

## **TransSOL Research Summary 2: Facts and Analysis on Solidarity in Europe**

*Innovative practices of transnational solidarity at times of crisis (WP2)*

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### **Introduction**

This research summary is based on TransSOL's second work package, which maps the field of solidarity groups in a systematic manner, focusing on citizens' initiatives and networks in three thematic areas, namely disability, unemployment and immigration.

Our research covers eight European countries (Denmark, Greece, Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and the UK) and the European arena of transnational solidarity practices. The research has generated a rich set of data using three methodological approaches: (a) a website-based analysis of 2408 Transnational Solidarity Organisations (TSO), (b) an online-based survey among TSO representatives involving standardised interviews with 144 TSOs and (c) 247 in-depth personal qualitative interviews with a targeted sample of TSO representatives. This research work was conducted during 2016, thus providing fresh insights into the current situation of European solidarity initiatives and practices.

This research summary strives to present key findings of our research, and highlights important policy implications and recommendations. For this purpose, we will draw particularly from the insights provided by our online survey among transnational solidarity organisations, and by our in-depth interviews with local solidarity initiatives and groups in the eight countries under analysis.

These data deliver rich evidence on pressing problems of practical solidarity throughout Europe, and assemble a series of policy suggestions and demands put forward by citizens

and organisations currently active in their respective field.

The summary thus provides a voice for citizens in their commitment to and quest for more solidary Europe.

### **Key Findings**

Our investigation allowed us to paint a picture of a vibrant and diversified field of solidarity initiatives and practices that are faced with several challenges and problems.

European solidarity is a growing field of citizens' activities meeting important needs. Our systematic mapping of European solidarity allowed us to identify almost 30,000 initiatives and groups, from which we selected those organisations with a transnational solidarity scope, either in terms of organisational forms, activities, beneficiaries, partners and other criteria. On this basis, we systematically analysed 2,408 cases, i.e., 300 per country, 100 in each field.

Our data show that the TSOs in the three fields have roots as far back as the early 1900s, with noticeably increasing waves immediately after WWII and in the 1950s and 1960s (see Annex, Figure 1). The growth of the sector was somewhat different in the three fields: disability organisations increased in number particularly from the early 1980s to the early 2000s (Figure 3), unemployment organisations from the late seventies to the early 2010s (Figure 2) and migration TSOs escalated in the most recent period, from the 1990s to the present, with a dramatic peak in the past three years (Figure 4). Growth of the

fields is more even in countries like Denmark and the UK, in contrast to Germany and Greece with the highest peaks since 2010.

TSOs are engaged in a variety of activities. Among them, meeting 'urgent needs' is the most important type, particularly in the migration and disability fields. Dissemination (reports, mass media, awareness raising, education, etc.) ranks second, and economy related activities (e.g., job training programmes, financial support, products and service provision) are third, particularly in the unemployment field. Findings show that most TSOs are well integrated into networks of cooperation. Almost half of the TSOs have one to ten partners at the national level, and almost a third have eleven to thirty partners.

Cooperation prevails also at the international level, with 63% of all TSOs having one to ten transnational partners. However, we need to highlight the fact that solidarity actions by civil society organisations are mainly a local phenomenon when considering activities and beneficiaries (see Figure 1). Solidarity at the supra- and transnational level is a priority only for a minority of TSOs. Our findings show that organizing European solidarity follows two approaches: either through collaboration with partners or through the setting up of proper organisational structures of operation.

Two further factors are relevant: The motivation to promote empowerment and participation interacts positively with European solidarity activities, and the same applies to a higher degree of organisational formalisation.

Further insight was provided by our online survey among transnational solidarity organisations, building on 144 standardised interviews. Findings from this survey show that these TSOs are not only located in the eight countries of our project, but also in other European countries (almost one third of our respondents), amongst them a number of

Brussels-based TSOs active at the EU level. The spread of TSO respondents is equal across the eight countries of our project except for Germany, which shows a somewhat higher frequency (22.2%), probably due to the larger population of TSOs it hosts.

NGOs or other formal volunteer associations are the most frequent type of TSOs, especially in the fields of migration and disability (67.2% and 58.7%), followed by information platforms, charities or trade unions. Overall, the major activities carried out by the TSOs focus (from highest to lower frequencies) on: networking with other organisations; raising awareness, political education, organising public campaigns or cultural activities; lobbying and fund-raising; drafting analytical documents, research or report writing; providing services, such as those related to food, shelter, healthcare, education and counselling.

Solidarity initiatives face a number of constraints and problems limiting their work. Lack of funding or donations is the highest/extremely pressing constraint for about half of the respondents across all three fields (Figure 5). Lack of material resources, lack of expert-personnel as well as lack of volunteers are highly or moderately pressing for the great majority of TSO representatives (Figure 6, 7 and 8). At the same time, lack of support or cooperation from state or EU organisations is either a moderately- or highly-pressing constraint, according to the respondents in the three fields (Figures 9 and 10), even though the most prevalent TSO partners are state agencies. The majority of TSOs in the three fields also experience lack support or cooperation from non-state or international organisations as a highly- or moderately-pressing constraint (Figures 11 and 12).

These problems are particularly pressing because most TSOs report that their solidarity activities have increased as a reaction to growing numbers of people in need and

mushrooming grievances and hardships in the three fields under analysis.

In fact, this problem is mirrored by our survey, which asked TSOs to identify the main trends and developments within their immediate environment.

On the one hand, TSOs have experienced during the past six years an increased demand for support in various areas of operation: They were asked more often by other organisations to provide help and intensify networking, and they stepped up their help for individual beneficiaries in the area of emergency financial or training support, non-material support as well as urgent needs provisions, as seen in Figure 13.

