
The social and solidarity economy as a partner along the refugee journey

OECD Global Action Promoting
Social & Solidarity Economy Ecosystems



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Produced as part of the OECD Global Action “Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems” funded by the European Union, it explores the role of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in implementing and complementing public systems for refugee protection, reception and integration. In particular, it reviews the different activities SSE entities can deploy in support of forcibly displaced populations, asylum seekers and refugees, along their journey from origin through to destination countries. Finally, it offers some policy considerations on how the SSE can help national and local governments identify win-win solutions for refugee and host communities.

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Acronyms

AERé	Action Emploi Réfugiés
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
CSO	civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ENSIE	European Network of Social Integration Enterprises
EU	European Union
IDP	internally displaced person
IRCT	International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
SSE	social and solidarity economy
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WISE	work integration social enterprise

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Executive summary

The value added of the social and solidarity economy, for policy makers and refugees alike

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 created the fastest displacement crisis, and one of the largest, since the Second World War. In less than a year, more than 10 million people have become either internally displaced or refugees in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2023^[1]). The situation revived international policy attention on refugee protection and reception systems. According to latest data from the United Nations Refugee Agency, the number of people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order grew by 21% in 2022, standing at an estimated 108.4 million (UNHCR, 2023^[2]). More than 1 in every 74 people worldwide remain forcibly displaced.

The protection, reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees is a complex policy challenge that requires constructive dialogue and constant co-ordination between public authorities, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders. The social and solidarity economy (SSE) comprises organisations such as associations, cooperatives, mutual organisations, foundations, non-profits and social enterprises as well as community-based, grassroots and spontaneous initiatives (OECD, 2022^[3]) that are on the front lines with refugees from country of origin to their final (albeit often temporary) destination. The landscape of SSE entities providing protection, reception and integration services to refugees is extremely diverse, not simply across countries, but often also within the same country.

As such, the SSE has played a historical role in dealing with the multifaceted challenge of migration, long before the recent refugee crises. Along the refugee journey, SSE actors relieve some of the hardship and support them to build a dignified life outside of their home countries. They can also positively influence their role in host communities and societies at large, for instance through public advocacy campaigns and by supporting self-entrepreneurship. Working with local staff, volunteers and citizens, the SSE can foster dialogue and connections between forcibly displaced populations and residents. The SSE can be even more important in those contexts where the rule of law and social protection might not be as advanced, filling the gap in public support. Indeed, low- and middle-income countries host around three-fourths of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection (UNHCR, n.d.^[4]). Moreover, 61 million refugees and internally displaced persons are residing in fragile contexts, representing 64% of the global forcibly displaced population (OECD, 2022^[5]).

The value added of the SSE derives from three main factors:

- Its **participatory and locally rooted governance models**, which help design protection and reception services that also address the need for social and work integration. By upholding its values of solidarity and co-operation, the SSE can prevent or alleviate conflicts with local communities but also among refugee groups.

- Its capacity to find **responsive and innovative solutions**, especially through volunteering and citizen initiatives, that complement public action, even in times of crisis. SSE entities are often initiators and implementers of social innovations because their primary mission is to address societal needs through operating models based on collaboration, typically at the local level.
- Its **holistic and people-centred approach**, which strives to support individual well-being, paying attention to the structural, social and cultural dimensions of integration. In this way, the SSE can help build acceptance and mitigate conflicts with native populations. This can also have a beneficial impact on the host community, in terms of enhanced social cohesion and economic development.

SSE support along the main stages of the refugee journey

The SSE plays an important role from the very beginning, accompanying forcibly displaced populations starting in their country of origin. Typically, these SSE entities may be local non-profits, branches of international NGOs or social enterprises. The SSE can be deeply involved in humanitarian aid, protection of civilians, and rescue and safe passage operations in cases of violent conflict. It can also assist individuals threatened by other forms of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, expression of gender identity, sexual orientation and political opinion. SSE entities can help counter violations of human rights by offering direct assistance to those whose rights have been violated, lobbying for changes to national, regional or international law, promoting knowledge of, and respect for, human rights more generally.

Additionally, SSE actors accompany forcibly displaced persons in their journey through transit countries. Local SSE entities in transit countries, for instance as humanitarian non-profits, social start-ups or grassroots associations of civil society, can provide temporary relief to displaced populations, support livelihoods and advocate for their rights. International NGOs have a complementary role because of their capacity to follow displaced persons across borders and to dialogue with national authorities.

Once the destination country is reached, the SSE supports asylum seekers in their applications for recognition of the refugee status and provides (or facilitates access to) essential social services. SSE entities can offer mediation and translation as well as administrative and legal support to request temporary protection or international asylum. They can orient and counsel forcibly displaced persons to have their humanitarian rights, residence and/or work permits recognised. They can directly provide support with housing, social and health services, as guaranteed by international law. They can assist with family reunifications, as well as resettlement.

The SSE further plays a significant role in the social and labour market inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in host societies. The defining features of SSE entities (e.g. being locally rooted and close to the needs of the population) contribute to not only making them helpful to asylum seekers and refugees as they integrate their new host societies, but also fostering community engagement and local economic development (e.g. through migrant and social entrepreneurship). SSE entities support integration in the education and health systems, provide language training and professional upskilling, create decent job opportunities, and foster social links with the local population. Work integration social enterprises are often the first employer for refugees, giving the opportunity to learn by doing, assessing the competencies, skills and desires of the person, and opening new recruitment channels. Sometimes, local social start-ups can offer innovative employment opportunities that help overcome language, cultural and sometimes considerable bureaucratic administrative barriers. In countries where labour market informality is an issue, they can help refugees move into job formality and combat modern forms of slavery. In their public advocacy role, SSE entities can empower refugee voices and participate in the design of innovative policy responses, such as dispersed and micro forms of accommodation or mobile applications for skills recognition. The active participation of refugees in local communities through the SSE can foster positive interactions and dispel misconceptions, ultimately leading to a greater sense of social cohesion.

Policy considerations on how to maximise the contribution of the SSE in support of refugees

Policy makers would benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the SSE all along the refugee journey. From preventing human rights violations and other forms of persecution that generate movements of forced displacement, to favouring social and economic integration of refugees in their country of destination, the SSE is a powerful ally to implement and complement public policies. SSE entities can do so as strategic partners in policy design, as contracted service providers, but also through their independent initiative, drawing on their own resources and volunteer base.

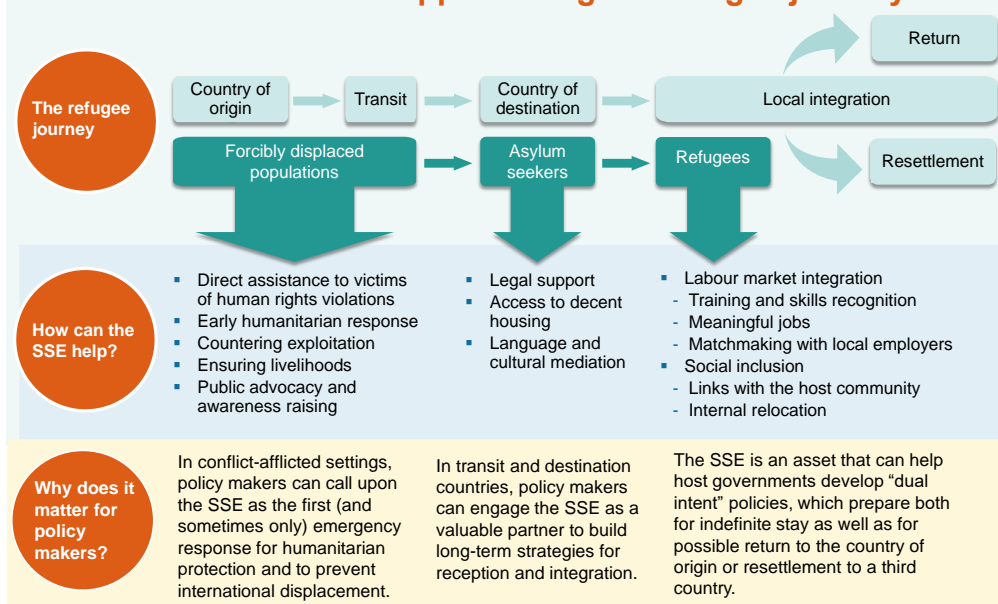
Policy makers can develop win-win solutions for refugees and host communities by leveraging the value added of the SSE, namely their participatory and locally anchored governance, their responsiveness and capacity to innovate and, finally, the holistic and people-centred approach to service delivery. By involving the SSE representatives through co-design and co-implementation, national and local governments can define structural solutions to the complex challenge of protection, reception and integration systems, including internal relocation. Moreover, the SSE can help prepare refugees for voluntary return to their country of origin, once safety is restored, or for resettlement to a third country. Better collaboration between policy makers and the SSE can both enhance the attainment of public policy goals and help achieve the SSE's social mission.

Infographic 1. The social and solidarity economy as a strategic partner for policy makers along the refugee journey

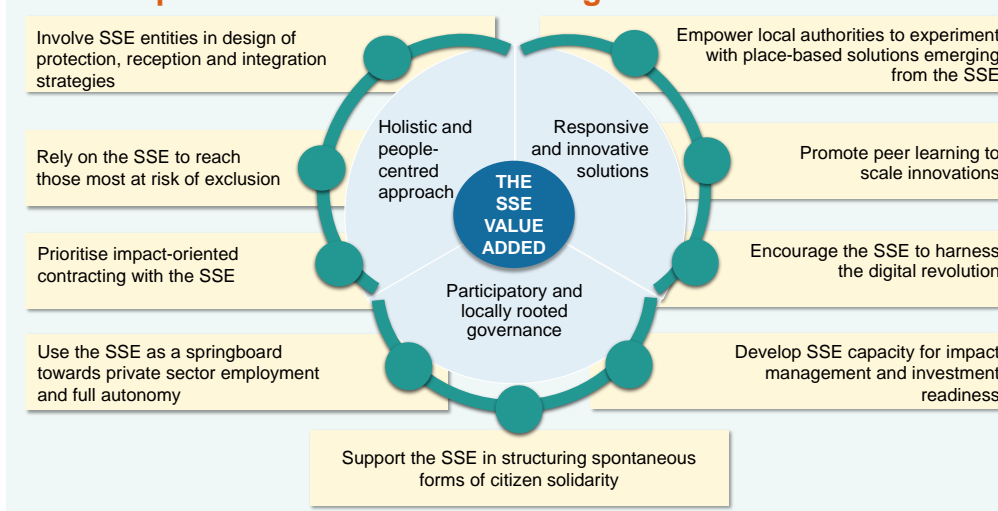
The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is an interconnected network of actors...



...that offers seamless support along the refugee journey



Policy makers can leverage the value added of the SSE to develop win-win solutions for refugees and host communities



Note 1: This stylised presentation does not imply that all asylum seekers have been forcibly displaced, nor that all refugees have gone through the asylum system. See Box 1 for the terms.

Note 2: SSE = social and solidarity economy; NGOs = non-governmental organisations.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Introduction

Why talk about the social and solidarity economy in the context of refugee policies?

In the context of multiple crises, movements of forced displacement are expected to rise

In the years and decades ahead, the frequency and magnitude of forced displacement are anticipated to rise due to armed conflicts and environmental disasters. Although international migration momentarily decelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, it picked up again in 2021 owing to a robust economic rebound, rising labour demands and the resumption of visa processing (OECD, 2022^[6]). The same trend applies to asylum-seeking requests, according to the latest data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Nearly 2.9 million individual asylum applications were registered worldwide at the end of 2022. The number of asylum seekers waiting for a decision stood at 5.4 million, an increase of 18% from the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2023^[2]). The aggression of the Russian Federation (hereafter, “Russia”) against Ukraine led to the largest movement of refugees in Europe since World War II. In 2022, 4.2 million people from Ukraine were granted international protection on a group basis or received temporary protection.

Box 1. How the individual status may change along the refugee journey, from forced displacement to international asylum

Under international law, individuals have the right to seek asylum in another country if they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country. This right is enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which have been ratified by most countries across the world. The legal context of people wishing to leave their country for a safer place depends on the specific circumstances of each individual case, as well as the laws and policies of the countries involved. Under international law, countries are prohibited from returning individuals to their home country if they would face persecution or other serious harm there. This principle is known as non-refoulement and is considered a cornerstone of international refugee protection.

Displacement is the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence (whether within their own country or across an international border), in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters. When they do not cross an internationally recognised state border, these are defined as internally displaced persons (IDP).

“Asylum seeker” refers to any person who is seeking international protection. In some countries, it is used as a legal term referring to a person who has applied for refugee status or a complementary international protection status and has not yet received a final decision on their claim. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee. However, an asylum seeker may not be sent back to their country of origin until their asylum claim has been examined in a fair procedure and is entitled to certain minimum standards of treatment pending determination of their status (OECD, 2022^[7]) (UNHCR, n.d.^[4]).

“Refugee” is a generic term to include all beneficiaries of international protection – both those who obtained formal refugee status and those who received other forms of protection, notably subsidiary protection (OECD, 2019^[8]). A “refugee” is any person who meets the eligibility criteria under an applicable refugee definition, as provided for in international or regional refugee instruments, under UNHCR’s mandate, or in national legislation. Under international law, a person is considered a refugee as soon as they meet the relevant criteria, whether or not they have been formally recognised as a refugee (OECD, 2022^[7]). Under UNHCR’s mandate, refugees are persons outside their countries of origin who are in need of international protection because of feared persecution, or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom in their country of origin as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder (UNHCR, n.d.^[4]).

Yet not all asylum seekers are forcibly displaced, and not all refugees go through the asylum system. For instance, people fleeing the war in the Ukraine to the European Union benefit from collective temporary protection, based on a decision of the Council of Ministers. Hence, they do not need to apply for international asylum in their host country. In addition, there are also refugees resettled from third countries, who do not pass through the status of asylum seeker in their destination country.

Sources: <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary>; (OECD, 2022^[7]); (OECD, 2019^[8]).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) foresees that migration and integration will be significantly impacted by several interconnected megatrends within the next 10-15 years, although the precise nature and direction of these effects are uncertain. Millions of people are expected to be displaced by environmental changes and extreme weather events, which could lead to societal breakdown and conflict, potentially causing unforeseen waves of long-distance migration, though most migration is anticipated to occur in neighbouring areas. Geopolitical instability and conflict have traditionally been drivers of outmigration due to factors such as increasing inequality, youth unemployment, political corruption, terrorism and insecurity (OECD, 2020^[9]). Recent estimates indicate that 61 million refugees and IDPs reside in fragile contexts, representing 64% of the global forcibly displaced population (OECD, 2022^[5]).

Refugees are one of the largest and most vulnerable groups worldwide. By the end of 2022, there were over 108 million displaced people worldwide, and 40% are children below 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2023^[2]). Therein, 35.3 million are refugees and over half of them originate from just three countries (Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Afghanistan). Low- and middle-income countries host 76% of the world’s refugees and other people in need of international protection (UNHCR, 2023^[10]). Most of the global refugee population resides in cities (60%), followed by camps and rural areas. These refugees often live in precarious situations beyond the reach of most humanitarian aid or public support (Urban Refugees, 2023^[11]). The benefit of integrating asylum seekers and refugees is evident not only at the individual level (e.g. in terms of self-esteem and empowerment) but also at the broader community level, in terms of enhanced social cohesion and contribution to economic development (UNDP and EMES, 2008^[12]; Chui, Shum and Lum, 2018^[13]).

The social and solidarity economy matters for refugees

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) comprises organisations such as associations, cooperatives, mutual organisations, foundations, non-profits and social enterprises as well as community-based, grassroots and spontaneous initiatives (Box 2) that are on the front lines with refugees from country of origin to their final (albeit more or less temporary) destination. Thus, it also includes non-governmental organisations (NGOs)¹ and civil society organisations (CSOs).² These terms are frequently used in some policy areas (e.g. development co-operation, humanitarian aid), although *de facto* they refer to the same type of entities, which are better known as “SSE” in other areas (such as economic development and active labour market policies). However, by referring only to NGOs, policy programmes addressing emergency response, migration and asylum issues might overlook the more entrepreneurial and economic dimension of the SSE, which can become fundamental for the refugee employment and social inclusion and also to improve their return perspectives. Indeed, by strengthening refugees’ labour market skills and sometimes revealing their entrepreneurial capacity, social enterprises can help meet the dual intent of preparing at once for long-term integration in the host community and for successful return in their country of origin or resettlement in a third country.

Box 2. What is the social and solidarity economy?

As mentioned in the **OECD Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation**, the activity of these entities is typically driven by social objectives, values of solidarity, the primacy of people over capital and, in most cases, by democratic and participative governance. SSE entities distinguish themselves in two respects: their *raison d’être*, as they primarily address social needs and pursue a social purpose, and their way of operating because they implement specific business models based on collaboration, typically at the local level. More recently, the notion of **social enterprise** has been added in order to recognise entities that trade goods and services, that fulfil a social objective and whose main purpose is not the maximisation of profit for the owners but its reinvestment for the continued attainment of its social goals (OECD, 2022^[3]).

