). In response to the significant refugee movements in 2015 and 2016, additional measures were implemented, primarily involving cooperation with transit countries, notably Turkey and Libya. While these collaborations have temporarily reduced the number of irregular migrants, the closure of certain migration routes contrasts with the insufficient establishment of legal pathways to migration. Thousands of people still risk their lives to make the hazardous journey to Europe, often in deplorable conditions (ibid.).

European governments are constantly struggling with the delicate task of balancing political and economic needs against public expectations. One critical challenge is maintaining openness to global markets, a necessity that involves addressing domestic skill shortages through immigration. In Germany alone, approximately half a million imported labourers are required annually (Buden, 2023). Simultaneously, governments must safeguard the rights of arriving immigrants, whether for work, study, or settlement. A third issue is the desire to keep in step with public sentiment, most notably calls for limitations or even reductions in immigration.

The displaced, especially the most vulnerable, are direct outcomes of border policies primarily designed to manage global capitalism. This reality fuels political movements centred around anti-immigrant sentiments (Guardian, 2023). From an economic perspective, the arrival of migrants can adversely impact the wages and employment of local workers in direct competition with migrants. Conversely, that same phenomenon can have a positive impact on the wages and employment opportunities for workers whose roles complement those of migrants. Additionally, wealthy countries gain from the migration of skilled workers, as many arrive with degrees for which European nations incur no expense (Milanovic, 2018). However, concerns arise when the local population perceives a threat to cultural values and unreasonable fear towards cultural differences and specificities. Striking a balance between economic advantages and cultural considerations becomes essential in navigating the complexities of migration policies.

In response to ongoing political pressures surrounding complex migration policies, authorities are resorting to performative political decisions. A notable example is the 'Rwanda plan' introduced by the UK government in 2022. Under this plan, certain asylum seekers were to be sent to the Republic of Rwanda for the processing of their asylum claims. The initiative aimed to tackle the increasing numbers of individuals reaching the UK illegally, particularly by crossing the English Channel in small boats. However, in November 2023 the UK's Supreme Court declared the policy unlawful, emphasising that Rwanda was not a safe destination for the removal of asylum seekers. Following this judgment, the government responded by releasing a new treaty with Rwanda, incorporating additional safeguards. Furthermore, a new draft bill was introduced, officially designating Rwanda as a safe country for asylum seekers. So far, no individuals have been sent to Rwanda as the proposed legislation has not yet been ratified by the UK parliament (Migration Observatory, 2024). It is noteworthy that the government has acknowledged the limited capacity of this

programme. Even if a court declared it legal, the UK would only be able to process a "small number" of deportees, estimated at possibly 300 per year during the four-year trial period. This is particularly significant considering that nearly 46,000 people crossed the English Channel in small boats in 2023, and by August of the same year, the number of pending asylum applications had reached 175,000 (Malik, 2023).

The deportation program clearly represents a measure of performative politics as an intention to show that the authorities are making some important decisions, instead of seriously trying to solve the root causes of displacement. Furthermore, plans in which inhumane and ruthless attitudes towards displaced persons are highlighted have been used as a means of covering up internal socio-economic problems (ibid.). There are many more illustrative examples. The Italian government's system for employers seeking visas for non-EU workers was fully subscribed on its first day in operation. Consequently, Italy is set to welcome more workers from outside the EU, with plans to issue up to 425,000 work permits for the period of two years. Similarly, Hungary plans to accommodate up to 500,000 guest workers, despite its strong anti-immigrant political rhetoric. Finally, Greece is striving to support its labour force while simultaneously holding tens of thousands of undocumented migrants in widely criticised camps (ibid.).

Civil society's commitment to a rights-based approach is pivotal in facing the challenges and managing the consequences of 'Fortress Europe' and policies such as the UK's Rwanda proposals. In this context, civil society continuously faces grave obstacles and challenges including discrimination, legal and political barriers, and limited access to human and financial resources. The inherent tension between the humanitarian imperative of civil society to support and aid the ones most at risk, and the indifferent responses from governments combined with right-leaning public opinion poses a critical challenge (Maccanico et al., 2018). The complexities surrounding the reconciliation of these conflicting interests has created a focus on the importance of fostering empathy, promoting informed discourse, and advocating for inclusive policies. While challenges persist, the potential for positive change lies in sustained advocacy, collaboration, and a collective commitment to upholding the fundamental rights of displaced persons. The future direction will be shaped by the extent to which civil society can influence policy reforms, challenge discriminatory narratives, and foster more compassionate and inclusive policies for displaced persons, especially the most vulnerable.

Women and other deprived groups in mixed migration streams often face multifaceted challenges, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and inadequate access to essential services. Recognising the diverse needs and experiences within these groups is the first step towards developing targeted and effective responses. A nuanced understanding and adequate response require sensitivity to cultural differences and individual circumstances that shape the experiences of women and vulnerable individuals during migration (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2022). Currently, there appears to be a lack of gender sensitive data as well as policies, measures and specific services in response to their urgent needs. Effective collaboration between civil society and government is crucial to address the unique needs and challenges faced by women and other marginalised displaced populations. Strategies are also needed to build comprehensive responses that integrate the efforts of civil society and decision makers; ensure the protection and empowerment of vulnerable groups; improve policies; enhance service delivery; and create a more holistic understanding of the diverse challenges faced by these populations.

The current lack of emphasis on peacebuilding policies and institutions in European governance is striking. There is an urge for a more comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflicts. Some of the potential solutions could be to invest more in diplomacy, to develop and establish conflict resolution mechanisms as well as sustainable development projects that can contribute to long-term stability, and to foster environments where people are less compelled to leave their homes. The predominant trend of militarisation in European policy making has contributed to displacement as people face conflict, instability, and other conditions that force them to flee their homes (Maccanico et al., 2018). It also emphasises the need for a holistic approach that prioritises diplomatic efforts, conflict resolution, and investment in institutions that address root causes. To break this cycle, a shift towards proactive peacebuilding policies is imperative. Persistent conflicts, rising inequalities, and environmental degradation may lead to increased migratory pressures, posing humanitarian and geopolitical challenges for Europe. If Europe prioritises peacebuilding policies and sustainable development, it can become a global leader in preventing displacement.

In the future, civil society efforts could successfully influence policy changes, leading to a more inclusive and rights-oriented approach. Civil society, comprising non-governmental organisations, grassroots movements, informal groups and movements, volunteers and active citizens, plays a pivotal role in addressing the needs of displaced people, especially women and vulnerable populations. Motivated by a sense of humanity and dealing as the first responder in every crisis, civil society organisations often step in where governmental structures fail. Whether assisting displaced persons, campaigning for human rights, or providing essential social, health and educational services, civil society acts as a vital force for positive change, bridging gaps in assistance and amplifying the voices of those at risk. At the same time, CSOs can act as a watchdog, carry out campaigns to raise awareness, be advocates for policy changes, and provide direct assistance and all the elements of the rights-based approach to displaced persons irrespective of their immigration status. CSOs engage in community support initiatives to ensure that displaced persons are treated with dignity, have access to essential services, and are protected from discrimination. In the overall environment of shrinking democratic space for civic dialogue and despite their impact and expertise, CSOs are not always seen in a positive light by governments and find their opportunities to engage directly with these decision-making forums restricted, particularly at the national level (Civicus, 2023).

In a bid to find a solution to the current impasse, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement in December 2023 on a new set of rules for the management of migration and asylum that should make the European asylum system safer and more efficient (European Commission, 2023). It contains five key regulations relating to all stages of asylum and migration management, starting with the screening of irregular migrants when they arrive in the EU, the taking of biometric data, and procedures for submitting and processing asylum applications (Al Jazeera, 2023b). The laws also refer to the rules on determining which member state is responsible for resolving asylum requests, on cooperation and solidarity between member states, and on how to act in crisis situations, including cases of the 'instrumentalisation' of migrants (ibid.). The EU is ostensibly still committed to dealing with the root causes of migration, cooperating with countries of origin and transit, and dealing with migrant smuggling.

It is about facing Europe's constantly ambivalent approach towards the protection of displaced persons. Moreover, it is about questioning the degradation of fundamental European values, rights and the rule of law (Tsourdi, 2018). Above all, it is about questioning the problems and limitations in the design of the EU's common asylum system, and most notably a structural solidarity deficit due to its responsibility allocation arrangements and its implementation design. In order to try to find a genuine and sustainable solution, we should predominantly start thinking of migration as a fact of life that concerns us all. A humane and comprehensive approach together with the joint effort of all the relevant actors including the public is needed to understand all the structural root causes. This must be followed by societal challenges in order to bring about sustainable and enduring solutions.

Europe must consistently uphold its values, norms, and legal commitments by extending international protection and humanitarian aid to those in need. The EU and the broader European community should utilise a comprehensive array of political, legal, and cooperative measures to tackle the root causes of migration. It is crucial to acknowledge the social and economic advantages that regular migration offers to both European and other countries. Additionally, Europe should champion the enduring accommodation and integration of displaced individuals in host countries, aiming for mutual benefits (Tsourdi, 2018). The EU should continue its support through additional development funds and enhanced cooperation with third states, with a specific focus on income, employment, economic integration, and education. Beyond concrete collaboration, European governments should actively partake in policy dialogue and strive towards concluding agreements on readmission and legal migration.

In all these processes, CSOs can be important leaders and partners. The specific and irreplaceable role of civil society was recognised in 2022 when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to activists and organisations in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia for their achievements in upholding the human rights and dignity of displaced persons (Civicus Lens, 2023). This official recognition of the importance of civil society contrasts with the current repression of CSOs in many countries. This shows that it would be easier to resolve crises, build peace and foster reconciliation in an environment where CSOs were respected and allowed to go about their work unhindered. With this in mind, building solidarity and an inclusive Europe should remain a key priority and the responsibility of all European citizens and institutions.

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Chapter 1

Displacement in Europe today: Where do we stand after 1945?

Liam Haller
Aurelia Streit

Introduction

Conflict, geopolitical tensions, and the resulting large-scale, unplanned movement of millions of people largely defined Europe during the latter half of the 20th century. By October 1945, 2,000,000 people from the Soviet Union, 1,500,000 from France, 500,000 from Italy, 200,000 from Yugoslavia, and tens of thousands of Poles and other European displaced persons were either repatriated or emigrated from Germany (Nasaw, 2020). During the Cold War, ideological differences and physical separation between socialist countries and Western Europe transformed asylum-seekers into strategic assets that were used to embarrass socialist countries by calling attention to the "bankruptcy of a system from which people had to escape, often at great peril" (Keely, 2001: 307). And, at the end of the century, new institutions and legal frameworks were tested as the fall of Yugoslavia and subsequent war on Europe's eastern borders displaced millions of civilians. These events, in part, inspired the moniker "The Century of Displacement" which in many respects is a fitting characterisation as conflict and migration dominated the contemporary political arena and unsettled the lives of countless individuals. However, the effects of these events were not confined to the 20th century. They served as catalysts that transformed the political dynamics of the continent, leading to the emergence of new institutions and ideologies which continue to colour the lens through which politicians view and respond to similar events.

The policy and public perception towards migration and immigration has changed dramatically in the past 25 years as Europe has solidified its external borders and erected bureaucratic barriers to regulate the flow of immigrants. Acceptance of refugees which was once the pinnacle of Western liberal ideology is now a controversial topic among politicians. Yet paradoxically, there has never been more free movement throughout the continent. Many countries strive to uphold their commitment to human rights and refuge but operate with the dual mandate to fortify themselves against "security concerns" and the unpredictability of global crises. As a result, migration opportunities, and the rights afforded to those on the move, have developed unequally and continue to diverge as reactions to displacement events garner increasingly polarised responses. Given the divergence from the historical norms of the 20th century, this raises the question: what pre-empted these changes?

The aim of this chapter is to examine the transformation of European migration policy, bringing attention to the causal link between displacement events in the 20th century and contemporary European migration policies. The chapter is structured in two parts: first, it presents a historical perspective that chronicles the most significant displacement events in the second half of the 20th century and details the environment in which the institutions, laws, and values that have most significantly influenced contemporary migration policy were developed; second, the policies and discussions related to the arrival of migrants from Syria in 2015 and Ukraine in 2022 will be discussed with specific attention on how legal obligations and strategic considerations concerning displaced persons have evolved over time and what effect that has had on policy decisions and outcomes. Here, we adopt a more critical perspective and analyse how trends and legal and cultural artefacts from the 20th century have served to influence contemporary policy.

Postwar institutions

Among the lessons learned from the Second World War was the need to establish specialised institutions to oversee the migration of vulnerable individuals and safeguard the protection of human rights within the continent, separate from individual governments or leaders. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was one of these institutions and was established to address the protracted nature of the ongoing situation of displaced persons in Europe as the last displaced persons' centres closed in the early 1950s. The original mandate of the UNHCR was conceived with a similar scope to its predecessors — as a temporary solution to a specific regional problem. When it was first founded, its scope was fairly limited. This was partly due to rising Cold War tensions restricting its authority only to persons displaced before 1951 who experienced individual persecution. While there was both a geographic and temporal limit on the organisation's ability to intervene, it subtly sought to expand its mandate by arguing later displacements were the result of earlier political changes, and over time developed its own autonomous values separate from founding nation states.

Today, as the primary international agency dedicated to refugees, the UNHCR sets standards for protection, assistance, and solutions, shaping policies and practices worldwide. Its influence extends to mobilising resources, advocating for refugee rights, and fostering cooperation among governments and organisations to ensure the well-being and protection of millions of forcibly displaced individuals. The agency's positive track record and non-political mandate have enabled it to become a trusted and 'principal actor' in global politics and to exert influence on migration policy at a high level (Loescher, 2001: 6). The UNHCR's mandate defines it as exclusively responsible for refugees, thereby creating a class of individuals who must be distinct and distinguishable from other border crossers. Given the UNHCR's role as a legal advocate and the political influence it wields, it is the *de facto* arbiter of which vulnerable migrants receive assistance. In the context of a polycrisis where economic, political, and environmental conditions change simultaneously to generate mass displacements, the task of separating 'deserving' political migrants from 'undeserving' economic and environmental migrants becomes increasingly political rather than objective (Hamlin, 2021). The obligation of the UNHCR to arbitrate who deserves protection and ultimately to be an advocate for some and not others compels the agency to weigh its commitment to social realism against realist tenets that guide nation states to act in their own best interest and who ultimately resettle refugees and fund the organisation. Also, the dependency on external funding constricts the agency's ability to serve as an impartial diplomat as its existence is predicated on continuing support from relatively few states. This limits its ability to openly critique refugee status determination and the border control policies of the Global North (Cuéllar, 2006: 36).

The postwar period also spurred the creation of several new laws and international organisations to uphold them which would recast countries' legal obligations towards displaced persons, namely the passage of the fourth Geneva Convention, the establishment of the Council of Europe, and proliferation of civil society organisations. Unlike the first three Geneva Conventions, the fourth Convention, which was adopted in August 1949, dealt exclusively with civilians displaced as a result of war. As much as the document is a historical tool to identify and rectify past injustices (e.g. the creation of neutral zones and the treatment of non-combatants), it was also drafted with an eye towards tempering future conflicts amidst the backdrop of rising Cold War tensions.

The Council of Europe was established under similar pretences as the Geneva Convention, with the aim of promoting awareness of, and respect for, human rights. It adopted the European Convention on Human Rights as a cornerstone of its mission to uphold human rights and went a step further by establishing an enforcement mechanism through the creation of the European Court of Human Rights which was tasked with enforcing these laws and adjudicating potential human rights violations. A supranational body dedicated solely to the enforcement of human rights represented a major leap forward in Europe's commitment to these values, but both the Council of Europe and Geneva Convention suffer from the same fundamental weakness in that they require states to uphold to these principles.

Growing concerns about reliance on the cooperation of states and multinational organisations, prompted by events such as the Red Cross' inaction when faced with evidence of a German-led genocide during the Second World War (Forsythe, 2001: 20), were one of many factors that sparked a new wave of civil society organisations in Western Europe after 1945. Civil society, which is not expressly apolitical, collaborated closely with state actors to develop the social state and also to complement international organisations like the Red Cross by contributing diverse expertise and grassroots connections, thereby enhancing the overall efficacy of humanitarian responses.

Asylum seekers as political instruments in the 20th century

The Cold War marks the next major vector which left a lasting impact on how subsequent generations perceived and reacted to displaced persons. In an attempt to promote and defend their contrasting economic ideologies, countries in both Eastern and Western Europe passed laws and created institutions to manage labour and mobility which contributed to diverging attitudes towards migration. The ideological differences with respect to migration did not play a huge role during the Cold War itself since East-West mobility was limited, but these differences would later contribute to the composition of contemporary states and perceptions of migration.