This growth is paralleled by stagnation, in some cases a decrease in those material and human resources TSOs need to fulfil their mission. As regards public funding, we see that a substantial number of groups and organisations work without this form of support (40% on average), in most cases as a reaction to an explicit choice to remain independent. Among those receiving this kind of funding, we see only a minority of TSOs reports receiving more state and international funding, while the majority indicates stagnating or decreasing resources. Interestingly enough, TSOs in the field of migration are less drastically exposed to this problem when compared to groups working in the disability and unemployment fields (Figures 14 and 15). This is a clear indication of awareness cycles and situational policy preferences, most obviously related to the refugee crises affecting many European countries during 2016.

Regarding non-state funding (Figure 16) the situation is less dramatic. Only a minority of groups reports doing without this kind of support, but among those building on private contributions and donations, we see a stronger group of TSOs reporting higher levels of funding, illustrating that the general public is

responsive towards the work of these organisations. TSOs active in migration and in disability fields have experienced an increase (38.1% and 40.9%, respectively), while this does not apply as much to the unemployment organisations.

The growing gap between resource provisions on the one hand, and intensifying activities is corroborated when looking at the frequency of conducted actions (Figure 17) and the number of beneficiaries and participants (Figure 18), which are both on the rise in all three fields for most of the TSOs interviewed. Hence, the majority of TSOs report shrinking funding opportunities in times of increasing activities, even though groups working on migration issues are less affected by these funding cuts. These bifurcating trends are affecting many TSOs, even though a substantial fraction is able to compensate for this gap through increasing numbers of volunteers and members (Figure 19).

Moreover, there is a second trend that is described by most TSOs rather positively. Only a minority of TSOs in all fields says that their involvement in consultations and meetings at the local, national and European levels has decreased since 2010. For most, the situation has either not changed or has even improved (Figures 20 and 21). Our analyses show that some TSOs benefit more strongly from this development. On the one hand, TSOs benefit in that they are better accommodated in established policy domains (e.g., participation in meetings and committees, drafting of reports, interest representation), and better included in wider networks of collaborations with other organisations. On the other hand, TSOs in the area of migration (and to some extent, disability) are more optimistic than those unemployment groups, thus reaffirming the awareness cycles and situational policy preferences mentioned before.

## Policy Recommendations

Citizens' initiatives, groups and organisations involved in solidarity practices face a number of challenges and problems, as we have seen in the previous section. However, in the various in-depth interviews we conducted in the eight countries, the representatives of these groups also raised a variety of expectations and demands about potential (political, legislative, administrative or social) improvements that would facilitate their work. In the following, we attempt to summarise their main recommendations.

It is noteworthy that TSOs did not necessarily agree on which route of action to take, given that their missions and preferred strategies diverge. For instance, while some organisations ask for more public funding by state authorities, others categorically discard this option for themselves, because they wish to uphold their financial autonomy vis-à-vis the state or private companies. However, we see the need to give all these various claims a voice, because administrations and legislators should reflect upon an institutional and legal framework that promotes civil societies in their diverse missions and approaches. While several recommendations address public policies in the field of unemployment and labour, disability, migration and asylum, in the following we will focus primarily on the institutional and legal framework of civic solidarity because this research summary is interested in identifying recommendations to help reduce limitations and further the development of civic solidarity practices.

The variety of recommendations and suggestions voiced in our interviews can be grouped into different categories. First, very often activists do not demand new laws, but rather a better handling of existing regulations and programmes. Second, they highlight limitations or side-effects of established legislation that generate unintended consequences for solidarity practices. Third, activists also ad-

dress the need to recalibrate policy preferences and priorities. These recommendations are based on the experiences of the TSOs' daily-work, as reported in our interviews, but also reflect the major challenges and problems we identified in our standardised survey (see above). Most of these recommendations are not necessarily tied to one of the specific issue fields we are monitoring (unemployment, disability, migration and refugees), because they relate to the steps necessary to improve solidarity practices more generally.

### **Improve the effectiveness of solidarity practices within the established legal and institutional framework.**

In this first group we find activists that criticise the problems associated with disjointed and discontinued funding schemes, with shifting public attention and priorities, and with the imperfections of existing forms of coordination and cooperation.

Even if solidarity practices are focused on meeting urgent needs, activists stress that problem-solving will take time and thus requires a more enduring and sustained collective effort. This applies to at least three aspects of solidarity practice.

First, TSOs report that public funding is often short term and gets discontinued, and that funding schemes at local, national or EU level are not well coordinated. Additionally, our surveys have shown that TSOs in the area of unemployment and disability report decreasing pools of funding much more frequently, when compared to groups active in the area of migration and refugees.

This evidences the existence of awareness cycles and shifting policy priorities among public authorities and (semi) private donors, which generate difficulties for sustained problem-solving in areas where the work of TSOs drops out of these awareness cycles. Hence, public authorities should take much more

care in guaranteeing sustained funding for the work of TSOs. In this context, TSOs also call upon the state and the public to be aware of those issues that remain outside of current headline news cycles, but continue to need attention and care.

Second, civic groups and organisations are concerned about the need to improve cooperation and coordination. This pertains not only to the relationships between the state and TSOs, but also to the coordination between various TSOs.

Activists urge that actors engaged in a specific region and issue field are enabled to better coordinate their welfare services and the methods of service provision, as was witnessed particularly in the Greek and Italian cases. Coordinative bodies, platforms or meetings at local or regional level are necessary in order to improve coordination and cooperation. However, for this purpose, state-TSO relations need to be improved because some activists, for instance in the French case, report difficulties in establishing and maintaining meaningful relations with governments and institutions. Moreover, also in this regard, our data show that awareness cycles do exist, given the fact that TSOs involved in the area of refugees are much more positive about the current state of consultation and cooperation with state authorities than groups involved in disability and unemployment issues.

Finally, we see from our interview material that the practice of solidarity can reach its limits in situations of overburdening. The impressive work that solidarity initiatives are currently undertaking in welcoming and servicing refugees is leading to work overload and burnout among volunteers. This situation is certainly due to the critical moments lived through the years of 2015 and 2016; however, it is recommended that we consider public assistance and professional services for volunteers, e.g., in the area of support, mentoring

and supervision of volunteers, and voluntary associations to cope with the problems of burnout and work overload.