Different notions, terms and concepts co-exist with the SSE and are used in different regions and countries (OECD, 2023^[14]). The term **social economy** is prevalent in Europe and includes a broad and diverse set of organisational forms. Countries such as Canada (with the exception of the province of Quebec) and the United States typically refer to the **non-profit sector**, which mainly relates to the non-distribution constraint according to which organisations cannot legally redistribute their surpluses to their owners. Other countries, including the United Kingdom and Italy, adopted the notion of the **third sector** that is positioned between the state and the market and encompasses organisations that do not qualify as private or public sector entities (Galera and Chiomento, 2022^[15]).

Sources: (OECD, 2022^[3]); (OECD, 2023^[14]); (Galera and Chiomento, 2022^[15]).

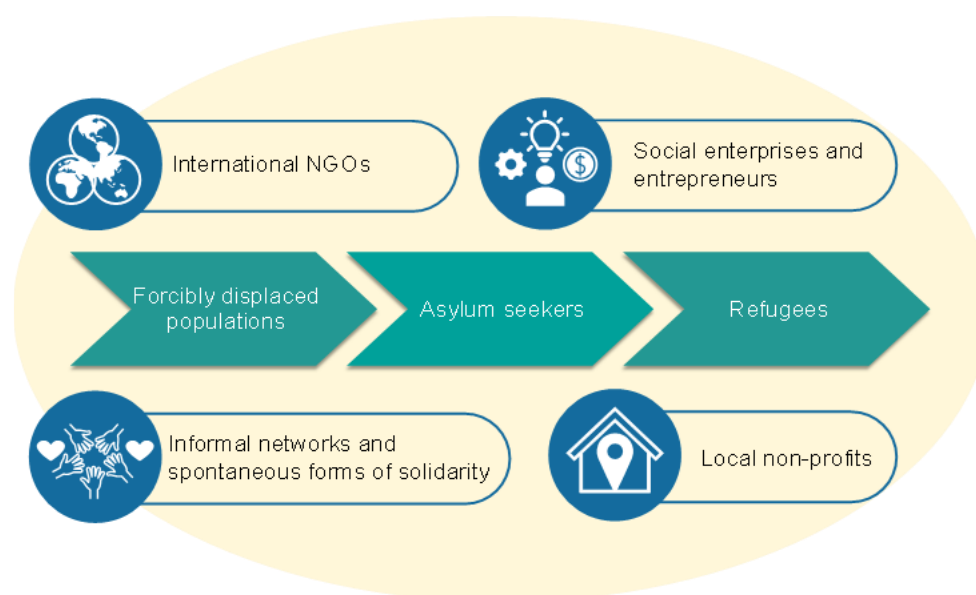
The SSE has historically played a pivotal role in dealing with the multifaceted challenge of migration, long before the recent refugee crises (Garkisch, Heidingsfelder and Beckmann, 2017^[16]), by supporting more broadly migrants and local communities. In countries that have a long-standing history of inward migration, the local SSE has usually developed a solid experience in welcoming asylum seekers and supporting their inclusion. This is the case for instance of the United Kingdom and France, where there are numerous SSE actors that provide support to refugees and asylum seekers, helping them overcome the trauma of being forcibly uprooted and better integrate into their new home. In other cases, the local SSE may address refugees as part of its broader mission of building more inclusive and sustainable societies. In Korea, for example, the onset of the SSE was stimulated by regional policies aimed at supporting the rebuilding of a sense of community (Miura, 2019^[17]). The local SSE has been striving to

promote decent work, social inclusion and social empowerment of a wide set of vulnerable categories. North Korean refugees can integrate into South Korean society through social enterprises and cooperatives (Lee, 2019^[18]). For example, the company Yovel³ was started in 2014 by five young refugees as a café where South and North Koreans can work together. The company recently expanded the scope of its activities into farming, to create new employment opportunities for North Korean refugees in Korea.

SSE entities that work with and for forcibly displaced populations along their journey take many shapes and sizes, each one being a piece of the larger puzzle. Different groups of actors can be identified, with their own specific advantages and limitations. However, all of them (local or international, formalised and spontaneous) are needed in the main areas of intervention related to countering exploitation, providing legal support and access to basic services (e.g. medical, housing), and ensuring livelihoods. The effectiveness of SSE actors is highly dependent on the local level of fragility on multiple dimensions (e.g. economic, political, environmental), the formal and informal institutions, and policies that are in place within the respective countries and regions.

- **International NGOs** that are well-established and recognised have the legitimacy to operate in certain regions and collaborate with important and resourceful (inter)national institutions. However, due to their large-scale operations, they can be somewhat slow in adapting to fast-changing needs. Local NGOs bring their grassroots knowledge and networks to react more quickly and mobilise targeted responses in crisis situations (Williams and Sheperd, 2018^[19]). However, due to their local focus, they are not able to follow migrants' entire journey across borders.
- **Local non-profits**, including NGOs, often carry a double advantage in the face of crisis: their knowledge of (and embeddedness in) the local context and their rapid response capacity. A recent example is how the Ukrainian civil society stepped up after Russia's invasion. Relief programmes and online platforms were created overnight to raise funds and co-ordinate aid. Numerous spontaneous initiatives emerged to evacuate people from occupied areas, rehabilitate wounded civilians and soldiers, and mobilise a community of activists in Ukraine and abroad.⁴ At the outbreak of violent conflicts, the presence of local SSE actors and their international partners is critical to meet, in a timely and effective manner, the needs of the most vulnerable in society.
- **Social entrepreneurs and social enterprises** develop products and services to address migration issues in more innovative and agile ways (Martin and Osberg, 2007^[20]). However, due to their focus on long-term sustainable solutions they are often not well-equipped to deliver humanitarian aid as a crisis response. When these organisations are led by people with a migrant background, they benefit from additional knowledge about the challenges and opportunities refugees face through their lived experience. Incorporating this knowledge and experience into interventions is crucial to address migration issues in humane and effective ways (Naimi, Hehenberger and Clewett, 2020^[21]).
- **Networks and spontaneous forms of solidarity** are less formally structured, allowing for more independence in organising tailor-made interventions that can reach migrants in complex and vulnerable situations. However, they are often not recognised by formal institutions and, therefore, difficult to scale.

Figure 1. The ecosystem of SSE entities working along the refugee journey



Note 1: This stylised presentation does not imply that all asylum seekers have been forcibly displaced, nor that all refugees have gone through the asylum system. See Box 1 for the terms.

Note 2: NGOs = non-governmental organisations.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The landscape of SSE entities providing protection, reception and integration services is extremely diverse, not simply across countries, but often also within the same country. SSE entities providing medium- and long-term assistance are extremely diverse in terms of legal forms covered, quality and quantity of the services provided, degree of specialisation, and professionalisation. While some SSE entities work solely with asylum seekers and refugees, others address their services to diverse vulnerable groups who require additional support to achieve social and labour market integration. All these aspects contribute to defining the diverse skill sets and know-how of SSE entities, which often draw also on the contribution of volunteers and the social capital that is embedded in transit and host societies.

What value added the SSE brings to policy makers

Participatory and locally rooted governance

The added value of the SSE stems from its peculiar ownership structures and governance models, which are designed to enable the active participation of multiple stakeholders, representing different components of society. Its distinctive institutional model plays a decisive role in strengthening connections with the local community, detecting new needs and challenges that may arise in society and redistributing unexploited resources (both monetary and non-monetary) for welfare and development goals. In essence, SSE entities are well placed to empower vulnerable recipients and to trigger social transformations, thanks to their capacity to partner with different stakeholders, including public authorities, for-profit companies and civil society. In essence, SSE entities are prone to facilitate the active involvement of asylum seekers and refugees also in designing the most adequate solutions and services. Research suggests that there is a correlation between the local anchorage shown by SSE entities and the quality of the welcome services provided (Galera et al., 2018^[22]).

In many cases, SSE entities stem from locally anchored initiatives providing protection and reception services that are designed from the outset to facilitate the social and work integration of asylum seekers and hence are able to generate beneficial impacts upon the hosting territory. Relevant patterns here include dispersed and micro forms of accommodation (e.g. in privately owned flats and houses as opposed to reception centres or hotspots), constant interaction with CSOs, and networking with stakeholders from both local authorities (e.g. welfare services, schools, vocational training agencies etc.) and for-profit organisations (Galera, Giannetto and Noya, 2018^[23]). At the opposite end of the spectrum, in the search for economies of scale, SSE entities can be pushed to provide protection, reception and integration services that are less locally rooted (e.g. by over-concentrating beneficiaries in one place, thus limiting their interactions with host communities), more standardised and possibly lower in quality, for instance often employing workers with limited training and supervision.

By spreading its values of solidarity and co-operation, the SSE can prevent or alleviate conflicts with local communities but also among refugee groups. In fragile contexts, the SSE works to protect individual human rights and counter discrimination or exploitation of vulnerable groups. When violent conflict erupts, the SSE can assist internally displaced populations, thereby preventing further migratory waves across borders. In transit and destination countries, SSE entities help organise spontaneous forms of solidarity, even where there remains hostility from local populations (Boccagni, Armanni and Santinello, 2021^[24]). Differences in protection arrangements across asylum seekers, depending on their legal grounds for application, can create disparities among individuals that, in theory, benefit from the same status. Notable examples are the special protection arrangements introduced for persons displaced from specific countries, such as Ukraine and Syria, in response to war situations (Kienast, Feith Tan and Vedsted-Hansen, 2022^[25]). Through its inclusive approach, the SSE can foster dialogue and social connections across different groups, as premises for peaceful co-existence and religious harmony.

Responsive and innovative solutions

SSE entities respond to the asylum and refugee challenge by developing concrete solutions and healing profound divisions in local communities (UNTFSSSE, 2023^[26]). This has proven possible thanks to the unique position of SSE entities, which often enjoy enough leeway to experiment with the design of new services tailored to meet the needs not only of asylum seekers and refugees but also of the local residents. In this way, they contribute to building bridges between newcomers and the hosting community (Galera, Giannetto and Noya, 2018^[23]). Many SSE entities have thus emerged bottom-up, taking stock of the collective engagement of volunteers, social workers and the community at large (Galera, Giannetto and Noya, 2018^[23]), often as a result of major crises, including the sudden arrival of a significant number of asylum seekers in a given area and the outbreak of new wars.

The responsiveness of the SSE in times of crisis, especially through volunteering and citizen initiatives, complements public action to organise refugee reception and assistance. Due to the sometimes political and bureaucratic nature of larger institutions, they may be less agile than spontaneous grassroots initiatives and local non-profit actors. The case of Ukrainian refugees, as a recent example, shows how volunteer organisations stepped up to work with Ukrainians entering Poland after the start of the war, while the local government and international refugee aid organisations were still organising their support (The Conversation, 2023^[27]). However, these citizen initiatives are not sustainable in the long run and public interventions are needed to offset challenges, such as financing, capacity, co-ordination, and risk of exploitation (OECD, 2022^[5]).

SSE entities are often initiators and implementers of social innovation because their primary mission is to address societal needs, through operating models based on collaboration, typically at the local level. Research also specifically refers to the important role social enterprises play in social innovations. However, the emergence of social innovation in a particular territory requires solid collaboration with the private sector, public administration and civil society (OECD, 2021^[28]). Refugees themselves, as self-entrepreneurs, have the capacity to create new job opportunities to answer the needs of their peers or to meet the hiring needs of their host society.

Holistic and people-centred approach

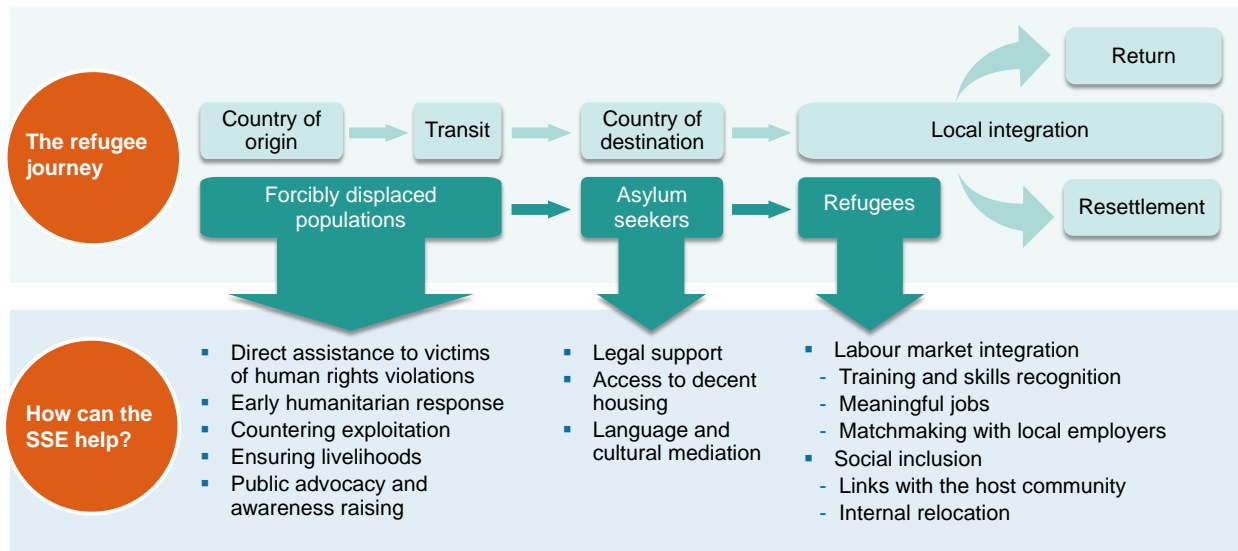
Several SSE actors embrace a “holistic approach”, not limited to exclusively supporting labour-market inclusion, but paying attention to structural, social and cultural dimensions of integration. SSE entities with a strong local anchorage are particularly well positioned to detect the needs and barriers faced by forcibly displaced individuals and therefore design tailor-made interventions and support measures. In the case of refugees, this can be especially true when there are people with migrant backgrounds who found or lead these organisations. The activation of holistic integration pathways is particularly pertinent for asylum seekers and refugees who typically have less social and financial capital compared with other migrant groups or natives (OECD/European Commission, 2022^[29]). Many SSE entities facilitating work integration of migrants adopt participative and individual-centred methodologies that encourage the development of the person and her/his involvement not only into work but also in society.

Besides supporting individual well-being, integration can also have a beneficial impact on the entire community, in terms of social cohesion enhancement and economic support. There is a wide consensus in the literature that the way migrants integrate into the labour market, and the time they take to do so, will determine the long-term impact of migrants on the economy in the receiving country (Martin and Acarons, 2016^[30]). However, labour markets are ridden with information imperfections, asymmetries and constraints that sharply reduce employment opportunities for migrants in general and for asylum seekers in particular. Moreover, in some countries, the legislation in force prevents asylum seekers and refugees from accessing the labour market and increases the need for the SSE to provide support. Asylum seekers accessing the labour market in a legal way not only earn a salary but also have the possibility to regain a normality which was lost due to forced displacement. A substantial part of the social economy that is focused on supporting migrant entrepreneurship: refugees who engage in entrepreneurship create jobs open new markets with their products and services, which have a positive impact on the local economy. Being in employment, in fact, plays a fundamental role in the structuring of daily life as it influences the well-being and balance of the person as well as his or her whole family. In turn, a lower need for financial and social support will have a positive impact on the welfare system of the hosting society and economy.

Through its activities, the SSE offers seamless support along the refugee journey

The chapters that follow describe how the SSE concretely intervenes to support forcibly displaced populations, asylum seekers and refugees. They do so by being physically present in the countries of origin, transit and destination. The SSE plays a role in all the possible “durable” solutions to the refugee journey: local integration, voluntary return at home or resettlement to a third country. Many of the activities identified in Figure 2 will overlap across the three main stages of the journey. Indeed, many SSE entities strive to provide a continuum of services, sometimes independently of a person’s legal status.

Figure 2. SSE activities accompany forcibly displaced populations, asylum seekers and refugees along their journey



Note 1: See Figure 1, Note 1.

Note 2: SSE = social and solidarity economy.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Notes

¹ An NGO is any non-profit entity organised on a local, national or international level to pursue shared objectives and ideals, without significant government-controlled participation or representation. NGOs include foundations, cooperative societies, trade unions, and ad hoc entities set up to collect funds for a specific purpose. The term can be used synonymously with the term civil society organisation (OECD, 2018_[124]).

² Civil society organisations (CSOs) are an organisational representation of civil society and include all not-for-profit, non-state, non-partisan, non-violent and self-governing organisations outside of the family in which people come together to pursue shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith and beliefs, including formal, legally registered organisations as well as informal associations without legal status but with a structure and activities (OECD, 2021_[95]).

