

TransSOL is a project that studies **European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis**.

The Third **TransSol** newsletter gives an overview of transnational solidarity initiatives and civic solidarity practices in eight European countries and provides information about the latest project activities.

Newsletter

Transnational Solidarity Initiatives and Citizens' Solidarity in Times of Crises — An Organisational Analysis

In its second work package, TransSOL monitors, analyses and assesses innovative practices of transnational solidarity in response to crises, including citizens' initiatives and networks of cooperation amongst civil society actors. These innovative forms and practices are studied across various fields of activity. Here, the main areas of focus are disabilities and health, unemployment and precarity, and migration and refugees. These fields have become especially visible in the past few years owing to the strong impact of the economic and refugee crises.

'TransSOL shows that "transnational solidarity" is a highly dynamic field responding to on-going societal challenges'

The first major objective of this work package was to map and monitor the field of transnational solidarity by means of an innovative web-based research methodology (see below). In the last nine months, the eight research teams were committed to implement a demanding process of data retrieval for each of the eight participating countries. We were able to generate a unique dataset that provides rich insights into the field of civic solidarity. On the basis of a comprehensive website search, we were able to map the field of transnational solidarity in the three issue fields. Through this mapping exercise, we identified a considerable number of 'transnational solidarity organisations' (TSOs). As Table 1 shows, we found almost 30,000 initiatives in the eight countries under analysis, with differences that mirror the size of the countries and the current urgency of the various issues.

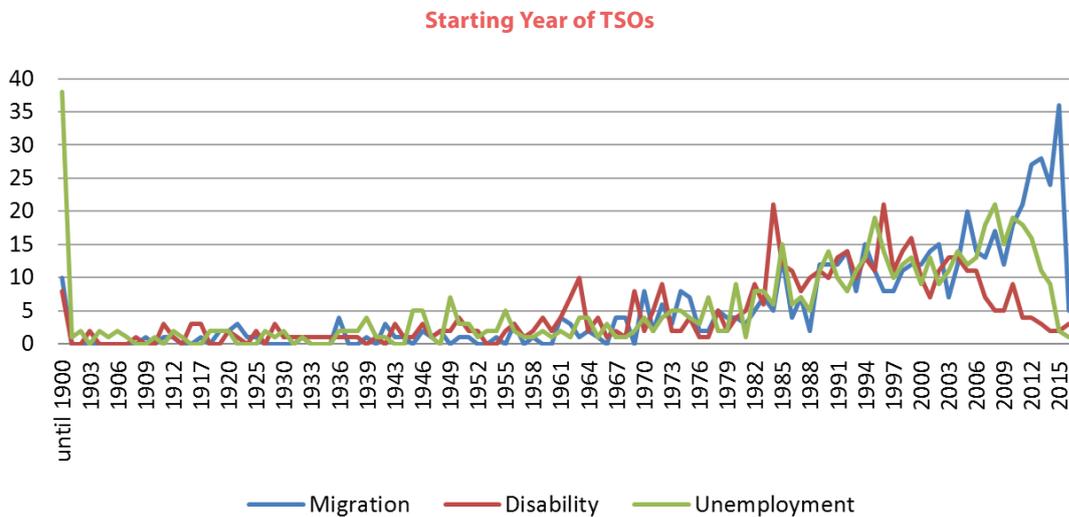
Table 1. A summary of hubs-retrieved websites per field of action, for eight countries

Country	Disability	Migration	Unemployment	General/ Humanitarian	Total
Denmark	260	267	150	243	920
France	2659	369	247	-	3275
Germany	5513	2422	556	-	8491
Greece	1079	651	190	3426	5346
Italy	1385	2459	1027	-	4871
Poland	1844	288	376	-	2508
Switzerland	852	646	330	-	1828
UK	558	394	1086	-	2038
Total	14150	7496	3962	3669	29277

(Marketakis et al. 2016, Analysis of Web Accessible Networks, Organisations and Groups, FORTH-ICS)