### **Assess and fix limitations and side effects of established legislation.**

TSOs repeatedly reported that institutional and legal provisions can constrain and even hinder their work, arguing that these provisions are often poorly implemented or do not consider the potential side-effects on the efforts of their organisations when being formulated.

On the one hand, TSO representatives have raised the problem of deficiencies in policy implementation. In this regard, we aim to highlight two typical problems addressed by our TSO representatives. British TSOs active in the disability field argued that good laws, such as the Equality Act 2010 or the Care Act 2014, do not fulfil their potential because they are poorly implemented. Local authorities, themselves under pressure due to budget cuts, are criticised for the limited implementation of these policies, to the detriment of the lives of disabled people at the local level. A second problem of poor implementation was raised by Italian respondents and addressed the lack of uniformity in the provision of social benefits and in the guarantee of social rights within the whole national territory, due to political and administrative regionalism. As a consequence, TSOs report inequalities in the treatment for disabled people or the provision of unemployment benefits according to region of residence, undermining the principle of equality. These spatial inconsistencies can contribute to unintended consequences, such as internal migrations for better services, and additional pressure on some regional social security systems, that directly affect the work of local solidarity initiatives.

As in many of these cases, advocacy TSOs commit themselves to addressing these problems and lobbying for an adequate

implementation of policies. However, TSO representatives call for a more efficient and effective judicial and administrative system that is able to process and implement these kinds of complaints and demands. Following these claims, we recommend that public administrations engage in regular monitoring of the implementation of policies, with the assistance of those organisations involved in advocacy and service provision. This might require monitoring and evaluation exercises, and specialised consultative bodies or procedures that give end-users and civil-society practitioners a possibility to give regular feedback.

On the other hand, our interviewees have raised a number of unintended consequences of established regulations and administrative provisions that need to be reflected upon and resolved in order to help them continue their work. These side effects concern two of the main resources TSOs depend on: funding and volunteers. Our survey findings underline the seriousness of these problems because the data show that TSOs are suffering a growing gap between increasing activities and beneficiaries on the one side, and stagnating or decreasing economic and human resources on the other. These side-effects depend largely on the legal and administrative provisions established in these countries. In Denmark and Greece, for instance, TSOs highlight that the current tax legislation does not encourage sufficient private donations. Additionally, Danish welfare regulations impose working restrictions on recipients of social benefits because these people are expected to take paid jobs, which in turn prohibits voluntary work. This problem is particularly evident among disability patient organisations because many of their active members are recipients of social benefits. Also, in other countries, representatives demand the recognition of non-formal work experience of the unemployed, given the fact that voluntary work in TSOs is a means of empowerment and social inclusion.

Aside from the unintended consequences of issue-field specific regulations, TSOs have also reported a more general side effect of established institutional and legal provisions: the increasing professionalisation, formalisation and bureaucratisation of their work. TSOs are increasing their fundraising activities due to the discontinuities and fragmentation of funding opportunities described earlier. At the same time, TSOs have to step up their efforts in proposal writing, reporting, auditing and communication, to the detriment of their solidarity-focused work in the strictest sense. In countries as diverse as Greece, Poland and Switzerland, TSOs demand less bureaucratic procedures of registration, application and control, and a less technocratic approach that leaves more flexibility. Complementary to this, Polish activists have proposed introducing an integrated piece of legislation that treats all organisations within the social economy alike, as long as this common framework brings simplification for all providers. In all these aspects, activists demand greater respect for the voice of solidarity organisations and groups.

This demand is particularly related to informal citizens' groups. Activists are concerned that the developments described here will privilege formal, professionalised and larger organisations – to the detriment of newer and smaller citizens' groups. The livelihood of civil society definitely depends on the capacity of citizens to freely form those associations that respond to upcoming needs and concerns. This is particularly true for the crisis-ridden countries that have shown a remarkable capacity to generate citizens' groups striving to remedy some of the most severe consequences of the socio-economic crisis. Given the complexity of this issue, we advise policy-makers and administrations to establish consultative bodies and procedures which can enable experts and TSO-practitioners to identify potential unintended consequences in the various policy fields, to ponder trade-offs and to propose legislative solutions at key stages

in the formulation and implementation of policy.

**Recalibrate policy preferences and priorities towards a more proactive welfare state.**

Our interviewees have addressed the need to develop and improve public policies in the three issue-fields under analysis, namely unemployment, disability and refugees and migration. TSOs ask for a more efficient degree of support for families with disabled persons. They demand more proactive legislation for the social inclusion of refugees and immigrants, and they make claims for redistributive policies to combat poverty and inequality. These policy-field specific demands are not the object of this research summary. However, they are relevant in so far as they converge on the conviction that civic solidarity practices require a much more proactive and generalised level of public support in order to be effective in solving societal problems. Indeed, activists recurrently state that while their work is of utmost importance, they are cognizant of their contribution being one piece of a much larger puzzle. Service-oriented organisations add that their work salves, but does not resolve, the basic problems of unemployment and poverty, exclusion, discrimination and segregation. In view of the increasing severity of the problems related to the various crises (economic downturn and poverty, immigration and ethnic tension, populist mobilisations, etc.), there is concern that the TSOs' work might turn out to be as ineffective as tilting at windmills.

In this context, we see two broader approaches and orientations within the field of solidarity practices. On the one hand, we see a call for a more proactive welfare state. In specific terms, this means that representatives of TSOs demand more public funding for those organisations dealing with service provision in the three fields under analysis. In a sense, this translates into a call for more 'social investment', given the fact that TSOs

highlight the responsibility of the welfare state to promote and support their work. However, representatives also voiced a demand for the renaissance of a strongly supportive welfare state, as expressed by the Danish and French TSOs. Civic solidarity can only be effective if imbedded in a legal and institutional framework that grants citizens social rights and complies with their provisions. This call expands into demands for a more socially-committed state that guarantees greater equality, inclusion and integration.

