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Working Paper

Refugees as humanitarian actors: Explaining the creation of organisations led by displaced and stateless persons in Europe

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RSC 2025/52
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WORKING PAPER

Refugees as humanitarian actors: Explaining the creation of organisations led by displaced and stateless persons in Europe

Lorenzo Piccoli, Eréndira León-Salvador, Tae Kyeong Meixner-Yun, Daniela Movileanu, Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar

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Abstract

This study presents an original mapping of organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons (DSP) in Europe. Based on a multilingual survey of 100 organisations conducted between December 2024 and March 2025, it provides an overview of their goals, activities, and challenges, highlighting their critical role in humanitarian action, advocacy, and social cohesion. The mapping reveals a dynamic of crisis-driven formation: DSP-led organisations often emerge during acute displacement events, filling gaps in humanitarian assistance and advocacy. This also reveals a potential fragility: organisations created in response to emergencies face sustainability challenges, raising questions about their longevity and capacity to institutionalise beyond the immediate crisis. Those that do manage to institutionalise, demonstrate remarkable resilience, often sustaining activities through innovative resource mobilisation, strong community networks, and partnerships with other civil society actors. Most of these organisations operate with limited resources at the local level and prioritise meeting urgent needs such as housing, legal assistance, and social support, while challenging narratives that portray refugees as passive recipients of aid. Recognising and supporting this agency through targeted funding, capacity-building, and formal inclusion in policy processes is essential to strengthen humanitarian responses and promote inclusive governance processes.

Keywords

Refugee-led organisations; migration governance; forced displacement; humanitarian governance; civil society

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Introduction

Across Europe, displaced and stateless people are creating their own organisations to fill gaps in humanitarian aid and advocacy. Drawing on an original multilingual survey of **100 organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons (DSP-led) in Europe**, conducted between December 2024 and March 2025, the study examines why these organisations are formed, how they are composed, and how they endure challenges over time[1].

The survey reveals that DSP-led organisations are critical actors in humanitarian aid, community-building, and rights advocacy, despite operating under severe constraints. Because they often emerge during acute displacement events, these organisations are structurally fragile: Many operate with limited budgets and face systemic barriers such as unstable funding and complex bureaucratic requirements. Such sustainability challenges raise questions about their longevity and capacity to institutionalise beyond the immediate crisis. Those that do manage to institutionalise demonstrate remarkable resilience, often sustaining activities for years through innovative **resource mobilisation, strong community networks, and partnerships with other civil society actors**. Most operate at the local level to meet urgent needs such as housing, legal assistance, and social support.

The study is relevant because refugees have long been portrayed as "speechless emissaries" by governments and international organisations (Malkki, 1996), largely due to linguistic barriers and impossibility to vote and stand as candidates in elections. Our work is part of a broader shift in perspective that recognises **refugees as active members of the community** where they live, exercising agency and participating in social and political life (Zetter and Pearl, 2000; Easton-Calabria and Wood, 2020; O'Byrne, 2022; Arrighi, 2024; Berding-Barwick and McAreavey, 2024). By foregrounding the work of displaced and stateless individuals, this research contributes to policy and scholarly debates on refugee empowerment, offering practical insights for more inclusive governance and humanitarian governance across Europe.

From displacement to participation: Understanding organisations led by displaced and stateless individuals in Europe

Displaced and stateless persons often form organisations that articulate collective goals and deliver essential service. These organisations advocate for rights, provide practical support, advance political causes, distribute information, promote legal aid, and manage community spaces offering social services, arts, and cultural activities. They frequently fill critical gaps in childcare, housing, healthcare, education, legal assistance, and psychosocial support (Brun, 2015; Easton-Calabria and Wood, 2020). Beyond material provision, these organisations also foster political and social participation. Evidence shows that **associational involvement enhances trust in institutions, strengthens interpersonal trust, and reinforces individuals' sense of political efficacy**, the belief in their ability to engage meaningfully in politics (Stolle, 1998; Morales and Geurts, 2007). Associational involvement fosters opportunities for members to exchange information, develop political consciousness, and acquire the necessary skills to interact with political institutions (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978; Stolle, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

In recent years, DSP-led organisations attracted the interest of international organisations and governments, which increasingly encouraged refugees to become economically and socially "self-reliant" (Easton-Calabria and Wood, 2020). Although funding for these organisations remains limited (Sturridge *et al.*, 2023, 2025), over the last decade the humanitarian sector has recognised the importance of **localising humanitarian interventions** to create a bridge between international directives and on-the-ground realities (Pincock, Betts and Easton-Calabria, 2021; Brumat, Geddes and Pettrachin, 2022; Zihnioğlu and Dalkıran, 2022; Pettrachin, Brumat and Geddes, 2025). In practice, because of DSP-led organisations, many international organisations and state agencies have a connection point with displaced populations and can advance the quality and impact of humanitarian responses.

1 These groups are sometimes called refugee-led organisations (RLOs) or refugee-led community organisations (RCOs). In this study, we use the umbrella term 'DSP-led organisations'.

Global frameworks reflect this trend. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) affirms that responses are most effective when they actively engage those they aim to protect. The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) prioritises refugee inclusion, while initiatives such as the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) and the Refugee-Led Innovation Fund (RIF) support DSP-led projects. In 2020, the European Commission institutionalised refugee input through the Expert Group on the Views of Migrants, composed of individuals with lived experience and DSP-led organisations.

Despite this recognition, **research on the conditions shaping DSP-led organisations remains limited**, especially in Europe where most studies focus on the role of these organisations as key actors for resettlement policies (Nawyn, 2001; Benson, 2022). More research exists on DSP-led organisations in countries with persistent economic and political turmoil, where these organisations serve as crucial support systems for displaced populations within an environment characterised by inconsistent policies and heightened vulnerabilities (Betts, Pincock and Easton-Calabria, 2018; Pincock, Betts and Easton-Calabria, 2021; Diab, Jasiukaitis and El-Zakka, 2024). While some European case studies exist (Cyprus Refugee Council, 2020; Giannetto, 2020; Stefanopoulos, 2020; Kassa Hailu, 2023) comprehensive mapping is still lacking.

Crucially, two major studies have surveyed migrant-led organisations (MLOs) across Europe (Badra, 2019; European Commission, 2020), but **they do not distinguish DSP-led organisations from other MLOs**. This lack of differentiation risks obscuring the distinct experiences, challenges, and forms of agency. Unlike other MLOs, DSP-led organisations emerge under conditions of forced displacement and statelessness, face disenfranchisement, and rely on distinct funding and representation mechanisms such as the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI). Recognising DSP-led organisations as a distinct field of inquiry is essential to understanding their contributions to self-representation, governance, and advocacy and to challenging persistent narratives of refugees as passive recipients of aid.

Methodology

Data

Between December 2024 and March 2025, we conducted an online survey translated into nine languages to ensure accessibility and inclusivity[2]. This approach allowed us to reach DSP-led organisations across Europe efficiently, overcoming logistical and language barriers. The structured format ensured consistency in data collection, making comparisons across responses possible, while the online format gave participants flexibility to respond at their convenience. By gathering standardised input, we were also able to develop an interactive platform that visualises collective experiences, providing a practical resource for participating organisations that is available online. The survey trace is available as **Appendix 1**.

We identified DSP-led organisations through a five-step approach combining convenience, purposive, voluntary response, and snowball sampling. First, we drew on a list of organisations previously engaged with the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, including partners of the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan. We then expanded outreach through an extensive desk review to identify additional organisations without formal ties to international bodies and contacted them directly. To increase inclusivity, we issued an open call via social media, while the Country Operations Contacts of UNHCR in Europe disseminated the survey through their official channels. Finally, we applied snowball sampling by asking respondents to recommend other relevant organisations, leveraging existing networks to broaden our reach.

We received a total of 100 valid answers to the survey. The full list of respondents to the survey is available as **Appendix 2**.

2 German, French, English, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish, Ukrainian.

Limitations

While the survey methodology aimed for broad outreach and inclusivity, three key limitations should be acknowledged.

The identification process began with a list of organisations previously engaged with the UNHCR Europe Bureau, relying on existing networks. This may have led to underrepresentation of organisations without formal ties to international bodies, despite efforts to include less connected groups. Indeed, although the approach reached a diverse set of organisations, the sample cannot be considered statistically representative. Organisations with strong digital presence or pre-existing links to UNHCR and international networks may be overrepresented, while smaller, informal, or less digitally active organisations were harder to identify.

We also note that participation was voluntary. This may have attracted organisations with a particular interest in the topic, skewing results toward those already aligned with the research theme. Snowball sampling, while useful for expanding outreach, tends to reinforce existing networks, limiting diversity of perspectives.

Finally, despite translating the survey into nine languages, some organisations operate exclusively in their community's language and may have opted out because their preferred language was unavailable.