Demographic changes

In the period after the Second World War, immigration to Western Europe was still relatively subdued. From 1950 to 1959, Western European states had a net loss of 2.7 million inhabitants as transnational ties abroad facilitated emigration (Bade, 2003). However, this period marked the inception of two trends which would attract millions of people in the coming decades and transform many Western European countries into cosmopolitan societies. The first was the recruitment of guest workers to fill labour shortages in Northwestern European countries. Between 1953 and 1958 industrial production increased 30% in Northwestern Europe (Dietz & Kaczmarczyk, 2008), and due to the population losses sustained during the Second World War and disinterest in blue-collar labour among generally well-educated populations, these countries looked abroad to fill the vacancies. Recruitment started in pre-industrial regions with high unemployment in neighbouring countries (e.g., Italy, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Yugoslavia), but steadily expanded outside of Europe as these populations were tapped and Cold War dynamics limited East-West migration (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey). In total the guest

worker schemes facilitated the migration of almost fifteen million people to the continent and established sizeable minority populations in destination countries (Meissner, 1993).

At the same time, the collapse of European colonial empires gave rise to the return of European settlers and the emigration of non-European collaborators towards continental Europe. The process of decolonisation started in the late 1940s with migration from Kenya, India and Malaysia to Britain; from North Africa to France and Italy; and from the Congo to Belgium. Both Portugal and the Netherlands also accepted and resettled large numbers of former settlers as they withdrew from their overseas territories. It is estimated that the total number of migrants of European descent resulting from decolonisation was between 5.5 million and 8.5 million (Bade, 2003). While these trends are not directly linked to displacement or forced drivers of migration, the impact they had on shaping the composition of subsequent generations would in turn influence public perceptions of migration.

In contrast to the rise in immigrant populations that took place throughout Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century, Eastern Europe, especially East-Central Europe, remained ethnically homogeneous in the postwar period (Gang & Stuart, 1999). Citizens of the Soviet Union did not have the right to freely migrate internally let alone internationally. Migration was carefully managed to maintain an economic balance, monitor dissenters and more easily surveil populations. Movement from one's location of residence, even for short visits, required permission from state officials. A high degree of direct official supervision and limited permission to move kept local populations fairly homogenous and by 1970, only roughly six percent of the population were considered migrants (Ibid). The Soviet Union also placed restrictions on foreign travel and immigration that were equally coercive despite the labour shortages. The risk that immigrants might influence Soviet Union populations or be used to transmit information was too great for a regime "that viewed itself as internationally and domestically embattled" (Light, 2012: 401).

Asylum during the Cold War

Western states essentially established a new, temporary international refugee regime by selectively enacting and interpreting the 1951 Refugee Convention. States implemented a broader interpretation of the refugee status determination process by recognizing arrivals prima facie as bona fide refugees and bucking existing guidance on durable solutions by prioritising resettlement as a preferred solution.

The West's strategic consideration of asylum seekers during the Cold War is exemplified by the response to the failed revolution in Hungary of 1956. The revolution initially emerged as a spontaneous expression of popular discontent and demands for political reform but was quashed within days and ultimately resulted in brutal suppression by military units from the Soviet Union and the continuation of communist control. Upwards of 200,000 political dissidents and civilians sought refuge abroad in neighbouring countries, fleeing the resulting generalised violence. Roughly 20,000 displaced persons entered Yugoslavia with the remainder seeking refuge in Austria, later resettled throughout 37 Western countries over the next three years (Cellini, 2017). The rapid recognition and resettlement of the Hungarians prompted policy changes given the strategic benefits they possessed. A later declassified U.S. intelligence document described the situation

as an unprecedented opportunity to produce propaganda against the Soviet Union and for the collection of intelligence on a "Soviet Bloc" country (Coriden, 2007: 1). To admit more migrants than was expressly allowed by existing quotas, the United States passed the Hungarian Escape Act of 1958 to grant an additional 30,000 Hungarians refugee status. The government justified the increase as a continuation of previous policies to only admit those who played a strategic role in Cold War dynamics and only recognising people fleeing communist states (Bon Tempo, 2008).

The widespread application of *prima facie* recognition and the policy of resettlement over repatriation were largely confined to the scope of the Cold War. This was partly because the popularity of the resettlement programs was predicated on a few key assumptions, namely that most refugees would arrive from the East, that flows would be limited and sporadic given emigration from the Soviet Union was controlled, and that there would be domestic political support for anti-communist policies. Since these changes were not directly motivated by the need to resettle refugees and restore order to the international community, but by an ancillary function which was to embarrass communist states, they were selectively invoked as precedent in similar future situations. While the strategic refugee regime during the Cold War was limited in duration, it had consequences for future displacements. The decision to assist migrants on strategic grounds on par with purely humanitarian reasons would in turn widen the binary between refugees and other border crossers and reinforce perceptions of who 'deserves' to be protected, ultimately providing future generations with the justification for neglecting certain vulnerable migrants.

Europe's liberal values, tested

Organised violence on the territory of the former Yugoslavia came on the heels of the decline of communism in Europe and final stages of the Cold War in the summer of 1991. The ensuing conflicts, which lasted for the better part of the next decade, resulted in the loss of over 100,000 lives and the forced displacement of more than three million citizens (Nation, 2017). While the weakening of communism in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Soviet Union coincided with the collapse of Yugoslavia, the conflicts cannot be neatly attributed to being a proxy or spin-off of the larger Cold War. The looming transition from socialism to a market democracy and desire to reap the spoils of a prosperous Yugoslavia certainly played a role in the conflict, but the core dynamic and catalyst of the war was militant nationalism (Silber & Little, 1997). This distinction is important as the motivations and nature of warfare created unique legal and ethical challenges. The desire to consolidate power along ethnic lines and build homogenous societies contributed to a lack of militarily constraint and the escalating use of terror (Nation, 2017). As a result, systematic violence against noncombatants and the generation of displaced persons became a strategy in itself, contributing to the atrocities and war crimes that defined the conflict.

While the fall of communism was not directly responsible for the outbreak of conflict in Yugoslavia, the uncertainty and anxiety associated with changing geopolitical order did have an effect on the delayed and tentative intervention from the West. In the 1990s, as the Soviet Union stood on the brink of collapse, Western policy towards displaced persons contracted significantly. The change in attitude towards migration was driven by anxiety that large numbers of people would enter Western Europe, no longer fleeing communist persecution, but rather poverty in the wake of its collapse. Even though this

East-West mass migration never manifested, the fear of the migration itself prompted Western Europe to take preventive policy action. Intergovernmental organisations such as the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development worked to coordinate the policies of Western European countries through agreements that sought to structure and regulate flows between receiving and sending states (Loescher, 2001). These restrictive migration policies and general attitude towards migration extended to Yugoslavia and contributed to later polices of containment despite the fact that the driver of the displacement was fundamentally different. Further, the lack of direct and decisive involvement from Western states would test the resolve and robustness of refugee and peace regimes created in the 20th century and hinted at a new attitude and policy towards displaced persons outside of the Cold War context.

Amidst these challenges, the UNHCR underwent significant changes in its approach. Simultaneously, it also faced an image crisis due to involvement in protracted situations, leading to policies limiting refugees' choices and tarnishing its credibility (Loescher, 2001). In response to reduced opportunities for conventional asylum, the UNHCR adopted a new modus operandi in the 1990s focusing on in-country protection, prevention, and solutions (United Nations, 1992). This expansion of functions faced severe tests in the former Yugoslavia.

Shortly after the outbreak of the war in Bosnia in early 1992, the UNHCR reinforced its commitment to preventive protection, deploying personnel to monitor human rights abuses on the battlefield and provide assistance. Aligned with Western states' containment policies, this approach aimed to mute the need for migration by providing resources directly to affected civilians. However, a miscalculation on the nature and scale of the war rendered even the monitoring of human rights abuses ineffective. The UNHCR, frequently impeded from establishing a presence in areas of ethnic cleansing, found itself powerless in the face of evictions and expulsions (Loescher, 2001). Over three million individuals experienced displacement or sought refuge within the former Yugoslav territories, with Bosnia and Herzegovina accounting for 2.2 million people. Over 800,000 sought sanctuary in various European nations, while 10,000 to 15,000 pursued asylum in overseas locations (Valenta & Strabac, 2013). As the number of vulnerable individuals ballooned from 15 million at the conflict's start to 26 million in 1996, the UNHCR faced the impossible task of delivering humanitarian assistance and legal aid to those on both sides of the conflict.

Despite missteps in their approach to the conflict, the UNHCR was restricted in its capacity to provide assistance due to limited cooperation from Western states who were reluctant to accept asylum seekers. Responding to a large number of internally displaced persons, many countries imposed strict immigration controls, limiting appeals for refugee eligibility decisions and creating barriers for those escaping war, persecution, or seeking new job opportunities (Silber & Little, 1997). The widespread closure of borders to deter unwanted refugee and migrant inflows expanded significantly beyond Cold War-era measures, driven by a new geopolitical landscape and anxiety surrounding mass flows of migrants from the former Soviet Union. Instead of providing legal protections, the UNHCR and Western states attempted to contain or prevent international migrants by providing direct humanitarian assistance and temporary protections. Missteps and lessons learned prompted the creation of institutions like the International Criminal Court and the Temporary Protection Directive, aiming to investigate, prosecute, and deter crimes against humanity and coordinate responses to mass influxes of displaced

persons. By the end of the 20th century, the perception of displaced persons had shifted significantly with the changing world order. Cold War tactics were supplanted by domestic anxieties surrounding migration and integration, transforming 'the refugee' from a symbol of Western liberal values into a burden that strained social resources and sparked divisive debates.

Displacement in the 21st century

During the 20th century, displacement in Europe was largely an internal affair, while during the 21st century displaced populations mostly originated from outside the continent, prominently from Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the key differences regarding displacement between the 20th and 21st centuries has been the aggravation of historical drivers of displacement, such as violence and conflict, alongside emerging factors such as climate change (Braun, 2023). The combination of these issues has resulted in a historically high number of people compelled to leave their homes. At the end of 2022, the UNHCR declared that over 108.4 million people were displaced worldwide, the highest number recorded to date (UNHCR, 2023). This has had significant repercussions not only on a global level, but also on the European level because after the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Europe was once again required to manage significant immigration originating from inside the continent. Other recent events have also highlighted the need to address displacement in Europe, including the Syrian civil war in 2011, instability in North Africa (Lynch, 2017), and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, which all resulted in a significant influx of refugees and migrants into neighbouring countries in the Middle East as well as into EU territory. In the case of Afghanistan, the country has experienced decades of conflict and has a long history of displacement since the 2001 U.S. invasion and even as far back as the Soviet Union invasion in 1979 (Vine et al., 2020). Indeed, the displacement that occurred after the withdrawal of coalition forces, the fall of the Afghan government and the takeover by Taliban forces has marked the "eighth" phase of Afghan displacement since 1979. In a report for the International Organisation for Migration, Afghans are labelled a "forgotten" refugee group, with attention shifting to others such as those fleeing Ukraine (Iqbal et al., 2022).

The immigration of displaced persons has become a source of contention as EU member states on the national and transnational levels have adopted a 'crisis mode' approach. Since the influx of over one million refugees in 2015, many EU member states have felt compelled to counteract a perceived loss of control over arrivals at their borders with policies that aim to reduce migrant arrivals. Consequently, the EU's approach to asylum and migration policy has been described as myopic in responding to the refugee influx through improvisational policy measures, and the gradual shifting of asylum responsibilities to countries outside the EU (Rasche, 2023).

Unlike the 20th century where displacement took place primarily between European states, the EU is no longer the origin but the destination point for many people seeking protection and safety. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the significant role played by Western countries, including many EU states, in various conflicts, especially in the Middle East, forcing people to flee. This is particularly the case with Iraq and Afghanistan where military actions by US and European forces have been a major cause of displacement to EU countries.

To date there are no studies solely examining the impact of EU military interventions on displacement but Brown University has conducted research into the number of refugees caused by the various conflicts following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, to which several EU countries contributed militarily. This suggests that the eight most violent conflicts in which the US was involved as part of the 'War on Terror' - Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, northwest Pakistan and the Philippines - resulted in at least 37 million people fleeing their homes (Vine et al., 2020: 1). Most wars occurred in Middle Eastern countries and these nations have until today been amongst the main countries of origin for refugees in the EU (ibid.). Apart from violence-driven displacement, climate change is another major factor driving those affected by sudden or gradual climate-exacerbated disasters to leave their places of origin. While Western industrialised countries have historically produced high levels of emissions which led to the current climate crisis, countries in the Global South emit less but bear the brunt of the consequences, which can lead to climate-induced displacement (Braun, 2023).

Contribution of Western countries in violence-driven displacement in the Global South has barely been recognised in debates on migration and refugees with displacement in non-EU countries often being seen as being brought about by self-inflicted violence or the aspiration for migrants to benefit from welfare systems in high-income EU countries. Particularly, in the case of the 'refugee crisis', the role of Western countries, including European countries in precipitating displacement is often neglected.

The violence-driven mass displacement in the Middle East has come at a high cost for those seeking protection and taking the decision to migrate towards the EU. The migration routes have become longer and more perilous. In 2014, a record-breaking 219,000 Mediterranean crossings occurred, where individuals from the northern coasts of Africa and Turkey journeyed by boat to reach the shores of Europe. Later that year, the International Organisation of Migration started to record migrant fatalities, corresponding to when the Mediterranean Sea became a site of escalating numbers of migrant deaths. From 2014 until November 2023, 28,248 missing migrants have been recorded (IOM, 2023), turning the Mediterranean into the "largest cemetery" – a term also used by Pope Francis (ECRE, 2022). Daily news coverage of overcrowded migrant boats, shipwrecks, and constant reports of deaths at sea have reached a state of normalcy in reporting on migration journeys across the Mediterranean. This has transformed the sea's historical image as a crossroads of civilisations to one of being the European Union's "invisible fence" (Kassar, 2014).

The evolving meaning and (un)making of 'Fortress Europe'

A paradigm shift that has defined migration policy and public sentiment towards displaced persons in the 21st century is the development of 'Fortress Europe'. The term suggests that Europe, by fortifying its borders, is creating a metaphorical fortress to keep out asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. The term, especially among human rights advocates, is used to criticise the EU's investment in deterrence and infrastructure that is undermining the principles of asylum and humanitarian protection, as outlined in international law. While the term itself is not new – its origins date back to occupied territory controlled by Nazi Germany (Tava, 2014) – it has seen a reemergence in the 21st century as voters and policymakers have generally reoriented themselves towards a more sceptical approach towards migration in general. Anti-immigration political groups in Europe

even embrace the term 'Fortress Europe' for their own agenda and have reinforced the idea in their anti-immigration policy stance. The co-party leader of the German far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, Alice Weidel, has claimed in 2023 that the AfD "wants to turn the EU into a fortress against migrants to protect our homeland, and we do that together with our European partners" (Politico, 2023). This implies working with other right-wing movements across Europe and placing opposition to immigration at the centre of their policy aims.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, more than 1,700 km of border fortifications have prevented irregular migrants from crossing into Europe (Martin, 2023) which represents the equivalent of 12 Berlin Walls (Rigby, 2023). Yet the EU defines itself as "an area of protection for people fleeing persecution or serious harm in their country of origin" (European Commission, 2023a). With the establishment of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in 1999, different regulations have gradually been introduced "to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system – wherever they apply" (ibid.). At the end of the 20th century instead of erecting new borders, borders were dismantled for the first time through the Schengen Agreement. The Agreement, which enabled the free movement of people, goods and capital within participating countries, has been widely regarded as one of the most influential integration methods and historical moments in the EU (Anderson & Bort, 2001). The Agreement essentially made Europe 'borderless' or, as described in a brochure by the European Commission:

> On a continent where nations once shed blood to defend their territories, today borders only exist on maps... The creation of the Schengen area is one of the greatest achievements of the EU and it is irreversible. Now, free movement makes Europe smaller and unites us (European Commission, 2015).

While it was adopted at the end of the 20th century, the Schengen area was first envisioned several decades earlier. Systematic identity controls were still in place on the border between most member states. The motivation for abolishing border controls was economic rather than political (Salomon, 2023). In 1990, the Schengen Convention proposed the complete abolition of systematic internal border controls and a common visa policy. Controls at the internal borders between EU member states have been formally abolished since 1995 and border controls within the Schengen area "are meant to be a thing of the past" (The Economist, 2018).

Since 2015, border controls have been reinstated by five member states on a quasi-permanent basis. The first instance was in response to the 2015 'refugee crisis' and terrorist attacks in France, and subsequently in 2020 to counter the spread of COVID-19 (Salomon, 2023). The reintroduction of border checks as a chain of reactions after 2015 was interpreted as the dislocation of the Schengen area, as a "Schengen crisis" (Börzel & Risse, 2018) and the "death of free movement" (Le Figaro, 2015).