Given that the initiatives were too numerous for us to analyse them all, the consortium decided to monitor and analyse a random sample of 300 organisations and groups (100 for each topic) in a systematic manner. For this purpose, we focused on those initiatives that could be considered transnational and solidarity-oriented (see below). The systematic analysis of their websites allowed us to put together a dataset consisting of more than 2,000 organisations and groups. Although this dataset requires minor revisions, our preliminary analyses allow us to paint a picture of a highly dynamic field of initiatives and activities. A first finding concerns the considerable growth of this field during the last fifteen years, as evidenced by Figure 1.

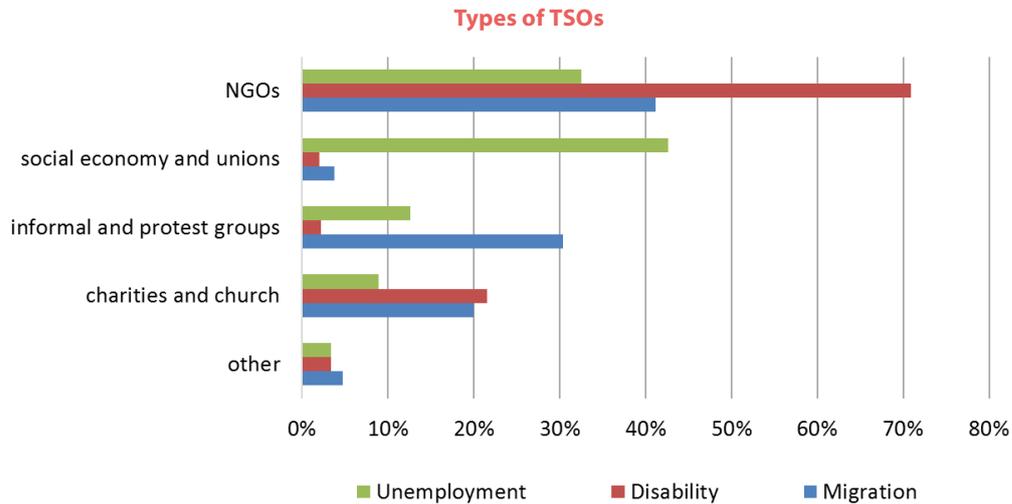
Figure 1. Starting year of TSOs, N=2199 (pooled data that includes TSOs in Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, UK)



Three main findings are illustrated in Figure 1. First, it is noteworthy that overall, TSOs in the three fields have roots as far back as the early 1900s, with noticeably increasing waves immediately after WWII and the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the unemployment and disabilities fields. Second, labour/unemployment TSOs and disabilities/health TSOs have existed longer than migration TSOs. And third, the top peaks in the numbers of new organisations in the three fields are different: disabilities organisations were the most numerous from the early 1980s to the early 2000s; unemployment organisations were most widespread from the late seventies to the early 2010s; and new migration TSOs escalated in the most recent period, from the 1990s to the present, but with an outstanding peak in the past three years (especially in 2015). Thus the growth of these fields seems to react in quite sensitive ways to societal developments. The dynamics tend to reflect the urgency of the various crises affecting the EU, both in terms of accelerating economic downturns and increased rates of immigration.