³ More information [here](#).

⁴ <https://lens.civicus.org/one-year-into-russias-war-on-ukraine-civil-society-in-the-crossfire/>.

1 The social and solidarity economy as the first helpline for forcibly displaced populations

The social and solidarity economy can help prevent international movements of forced displacement and mitigate their human cost on affected populations

The role of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in combating discrimination and promoting social justice has long been recognised by policy makers. For instance, the Council of Europe has committed to support the action of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to refine policies and legislation in the area of racism and xenophobia, and ensure that the point of view of minority groups is taken into account in their preparation, implementation and monitoring, cf. Resolution 1910 (2012).¹ By preventing and reducing episodes of violence and persecution at home, the SSE contributes to building inclusive and peaceful societies, ultimately preventing migratory pushes across borders.

The SSE is already active in countries of origin, before and during forced displacement

In their country of origin, forcibly displaced people interact with the SSE in various ways. They may be internally displaced or flee abroad to obtain international protection. If they do not or cannot cross an international border, they are not classified as asylum seekers, despite sharing similar experiences and difficulties with those who do.² In most cases, however, SSE entities working in the space of human rights protection and humanitarian aid will not discriminate between populations in need and thus equally cater the needs of internally displaced groups and future asylum seekers.

For people who seek to depart their country of origin, SSE entities can serve as important information points on both escape routes and the prospects of obtaining refugee status. While online platforms and social networks have become the primary source of information and connection for most migrants, in-person information points remain important, too. A study by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) revealed that Ukrainian refugees who are over 60 years of age or with lower levels of education are more interested in receiving information in person or from their friends and family, while more than half of the Ukrainian refugees preferred receiving information via social media channels (UNHCR, 2022^[31]).

The SSE can help address the root causes of forced displacement, by advocating for social and economic change in the country of origin. As IDPs and/or asylum seekers, individuals seek advice, support and/or networking opportunities through SSE entities. By creating a more supportive environment for potential migrants, SSE entities can reduce the push factors that can lead people to leave their home country in the first place. Through its different forms, including community-driven, grassroots initiatives, the SSE can also advocate for policy improvements that help promote economic development, social justice and human rights.

The SSE accompanies asylum seekers through transit countries

Once people are forced to flee their homes to seek refuge from dangerous and harmful circumstances, they embark on a risky passage that begins in their home country. The precarious journey often begins in the Global South, where most refugees are hosted. Almost 60% of forcibly displaced people worldwide are internally displaced (UNHCR, 2022^[32]). From the refugees that are able to cross borders, 72% of refugees worldwide are hosted in neighbouring countries in the Global South (UNHCR, 2022^[32]). Often, these neighbouring and regional countries are also economically and/or politically fragile, which can lead to adverse circumstances for the refugees who arrive there. Still, relatively high levels of social entrepreneurship are observed in the Middle East and North and sub-Saharan Africa, especially at the start-up phase (Bosma et al., 2015^[33]).

The challenges refugees face partly depend on their time in “transit”, where temporary conditions can become permanent. Often, hosting countries in the Global South are referred to as “transit countries” where refugees pass through or stay momentarily on their way to their destination countries. However, this definition is problematic since there is no agreement on the length of a temporary stay and not all asylum seekers have a set destination country in mind. Depending on their personal circumstances, economic situation and how the journey unfolds, asylum seekers can voluntarily settle or be forced to reside in transit countries for longer periods of time. Asylum seekers in transit, either temporarily or not, are at great risk of marginalisation and humanitarian violations due to their uncertain/illegal status and lack of legal support (OCHR, 2021^[34]).

A selection of refugees with more economic, social and human capital migrates to the Global North with the aim of seeking asylum in more stable countries. These countries, often referred to as advanced economies, are less fragile on multiple other dimensions (e.g. political, environmental) compared with refugees’ home countries (OECD, 2022^[5]). Generally, asylum seekers that make this crossing have more economic capacity and/or stronger social ties in destination countries, compared with those that remain in the Global South. Once they decide to lodge a request for international protection, SSE entities can provide legal and administrative support (see Chapter 2).

However, due to the lack of safe, legal routes and strict migration policies in the Global North, many refugees are stopped at the border. These people end up in so-called “regulatory limbo”, where the asylum procedures are lengthy and unclear. Additionally, they face difficult circumstances in the major hosting countries, including Türkiye with 3.8 million refugees, followed by Colombia (1.8 million), Uganda (1.5 million) and Pakistan (1.5 million) (UNHCR, 2023^[35]). These countries may not always succeed in adequately providing reception and integration for all those in need, because of the large number of people they host. In this context, the SSE can step in to ensure their human rights are respected, provide some temporary relief and prevent further harmful situations.

In practice, the SSE helps forcibly displaced populations by:

Offering direct assistance to victims of human rights violations

Across all geographies worldwide, the SSE is at the forefront in protecting human rights. In stable and developed contexts, SSE entities can support and facilitate access to justice for minorities and victims of discrimination, contributing to the preservation of their human dignity. In conflict-afflicted areas, SSE entities serve as the front line to support injured and threatened lives. They also offer direct services to victims of human rights violations, by providing legal advice on how to present claims under the law. When the violation cannot be rectified or prevented, SSE entities may need to propose alternatives to reach safety outside country borders.

The SSE is active against all the most common forms of persecution, be it religious, ethnic or political grounds. SSE actors in this field range from small pressure groups (for example, educational charities, women's refuges, religious organisations, philanthropic foundations) all the way to the international NGOs with hundreds or even thousands of branches or members in different parts of the world. Guided by the principles of solidarity, SSE entities bring together volunteers and grassroots activists to support threatened minorities, who are often indigenous peoples, displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees. Internationally renowned SSE entities that are actively engaged in the protection of civil and political rights include the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights, Human Rights First, and Interights (Council of Europe, n.d.^[36]).³

Because of their proximity work, NGOs can collect accurate information on the injustices and their perpetrators. They often maintain extensive websites documenting violations and calling for remedial action, at both governmental and grassroots levels. In this way, they attempt to put pressure on people or governments by identifying an issue that will appeal to people's sense of injustice and then making it public. In order to combat impunity, SSE entities will not only document mass violations of human rights, but they can also open legal proceedings at national or even international level for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocides committed domestically or abroad. Two of the best-known examples of organisations that are reputed for their accurate monitoring and reporting are Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross.⁴ Both of these organisations possess authority not only among the general public but also at the level of the United Nations, where their reports are taken into account as part of the official process of monitoring governments that have agreed to be bound by the terms of international treaties (Council of Europe, n.d.^[36]).

Providing early humanitarian response, including immediate shelter

In conflict-afflicted areas, SSE entities can provide first-line rescue in terms of medical and psychological support to victims of war or other forms of violence. SSE entities can work to protect civilians who are not, or no longer, taking part in a conflict or other situation of violence, notably persons or groups exposed to specific risks, such as children, women, the elderly, the disabled and the displaced. They may also offer protection to persons deprived of their freedom, particularly those detained in connection with an armed conflict or other situations of violence.

SSE actors are often the only ones who can reach certain populations or territories where public authorities and official development cooperation cannot go for political reasons. They strive to provide decent living conditions through emergency food assistance and interventions in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene. One of many examples is the Romanian NGO AIDRom, which has deployed teams to the Ukrainian border to provide refugees with food, hygiene products, and other essentials such as blankets and clothing (AIDROM, n.d.^[37]).

At the outburst of violent conflict, local SSE entities quickly adapt their operations to provide safety and meet the urgent needs of IDPs. For instance, since the large-scale Russian Federation (hereafter, "Russia") aggression in Ukraine, the social enterprise Ba and Di Club shifted its initial focus from engaging older individuals in childcare positions to the establishment of a bombshell-safe kindergarten in the basement for children from internally displaced families (Pioneers Post, 2023^[38]). In neighbouring countries, several temporary housing initiatives (e.g. reception centres, private homes) were set up by SSE actors, such as Shelter.Ukraine, described in Box 1.1, to address the limited available housing options in the short term.

Finally, the SSE can facilitate the evacuation of civilian populations from combat zones and offer logistical support in the implementation of humanitarian corridors and safe passages. For example, the United States-based non-profit Razom worked to evacuate civilians from active war zones to safer areas within Ukraine, focusing particularly on the most vulnerable populations, such as children with disabilities (Razom, 2022^[39]).

When faced with protracted conflict, the SSE may need to adapt its mode of functioning and sources of funding. While SSE entities are known to be resilient in times of crisis (OECD, 2020^[40]), the transformation of their regular activities to respond to the acute needs of different vulnerable groups requires additional effort and resources. In this light, the Ukrainian Social Venture Fund has launched a Social Enterprises for Emergency Call for Proposals, which is offered to social enterprises operating during wartime. Though this fund, social enterprises can receive grants needed for transitioning their production to serve the needs of the civilians affected by the war (Collaborate4Impact, 2022^[41]).

Box 1.1. Shelter.Ukraine

Just four days after Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine began in February 2022, several SSE entities came together and launched the humanitarian initiative Shelter.Ukraine to assist internally displaced civilians. The fundraising efforts were spearheaded by the Valores Foundation (Poland), while SILab Ukraine, Teple Misto and VPLYV Fund managed the distribution of resources at the community level: eligible beneficiaries (i.e. registered NGOs and charities, volunteer initiatives, local governments) could request from Shelter.Ukraine financial support to equip centres for IDPs or to purchase food or hygiene products. They collaborate with local authorities all over Ukraine to repurpose public buildings, schools and social aid centres to accommodate the IDPs and prepare bomb shelters.

Over the course of the initial 12-month period of the war, Shelter.Ukraine successfully secured funding exceeding EUR 1 million. This enabled them to aid more than 54 000 IDPs and support 260 shelters with necessary equipment. While certain shelters have been designed for temporary stays, others are intended to offer long-term residence options. IDPs who were not residing in shelters still received aid in the form of food and hygiene kits, essential medicines, and various personal items.

An evaluation was conducted during the 10th and 11th months of implementing the initiative to assess its effectiveness in meeting the urgent needs of beneficiaries by providing timely and efficient assistance. The NGO Centre for Social Audit organised an online survey with 587 IDPs who received aid through the Shelter.Ukraine initiative. Overall, the feedback received from IDPs was positive across three indicators: 1) relevance of products/services; 2) quality of products/services; and 3) positive impact of the assistance provided on the psychological state. Furthermore, ten focus group interviews were held with representatives from 38 local partners who played an instrumental role in delivering assistance. All interviewees unanimously acknowledged that the application process and collaboration requirements for the initiative were transparent and easy to comprehend. In particular, the efficiency and flexibility of the initiative were commended.

Source: <https://shelterukraine.org>.

Countering exploitation on the move

The SSE actors help address the risk of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation (e.g. labour, sexual abuse) of forcibly displaced groups. People on the move are especially vulnerable because of their precarious circumstances and difficulties accessing legal protection of their basic human rights. During their transit across borders, SSE actors can help prevent life-threatening conditions, such as overloaded trucks, ship containers and boats.

SSE actors can help preserve the dignity of the most vulnerable groups during their stay in temporary reception facilities. Refugees often live in dire circumstances in cities and camps without proper access to basic services due to their migration status. Compounded and intersectional areas of vulnerability that are experienced by unaccompanied minors, women, LGBTQ+ and disabled populations, among others, can exacerbate discrimination and violence against them (OHCHR, 2017^[42]). Some NGOs choose to focus their activities on particularly vulnerable groups, such as Still I Rise (Box 1.2).

Box 1.2. Educational and psychological support for children: Still I Rise

Still I Rise was founded in 2018 to offer education, safety and protection to refugee children in the overcrowded accommodation on the island of Samos, Greece. At that time, 350 unaccompanied minors were living in the Samos camp.

Still I Rise's mission is to offer world-class education to those who lack access and are most in need. The organisation initially focused on refugees and now also supports other disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It aims to expand globally and reach refugee children in places where violations of fundamental human rights occur. Still I Rise engages in advocacy work to restore the rights of these children and call for justice.

Still I Rise has formulated two different approaches to education:

- **Emergency schools** provide protection and education in complex and underserved hotspots of global humanitarian crises. These schools address basic needs (e.g. nutrition, hygiene and child protection) and provide psychosocial support that aims to rehabilitate children affected by a range of circumstances including displacement, homelessness and labouring in mines. They follow a versatile curriculum delivered via modern pedagogical techniques such as learner-centred mentorship and project-based learning. These schools are based in Northwest Syria and Democratic Republic of Congo, with two more sites due to open soon. The programme in Greece, the organisation's first, was completed in 2022 after successfully transitioning all its students on to long-term educational pathways.
- **International schools** are established in more stable settings to turn emergency into rebuilding, offering the highest level of education and a holistic state-of-the-art curriculum to ensure long-term solutions. The organisation has developed a unique model, providing up to seven years of high-quality education free of charge to the most in-need children in developing contexts. In addition, their pedagogical approach fosters independence, leadership and responsibility within fragile communities from an early age. These schools are based in Kenya and Colombia, and there are further plans to open a school for refugees in Italy in the future.

Over 2022, Still I Rise served more than a quarter of a million meals and delivered 25 000 hours of classes. It is on course to work with over 500 students full time across emergency and international school sites by the end of 2023 as well as 9 000 students via online school workshops. The organisation was shortlisted among the top ten World's Best Schools in 2022 and nominated for the 2023 Nobel Prize.

Sources: <https://www.stillirisengo.org/en/>; <https://www.stillirisengo.org/en/news/the-2020-nobel-peace-prize/>.

The role of SSE entities working in the humanitarian space is even more vital when crises compound. As witnessed during the global pandemic and the recent earthquake in Türkiye, forcibly displaced populations in these situations risk further marginalisation. Host country institutions may unintentionally prevent undocumented migrants from accessing basic services because of their efforts to contain or control the crisis (Red Cross EU Office, 2021^[43]). SSE actors who are already operating within migrant communities, such as the International Rescue Committee, help refugee populations in crisis by distributing cash, clothes and food and by providing medical aid and mental health support, among others. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, for example, provided access to basic services to those in need and the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab advised states to develop an effective COVID-19 response that took into account the vulnerabilities and protection needs of migrants (Red Cross EU Office, 2021^[43]).

Offering legal advice for temporary settlement

SSE entities can help forcibly displaced persons to navigate the complex legal system of transit countries by creating multilingual resources and information. These resources can include translated legal forms, brochures and online guides that are disseminated on the organisation's website or through outreach events. In addition, SSE entities may refer migrants to legal service providers who specialise in immigration law, such as immigration lawyers, legal aid organisations, or other community-based legal service providers.

SSE entities support people affected by displacement in exercising their rights by obtaining and retrieving official documentation. Registration and identification are often a prerequisite to access basic services and rights such as humanitarian assistance, freedom of movement or access to education. SSE entities can help individuals to acquire such documents. The Norwegian Refugee Council, for example, facilitated the registration and document procurement of more than 600 000 people across the globe in 2018. Their services include providing information on rights, procedures and remedies, offering legal advice and representation in dealings with government entities, supporting women in their pursuit of documentation, and, in certain scenarios, providing cash transfers to complement these efforts (NRC, n.d.^[44]). Similarly, the International Rescue Committee assists refugees, immigrants and eligible individuals on matters such as employment authorisation, travel documents and replacing lost documents (International Rescue Committee, n.d.^[45]).

The SSE can fill the institutional voids that exist in protecting the human rights of forcibly displaced persons by advocating on their behalf. Forcibly displaced people need individual assistance and tailor-made advice, especially if their status has not been confirmed, for instance to address legal disputes with their landlords or employers. Moreover, international NGOs may provide refugees with information, counselling, and legal aid in countries where there is little refugee-related legislation (UNHCR, 2023^[46]). The role of SSE actors in addressing these formal institutional voids is especially important as it can redefine and legitimate the role of refugees and include them in host societies and institutions (Mair, Marti and Ventresca, 2012^[47]).

Ensuring livelihoods during transit

Forcibly displaced populations are often inadequately protected and their right to work restricted, pushing them into informality and at risk of labour exploitation (European Commission, 2022^[48]). In the absence of a legal residence and/or work permit, they can lead to employment engagements in low-tier jobs, in the informal sector or necessity entrepreneurship to ensure their livelihoods and that of their families (Rashid, 2018^[49]). Migrants often end up in temporary employment engagements with little to no access to decent jobs and at risk of ill treatment (United Nations, 2022^[50]).

SSE actors can facilitate the emergence and scaling of income-generating activities for forcibly displaced populations. For example, Uganda's open-door policy towards refugees is recognised as an effective approach in ensuring economic self-reliance by guaranteeing freedom of movement and right to employment, education and health (Africa Renewal - UN, 2019^[51]). These policies acknowledge the potential of refugees to contribute to host countries under the right conditions. Refugees can access small plots of land for shelter and agricultural use. However, this is not enough; they need technical knowledge and skills to improve their productivity and, ultimately, their income. Social enterprises in Uganda have risen to this task and provide these services to refugee farmers, creating a better fit between policy and grassroots realities (Cohero, 2022^[52]). In turn, social impact investors support these social enterprises with capacity-building activities and funding to accelerate ventures that target displaced populations (Acumen Academy, 2022^[53]).