This evolution of Schengen and the temporary reintroduction of border checks suggests that there is a high dependency between enabling free movement in the EU territory for millions of its citizens on the one hand and the need to re-erect border controls for those who are not automatically deemed entitled to enter this territory on the other. The different legal tools and frameworks contained within the CEAS, the EU migration regime, ultimately decide which displaced person deserves protection and which one is to be kept out of the EU. Unlike the previous century, the current age has witnessed a more

contentious response to displacement in Europe. While a new era of free movement for 400 million EU citizens was heralded through the Schengen agreement and led to the abolition of border checks, the celebration of a 'borderless' Europe would only last until high numbers of non-European refugees reached the borders of the EU (Ekim, 2016).

The 2015 'refugee crisis' — a historic test for Europe?

By the end of 2016, approximately 5.2 million refugees and migrants had arrived on Europe's shores, primarily from war-torn countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (UN Refugees, 2023). Germany, France, Italy and Sweden were the primary destinations for most of these refugees, while southern European countries like Italy and Greece faced heightened challenges as they became migration hotspots due to their geographical locations (UNHCR, 2023a).

The displacement resulting from this violence was later dubbed the 'refugee crisis' and has since become a watershed moment in the 21st century for the EU's migration and asylum policies. The events of 2015 were characterised as a 'crisis' primarily because the governments of various EU member states struggled to exert control over the unfolding situation (van der Brug, 2021).

A core part of the refugee reception system in Europe is the Dublin Regulation, which determines which EU member state is responsible for processing asylum applications from individuals seeking international protection within the EU. The Dublin Regulation was originally signed in 1990 and is today also called Dublin III, having been amended several times with its third version coming into force in 2013. Whereas the Schengen Agreement regulates internal migration, the Dublin Regulation is part of the larger CEAS and provides a framework to manage external migration. However, the influx of migrants in 2015 shed light on some shortcomings of the Dublin Regulation and how it lacked a solidarity mechanism allowing the distribution of refugees across EU member states. The regulation placed a disproportionate responsibility on countries located at the external borders of the EU, such as Greece and Italy, as they were often the first points of entry for many refugees and asylum seekers and therefore were required to process the majority of the applications. These countries struggled to cope with the large numbers of arrivals and to provide adequate facilities and resources for processing asylum applications. For its part, Germany decided to welcome over a million Syrian refugees, by temporarily setting aside the Dublin Regulation (Davis, 2020).

The general acceptance of displaced persons did not last for long. Soon after, several member states began to reintroduce border patrols and tighten their national borders. This is still possible within the Schengen Agreement as Article 29 holds that internal border controls can be maintained for more than six months and up to two years if the EU Council of Ministers recognises a systematic threat to the entire Schengen zone. This was invoked for the first time in Greece in May 2016, due to the high surge in arrival numbers and later by Germany, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The German government also made a temporary decision to reinstate border controls with Austria, arguing the move was necessary given the exceptionally large influx of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees attempting to enter Germany without proper documentation. Ironically the same German government that had previously opened its borders to those seeking refuge on humanitarian grounds was now essentially refusing entry and diverting refugees elsewhere (Etzold, 2018).

Understanding the context in which the Dublin Regulation and Schengen Agreement were created is key to understanding the differences in levels of solidarity, political discourse, and arrivals between EU countries. When these regulations were first introduced, they were not envisioned as a mechanism to facilitate responsibility sharing, highlighted by the shortcomings of the Dublin Regulation in 2015 and the disproportionate burden placed on EU border states. The inadequacy of these policies set off a chain reaction where EU member states, frustrated by perceived lack of support, started to build borders and barriers to manage the arrivals unilaterally. The development of these barriers prompted other countries deeper within Europe to construct their own walls, fences, or reintroduce border controls to avoid taking on asylum responsibilities (Armstrong, 2023). In addition to the reintroduction of borders, externalisation policies became an important measure aimed at reducing migrant arrivals on European shores. With a lack of unity in the EU states' response towards relocating refugees among member states and a shift to the right in political discourse, European decision makers have increasingly been looking for refugee policy solutions outside Europe.

Ukrainian displacement and the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive

Russia's military offensive against Ukraine, which escalated on 24 February 2022, caused the fastest and largest forced displacement of people in Europe since the Second World War. By the end of 2022, around 7 million people out of a population of 38 million had fled the country, the majority of them to EU member states. In total nearly a third of the Ukrainian population was forced to flee as an additional 5.9 million people were internally displaced because of the war (European Council, 2023). This was an inflection point for EU migration policymakers as for the first time in the 21st century there was a strong EU consensus on migratory policy. Already before the war began Ukrainian citizens were already eligible to travel into the EU without applying in advance for a visa since 2017 and therefore had earlier on less barriers in EU movement compared to other non-EU migrant groups (European Council, 2017). The EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD, see below) and similar national protection schemes across the EU quickly provided prima facie legal protections and access to residency for the nearly 5 million Ukrainians that registered (European Commission, 2023b). Given the Ukrainians quickly received legal protections and were able to move freely within the EU, they could select their chosen destination. Roughly one million refugees from Ukraine elected to stay in Poland, a neighbour and first country of reception for many. The highest number of refugees had in fact crossed the border to Russia, with 2.85 million recorded by UNHCR by October 2022 although after this date no reliable data is available. Many Ukrainian civilians had little choice but to escape from an active war zone and some were deported by Russian authorities but there is little information about their situation as they are outside the scope of the international protection regime (Kuzemska, 2023). Approximately 1.5 million people transited through Poland and continued to neighbouring countries such as Germany and Czechia, while 1.4 million people sought refuge in other western and southern EU countries. Unlike 2015, the first reception countries were different, with Eastern European countries such as Poland playing a more prominent role. As in 2015, the distribution of migrants across EU member states was uneven, with the UK, France, Italy and Spain together having received just half as many Ukrainians as Poland (UNHCR, 2024). However, unlike 2015, there was a general consensus and willingness among EU countries to accept Ukrainian refugees, exposing a double standard with respect to EU wide quotas

and relocation mechanisms (Tränhardt, 2023). According to a UNHCR survey, around 76% of Ukrainian refugees in Europe plan or hope to return to Ukraine one day, with a few returns already taking place, showing there is a lack of clarity for both Ukrainian refugees and their host country regarding the duration of their stay (UNHCR, 2023b).

EU 'selective' welcome of refugees?

By definition, the TPD is an emergency mechanism which is activated in exceptional circumstances of mass influx. It was originally adopted in 2001 following the large-scale displacement due to the armed conflicts in the Western Balkans, in particular from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (European Council, 2023). The introduction of the TPD signified a shift towards more long-term planning that was largely missing at the time. However, the recent activation of the TPD and conspicuous absence of its use in 2015, has opened the EU to charges of double standards in asylum policy. This situation is best illustrated by the fact that the border with Ukraine has since the visa free travel scheme been open in Poland while asylum seekers arriving in Belarus from the Middle East and North Africa are frequently prevented from lodging asylum claims, sometimes through the use of force. Additionally, negotiations on the recently agreed solidarity mechanism have shown that the apparent unity among member states, as demonstrated when activating the TPD, is likely to be short-lived. Instead of having all member states commit to receiving asylum seekers, the TPD envisions voluntary relocations by a coalition of willing member states (Rasche, 2023). In a 2020 regulation, the European Commission had suggested it would not even consider this, stating it "no longer [responds] to member states' current reality" and that its activation is not possible (European Commission, 2020). The possibility of using the TPD for refugees from Afghanistan was also raised during the mass displacement that followed the Taliban takeover in 2021 with one media outlet stating that:

> "[t]here's a directive from 2001 that has never been used, and this might be the occasion to use it in order to face the situation of mass migration problem that can affect some member states" (Euronews, 2021).

However, before the mass arrival of Ukrainians it was never activated.

With the Ukrainian refugee situation viewed differently due to a sense of shared European values and support for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, the EU displayed a more welcoming approach than in prior displacement contexts. This U-turn demonstrates on the one hand that the EU is able to rapidly and uniformly find solutions and gather support for around 6 million displaced Ukrainians in Europe. At the same time, it has made the EU subject to the charge of having double standards with its migration policy towards non-Ukrainian refugees seeking protection in Europe and being confronted with border pushbacks and potentially deadly sea crossings. Ukrainian refugees are not perceived as a similar threat as refugees from non-European countries of origin, which partially explains the more welcoming stance of EU countries and their societies towards their reception. Some authors have argued the Ukrainian reception policy resembles Cold War migration policies, where welcoming refugee reception programs were tied to geopolitical and ideological goals (Stünzi, 2022). Yet the current development illustrates that it is unlikely that this is leading to a wider policy change that will be extended to other refugee groups. The Ukrainian reception currently exists in parallel with more discriminatory practices towards non-European refugee groups and thus far has not been shown to have led to more inclusionary policies on the whole.

Conclusion

Addressing mass displacement in Europe and giving protection to displaced populations has historically been a long and complex process, with different interests at play between individuals, states and institutions. Defining who counts as a refugee or who should be granted protection or asylum and receive support has been subject to long-standing discussions since its historical conceptions. In the aftermath of the Second World War differentiated international regulations for the protection of refugees were established for the first time. Around 60 million people in the European continent were forcibly on the move as result of the Second World War, which then equalled around ten percent of Europe's population.

However, as one writer noted, "in the 21st century, a border is not just a line on a map; it is a system for filtering people that stretches from the edges of a territory into its heart" (Trilling, 2018). Reflecting on the impact of the changes of the 21st century on migration, the initial celebration of a 'borderless' Europe through free movement agreements was called into question with the arrivals of refugees from the Middle East in 2015. These unprecedented high numbers of arrivals were also strongly linked to the rise of nationalist and populist movements in some European countries, prompting debates with growing concerns about immigration.

While in the 20th century the most important legal and institutional frameworks were created to offer protection for displaced populations, the 21st century has only witnessed a polarisation of debates on refugee reception and a further division of who is worthy of protection schemes and who is unwelcome in the EU. While the reasons for this are manifold and complex, one major change here that has to do with increasing securitisation is the perception of refugees and migrants as a threat to society. This is not a novel trend and opposition to migrants and refugees has always been debated, yet a stronger trend towards polarisation has been growing steadily since the 1990s. Despite the fact that most refugees are located in, and restricted to, the Global South, the tendency of local populations in Western industrialised states to feel threatened by an influx of refugees is highest. Political parties on the right in Europe have been making use of this perceived threat and often focus their political campaigns on claims that refugees and migrants are a burden on the labour market, the welfare system, and a direct threat to national and cultural identity. The 'otherisation' and use of xenophobic speech referring to refugee groups, especially if they are contrasted as being 'different' to the national population, has fuelled this perception that refugees pose a threat to national institutions. Refugees from Middle Eastern or African countries of origin are those that are most 'otherised' and discriminated against. This 'otherisation' however does not apply universally or equally. For example, Ukrainians were granted comparatively exceptional status in terms of treatment and protection schemes and Western media outlets described Ukrainian refugees deserving more protection as they were perceived as similar to Euopeans than other non-EU refugee groups (Sales, 2023).

Perceived challenges related to border control, security concerns, and 'burden-sharing' among EU member states have more recently dominated the debate on migration and Europe — and at times become its Achilles heel. The pushback against immigration led to political polarisation and debates about the very essence of European identity. One contentious issue was the use of migrants as 'bargaining chips' in EU migration debates. The treatment and fate of migrants became entangled in political negotiations, further complicating the already intricate web of immigration policies and practices in the EU. The

EU's reaction to displacement occurring in Ukraine exemplifies a major contrast here, compared to its former focus on border controls.

These border practices and constant trends towards securitisation and externalisation of refugees and the many migrants and refugees who have died crossing the sea also undermine the ideas behind the 1951 Refugee Convention and make the differentiation more obvious between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' refugees. The rapid response from EU member states and the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, for the first time in more than 20 years, unlike the case of Syrian refugees in 2015, has brought the stark contrast between the treatment of Ukrainian and non-European refugees to the fore. This has led to criticism of these perceived double standards and has also prompted calls for the unity and solidarity shown by EU leaders to Ukrainian refugees to serve as an example of how other refugee groups could be welcomed in the future.

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Chapter 2

Displacement, gender and civil society

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Milana Lazić

Introduction

Over the last decade, the dynamics of mixed migration flows in Europe have grown increasingly complex, especially when one considers the circumstances of displaced persons through a gender lens. The diverse gender identities of displaced persons, i.e. whether someone identifies as a heterosexual, woman or a man, homosexual or lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, queer, non-binary, intersex, (EU Gender Equality Strategy, 2020), their gender identity and sexual orientation may significantly influence their experiences, including their safety and health risks, as they journey from their country of origin into the EU.

The gender-related risks associated with this migration process can make people more susceptible to safety issues through experiences of gender discrimination and gender-based violence. These risks underscore vulnerabilities that require a nuanced gender-sensitive approach and response, emphasising inclusion and the need for an inclusive migration policy. The consequences of neglecting a gender-sensitive approach are extensive, ranging from violations of the individual human rights of displaced persons — such as discriminatory attitudes adversely affecting the mental and physical health of different genders and sexual orientation, particularly LBGTIQ persons — to the undermining of the overall process of their inclusion and integration, resulting in increased social distance.

This chapter focuses on the gender-specific experiences of displaced persons, drawing on real-life narratives from interviews conducted with affected people. It explores to what extent existing EU policies on the integration and inclusion of displaced persons incorporate gender mainstreaming and address diverse gender needs and focuses on the experience and expertise of civil society organisations as first responders in qualitatively monitoring policy implementation through a gender lens. The report scrutinises how EU member states facilitate integration and inclusion in crucial areas like education, employment, health and housing, using personal stories of displaced persons to reveal barriers and vulnerabilities that can compromise their integration prospects.

A gender perspective examines reality by analysing power relations between different gender identities and their social interactions. Gender analysis thus offers a framework for interpreting and critically analysing differences in gender roles, needs and opportunities that affect displaced women and men, including LGBTIQ persons (EIGE, 2016). A gender perspective should be indispensable in the formulation of EU migration policies, offering a framework to scrutinise power dynamics and social interactions with the understanding that gender and gender identity are socially constructed categories (ibid.). Without comprehensive gender considerations or mainstreaming in migration policies, there is a risk of overlooking the diverse needs of women, men and LGBTIQ persons and opening space for gender discrimination. Thus, an inclusive approach to gender and sexual orientation is paramount for the development of policies and best practices that address the varied gender identities, experiences, power dynamics and social interactions (Butler, 2021).

This report relies on qualitative research methods, primarily utilising individual, semi-structured interviews with displaced persons. It is complemented by insights from existing reports by CSOs, enriching the depth and scope of the analysis.

The gender aspect of displacement in the EU today

Contemporary displacement trends within the European Union have been significantly influenced by the so-called 'refugee crisis' originating from conflict-affected countries and regions in the Middle East and Africa in 2015 and 2016. The situation has been further complicated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2022.[1]

As a result of the Russo-Ukrainian war, there has been a noticeable shift in the gender composition of displaced persons. Between 2015 and 2022, it was predominantly men who sought asylum, making up approximately 70% of applicants from various origin countries, including conflict areas like Syria and Afghanistan, as well as countries like Venezuela, Turkey and Colombia (Eurostat, 2023). However, recent displacement trends indicate changes in gender ratios, particularly evident in the influx of Ukrainian refugees. The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused one of the fastest and largest forced displacement events since the Second World War. In July 2023, more than 4.1 million non-EU citizens had temporary protection status in EU countries. Among these, 98% are Ukrainian nationals (ibid.). Restrictions on male emigration from Ukraine have led to a refugee demographic primarily composed of women, children, and the elderly.[2] In host countries like Italy and Poland, women now constitute over 80% of the refugee population, highlighting the need for integration policies that prioritise measures such as childcare to support the labour market participation of predominantly adult female refugees. It is interesting to note that over the years, women seeking asylum tend to achieve a higher success rate in obtaining refugee protection than men.

Furthermore, the conflict in Ukraine has triggered a significant exodus of Russian citizens. Understanding Russian emigration is challenging due to varying legal regulations across host countries, resulting in unclear precise numbers and a lack of gender-specific data. Nevertheless, available statistics indicate a noteworthy increase in Russians relocating to the EU, with a roughly 33% rise in first-time residence permits issued from 2021 to 2022, with more permits granted to women than men (Eurostat, 2023). For Russian emigrants to the EU, employment often serves as the primary reason for men obtaining a residence permit, while family-related reasons are more common among women (ibid.). In examining the reasons for leaving Russia, testimonials from recent Russian emigrants suggest that avoiding conscription and fear of persecution for political and civic involvement were pivotal motives, particularly among activists of LGBTIQ organisations who face heightened risks under Putin's government.[3]

In the context of asylum applications in Europe, experiences and outcomes between men and women are significantly divergent, mainly due to the types of persecution faced and their recognition within asylum legal frameworks regarding their gender identity. As noted by one interviewee, a human rights defender of displaced LGBTIQ migrants, seeking asylum in the EU based on gender also means trying to escape a society where you don't have the rights that you can get in the EU (Interview G7).