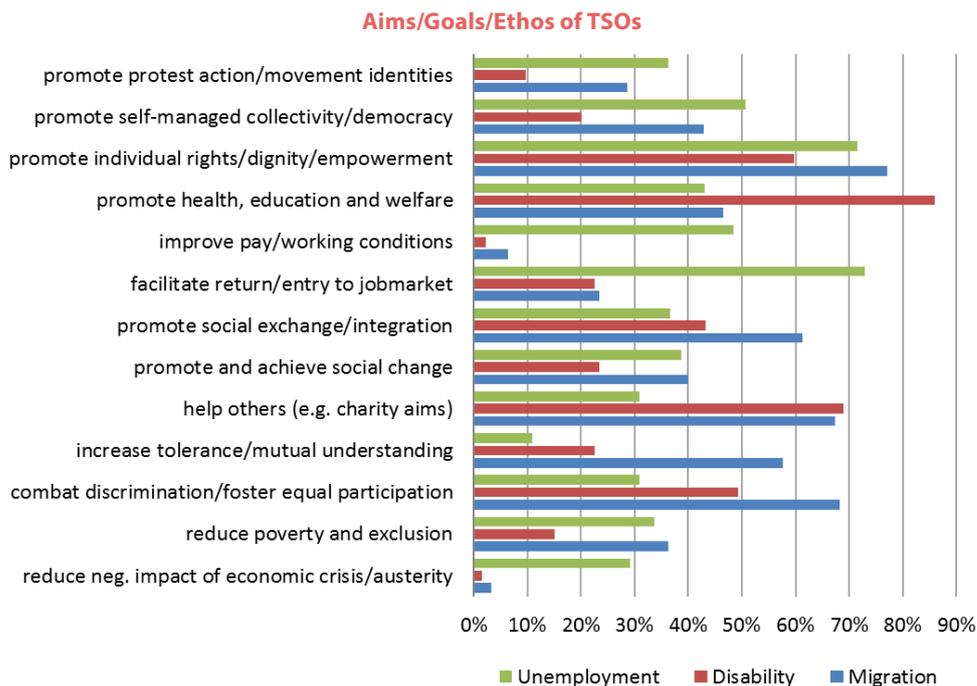
But who are these transnational solidarity organisations? Figure 2 provides an overview of the field, distinguishing between various organisational forms or types. Overall, the most prevalent type of organisation is the Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which comprises almost half of all TSOs (47.5%). This group is followed by social economy enterprises and unions (17.2%), charities and church organisations (16.7%) and informal and protest groups (16.0%). Comparing across the three fields we see that informal and protest groups are mainly active in the migration field (30.4%), social economy enterprises and unions are mostly engaged in the unemployment field (42.6%) and NGOs are dominant players especially in the disabilities field (70.9%). Together with the information provided by Figure 1, this seems to indicate that TSOs active in the migration field are younger, less institutionalised and more loosely organised than the more established and formally organised groups in the two other issue fields.

Figure 2. Types of Transnational Solidarity Organisations (TSOs) by field



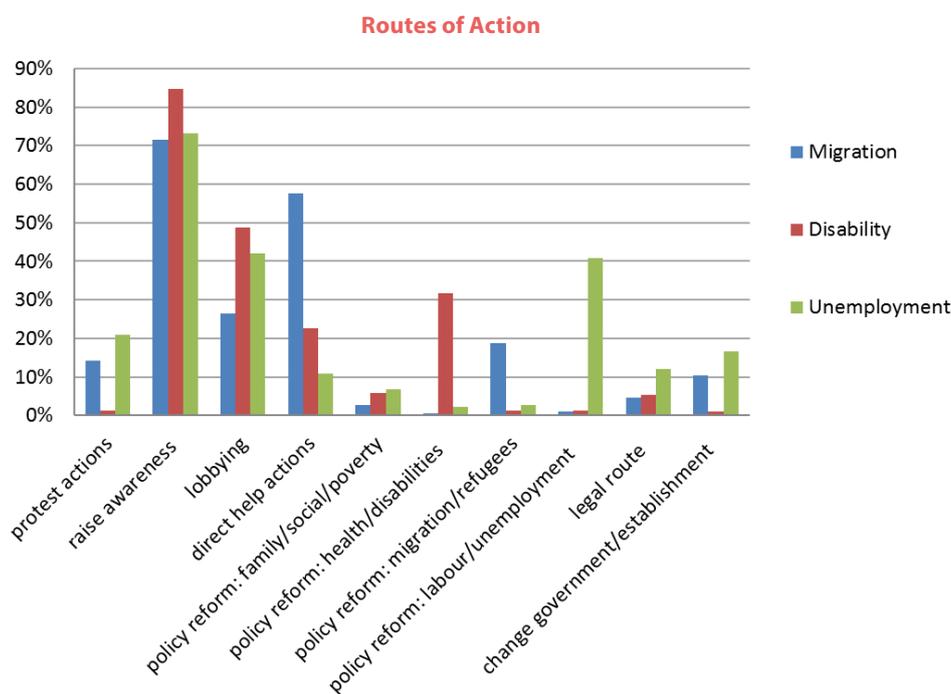
All these TSOs are committed to promoting solidarity in various ways. Figure 3 depicts the core goal or ethos that appears on each TSO's website/online media. The top aim (70.0%) is 'to promote and defend individual rights, dignity and self-empowerment', followed by aiming 'to promote health, education and welfare' and 'to help others' (56.8% and 54.9%, respectively). Other prominent aims are 'to combat discrimination/to promote equality of participation in society' (49.5%) and 'to promote social exchange and direct contact/integration in society/local communities' (47.2%). Notable comparisons across the three fields show that the reduction of the negative effects of the crisis is the primary aim of TSOs active in the unemployment field (29.2%), while combating discrimination and increasing tolerance and mutual understanding are much more visible goals of migration TSOs (68.3% and 57.7%, accordingly).