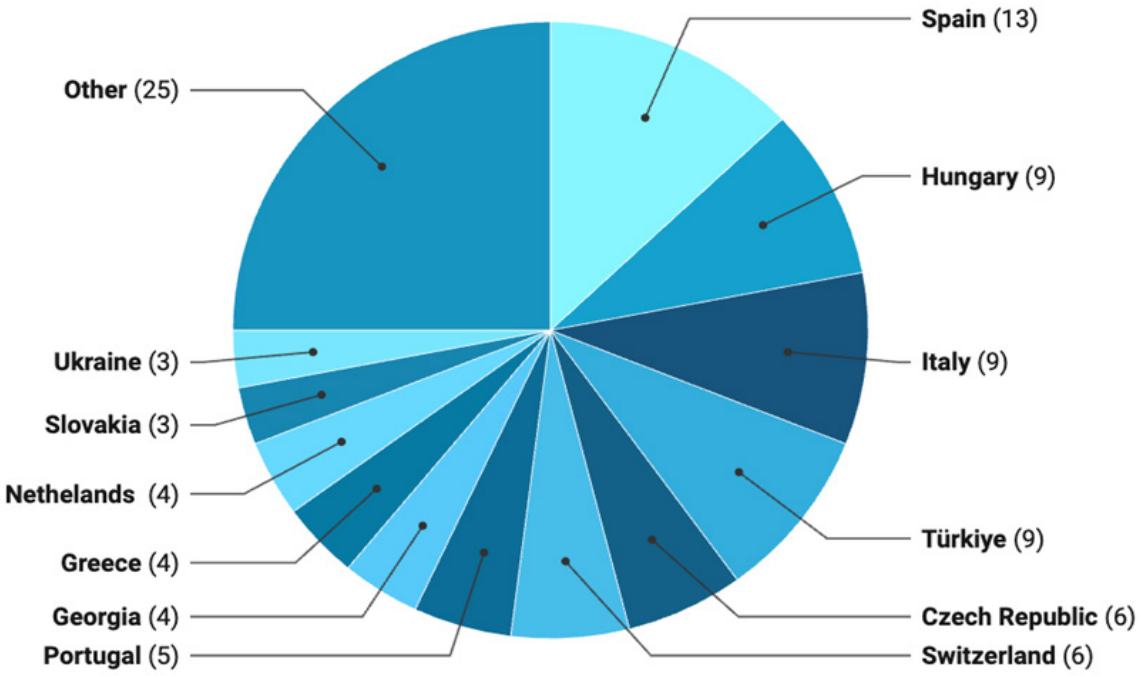
For these reasons, the analysis below should be considered **exploratory**. The list of DSP-led organisations in Europe is not exhaustive. However, the results capture a substantial share of the most active organisations and offer **heuristic value**: they highlight emerging trends, reveal patterns of organisational practice, and suggest directions for future mapping activities. By illustrating key dynamics within a large subset of DSP-led organisations, the survey provides an informed starting point for more comprehensive data collection and deeper qualitative investigation.

Findings

Geography

The distribution of organisations that responded to the survey is largely concentrated in six countries: Spain (13%), Hungary (9%), Italy (9%), Türkiye (9%), Czechia (6%), and Switzerland (6%). This reflects the interaction of several structural and contextual factors. Chiefs among these are: the **size of refugee and stateless populations**, which creates a demand for community-based initiatives; the **tradition of civil society organisation**, which provides an enabling environment for collective action; and **the restrictiveness of asylum and integration policies**, which often drives displaced communities to create their own support and advocacy structures.

Figure 1. Number of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Spain and Italy, for example, have become major destinations for refugees and asylum seekers over the last few years, particularly from North and West Africa; while Czechia is among the countries that have received the highest number of refugees from Ukraine (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2025). Similarly, the strong presence of organisations in Türkiye and Georgia can be linked to their geographical position as major refugee-hosting country (for Türkiye) and large internally displaced population (for Georgia), where DSP-led initiatives often provide essential humanitarian aid, legal support, and community-building services in the absence of sufficient governmental support.

The relatively large number of DSP-led organisations that have answered our survey from these countries can also be explained through the existence of traditions of democratic associationism (Putnam, 1993; Encarnacion, 2001), which has proven a fertile ground for the development of many immigrant organisations (Aparicio Gómez & Tornos Cubillo, 2010; Danese, 2001).

Finally, restrictive asylum policies create a demand for DSP-led initiatives that support social inclusion, employment, and legal advocacy. Over the last decade, for example, Hungary has taken restrictive approaches to refugee protection. This can explain the creation of several DSP-led organisations to promote rights advocacy, legal assistance, and counter xenophobia in the country. The presence of DSP-led organisations here can be seen as a response to restrictive policies that lead to a greater need for DSP populations to create measures of mutual support and advocacy[3].

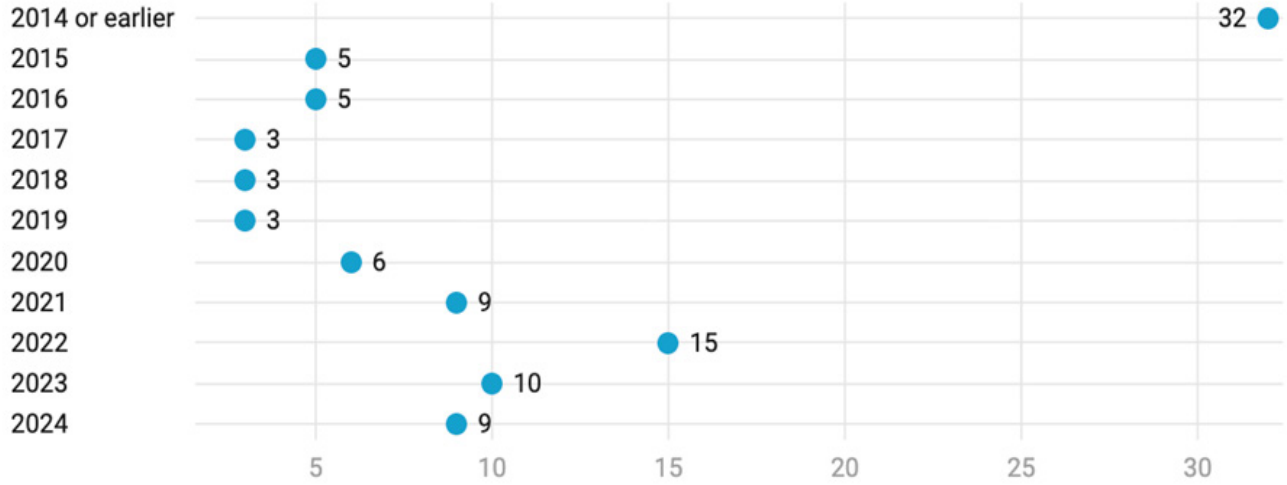
Year of founding

About one-third (32%) of surveyed organisations were established before 2015, reflecting long-standing initiatives that emerged in earlier waves of displacement. Between 2015 and 2020, a steady but modest growth occurred, accounting for 24% of organisations. This period coincides with the aftermath of the 2015–2016 refugee arrivals in Europe, which prompted new forms of community organising. A notable surge appears in the early 2020s, particularly after 2022, when 44% of sur-

3 Three DSP-led organisations for Ukrainians answered our survey from Hungary. The other DSP-led organisations in the country address different populations.

veyed organisations were created. Many of these initiatives responded directly to the large-scale displacement caused by the invasion in Ukraine.

Figure 2. Year of creation of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



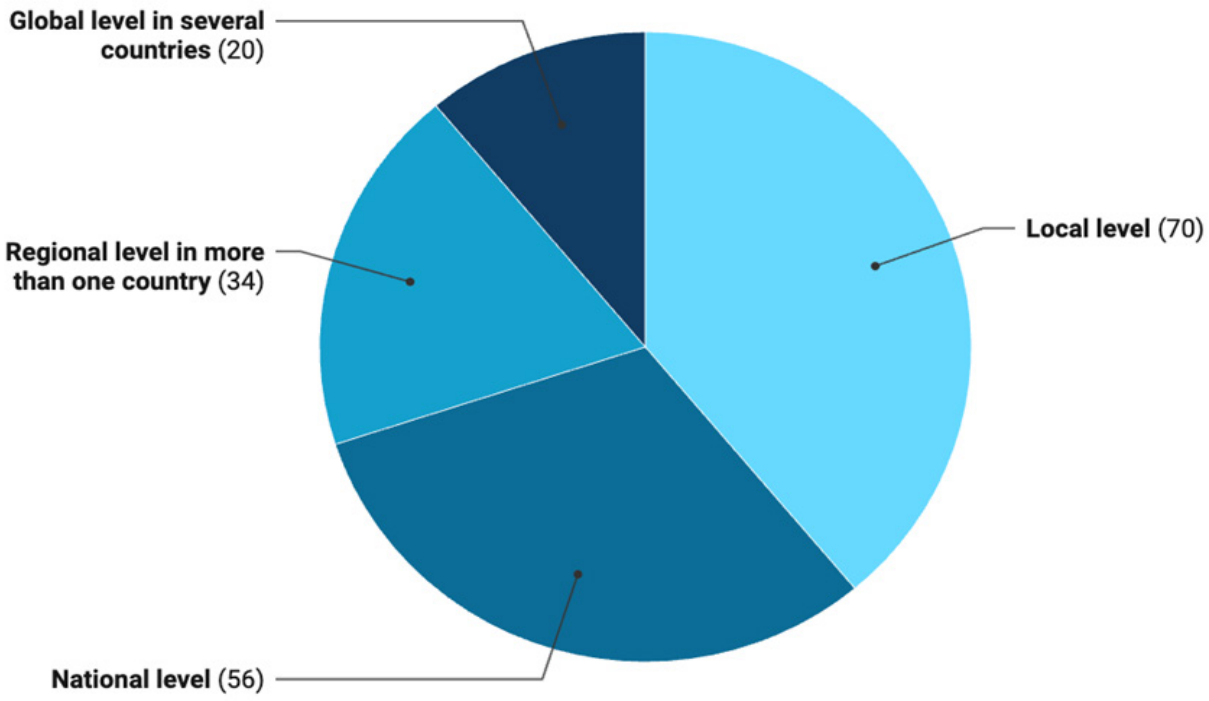
Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

This sharp increase underscores the responsiveness of DSP-led organisations to humanitarian crises and geopolitical shifts, demonstrating their capacity to mobilise rapidly when needs escalate. However, the fact that nearly half (45%) of organisations were established after 2020 suggests a dynamic of **crisis-driven formation**: DSP-led organisations often emerge during acute displacement events, filling gaps in humanitarian assistance and advocacy. It also suggests a **potential fragility**: organisations created in response to emergencies may face sustainability challenges, raising questions about their longevity and capacity to institutionalise beyond the immediate crisis.