1 See Chapter 1 for a comprehensive overview.

2 Interviews conducted for this report reveal that the mandatory mobilisation in Ukraine meant that women were predominantly able to flee the country, while men found it significantly more difficult, if not impossible.

3 This information was gained from anonymous testimonials and discussions with several activists and CSOs from Russia who are either still in Russia or emigrated with their work outside Russia.

Despite the official definition of refugee not explicitly referencing gender, there is a broad acknowledgement that gender significantly shapes the nature of persecution or harm experienced, and a proper interpretation should extend coverage to encompass gender-related claims (Niżyńska, 2015). Additionally, women seeking refugee status often come from the same background as men but seek help for different reasons (ibid.). Adopting a gender perspective in granting refugee status requires a comprehensive analysis of the asylum process, considering whether women or men, including members of the LGBTIQ community, are victims of persecution simply because of their gender or if each gender experiences equal persecution with differing characteristics due to their gender.

Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge persecution when displaced people suffer consequences for not adhering to gender-specific religious expectations. The assessment of claims related to religion include considering gender-specific restrictions such as clothing requirements, movement limitations, and traditional practices. In certain states, religious norms assign distinct roles or behavioural codes to women and men. When a woman deviates from her assigned role or rejects these codes, and faces punishment as a result, she may legitimately fear religious persecution. Non-compliance with these codes could be misinterpreted as holding unacceptable religious or political opinions (UNHCR, 2004).

The EU policy response to the gender aspect of displacement

It is crucial to note the key EU documents in gender equality policy when evaluating whether and how these risks are considered. The Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) of the EU emphasises that all actors should include gender mainstreaming with targeted actions, intersectionality as a horizontal principle for its implementation, and support the specific needs of women in the asylum procedure. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) highlighted protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls. Other relevant strategic documents are the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (2020-2025), the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation, the EU Equality Strategy (2020-2025), and the forthcoming Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, along with the Gender Action Plan of the External European Action Service (2020-2027).

Integration policies guided by the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy of 2004 and the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (European Commission, 2011) continue to face significant challenges in recognising and effectively addressing the diverse gender-related needs of migrants, encompassing various genders and non-binary persons.

Displaced migrants encounter substantial difficulties in accessing national protection mechanisms due to their unique circumstances, not least because they often lack legal documents from both their countries of origin and destination, placing them at a distinct disadvantage in terms of legal protection. As a key document for shaping national integration policies, the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (European Commission, 2021) incorporates all pertinent guidelines for member states on how better to address the needs and challenges faced by migrants, including their specific gender-related needs. Despite feedback during consultations on the revision of the Action Plan in 2016,

the new Action Plan only partially recognises the specific needs of certain migrant groups and potential cross-cutting issues such as various forms of discrimination (e.g., based on gender, sexual orientation, age and ability).

The way that member states follow the EU's guidelines on integration is an ongoing process with different levels of progress. Some countries are successfully putting certain integration measures in place but there are ongoing challenges, making it difficult to achieve and measure consistent success across the entire EU. As noted by one interviewee:

> "We still don't have gender sensitive policies consistently across member states. In some we have more, in others we don't have any. We still don't have a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities people are experiencing at the borders, in destination countries, and in transit. These efforts are valuable but at the same time we need to underline that a lot of things still need to be done." (Interview G5)

In recent years, some EU member states have seen political parties using migration as a major election topic, often with an anti-immigration stance. This has led to a decrease in efforts to integrate newcomers or shift to an opposing narrative (ECRE, 2020b), creating gaps between policies and what actually happens, showing that improvement is still needed (Interview G5). For example, the Polish parliament passed a bill in March 2021 to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, including a draft of a new law known as 'Yes to Family – No to Gender' (Observatory for Socio-political Developments in Europe, 2021). It called for mobilisation against gender equality as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights, LGBTIQ persons, and civil society (ibid., p.2). Furthermore, the Bulgarian Constitutional Court ruled the Istanbul Convention to be at odds with the country's constitution. Civil society groups working on women's rights, victims of violence against women, and LGBTIQ issues have faced "smear campaigns, hate speech in the media, cuts in funding and physical attacks" (CoE Parliamentary Assembly, 2021). Similar dynamics detrimental to women's and LGBTIQ rights have been observed in Slovakia, which refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention (ibid.), and also in Croatia and Lithuania.

Despite this, the EU has recognised the risks of falling standards due to backlashes against gender equality, and in 2023 the European Parliament ratified the Istanbul Convention. As of early 2024 it had been signed by all EU member states and ratified by all apart from Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia. In 2021, the Council of Europe, adopted a resolution to combat the increase of hate speech and hate crimes, including violence against LGBTIQ persons throughout Europe, which was organised with wide-ranging campaigns from political and religious leaders (ILGA, 2021).

Personal stories of discrimination

Displaced migrants, particularly women and members of the LGBTIQ community often encounter gender-sensitive risks that intensify their vulnerabilities in the context of forced migration. There are many factors that determine why and how women migrate, including gender roles and migration policy frameworks (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2022). One overriding concern is safety: the heightened risk of gender-based violence; bullying and exploitation; and a lack of access to healthcare during the journey and in overcrowded refugee camps or temporary settlements.

Based on evidence collected from interviews, women fleeing Ukraine often report more safety triggers, a lack of mental health support or access to hygienic facilities as reasons for leaving refugee centres or changing locations – either to different cities or different EU member states (Interviews G1 & G3). This issue is exemplified in the experiences of displaced Ukrainian women who took different paths into the EU and experienced bullying and harassment. R. R. notes:

> "I was initially hosted by an all-male family in Amsterdam, where I faced harassment and demands to stay indoors. The neighbours verbally attacked me, nobody asked me how I was doing or what I was thinking. My well-being and my perspective were not taken into account. I felt compelled to adapt to their wants and needs without being able to express my feelings. Later, I moved to an acquaintance's home, where I unexpectedly faced aggression and bullying, forcing me to move again out of fear for my safety." (Interview G1)

Reflecting on her experience of being accommodated in a refugee camp, L. T. points out:

> "I faced safety concerns in refugee camps, with personnel searching my room without consent. I experienced food poisoning and a skin allergy without medical attention. In Germany, a male host who initially offered work later bullied me, stole my equipment, and verbally abused me, causing fear and a sense of worthlessness." (Interview G3)

From the interviews, there are reports of Ukrainian women being exploited: "I have heard stories of [Ukrainian] women being kidnapped and their passports being taken away" (Interview G1).

CSOs working in the field have the impression that men also face vulnerabilities. They are often at increased risk of physical violence during their journey and under significantly greater pressure to fulfil traditional roles as providers for their families, leading to serious mental health issues and addiction to psychoactive substances. Male migrants are more likely to be stopped by the police and detained (based on being undocumented or on asylum-related grounds) than females. Despite underreporting and stigma, they are also vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse (Bartolini & Zakoska-Todorovska, 2022), especially homosexual and trans men (Interviews G7 & G8). The lack of targeted support services and societal norms that discourage seeking help highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches in migration policies and support services. Female migrants often face greater integration challenges than males due to dual barriers associated with being both a migrant and female, including contending with stereotypes (Fleury, 2016). Moreover, the interviews conducted with displaced persons indicate that many women, queer, non-binary, and trans persons are prone to re-traumatisation and vulnerability meaning that finding a space to feel safe can be very difficult (Interviews G1 & G3).

Social tensions, gender stereotypes and ethnicity-based discrimination can also be experienced by displaced persons in host communities. EU residents with a migrant background regularly encounter direct or subtle discrimination, as well as racism, while seeking housing, jobs, or simply in everyday situations at school, in their community, or at their place of work (European Commission, 2020c). This prejudice can stem purely from their status as a migrant but can intensify due to their ethnicity, race, religious beliefs, or convictions. As one Ukrainian interviewee noted:

> "I have experienced several times people approaching us in the park after hearing us speak in our native language, playing Russian music and saying bad things about Ukraine and Ukrainian women [...] And in Berlin, two months after the war started, there was a big parade where Russian people were celebrated." (Interview G1)

Such stories underscore the pressing need to address and mitigate the gender-specific risks faced by displaced women during migration and in host communities.

While gender considerations are not uniformly integrated into asylum policies across all countries, some have made strides in adopting gender-sensitive practices. In Greece, some of these positive practices include providing female interviewers for women asylum seekers, allowing expert testimony on gender-based violence, offering training for asylum officers, and ensuring childcare during interviews (Interview G4). However, challenges persist, particularly regarding the provision of adequate reception standards: "One of the pressing needs is securing accessible and pre-existing emergency accommodation for gender-based violence in order to swiftly support survivors during crises" (ibid.). In other countries, challenges include placing individuals in reception centres based on sex rather than gender, potentially leading to discriminatory policies later. Inconsistencies across different countries remain, and the success of women's asylum claims often depends on navigating these complex systems within the specific legal and cultural context of the host nation.

Understanding and addressing the gender dimensions of displacement trends is critical for tailoring effective policies that meet the diverse needs of displaced populations, especially considering the evolving nature of conflicts and their impact on demographic compositions.

LGBTIQ vulnerability

The LGBTIQ community represents a particularly vulnerable group within the context of displacement. For persons who do not confirm to traditional male or female identities — for example trans, queer, non-binary, or homosexual people — reasons for migration often revolve around the pursuit of freedom in expressing their gender identity outside assigned roles, the possibility of engaging in same-sex partnerships, or seeking specific health treatments – the latter being particularly relevant for trans persons.

The European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) notes a significant increase in asylum claims based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics in recent years (SOGIESC, 2022). This rise is particularly noteworthy given the criminalisation of same-sex relationships in numerous refugee-producing countries, such as Afghanistan and Iran.[4] But the problems faced by LGBTIQ migrants are not immediately solved when they enter the EU:

4 According to the Human Dignity Trust, 65 jurisdictions criminalise private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity. See: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/.

> "I didn't know how to say that [I am gay] and didn't want to talk about it with the official interpreter who was present during the interview. He was from the Arab community, and I didn't know how he would react." (Refugees Deeply, 2017)

It is essential to highlight that LGBTIQ migrants can face intersecting forms of discrimination. In the Netherlands, notably the first country to recognise same-sex marriages in 2001, authorities have introduced the challenging policy that asylum seekers should prove their sexuality (The World, 2017). As one interviewee noted, the asylum claims "are still being assessed based on criteria of self-acceptance and awareness" (Interview G7). It can be a much easier process if you accept your own sexuality, which can be difficult when coming from an environment in which you have had to suppress it.

> "In other words, the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) continuously imposes an image from our Western society, while the starting point should actually be 'how does the society you want to escape from deal with it?'" (ibid.)

Similar practices exist in Austria, where one applicant was denied asylum based on the argument that "neither your walk, your behaviour, nor your clothing indicate even in the slightest that you could be homosexual" (The Nation, 2020).

Many EU member states navigate different social and cultural norms for displaced LGBTIQ persons, advising asylum seekers to conceal their sexual identity in countries where homosexuality is criminalised (ibid.). There is a need for dedicated LGBTIQ shelters to prevent ongoing discrimination, posing risks of suicide and hindering integration efforts.

While specific data on the experiences of LGBTIQ migrants is often lacking, other evidence and testimonies highlight that activists fleeing Russia face similar fears of persecution (Interview G8). Although the migration experience exposes women and minority groups to greater vulnerability compared to men, it is crucial to recognise that men, particularly homosexual, trans, queer, and non-binary men, also encounter specific safety and security risks during their migration journey.

Adding another layer of complexity is the issue of documentation for trans people in transition. A trans woman from Lebanon, was rejected in Germany on the grounds that she crossed from Turkey to Greece as a man and therefore couldn't be considered trans (Refugees Deeply, 2017). This poses unique challenges and vulnerabilities for this group, requiring specialised attention and support in the context of displacement.

These problems persist, even though the European Court of Justice concluded that asking asylum seekers to provide proof of their sexual orientation violates their privacy and dignity (ECLI, 2014). Understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by LGBTIQ migrants, considering both their gender identity and sexual orientation, is crucial for developing effective and inclusive policies that promote their safety, well-being, and successful integration.

The role of civil society in gender mainstreaming: how does it work in practice?

Civil society plays a significant role in promoting and safeguarding the rights of displaced migrants. Its importance extends to recognising and addressing gender-related needs, and ensuring an inclusive approach that considers the requirements of the most vulnerable. Reports and findings from civil society and service providers not only shed light on the diverse needs of displaced persons, but also provide essential evidence, which can offer valuable insights when it comes to policymaking (Interview G5). Starting from an evidence-based approach, CSOs have done tremendous work on incorporating and developing the gender dimension in national asylum and migration policies.

LGBT Asylum Support, an organisation that assists refugees who have fled to the Netherlands because of their sexuality, observed that LGBTIQ asylum-seekers in the Netherlands are at risk of having their asylum applications rejected because their sexual orientation is deemed 'not credible' by the criteria of the IND. In response, they launched the 'Not Gay Enough' campaign, demanding that a new expert committee be created to assess LGBTIQ asylum appeals. Through lobbying efforts, they successfully influenced the institution, resulting in an adjustment of the IND's working instructions in 2018. Sandro Kortekaas, chairman of the organisation, says:

> "We had a strong argument based on research from a wide range of incidents, revealing incorrect assessments based on self-acceptance and the awareness process. Due to our petition and report, the State Secretary was instructed to adjust the existing working instructions. Our plan was actually for it to be completely renewed, but it ended up being just an adjustment. And to this day, we have noted that the IND still applies incorrect assessments, not everywhere, but sporadically." (Interview G7)

A further example from Poland raises concerns about medical assistance provided to asylum seekers, specifically allegations of hindering access to specialised medical care. Some people were denied expensive treatments, such as specialised care for HIV or hepatitis C (Pachocka, et al., 2020). It was only through the monthly advocacy efforts of CSOs that asylum seekers were finally able to access the necessary medical care (AIDA, 2021).
Through their advocacy efforts, including social media campaigns, CSOs are making a big impact in the fight against gender discrimination and violence at the national level. In Lithuania, they have been actively involved in supporting key initiatives, such as the ratification process of the Istanbul Convention, and undertaking comprehensive anti-violence campaigns as part of their broader commitment to fostering positive social change. Individual activists can also play a crucial role in spreading awareness and countering the rise of detrimental narratives. One example is the project 'Stop Funding Fake News' (Szakacs & Bognar, 2021) initiated by activists concerned about the rapid spread of anti-gender and anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe. They successfully managed to shut down the anti-immigrant site Voice of Europe by openly criticising companies advertising on fake news websites, ultimately influencing advertisers to remove their adverts and creating a lack of revenue for the targeted site (ibid.).

The work of CSOs at the national level is crucial as the direct results of their efforts and the success of their advocacy initiatives have the most visible and immediate effects on enhancing the position and protection of displaced migrants. Civil society has also been

playing a crucial role in supporting state institutions in providing targeted direct support services to displaced migrants. As noted by one female interviewee in the Netherlands: "Representatives of CSOs working in reception facilities are really helping refugees: they speak Ukrainian, provide psychosocial support to us, organise yoga classes and theatre tickets, and so on" (Interview G1).

Moreover, CSOs campaign for the enhancement of integration policies at the EU level. This is particularly relevant due to the absence of a structured monitoring system and the lack of comprehensive sex-segregated data and an intersectional approach at the EU level, limiting the ability to measure improvements in integration outcomes and assess the specific needs of displaced persons. By independently monitoring the implementation of national integration policies using a comparative methodology across different EU countries, such as the Migrant Integration Policy Index methodology (MIPEX, 2020), civil society is able to gather important intersectional data. This is also available in the Gender Statistics Database of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), where intersectional information on sex, age, migration status, citizenship, educational attainment level, employment, country of birth, etc., are key indicators used by civil society to understand gender gaps. Civil society should continue to campaign for more sex-segregated data and the comprehensive use of gender mainstreaming tools in migration policy and integration. This evidence can serve as a foundation for formulating recommendations to improve and ensure more effective and inclusive integration policies at the national and EU levels.

Main challenges to the inclusion of gender-specific policies

Understanding and addressing the gender-specific challenges in access to education, employment, housing and healthcare is pivotal for fostering the successful integration of displaced persons into host societies. These areas serve as main pillars in the process of integration, influencing displaced persons' well-being, autonomy, and social inclusion. By examining the gender dimension within these key areas, we explore opportunities for targeted interventions to enhance integration processes.

Education

Educational challenges for female migrants in Europe arise from systemic barriers, including legal issues impeding eligibility for certain educational opportunities, difficulties in having foreign qualifications recognised, and financial constraints limiting the pursuit of further education. This affects how quickly and to what extent migrant and refugee women can re-enter their professional fields.