Figure 3. Aims/goals/ethos of TSOs by field



A final observation relates to the practices of the TSOs, because we were interested in identifying the main routes of actions that TSOs adopt to achieve their aims, as highlighted on their websites. Figure 4 shows that transnational solidarity organisations envision a rather broad array of activity areas. TSOs try to achieve their aims primarily through raising awareness (75.9%), followed by lobbying (38.5%) and direct solidarity actions and campaigns (30.9%). Also in this regard, we noticed significant differences between the three issue areas. TSOs active in the disabilities field are more oriented towards lobbying, while TSOs in the two other fields of action more often highlight direct solidarity actions and campaigns. An interesting finding is that there are more than 200 TSOs aiming to change the government or the establishment.

Figure 4. TSOs' proposed routes to achieve its aims, by field



Overall, TransSOL data provides a lively picture of civic solidarity across Europe. It shows that transnational solidarity has grown considerably in the recent period, seemingly trying to keep up with societal challenges within the European Union. These organisations and groups are committed to confronting a number of problems and hardships (e.g., poverty, social inequalities, exclusion and discrimination), and they do so by committing to activities that address various sectors of our society (e.g., politics, the public sphere, the judicial system, and civil society). Further analyses are necessary to show how sustainable these civic efforts can be, and under which circumstances they can and will prolong their work during times of extended insecurities and crises.

'TransSOL develops innovative instruments of mapping and monitoring transnational solidarity'

These findings are based on a dataset generated by the TransSOL consortium during its second work package. For this purpose, research teams developed a new research method—Action Organisation Analysis (AOA, created originally for the study of Alternative Action Organisations of the EU project LiveWhat; see Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen, 2016). AOA is a novel content analysis method derived from protest event, protest case, and political claims analysis to systematically produce data on a TSO, defined as 'a collective body/unit which organises solidarity events with visible beneficiaries and claims on their economic and social wellbeing – including basic needs, health, and work', as depicted through the TSO website/online sources (TransSOL WP2 Codebook, 2016).

AOA used a Google hub-search approach to retrieve TSOs in each of the eight countries. Our systematic exploration using alternative news media as well as more traditional sources (e.g., newspapers) showed that – compared to these sources – hub searches offer much more comprehensive coverage. The hub-search approach offered an approximate ‘population’ that was used to derive more specific samples. Hubs/subhubs were identified and ranked by each country team through Google searches on the basis of a set of keywords in the home languages. TSO websites were extracted from the databases of the highest ranked hubs/subhubs by engineers through a systematic process (Marketakis et al 2016, Analysis of Web Accessible Networks, Organisations and Groups, FORTH-ICS), and the resulting national ‘populations’ were checked for adequacy by the teams.