On the other hand, several of our TSOs are engaged in alternative forms of organisation and problem-solving beyond the institutionalised welfare state. These activities involve alternative forms of production and consumption (e.g., food banks or social groceries, collective purchasing groups, repair cafés, free legal advice or medical services), which are often tied to political forms of contestation and protest. Many of these initiatives and groups see their main aim as promoting empowerment, self-initiative and dignity. They do not see their role as auxiliaries of the established welfare system or emergency relief groups reducing the burden of socio-economic hardship. Instead, they define themselves as instruments of social change, aiming to overcome the existing economic and state system. In this sense, their activities are directed towards the citizens themselves, and towards society at large in an attempt to unleash the creative potential of social, political and economic renewal. These initiatives and groups do not voice policy recommendations in the traditional sense because their aim is to transcend conventional forms of institutionalised governance and problem solving. However, on another level, they do translate into an overarching recommendation: public authorities should enable these kinds of 'social experiments' to develop and demonstrate their merit. They might indeed prove to be effective in empowering deprived groups and developing alternative forms of

social economy and self-managed governance beyond the ambit of small groups and local constituencies. Given the fact that most of these groups are local initiatives, it seems necessary that local authorities commit themselves to providing enough space for these civic ‘laboratories’, for instance, by granting logistical support, facilitating participation and engaging in deliberation and evaluation.

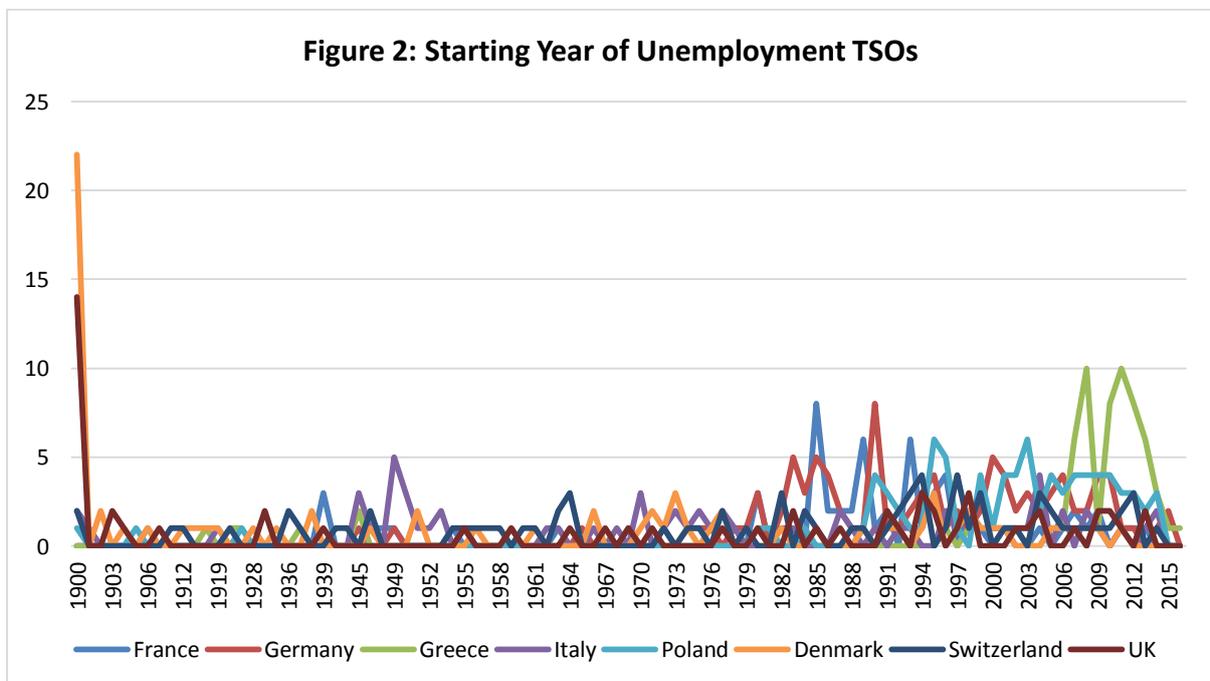
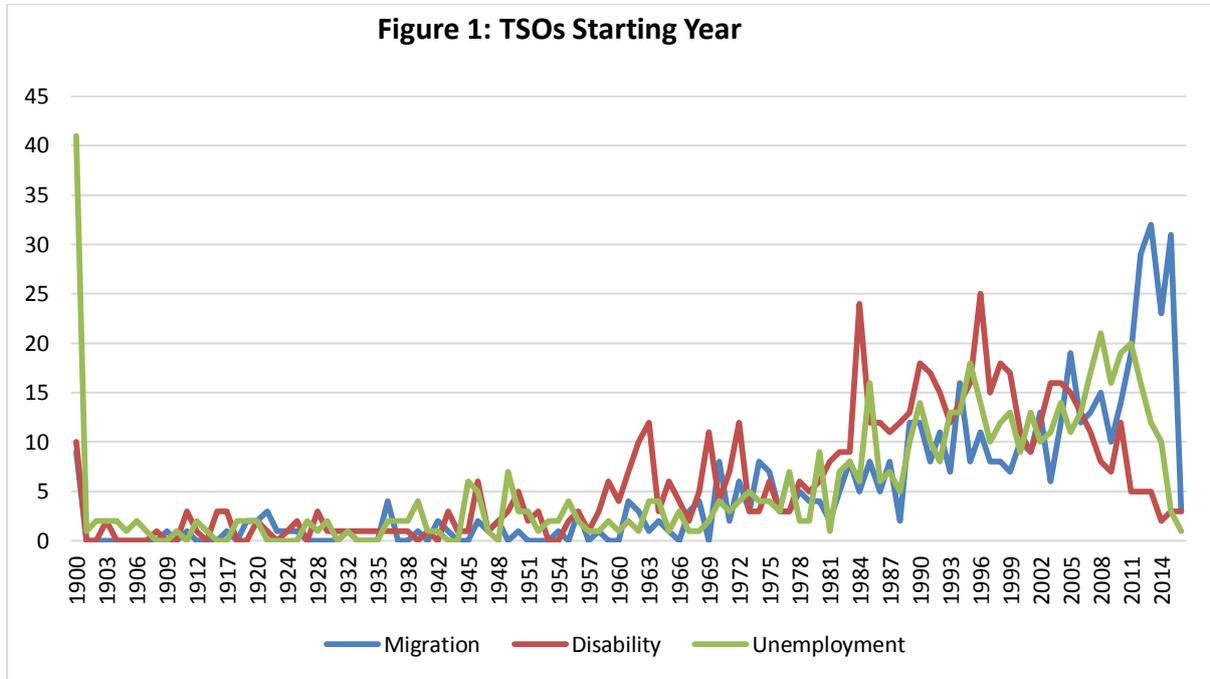
### **Strengthen the foundations of transnational solidarity.**