Political instability and conflict in home countries may hinder the acquisition of official documentation, potentially devaluing their previous education. R. R. from Ukraine graduated from art school and obtained a degree at a Ukrainian university. However, in Amsterdam, where she obtained her legal residency, she cannot present her degree as it was left at home. She is unsure if she will ever be able to retrieve it and prove her qualifications. For this reason she was forced to take on lower-skilled jobs as a source of in-

come (Interview G1). V. M. is an educated male Ukrainian who was imprisoned by Russian soldiers in his home city of Donetsk. He managed to escape to Lithuania and after some time was given a job in a local military institution as a janitor. "As a child psychologist, it is difficult for me to find a job in my field because the diploma needs to be certified by a notary, translated, and I need to sufficiently learn the language" (Interview G2). These two experiences show that previous education and experience can easily be devalued without official documentation.

Research shows that education has a stronger positive effect on adult learning for women than for men. Family factors also play a role: having a child increases the likelihood of men participating in adult learning, but not for women. Living with a partner negatively affects women's participation but doesn't impact men. Additionally, women are more likely than men to see family responsibilities as a barrier to adult learning (Stoilova, et al., 2023).

Language proficiency is often cited as a critical hurdle: being able to speak the language of the host country is typically a key requirement for educational and employment opportunities. However, accessing language courses can be challenging due to potential costs and conflicts with work schedules or family responsibilities, which are frequently reported to affect women to a greater extent than men. Many host countries in Europe have programs aimed at enhancing the education and integration of migrants and refugees, which can help improve their educational profiles over time. The Lithuanian government has organised a three-month free language course for basic-level Lithuanian for Ukrainians, with a stipend. "With the certificate I received, I believe I have better chances in accessing the job market and integrating into society", said V. M. (Interview G2).

Economic challenges

Integrating migrant women into the labour market is a significant challenge. Numerous obstacles are present, including a lack of language skills, no recognition of qualifications, being forced to take a job that does not match one's skills and qualifications, discriminatory practices in recruitment processes, and a lack of access to childcare (FRA, 2019).

> "Migrant women are often more highly educated than migrant men, but they still experience deskilling because they are usually employed in low quality jobs compared to their own qualifications. They have to accept these jobs as they have no other chance to find a high-quality job." (Interview G5)

Unemployment rates for migrant women remain consistently high, both in comparison to migrant men and native women. Variations exist based on region and sector, emphasising the necessity for tailored interventions. Notably, women born outside the EU generally exhibit lower employment rates across EU regions. In Eastern European member states, employment rates for women born outside of the EU are relatively higher than in Western European states (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2022).[5]

5 Rates are 70-80% higher in Estonia, Lithuania, Czechia and Hungary; they are 60-69% higher in Poland, Latvia, Slovakia and Bulgaria.

Data published on intersectionality show a gender gap in the employment rate of male and female migrants in EU member states (EIGE, 2022) with male migrants having higher levels of employment intersected with their attained educational level. Identifying country-specific obstacles is crucial to define targeted interventions, leverage the employment potential and balance gender gaps. As pointed out by one interviewee:

> "Many CSO workers, based on field experience, note that among Middle Eastern and African migrants, there are highly educated women willing to work in less skilled jobs, but they still face challenges due to a lack of childcare support." (Interview G6)

Moreover, in countries where a lack of access to childcare leads to adult female migrants not entering the job market, integration policies that prioritise initiatives such as childcare are desperately needed.

Apart from gender-specific obstacles, migrant women face additional challenges in labour market integration. These include a lack of targeted job-seeking counselling, limited proactive employment initiatives, and scarce exclusive services for vulnerable refugee subsets. Only a few member states provide dedicated personnel and proactive initiatives for guiding job-hunting refugees, with exclusive services available in Sweden for those with disabilities, violence and abuse victims, and lone minors, and in Italy for disabled refugees and lone minors (EIGE, 2022).

> "In the pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable society, it is imperative that inclusion policies prioritise the economic empowerment of migrant women. By granting them financial independence, we as a society not only uplift individual lives but also contribute to the creation of a diverse, resilient, and thriving community for all. Thus, in order to empower women with limited formal education, it is crucial to implement inclusive educational initiatives, covering literacy, language, and practical skills. Recognising the strong interest among migrant women, simultaneous support like childcare services is essential for their active participation. This reflects a commitment to fostering inclusive and supportive policies." (Interview G10)

Access to employment also has a great impact on mental health. As one female refugee from Iran stated:

> "I have been living in the camp for around 9 months with my husband and children. When I first arrived, I felt extremely unwell, spending days confined to my room, sitting and crying, feeling very unsettled. Subsequently, my husband informed me about a sewing workshop and a gathering place for women. I started going there daily. Learning to sew has brought joy back into my life. In Iran, I was solely a housewife, but now I can pursue this craft – sewing shirts, bedding, and frequently making alterations for myself. It has acted as a healing process for me." (Interview G11)

Even when employed, migrant women are often overqualified, risking skill depreciation. Additionally, they may experience workplace harassment, feeling unprotected and discouraged from seeking help:

> "I experienced verbal bullying and was denied access to my personal belongings after resigning. He [the employer] began yelling at both me and my friend because he was interested in her. We attempted to leave but I was working there unofficially. During the confrontation, he threatened to take all our belongings, including cash, laptops, and phones. My personal items were inside the studio, which he locked. He declared that if we stayed, he would return our possessions, but if we left, we wouldn't get anything back. Our reluctance to report the case was driven by a desire to get out of there quickly." (Interview G3)

Inclusive healthcare

Healthcare presents intricate challenges for displaced populations with unique gender-related experiences. Immediate medical needs are not always addressed, and long-term health requirements often remain unmet. This is particularly evident in the limited access to mental health support.

> "Until recently it wasn't considered important, and people really started talking about it, especially CSOs and migrant women's organisations. They started to talk about trauma and how to deal with it." (Interview G5)

Interviewees with a migration background emphasised the emotional and psychological aspects of trauma experienced in their home countries or during their journeys. One interviewee noted: "At the beginning, for the first two months, I heard the sirens all the time, it never stopped in my head" (Interview G1). Another shared their health concerns:

> "I couldn't obtain regular healthcare while staying in Bavaria, Germany, even though I was suffering from heavy allergies. I also had problems with my lymph nodes for the first time, but all the explanation that I got was 'you shouldn't have shaved that area'. Only when I finally moved to Tbilisi, Georgia, could I get all the necessary medical care." (Interview G3)

These (mental) health concerns may be overlooked, underscoring the necessity for gender-sensitive healthcare policies and interventions. Both men and women emphasise the lack of psychological support and post-traumatic stress disorder counselling in transit or destination countries (Interviews G1 & G2). But even in those countries where psychological support services exist, there is room for further improvement. This is underlined by one male Ukrainian refugee:

> "In Lithuania, there is a telephone hotline for support for Ukrainian refugees, but I am also a psychologist by education, and I cannot talk to them because they just repeat my problems back to me." (Interview G2)

Furthermore, there is a heightened risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts, as well as depression, intensified by different gender identities. Studies indicate up to 14 times more suicide attempts among LGBTIQ people, with rates of depression over five times higher among transgender persons and 3.5 times higher among lesbian, gay and bisexual persons than in the general population (Moagiet al., 2021).

These examples further underline that the needs of displaced migrants necessitate additional services targeting their specific requirements, particularly in the areas of counselling and continuous care for chronic illnesses. Data collected in the EU and Norway between 2016-2020 reveal that third-country female migrants face greater challenges in accessing medical care compared with their male counterparts and the general population (EMN, 2022).

Various factors contribute to this disparity, including cultural barriers, lack of knowledge about the healthcare system, or economic reasons affecting the ability to seek timely and appropriate healthcare. Women, trans persons, persons living with HIV, and LGBTIQ persons encounter significant barriers when seeking medical help, with fear of deportation hindering access, especially for those with HIV. Specific gender-related health issues are exemplified by the challenges faced by Ukrainian migrants in Germany, such as access and language barriers. On the Greek island of Lesbos HIV patients struggled to access antiviral medication, leading to severe health consequences (Interview G4). The issues with access to healthcare for some migrants have been a key factor in moving between different EU member states to obtain a supply of medicine across borders.

Reproductive health poses severe challenges for migrant women. Migrant women face obstacles in accessing necessary maternal and reproductive health services due to language barriers, lack of information or legal status. This is particularly evident in Poland:

> "For Ukrainian refugees fleeing the devastation of invasion, women who require urgent abortion care after experiencing serious sexual assault face the shock of Poland's harsh and draconian abortion legislation. They must either return to Ukraine and the treacherous conditions they have just fled, navigate confusing systems to seek care or proceed with their pregnancies, where the severe emotional distress of carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term is compounded by the fear that any problems they may face could result in death." (Lempart & Donadio, 2023)

The illegality of abortion has led to dangerous practices and victims of gender-based violence struggle to cover healthcare costs. The current repressive law criminalising abortion has created conditions for illegal procedures, compelling some women to move to other EU member states. In cases of pregnancy resulting from human trafficking and sex work, women face barriers in protecting their health. Additionally, victims of gender-based violence encounter challenges as healthcare costs are not covered, proving to be prohibitively expensive. In some instances CSOs play a crucial role in covering the costs of healthcare services to ensure women can access them (Interview G9).

Housing

In terms of housing facilities, women face heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, significantly impacting their well-being and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Access to adequate and affordable housing is recognised as a key determinant of successful integration, having a knock-on effect on health, education and employment opportunities. Although EU countries generally consider the basic needs of vulnerable persons in housing provision, there is a gap in temporary targeted support, particularly evident in refugee camps where a gender perspective is consistently lacking. This was underlined by one interviewee:

> "Within the same accommodation facilities, we've observed cases where individuals with various forms of vulnerability coexist, ranging from psychiatric cases, children with behavioural issues, to individuals with specific health problems like diabetes. This includes women who are victims of domestic violence and resist separation from the perpetrators, complicating the support system considerably." (Interview G6)

A further example comes from a Ukrainian girl who shared her experience with temporary accommodation on the Dutch island of Texel:

> "At some point, I was living in a hotel, a boat that was used as a refugee centre. The conditions were really bad and unhygienic. Displaced persons can often suffer from stomach problems due to their living conditions, and the toilets were small dirty boxes without any privacy. A private company was maintaining the centre. We were eating food that was way beyond the expiry date. In addition to the fact that I was facing constant discriminatory language and harassment, guys from the company entered our rooms every morning, using their own keys, to check our stuff, under the pretext of 'security'." (Interview G3)

R. R. had a similar experience:

> "The food in the camp [in Amsterdam] was terrible, and this was the impression not only of Ukrainians but also refugees from other countries who were accommodated there. I developed allergies and stomach issues, which I still have." (Interview G1)

As a refugee with experience living in different accommodation facilities for refugees in several countries including Denmark, Georgia, Germany and the Netherlands, L. T. notes:

> "It is important that institutions – both national and EU – gather information from individuals housed in these centres about their experiences, not solely relying on the management and other personnel who work there." (Interview G3)

In Greece, the organisation HIAS, which provides free legal aid to asylum seekers, is actively addressing housing challenges on the island of Lesbos. A firsthand account from an interviewee has shed light on the housing issues within the centres. Single women in particular face unsafe conditions, with showers and toilets located in poorly lit areas, and insufficient security staff during evenings. Incidents of psychological abuse and gender-based violence have been noted, including domestic violence against women by their partners and actions from community leaders or members. This highlights the urgent need for improved safety measures and gender-sensitive approaches in accommodation facilities (Interview G4).

In the Netherlands, LGBT Asylum Support receives daily reports of unsafe situations in accommodation facilities for asylum seekers. They particularly highlight a concerning situation at the emergency accommodation facility in Biddinghuizen, where more than 50 reports were submitted by a group of LGBTIQ asylum seekers. According to official regulations, vulnerable persons are not allowed to be housed there, but they find themselves there because all other accommodation locations are full and finding suitable placements for vulnerable groups is difficult. Despite discussions with various government officials

since 2016, the only solution utilised by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) is still 'LGBT units' within larger group settings. As Sandro Kortekaas of LGBT Asylum Support notes:

> "The problem has actually become even bigger [since 2016]. We now have more than 50 documented reports from one location. The COA admits that they don't have the situation under control, and the only solution is to remove this group from this environment, which is very difficult at the moment." (Interview G7)

In Czech accommodation facilities, the safety risks faced by women are underscored by the joint input from the Czech Organization for Aid to Refugees and the Forum for Human Rights. According to their report, women, men and families were not separated within the reception facility, resulting in at least one incident of sexual assault (Organisation for Aid to Refugees and Forum for Human Rights, 2021). Despite the Ministry of the Interior attributing the reported incidents to tensions in quarantine rather than the lack of gender separation, the overall situation highlights the vulnerability of women to safety challenges in such accommodation settings.

Conclusion

The immediate inclusion of a gender dimension in displacement policy is paramount to crafting effective and equitable strategies for vulnerable displaced populations. Displacement disproportionately affects women and LGBTIQ people, with each group facing unique challenges and vulnerabilities. The gender dimension of displacement in the European context reveals a multitude of persistent and often overlooked challenges. While migration policies and approaches lack inherent gender mainstreaming, leaving some women, men and LGBTIQ persons vulnerable to gender-based discrimination and violence, there is a critical need for comprehensive data collection and gender-sensitive policies. The experiences of displaced women, especially those travelling alone, highlight significant challenges in access to healthcare, where issues such as mental health, trauma support, and discrimination against LGBTIQ persons demand urgent attention. The lack of a holistic approach to mental health and inadequate sanitary standards in refugee centres pose significant risks, leading to instances of bullying, harassment, and even suicides. The EU must collaborate with first responders such as CSOs, experts, institutions and others to effectively integrate gender-responsive measures in reception centres and reevaluate the asylum application process to avoid leaving people in legal limbo. By integrating a gender perspective from the outset, policymakers can tailor interventions that address the specific needs and risks associated with different genders.

Gender mainstreaming goes beyond mere quota fulfilment. It involves crafting migration policies that genuinely cater to the needs of all displaced individuals, irrespective of gender. Failing to do so renders EU migration policy gender-blind, fostering increased inequality and discrimination. Consequently, there is an urgent need for the inclusion and integration of displaced persons, considering their diverse gender-specific needs. This necessitates a holistic approach that acknowledges and tackles unique gender-related challenges and difficulties, ultimately aiding individuals in leading lives of wellbeing and dignity.

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List of interviews

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All interviews conducted by the authors, except Interview G7 conducted by Robin van Berlo.

Chapter 3

The role of civil society in repairing the consequences of displacement

Robin van Berlo

Introduction

As governments grapple with the complex dynamics of migration and the number of people on the move and those living as migrants within Europe increase, expectations of civil society are high.[6] Often among the first responders in crisis situations, civil society provides critical aid to those in distress. Whether it is distributing food to people on the move or monitoring human rights violations, civil society organisations (CSOs) are instrumental in alleviating human suffering. This chapter delves into the essential role of civil society in addressing these challenges and supporting displaced persons. Personal stories and interviews with dedicated CSO workers will provide firsthand accounts of the challenges and successes of humanitarian and development work when it comes to displacement.

The chapter places a primary focus on the experiences and perspectives of civil society, with qualitative data mainly derived from interviews conducted with various representatives actively engaged in addressing displacement-related challenges. By placing civil society at the forefront, the chapter aims to amplify their voices and shed light on their valuable contributions. However, it is essential to recognise that while civil society insights provide a crucial foundation, a comprehensive understanding of displacement management necessitates insights from authorities, government bodies, and other relevant stakeholders. To address this, the chapter commits to transparency in methodology, ensuring a candid acknowledgment of the potential bias introduced by focusing predominantly on civil society perspectives. Despite these acknowledged limitations, the emphasis on civil society perspectives underscores the chapter's commitment to fostering a more inclusive narrative, recognising that local initiatives often drive meaningful change in affected communities.

The civil society representatives interviewed for the chapter were intentionally selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by displacement. The choice reflects regional dispersion, encompassing diverse geographical areas to capture the nuanced variations in practices and services provided. By engaging with organisations that have dealt with the ongoing migration crisis for over a decade, the interviews sought to gain insights into the long-term strategies and adaptations employed by experienced entities. Furthermore, the inclusion of organisations dealing with recent crises such as the Turkey earthquake of 6 February 2023 and the situation at the EU-Belarus border serves to shed light on the dynamic landscape of civil society responses to evolving humanitarian challenges. The interviews also extend to new organisations addressing long-standing crises, offering insights into fresh approaches and innovations. Additionally, the choice of diverse organisational structures, including grassroots initiatives and NGOs implementing national policy, seeks to highlight the varied ways civil society engages with displacement challenges – recognising the value each type of organisation brings to the collective response of civil society to migration challenges.

6 At the close of 2021, the EU hosted less than 10% of global refugees and a fraction of internally displaced persons. By mid-2022, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the share of refugees in the EU rose sharply, exceeding 20% (European Commission, 2022).