These websites searches delimited the universe of potential TSOs from which a random sample of such organisations was drawn for coding purposes. As the total population of organisations was considerably high, a random sample of 300 TSOs (100 for each topic) was drawn, based on a set of selected criteria following the aims of the WP.

Organisations were excluded from the sample if they were: 1) state (central)-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action; 2) EU-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action; or 3) Corporate-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action (e.g., corporate social responsibility action). The TSO websites and related online media outlets (Facebook, blogs, Twitter, hubs) were coded only to the extent that they were active between 2010 and 2016 and offered related information as described above. In order to code these TSOs websites, an online coding tool and a respective codebook were developed following coder training workshop sessions, a series of pilot tests, and reliability tests with the participation of all eight teams. Data retrieval was conducted for about eight months.

Projected work

The website analysis is part of TransSOL’s second work package, whose aim is to map, monitor, and assess transnational solidarity at the level of citizens and civil societies. For this purpose, the research agenda identified three phases that build on each other. The website analysis was the first and most demanding research task, and allowed us to provide a comprehensive and systematic picture of the organisational field of TSOs. Two other research phases are being implemented to complement the evidence generated by the website analysis. On the one hand, TransSOL is interested in gathering more direct information from TSOs engaged in transnational solidarity work. For this purpose, an online survey has been conducted with organisations, groups, and networks active in the field of transnational solidarity, during June and July 2016. The sample of 1,108 invited organizations is based on systematic Google searches following criteria similar to those of the coded TSOs, but more inclusive in terms of field activities and with a higher transnational orientation. The survey questionnaire offers detailed information concerning the mechanisms, tactics, and links of the involved collective actors, the ways in which they are addressing solidarity with citizens confronted with hardships, and the different types of resources they require. The overall response rate is around 13%, as expected with organisational surveys.

On the other hand, the work package on civic solidarity will make use of qualitative interviews with TSO participants, initiators, and representatives. Approximately a total of 30 interviews will be carried out in each country, 10 in each of the three issue fields. The sample selection criteria and the interview guidelines have been already finalised and the interviews will be carried out through September 2016. The analysis of the interviews will: highlight the effects of crises on the unemployed, immigrants, and asylum-seekers; investigate the activities and strategies of transnational solidarity work, its constraints and opportunities; and assess innovative practices and initiatives. Overall, the aim is to gather information about good practices, generate networks of activists, initiatives, and organisations involved in transnational solidarity, and develop toolkits and policy recommendations to further transnational solidarity.

Leading Institution: [University of Crete \(GR\)](#)

Participating Institutions: University of Siegen (coordinating institution, DE), University of Florence (IT), University of Warsaw (PL), University of Geneva (CH), Glasgow Caledonian University (UK), University of Copenhagen (DK), Sciences Po Paris (FR)

EC Workshop on Cultures & Citizenship in Brussels

On 8th April 2016, TransSOL participated at a Workshop on Cultures & Citizenship in Brussels that was organised by the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation and its Open and Inclusive Society Unit. The workshop brought together researchers from various projects that address aspects of cultures and citizenship with representatives from different European institutions. At this event, researchers and policy-makers engaged in exchange and discussion regarding policy relevant research findings, their implications for policy making as well as current policy initiatives. The workshop thus served to enhance knowledge exchange and cooperation between research and political decision making and to stimulate the political and societal impact of scientific studies in this area. At the workshop, TransSOL presented preliminary results on the legal and political context of European solidarity. In particular, the presentation highlighted the role of European citizenship as a basis for European solidarity. More specifically, it discussed how the underlying idea to build the Union from below on the grounds of common rights and duties constitutes an important source of transnational solidarity within the Community. In addition, it was argued that particularly in times of crisis, the constitutional foundations of the solidarity principle tend to work as an antidote against severe austerity measures.

