

# European Policy Brief

*Policy implications of TransSOL - European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis*

## Policy Considerations from Analysing Collective Forms of Solidarity at Times of Crisis

TransSOL is an EU-funded research project dedicated to describing and analysing solidarity initiatives and practices at a time in which Europe's existence is challenged by the consequences of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, by the problematic management of large fluxes of refugees and by the outcome of the 2017 Brexit referendum. The fourth work package systematically examines organised forms of European solidarity, paying particular attention to key areas of vulnerability: migration / asylum, unemployment and disability. The aim is to provide data on the organisational field of civil society organisations (CSOs) across eight nations, providing a factual basis for understanding the main conditions and constraints, the structures and dynamics, of organised forms of transnational European solidarity.

### Introduction

Solidarity is conceptualized as an element that binds society together, and it is understood first and foremost as a moral value that commits people to mutually supporting one another. What takes place within civil society is important for registering European solidarity precisely because of the latter's presumed voluntary nature: Solidarity implies that people organise themselves out of an intrinsic concern for the well-being of one another rather than owing to an overarching authority or because they are merely following utilitarian or economic interests. Civil society organisations (CSOs) facilitate pro-solidarity action through two functions: 1) work at the political level, such as advocacy and contributions to policy-making, and 2) service delivery on a range of policy domains related to the welfare state. Through policy-making and service-oriented activities, therefore, CSOs can be seen as proper political actors of solidarity. What has been so far

difficult to assert, however, is the transnational or cross-European intervention of these actors.

The TransSOL team has investigated CSO activity at the edges of national and cross-national boundaries to ascertain the degree of involvement at the transnational level as well as the different shapes such involvement might have. This research suggests that evidence of transnational solidarity remains limited, partly owing to the genuinely political nature of solidarity: CSOs act at the national and the local levels more than at the transnational level because their impact groups – in terms of access to policy-making, funding mechanisms and intended beneficiaries – are nationally and locally oriented. Public policy should therefore target these areas to promote transnational European solidarity.

## Evidence and Analysis

### Service-Oriented Activities

A main function of civil society organisations (CSOs) is service-oriented: these organisations help people to access benefits. In our examination of solidarity in relation to providing access to benefits, we considered the type of service provided by CSOs, their frequency and the number of beneficiaries of these services. Two thirds of CSOs provide assistance with accessing the welfare state on a regular basis and another 10% does so from time to time (Figure 1). This service is not only relevant in countries with less generous welfare regimes, such as Italy and Greece (where respectively 90% and 67% of CSOs interviewed provide assistance with accessing the welfare state system) but also in countries with generous welfare provisions, such as Denmark (73% of CSOs provide support with accessing welfare services). This evidence complements our understanding of the welfare-state-related contribution that CSOs provide by revealing how CSOs provide in-kind forms of support such as meals, clothes and accommodation which would usually be provided by public anti-poverty pro-

grammes. Figure 2 shows that one in every four organisations provides such in-kind services on a regular basis, and that more than one in every ten does it occasionally. The provision of in-kind services is more salient in countries such as Greece, which is experiencing difficult circumstances, but it is still not negligible in welfare-generous and affluent countries such as Denmark, France and Italy, where a third of CSOs provide these services regularly or occasionally. Figure 3 provides an estimation of the number of beneficiaries that our CSOs reach with their welfare-state related services: 40% of our sample offer services on a yearly basis to a large number of beneficiaries (more than 1000), with some of these reaching even a much larger share of the population in need.

Our research (Figures 1, 2 and 3) confirms the contribution that CSOs are making in keeping welfare-state services running, and they provide concrete evidence of what some social scientists have referred to as “the welfare-mix”, which has been used to describe contemporary European welfare systems in which a mix of public and private actors provide a range of services in a diversified legal pattern. On this basis, we are able to conclude that service-oriented activities take place primarily at the local and national levels. This tendency is a key obstacle to transnational solidarity, as the services provided keep the focus of CSOs national rather than transnational.