Shrinking civic space

In a time marked by the expanding influence of right-wing parties and the rise of populism, the civic space, as highlighted in the Atlas of Migration (2022) and by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023), is undergoing a significant contraction. Democratic decline looms over the EU's established democracies and critical member states like Hungary and Poland, while Turkey, Belarus and Russia distance themselves further from democratic ideals. The CIVICUS Monitor (2022) also points to democratic backsliding, particularly in Hungary and Serbia, sounding alarms about civic freedoms. This shifting political landscape, marked by nationalist ideologies and anti-immigrant sentiments, creates a hostile environment for organisations advocating for inclusive policies and migrants' rights. In this context, civil society actors find themselves facing not only legal challenges, but also societal pushback. The increasing polarisation and politicisation of migration-related issues hinder constructive dialogue, making it even more challenging for civil society to bridge gaps and foster understanding.

Economic uncertainties, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly impact civil society. As governments tighten budgets and prioritise other pressing concerns, funding for civil society initiatives addressing migration-related issues may dwindle. This financial strain limits the capacity of civil society to implement comprehensive and sustained programmes, hindering their ability to address migration challenges, as they must navigate an environment where resources are scarce, yet demand for their work remains high. The distance between those working on the ground and policymakers, particularly in the allocation of funds, adds a layer of complexity, prompting questions about whether institutional support aligns with the needs identified by those directly engaged in frontline efforts. While those working on the ground, such as local NGOs, often identify pressing needs at the community level (e.g. language education and healthcare services), policymakers may prioritise broader, macro-level policies that may not sufficiently address these nuanced requirements. Furthermore, the allocation of funds may disproportionately favour well-established organisations over smaller, grassroots entities. Larger NGOs with established connections to policymakers may secure the lion's share of funding, while smaller organisations with direct connections to local communities struggle to access adequate resources. This dynamic perpetuates an uneven distribution of financial support, potentially sidelining innovative and community-driven projects. This disparity not only reinforces power imbalances within the civil society landscape, but also raises concerns about the inclusivity and fairness of the funding distribution process.

Lastly, the criminalisation of civil society emerges as a pressing issue, with governments enacting laws to curtail the activities of CSOs and actors working with displaced populations. Increased criminal investigations in countries such as Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Poland, Turkey and Latvia, further draw attention to the growing challenges faced by civil society in an increasingly restrictive environment. In Italy, the controversial "Rescue at Sea" law has led to criminal charges against humanitarian organisations involved in search and rescue operations (Al Jazeera, 2023). In Greece, the case against volunteers Sarah Mardini and Seán Binder, accused of espionage and human trafficking, exemplifies the legal challenges faced by those supporting displaced populations (Amnesty International, 2023). The criminalisation extends to migrants themselves, with those steering boats being prosecuted as smugglers, raising critical questions about the legal frameworks governing humanitarian initiatives and impeding the collective efforts to address the consequences of migration.

Bridge of support: a diaspora organisation's role in assisting Ukrainian refugees in Poland

In the heart of Warsaw, Poland, the Ukrainian House Foundation emerges as a beacon of support for Ukrainian citizens navigating the challenges of displacement. The organisation traces its origins back to 2004, a pivotal year when a collective of Ukrainians and Poles joined forces to support the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Evolving from their citizens' initiative "Our Choice – Ukraine", the Ukrainian House Foundation initially operated as the Our Choice Foundation, which was founded in 2009 by Ukrainian migrants to assist their peers. The organisation has undergone a transformative journey, evolving into a multifaceted support system amid geopolitical shifts and humanitarian crises. With the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian House Foundation found itself at the forefront, responding to the needs of the extensive number of Ukrainians seeking refuge in Poland. Benjamin Cope, serving as a representative for the Ukrainian House Foundation, provides a comprehensive view of the organisation's undertakings, the challenges encountered, and the insights gained on their journey to support Ukrainian citizens facing displacement (Interview R2; all quotes in this section are taken from this interview).

In light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Benjamin highlights the complex nature of the Ukrainian migrant situation in Poland. Already prior to the full-scale invasion, workers frequently migrated from Ukraine to Poland for employment. Furthermore, the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbass prompted a significant influx of Ukrainian migrants into Poland. Benjamin emphasises the challenge in drawing a clear line between refugees and migrants in this context:

> "The migrants that we were serving before the full-scale invasion were treated as economic migrants. But there were people already leaving Ukraine because of fear of the future. [Now] Ukrainians in Poland are not formally migrants, but not formally refugees. They are covered by the Temporary Protection Directive."

Benjamin notes that approximately one million people are covered by this directive, while an equal number are not.[7]

After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian House Foundation leveraged its pre-war activities as the cornerstone for its more recent initiatives. Their consultation point, originally manned by two individuals, expanded substantially and now boasts a team of 17-18 members. This service addresses a range of everyday concerns related to life in Poland, with a particular focus on handling administrative issues. Educational initiatives, too, evolved. What started as a Ukrainian Saturday school offering language, history, and cultural classes, has now been supplemented by a full time, dual-diploma Ukrainian school, navigating the complexities of both the Polish and Ukrainian education systems. Benjamin explains:

> "We try to make it possible for the children and parents to have the choice of what their next steps might be in their educational career. [At the moment] about 50% of the Ukrainian children in Poland are in online education in Ukrainian schools.

7 See Chapter 1 for an explanation and discussion of the Temporary Protection Directive.

> But nobody really knows what that means, especially with the difficulties that many schools in Ukraine face in maintaining their services. On the back of COVID, for many Ukrainian children this is now a long time to be outside physical school systems."

Another initiative worth mentioning is the organisation's Women's Clubs, which play a pivotal role in providing a supportive space for female migrants. Established in 2017, these clubs serve as a platform for women to exchange experiences, build networks, and discuss entrepreneurial opportunities. "After the war and the massive influx of highly educated women with children, this is something that we also wanted to continue," Benjamin reveals. In addition, the Ukrainian House Foundation also expanded its services, introducing, for example, short-term psychological support, recognising the mental health challenges faced by migrants affected by the war, as well as a database connecting people offering accommodation with those who were in need. However, with growth has come challenges. Benjamin acknowledges the difficulties of managing the foundation's swift expansion, stating, "What started with the sense of mission, and I think people still feel this sense of mission, is also a job now." Fortunately, with the inflow of funds from international organisations, the Ukrainian House Foundation has been able to professionalise its services and hire their volunteers on a full-time basis, many of whom are Ukrainian refugees themselves. Benjamin highlights that cultural integration remains pivotal, with events, discussions, and a library acting as bridges between the Polish and Ukrainian communities. The Ukrainian House regularly serves as a venue for various cultural events, discussions, and exhibitions featuring Ukrainian writers, academics, and artists. Following the invasion, these events took on heightened significance as platforms for reflection on the ongoing war. Benjamin shares:

> "When artists or film makers come to present their works, they are obviously digesting the war through their art. The meetings become these kind of community bonding moments, but also moments of sharing the trauma of war. Thus, this cultural side of things remains not just an addition to the humanitarian response, but fundamental to how we see ourselves as a holistic support space."

As the war has increased attention on towards longstanding issues affecting Ukrainian migrants, including education, workers' rights, and integration, the Ukrainian House Foundation faces both opportunities and challenges. "Lots of the things that we were trying to argue for prior to the full-scale invasion, suddenly became front page issues." The political situation in Poland, particularly from 2015 until the full-scale invasion, added another layer of complexity. According to Benjamin, the expansion of the Ukrainian House was impeded by the previous Polish government, which obstructed the flow of European funds dedicated to supporting migrants and refugees, as "they were generally suspicious of NGOs, especially civil society who were supporting migrants and refugees." While Benjamin compliments the stance taken by the Polish state after the full-scale invasion and their support for the Ukrainian House Foundation, he observes that this change of attitude "did make it difficult to know where you stand or where to try and invest the energy in activities. In terms of advocacy, suddenly everybody wants to know what we think should be done about XYZ, which is of course great, but politicians and embassies like to have simple solutions, while the contexts are long term," Benjamin explains. For the moment, the mood is optimistic, but the further evolution of the socio-political context is uncertain at the time of writing.

The Ukrainian House Foundation was able to respond to the crisis by leveraging pre-existing projects and connections. The organisation benefited from an established presence both within the Ukrainian community in Poland and within various networks, including NGOs focused on migration. One best practice noted by Benjamin involves integrating support and cultural programs with research and reports on the situation of Ukrainian migrants in Poland. He also draws attention to the foundation's unique identity, explaining that "the fact that we are an organisation founded by Ukrainians for Ukrainian migrants, means there is this sense of cultural intimacy, which is really key to what we have been able to do." According to Benjamin, it is this community-centric approach that allows the foundation to create transformative opportunities, enabling those who have received support to become assets within the foundation.

> "The story of someone who has gone through genuinely traumatic experiences, but has started themselves to lead workshops and has become an asset in building resilience amongst the community is a strong, meaningful message, that we also feel."

Overall, it can be said that the Ukrainian House serves as a crucial support system for Ukrainian citizens, evolving rapidly amid the challenges of displacement. Leveraging pre-existing projects and international aid, the organisation expanded its services, addressing complex needs following the full-scale invasion. While navigating political complexities and newfound attention, the organisation remains a resilient hub, offering vital support to Ukrainian citizens facing displacement in Poland.

The impact of a devastating earthquake on the work of a Turkish civil society organisation

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and the Middle East, Turkey assumes a pivotal position in discussions surrounding displacement and refugee aid. The country's role in migration management has been controversial, with debates revolving around issues such as border control policies and the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal. Against this backdrop, Mahmut Can Isal, Local Humanitarian Forum Coordinator at the Turkish NGO Support to Life, reveals the intricacies of their work, not only addressing the challenges posed by displacement, but also the added complexities arising from the aftermath of a devastating earthquake (Interview R1; all quotes in this section are taken from this interview).

Established in 2005, Support to Life initially focused on emergency support during earthquakes in Iran and Pakistan. Expanding its scope in 2012 to include a Refugee Support Programme, the organisation now provides crucial services, such as case management, mental and psychosocial support (MHPSS), legal assistance, and livelihood opportunities. Mahmut highlights that this expansion was a response to the growing migration crisis, aiming to address the long-term needs of displaced populations. The establishment of multipurpose community centres has become the foundation of their operations, as they provide a hub for diverse support services, fostering community resilience in the face of adversity. Support to Life's strategy involves 'collaborative humanitarianism', actively engaging with local NGOs and advocating for a collective approach. Mahmut em-

phasises that this approach has proven effective in navigating the competitive landscape for resources and allows the organisation to refer cases to others that have specialised expertise, e.g. when dealing with persons with disabilities or members of the LGBTQ+ community. For Support to Life, which operates as a women-led organisation, diversity and equality are core themes. Mahmut shares:

> "I remember a case in a really conservative city, where we were the only NGO with four female managers. At the start, even the drivers in this city were not happy about taking orders from women, and locals, like the governors and mayors, were more reluctant to communicate with women leaders. With huge support from our headquarters, we insisted on it. And now they have become used to it."

In addition, Support to Life has pioneered initiatives for long-term social inclusion, such as the organisation's approach to fostering collaboration between Syrian and Turkish women through women's cooperatives. The initiatives aim to empower refugee women with limited access to the local community, especially those who had never interacted with Turkish individuals before. While men often integrated into the Turkish community through work, many women remained isolated, never having spoken a single Turkish word since their arrival.

The earthquake of 2023, which particularly impacted the border city of Hatay where Support to Life had a significant operational presence, posed unprecedented challenges. Mahmut explains: "Hatay lost so much that it is still in a semi-emergency state. At the moment, the city remains without a functioning community centre, compelling us to operate solely through mobile teams." Historically, the organisation focused on Turkey's border cities, as they harbour significant refugee populations. Post-earthquake, locals sought refuge in central areas, while refugees were relocated by the Turkish government to the outskirts to mitigate tensions. In some areas, refugees still live in tents, and advocacy is ongoing to resist additional refugee transfers. As public transportation remains inactive, Mahmut points out Support to Life's initiatives to deliver humanitarian aid directly to those in need. Utilising hotlines and on-site visits to assess refugee needs, the organisation is preparing for the winter season by reinforcing containers, providing essential items like warm clothes and vitamins, and conducting courses to equip other CSOs to do the same. Furthermore, the earthquake's impact not only affected the large refugee community, but also the wider field of NGO work in Turkey: "Because of its native Arabic-speaking population, it is always the people from Hatay who are working in the NGO sector." The aftermath of the natural disaster thus necessitated a recalibration of the organisation's strategies, including the employment of new staff to replace those temporarily unable to work. In addition, activities concerning MHPSS came to an abrupt stop, as this type of support needs to be stable for it to be effective.

> "Now (October 2023), as two and a half months have passed, our MHPSS teams say that they are seeing progress. However, for children to truly benefit, they need to be supported by school environments. Schools are not fully open yet, but even before the earthquake, school attendance among refugee children was around 50%, which is now suspected to have dropped to less than 30%."

Mahmut also draws attention to the rise of child labour among refugees, a phenomenon exacerbated by the earthquake. Underscoring the challenge of combating child labour, Mahmut cites a project in the Şanliurfa province where, despite a decade-long effort, only fifty children were permanently removed from labour.

Aside from the disastrous effect of the earthquake, operating as an NGO in Turkey presents its own set of challenges, with regular inspections and bureaucratic hurdles posed by the authorities. Mahmut details the extensive paperwork required, highlighting the substantial resources devoted to compliance. "Before COVID-19 hit, there was this one point where we had to hire a truck to transport all the documents they asked from us, because we could not fit these documents into a normal car." While Mahmut's organisation is supported by a team of financial and legal experts, he acknowledges the burden such inspections place on smaller organisations. Moreover, societal challenges, including racism and local resentment, demand a delicate balancing act to ensure the organisation's impartiality and effectiveness.

> "When you are working with Syrians, you have to do some work with the local population as well. If not, you will not be able to work in mixed neighbourhoods and [feelings of unfairness can] turn to the refugees."

In overcoming these obstacles, Support to Life has embraced a principle of 'critical friendship', balancing compliance with authorities, while advocating for ethical practices. Mahmut recalls an instance where the organisation refused certain activities, such as cross-border work in an occupied zone, to preserve their independence and impartiality. According to Mahmut, "While we did have some hard times [after this], because we had always done everything by the book, we were safe to leave this behind." The pressure on civil society also means that the organisation has to be careful with its advocacy, mainly trying to disseminate its reports to contacts in Brussels and Geneva. Mahmut explains:

> "We provide the evidence and we expect them to do the campaigning. Based on our casework in the field, we provide official numbers as well as videos and photographs, taking into account privacy."

Support to Life's journey is thus a testament to the resilience required in the field of humanitarian work. The organisation's evolution from emergency support to a comprehensive refugee support programme reflects an adaptive response to the evolving needs of displaced populations. As they navigate legal complexities, social inclusion initiatives, and broader challenges, Support to Life continues to embody its commitment to upholding humanitarian principles and fostering critical friendships in a complex landscape. The recent earthquake in 2023 has underscored the imperative for flexibility, requiring adjustments to address the heightened vulnerabilities of those affected while reaffirming the organisation's dedication to providing timely and relevant assistance.

Missing and dead migrants at the EU-Belarus border

Starting in the summer of 2021, a significant crisis involving migrants unfolded at the EU-Belarus border, with reports of thousands of migrants attempting to cross into EU member states such as Poland, Latvia and Lithuania (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Belarus Service, 2021). Brussels asserted that the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was actively pushing migrants into the EU as a political tool in response to sanctions levied against him and other prominent Belarusian officials (ibid.; Council of the European Union, 2021). Conversely, Lukashenko's administration, backed by the Russian Federation, denied any involvement in engineering the crisis, but rather blamed

Europe and the United States.[8] The crisis continued into 2022 and 2023, with ongoing tensions and challenges related to the movement of migrants in the region. At the heart of this crisis, CSOs have stepped up to address a growing humanitarian challenge - the fate of migrants that end up missing or dead at the EU-Belarus border.

In this context, the experiences of Aušrinė Gogelytė (Interview R4) from Sienos Grupė, a Lithuanian civil society organisation, contribute to a better understanding of this pressing humanitarian crisis. Her line of work consists of collecting as much information as she can about people who have gone missing at the border, for example by conducting interviews with family members and organising search parties to check for any signs of campsites or even bodies. Furthermore, together with her team, Aušrinė is involved in efforts to secure legal representation for the families, ensuring proper investigation of the deaths, as well as grave maintenance of those migrants that have been buried in Lithuania. On a separate occasion, Aleksandra Łoboda (Interview R5), who works as a Communication and Advocacy Specialist for the migration department at the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland detailed her experiences pertaining to the Polish-Belarusian border. Before joining the Helsinki Foundation, Aleksandra was active at Grupa Granica, a Polish grassroots initiative created in response to the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarus border. While her main field of work is concerned with communication and advocacy efforts, Aleksandra is also involved in a project aimed at systemising her organisation's work on missing and dead migrants. It is essential to remember that although Aušrinė and Aleksandra will both discuss their involvement with the missing and deceased migrants' issue at the EU-Belarus border, they bring unique perspectives due to their different national backgrounds and distinct approaches to addressing this crisis.