Scope of action

Most DSP-led organisations concentrate their efforts at the local level, with 70% **primarily serving their immediate local communities**. This focus reflects their role in addressing urgent needs such as housing, legal assistance, and social support for displaced populations. However, many organisations extend their reach beyond local contexts: 56% operate nationally, leveraging networks and resources to influence policy debates and coordinate with broader civil society actors. A significant minority of 38% work either regionally or globally across more than one country, demonstrating the capacity for cross-border collaboration and transnational advocacy. This **multi-level engagement** highlights both the adaptability of DSP-led organisations and their potential to engage in policy initiatives at different scales, from community-based service delivery to regional policy influence.

Figure 3. Scope of action of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025

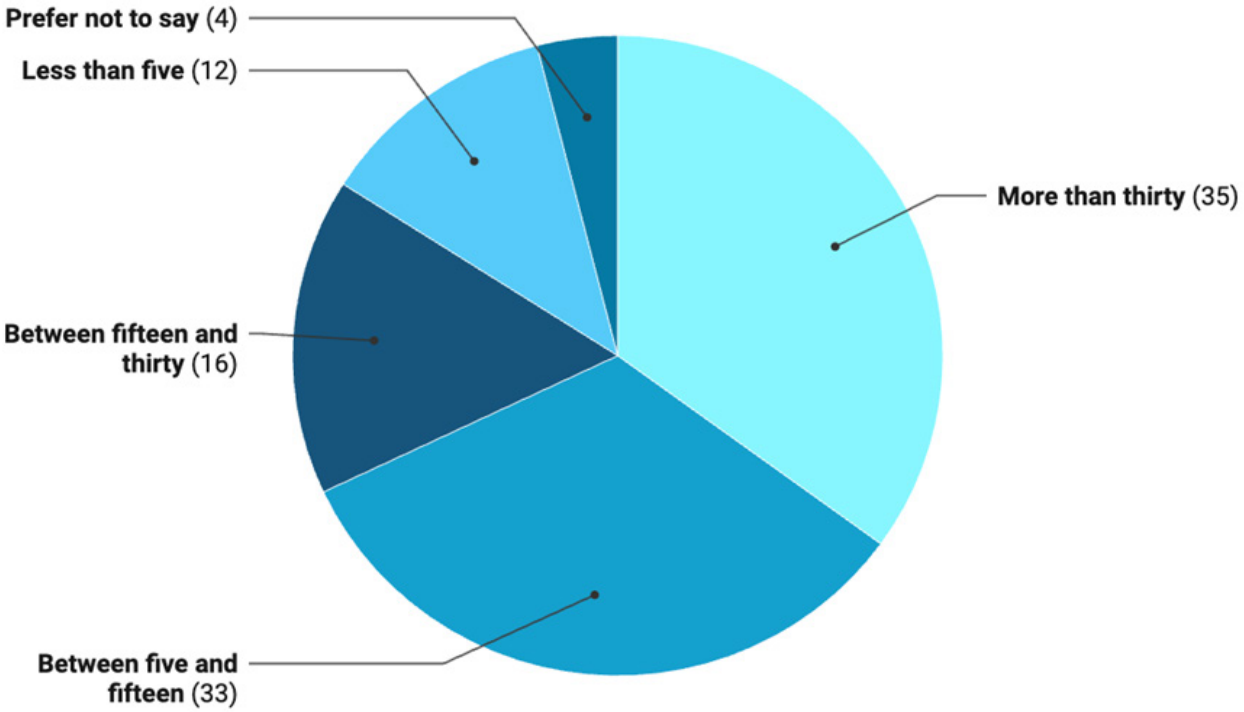


Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Membership

Membership size among DSP-led organisations varies considerably, indicating no clear trend toward either small or large structures. The largest concentrations fall into two categories: 33% report between 5 and 15 members, while 35% have more than 30 members. This distribution suggests that DSP-led organisations generally are either mid-size, community-based groups or larger collectives, with no clear trend toward either model. However, relatively few organisations (12%) report a staff of five or less members. Figure 4 illustrates membership size across surveyed organisations.

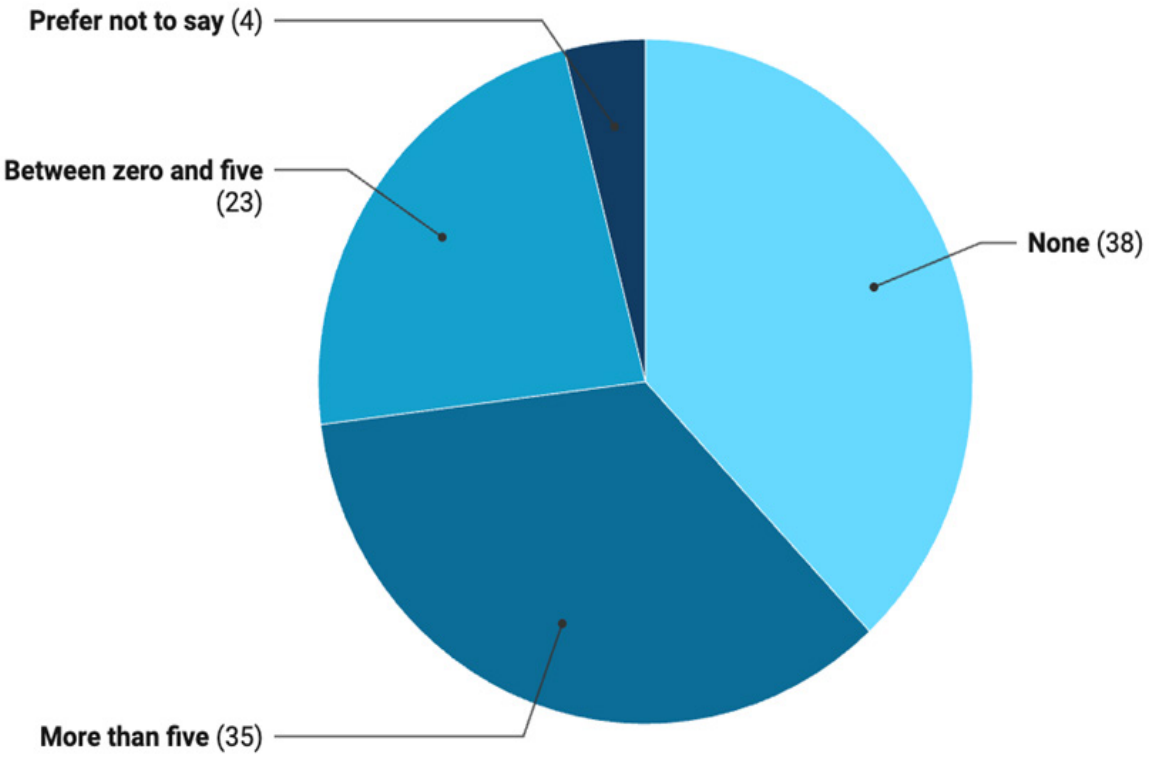
Figure 4. Average membership size of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Staffing patterns reveal significant variation in professionalisation. **More than one-third, 42% of the organisations, report having no paid staff**, indicating heavy reliance on volunteers or self-funded efforts. This suggests high vulnerability to turnover and interruptions in service delivery, as continuity hinges on unstable labour and personal resources. By contrast, 35% employ more than five paid staff members, pointing to a subset of organisations with greater institutional capacity and resources.

Figure 5. Average number of paid staff members working for organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

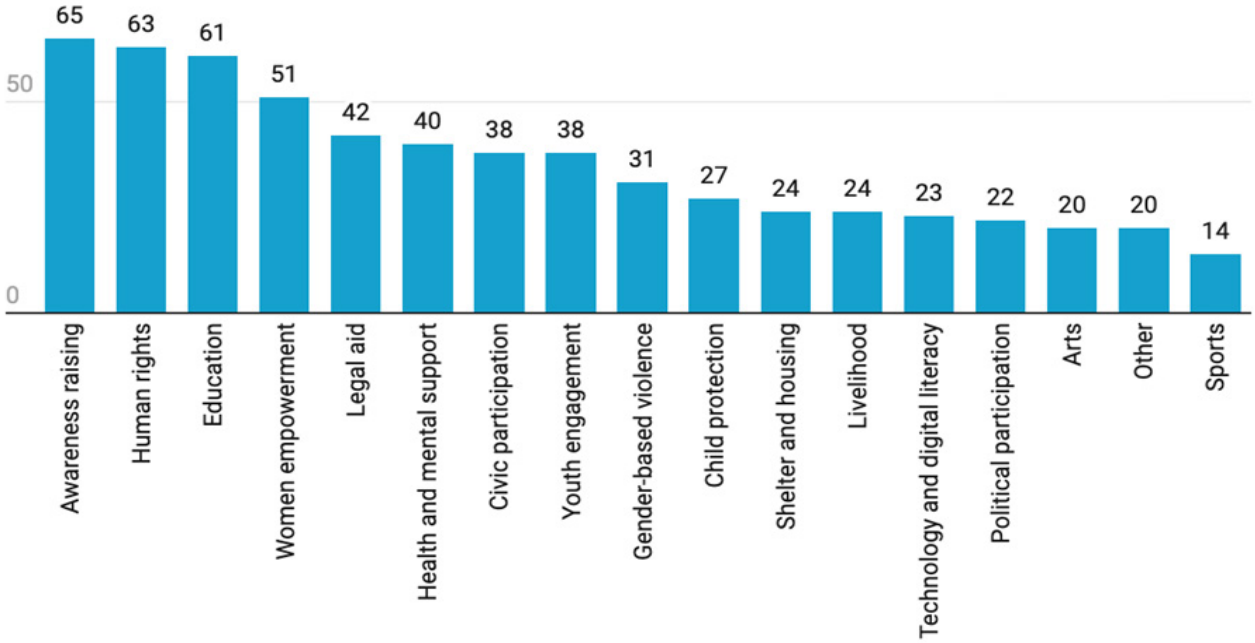
A large proportion of these organisations are either exclusively led by people with experience of forced displacement (40%) or have more than half of their leadership drawn from such backgrounds (30%).