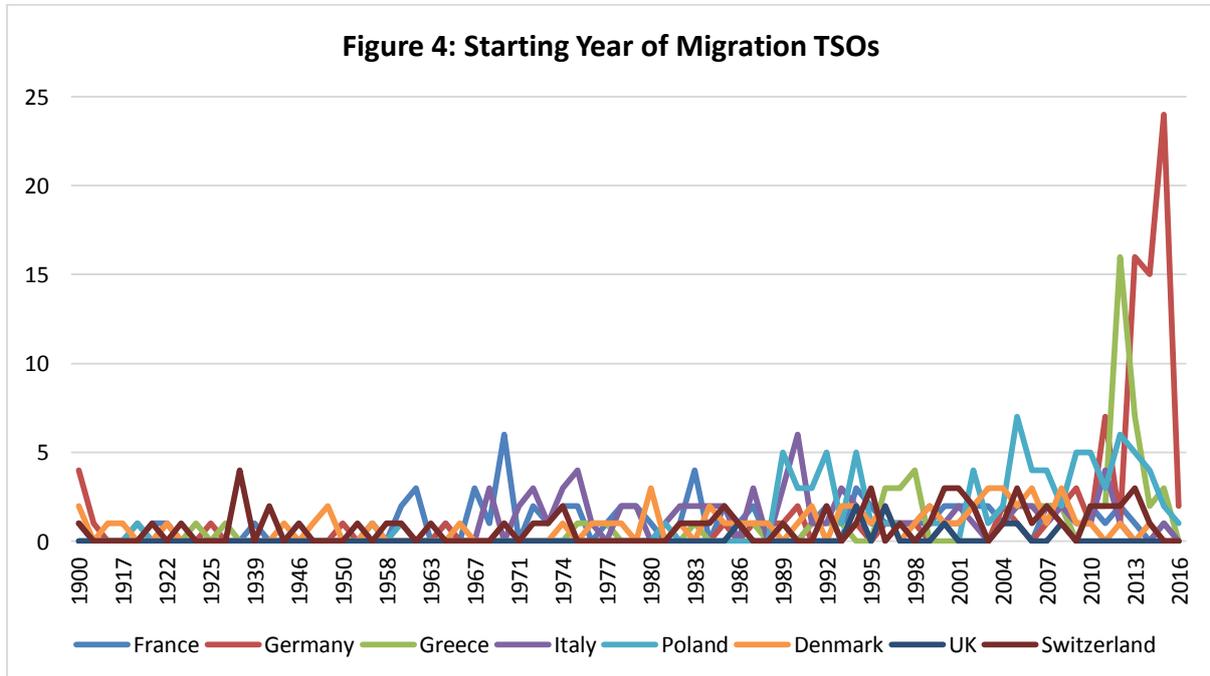
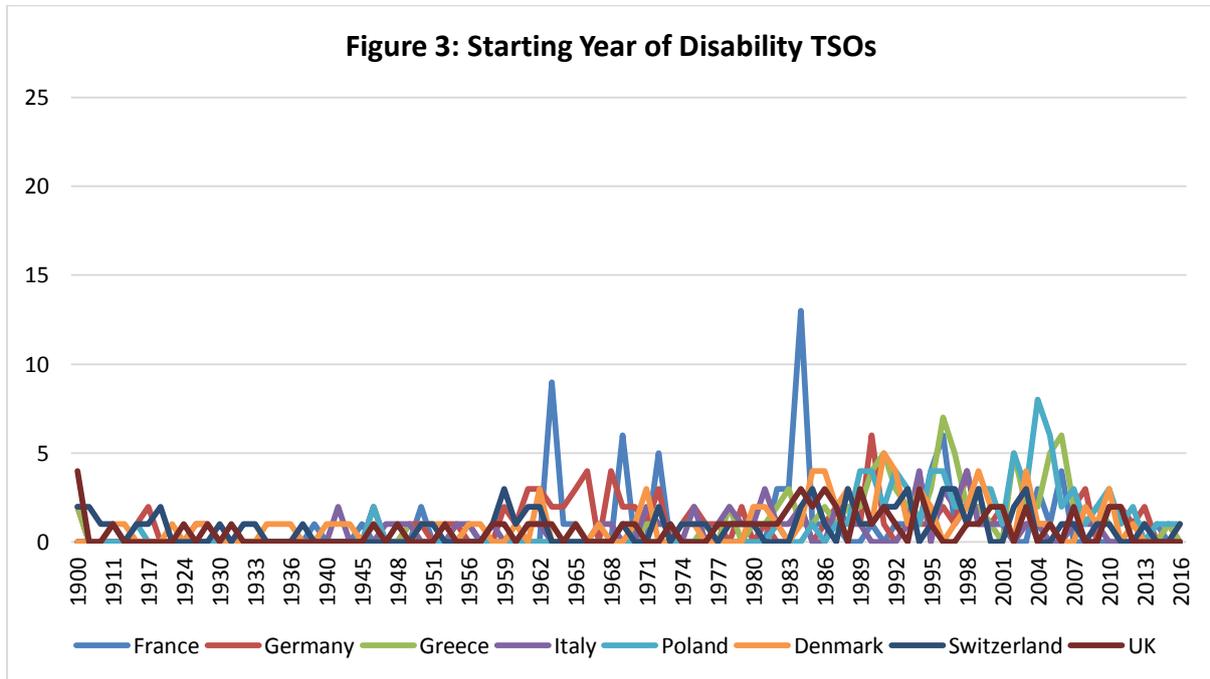
Our research analyses show that civil society is strongly and firmly committed to solving problems and hardships directly linked to the various crises affecting the European Union. The number of initiatives, groups and organisations is on the rise, and this applies also to the number of their activities and collaborations. The main focus of civic solidarity, however, is a local one (see Table 1). Cross-national and European solidarity is a priority only for a minority of TSOs. A truly European scope of activities is more diffused among TSOs with a higher proportion of transnational partners, and amongst TSOs with more Europeanised organisational structures. Still, the vast majority of TSOs explicitly emphasised the benefits of transnational cooperation. They value highly the advantages of getting together to have their voices heard in the public domain, to reinforce their legitimacy and to strengthen lobbying and policy negotiations. Moreover, transnational cooperation is regarded as important in order to exchange knowledge and experience, to foster learning processes and to enhance the discussion capacity in the field. Across all three fields, interviewees stated that it would be desirable to establish more transnational partnerships.