When dealing with missing persons cases, Aušrinė explains that the first step is to determine if the individual is genuinely missing and if they wish to be located, as people may intentionally seek to distance themselves from family members. Moreover, it is crucial to ascertain the legitimacy of the inquirer. Verification involves methods like video calls and requests for photos, identification documents, and additional images of relatives. Complicating matters, smugglers sometimes impersonate family members, reaching out to volunteers across different countries to obtain information about missing persons. This could be motivated by unpaid debts or the intention to sell information to the missing person's family. For Aušrinė, the process of identifying smugglers involves analysing their communication patterns, such as the use of different phone numbers or specific language. Suspicions are raised when they evade requests for proof of familial connection or exhibit aggressive behaviour. To verify cases, investigators seek information about the person's journey, including companions and the border crossing point they travelled through. Details about their physical and health condition can provide clues and indicate vulnerabilities. Once a location is determined, field investigations ensue. In Lithuania, teams from Sienos Grupė visit these locations to examine the terrain, search for signs of human presence, and even identify remnants like clothes and food, which may help establish a timeline. Coordinates are meticulously documented through photographs, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the situation (Interview R4). While in

8 A tangible example of the framing of the crisis in Belarus is a photo exhibition titled 'The Border Between Life and Death' that was exhibited in the Belarusian city of Grodno in April 2023. According to the region's governmental authority, the exhibited photos of distressed migrants at the Poland-Belarus border both showcase a lack of European values and the Belarusian military's graciousness and compassion. (Dyatlovo Regional Executive Committee, 2023).

Poland, Aleksandra is not involved in search and rescue parties, she shares that:

> "[...] we aim to conduct in-depth analysis of the conditions that contribute to individuals going missing. This involves examining the specific geographical settings in which migrants are prone to disappear. Additionally, we are working on identifying regions with higher risks of mortality, thereby pinpointing circumstances that could potentially be mitigated. Our ultimate goal is to formulate recommendations not only for the Polish Government, but also for the European Union and the United Nations." (Interview R5)

Drawing attention to the legal complexities that undocumented migrants face, as "the people who disappear do not really officially exist in [Lithuania]", Aušrinė underscores the difficulty of dealing with a group of people who often lack official documents or even acknowledgment by the state. This lack of documentation complicates civil society's efforts, making it challenging to even launch investigations into their disappearances. While Aušrinė did manage to initiate one missing person investigation with the police, she elaborates: "The only reason it really worked was because this man's items, his backpack, were found inside Lithuania with his documents." Unfortunately, such circumstances are rare. Without concrete evidence, law enforcement agencies are often reluctant to act. Bureaucratic hurdles, a lack of transparency, and insufficient coordination between border guards and police can add to the complexity of cases. In addition, a lack of trust between CSOs and government authorities can hamper potential cooperation (Interview R4).

In Poland, the frustration over the distrust between civil society and authorities was the driving force behind Aleksandra and her colleagues' decision to team up with the ITAKA Foundation, a Polish NGO with over two decades of experience in searching for missing individuals as well as organising funerals and transporting the bodies of those who were found dead. With their collaboration extending to the Polish government, this NGO has access to police databases, a vital asset for confirming if a migrant is in a detention centre, hospital, or elsewhere. In Aleksandra's words:

> "When authorities want to know how many migrants are missing at the Polish-Belarusian border, they turn to the ITAKA Foundation. Up to now (mid-October 2023), only two individuals were officially reported missing at the border, largely because there was limited contact between ITAKA and relatives of missing migrants. This made Grupa Granica seem less credible in the eyes of the authorities. We claimed 350 missing individuals, while the ITAKA Foundation had records of just two. So we really want this partnership to be the basis of reliable sources of information and a tool in advocacy attempts." (Interview R5)

Moreover, there was a misconception among missing migrants' relatives that Grupa Granica would conduct search and rescue operations. Lacking the capacity, especially for cases older than 48 hours, the grassroots initiative primarily recorded disappearances. According to Aleksandra, local activists might attempt to find missing migrants, but without police database access and a systematic approach, effective operations are impossible. Now, with the partnership with the ITAKA Foundation, the intention is to create a structured system and make clear to families that Grupa Granica can report disappearances to the police or transfer the report of their missing relative to the ITAKA Foundation. Aleksandra adds:

> "However, not every family is willing to cooperate with the Polish authorities. And I think that is perfectly understandable, because these are the Polish authorities, who are actually partially responsible for the crisis, for the pushbacks, and for the migrants going missing." (ibid.)

For another project, Aleksandra is involved in advocating against the criminalisation of solidarity at the Polish-Belarusian border. She explains:

> "In terms of legislation and jurisprudence, the courts actually confirm in all the judgements that providing humanitarian aid is legal. However, this does not reflect the situation at the border, because activists are facing more and more criminal charges. As I am responsible for communication and advocacy, what I am trying to do is publish some reports to let people know that this is actually happening, that people are facing charges for the fact that they provided, for example, water and medical aid to migrants." (ibid.)

In these reports, the Helsinki Foundation collaborates closely with legal professionals who offer assistance to activists, as well as the activists themselves. The essence of these reports is to shed light on the forms of repression that have emerged in recent months, emphasising the voices and experiences of the affected activists. In addition, their investigative efforts extend to understanding the broader trend of solidarity actions being subjected to criminalisation throughout Europe. For civil society, holding the state accountable is one of the most challenging issues, Aleksandra mentions that:

> "While we would like to hold the authorities responsible, we know that we operate in a certain context and that context is that solidarity is being more and more criminalised. When we sue the Polish government, it is probable that there will be some counteractions, likely directed at the people who provide humanitarian aid on the ground." (ibid.)

Both Aušrinė and Aleksandra provide a candid view of the emotional toll that comes with this work. As Aušrinė shares, "It is emotionally taxing. When you are dealing with cases of missing people and deaths, it is a constant emotional burden" (Interview R4). In addition, Aleksandra reflects:

> "What has been extremely difficult for us was constantly being in this mode of emergency. For example, when I was the head of communications at Grupa Granica, I barely had weekends and evenings off. There was always some emergency that we had to respond to, and I think that in the long term, this is really exhausting. So, I am really happy that at the Helsinki Foundation, we have special funds allocated specifically to well-being. On the other hand, this emergency mode is understandable, because you think: 'Yes, I wanted to have an evening off, but someone's relative has just gone missing.'" Despite the many obstacles, Aušrinė highlights the remarkable sense of international community among civil society organisations and volunteers, making the effort less isolating. She emphasises the importance of this network, saying, "It has been lovely seeing people involved internationally, to be able to talk and communicate with other people who are trying to help you." (Interview R5)

Aušrinė and Aleksandra cast a detailed lens on the humanitarian crisis unfolding at the EU-Belarus border, unravelling the intricate challenges faced by civil society in tackling the issue of missing and dead migrants in the border regions. From navigating verification processes to grappling with legal complexities and spearheading advocacy initiatives, their experiences underscore the multifaceted nature of their roles. The collaboration between grassroots and established NGOs marks a shift towards addressing challenges collectively. Despite the emotional toll, both individuals emphasise the resilience and strength derived from the international community within civil society.

Empowering LGBTIQ asylum seekers: Advocacy and support in the Netherlands

In a country celebrated for its progressive stance on LGBTIQ rights, the Netherlands has long been considered a safe haven for individuals seeking acceptance and equality. However, even within this inclusive landscape, the challenges faced by LGBTIQ asylum seekers remain complex and often overlooked. At the forefront of addressing these challenges stands the Dutch non-governmental organisation, LGBT Asylum Support, led by its founder Sandro Kortekaas. With a mission that currently encompasses assisting more than 900 individuals, the NGO grapples with the difficulties faced by LGBTIQ asylum seekers on their journey to safety. At the forefront of its efforts lies a commitment to offering safe shelter, recognising the unique struggles experienced by those escaping societies where LGBTIQ rights are non-existent.

Navigating the asylum procedures in the Netherlands involves engaging with the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), the authority entrusted with assessing the credibility of LGBTIQ asylum seekers. Sandro elaborates on the challenges inherent in this process, describing the intricate dynamics involved in interviews conducted between IND officials, translators, and asylum seekers. Many asylum seekers find articulating their sexuality challenging due to cultural and societal constraints, Sandro explains:

> "They are not accustomed to discussing their sexuality, mainly because they almost all come from a culture where such topics are considered private. Thus, they have never had the opportunity to articulate who they are or the intricate process that led them to the point where they can identify themselves as LGBTIQ." (Interview R7; all further quotes in this section are taken from this interview)

He stresses the need for the IND to consider the cultural background and societal context of the asylum seeker, avoiding an imposition of Western norms. Amid these complexities, Sandro highlights a recent positive shift, acknowledging the IND's nascent inclusion of reference frameworks in assessments:

> "Only if you bring that reference framework into focus can you determine what you may expect from someone. That is a point where the IND still makes many mistakes. I do gradually see that various points of criticism that I bring along are being pursued. One and a half years ago, no reference framework was being established at all, but I see that it is now included in assessments. However, it remains very brief, which we reflect in every report written for court hearings - 155 reports in three years - as a point of criticism."

He underscores that the challenges persist, emphasising the ongoing need for nuanced evaluations within the asylum process. As part of asylum procedures, LGBT Asylum Support offers support before asylum seekers' initial hearings with the IND: "We do not give lessons on how to do it, as that is not possible, but we offer guidance on becoming aware of how to articulate your feelings." This way, the organisation plays a pivotal role in helping asylum seekers manage a process where articulating one's feelings is both challenging and crucial.

The organisation's commitment to advocacy is exemplified through its daily dispatch of reports, highlighting unsafe conditions within accommodations. These reports and publications serve as a means to engage with both the Dutch authorities as well as the wider public, fostering awareness and pushing for systemic changes. "Our role in drawing attention to issues that might be overlooked or neglected is a very important task. It enables us to maintain a critical stance towards the government's efforts in providing and ensuring safety," Sandro observes. Furthermore, these reports are often submitted to the court, shedding light on systemic issues and incorrect assessments, contributing to the ongoing dialogue surrounding LGBTIQ asylum seekers' rights. According to Sandro, the success of the organisation lies in precisely this commitment to research and advocacy. He stresses the importance of critical engagement with the Dutch Parliament, detailing the collaborative efforts to influence policy changes and raise awareness about the structural issues within the asylum process. "Establishing connections with the House of Representatives proves to be of immense significance in our advocacy efforts," Sandro details. A central initiative was the organisation's 'Not Gay Enough' campaign, which addressed a recurrent rejection criterion applied by migration services, citing an individual's inadequate understanding of their sexual orientation:

> "We encapsulated this concern in three petitions, collectively known as 'Not Gay Enough'. The petitions have not only elevated our cause, but also facilitated direct engagement with Members of Parliament, reinforcing the impact of our advocacy within the legislative sphere."

Describing the magnitude of the problems faced by LGBTIQ asylum seekers, Sandro delves into a recent and alarming situation in an emergency shelter in the Dutch city Biddinghuizen. According to the Dutch public broadcaster NOS, over 40 reports were generated, bringing to light issues ranging from safety concerns to death threats within the accommodation (NOS, 2023). "Ultimately, it resulted in them [the relevant authorities] admitting that they would transfer the whole group to different locations, for safety reasons. This is a very important point for us because, so far, everything has been ignored," Sandro shares.

Expanding the narrative from the emergency shelter incident, Sandro shifts the focus towards an initiative the organisation proposed to the state secretary concerning the housing of LGBTIQ asylum seekers, as early as 2016. Recognising the limited capacity of existing facilities and the complexities of relocating a vulnerable group, Sandro recalls suggesting LGBTIQ units in group settings as an alternative. The rationale behind this proposal was grounded in the organisation's practical experience, demonstrating that group settings foster a heightened sense of safety. Sandro states little interest was shown in pursuing this avenue, with office holders arguing that, akin to broader Dutch society, separate accommodation should not be provided in asylum seeker centres. "However, it is crucial to recognise that an asylum seeker centre is not a microcosm of our society; instead, it mirrors the societal challenges that LGBTIQ asylum seekers are striving to es-

cape," Sandro explains. He points out that while these units are common in Dutch asylum seeker centres, there is a lack of official policy associated with them.

One of the prominent challenges for LGBT Asylum Support lies in maintaining a dedicated team of volunteers, essential for the organisation's operations. Sandro acknowledges the difficulty in managing workload pressures, especially when dealing with a surge in asylum seeker numbers.

> "Everyone is still holding on. But yes, I have to let certain things go, and I find that difficult. Asylum seekers are, of course, assisted in their procedure by a lawyer. Yet, I see that every time we submit a report at a hearing, it makes a difference."

With the prospect of welcoming around ten new members of his team, Sandro expresses optimism about addressing the challenges ahead and reinforcing the team for more impactful advocacy. However, the recent political shift in the Netherlands, reflected in the 2023 parliamentary elections that brought significant gains for the far-right, populist Freedom Party (PVV), introduces new uncertainties. Sandro expresses concerns about the impact of the upcoming political changes on LGBTIQ asylum seekers:

> "I almost feel like I have ended up in another country. You cannot change this global issue by just closing borders and thinking that migration will stop. You have to be realistic and look at how you are going to solve it together. This political climate directly impacts the group we assist. This year, due to failing policies such as too little psycho-social support, five LGBTIQ refugees died by suicide. It is the most vulnerable group within the migration chain, where signals are structurally addressed insufficiently. We keep asking the State Secretary to launch an independent investigation into this, but so far it has not taken place."

This creates a profound sense of being unwelcome—a powerful gesture of exclusion, Sandro remarks.

In the face of these challenges, LGBT Asylum Support remains steadfast in its commitment to providing a lifeline for LGBTIQ asylum seekers. The organisation's advocacy efforts not only seek to address immediate concerns, but also strive to create systemic changes in the asylum process. As the political landscape evolves, LGBT Asylum Support continues its vital role as a beacon of support for a community often overlooked and undervalued in their pursuit of safety and acceptance.

The case of Italy: CSOs providing essential services

CSOs have been at the forefront of providing essential services to displaced persons in Europe. These services encompass humanitarian assistance, immediate relief efforts, and long-term sustainable solutions. In the realm of the latter, CSOs work on projects that empower displaced individuals to rebuild their lives. It is in this landscape that Cecilia Sanfelici, a Legal and Protection Officer actively involved with the Italian NGO Cooperativa Sociale Fiordaliso, offers her perspective on working in a reception and integration system. Guided by a mission to provide comprehensive support to migrants, this programme puts a particular emphasis on their well-being and successful integration into Italian society.

The Italian reception and integration system is multi-faceted, encompassing housing, financial support, and a wide range of services aimed at assisting migrants in their transition to life in Italy. As Cecilia explains:

> "The whole idea with which the system was created at the national level was to provide holistic support to the person in order for them to start an autonomous and independent life after this period in the project. It is very easy to say, very difficult to do." (Interview R6; all further quotes in this section are taken from this interview)

What stands out is the multi-agency approach, involving different stakeholders like social workers, legal professionals, and medical practitioners from diverse organisations:

> "I actually often find myself working much more with people from other organisations than from my own, which I think is really an added value. There is a richness that comes from working with people from different backgrounds and who have different focuses and different expertise."

At the national level, the integration system is overseen by the Italian Ministry of Interior. Subsequently, municipalities and cities across the country can choose to establish projects within their territories and, in doing so, entrust the organisational aspects of reception and integration to civil society organisations. The majority of people entered into the system are recognised refugees or people with other kind of documents, who typically spend six months to a year and a half in the programme. While some asylum seekers have been admitted to the system, these are more isolated cases, Cecilia explains:

> "As of now, only female or vulnerable asylum seekers can be welcomed in these reception projects, as there have been multiple legislative changes that have now made this system almost exclusively for recognised refugees."

Entering this system happens in different ways. The first method involves relocating asylum seekers who have resided in asylum seeker accommodation centres and have gained refugee status. In this official process, a central service identifies projects in Italy with available spaces and connects them with the organisation previously hosting the individual. Unfortunately, this can result in significant displacements, uprooting those who may have spent years in one part of Italy only to be moved hundreds of kilometres away. The second, more informal approach operates at the territorial level. Organisations like legal offices and social services identify individuals in need of housing and support, provided they possess the necessary documentation. If these individuals have never been entered into the system before, a request is sent to the national level for their admission. This process is more contingent upon place availability and can vary by territorial area and the types of accommodations available, such as for single men, single women, or families. While there are also projects for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable people, these account for hardly any places nationally.