These findings highlight that many DSP-led organisations operate with limited resources, although a few have high levels of professionalisation. This uneven professional infrastructure means that less formalised organisations are more likely to be excluded from competitive funding programmes that require administrative capacity, reporting systems, or prior experience, pushing them into cumulatively precarious positions.

Areas of activity

DSP-led organisations engage in a wide range of activities that reflect both immediate needs and longer-term priorities. The survey shows that **awareness raising** is the most common area of engagement, reported by 65% of organisations. Other prominent activities, each cited by more than 50% of respondents, are **human rights advocacy, education,** and **women's support**. **Legal aid, health and mental health support**, civil participation, youth engagement, and gender-based violence prevention also feature strongly, underscoring a commitment to tackling systemic injustices and supporting marginalised groups. At the other end of the spectrum, activities such as sports, political participation, and arts appear less frequently, suggesting they are often supplementary rather than core priorities.

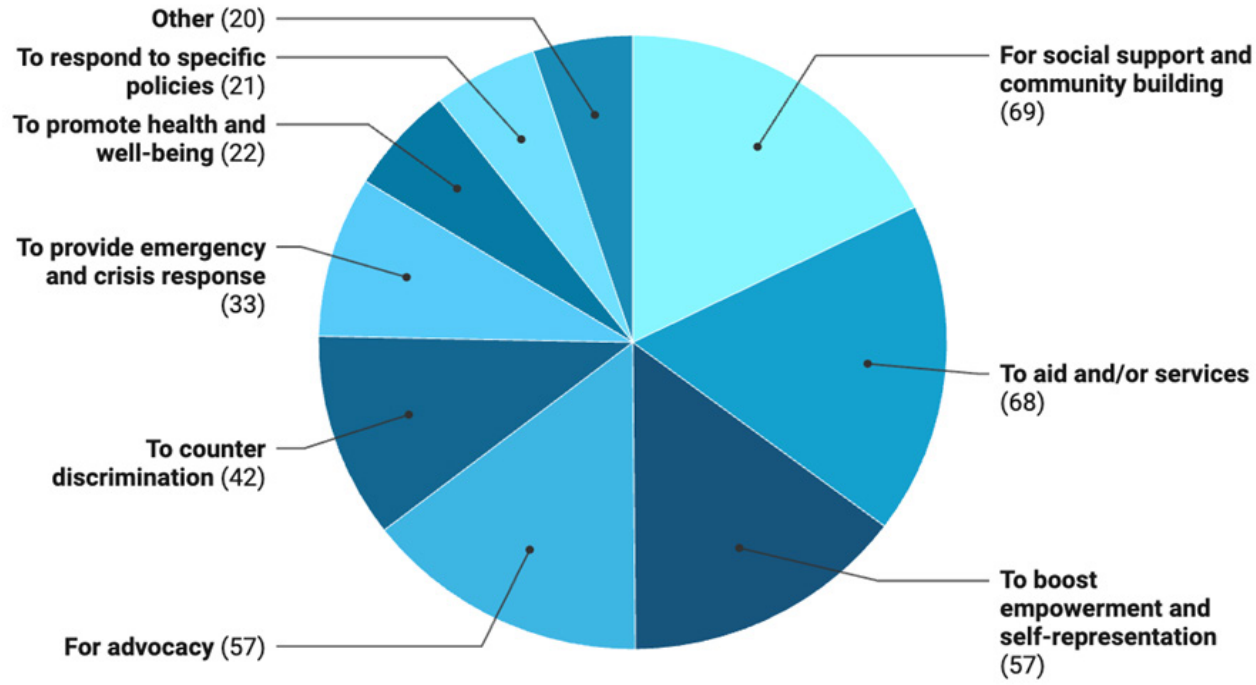
Figure 6. Areas of activity of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

These figures show that DSP-led organisations see the provision of services in critical areas as the starting point for their work. These trends are illustrated by responses to the question about why these organisations were created in the first place. A significant majority of 69% of responses indicated that **providing aid or services, as well as social support and community-building** were the main motivations behind their creation. Also important, with 57% of respondents, are **advocacy** and **boosting empowerment and self-representation**. This balance between practical assistance and public engagement suggests that many organisations combine the provision of immediate services with longer-term goals and systemic change. Fewer organisations report as their motivation countering discrimination (42%), providing emergency and crisis response (33%), promoting health and well-being (22%), and responding to specific policies (21%).

Figure 7. Stated motivations behind the creation of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025

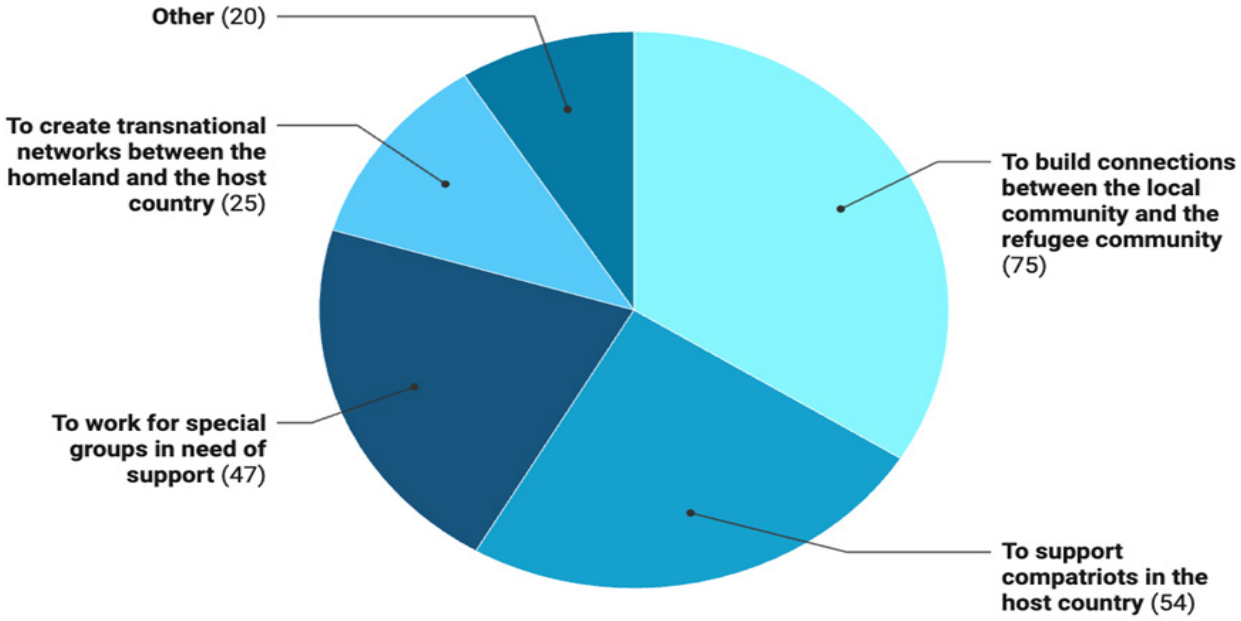


Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Goals

Building connections between the local community and the refugee community is the most frequently cited goal, with 75% of responses. This suggests that a large proportion of DSP-led organisations see their primary mission as bridging ties: reducing social isolation, promoting cultural exchange, and facilitating mutual understanding between newcomers and their host societies.

Figure 8. Stated goals of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

The second most common goal, selected by 54% respondents, is to **support compatriots in the host country**. Indeed, nationality-oriented DSP-led organisations are the majority, although there is a broad distribution of different nationalities including Afghanis, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Iraqis, Somalis, Syrians, Ukrainians. So, this is not driven by one specific group. The only exception is represented by Ukrainian nationals: there are 15 organisations dedicated to this nationality among those that have answered the survey, a very significant number.