Yet, in practice, transnational cooperation often plays a rather marginal role. For many – particularly local – TSOs, it is difficult to reinforce this area because transnational cooperation is highly dependent on time and human resources. In fact, TSOs have to cope with two main challenges. On the one hand, they are faced with a very high workload concerning their core activities. As a consequence, they lack time and personnel for other activities. This is especially true for smaller and/or volunteer-based TSOs. On the other hand, and closely interlinked with the former, is the lack of financial resources. The current economic crisis has witnessed funding diminishment in various EU countries, with regard to both public financiers and private donors. For TSOs, this implies the need to focus their resources on their key tasks at the expense of transnational solidarity work. In other words, the crisis has weakened the potential for transnationality of some of our TSOs.

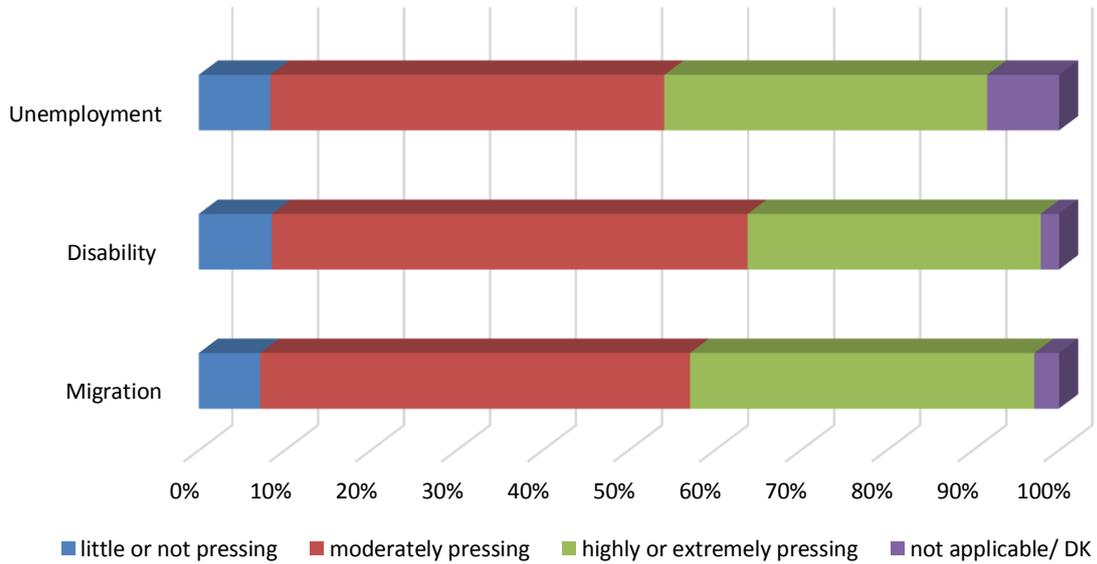
Against the backdrop of the current political and social climate of national retrenchment and growing right-wing populism, this is a concerning, if not dangerous trend. In light of this development, it would be advisable to refortify social investment and to provide the civil society sector with the necessary financial resources that are needed to maintain and reinforce transnational cooperation. Moreover, public institutions should intensify their efforts in assisting civil society organisations to establish more arenas of cross-national encounters and deliberations amongst local and national TSOs in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and practices.