Box 1.3. 249 Startups, social entrepreneurship in Sudan

Sudan is one of the most fragile contexts in the world and historically a country of transit for refugees from South Sudan, but the situation has significantly deteriorated since the start of the internal armed conflict on 15 April 2023 in Sudan. As of September 2023, over 5.36 million civilians have already been forced to flee, including people who were already internally displaced and refugees from other countries who had sought safety in Sudan. Therein, over three-quarters self-relocated within Sudan, while thousands of people fled into neighbouring countries or returned home in adverse circumstances, notably to the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan.

The social enterprise 249Startups is an incubator established in 2018 to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem for young social start-ups in Sudan. With over 46 million inhabitants and a large diaspora, Sudan has a potential for young entrepreneurs, especially the ones tackling primary needs at the core of their innovations. With a team of 30 seasoned professionals, 249Startups offers tailored services in diverse areas including business development, project management, financial consultancy, product innovation and marketing. Operating through a connected system, it strives to integrate local and global entrepreneurial networks, in collaboration with private corporations and development institutions such as United Nations development agencies, the African Development Bank and bilateral donors such as the Netherlands and the United States.

In the aftermath of the war, 249Startups stands as the sole active hub, playing a critical role in supporting the recovery of start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region. Based in Khartoum, the incubator manages three programmes. The first is called Orange Corners, in partnership with the Dutch government and private companies, providing funds and assistance to start-ups at the seed or pre-seed stage. The second focuses on SMEs, providing finance and business development support. Finally, the Rhino Acceleration Programme is an equity investment platform linking projects to business angels, who provide funding. Through these programmes, 249Startups has empowered over 1 000 entrepreneurs and supported 120 enterprises, raising over USD 2 million between 2018 and 2022. Additionally, it curates various events and conferences, such as the 2022 Beyond Capital Summit during Global Entrepreneurship Week. This platform spotlighted the Sudanese social start-up scene and called for international investments in early-stage projects within Sudan.

249Startups defines itself as a social enterprise, targeting innovations that can support local communities. Examples feature Betagdari, a women-led initiative tackling women empowerment challenges especially in rural areas. The company helps them diversify and update their production, while giving them a safe and comfortable working environment and innovative marketing solutions. First results hint at an increase in the client's daily income of 150%. Another example is Humocare, an enterprise with the mission of providing essential health services to the people of North Darfur, despite facing numerous obstacles and limited resources even during war times. Their relentless dedication and innovative approaches have enabled them to make the impact on the lives of those in need. Both examples are alumni of the Orange Corners Incubation programme.

Sources: [about | 249Startups](#); <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation>; [Document - Sudan Emergency UNHCR Supplementary Appeal - May to October 2023 \(Revised June 2023\)](#); [Amid Sudan's civil war, startups help people survive and flee - Rest of World](#); [Sudan | IDMC \(internal-displacement.org\)](#); [UNHCR: http://www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/](http://www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/); [OECD \(2022\), States of Fragility 2022, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/c7fedf5e-en.](#)

Entrepreneurial communities, including social entrepreneurs, provide populations in distress with help and innovative solutions to flee from violence and get access to basic humanitarian needs.

Since the start of the internal armed conflict in Sudan, the local entrepreneurial community has rapidly stepped up in supporting forcibly displaced persons (Box 1.3). For example, Nidaa (“call for help” in Arabic) is a platform created for people to post their urgent requirements, such as money, food, medical services or a ride. These are then addressed by volunteers, easing communications between solution providers and people in need. Although disrupted by the conflict that hit the capital, Khartoum, the start-up ecosystem is providing support to refugees and internally displaced populations.

Engaging in public advocacy and raising awareness

Many SSE entities engage in advocacy and lobbying in order to bring about policy change at the local, national and international levels. Common practices include letter-writing campaigns, street actions or demonstrations and social media campaigns. Shadow reports are submitted to United Nations human rights monitoring bodies to give an NGO perspective of the situation regarding human rights in a particular country. Advocacy efforts can be targeted to specific public authorities or to all citizens, to shift public opinion and multiply pressures for change. For example, UNITED for Intercultural Action⁵ is a European network committed to combating nationalism, racism and fascism while advocating for the rights of migrants, refugees and minorities. With the aim to advance on the vision of fostering a diverse and inclusive society, UNITED collaborates with more than 560 supporter organisations, ranging from local grassroots associations to national and international NGOs (UNITED FIA, n.d.^[54]).

SSE entities act as a watchdog to critically monitor the activities of governments, industries and other large institutions to alert the public about misconduct. These SSE actors, often international NGOs, conduct research on human rights violations of migrants in home, host and transit countries. They use these data to build campaigns to raise public awareness about “hidden” abuse within the judicial systems and to influence decision-makers to change policy and practice. By fostering greater awareness on the existence of human rights, the state of their violations and the available methods for defending them, these SSE entities aim to inspire more respectful behaviours and to mobilise support in case of human rights violations. For example, Amnesty International has advocated for the plight of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, focusing specifically on women as a vulnerable group (Amnesty International, 2022^[55]).

Notes

¹ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19222&lang=en>.

² Unlike refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not given a unique legal status with specific rights related to their predicament. The term “internally displaced person” only serves as a description of their situation (UN Human Rights Office, n.d.^[122]).

³ Additional examples of non-profits engaged in this space include the Human Rights Action Center and Human Rights Without Frontiers. More information [here](#).

⁴ Although the International Committee of the Red Cross is not part of the SSE, its work catalyses many SSE entities on the ground. Indeed, its mandate and legal status sets it apart from both intergovernmental organisations and NGOs.

⁵ <https://unitedfia.org/>.

2 The social and solidarity economy as an enabler for asylum seekers to access international protection

In the country of destination, the social and solidarity economy can support requests for asylum or other forms of subsidiary protection

Every year, social and solidarity economy (SSE) entities enable and facilitate access to international protection to an indefinite number of asylum seekers who would otherwise face significant difficulties to assert their rights, or risk falling into an illegal status. However, the modalities and range of this support vary considerably across and within countries depending on several factors, including national regulations on international protection, legislation framing the scope of SSE activities in the protection system, the needs and preferences of asylum seekers, and the approach of subnational governments and municipalities. Typical services carried out autonomously by SSE actors include promotional activities aimed at raising awareness about the rights of persons seeking asylum as well as educational activities based on the engagement of the hosting community, which all contribute to fulfilling basic needs that would otherwise remain unattended. In some cases, SSE entities also provide language courses, cultural mediation services and training to help asylum seekers achieve a sufficient level of autonomy and integrate into the hosting country.

While in some countries, SSE entities are acknowledged as important providers of reception and protection services, in others they are involved in a spotty manner by public authorities. Where SSE entities have a well-defined role, the services provided are in a generally homogeneous manner. SSE actors are often entrusted to deliver reception services, including temporary accommodation to fulfil the duty to guarantee protection, which is a responsibility of national governments, in accordance with international regulations. In Sweden, for example, the Refugee Law Center and the Red Cross provide standard legal advice and individual case support in asylum and family reunification cases (free of charge). Whenever the public system is driven by an emergency rationale, the contribution of the SSE tends to be patchier, ranging from very innovative initiatives, up to negative examples of sometimes severe mismanagement of reception facilities.

The extent of SSE involvement in the implementation of public policies affects their degree of professionalisation as well as their capacity to provide services on a stable basis to all those in need. Interactions with public authorities range from the fruitful co-design of welfare interventions (quite rare), up to the contracting out of reception services, which often remains solely guided by cost-minimising criteria (OECD, 2023^[56]). In some countries, beyond a minimal provision of basic services, the spectrum and quality of the services provided to asylum seekers depends very much on the goodwill of SSE entities (Galera, Gotz and Franch, 2021^[57]).

In addition to providing services based on contractual agreements with public authorities, SSE entities may operate beyond the boundaries of national reception systems. This may entail providing continued support to those individuals whose asylum requests have been rejected. An interesting example of a transborder SSE entity displaying a relevant role independently from public policies is CareforCalais. The association facilitates asylum seekers' access to international protection working across the two opposite shores between the United Kingdom and France. CareforCalais distributes aid and provides support (including food, clothes and other material necessary for a dignified life and social support) in a number of French sites (Calais, Dunkirk, Caen) and runs a day centre for social interaction and a children's centre in Calais. In the United Kingdom, volunteers help to provide basic needs items, as well as help vulnerable asylum seekers to organise themselves for the protection process. The association has close contacts and collaborates with other SSE entities, particularly in the domain of housing and health.

In practice, the SSE helps asylum seekers by:

Offering legal support for asylum applications

SSE entities can assist recipients in accessing protection statuses to which asylum seekers are entitled. Available statuses vary significantly across countries, as well as the procedures to fill in the application and the national rules that may complement international ones, especially in relation to what happens in the event of refusal. Additionally, relevant documents explaining the asylum process and all its ramifications are not always translated into foreign languages. Furthermore, the officials in charge of collecting applications may have themselves limited or no knowledge of languages other than the official one spoken in the host state.

SSE entities can be contracted by the state to collect applications, to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers, and support the production of the required documentation needed to explain the reasons for leaving one's own country. There are mainly two types of SSE organisations offering legal support: SSE organisations specialised in providing legal assistance that target a broad set of beneficiaries, and organisations addressing specifically the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, which have equipped themselves to provide legal support in addition to other support services.

Through the pro bono mobilisation of legal professionals, SSE entities provide free or low-cost legal services to asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups who cannot afford legal representation. They are often born to overcome barriers in the justice systems, out of the legal profession's commitment to justice for anyone, and often operate thanks to private donations. In the United States, for example, legal service organisations work with immigrants, assist with completing immigration forms as asylum applications, and provide representation at asylum interviews (Androff and Mathis, 2021^[58]). However, there is not sufficient pro bono legal representation available for every asylum seeker. To meet the demand, legal orientation programmes (commonly known as "Know Your Rights" presentations) are designed to teach asylum applicants the basics of self-representation and are run by the American Civil Liberties Union,¹ a non-profit organisation founded in 1920. Similarly, several associations provide support to the many asylum seekers, for instance from Haiti, who are in transit or stranded in Mexico (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Mexico and asylum seekers from Haiti

Mexico is still considered a country of emigration due to many more citizens leaving it than foreigners coming in, but its importance as a transit country is increasing, as a large number of migrants and refugees are settling in. Thousands of displaced people have left Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador to neighbouring Mexico and to the United States to seek asylum. Mexico is also the principal destination for Venezuelan, Cuban and Haitian asylum seekers. Many Haitians came to Mexico from largely safe countries in South America rather than directly from unsafe Haiti. The arrival of Haitians originating from theoretically safe countries of last residence makes processing of all Haitian applications more complex since it is necessary to distinguish between those qualifying for protection in Mexico and genuinely interested in taking it, from those not qualifying for protection in Mexico and more interested in migrating onwards to the United States.

Several associations have sprung up along Mexico's borders, providing support to the many migrants and asylum seekers in transit or stranded in the territory. A fundamental part of this work is legal support, as in the case of the association Asylum Access Mexico. Other SSE entities, such as Fundación Barra Mexicana and Centro Mexicano Pro Bono, A.C., provide free counselling and legal support to the most vulnerable groups of Mexican society, including refugees.

Sources: Schmidtke, R., Escobedo, D. 2021, "Mexico's Use of Differentiated Asylum Procedures: An Innovative Approach to Asylum Processing". Refugees International; P. Plewa, Recent Trends in Haitian Migration to Mexico, 2022; <https://asylumaccess.org/>.

Epecially relevant is the SSE's continued support for asylum seekers whose protection claims display lower recognition rates or whose requests have been rejected, forcing them in some cases into a situation of illegality. SSE entities, sometimes in co-operation with public institutions, can make themselves available to support either in asserting the rights of asylum seekers or in finding solutions to the lack of documents, or provide important information with respect to the risk of exploitation and the laws that protect against it. In Austria, the drop-in and counselling centre for undocumented workers UNDOK developed from a multi-stakeholder partnership. It is run by trade unions, the Chamber of Labour, the National Student Union and anti-trafficking NGOs, as well as other self-organised migrant SSE entities. The centre, which is funded by public institutions (the Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, and the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund) is a one-stop shop offering counselling and support to undocumented migrant workers about their rights, issues of labour law, claims for unpaid wages and compensation, and issues of social security.

Providing access to decent housing

Housing and homing play a crucial role in supporting integration. Housing does not simply imply having a place to sleep; it is an important social determinant of health that strongly affects the well-being of people with refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds in the country of resettlement (Ziersch and Due, 2018^[59]). To assure physical and mental health, accommodations should be adequate, secure, comfortable and as "homing" as possible. The concept of "homing" (Boccagni, 2017^[60]) was developed with respect to migrants to describe the set of home-related routines and practices, and an underlying existential struggle towards a good-enough state of being at home (Boccagni, 2022^[61]). Obviously, all these features are rare if not impossible to set in crowded and big places where large numbers of asylum seekers are housed. Big accommodation facilities are, in fact, often settled in peripheric or remote areas and subject to strict management rules, where interaction with the local community is almost impossible.

SSE entities provide housing for asylum seekers, above and beyond what is foreseen by public reception and integration systems. Sometimes, SSE entities deliver housing services that are

contracted out to them by public authorities, but they can also offer autonomous housing alternatives particularly for those who are not eligible to enter the reception system or that are placed on long waiting lists (Box 2.2). In parallel, the SSE can help recipients fulfil the requirements to be eligible for subsidised housing. Furthermore, SSE actors have been pioneers in experimenting with dispersed and micro forms of accommodation, which are more likely to favour integration compared with big centres.

Box 2.2. Refugees Welcome International: Housing and community building

Refugees Welcome International, born in 2015, is the umbrella organisation for all Refugees Welcome organisations located around the world, united by a shared mission and by the willingness to foster international co-operation and share the accumulated knowledge of each participant. Refugees Welcome International provides support (especially housing) to asylum seekers and refugees, although the most important aspects of practical hosting, finding flats, and facilitating meetings between guests and hosts are managed by the individual local entities. The international network plays more of an advocacy role, preparing and disseminating information material (also in foreign languages) on its services and referring people who contact it (via email or through forms and information available online) to the various local sections.

In practice, this international NGO originated out of the German association Refugees Welcome (Flüchtlinge Willkommen), first established in 2014, when a refugee moved into the spare room in the founders' flatshare in Berlin. The organisation quickly gained local momentum, and soon activists across Europe began contacting the German branch in hopes of establishing their own teams. The creation and activation of the different national "affiliates" follows different paths. Very often, initiatives by private citizens emerge as part of the social economy and later decide to join the international network, sharing its values and mission. In many cases, having witnessed the work done by the association, groups of people spontaneously decided to establish a national node. Alternatively, such as in Hungary, the work to support migration and intercultural encounters predates the most recent crisis.

The network developed bottom-up and is united by its shared mission to provide private accommodations for refugees all over the world (flatshare model), with the aim of fostering exchange between refugees and locals, combating discrimination and prejudice, and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the establishment of local social networks. This is not "charitable" hospitality; in fact, the association emphasises that the guest becomes a full member of the household, sharing housekeeping duties, and even rent if he or she works. The host and guest must have their rights and freedoms, such as religious freedom, respected. The umbrella organisation has developed a set of common operating principles: 1) safe and appropriate accommodation; 2) a dignified life and agency; and 3) local participation and long-term community building – which must be applied by the local associations and which also aim to inspire the host societies and governments.

As of 2023, Refugees Welcome International comprises 12 individual organisations (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden) providing accommodation to displaced persons in three continents (Europe, South America and Australia). The goal is to continue expanding over the next several years. More than 2 500 people have been hosted, and there are more than 450 volunteers.

Source: <https://www.refugees-welcome.net>.

Providing language and cultural mediation services

In many countries, SSE entities are the sole providers of language courses (often with state funding), interpretation services and sometimes cultural mediation. The acquisition of language skills is an essential prerequisite to understand and navigate through the asylum procedures. Language skills also enable searching for employment, integrating in the host society and gaining new skills that may enable them to access more qualified jobs. In some cases, depending on the legal framework and individual status, language courses are not funded by the government, but they can be offered by the SSE on a voluntary basis and financed with their own resources.²

Language trainings provided by SSE entities are often innovative. In Germany, there have been lots of innovations in this area, in spite of state provision of language training. Language courses sometimes experiment with innovative teaching methodologies such as the one developed by the charitable Foundation Liechtenstein Languages (LieLa),³ which has elaborated an innovative integration and education programme for asylum seekers and refugees to acquire basic spoken language skills to navigate in new societies as quickly as possible upon arrival. It mainly operates in German-speaking countries across Europe (Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland) but has recently extended its activities in Türkiye. LieLa offers different course formats for different needs: basic language classes focusing on interaction with authorities, healthcare, orientation in town and communication in housing facilities, advanced language classes, early-childhood classes, and language classes for vocational integration. Another goal of the programme is the social integration of refugees. The integrative style of the classes fosters community-building among participants and helps them acquire cultural knowledge about the new society in which they live.