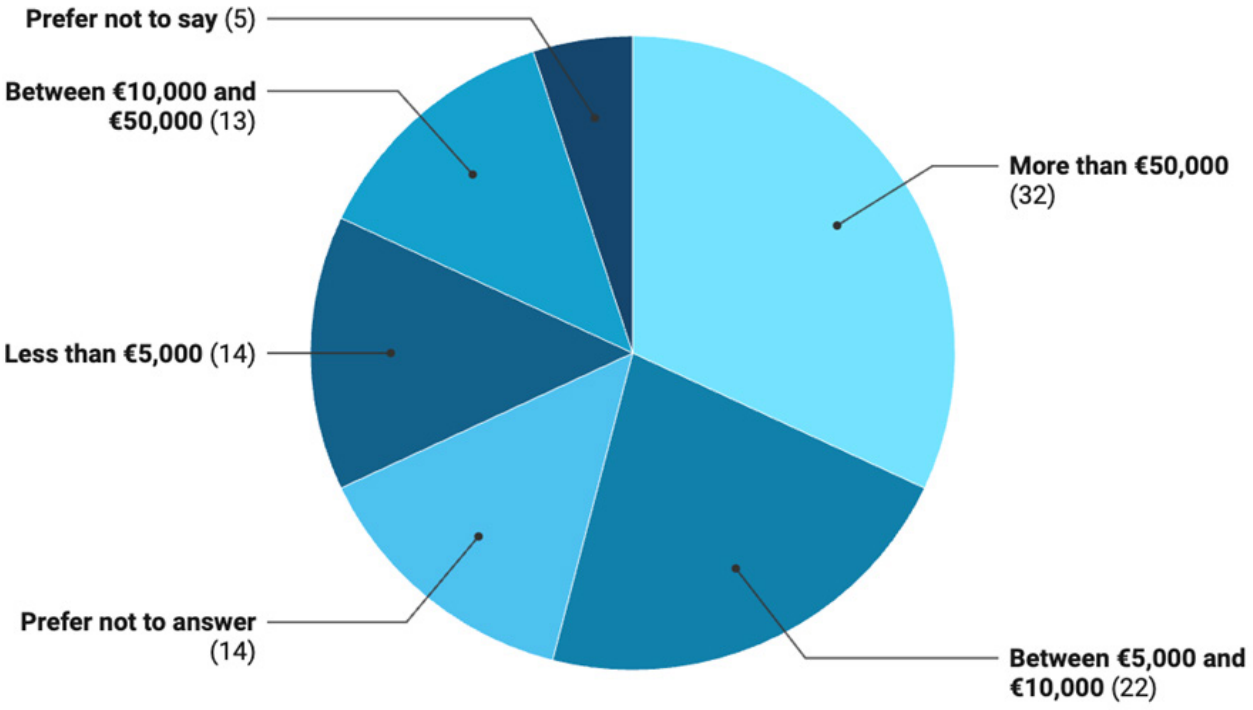
A significant subset of 25% respondents seeks to **create transnational networks between their homeland and the host country**. For these organisations, a key goal is to maintain cross-border connections and engage in transnational advocacy. However, only 11% of respondents emphasised pursuing political goals for the homeland, suggesting that overt political advocacy related to refugees' country of origin is less widespread likely due to strategic considerations about policy environments or constraints that limit their capacity for cross-border political advocacy.

Answers to the survey show that most DSP-led organisations **serve specific constituencies**: as already reported, 54% of the organisations that answered the survey primarily support compatriots, while 47% focus on particularly vulnerable groups: refugees with disabilities, refugee women and children, refugee mothers raising children on their own, large families of refugees, elderly refugees, refugee and migrant journalists, war trauma survivors, LGBTQ + refugees, stateless individuals, and refugees who have been victims of exploitation and human trafficking.

Funding: budget, sources

A total of 32% of the surveyed organisations reported a budget exceeding €50,000, indicating a substantial capacity for larger-scale operations. In contrast, 13% indicated a budget between €50,000 and €10,000, 22% between €10,000 and €5,000, while 14% organisations operated with budgets under €5,000. This distribution reflects a diverse mix of organisational capacity, suggesting that the sector encompasses both well-resourced entities and those grappling with significant financial limitations.

Figure 9. Average budget size of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025

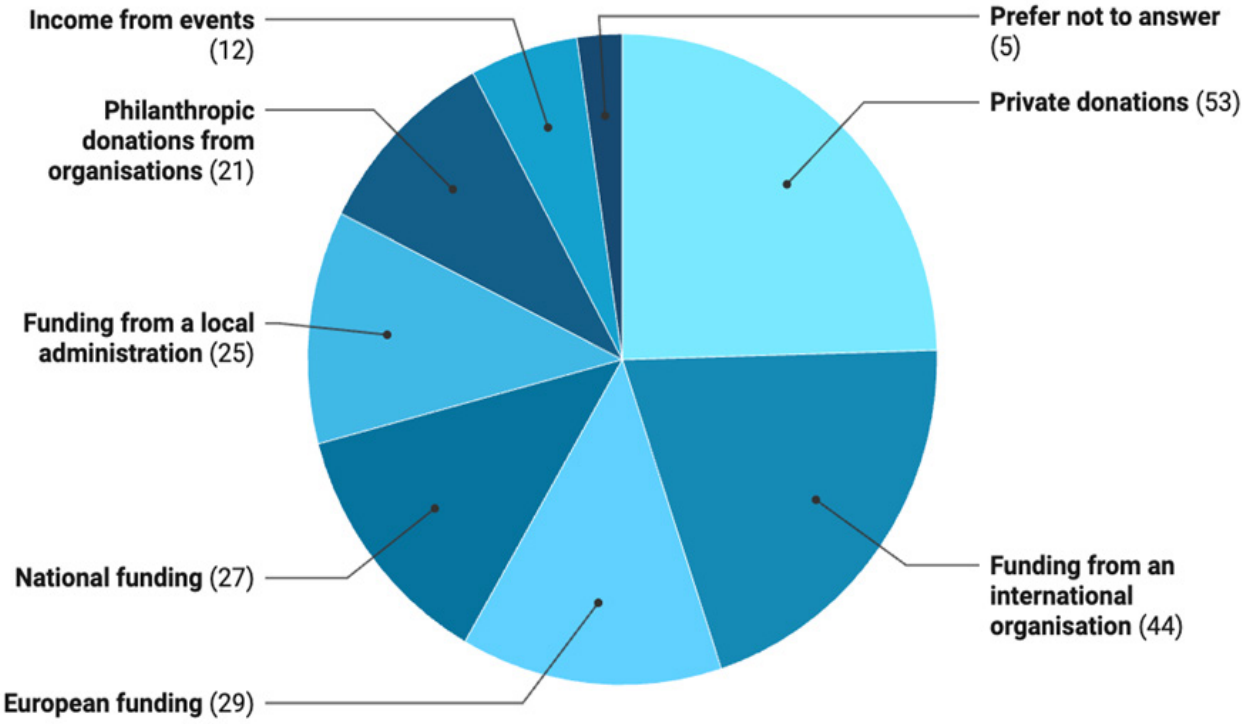


Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Among the organisations that disclosed their primary funding sources, 53% indicated that **they primarily rely on private donations**. This reliance on individual contributions raises concerns about the sustainability and stability of their funding. Event-generated income, reported by 12% of organisations as their primary source of funding, further underscores the precarious nature of their financial foundations, as this source can often be unpredictable and subject to external factors.

The survey also reveals a strong reliance on institutional support. Among those, the most common source is international organisations, cited by 44% of respondents, followed by European organisations (29%), national governments (27%), and local administrations (25%). In contrast, philanthropic donations were reported only by 21% of organisations, indicating that philanthropists only provide a relatively minor contributor to the financial stability of DSP-led organisations. Overall, the heavy reliance on institutional funding indicates a vulnerability to fluctuations in policy priorities and donor agendas

Figure 10. Funding source of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025

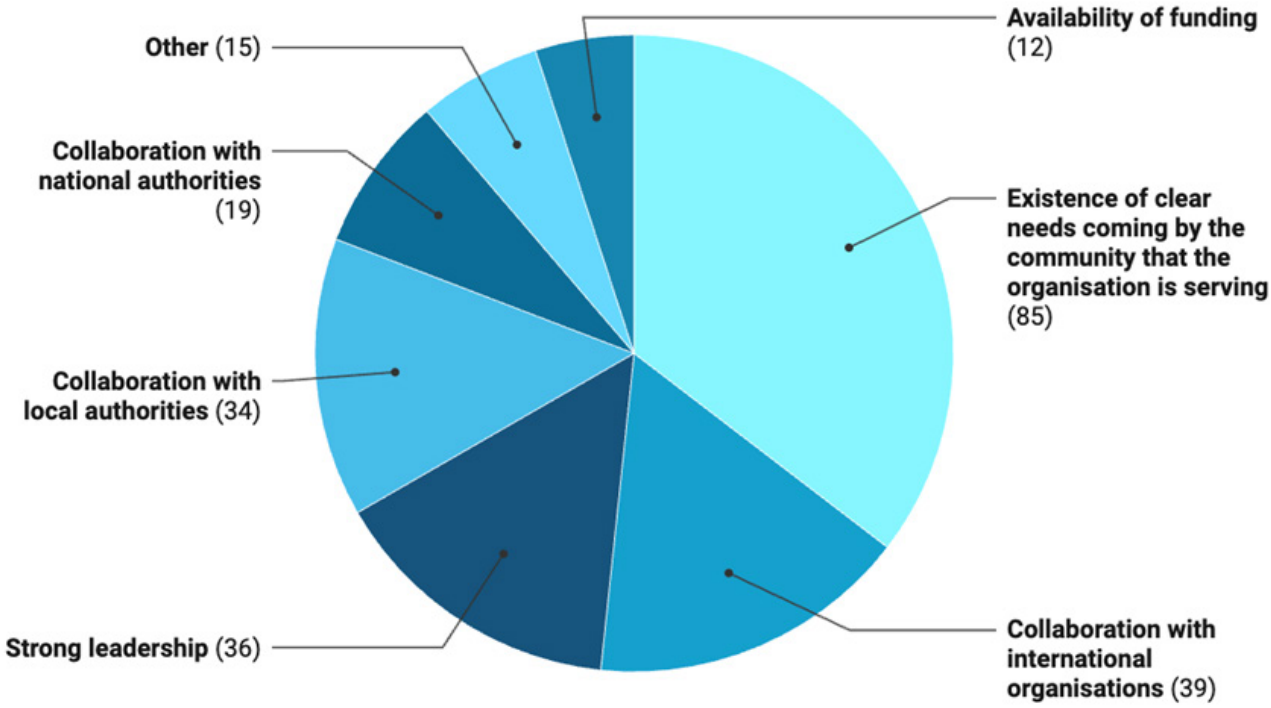


Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Enabling factors

A substantial majority of respondents (85%) identified the **presence of community needs** as the primary catalyst for the formation of their organisations. This suggests that DSP-led organisations are generally created to respond to clear needs coming from specific communities. **Collaboration with international organisations** was identified as the second most important enabling factors, with 39% of the responses, **Strong leadership** is the third most reported enabling factor, with 36% of respondents citing it as instrumental in their organisation's creation. This points to the importance of entrepreneurial leaders who can articulate a shared mission and go through the hurdles of setting up an organisation. Collaboration with local and national authorities was identified as an important enabling factor by 34% and 19% of organisations, respectively. These findings suggest that partnerships with established entities provide critical support, resources, and legitimacy to about one-quarter of newly formed organisations.