One of the key services Cecilia provides is legal support, as many migrants' prospects in Italy depend on obtaining the proper documentation, which is often a maze-like process. As new participants join, the social worker supporting the person in their daily life organises meetings with all the different operators that are working in the project, like Cecilia. During such sessions, she explains her capabilities and limitations and discusses the individual's legal situation:

> "As the legal support mainly consists of doing the bureaucratic procedures for people's documents, I explain to them how these procedures are done and what they would have to do, for instance, when their document expires in five years. I inform them about their rights as refugees in Italy, support people with family reunion, and give information about citizenship or long-term documents. Based on the person's legal situation, I put down some legal objectives that I think need to be done within the time that the person will be in the project. But the idea is really to do it in a way that the person can learn and be able to do it by themselves when they leave the project."

To reach some of these objectives, Cecilia is regularly in touch with the authorities responsible for handling the procedures regarding the documents of people, which is mainly and mostly the police station. However, engaging with authorities, including the police and government institutions, can be intricate and problematic. As Cecilia explains, the police's role in migration issues can be fraught with complications, creating tension and unease between NGOs and law enforcement agencies. "The relationship with the office that is responsible for the documents of people is one of the hardest things," Cecilia says, as she cites long waiting times and unwilling officers:

> "We still get things done one way or another, but it is a very fragile balance between standing up for what is right, but also not being too loud and not being too vocal. It is also for me personally a big obstacle, because I really have to compromise my values to say: 'I decide that it is still okay to work in this system, because I am still helping people. I am still doing good.'"

Furthermore, frequent policy changes in Italian migration law present barriers to the integration system. The introduction of new laws disrupts the organisation's efforts as changes in regulations require rapid responses and adaptations, putting additional stress on civil society. As Cecilia explains:

> "It's becoming more and more difficult, because some years ago the accommodation centres for asylum seekers were providing more support than they are now. Services like legal aid and language classes have been decreasing, due to the financial cuts being made by the responsible ministry for these kinds of projects. So now, we sometimes end up working with people who are recognised refugees, who have been in Italy for maybe five years already and they do not speak a word of Italian. You really have to start working from scratch, because how can you support a person to land on their feet in one year if they do not even speak Italian? How can they find a job that allows them to sign a rental contract for a house? And even in the cases when they have a good work contract, a lot of landlords do not want to give their houses to black people, because of racism."

Despite these challenges, Cecilia asserts it is always worth it to fight, even when progress feels slow or insufficient.

> "Step by step, you can really build something important, and I think that is something key to keep in mind. I see that I still do a lot, and that we are still able to obtain what we want, even if it is hard and even if it is long. For me, that is enough."

Cecilia's role in delivering legal support highlights the complexities of bureaucratic procedures and the delicate dynamics with authorities, especially the police. The ever-changing landscape of Italian migration laws and financial constraints impact the system's efficacy, posing challenges in aiding individuals, including recognised refugees, on their integration journey. Despite these hurdles, Cecilia persists, emphasising the gradual progress in constructing impactful support networks.

Advocating for the rights of migrants, refugees, and displaced people in Cyprus

In the field of policy and legislation, civil society is a powerful force for change. CSOs work to influence governments and international bodies to enact policies that uphold the rights and dignity of migrants, refugees, and displaced people. This advocacy includes research, lobbying, amplifying the voices of the displaced through activism and solidarity, and public awareness campaigns to push for reforms that foster inclusivity and protection. Born in response to the global wave of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, Cypriot NGO Generation for Change emerged as a dynamic force, committed to dismantling barriers faced by migrants, refugees, and others facing discrimination. "Our vision is to create a more inclusive society, where people of different backgrounds feel included and have equality," co-founder Etinosa Erevbenagie-Johnbull explains (Interview R3; all further quotes in this section are taken from this interview).

The organisation does so via three pillars of action: humanitarian aid, integration and empowerment, and advocacy. "People request support, and what we do is screen their needs and immediately respond," Etinosa shares, reflecting the organisation's agile approach in addressing immediate concerns, from food and hygiene items, to assisting protesting minors and trying to increase the level of interculturalism and tolerance in local society. For Generation for Change, integration and empowerment are not just buzzwords. They are the heart of their mission. Etinosa proudly notes, "We have had continuously at least 200 students participating in our language classes, and a great percentage are women." He attributes the latter to the possibility to follow both in-person and online classes, a remnant of the COVID-19 period:

> "While everything shut down, integration did not stop. People were still trying to find work and trying to communicate, so we decided to create online programmes, which have been a great success. [The high level of women's participation] is not the usual case when it comes to other programmes, because, for example, you have different cultures who are not accustomed to women leaving the house to attend a class. So [online class] is an alternative option."

In addition, Generation for Change tries to engage with women from leadership positions within their communities to spread the word. The organisation's educational programmes do not just include teaching languages, but also offer pathways to employment.

Advocacy is an important activity for Generation for Change, with Etinosa at the forefront of initiatives aiming to bridge the gap between law enforcement and migrant communities. After releasing a statement addressing the increased hostility towards refugees and

migrants (Generation for Change, 2023a), the organisation received an invitation from the Cypriot police to engage in a discussion on various approaches to address racism and xenophobia. To maximise impact, four additional migration-oriented organisations attended this meeting as well as several UNHCR representatives. Having a migrant background himself, Etinosa underscores the significance of involving migrant-led initiatives, providing them with a platform to voice their perspectives in discussions often excluding them. Among the proposals that resulted from the meeting was the idea to create a community body in Cyprus to tackle racism and xenophobia issues, fostering consultation between the community and the police. Etinosa recalls the emphasis placed on inclusive representation within this body, considering, for example, voices from the Syrian community and women. During the discussion, concerns also arose about police-led training on racism, with the local NGOs urging community-led initiatives for trust-building between the police and migrants. "The migrant community is scared of the police, because of the idea they have of what policing is back home," Etinosa illustrates. Thus, the goal of such initiatives is for migrants to realise that law enforcement is there to protect and support them, while the police understands that migrants are individuals seeking a new home, in effect challenging stereotypes and countering xenophobic rhetoric.

However, Etinosa acknowledges the uphill battle when campaigning for long-term initiatives in a world hungry for immediate solutions: "People will say: why are you telling me to engage in this initiative that might bear fruit in five years, when there is someone in need of legal aid right now?" The challenge thus lies in convincing partners and funders of the enduring impact of their work. Reflecting on the organisation's journey, Etinosa shares one of the lessons learnt: "This work needs commitment and planning. Planning and strategy are ninety percent of the work." This strategic approach involves not only engaging with NGOs, but also being in contact with political entities, ensuring a holistic impact. This approach came to life at the October 2023 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference,[9] where Etinosa's speech on the topic of tolerance and non-discrimination (Generation for Change, 2023b) garnered an almost immediate response from the Cypriot delegation: "They expressed commitment to doing better, addressing rising xenophobia and discrimination in Cyprus. They would like to find ways to actually be partners in doing so." The inclusion of Etinosa as a speaker not only increased the organisation's confidence in its capabilities, but also indicated that the efforts of Generation for Change are gaining attention and trust from established institutions, essential for building a track record in the field.

Going beyond meetings and discussions, Generation for Change also takes their mission to the streets, basketball courts, and cultural arenas. Etinosa underscores the importance of bringing people together through events like basketball tournaments, where the focus is not just on the game, but on human connection. "Bringing them together to play basketball and just exchange: 'That is a person and I am a person, so let's start from the basics,'" Etinosa explains, underlining the power of shared experiences. He adds:

> "The trick in this is that people are not necessarily coming for the human rights aspect of the event, but they are coming for the actual artistic, cultural, food or just sports-related part of the event. So first of all, we provide the opportunity

9 Organised by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR), this annual conference is "dedicated to discussions on the condition of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the OSCE area" (ODIHR, 2023).

> for those who are almost pro-migrant or in the middle to actually reinforce that sentiment. Second, because it is mostly team sports or culture, you are going to have someone in a team who is more pro-migrant, creating a team and bringing a friend, who might just want to play basketball. And then they might think 'Wow, interesting, we are playing basketball against racism, let's see how that goes.'"

In summary, Generation for Change, born in response to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, stands as a dynamic force committed to dismantling barriers for migrants in Cyprus. Through pillars of humanitarian aid, integration and empowerment, and advocacy, the organisation addresses immediate concerns and fosters inclusivity. Etinosa's leadership emphasises strategic planning, evident in impactful engagements like the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference. The organisation's multifaceted approach, blending activism, cultural events, and sports, not only strengthens connections but also challenges stereotypes, contributing to a more inclusive society.

Conclusion

The exploration of CSOs and their pivotal role in addressing displacement in Europe has unveiled stories of dedication, resilience, and adaptability. Through the lens of diverse case studies, this chapter has explored the multifaceted challenges and triumphs of CSOs navigating the complex landscape of campaigning for the rights of migrants, refugees, and displaced people. The interviews underscore the critical role that civil society plays, often stepping in where official government responses fall short. By sharing their stories, the interviewees show that the pursuit of justice and humanity for people on the move is a collective responsibility that transcends borders, politics, and bureaucracies. The lessons learnt from their journeys draw attention to the importance of commitment, strategic planning, transparent legal frameworks, and prioritising the well-being of those engaged in this critical work. These findings will be further detailed in the recommendations below – serving as a resource for shaping future strategies, fostering collaboration, and championing the rights and well-being of migrants, refugees, and displaced people. While these insights form a crucial foundation, acknowledging the need for perspectives from authorities and relevant stakeholders remains vital. Despite limitations, emphasising civil society perspectives indicates the chapter's commitment to inclusivity. As Europe deals with the ongoing challenges of migration, civil society's evolving role remains critical, and its adaptability and resilience are key assets in addressing the needs of displaced persons. It is only through continued collaboration, innovative solutions, and dedication to the rights and well-being of migrants, refugees, and displaced people that Europe can effectively respond to the challenges of displacement.

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List of interviews

Interview R1: Mahmut Can Isal, Support to Life, Turkey
Interview R2: Benjamin Cope, Ukrainian House Foundation, Poland
Interview R3: Etinosa Erevbenagie-Johnbull, Generation For Change, Cyprus
Interview R4: Aušrinė Gogelytė, Sienos Grupė, Lithuania
Interview R5: Aleksandra Łoboda, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland
Interview R6: Cecilia Sanfelici, Cooperativa Sociale Fiordaliso, Italy
Interview R7: Sandro Kortekaas, LGBT Asylum Support, Netherlands

All interviews conducted by the author.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for governments (local, regional and national)

Multi-sector communication and coordination

- Support further strengthening of mechanisms at both the local and national levels to allow multiple stakeholders to consult regularly with those civil society organisations which are working with displaced persons in order to improve migration, asylum and integration policies.
- Expand local programmes, services and mechanisms to provide support – especially legal aid – and information about rights and procedures, and assistance in reporting abuse.
- Strengthen multi-sector cooperation by providing clearer guidelines for the referral mechanism for recognising vulnerabilities. This would mean referrals to specific institutions based on the needs of displaced people.

Improve access to social and health services for displaced people

- Support the development of social services to target the requirements of displaced people in need of social protection, in such a way that they complement existing systems.
- Standardise frontline support from service providers including CSOs, ensuring gender-sensitive standards for safety measures, operational protocols, and anti-discrimination practices are included.
- Increase access to better social benefits (including pension plans and medical benefits) as well as access to sexual and reproductive health services (including family planning and maternity care).

Improve access to the labour market and more effective labour policies

- Simplify labour policies, ensuring access to the labour market for various categories of displaced persons including union membership and formal labour contracts.
- Enhance labour market participation for displaced women by combining gender-specific employment policies, improving skill recognition processes, verifying the qualifications of displaced women and designing customised vocational training and higher education programmes to meet their specific needs.
- Provide financial and other economic incentives for highly skilled migrants, such as subsidies, tax and duty exemptions.

Develop more effective and long-term labour measures

- Mainstream active labour market policies based on personalised intensive services (tailored job related courses and counselling services, skills and language evaluation). Pilot and promote skills partnerships to ensure that migrants meet the labour market requirements of the destination country.
- Facilitate effective access to all labour rights including the unemployment benefits of the destination country.
- Take all necessary measures to prevent labour exploitation of foreign workers.

Improve access to education

- Support and fund initiatives that provide education and livelihood programmes for displaced communities, such as skill development internships and job placements in the public sector or government-funded projects.
- Develop public education programmes to dismantle gender stereotypes, incorporating gender equality education in school curricula and promoting diverse and inclusive portrayals of gender in the media.
- Provide and facilitate easy access to free obligatory language courses by local teachers or qualified CSOs, as part of public education programmes.
- Support and provide funds for additional language lessons that should be adapted to further education. Depending on the level of education providers could be local schools, other educational institutions or CSOs.
- Allocate resources and support initiatives that prioritise the mental health of individuals engaged in displacement-related work.

Improve access to accommodation

- Define and enforce comprehensive guidelines including the engagement of civil society to ensure compliance and implementation of international and regional standards for decent living conditions.
- Define and enforce comprehensive guidelines for state institutions to ensure safe and gender-friendly accommodation for displaced people, especially women, with measures such as separate sleeping areas, clean and secure bathrooms.
- Take all necessary measures to prevent violence and exploitation in temporary accommodation.

Recommendations for the institutions of the European Union

Implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum

In light of the newly adopted Pact on Migration and Asylum, and the fact that the normative EU framework is unlikely to change in the near future, the main priority and the focus now should be on implementation.

That means considering how to incorporate the existing provisions of the Pact into national legislation while ensuring the preservation of fundamental rights. The EC is obliged to submit the framework model of the Action Plan this year. It will serve as a framework for the member countries to define and adopt their Action Plans by the end of 2024. We call on the EU to:

- Build a relationship with civil society based on partnership and respect.
- Introduce mutual recognition of positive asylum decisions into EU law, accompanied by specific free movement rights for recognised beneficiaries.
- Define the safe third country principle, as well as allocate funding assistance for the countries and communities concerned.
- Define the legal requirement that displaced persons who were refused entry be informed about the processing of their personal data and potential implications for fundamental rights.
- Define an EU-wide common return management system at European and national levels to provide timely information and data on the identity and legal situation of potential returnees.
- Provide a comprehensive training system for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).
- Improve the system of data collection so that information is sex/gender segregated and develop indicators on gender-based violence.

Ensure continued public and transparent recognition of the role of civil society and the allocation of financial resources for its work, especially in light of the implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and EU and MS APs that are going to come in the near future.

Recommendations for civil society organisations

Dialogue: Establish and develop structured dialogue on displaced persons, engagement and communication with governments, local authorities, local communities, their leaders and grassroots organisations.

Services: Design, promote and develop comprehensive service packages that address the physical, mental and socio-economic needs of displaced people.

Capacity building

- Develop and conduct comprehensive training for all the stakeholders involved in assisting displaced persons, especially regarding mental health and psychological support.
- Provide gender-sensitive training for policy officers and service providers in order to ensure early detection of gender-related issues and prevent further gender-based discrimination and violence.
- Strengthen civil participation of migrants/displaced persons by encouraging their association, capacity building for advocacy, and networking.

Supervision, monitoring and reporting

- Ensure continuous oversight of service providers assisting displaced persons to guarantee their sustained empowerment and support.
- Regularly monitor the delivery and quality of services provided to displaced persons by local authorities.
- Publish regular reports on the state of the human rights of displaced persons, especially women and vulnerable groups.
- Establish evidence-based and gender-sensitive systematic monitoring of national integration policies and migration, which will make all genders visible.

Awareness-raising: Allocate resources to awareness campaigns and community programmes that foster understanding and acceptance of displaced persons with the special focus on the most vulnerable including members of diverse gender identities and the LGBTIQ community.

Resources

- Diversify and find new funding sources to ensure the integrity and independence of civil society.
- Use these funds to educate public representatives, institutions, the press, citizens and local communities as to the reasons for migration, migration flows and the opportunities for the integration of displaced persons.
- Pay specific attention to the situation of women and vulnerable groups and ensure that they are sufficiently assisted in the field of healthcare, legal assistance, psycho-social support, economic empowerment and other fields.

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"The report is important because it highlights the vital work done by CSOs to help displaced people. The focus on women and members of the LGBTIQ community offers fresh perspectives and underlines the value of intersectional approaches. The report also examines the considerable challenges facing these organisations. The case studies and recommendations are very useful and I am happy that these stories will not go unnoticed."

Marta Lempart

Polish Women's Strike, Poland

"I've dedicated my life to advocating for institutional change, culminating in my candidacy for national parliament. The current edition of the State of Civil Society Report amplifies vital narratives, stories like mine itself. It's imperative to shed light on these experiences. Yet, equally critical are the structural recommendations offered within the report for institutions and civil society organisations. Such actionable suggestions are paramount for effecting real change and alleviating the repercussions of displacement."

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