### **Local, National and Transnational Organisation**

As Figure 4 shows, only half of all CSOs are active at the transnational level (53.9% at EU in particular and 48.6% at the transnational level). For CSOs, including those that are part of transnational networks and campaigns, the national level remains the most salient geo-political spatial dimension at which to act. The national level of action is by far the most popular choice of our CSOs, with close to 80% of them affirming that they operate at that level. Further reinforcing the importance of the national level of action, slightly more than one in every two organisations is also active at sub-state levels (both local and regional).

The level of transnational engagement is more nuanced when we consider cross-country differences: Danish and Polish CSOs lead the group on European and transnational level activities, while Greek, German, British and Swiss organisations appear to be less inclined to engage across their country borders, while French and Italian CSOs occupy an intermediary position. The transnational activism of Danish CSOs is, at least in part, explained by the connection and activation of

these CSOs through Scandinavian networks rather than through EU-based ones. While the high degree of Polish transnational (particularly EU-level) activism reflects the country's engagement with the EU in terms of access to regional development-related funding, it also shows the difficulties that Polish CSOs face when dealing with a national government that approaches migration / asylum, disability and unemployment with a conservative policy frame. The tendency for CSOs to act at the national level also becomes apparent when we consider the distribution of CSO activities at the national versus the transnational geo-political level (Figure 5). No matter which specific activity an organisation deploys, whether it be mobilising members through direct actions or participating in policy-making processes, the national level largely overshadows the transnational one.

Another intriguing finding is that only a very small number of organisations look to the transnational and European levels for fundraising: Only one in every five organisations declare that they undertake fundraising activities at the transnational level while two thirds carry out fundraising at the national level. Organisations in constant need of funding will likely focus their capacity and resources for action at the level where they can expect such funding to have the greatest impact and where future funding streams are most readily available. We can therefore make the assumption that our CSOs act at the national level more than at transnational one because the groups that they engage with and impact are, in many senses (funding-wise, policy-wise and beneficiaries-wise) nationally more than transnationally oriented.

Regarding the sources of funding for CSOs (Figure 6), grants from national governments are more than twice as important as European grants. Again, there are differences among countries: French and Polish CSOs show a higher interest in pursuing, or a greater reliance upon, EU grants than CSOs in the other countries. For Polish organisations, European funding is as relevant as national government funding: Due to the strong political polarisation promoted by the centre-right government, many CSOs that oppose government policies need recourse to EU funding in order to survive. In Greece, funding from the EU largely supersedes funds from the national government, which is a consequence of the reduced capacity of the Greek state to subsidise CSOs due to the critical situation of its public budget. For the remaining countries, national governments still provide a significant source of economic resources.

Another indicator we assessed is whether or not CSOs are part of consultative policy-making processes across the EU, national and subnational levels (Figure 7). Consistent with other findings, the national and subnational levels are more relevant than the European one as an arena for policy engagement. However, if we compare the situation between countries, there are again interesting differences to be noted. Firstly, Polish CSOs are highly engaged at the EU policy consultative level, as 63% of those interviewed in Poland say that they are consulted systematically on policy issues by EU bodies. Secondly, Danish CSOs appeared to be more engaged at the transnational level than German CSOs. The EU consults one in every two German and Italian CSOs during policy-making procedures, while less than one fifth of Danish organisations are consulted in EU policy-making processes. This is despite the fact that 87% of Danish CSOs were active at the EU level (Figure 4).

An assumption underlying our research is that solidarity is a genuinely political enterprise because CSOs are engaged in advocacy activities in support of vulnerable groups. This explains why CSOs act primarily at those levels in which they consider political actors to be more prominent and also more easily approachable: that is, at the national level.

What motivates individuals to join CSOs helps us to further understand the fundamentally political nature of solidarity. Figure 8 provides evidence about the deeply political nature of solidarity as it is expressed in CSOs. The survey question reads: "Why do people join your organisation?" Although the most important reason across the countries is an altruistic willingness to help others (63%), the second most relevant reason to join such an organisation is for sharing political ideas and values (55%), and more than one third of the respondents in the sample (36%) also chose an explicitly political response: "for political support". These explicitly political answers are common across all countries except for Greece, where less than one third selected these options. This might be explained by the need for Greek CSOs to concern themselves with providing the help and support required by both an impoverished population suffering from the national economic crisis and by the masses of refugees fleeing Syria. While solidarity as expressed by CSOs is fundamentally political, therefore, it is also activated primarily at the national level.