The experience gained by SSE entities on the ground has contributed to shaping the job profile of the cross-cultural mediator, whose role is essential when it comes to supporting refugees that face critical situations, while at the same time building bridges among different components of the host society. In this context, the cultural mediator facilitates mutual understanding between asylum applicants and the local community, including professionals who provide support services of different kinds (see for example Box 2.3). Mediators play a role in helping recipients get access to basic services and deal with bureaucratic barriers and are often hired also by schools, hospitals, police and the judicial system, thus contributing to facilitating interaction between newcomers and the hosting communities.

In the case of asylum seekers, but also refugees, it may be crucial that the person offering mediation is particularly sensitive to the issue of violence and torture and also aware of its consequences. Asylum seekers and refugees experience frequent violence and abuse both in the country of origin and during their journey. The task of SSE entities in this case is to make public institutions and the broader community aware of the widespread phenomenon of violence and torture, which is especially relevant for the evaluation of asylum applications. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)⁴ offers care and support to victims of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment. Operating at the intersection of medicine and law, as of 2023, it counts 156 member centres in 76 countries across the world, staffed by around 4 000 professionals, including doctors, psychologists, lawyers, social workers and physiotherapists. Many of its members have been working to develop a programme providing basic advice and information not only to individuals, but in group sessions organised to reach a broader number of beneficiaries, who can then be referred to other services and organisations supplying aid. Experts rely on interpreters and cultural mediators with specific experience related to asylum seekers and refugees who have survived torture and other forms of inhumane, degrading treatment, and these professionals are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team assisting victims of torture.

Box 2.3. Salud y Familia – intercultural mediation services in Catalonia (Spain)

Asociación Salud y Familia is an independent, private and non-profit organisation that provides intercultural mediation services with the aim to improve access to healthcare and quality of family life. Its mission is to assist people in accordance with the principle of impartiality, namely, regardless of their origin, ethnicity, gender, nationality, social status or religion. The hub of activities is the city of Barcelona, although there are other locations in Catalonia.

Health and family, also with a view to safeguarding motherhood, are extremely sensitive issues in the light of the strong influence of values, beliefs and traditions in this intimate sphere. Misunderstandings, denial of rights and marginalisation are phenomena frequently experienced by refugees, especially as undocumented asylum seekers.

In collaboration with other non-governmental organisations and individual volunteers, Salud y Familia mediates between public health centres and migrants (including refugees) if they are rejected without justification. Although the service is open for free to all migrants who have difficulty in accessing healthcare, regardless of their legal status, undocumented asylum seekers are the main target group because of their vulnerability.

Source: <https://saludyfamilia.es/>.

Notes

¹ www.aclu.org/.

² Even where public funding is available, the SSE remains an important partner for its implementation. For instance, the Australian government delivers the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), which offers unlimited and free English language tuition for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants, to support economic and social participation. Recent Australian government investment in English language learning resources saw the launch of AMEPOnline on 1 July 2023. This extensive range of contemporary and interactive resources are now freely available to anyone, including non-government entities supporting language learning in the community.

³ <https://21.liela.li/>; www.gfmd.org/pfp/ppd/5423; <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/language-learning-programme-asylum-seekers-and-refugees>.

⁴ <https://irct.org/>.

3 The social and solidarity economy as a vector for economic and social inclusion of refugees

Once refugees are recognised international protection, the social and solidarity economy helps them achieve economic and social integration in their new country of residence

The medium- to long-term integration of refugees calls for a holistic approach, taking into account social, economic, health, educational, financial and cultural dimensions. It is a multifaceted process that necessitates collaboration from various stakeholders, including national, regional and local governments; financial institutions; private sector; and the social and solidarity economy (SSE). Recent literature sheds new light on the importance of adopting a migrant-centred perspective, which has led to incorporating people's agency in migration theory (Borselli and van Meijl, 2021^[62]). Indeed, long-term labour market inclusion and social inclusion are deeply interlinked, and it is not recommendable to focus on one single dimension at the risk of generating conflictual relations among refugees and host societies (Galera, Gotz and Franch, 2021^[57]). This is quite evident in countries where migrants show high employment rates but have very few opportunities to interact with the host community (Sundvall et al., 2020^[63]) (Barwick and Boccagni, 2018^[64]).

SSE entities are intrinsically inclined to consider individuals in their entirety, not from the lens of a single integration-related service. Because of their defining features, SSE entities often develop solutions that tackle both the work integration of refugees and their broader social inclusion at the same time. They help asylum seekers and refugees to understand both the rules of the labour market and the diverse cultural codes of the host societies, which often differ dramatically from their countries of origin. First and foremost, SSE entities are often locally based, have a participatory governance and follow a person-centred approach which pushes them to address the needs of recipients and communities alike (Utting, van Dijk and Matheï, 2014^[65]) (ILO, 2014^[66]). For these reasons, SSE entities can succeed in helping recipients overcome the diverse barriers preventing them from entering the labour market, while also encouraging the wider local community to change its (often negative) perception towards newcomers.

Depending on the local context, SSE entities can, at least partially, step in to fill existing gaps in public integration systems, by supporting refugees through their own resources, often until the person achieves full autonomy. The degree of labour market integration of refugees largely depends on the individual's profile as much as on the characteristics of the receiving territory, for instance whether it is a remote area or an urban setting, and on the existence or not of networks supporting newcomers. Differences are also connected to the characteristics of national and local public administration, including possible gaps in welfare and general-interest services. In most host countries, the cost of integrating refugees is largely borne by subnational governments (OECD,

2017^[67]), which support housing, food and education throughout the duration of the asylum application. However, a significant part of the broader cost of integrating refugees in the labour market and in society is often left uncovered by public national funding (Galera and Giannetto, 2023^[68]). This is all the more true in times of crisis (OECD, 2022^[69]). SSE entities tend to adapt to the characteristics of the territory, for instance by revitalising abandoned spaces through the integration of asylum seekers and refugees (Perlik et al., 2019^[70]).

In practice, the SSE helps refugees by:

Facilitating labour market integration

Refugees tend to have low employment rates relative to the native population and they also lag behind other types of migrants who possess greater levels of human, social and financial capital (OECD/European Commission, 2021^[71]; OECD, 2019^[72]; OECD, 2016^[73]). Even where access to work for asylum seekers is possible at an early stage, after the lodging of the asylum application, a wide set of barriers hinder finding a job legally, e.g. language skills, recognition of foreign certificates, negative perceptions by employers (Galera, Giannetto and Noya, 2018^[23]; Ludolph, 2023^[74]; Lochmann, Rapoport and Speciale, 2019^[75]). For this reason, entrepreneurship can offer an alternative route into work for some, though it comes with additional barriers, such as the lack of credit history. Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), refugees are significantly more likely to be economically inactive, unemployed, underemployed, or working in low-skilled and badly paid jobs.

The SSE can help refugees with labour market integration by preparing them for work, through training and skills recognition, by directly providing jobs, as in the case of work integration social enterprises (WISEs) and/or by connecting them with (other) private employers. Indeed, the SSE operates in a wide range of sectors where refugees may find employment. While traditionally involved in the provision of social services and healthcare, the SSE is present throughout the economy (education, energy, manufacturing, culture, tourism, construction, banking, recycling and the agri-food industry) in almost all countries (OECD, 2020^[40]).

Providing training and skills recognition

A successful integration depends on whether refugees (and before that, asylum seekers) are endowed with skills, are trained and are allowed to work. Refugees may have very different experiences of education: some may not have attended formal schooling and others hold high academic and professional qualifications that have no direct equivalent in the host country. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 3% of refugees manage to continue their academic studies that had been interrupted in their country (UNCHR, 2019^[76]). Investing in refugees' language skills is key to facilitating the insertion of children into national school systems as well as ensuring their parents' smooth entry into labour markets (OECD, 2022^[77]). Evidence of the importance of early interventions to facilitate labour market integration of migrants has led many SSE entities to develop different ways to assess the skills of recipients and direct them towards training or professional activities that are in line with their skills as soon as possible in the reception process. Indeed, the first two to three years from arrival have a disproportionately positive impact on the probability of finding a job, which drops by 23% after this time (Bansak, Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2016^[78]).

Some SSE entities specialise in (re)training and formal skills recognition of asylum seekers and refugees. In addition to providing basic support, for instance on how to write a CV, they have started to develop new methodologies for assessing and taking better stock of the skills refugees have acquired in their country of origin. For adult refugees, the recognition of prior learning can support upskilling and reskilling opportunities by fostering shorter training times and enabling personalised learning pathways

(Meghnagi, 2022^[79]). For example, in Vienna, the social enterprise ABZ*AUSTRIA supports women with a migration background through a competence check, which consists of identifying informal skills and experiences. This approach helps clients find labour market opportunities that match their skills. In Frankfurt, Germany, the social enterprise Stitch by Stitch¹ has developed three-year traineeships for refugees, delivering a formal certificate upon completion. Stitch by Stitch runs a tailor's factory that uses professional, refugee tailors to produce small series and prototypes for fashion labels with the "Made in Germany" seal of quality. In Türkiye, the European Union-funded Erasmus+ project in Şanlıurfa provides an example of the SSE's significant contribution to asylum seekers' social inclusion in host communities. Supported by the Turkish National Agency under the implementation of Şanlıurfa Technocity, it promotes the interaction of young asylum seekers with local inhabitants by providing a comprehensive training focused on social enterprises and mentorship services, including a social entrepreneurship curriculum (Gülerce, Girasella and Skoufi, 2021^[80]).

SSE entities can help take stock of the survival and practice-oriented skills of refugees in a variety of economic fields of activity, which range from recycling to community tourism and social farming (Galera and Giannetto, 2023^[68]). The certification of skills acquired by asylum seekers in informal contexts is especially difficult to document and get recognised. SSE entities build on refugees' manual-informal capabilities as a basis for fostering their entrepreneurial skills, through extended and tailored interaction with them (Galera, Giannetto and Noya, 2018^[23]). For example, the Swiss-based social enterprise SEP Jordan works in the luxury fashion field. By leveraging the skills and talent in hand embroidery, its mission is to bring thousands of refugees located in the Jerash "Gaza" Camp in Jordan above the poverty line. SEP Jordan currently works with over 500 refugees, mostly women, enabling them to regain their economic and emotional independence. Magdas Hotel² is an award-winning project run by Caritas in Vienna, which offers employment and on-the-job training to refugees in the hospitality industry. SSE entities often favour learning by doing and display a high degree of creativity, thanks to their tendency to engage stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, including pro bono experts and volunteers.

SSE entities promote the valorisation of the refugees' informal and soft skills, including interpersonal ones, which contribute to improving their sense of worth and general well-being. This is a particular concern for people coming from countries with different social norms and the importance of building trust-based relationships with the host community. In London, the social enterprise Migrateful has created a dedicated space for asylum seekers and refugees looking for jobs, where in addition to English lessons, participants can share recipes from their countries, their culture, language and stories through cooking classes – in person or digital. Similarly, the United Kingdom social enterprise Routes³ brings migrant women together to facilitate mutual support; runs a mentorship programme with a view to helping them to upskill, find work or, in some cases, start their own businesses; and uses theatre to help them build confidence.

The SSE has significantly contributed to experiment with skill recognition in innovative ways. The Dutch company SkillLab⁴ uses artificial intelligence to provide mobile skill profiling and job matching for refugees all over the world. As part of the PROSPECTS programme,⁵ promoted by the Netherlands, the United Nations and the World Bank, they piloted a skills-profiling application that enables refugees in Egypt to self-assess and communicate their skills to potential employers, including the SSE. The pilot study, conducted among 400 beneficiaries between 2020 and 2021, showed how innovative practices are necessary (ILO, 2022^[81]).

Creating decent and meaningful jobs

SSE entities support the inclusion of refugees in the hosting territory through the creation of decent and mission-driven jobs. Being locally rooted and close to the needs of both recipients and the local population, SSE entities strive to integrate refugees into the hosting labour market, while also fostering community engagement and supporting local and social economic development. One in two of the European social enterprises surveyed in 2022 reported "Decent Work and Economic Growth" as their main impact target, at par with "Good Health and Well-Being" and closely followed by "Reduced

Inequalities". In fact, over half of them (52.9%) claimed to employ individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds, which may include refugees but also second-generation migrants (Dupain et al., 2022^[82]).

Whenever their aim is primarily to facilitate work integration and they act according to a market logic, SSE entities can be regarded as WISEs.⁶ WISEs are the social enterprise type mostly widespread worldwide (Defourney and Nyssens, 2006^[83]). WISEs integrating migrants exist indeed in almost all countries which have a significant population of migrants and are sometimes the first employer for refugees. In 2021, over 2 160 WISEs were identified across 12 countries in Europe accounting for approximately 118 000 workers, with over 78% of them presenting some form of disadvantage (thus including refugees and asylum seekers).⁷ In Italy, those cooperatives that have WISE status show a bigger representation of non-European Union migrants among their workers and members, reaching almost 10% (Confcooperative, 2022^[84]).

WISEs facilitating the work integration of asylum seekers and refugees can be regarded as a double output enterprise. First, like any other business, they are engaged in income-generating activities. They produce goods and/or services of different kinds, including manufacturing products, agriculture, and maintenance of green areas and waste management activities that are traded on the market to both private and public clients. The second output is the work (and social) integration of people with support needs otherwise excluded from the labour market (Galera and Giannetto, 2023^[88]). Against this background, social enterprises and cooperatives can offer refugees an opportunity to access meaningful occupation and (re)gain control over their life plan (see for instance Box 3.1). In most cases, sheltered workshops are also intended as a way to transition towards other employment opportunities in the private sector.

Box 3.1. Strengthening economic opportunities for Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye

In Türkiye, there were more than 3.7 million Syrians in 2022 according to official statistics. The refugee influx has created socio-economic challenges to allow the integration of this new and vulnerable population into the labour market. Particularly complex is the situation of women, who are also subject to intersectional discrimination when looking for work.

With funding from the European Union, the World Bank has implemented a project aimed at strengthening economic opportunities for Syrians under temporary protection and Turkish citizens in selected localities. The project focused on bringing communities together and strengthening social cohesion through the daily work of cooperatives.

Since 2019, it supported the creation of four pilot social cooperatives (AHENK, BERİ, EKİP, HALKA) in four Turkish cities (Ankara, İzmir, İstanbul and Mersin) for Syrian refugee and marginalised Turkish women. These cooperatives aim to create quality jobs and upskilling opportunities while also lifting those socio-economic barriers (such as childcare, transportation) that keep women out of the workforce. Overall, the four cooperatives generated over 500 employment opportunities for Syrian refugee and Turkish women through sustainable business models that improve social cohesion and the livelihoods of the communities they are part of.

To share operational knowledge and inform social economy public policy, the project established the Social Entrepreneurship Community of Practice as a public good that unites over 800 members from approximately 300 organisations co-operating to maximise the potential of social entrepreneurship in Türkiye and address the labour market gender gaps. The lessons learned through this experience are thus being actively disseminated to sustain the growth of the social enterprises in Türkiye.

Sources: <http://ahenkkoop.com/>; <https://www.bericoop.com/>; <https://ekiplatformu.com/tr/>; <https://www.halkakoop.com/>; <https://www.instagram.com/secopturkiye/>.

In some cases, the emergence of WISEs and other types of SSE entities can be triggered by refugees themselves, with a view to create new employment in economic fields with an unmet demand. There are many examples of bottom-up initiatives stemming from migrant entrepreneurship, sometimes with the mobilisation of social workers and local volunteers, to experiment with innovative paths of work experience and on-the-job training. In particular, platform cooperatives can offer an innovative venue for refugee self-employment (one example being presented in Box 3.2).

Box 3.2. SSE and refugees' self-organisation in the gig economy: Up & Go (United States)

New York State has been a major destination for refugees and asylum seekers coming to the United States. New York City has multiple organisations that support them by providing material assistance but also seeking to encourage professional growth and fulfilment.

Among them, Up & Go is a platform cooperative that offers an online booking service for domestic and commercial professional cleaning. It was launched in New York in 2017. Up & Go is owned by, and employs, women with migrant backgrounds, who have started to collaborate thanks to the support of, and the networking opportunities created by, the non-profit community job centre La Colmena, the Centre for Family Life, the tech support of the CoLab Cooperative, and partial funding by the Robin Hood Foundation.