Third Project Meeting in Trento



The TransSOL consortium held its third project meeting on 15th June 2016 at the University of Trento. The meeting was dedicated to our ongoing research activities. Consortium members discussed the initial findings of the project as well as our forthcoming research tasks. Currently our attention is focused upon innovative forms and practices of transnational solidarity in response to the economic crisis. The analysis is devoted to the comparative assessment of three fields of activity, namely: disabilities, unemployment and migration. In particular, the teams considered

the preliminary results of the action case analysis of selected online media sources. These websites provide interesting insights into the activities of transnational solidarity initiatives in the eight European countries involved in the project. This web-based analysis is currently complemented by an online survey of transnational solidarity organisations and by qualitative interviews with civil society activists across the three fields. Preliminary results will be available by September 2016, with the final report on these analyses to be published in November 2016.

The consortium also discussed the research tasks of upcoming work packages. Here, the main focus was on the planning of the fourth work package which examines organisational forms of transnational solidarity at the national and European levels. The purpose of studying organised solidarity is to provide us with in-depth knowledge about collective actors that organise, promote and stabilise acts of solidarity within Europe. Moreover, the aim is to reveal and compare the main conditions and constraints, structures and dynamics of organised forms of transnational solidarity both across our three issue fields and the eight countries under analysis. On this basis, we will contribute to existing scientific debates about European civil society, identify practical toolkits and suggest potential policy recommendations.

ECPR SGEU Pan-European Conference in Trento

TransSOL teams presented key findings of the first project period at the 8th Pan-European Conference on the European Union of the European Consortium for Political Research and its EU-Standing Group. The conference took place on 16th-18th June at the University of Trento and brought together scientific papers under the topic "The Union's Institutional and Constitutional Transformations: Stress or Adaptation?". The TransSOL project contributed to the conference with a panel on „Transnational Solidarity in Times of Crisis – Challenge or Chance for European Cohesion?“ The panel was based upon the notion that solidarity has become a key issue within the European Union. Continued divisions between member states regarding financial solidarity with weak states and a fair distribution of burden-sharing in relation to the high numbers of refugees has revealed the difficulties of living up the standards of solidarity and cohesion recurrently advocated by the EU. The panel aimed at broadening the debate about European solidarity by focusing on 'civic solidarity'. Its main objective was to shed more light on the scope of solidarity at the level of the citizenry and societies in Europe. Existing evidence tends to paint an ambivalent picture, because the rise of solidarity initiatives in many issue fields is as notable as the spread of populist groups and movements across Europe. Against this backdrop, the panel sought to shed light on this underdeveloped research field with the aim of answering a number of basic questions: Does our conceptual and theoretical understanding of solidarity help to address the specificities of European solidarity? How is solidarity affected by its context? And what does transnational solidarity mean at the level of citizens and civil societies?

The papers presented by members of the TransSOL-consortium provided numerous insights in relation to these questions. On the one hand, findings revealed that European solidarity at the citizens' level is conditioned by the scope and structure of organised civil society and the opportunities and constraints provided by the legal and institutional environment. The principle of solidarity and its institutionalisation in the legal system (constitutional and case law) seems to play a key role in this respect. Empirical analyses of the Italian, British, Germany, Danish, and Swiss situation demonstrated that civic solidarity is a growing field of engagement. It is operationalised through a considerable number of initiatives, groups and organisations, and a notable degree of interorganisational networking. However, differences between the issue fields of disabilities, unemployment and refugees indicate that citizens tend to react in a compensatory manner to the most pressing hardships and crises of the domestic and European governance structures. Moreover, civic solidarity is a highly contentious field of action, and thus any research into this subject matter encounters a myriad of antagonistic claims and mobilisations.

The panel on transnational solidarity was very well attended by political scientists and European studies scholars and provided a fruitful occasion for TransSOL members to engage in direct discourse about our research findings with fellow scholars. What is more, the panel discussions confirmed that there is a high demand to understand better the issue of transnational solidarity, its forms, conditions, role models and policy implications.

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Project Information

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