## Transnational Campaigns and Events

Further light can be shed on transnational solidarity through our examination of a few of the campaigns and events organised by CSOs whose projects are fundamentally transnational in nature, as they are organised around human rights issues related to the three aforementioned areas of vulnerability. Truly transnational cooperation has to struggle with various challenges.

### 1) Migration / Asylum: The Decriminalising Solidarity Campaign.

The concrete aims of this campaign are to work towards decriminalising humanitarian work, and it mainly targets EU agencies and bodies (especially the European Commission). The campaign brings together a group of very diverse organisations which include NGOs advocating for a "more social Europe", anti-racist platforms, religious organisations, networks focused on homelessness, an NGO dedicated to rescuing migrants at sea and an NGO network working for "vulnerable groups". Through the interview process, TransSOL researchers found that communication and lack of time are among the main challenges posed when considering transnational cooperation. The second most pertinent problem was finding a frame for discussing the topic of migration that was well received across all European countries. That is to say, responses indicated an implicit recognition of the different experiences and policies that each nation state has had with migration and of the importance of national frameworks for mobilising public opinion.

### 2) Unemployment: The Transnational Social Strike.

The case of the Transnational Social Strike platform is representative of a bottom-up perspective on solidarity, as it consists of grassroots associations within loose networks of collaborations. The Transnational Social Strike event, which took place in London in February of 2017, provides an illustrative case study of transnational activism in action. The organisations taking part represented a broad spectrum of grassroots organisations in the field of unemployment at the intersection of labour markets, migration and precarious workers. In addition, it focused on the variegated challenges which workers face across Europe. The event offered opportunities for organisations to maintain and to build collaborative networks, share information, raise awareness and pursue opportunities for social change. TransSOL's research findings indicate that participants feel challenged at the level of transnational activism, as inter-organisational resources are scarce and only a few organisations have the necessary resources to fully participate in such events.

**3) Disability: The European Day of Persons with Disabilities.** The European Day of Persons with Disabilities took place in Brussels in November of 2016, and it provides an illustrative case study of transnational activism in action. Organisations taking part represented a broad spectrum of the field of disability and the variegated challenges that disabled people are confronted with across Europe. Interviews reveal that one key challenge facing this event is the degree of interest and proximity with the issues and events taking place at the European level: issues are often seen as having local importance, and policy targets seem far away from these issues.

### Policy Recommendations

So far, we have provided evidence of the existence of a range of activities that civil society organisations (CSOs) engage in, and we have considered solidarity as both an act of support in meeting people's needs and an act of political expression. Based on this systematic research and examination of data, the following is recommended at the level of public policy.

The strength of CSOs active at the transnational level is that they have the capacity to promote solidarity at the transnational level, while CSOs focused at national level foster mutual support only within a national context. The promotion of transnational activity through CSOs is tantamount to harnessing the power of and further honing grass-roots activism already in existence. That is to say, the task at hand is in finding a means to work with decentralised practices focused on nations while also considering new possibilities for Europe. This is of the utmost importance in this period of crisis.

CSOs act at the national level more than at the transnational level because their audience and target interests are, in many senses, nationally oriented. This tendency is both felt, as it is reported by interviewees, and empirically verifiable, as evidenced by the budgetary and political infrastructures that be. Constraints to transnational solidarity can therefore be related to policy-making, funding apparatuses and intended beneficiaries. Public policy that seeks to promote transnational European solidarity should therefore target these areas. States and CSOs alike need to ensure that the decentralized structure of solidarity initiatives is comprehensive and reaches out to everybody in Europe. For this to happen, monitoring, coordination and support measures will be necessary. This is especially important with regard to the service-delivery aspect of CSOs. In terms of

political advocacy work, more transnational cooperation and coordination is necessary to give vulnerable groups a voice everywhere, and this means not only equally in each country but also at the EU-level. Here, public policy should be directed at ensuring cooperation and coordination of CSOs across countries.