The sustainability of this platform is ensured thanks to investment in customer service and towards advancing the technology of the mobile app. While 95% of the profits made by Up & Go are allocated to support the cooperatively-owned business, 5% are reinvested in the further development of the platform itself.

While the app supports workers with migrant backgrounds by overcoming the language barrier during the search for job opportunities, the main strength of Up & Go is the innovative use of the platform economy to benefit its workers and their community. The ownership of the app by the self-organised migrant workers ensures that they receive a fair income, have reasonable and flexible working hours, and have a better understanding of their rights and potential not only as workers but also as entrepreneurs. Tapping into the potential of technology, Up & Go can provide a different model of the gig economy, fighting precarious labour but also stereotypes and prejudices by empowering women with migrant backgrounds to provide high-quality services to clients residing in New York. Finally, this cooperative model unearths the talents and skills of the workers/entrepreneurs and motivates them to train further.

Source: www.upandgo.coop.

Connecting refugees with local employers

There are numerous initiatives promoted by SSE entities which aim to build connections among local employers, asylum seekers and refugees. On the one hand, SSE entities can provide refugees with the social capital they lack and the necessary information about the country of destination regarding how the labour market works and how to access it. On the other, they can help traditional businesses understand how to deal with diversity and the specific challenges that refugees face when integrating a foreign corporate environment. In Mexico, grassroot social entrepreneurs, such as Intrare, support the integration of refugees in the workforce by mediating with employers, highlighting the talent and skills of refugees, and promoting diversity and inclusion policies in companies (Intrare, 2023^[85]). Often, these WISEs are supported by private foundations, in this case the Ikea Foundation, with the aim to co-create impactful programmes for refugees that are run by organisations with the necessary network and knowledge of the local job market (Ikea, 2023^[86]).

The SSE can use technology and virtual spaces for job orientation and matchmaking purposes, in a way that favours the creation of individualised inclusion pathways. Leveraging the opportunities offered by the digital economy, the social enterprise NaTakallam⁸ pairs refugees and displaced persons worldwide with individual learners, schools, universities and corporate clients to provide online language training and translation services. According to their impact reports, the platform represents the only source of income for 60% of the “language partners” involved, whereas about a third found other jobs or resettlement opportunities through NaTakallam friendships and network. In France, the social enterprise Action Emploi Réfugiés (AERé) runs a digital platform to unearth and match refugees’ skills with businesses’ demand for work. Its goal is to “level the playing field” for refugees in accessing the labour market of the country of destination. It provides employers the possibility to advertise the opening of new job positions and supports refugees in self-assessing their skills and competences, creating and fine-tuning their CV, and preparing for their job interviews. Operating since 2016, AERé has developed a solid network with traditional businesses and other social enterprises, notably through the Tent Partnership (Box 3.3), as well as with public services working on labour market inclusion. The French non-profit SINGA is another world-renowned success story that managed to galvanise an international community striving to integrate newcomers in local professional and social networks (Box 3.4).

Box 3.3. Work integration support – Tent Partnership for Refugees

The Tent Partnership for Refugees (Tent) was founded in 2016 with the aim of mobilising the business community to connect refugees to work.

With more and more refugees displaced for longer periods of time, businesses have a critical role to play in helping refugees economically integrate in their new communities. Tent galvanises leading businesses to fill this gap by helping refugees become job-ready or providing them with work, because securing a job is a critical milestone for a refugee to build a new life in their country of residence.

Tent partners with more than 300 major companies, including Amazon, Marriott and Pfizer. The non-profit organisation operates in 11 countries across Europe, North America and Latin America. Its members span industries from consumer goods to hospitality, retail to professional services, and technology to manufacturing. In each country, Tent provides companies with tailored guidance and support to advance the economic integration of refugees through:

- **Job preparation:** Companies can provide training to refugees or harness their employees to provide one-to-one professional mentorship to refugees.
- **Employment:** Companies can hire refugees directly into their workforce or connect them to work through their suppliers, their clients or their own contingent workforce.

Since its founding, Tent member companies have pledged to help over 360 000 refugees enter the labour market by preparing them for jobs or employing them. For example, in 2019, Tent teamed up with the Inter-American Development Bank to create 4 200 new jobs for Venezuelan refugees in Colombia and Peru; in 2022, at Tent’s U.S. Business Summit on Refugees, 45 major companies pledged to hire over 20 000 refugees, and in 2023, more than 40 companies committed to provide jobs and training to over 250 000 Ukrainian and other refugees at the Tent European Business Summit.

Source: <http://www.tent.org/>.

Box 3.4. SINGA: A global community for the social and professional inclusion of newcomers

SINGA is an international non-profit that aims to create interactions that accelerate the inclusion of newcomers and enrich the perspective of local people, ultimately strengthening the entire society. Since its founding in 2012, it has become a global community spanning 17 cities across 7 countries in Europe and North America, with over 80 000 members and a dedicated team of 90 full-time professionals.

In France, SINGA's localised efforts contribute significantly to cultivating a more inclusive society by forging connections between locals, who possess a deep understanding of the cultural fabric, and newcomers, including individuals with refugee status and asylum seekers. While SINGA engages in cultural dialogue initiatives and language classes, its distinctive focus lies in generating job opportunities for refugees. Recognising that refugees often lack the professional networks required for successful integration, SINGA strives to bridge this gap by facilitating connections with relevant individuals who can provide invaluable assistance in launching businesses or securing employment.

SINGA France promotes the above-mentioned mission through different programmes and activities:

- SINGA's Pre-incubator Programme lays the foundation for effective labour market integration. Through this initiative, entrepreneurs are provided with the tools and support necessary to develop viable entrepreneurial projects. Components of the programme include engaging workshops, personalised mentorship and essential resources tailored to ensure market viability.
- SINGA's Incubation Programme offers a nurturing environment for promising start-ups to thrive. Entrepreneurs benefit from ongoing mentorship, access to collaborative workspaces and valuable connections to potential investors.
- The Accelerator Programme is designed to propel entrepreneurial projects towards success. Structured as an intensive programme, it equips participants with advanced training, tailored support and valuable networking opportunities.

The programmes are supported through volunteer engagement, which encompasses two distinct approaches that cater to varying availability. Through punctual engagement, volunteers offer their expertise in one-on-one sessions or workshops, contributing to the professional development of refugees. For those with more time to commit, longer engagements as mentors guide refugees throughout their entrepreneurship journey, from refining ideas to overcoming challenges.

Since 2016, the incubation programme has supported more than 350 start-ups and provided assistance to over 1 500 entrepreneurs in France. In terms of outcomes, a substantial 54% of business creation was observed within six months following participation in the programmes.

Note: As of 2023, SINGA communities are active in Belgium (Brussels), Canada (Montréal), France (Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Paris, Saint Etienne, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Valence), Germany (Berlin, Stuttgart), Luxembourg, Spain (Barcelona), Switzerland (Geneva, Zurich). Sources: [SINGA International](#) | [SINGA France](#) | [Unlocking the potential of youth-led social enterprises. OECD](#) | [Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Paris. OECD](#); <https://www.oecd-forum.org/posts/le-role-des-ong-dans-l-integration-des-migrants>.

Fostering social inclusion

Social integration involves both the migrant and the host community. For migrants, it means developing a sense of belonging to the host society. This often involves accepting and acting according to the host society's values, norms and laws and becoming acquainted with the rules of the hosting community. Moreover, it involves finding ways to reconcile daily life in the hosting country with one's own values and identity, which may significantly differ from the values of the receiving society. For the native

population, it implies that refugees are accepted as members, and the valorisation of different identities co-existing within the community. Such mutual recognition, apart from improving individual well-being, leads to better social cohesion and has considerable economic implications.

The SSE can help prevent and solve conflicts thanks to its ability to build trustful relations with different components of society and with newcomers. Inclusion and valorisation of diversity require constant questioning of all actors involved. This never-ending process is extremely challenging also due to differences in religion, culture, traditions and values. Experience from various countries around the world shows that there is a need for mediation to support dialogue between newcomers and the receiving community (UNCHR, 2020^[87]). In doing so, it is necessary to define locally based inclusion strategies that take the characteristics and needs of each territory into account (Halsall et al., 2022^[88]). Through increased interaction and mutual understanding, the SSE can facilitate the identification of common goals shared by the whole community.

Building connections with the host community

SSE entities have managed to design and implement highly innovative solutions in hosting territories which have proved to be effective in creatively managing conflicts. By paying attention to relational aspects, SSE actors are not only extremely helpful in ensuring refugees social inclusion and autonomy, but also in building bridges between them and their host community. Especially when refugees are involved as members, for instance through social cooperatives, SSE entities can more easily gain the trust and engagement needed to underpin mediation. In parallel, the SSE can improve public perception by communicating about what refugees and migrants bring to society, including in terms of innovation and taking up jobs that face shortages. Indeed, when compared with public authorities, SSE actors are typically better placed to reach and provide support to asylum seekers that are not (yet) part of the official reception system.

Many SSE entities have experimented with spontaneous strategies to involve the local community. The SSE helps make public places attractive to mixed groups, including refugees and asylum seekers. From 2015 to 2020, a former hospital in Paris transformed into the biggest temporary regularised occupation in Europe, containing an emergency shelter and administrative consultancy for refugees, alongside start-up offices, artist studios and shops, as well as a bar and an event location, thus becoming a key meeting point for Parisians and migrants alike and allowing different communities to mix together (OECD, 2018^[89]). A similar example is the Pink Station (Rosa Stationen) project started in March 2016 by Refugees Welcome Stockholm (see Box 2.2), in partnership with two other organisations, Birkagården in Vasastan and Diesilverkstaden, to provide a meeting place for Swedish residents and newcomers. Participants are offered a number of activities, including Swedish language classes, a language café, legal advice, community information, activities for the disabled, cultural activities, games and babysitting. Another way the SSE can intervene to strengthen social ties between refugees and host society is by creating buddy systems (Box 3.5).

Box 3.5. Tandem Réfugiés (France)

Tandem Réfugiés is a non-profit association set up in 2016 and operating in the Ile-de-France region. The project was launched by volunteers previously involved in another SSE entity, La Cimade, a French association offering legal assistance for asylum petitions. Having witnessed the isolation and lack of integration experienced by refugees, the founders of Tandem Réfugiés decided to develop a buddy system to stimulate social links with French inhabitants.

Tandem Réfugiés facilitates the integration of people who have already been granted international protection in France and thus a legal residence permit. Refugees are pre-identified through La Cimade as soon as they are recognised official status, and put in touch with a local inhabitant, volunteering to form a "tandem". The management team strives to match refugees and French citizens considering several criteria, including age, language skills, location, personal interests and family situations. The collective life of the association provides additional opportunities for all Tandem refugees and volunteers to meet regularly, through group activities and cultural outings. The association further relies on a network of public and private partners who guarantee collaboration and support, including public funding and individual donations.

In 2022, the association counted 3 employees and 50 volunteers who supported 45 refugees of all ages and origins. The ambition is to support 100 refugees a year by 2025.

Source: <http://www.tandem-refugies.org/>.

The SSE often operates local community centres as open spaces for dialogue and connection between refugees and other, more or less vulnerable, groups of local inhabitants. The active participation of refugees in local communities through the SSE can foster positive interactions and dispel misconceptions, ultimately leading to more favourable perceptions and a greater sense of social cohesion. In British Columbia, Canada, several SSE entities work on building social connections among refugee claimants, naturalised Canadian citizens and the indigenous community. Throughout the province, a network of eight Neighbourhood Houses⁹ operates more than 500 community-based programmes and services for a diversity of participants, including newcomers and indigenous people. For instance, the Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House¹⁰ resettlement and integration services comprise a full range of activities, such as youth leadership, language training, job shadowing, community connections, mental health and life skills workshops. A similar example is the Community Centre run by the Homo Faber association in Lublin, Poland (Box 3.6).

Box 3.6. Community Centre in Lublin, Poland

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Poland has received more than 8 million refugees, and about 1.5 million of them are (temporarily) settling there (UNHCR, 2023). In Poland, Ukrainian refugees are supported in their basic needs (e.g. housing, health, food, education) and given the right to work. The Polish government launched several plans to encourage refugees to work and help fill gaps in the labour market. In addition, civil society organisations, such as Homo Faber, mobilised quickly to assist Ukrainian refugees.

Homo Faber is a local human rights non-governmental organisation that co-ordinates the Baobab Community Centre, a multipurpose space to support the activation and empowerment of migrants, including refugees, living in Lublin. Homo Faber conducts activities both within the community centre, inviting other organisations and initiatives to create the programme, and outside, in collective accommodation facilities around the city and region. It aims to build relationships between old and new residents of the city and create a positive narrative around migration issues.

The programme of the Baobab Community Centre offers comprehensive support to refugees, taking into account the local context and resources:

- psychological support for children and adults and group sessions for parents
- legal support on labour and migration issues (including filling out documents, writing letters)
- language courses, such as business English for job sectors that need workers
- a front office and hotline that provides information and assistance on procedures, administrative issues (e.g. translation for official, living, and medical matters), and maps other services available in the city
- educational guidance for students and support for integration in (pre)schools/educational institutions, including work placement
- gender-based violence protection
- facilities for workshops and “activating classes” (some of them run by refugees) as well as a multilingual library, an accessible kitchen, a computer room, a children's common room and a playground.

Since its official start in February 2023, Baobab has reached over 8 300 people in various ways with its front desk services. For example, the centre has provided general assistance to over 1 500 people, psychological support to almost 1 050 people, and 185 educational consultations. The playground has been used by over 1 500 children, and 288 workshops were organised for them and their mothers. In addition, 1 800 visits have been made to the library, resulting in 1 500 book loans. The hotline that was established to provide reliable information to refugees fleeing Ukraine received over 16 000 calls. These numbers show how necessary these services have been to the refugee population in Lublin in the months after the start of the Ukrainian war.

Sources: <https://hf.org.pl/en/> <https://hf.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/raport-eng.pdf> <https://www.unhcr.org/pl/14133-unhcr-municipality-of-lublin-and-civil-society-support-refugees-from-ukraine.html>.

Moreover, the SSE actively contributes to changing the narrative around the migration phenomenon, which is often at two extremes: security versus humanitarian concerns. In the first case, migration is portrayed as an emergency which often leads to the criminalisation and dehumanisation of forcibly displaced persons (OHCHR, 2020^[90]), thus presupposing a negative perception of asylum seekers. At the other extreme, migration is described as a tragedy, implying conversely a positive representation of the hosting society. By giving voice to both asylum seekers and the local community, SSE entities can facilitate communication on the drivers of migration and the challenges faced by newcomers and local populations, thus helping to build bridges. A more accurate narrative around the asylum and refugee phenomenon can help to reduce social polarisation and to prevent and manage conflicts that may arise in local communities.

Facilitating internal relocation

Although refugees are mostly concentrated in urban settings, the SSE can create opportunities for employment and social interaction in rural areas, which suffer from structural weaknesses such as the lack of proximity services and public transportation (OECD, 2023^[91]). The social cooperative Jobel has provided social and educational services in small towns and rural areas in Italy since 2005. It operates in touristic areas with a declining population, where they developed several entrepreneurial initiatives (e.g. restaurants, tailoring, woodworking shops) that enable training and employment for people hosted in its reception centres while fostering local development. In Finland, the municipality of Punkalaidun developed the European Union-funded Immigrant Village Project (2011-15), with the aim to facilitate the integration of migrants into rural communities by boosting work opportunities in farms, small enterprises and the SSE (Nordregio.org, n.d.^[92]). Thanks to the arrival of migrants and the reactivation of agricultural businesses, the local economy was revitalised. This inspiring initiative was replicated also in other municipalities.

SSE entities can facilitate the process of internal resettlement of refugees within their new country of residence. In Brazil, the so-called Operation Welcome (Operação Acolhida) has allowed for the voluntary relocation of more than 74 000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants from the states of Amazonas and Roraima into other cities with the support of the Brazilian government, United Nations agencies and the SSE (IOM, 2022^[93]). The SSE plays a fundamental role in supporting the relocation processes and raising awareness in other regions of Brazil. SSE entities help identify protection cases, manage relocation shelters and transitional housing, direct to essential service providers at their destinations, provide job opportunities, support for entrepreneurship, and other activities together with local public policy networks.

Notes

¹ www.stitchbystitch.de/.

² <https://magdas-hotel.at/>; https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/integration-practice/magdas-hotel-refugee-integration-through-hospitality-training_en#:~:text=The%20hotel%20has%2088%20rooms,job%20training%20from%20the%20professionals.

³ <https://routescollective.com/>.

⁴ <https://skilllab.io/en-us>; <https://skilllab.io/en-us/news/trying-to-help-refugees-into-the-workplace-now-theres>; <https://skilllab.io/en-us/news/ilo-caritas-refugees-egypt>.

⁵ www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---ddg_p/documents/publication/wcms_862717.pdf.