Figure 11. Enabling factors behind the creation of organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

In response to the open-ended question regarding other enabling factors, several organisations highlighted their establishment as a direct response to ongoing crises, such as the displacement resulting from the Arab Spring in 2015-2016 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This confirms what discussed above: crisis situations work as accelerators for organisational formation, prompting individuals to organise in response to immediate and pressing needs in their communities of origin.

Moreover, the lack of representation for specific groups, such as youth, stateless, and people with disabilities, emerged as a motivating factor for some respondents. This insight underscores the necessity for targeted advocacy and support for marginalised populations within displaced and stateless communities. Finally, cooperation with other NGOs and church organisations was frequently noted as an enabling factor, illustrating the significance of solidarity and collaborative efforts.

These findings suggest that while DSP-led organisations are primarily **driven by the existence of needs**, rather than by the availability of funding. Their success over time often depends on leadership capacity and strategic partnerships, combined with the ability to respond quickly to crises and represent marginalised voices.

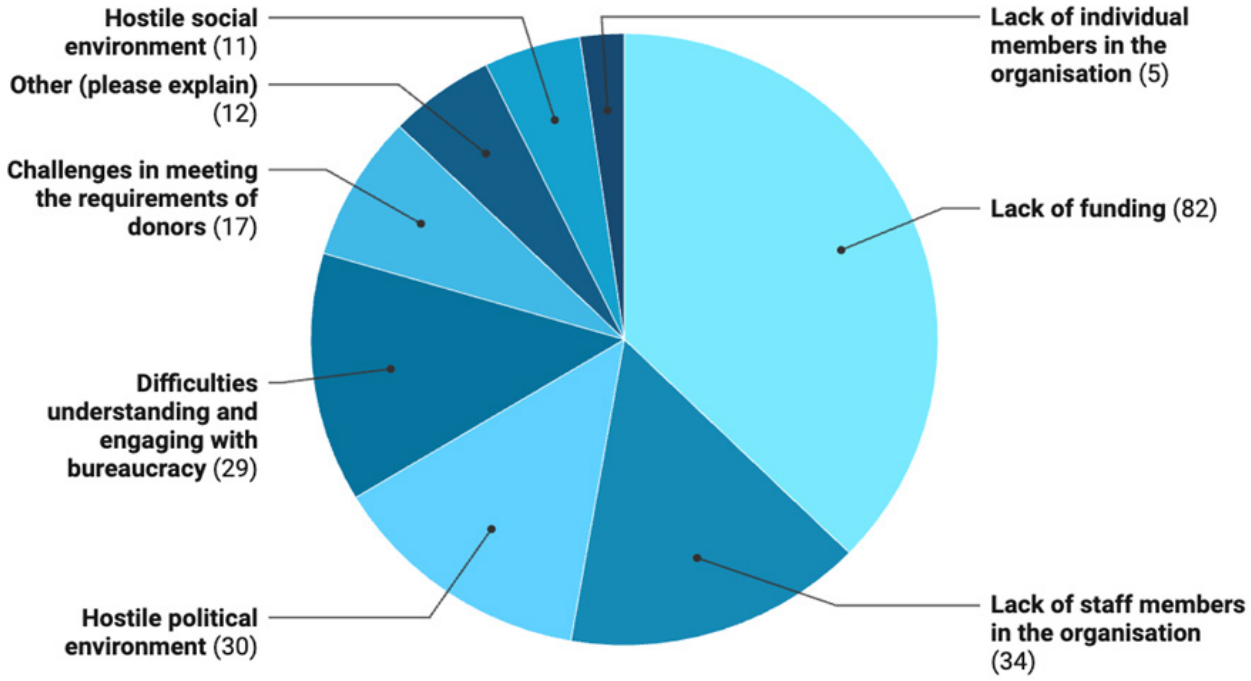
Challenges

A significant majority of respondents (82%) identified **lack of funding as the predominant challenge** faced by their organisations. This finding underscores the critical financial constraints that inhibit the operational capabilities of DSP-led organisations. In addition to funding, some respondents highlighted **difficulties in understanding and engaging with bureaucratic processes** (29% of respondents). The complexity of bureaucratic systems can create significant barriers to accessing resources and support, further exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by DSP-led organisations.

The survey also revealed that a **lack of staff members** (34%) and a **hostile political environment** (30%) are important sources of concerns for DSP-led organisations. The scarcity of personnel

not only limits the operational capacity of these organisations but also places additional strain on existing staff members. Furthermore, the presence of a hostile political environment can stifle advocacy efforts and deter community engagement, negatively impacting the overall mission of these organisations. Additional challenges identified by respondents included the vulnerability of the communities they represent, with individuals expressing fear of speaking out or assuming leadership roles. Uncertainty regarding operational logistics, such as securing venues and sustaining projects, was also noted, alongside the unpredictable nature of political events.

Figure 12. Main challenges reported by organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



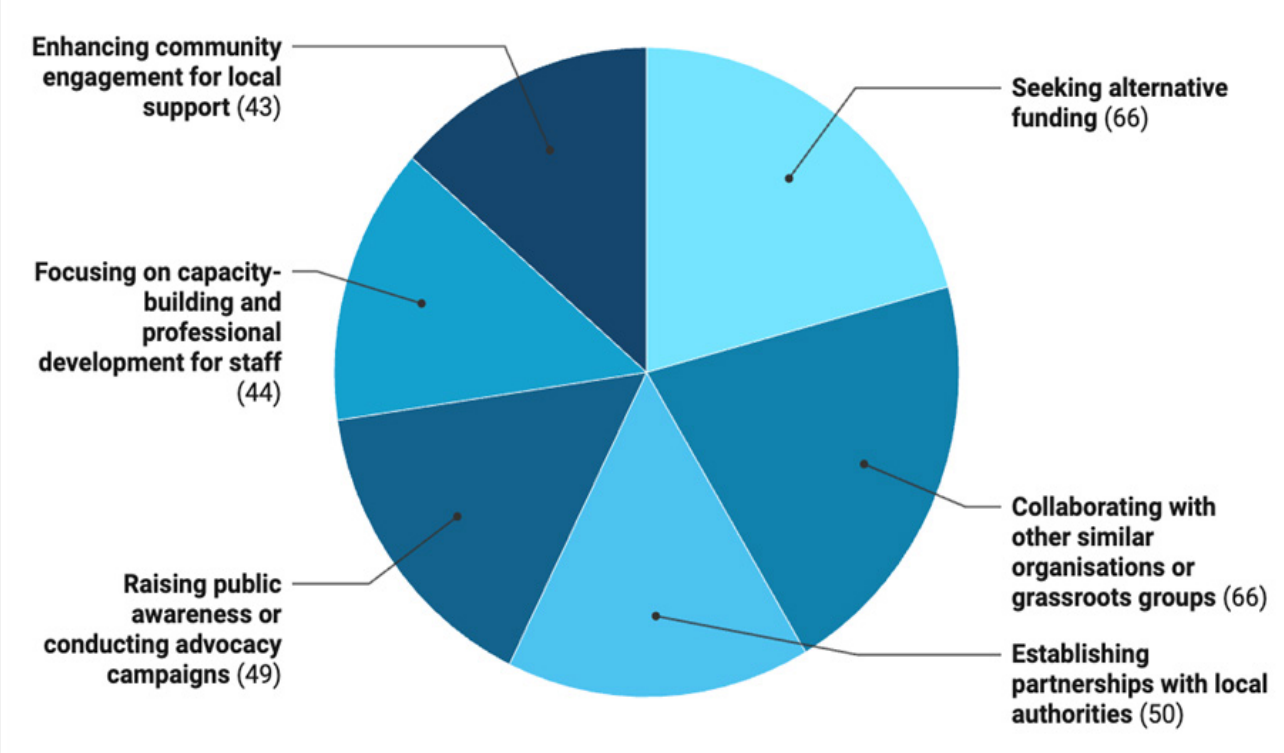
Source: Authors' elaboration with data collected through the online survey.

Solutions to the challenges

The survey reveals several strategies that DSP-led organisations employ to address operational and structural challenges. The most common approaches, both reported by 65% of respondents, are **securing alternative funding sources and collaborating with other DSP-led organisations or grassroots groups**. This reflects the sector's reliance on diverse financial streams to maintain operations, particularly given the instability of traditional funding channels, and the importance to establish networks and mutual support initiatives.

Other frequent strategies are establishing partnerships with local authorities (50%), raising public awareness through communication campaigns (49%), supporting professional development of the staff (44%), and enhancing community engagement (43%).

Figure 13. Main strategies reported by organisations led by displaced and stateless populations per country in Europe active in 2025



Open-ended responses point to additional solutions, including partnerships with the private sector, use of cost-effective technology, and engagement with politicians. These approaches demonstrate adaptability and creativity in navigating resource constraints and institutional barriers.

These findings underscore that DSP-led organisations rely on **network-building, resource diversification, and advocacy as core strategies to build resilience over time**. Supporting these efforts through targeted funding, capacity-building, and facilitation of partnerships could significantly strengthen their sustainability and impact.

Conclusion

DSP-led organisations have emerged as indispensable actors in refugee governance across Europe. They fill critical gaps in humanitarian aid, community-building, and rights advocacy, often stepping in where state and international responses fall short. Our survey finds that their formation is primarily driven by urgent community needs and frequently accelerated by crises such as large-scale displacement events. This responsiveness demonstrates agility and local knowledge, but it also exposes a structural fragility: organisations created during emergencies often struggle to sustain themselves beyond the immediate crisis.