If more transnational cooperation is desirable and needed, CSOs also have the opportunity to act: They are at present too centred on their limited area of activity, too tied to or dependent on nation-state institutions and too little engaged in overcoming the challenges of transnational cooperation.

At the level of policy-making and involvement, Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate that there is no direct correspondence between those CSOs that undertake action at the transnational level and those that, although focusing on nationally bounded activities, are still considered valuable interlocutors in policy processes in Brussels and are therefore invited to provide advice during a policy-making procedure. This is an outcome we should consider in greater depth as it has implications for how we interpret transnational activism, drawing our attention to the existence of difference shades of transnational activism and different types of organisations engaged at the transnational level. Some are more openly focused on supranational policy issues and arenas; others are more concerned with their own country's situation but are still open to engage, if invited and on an ad hoc basis, also at transnational level. In fact, when we discussed with CSOs their experience of work at transnational level, most of them did appreciate acting across state boundaries as an opportunity for mutual learning, and also as a viable way to strengthen their voices vis-à-vis policy makers and stakeholders. Moreover, activities done at the transnational level seem somehow less exposed to competition between CSOs, and as such have the capacity to foster cooperation and reciprocal support.

If CSOs cannot manage to improve their facilitation of transnational solidarity, then policies should provide more incentives and opportunities for this kind of engagement. This could include: monitoring solidarity initiatives and activities across countries to see whether spatial inequalities exist and where more support of local CSOs are needed as well as financial, organizational and symbolic support of CSOs in setting up transnational platforms and organizations to coordinate their work. In particular, this could mean legal measures for promoting truly pan-European forms of organization and association.

We need to remember that today associations can only be established within each nation-state (no European status of association exists), which means that every group that formalizes itself needs to conform to national regulations and programs in terms of tax exemption, organisational status and funding schemes.

In summary, CSOs are at present inherently tied to the nation state, their regulations and funding institutions. More transnational and even EU-level platforms, for advocacy and policy-awareness but also for more service-oriented projects such as support in accessing the welfare state and in-kind services, would encourage political solidarity beyond the boundaries of nation and would further promote and foster a political dynamic of mutual support across Europe.

## Research Parameters

In our research on solidary and civil society, we systematically analysed civil society organisations (CSOs) in eight European countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. In this study, we provide national as well as transnational reports, accumulating data on the transnational activity of these organisations in three key fields of vulnerability: migration / asylum, disability and unemployment. Civil society is conceptualised on the basis of three features: a) organisational activities (the events and campaigns), b) organisational formal structures (the associational ecology) and c) their relations (their political and social networks). We define as transnational those activities that occur both across the EU and inside and outside the EU, but we distinguish these two types accordingly.

The first part of this work package investigated the actions of CSOs at a national level. The scope of the research entailed 245 interviews conducted with CSOs across the eight aforementioned countries. These interviews were divided into three parts, reflecting the three main areas of vulnerability. In the first part, an open-ended question format was adopted in order to capture information from interviewees on the participation of their organisations in joint events and campaigns. The second part of the interviews focused on the composition of organisations and their operational scope. The third part involved working with interviewees to identify the relationships their organisation had with other CSOs and institutions. In each of the eight countries, 30 interviews were conducted, providing 10 interviews per area of vulnerability.

In the second part of this work package, the TransSOL team conducted interviews at three cross-thematic events and campaigns at the transnational level, such as the Transnational Social Strike in London in February 2017, the European Day of Persons with Disabilities in Brussels in November 2016, and the on-going Decriminalising Solidarity Campaign organised by Social Platform, which deals with migration / asylum. For each of these transnational activities, 10 interviews were conducted, providing 30 interviews in total.