⁶ WISEs aim at training and reintegrating disadvantaged individuals in the labour market (OECD, 2018₍₁₂₃₎). As such, depending on the national legal context, they can be set up as a cooperative, an association, a conventional enterprise or other legal forms.

⁷ www.ensie.org/wises-data/impact-wises.

⁸ <https://natakallam.com/>.

⁹ <https://anhbc.org/>.

¹⁰ www.froghollow.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Frog-Hollow-Settlement-Programs-Trifold.pdf.

4 How can policy makers partner with the social and solidarity economy to develop win-win solutions for refugees and host communities?

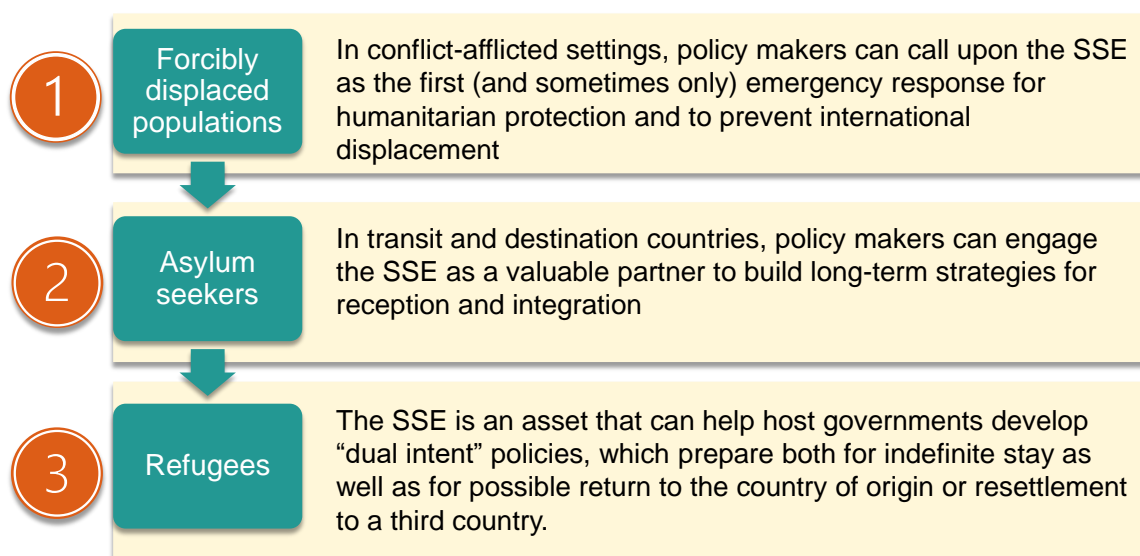
Policy makers would benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the social and solidarity economy all along the refugee journey

From preventing human rights violations and other forms of persecution that generate movements of forced displacement, to favouring social and economic integration of refugees in their country of destination, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) is a powerful ally to implement and complement public policies. It can do so as a strategic partner in policy design, as a contracted service provider, but also through independent initiatives, drawing on its own resources and volunteer basis.

Targeted protection, reception and integration policies can leverage the activities of SSE entities by considering their various characteristics and roles. Along the refugee journey, SSE actors relieve some of the hardship and support them to build a dignified life outside of their home countries. Better collaboration between policy makers and the SSE can enhance, at once, the attainment of public policy goals and of the SSE's social mission. This can improve the asylum seekers' lives during transit and positively influence their role in host communities and societies at large. Each type of SSE actor brings specific added value that can be leveraged by policy makers by tapping into their specific value added.

Better recognition of the SSE as comprising a diverse range of actors (including non-profit associations, cooperatives, mutual aid societies and social enterprises) would facilitate the emergence of a whole-of-government approach, also in terms of refugee support. Increased awareness of the substantial overlap of the partners mobilised in different policy areas, independently of the terminology used, might help develop a more consistent approach when interacting with them and better leverage each component of the SSE for its specific features. This implies, for instance, promoting the role of social enterprises even in low- and middle-income countries, where most refugees are hosted. In general, SSE initiatives, and in particular their double dividend for refugees and the host community, could be given more visibility in both the policy arena and public media.

Figure 4.1. Policy makers would benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the SSE all along the refugee journey



Note 1: See Figure 1, Note 1.

Note 2: SSE = social and solidarity economy.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

In conflict-afflicted settings, policy makers can call upon the SSE as the first (and sometimes only) emergency response for humanitarian protection and to prevent international displacement

The SSE can sometimes be the only actor present in highly dangerous contexts, where official humanitarian aid and development co-operation agencies cannot operate due to safety concerns or international sanctions. Whether during a humanitarian crisis or in a longer-term development context, governments can choose to create an enabling civil society space or rather to stifle grassroots initiatives. Specific restrictions in a humanitarian context are many, such as limitations on receiving foreign funding, or counterterrorism laws affecting funding allocated to specific groups. There may also be needs that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are not allowed to address, for example, protection concerns or certain reproductive health issues. Local governments can prevent international actors from working in direct partnership with local NGOs.

Despite often being the first line of the humanitarian response, SSE entities tend to be overshadowed by other forms of official support in the subsequent phases of a new refugee situation (e.g. from multilateral or bilateral development agencies). This can lead to tensions where SSE actors do not feel recognised or supported. Official humanitarian and development institutions might benefit from better incorporating the SSE's existing knowledge and capacities in their strategy-setting and public communications. Better integration of the SSE in official response systems, through mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and co-ordination, could improve the chances of communities' positive acceptance of internally displaced populations and facilitate operations, even in very fragile settings.

Nonetheless, it is important to be aware that SSE activities (like any other form of external interventions) may at times run the risk of exacerbating conflicts. Their efforts can become distorted and actually contribute to create tensions. Warring factions may “tax” the NGO for the right to deliver their aid. Those “taxes” then support the war effort. Aid may be stolen and redirected to the fighting parties. Resources given to victims may be passed on to friends and relatives who are engaged in fighting. NGO-

built infrastructure, such as roads, may enable military troops to travel farther, faster. Local, NGO-trained specialists may be conscripted into military service. Operational decisions taken by NGOs (for instance, when hiring people, purchasing goods, delivering support) can favour some groups instead of others and deepen inequalities (Anderson, 1996^[94]).

Hence, policy makers must carefully consider the implications of public backing to the SSE entities, which should not worsen existing social and cultural cleavages. The 2021 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance provides guidance for development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers to support civic space and civil society actors, at home as well as in partner countries or territories (OECD, 2021^[95]). Thereby, OECD DAC members are committed to respecting, protecting and promoting civic space; supporting and engaging with civil society; and incentivising the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of civil society organisations. Further guidance by the OECD indicates the need to conduct regular context and stakeholder analysis to identify power imbalances and (actual or perceived) lack of neutrality when funding partner-country civil society (OECD, 2023^[96]). Equally noteworthy is the DAC 2019 Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, which raised the bar on professional conduct standards for implementing partners such as non-governmental and civil society organisations. It further encouraged the development of survivor- and victim-centred response and support mechanisms, where again the SSE may be an invaluable asset.

In transit and destination countries, policy makers can engage the SSE as a valuable partner to build long-term strategies for reception and integration

Policy makers need to shift from following a short-term approach, of responding to crisis after crisis, to a structural one, as refugee flows will increase in the future. Since 2018, the United Nations Global Compact on Refugees¹ calls for a comprehensive response to refugee situations, including easing the pressure on refugee hosting countries, burden- and responsibility-sharing by the international community, and promoting self-reliance of refugees and hosting communities. Yet, according to OECD analysis, short-term humanitarian financing constituted 71% of all official development aid for refugee situations in 2020 (Hesemann, 2021^[97]). The involvement of SSE entities in asylum and reception systems is deeply affected by the changing political discourse around incoming refugee flows and the consequent instability of public funding. The predominant approach of addressing the refugee challenge as pressing emergencies rather than a structural trend has, in many instances, hampered the adoption of solutions that may be beneficial and sustainable for recipients and the hosting communities.

Through its operating principles of solidarity and primacy of people over capital, the SSE can greatly contribute to build a collective culture that values diversity in all its forms. In general, places and people that have experience with diversity are more likely to accept migrants, and refugees in particular. According to recent OECD analysis, migrants' perceived contribution to the local economy is positively correlated with the share of foreign-born people in a region (OECD, 2022^[98]). In turn, this can facilitate the task of public authorities facing large, and recurrent, incoming waves of refugees and help maintain a positive perception in the public opinion.

Provided that reception and integration policies are successfully implemented, asylum seekers and refugees have the potential to trigger development, especially in countries with a depopulation trend (OECD, 2018^[99]). For instance, refugees can increase foreign direct investment between their host country and country of birth by reducing the transaction and information costs. Refugee flows can also drive the diffusion of international knowledge and skills across borders, which can be particularly important for the economic development of countries of origin. One notable example is that of former Yugoslavia refugees who received temporary legal status in Germany during the early 1990s and have since been repatriated back to their home country or to other territories of dissolved Yugoslavia (OECD, 2022^[98]). After

their return, Yugoslavian exports started increasing, particularly strong in those industries that received a large number of returnees. Moreover, through dispersal mechanisms steered by the central administration, refugees may help repopulate rural areas. Indeed, OECD evidence shows that asylum seekers are more spread across urban-rural areas than are the resident population, including other migrants and native born (OECD, 2018_[99]).

Especially where country systems are overburdened, SSE entities can support asylum seekers in accessing formal recognition of their refugee status through legal, administrative and language support. Timely recognition of asylum status and a swift labour market entry allows refugees to rebuild their livelihoods, better interact with the host society and ultimately save money for the public purse (OECD, 2023_[11]). In the case of Ukrainian refugees, group attribution of international protection by European Union (EU) member states has greatly contributed to faster labour market entry compared with other refugee groups. By supporting individual asylum seekers' requests, the SSE can ensure more equal treatment of forcibly displaced persons and ultimately prevent tensions among different refugee groups. By mobilising volunteering, pro bono expertise and citizen initiatives, the SSE can step in to help the public administration in fulfilling its duty of international protection.

The SSE is an asset that can help host governments develop “dual intent” policies, which prepare both for indefinite stay as well as for possible return

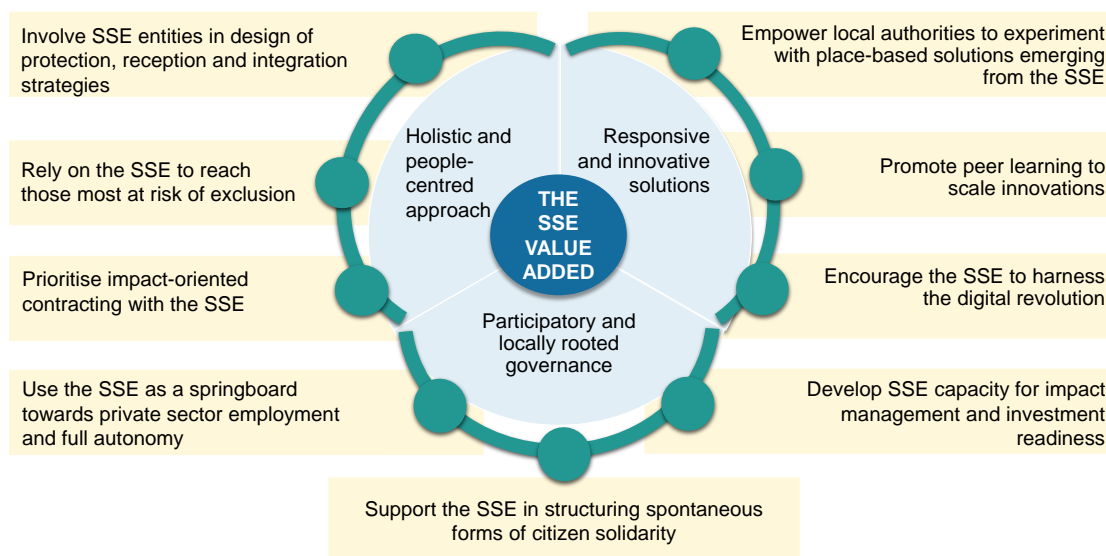
The Ukrainian crisis has shown improved collaboration among governments and the many facets of the SSE, but more is needed to plan for long-term displacement. In OECD countries, citizens and NGOs have stepped forward to provide immediate support to Ukrainian refugees, particularly in the form of shelter for new arrivals. This spontaneous outspring of solidarity from civil society, often co-ordinated by more formal SSE entities, has been broadly recognised by public initiatives and helped amplify their outreach.

The SSE is strategically placed on many of the outstanding challenges to support long-term integration: offering childcare and family support services, flexible and part-time employment, fostering skills recognition and transferability, countering undeclared work and exploitation. Ensuring access to housing has been one of the main challenges in most receiving countries, especially in a context of insufficient housing supply and inflationary pressure. The SSE can help to mobilise private hosts and households, especially through diaspora and grassroots initiatives. SSE entities are also well placed to support access to public education for minor children and vocational education and training for adult refugees. Further, engagement with the SSE can inspire entrepreneurial efforts among refugees, aimed at creating self-employment but also at giving back to the community, both in their temporary settlement and back in their country of origin.

By developing policies that better support the SSE ecosystem, policy makers will also implicitly favour labour market and social inclusion of refugees. By clarifying the legal framework for SSE entities, in particular those working on labour market integration of refugees and other vulnerable groups, policy makers can strengthen their capacity and growth potential, while also facilitating the creation of new initiatives among refugees and vulnerable local communities (OECD, 2022_[100]). Additional measures that policy makers can take include facilitating registration and licensing for refugee-owned businesses, including home-based businesses, and streamlining vocational licensing (OECD et al., 2020_[101]). Taking an ecosystem approach would also involve fostering connections with local intermediaries (e.g. chambers of commerce) and potential funders, such as microcredit institutions.

Supporting the internationalisation of local SSE actors can ease the reintegration of refugees back into their countries of origin (OECD, 2023_[102]). Especially in fragile and post-war contexts, where basic public infrastructure and welfare systems have been strained by violent conflict, non-profit organisations through their international branches, social enterprises that are willing and ready to expand their impact abroad, and emerging forms of local solidarity can be powerful allies in the reconstruction process. This may require policy learning and peer exchange among experts and public officials on how to support the development of the SSE in geographies where it might have been poorly recognised before.

Figure 4.2. Policy makers can leverage the value added of the SSE to develop win-win solutions for refugees and host communities



Note: SSE = social and solidarity economy.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Policy makers can take inspiration from the SSE to develop holistic and people-centred approaches

To successfully tackle refugee integration, policy makers need to take a holistic approach that embraces different sectors and levels of government. This is particularly important for policy makers to achieve the “dual intent” of giving refugees quick access to full-scale integration support without hampering a possible return to their home country, once the situation allows (OECD, 2022^[77]). Nonetheless, policy makers do not systematically tackle refugee integration as a cross-sectoral issue. Recent OECD data show that just over half of the surveyed cities (54%) have a specific strategy covering all sectors involved in migrant integration (OECD, 2018^[99]).

Involve SSE entities in design of protection, reception and integration strategies

The protection, reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees is a complex challenge that requires co-ordination and communication among the state, SSE entities and other stakeholders (Garkisch, Heidingsfelder and Beckmann, 2017^[16]). To this end, the co-planning/co-production of public initiatives with the participation of a wide set of stakeholders has proved capable of strengthening the resilience of local communities and hence the ability of SSE entities to develop activities that are conducive to the revitalisation of receiving territories. SSE representatives can help policy makers move towards human-centred design and include the voice of the refugees in their strategy setting.

A constructive dialogue between the SSE and public institutions can help develop more effective, resilient and inclusive responses to crisis situations (Boersma et al., 2022^[103]). Some national and local authorities have successfully involved SSE representatives in designing and managing reception and integration mechanisms for refugees and asylum seekers. Examples include Italy's Protection System for Asylum and Refugees set up in 2002 and the early integration programme developed by the city of Amsterdam. Based on previous challenges observed in the labour market integration of refugees, Amsterdam designed an all-encompassing, early integration model where all sectors are represented (OECD, 2018^[99]).

Through its information gathering and advocacy activities, the SSE may serve as a valuable asset to inform policy design and identify tailored solutions for refugee needs. National and local authorities may gain advice, field insights or even statistical evidence from SSE entities operating locally with refugees and other vulnerable populations. Even at a time of crisis, local SSE and refugee-led initiatives can help increase speed and responsiveness of public interventions by tapping into their knowledge, experience and networks. Yet recent OECD data showed that when developing their strategies for migrant integration, only 47% of the surveyed cities consulted with other actors such as migrant organisations, civil society or the private sector (OECD, 2018^[99]). Co-construction of protection, reception and integration policies with refugee representatives and SSE entities directly working at their sides is an essential element to facilitate acceptance and smooth implementation.