Despite these challenges, some DSP-led organisations show remarkable resilience. Those that endure over time do so by mobilising resources creatively, building strong community networks, and forging partnerships with other civil society actors. Most of these organisations operate primarily at the local level, focusing on immediate community needs such as housing, legal assistance, and social support. These strategies enable them to maintain activities even under conditions of unstable funding and bureaucratic complexity. The existence and persistence of these organisations challenge outdated narratives of refugees as passive recipients of aid. Instead, they reveal displaced and stateless individuals as active agents who contribute to social and political life in host countries.

Recognising and supporting this agency is essential for inclusive governance. Targeted funding, capacity-building, and formal inclusion of DSP-led organisations in policy processes can strengthen humanitarian responses and foster more equitable and participatory systems across Europe.

Policy Recommendations

For states, public bodies, and international organisations

1. **Simplify registration processes**: Plan for simple access and legal assistance to help DSP-led organisations formalise and sustain their operations.
2. **Institutionalise the participation of DSP-led organisations in governance and policy processes**: This study highlights that DSP-led organisations are crucial intermediaries between displaced communities and host societies, providing insights into local needs and improving trust in institutions. Building connections between local and refugee communities is the main goal for 75% of organisations, yet their expertise in bridging these divides is rarely used in formal decision-making. However, they are often excluded from formal decision-making structures due to legal, political, or administrative barriers. Including them in governance processes strengthens both humanitarian outcomes and democratic legitimacy.
3. **Make emergency funds quickly available to DSP-led organisations**: Set aside funds that DSP-led organisations can easily access when crises occur and ensure that there is direct funding available without passing through intermediary organisations. The survey findings show crisis situations consistently trigger the creation of new organisations, with DSP-led groups stepping in as first responders when displacement happens, demonstrating their critical role that needs immediate funding.
4. **Plan for what happens when emergency funding ends**: Develop funding that recognises that newly formed organisations need time to establish themselves and provides multi-year funding during their first years. Nearly half (44%) of surveyed organisations were created after 2022, showing they mobilise quickly during crises but need sustained support to become stable organisations beyond the immediate emergency. The 15 Ukrainian organisations (14% of respondents) that formed quickly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine now face uncertain futures as emergency programs end, showing the need for planned transitions rather than sudden funding cuts.
5. **Make small grants easier to get**: Design application processes that match the grant size with simpler requirements for smaller amounts. Over one-third (36%) of organisations work with budgets under €10,000, while 32% say that bureaucracy is a major problem, showing that current requirements are too complex for the small amounts of funding these organisations typically handle.
6. **Create a single place to find all funding opportunities**: Build a platform in multiple languages that bring together all funding opportunities and resources in one place. Most DSP-led organisations work mainly at local level (74%) and struggle to find information about funding, a gap that could be solved with accessible and centralised information.
7. **Help organisations develop beyond their founders**: Support leadership development and planning for leadership changes within DSP-led organisations. While strong leadership is the second most important factor for success (34% of respondents), the fact that 42% have no paid staff shows these organisations are vulnerable if key leaders leave.
8. **Give established DSP-led organisations official recognition**: Develop systems that formally recognise experienced organisations to make future funding easier to access. One-third (32%) of organisations have existed since before 2015, showing they have survived multiple crises and deserve recognition that helps them access resources more easily.
9. **Support organisations working with the most vulnerable**: Create specific funding for DSP-led organisations serving particularly marginalised groups. Over one-third (35%) of organisations help specific vulnerable groups including refugees with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, elderly refugees, and single mothers, filling gaps that mainstream services often miss.

For civil society organisations, including DSP-led organisations

1. **Share resources**: Facilitate access to office space, technology, and networks to reduce operational barriers.
2. **Design processes of capacity strengthening**: Offer tailored support to other organisations in areas such as governance, fundraising, and digital tools, while respecting organisational autonomy.
3. **Facilitate dialogue with authorities**: DSP-led organistions play a critical role in facilitating dialogue with public authorities by supporting structured engagement with local governments, coordinating communication, and acting as trusted liaisons between communities and institutions both preventively and during crises. Findings from this study show that their work strengthens mediation, advocacy, and social cohesion, while also creating pathways for refugee employability and volunteerism in roles such as community liaison officers, government-relations assistants, advocacy and outreach coordinators, public-affairs assistants, institutional communication facilitators, and community–government interface officers. DSP-led organisations can leverage on this experience to offer training to public administration and assist in strategic communication to enhance institutional dialogue and outreach.

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Appendix 1. Survey questions

1. What is the name of your organisation?
2. In which country is your organisation's headquarters?
3. Can you please indicate your organisation's website, if available?
4. Can you please indicate your organisation's main social media handle, if available?
5. Is your organisation active at the local, national, regional or global level? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Local level (in one or more countries)
    b. National level (one or more countries)
    c. Regional level (regional issues in one or more countries)
    d. Global level (global issues in one or more countries)
    e. Global activities only with no programmes at country level
6. How would you identify your organisation? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Refugee-led organisation
    b. Stateless-led
    c. Migrant-led
    d. Women-led
    e. Youth-led
    f. LGBTQI+-led
    g. Led by people with disability
    h. Led by internally displaced persons
    i. Other (please explain)
7. Where do most operations of your organisations take place?
    a. In the country where my organisation has the headquarters
    b. In the country of origin of the members of the organisation
    c. Other (Please explain)
8. What is the approximate share of people with lived experience of forced displacement who are leaders or hold managerial positions in your organisation?
    a. 100%
    b. More than 50%
    c. Less than 50%

9. What is the share of members with lived experience of displacement in your organisation?
    a. 100%
    b. More than 50%
    c. Less than 50%
10. When was your organisation created?
    a. Before 2015
    b. In 2015
    c. In 2016
    d. In 2017
    e. In 2018
    f. In 2019
    g. In 2020
    h. In 2021
    i. In 2022
    j. In 2023
    k. In 2024
11. Why was your organisation created? (Please select all that apply)
    - To aid and/or services
    - To boost empowerment and self-representation
    - For social support and community building
    - For advocacy
    - To promote health and well-being
    - To provide emergency and crisis response
    - To respond to specific policies
    - To counter discrimination
    - Other (please explain)
12. What is the area of activity of your organisation? (Please select all that apply)
    - Arts
    - Awareness raising
    - Child protection
    - Civic participation
    - Gender-based violence
    - Education
    - Health and mental support

- Livelihood
- Women empowerment
- Political participation
- Shelter and housing
- Legal aid
- Human rights
- Sports
- Technology and digital literacy
- Youth engagement
- Other (please explain)

13. What is the main goal of your organisation? (Please select all that apply)
    - To support compatriots in the host country
    - To build connections between the local community and the refugee community
    - To create transnational networks between the homeland and the host country
    - To pursue common political goals for the homeland
    - To work for special groups in need of support (Please specify)
    - Other (please explain)
14. What are the main activities offered by your organisation? (Please select all those that apply)
    - Common meal/celebration
    - Consultation on life in host country
    - Language courses
    - Assistance communicating with authorities
    - Courses on living in host country
    - Courses on life/traditions in the home country
    - Sports
    - Civic and/or political debates
    - Legal advice
    - Other (Please specify)
15. How many people are members of your organisation?
    - Less than five
    - Between five and fifteen
    - Between fifteen and thirty
    - More than thirty

16. How many paid staff members (either part-time or full-time) does your organisation have?
    - None
    - Between zero and five
    - More than five
17. What are the funding sources of your organisation? (Please select all that apply)
    - Income from events
    - Private donations
    - Philanthropic donations from organisations
    - European funding
    - National funding
    - Funding from a local administration
    - Funding from an international organisation
    - Prefer not to answer
18. What was your budget for the latest financial year?
    - Less than €5,000
    - Between €5,000 and €10,000
    - Between €10,000 and €50,000
    - More than €50,000
    - Prefer not to answer
19. Does your organisation work for specific nationalities?
    - Yes (If yes, please specify)
    - No
20. What are important enabling factors that contributed to the creation of your organisation? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Existence of clear needs coming by the community that the organisation is serving
    b. Strong leadership
    c. Availability of funding
    d. Collaboration with local authorities
    e. Collaboration with national authorities
    f. Collaboration with international organisations
    g. Other (please explain)

21. Has your organisation been involved in grassroots initiatives (e.g. Manifestations, food banks, sit-ins, workshops…) with other organisations?

    a. Yes

    b. No

22. If yes, please specify

23. Has your organisation ever participated in participatory initiatives (such as consultations, advisory boards, surveys, etc.)? (Please select all that apply)

    a. Yes, with local government(s)

    b. Yes, with national government(s)

    c. Yes, with an international organisation

    d. Other, please explain what type(s) of initiatives you participated in

24. What are the most effective projects implemented by your organisation? (Please indicate the project name, goals, and detailed activities, if possible).

25. What are the main challenges that your organisation faces? (Please select all that apply)

    a. Difficulties understanding and engaging with bureaucracy

    b. Lack of funding

    c. Lack of staff members in the organisation

    d. Lack of individual members in the organisation

    e. Hostile political environment

    f. Hostile social environment

    g. Challenges in meeting the requirements of donors

    h. Other (please explain)

26. How does your organisation deal with these challenges? (Please select all that apply)

    a. Establishing partnerships with local authorities

    b. Seeking alternative funding

    c. Raising public awareness or conducting advocacy campaigns

    d. Enhancing community engagement for local support

    e. Focusing on capacity-building and professional development for staff

    f. Collaborating with other similar organisations or grassroots groups

    g. Other (Please explain)

27. Would you like to add anything else about the factors that enabled or hindered the creation, sustainability, and impact of your organisation?