## Annex: Figures and Tables

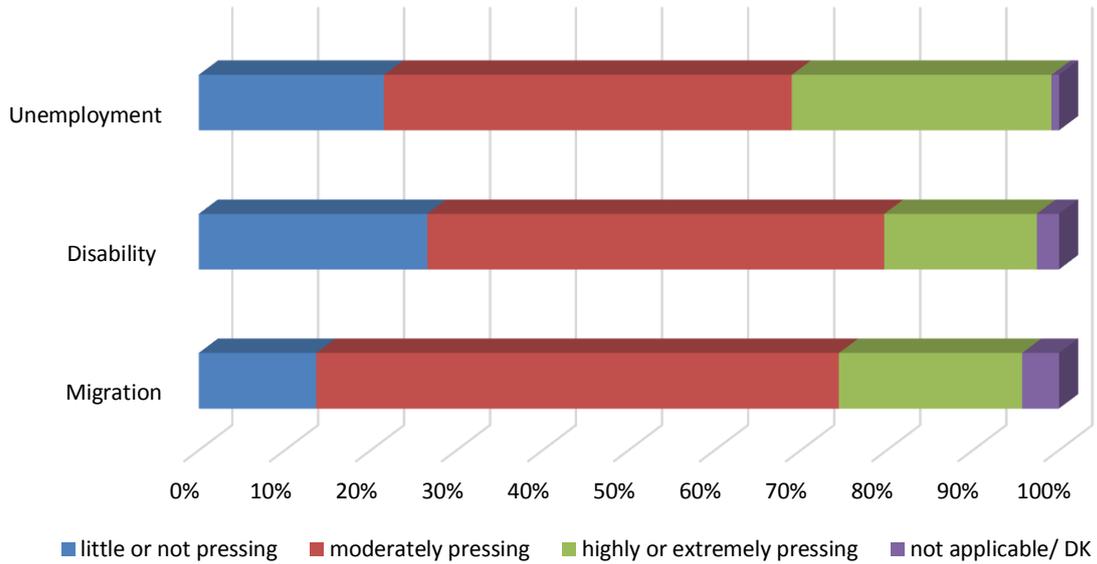




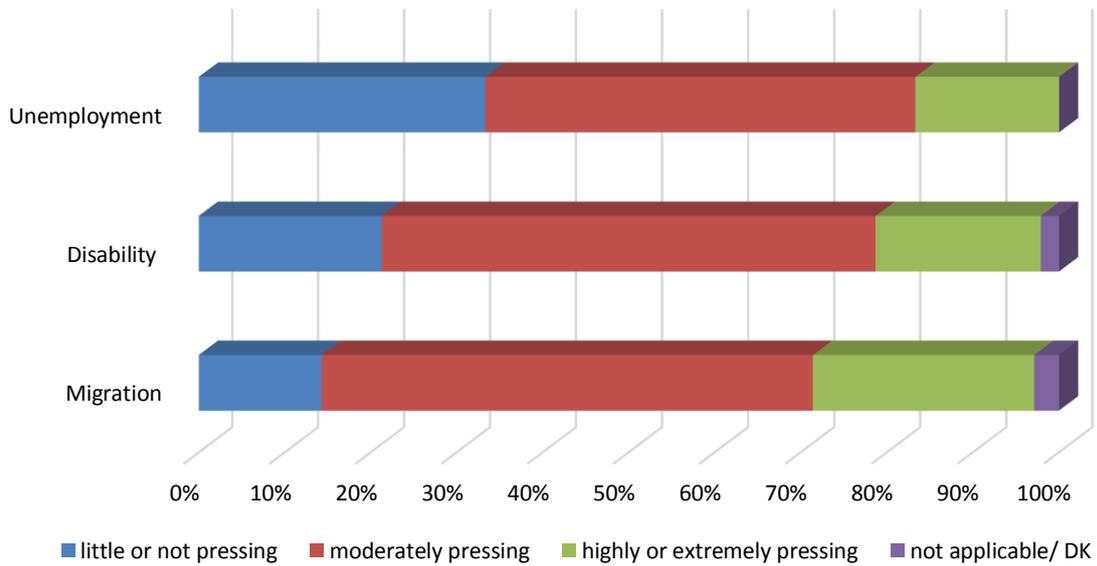
**Figure 5: Lack of funding or donations**



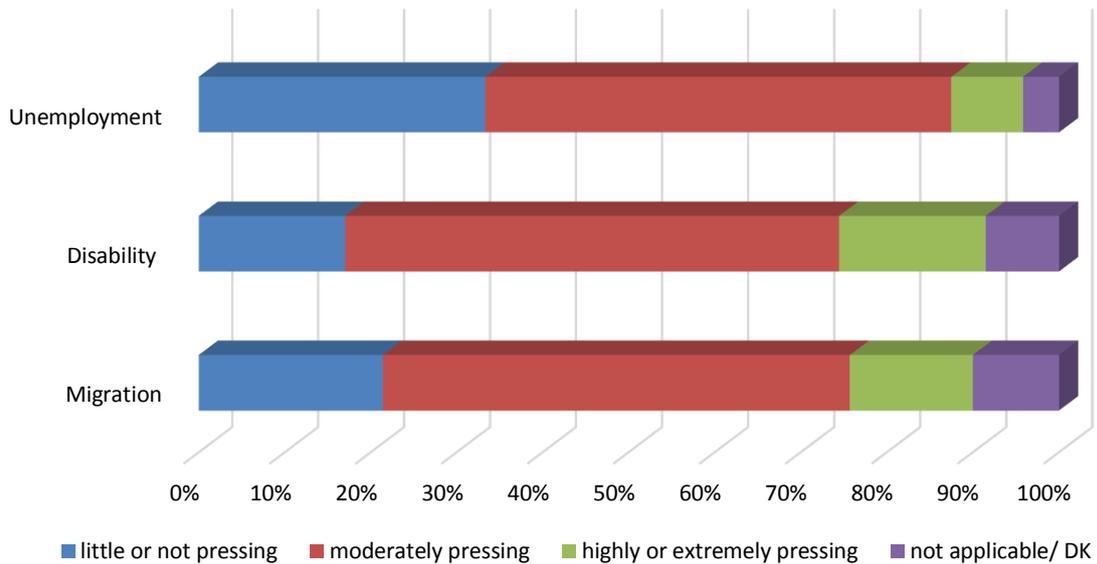
**Figure 6: Lack of material resources**