Rely on the SSE to identify and support those asylum seekers and refugees most at risk of exclusion

The SSE can be a particularly promising channel for successfully integrating refugee women into the workforce. Women are a particularly vulnerable group in the refugee community, but at the same time, they can be a strong asset for the development of the SSE. From the onset of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, most refugee arrivals have been women and children, creating unique challenges for integration. The share of women among adult refugees is around 70% in most host countries and many have arrived with children, with the share of minors around 30% (OECD, 2023^[104]). At the same time, women represent a larger share of the labour force of the SSE relative to the share of women in the total labour force in a number of countries. This share is estimated to exceed 60% in countries such as Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain (OECD, 2023^[105]). Moreover, gender gaps in pay and leadership are often lower in the SSE, offering lessons for the rest of economy. For example, in Türkiye, the share of women with managerial roles in social enterprises is reported at 65%, more than triple the rate in the total labour force (18%). Many SSE entities provide flexible working arrangements as well as childcare services to their employees and members, which can help women overcome their barriers to work. Hence, employment in the SSE may not just be easier, but also fairer and more qualifying for refugee women.

Further, the SSE can help identify and support asylum seekers and refugees with additional factors of vulnerability (unaccompanied minors, elderly, ethnic minorities, individuals affected by disability or health conditions). The SSE typically works with vulnerable groups that, in a situation of forced displacement, are those most exposed to the risk of exploitation and marginalisation. For instance, over a third of Ukrainian refugees are minors and around 4-6% are aged 65 and over (OECD, 2023^[106]). At the end of 2022, 40% of forcibly displaced people, an estimated 43.3 million, are children below 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2023^[107]). In a significant number of EU countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain, recognition of the legal status as work integration social enterprises (WISEs) entails that at least 30% of their workforce is represented by disadvantaged individuals, which may include refugees.

Prioritise impact-oriented contracting with the SSE for the delivery of protection, reception and integration services

The role played by SSE entities is significantly influenced by differences in the organisation of welfare service delivery. The involvement of the SSE is affected by several factors, including to what extent non-state actors are allowed to participate in public tenders for procuring reception and integration services, what private providers are entitled to supply these services and what are the selection mechanisms used to recruit them. While in Italy and France most reception services are delivered by SSE entities following public tenders, in Germany local municipalities play a key role, sometimes in co-operation with local volunteer relief groups (OECD, 2018^[99]).

Interactions with public authorities are however not straightforward due to procurement processes that often prioritise cost savings over long-term impacts. Most protection and reception services (i.e. accommodation, food, legal support) are contracted out to private providers that include both conventional businesses and SSE entities. Challenges arise particularly from competitive tenders evaluating offers on value-for-money grounds, which tend to crowd out locally rooted SSE entities and favour for-profit business with scale economies generated by the large number of recipients hosted and low cost (and low quality) of the services delivered (Del Baggio, 2020^[108]; Galera et al., 2018^[22]).

Selection rules for the contracting out of reception and integration services can be designed to prioritise the provision of quality services. Effective patterns here include competitive procurement procedures that value the contribution of SSE in meeting specific conditions (locally based, engagement of the community, empowerment of recipients), as well as collaborative interactions between SSE entities and public authorities (Galera et al., 2018^[22]). Public procurement practices can also encourage co-operation rather than competition and stimulate networking between local SSE service providers, so as to increase their tendering capacity. Recent trends towards social procurement can be particularly relevant in this policy area, including the introduction of social impact considerations, reserved contracts for legally recognised SSE entities and outcome-based contracting (OECD, 2023^[109]).

Policy makers can count on the SSE to build bridges across communities for peaceful co-existence and mutual development

Use the SSE as a springboard for refugees towards private sector employment and full autonomy

The SSE can represent a stepping stone for many refugees, once they are ready to integrate into the mainstream corporate environment or to develop their own entrepreneurial project. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in co-operation with OECD recently published the paper "Engaging with employers in the hiring of refugees", which provides a ten-point multi-stakeholder action plan for employers, refugees, governments and civil society (OECD and UNHCR, 2018^[110]). In this framework, civil society organisations are invited to provide background information on refugees' countries of origin, for example, data/fact files regarding the primary industries in that country and their work culture. However, the SSE can help with virtually all the other action points envisaged for public authorities and employment services, employers and refugees themselves. For instance, they can help disseminate the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals.² This corroborates the importance of explicitly including both the SSE and refugees in local economic development strategies.

Fruitful relations with conventional enterprises could help develop effective integration pathways in the open labour market: thanks to their specialised know-how, WISEs could both assist conventional businesses in integrating refugees and help the same recipients improve their skills. Furthermore, stable relations with adult training providers could allow for the development of tailored curricula for asylum

seekers and refugees aiming to meet labour shortages. Among other stakeholders, civil society and faith-based organisations, youth and students' organisations, diaspora organisations, and refugees themselves are crucial to achieving an integration policy that works on the ground.

The SSE can help tackle structural challenges in rural areas, for instance in terms of lack of transportation and proximity services. The concentration of a high number of recipients in big reception centres tends to isolate asylum seekers from the hosting communities and nourish social exclusion. In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, a recent survey by the European Committee of the Regions, Eurochambers and the OECD³ showed that only one in five European countries encouraged refugees to move to these areas (OECD, 2023_[111]).

Support the SSE in structuring spontaneous forms of citizen solidarity

It is in the policy maker's interest to safeguard the SSE's autonomy to experiment, by taking advantage of its deep connections with civil society, refugees and other vulnerable groups. SSE entities play a unique role in identifying new needs arising in local communities and co-designing innovative reception and integration services (Galera et al., 2018_[22]). This also means recognising and fully exploiting the potential of bottom-up grassroots initiatives. Already during the 2015-16 refugee crisis in Europe, refugees contributed to a trend of creation of new social enterprises that are inclined to experiment with new housing patterns and integration pathways (European Commission, 2020_[112]).

Being embedded in the civil society, the SSE can help steer spontaneous forms of solidarity in a way that complements public action. The Ukrainian crisis has triggered an unprecedented movement of citizen solidarity, where hundreds of thousands of Europeans have opened their homes to host, at least for a short period of time, displaced people from Ukraine. Member states reported that private hosts accommodated between 20% and 90% of displaced people, depending on the country. Against this background, the European Commission developed targeted guidance to member states, regional and local authorities, and civil society in the organisation of private housing initiatives for those fleeing Ukraine who are in need of protection as part of the Safe Homes initiative (European Commission, 2022_[113]).

Community sponsorship schemes are an innovative, flexible form of partnership, where several actors (including public authorities, SSE representatives and private individuals) team up to help newcomers become independent. They can take many forms, depending on the context, with the aim to facilitate integration and, in some cases, also the admission of people arriving in the host society (European Commission, 2022_[113]). Sponsor groups can support asylum seekers and refugees regarding housing but also with other activities, such as language trainings, administrative steps, psychological and emotional support, and access to services, such as education, employment and healthcare.

Develop SSE capacity for impact management and investment readiness

SSE entities often struggle to survive, and face organisational and management challenges and financial instability due to the lack of long-term projects and high dependency on public funds. Ensuring sustainability while seeking to remain faithful to SSE values and founding principles is not always an easy task. This is particularly relevant when SSE entities developed bottom-up out of voluntary initiatives. SSE entities are sometimes pushed to adopt management and governance methods similar to those of conventional businesses, to attract private investors and increase their efficiency. However, in doing so, they may sacrifice their competitive advantages in relation to public and for-profit providers, resulting from their connections with the community and territory in which they operate (Galera et al., 2018_[22]; Borzaga, Fazzi and Galera, 2016_[114]; Borzaga, Poledrini and Galera, 2017_[115]).

Access to finance remains the greatest obstacle for SSE development worldwide. This is true for non-profits that typically rely on public grants and private donations, as well as social enterprises that dispose of additional sources of income generation, through their market activities, but may still experience

resistance to external funding, especially when equity-based. Indeed, social entrepreneurs often rely on the founder, friends and family (the 3F's). Few social enterprises tend to access bank financing, mainly because of a lack of collateral or a lack of availability of tailored financial tools, such as patient capital or equity or quasi equity (OECD/European Commission, 2022^[29]). SSE entities are often faced with misperceptions on their long-term viability and thus suffer from a biased assessment of risk-return profile. As transaction costs are proportionally higher for smaller investments, this is another deterrent for traditional institutional investors. Further, SSE entities experience difficulties in establishing long-term financial strategies or investment plans for external fund raising.

Similarly, **the growing pressure towards impact measurement and management practices is another pressing challenge for many SSE entities.** Both internal and external drivers prompt the need for social impact measurement in the SSE ecosystem, although its widespread adoption is still hampered by technical and sometimes ethical challenges (OECD, 2021^[116]). As public authorities and external investors increasingly turn towards outcome-based mechanisms, it is in the SSE's interest to level up their skills in terms of impact reporting. For instance, the Global Compact on Refugees has a framework that shows how efforts in support of refugees contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴

SSE entities need better financial and impact literacy to help inform strategic resource allocation decisions and hence, better shape their activities in support of refugees. This is especially a challenge for social entrepreneurs who typically need to combine market resources (e.g. the sale of goods and services), non-market resources (e.g. government subsidies and private donations) and non-monetary resources (e.g. volunteer work). To help improve the financial literacy of social and inclusive entrepreneurs, a recent policy brief suggests embedding dedicated modules in inclusive and social entrepreneurship training programmes, creating online platforms with free resources, including skill transfer as part of financial intermediation (OECD/European Commission, 2022^[29]). Despite their purpose-driven mission, SSE entities may not always be equipped with the resources and know-how required to accurately assess their impact. Policy makers can help develop the impact measurement capacity of SSE entities, both internally and externally, to facilitate uptake and adaptation to their specific learning and accountability needs. In particular, they can provide trainings and mentorship services to equip SSE entities with know-how on social impact measurement and facilitate networking among SSE entities, policy makers, financiers and other ecosystem stakeholders to capitalise on existing knowledge base on social impact measurement and adapt it to different needs of the SSE ecosystem.

Policy makers can identify and replicate viable innovations piloted by the SSE at the local level

Empower local authorities to experiment with place-based solutions emerging from the SSE

There is widespread evidence that subnational governments are best placed to carry out the reception and integration responsibilities of asylum seekers and refugees. While the definition of migration and especially asylum policies is a notably centrally owned topic, the implementation of reception and integration programmes is instead increasingly decentralised (Galera, Giannetto and Noya, 2018^[23]). The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 acknowledges that the local level plays a key role in welcoming and guiding newcomers when they first arrive in their new country. Not only in federal countries such as Austria, Belgium and Germany, but also in the unitarian Scandinavian countries, integration policy is widely implemented at the subnational level (OECD, 2017^[67]). Previous OECD work estimates that subnational governments bear between 35% and 45% of refugee-related spending (OECD, 2018^[99]). Further, a survey from 2022 shows that small and medium-sized cities are promising places for the integration of Ukrainian refugees, because that's where most hiring needs are located (OECD, European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and Eurochambres, 2022^[117]).

Collaborations between SSE actors and local authorities are essential to support the socio-economic inclusion of asylum seekers. On the one hand, SSE entities' grassroots approach and understanding of local contexts enable them to deliver targeted assistance, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among newcomers. On the other hand, local authorities possess the legal framework, administrative capacities and access to public resources necessary to facilitate the integration process. By collaborating with SSE actors, they can leverage their institutional expertise and financial support to scale up initiatives, remove bureaucratic barriers, and ensure that asylum seekers have equal access to essential services and economic opportunities.

Local authorities have critical capacities to identify innovative and tailored solutions for the actual protection needs of asylum seekers and refugees, based on their local assets (OECD, 2021^[28]). Being closer to the local economy, they are well aware of its problems and challenges. Hence, they can help design and test tailor-made solutions that match the needs of incoming asylum seekers, more settled refugee groups and economic actors. Consequently, they are also the most competent to understand which practices work best – for instance whether to "first train, then place" or to "first place, then train".

Subnational governments can mobilise local networks and prompt the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including SSE representatives (non-profits, charities, philanthropic foundations, social enterprises), universities and private businesses (OECD et al., 2020^[101]). In some cases, they can establish permanent mechanisms to exchange information and co-ordinate activities around asylum seekers, refugees and returnees. This can facilitate co-operation between SSE entities, especially WISEs that tackle the refugee challenge, public employment agencies, conventional businesses, vocational, education and training providers. The quality of reception services is therefore strongly influenced by the type of relations SSE entities establish with local public authorities, whose role can be crucial in integrating newcomers and empowering them (OECD, 2018^[99]).

Still, recent evidence shows there is still margin for improvement in co-ordination across government levels and capacity building for local administrations. Nearly 90% of the 72 cities surveyed by the OECD in 2022 reported a lack of adequate co-ordination with central government in migrant integration services (OECD, 2018^[99]). As part of the response to the Ukrainian crisis, only one in two subnational governments surveyed by the OECD collects data on local employers' hiring needs and in relation to Ukrainian refugees (OECD, 2023^[111]).

Encourage the SSE to harness the digital revolution

The digital revolution opens new opportunities for labour market and social inclusion. For refugees, especially in rural areas, information and communication technologies are a useful resource that can help access settlement services, stay socially connected and communicate with distant relatives, and promote their participation in the new host society (Ye and Yang, 2020^[118]). For the SSE, modern technology can allow new forms of co-operative economics where refugees and other vulnerable groups can more easily be included.

The digital economy can help broaden the outreach of SSE initiatives, for instance in the form of platform cooperatives. Even undocumented asylum seekers can take advantage of the gig economy through mobile connection and many social enterprises have been working with international development institutions to make progress in this space. Digital platforms can enable remote and geographically dispersed forms of work that are easily accessible to refugees and sometimes reconnect them with other members of the diaspora.

Many social enterprises are born out of the will to deploy new technological advancements at the service of refugees. New technologies, such as blockchain, can help with the registration and identification of asylum seekers and refugees. Innovations in mobile technology are also transforming how humanitarian organisations deliver aid to refugees, for instance in the form of digital cash payments (GSM Association, 2017^[119]). Further, they can create creditworthy identifications and thus help refugees gain

access to the financial system. In fact, many fintech companies can be social enterprises that aim to reduce the finance gap for inclusive and social entrepreneurs.

Digital channels can help unlock new resources for SSE growth, for instance through fundraising, social media advocacy campaigns and mobile data collection. Hackathons and crowdfunding can help social and inclusive entrepreneurs, such as refugees, build legitimacy for their projects. This may in turn help them gain access to further finance through larger investors and/or lenders. Open-source mobile data collection platforms and real-time feedback surveys have become important tools to help SSE entities prove their impact and keep them responsive to the fast-changing needs of forcibly displaced populations.

However, digital skills are very unevenly spread among the SSE. Even within Europe, some organisations, often the smallest ones, have only slightly adopted the new digital tools and uses, compared with others, such as the Tech for Good start-ups, which build their social project around an intensive use of digital technologies (Bretécher, 2023^[120]). Hence, policy makers can promote opportunities for the digital training and upskilling of the SSE workforce that may also help overcome the digital divide for refugees.

Promote peer learning for the SSE and public officers to help scale innovations

Peer learning mechanisms at city or regional level can support the dissemination of good practices stemming from the SSE, and especially innovative work integration pathways. Innovative examples piloted by the SSE are often poorly known outside local circles and rarely replicated, because they are not analysed in-depth. There is indeed little knowledge of the bottom-up strategies whereby SSE entities succeed in preparing local inhabitants to face the refugee challenge and co-design initiatives that have a beneficial impact upon the same host community. One useful resource in this regard may be the EU/OECD Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool (European Commission and OECD, n.d.^[121]). Another example is the OECD Local Development Forum, which has tackled social innovations since the year 2000 and continues to build evidence on local success stories, including from the SSE.⁵

SSE actors themselves can greatly benefit from peer learning and international exchanges, as recently demonstrated by the six partnerships sponsored by the OECD Global Action “Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems”, which gathered over 130 organisations from 38 countries.⁶ Indeed, peer learning turns out to be a particularly appropriate tool in this space, due to the collaborative and participatory values that guide SSE entities.

Accrued policy interest on the role of the SSE in handling and preventing refugee crises might trigger collective stock-taking exercises and the dissemination of lessons learned for the benefit of all stakeholders. Policy learning from dispersed forms of innovation requires the creation of knowledge repositories where impact evidence can be identified, cross-examined and spread around. One example going in this direction is the EU Social Economy Gateway⁷ and, even more on point, the collection of good practices identified by the European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE) regarding refugees as a specific target group.⁸

Notes

¹ <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/>.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1412&langId=en>.

³ Based on 117 respondents from EU municipalities, counties and regions in 19 countries and 24 national, regional and local EU Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

⁴ www.unhcr.org/media/sustainable-development-goals-and-global-compact-refugees.

⁵ www.oecd.org/local-forum/localstories/.

⁶ www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/social-economy/oecd-global-action/.

⁷ <https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/>.

⁸ www.ensie.org/focus-areas/themes/specific-target-groups-2017-ensie-s-contribution-about-member-s-activities-regarding-the-refugee-crisis.

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