28. What would be one success or enabling factor that will make your organisation thrive and become sustainable in the long-run? (Please explain)

29. Can you help us disseminating this survey?

30. Would you like to be informed about the results of this research?
    a. Yes (Please provide an email address)
    b. No
31. Do you have any final comments you would like to add?

Appendix 2. List of organisations that answered the survey[4]

Name of the organisation (Original language)	Name of the organisation (English)	Website
Center for artsakh cultural prezervation	Center for Artsakh Cultural Preservation	N/A
Associazione Studenti Diaspora Africana (ASDA)	African Diaspora Students Association	http://www.asda.altervista.org
Comissió Catalana d'Acció pel Refugi - Comision Catalanada de Acción por el Refugio	Catalan Commission for Refugee Action	http://www.ccar.cat
ABC Danmark	ABC Denmark	http://www.abcdanmark.dk
Aditus foundation	Aditus foundation	http://www.aditus.org.mt
Aesco Ong	Aesco Ong	http://www.ong-aesco.org
Afghan Refugee Solidarity Association (ARSA)	Afghan Refugee Solidarity Association (ARSA)	http://www.arsa.org.tr
Afghan Women Association in Spain (AMAE)	Afghan Women Association in Spain	N/A
Afganistan Hazaraları Kültür Ve Dayanışma Derneği	Afghanistan Hazaras Culture and Solidarity Association	http://www.ahcsa.org
Afganistanlılar yardımlaşma derneği	Afghanistan Solidarity Association	N/A
Associação Africa Cultura e Evolução	Africa Culture and Evolution Association	N/A
Comunità africana di Brindisi e provincia APS	African Community of Brindisi and Province APS	N/A
Apatride Network	Apatride Network	http://www.apatride.eu
Arc Essentiel	Arc Essentiel	http://www.arcessentiel.org
ASA	ASA	N/A
Asociacion para la Amistad y el Refuerzo Intercultural Afgano-Españoles (ARIA-E)	Association for Afghan-Spanish Friendship and Intercultural Reinforcement (ARIA-E)	http://www.aria-e.org
Association pour la promotion des droits humains en Migration (APDH)	Association for the Promotion of Human Rights in Migration (APDH)	http://www.apdh.ch
XXI. Századi Roma Nők O. Egyesülete	Association of 21st Century Roma Women	http://www.romanokegy.mozzelosite.com
Association of citizen VIVE ZENE	Association of citizens VIVE ZENE	http://www.vivezene.ba
Associação da comunidade afegã em Portugal	Association of the Afghan community in Portugal	N/A
Спілка українців та їх друзів в Маріанських Лазнях та околиці	Association of Ukrainians and their friends in Mariánské Lázně and the surrounding area	http://www.ukrspolek.eu
Associacio d'ucraïnesos a catalunya "txervona kalyna"	Association of Ukrainians in Catalonia "Chervona Kalyna"	N/A
Association Snaga zene	Association Snaga zene	http://www.snagazene.org

4 The websites of the organizations were last accessed on 8 December 2025.

Asylum Protection Center	Asylum Protection Center	www.apc-cza.org
Associazione Socio-Culturale Awa	Awa Socio-Cultural Association	http://www.associazionea-wa.org
Basmeh&Zeitooneh	Basmeh&Zeitooneh	https://basmeh-zeitooneh.org/
Better Future	Better Future	N/A
Associazione culturale BLITZ	BLITZ Cultural Association	https://asscultblitz.wixsite.com/blitz
Bona Fide	Bona Fide	N/A
Capacity	Capacity	http://www.capacity.swiss
Care is near	Care is near	N/A
Change for Syria	Change for Syria	http://www.change4syria.org
Civil Rights Project Sisak (CRP Sisak)	Civil Rights Project Sisak	http://www.crpsisak.hr
Community Rigths in Greece	Community Rigths in Greece	http://www.community-rg.org
Асоціація “ConUcrania”	ConUcrania Association	http://www.conucrania.com
Cooperación y Desarrollo con el Norte de África- CODENAF	Cooperation and Development with North Africa - CODENAF	http://www.codenaf.org
Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria	Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria	http://www.crw-bg.org
Czech-Ukrainian Scientific Society	Czech-Ukrainian Scientific Society	http://www.czuss.cz
Associazione volontariato Donne dell’Est	Eastern Women’s Voluntary Association	N/A
Echo of diversity	Echo of diversity	N/A
Eritreischer Medienbund Schweiz	Eritrean Media Association Switzerland	http://www.eritreischer-medienbund.ch
Ethiopians.ch	Ethiopians.ch	http://www.Ethiopians.ch
Experts by Experience Employment Initiative	Experts by Experience Employment Initiative	http://www.ebeemployment.org.uk
Bundesweiter Koordinierungskreis gegen Menschenhandel - KOK e.V.	Federal Coordination Group against Human Trafficking - KOK e.V.	http://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de
Asociación Por Ti Mujer	For you Woman Association	http://www.asociacionpor-timujer.org
Foundation for Access to Rights-far	Foundation for Access to Rights-far	http://www.farbg.eu
Amigos de Ucrania	Friends of Ukraine	http://www.amigosdeucrania.es
FSC “Open Doors”	FSC “Open Doors”	http://www.opendoors.center
Greek Forum of Refugees	Greek Forum of Refugees	http://www.refugees.gr
Kŕdeľ	Herd	http://www.krdel.org
HOMETOWN association, z.s.	HOMETOWN association, z.s.	http://www.home-town.cz
Humanitarian council SOS-Kramatorsk	Humanitarian council SOS-Kramatorsk	N/A

Uluslararası Mavi Hilal İnsani Yardım ve Kalkınma Vakfı (IBC)	International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC)	http://www.ibc.org.tr
Intrecciante ASD	Intrecciante ASD	http://www.intrecciantеasd.it
Unione Italiana Apolidi	Italian Stateless Union	https://www.unioneitalianaapolidi.com/
Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados Portugal	Jesuit Refugee Service Portugal	http://www.jrsportugal.pt
KAHU	KAHU	N/A
Pabėgėlių Taryba	Lithuanian Refugee Council	http://www.refugeeslt.com
Media and Migration Association	Media and Migration Association	http://www.medyavegoc.org
Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants	Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants	http://www.menedek.hu
MeTooCuba	MeTooCuba	http://www.metoocuba.com
Huellas Migrantes	Migrant Footprints	N/A
Migrant women Hungary association (she4she) Migrans nők Magyarország Egyesület MINŐK	Migrant women Hungary association (she4she)	http://www.she4she.hu
Migration Inc.	Migration Inc.	http://www.migrationinc.nl
Migration Observatory and Diaspora Integration Lab MODIL 2025-2030	Migration Observatory and Diaspora Integration Lab MODIL 2025-2030	N/A
Mosaico - Azioni per i Rifugiati	Mosaic - Actions for Refugees	https://mosaicorefugees.org/
MTÜ Ukrainians in Haapsalu	MTÜ Ukrainians in Haapsalu	N/A
National Aviation University	National Aviation University	http://www.nau.edu.ua
NEEKA z.s.	NEEKA z.s.	N/A
New Women Connectors	New Women Connectors	http://www.newwomenconnectors.com
Newcomers with disabilities in Sweden	Newcomers with disabilities in Sweden	http://www.newcomerswithdisabilities.se
Next Step Hungary Association	Next Step Hungary Association	http://www.nextstepeu.org
NGO Unite Together	NGO Unite Together	https://unite-together.org
Olive Branch Organization	Olive Branch Organization	http://www.olivebranchorg.org
OLIve Oktatasi Egyesulet	OLIve Education Association	http://www.openeducation.group
Patchwork: Association for Immigrant Families of Persons with Disabilities	Patchwork: Association for Immigrant Families of Persons with Disabilities	http://www.patchworkngo.org
Phone Credit for Refugees	Phone Credit for Refugees	http://www.pc4r.org
Conselho Português para os Refugiados - CPR (Portuguese Refugee Council)	Portuguese Refugee Council	http://www..cpr.pt
Rad Music International	Rad Music International	http://radmusicinternation.com

Flüchtlingsparlament Schweiz	Refugee Parliament Switzerland	http://www.flüchtlingsparlament-schweiz.ch
Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT)	Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT)	http://www.refugeesseat.org
Roots	Roots	http://www.charitableroots.com
Ščedryk, Společenství Ukrajinců Olomouckého kraje, z.u.	Ščedryk, Community of Ukrainians of the Olomouc Region, z.u.	http://www.scedryk.com
Spark 15	Spark 15	http://www.spark15.org
Stateless Rights Collective	Stateless Rights Collective	https://statelessrightscollective.nl/
Stil	Stil	http://www.www.stil-utrecht.nl
Support Survivors of African War (SSAW)	Support Survivors of African War	http://www.ssaworg.com
Svoja	Svoja	http://www.svoja.eu
انجمن بین‌المللی کمک و همبستگی نسل روشن	The International Association for Aid and Solidarity of the Enlightened Generation	N/A
Український Центр	The Ukrainian Centre	http://www.ukrainakeskus.ee
Ukraine - Slovakia HUB	Ukraine - Slovakia HUB	N/A
Ukrajinská Rada Kraje Vysočina	Ukrainian Council of Vysočina Region	N/A
Ukrán Remény Egyesület	Ukrainian Hope Association	N/A
Ukrainian Refugee Education Centre	Ukrainian Refugee Education Centre	N/A
Umbrella Refugee Committee	Umbrella Refugee Committee	http://www.refugee-committee.org
Вектор Плюс	Vector Plus	N/A
SME SPOLU o.z.	We Are Together Civic Association	http://www.smespolu.org
Welcome Office Lesvos AMKE	Welcome Office Lesvos AMKE	http://www.welcomeoffice-lesvos.org
Mujeres Supervivientes	Women Survivors	http://www.mujeressupervivientes.com

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