The full report can be read at:  
<http://transsol.eu/outputs/reports/>

## Consortium

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Further information on the TransSOL-project is available at:  
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### Project Information

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**Annex:**

**Figure 1:** *Providing assistance in accessing the welfare system*

	<b>Often (%)</b>	<b>Seldom (%)</b>	<b>Never (%)</b>
Denmark	73	3	0
France	61	15	9
Germany	33	17	0
Greece	67	10	0
Italy	90	7	0
Poland	50	7	0
Switzerland	33	13	7
UK	56	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>

(N=245)

**Figure 2:** *Providing assistance in-kind support (e.g., meals, accommodation, clothes, etc.)*

	<b>Often (%)</b>	<b>Seldom (%)</b>	<b>Never (%)</b>
Denmark	27	10	63
France	30	15	39
Germany	10	13	73
Greece	43	27	30
Italy	30	10	60
Poland	37	10	53
Switzerland	13	20	60
UK	13	22	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>56</b>

(N=245)

**Figure 3:** How many persons (beneficiaries) overall obtained services in the last year?

	<b>None</b>	<b>Less than 100</b>	<b>Less than 500</b>	<b>Less than 1000</b>	<b>More than 1000</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Denmark	7	7	20	10	50	7
France	0	18	15	9	55	3
Germany	0	17	10	20	27	27
Greece	0	17	33	10	30	10
Italy	0	7	23	13	53	3
Poland	0	17	17	17	30	20
Switzerland	0	17	20	3	37	23
UK	0	6	25	9	41	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>14</b>

(N=245)

**Figure 4:** In which of these geographical areas is your organization/group active?

	<b>Local</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>EU</b>	<b>Transnational*</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Denmark	63.3	66.7	96.7	86.7	63.3
France	69.7	75.8	81.8	57.6	57.6
Germany	23.3	33.3	90	40	43.3
Greece	36.7	46.7	73.3	36.7	30
Italy	76.7	66.7	76.7	50	56.7
Poland	56.7	53.3	86.7	76.7	66.7
Switzerland	50	63.3	66.7	43.3	33.3
UK	81.3	56.3	62.5	40.6	37.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>79.2</b>	<b>53.9</b>	<b>48.6</b>

\*Transnational here refers to activism inside and outside the European Union (N=245)



**Figure 5: Type of action by geo-political level**

	<b>National (%)</b>	<b>Transnational*</b> (%)
Political education of citizens / raising awareness	89	28
Services to members (advisory-counselling, material support, etc.)	81	14
Interest representation / lobbying institutions	79	36
Participation in legal consultations / policy making processes	79	31
Mobilising members through direct actions	69	20
Fundraising	64	20
Services to others (e.g., clients)	61	17
Mobilizing members through protest/demonstrations	51	20

\*Transnational here refers to activism inside and outside the European Union (N=245)

**Figure 6: Share (%) of CSOs for whom national and EU level grants are very relevant for survival**

	<b>National Governments Grants (%)</b>	<b>EU Grants (%)</b>
Denmark	80	13
France	45	36
Germany	50	7
Greece	7	20
Italy	27	10
Poland	37	33
Switzerland	37	3
UK	13	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>

(N=245)

**Figure 7: CSO participation with a consultative status in policy-making procedures at different levels**

	<b>EU consultative</b>	<b>National consultative</b>	<b>Subnational consultative</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Denmark	<b>17</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>40</b>
France	39	61	51
Germany	53	53	30
Greece	33	53	60
Italy	47	70	80
Poland	63	77	60
Switzerland	20	57	50
UK	34	69	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>54</b>

(N=245)

**Figure 8: "According to your experience, why do people join the organization?"**

	<b>For political support</b>	<b>For financial support</b>	<b>For legal/ judiciary support</b>	<b>For social contacts</b>	<b>For helping, assisting people</b>	<b>For sharing political ideas values</b>	<b>Other</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Denmark	50	13	30	63	80	63	60
France	58	27	33	73	67	64	49
Germany	40	13	27	37	63	57	33
Greece	30	17	20	30	77	27	27
Italy	17	0	23	47	70	73	37
Poland	10	17	37	47	63	40	30
Switz.	57	37	13	20	40	53	27
UK	22	9	22	44	47	62	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>38</b>

(N=24)