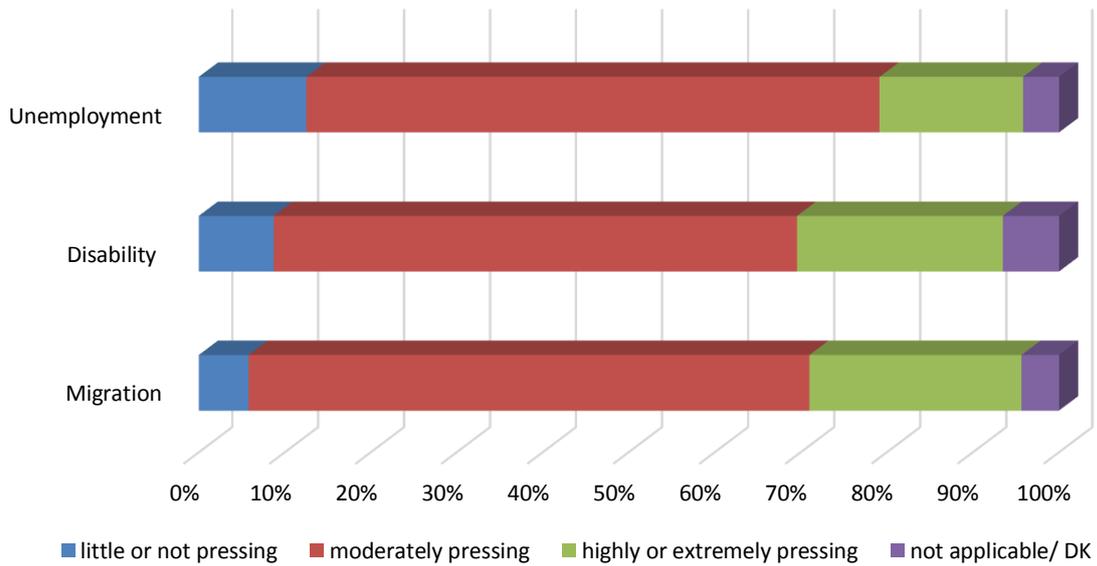
**Figure 7: Lack of personnel with skills or expert knowledge**



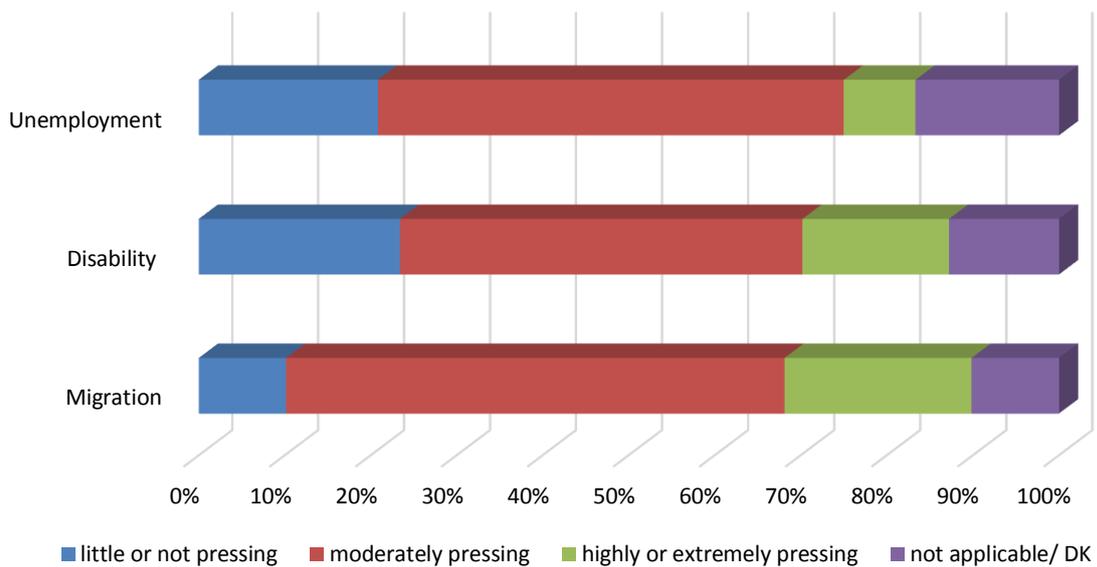
**Figure 8: Lack of volunteers or/and active members**



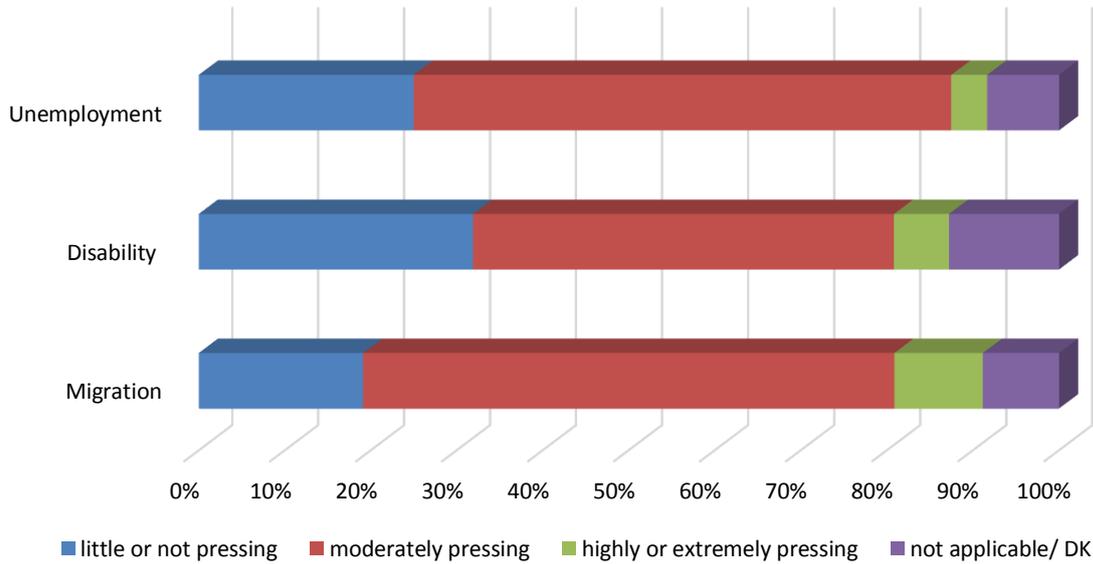
**Figure 9: Lack of support or cooperation from state agencies**



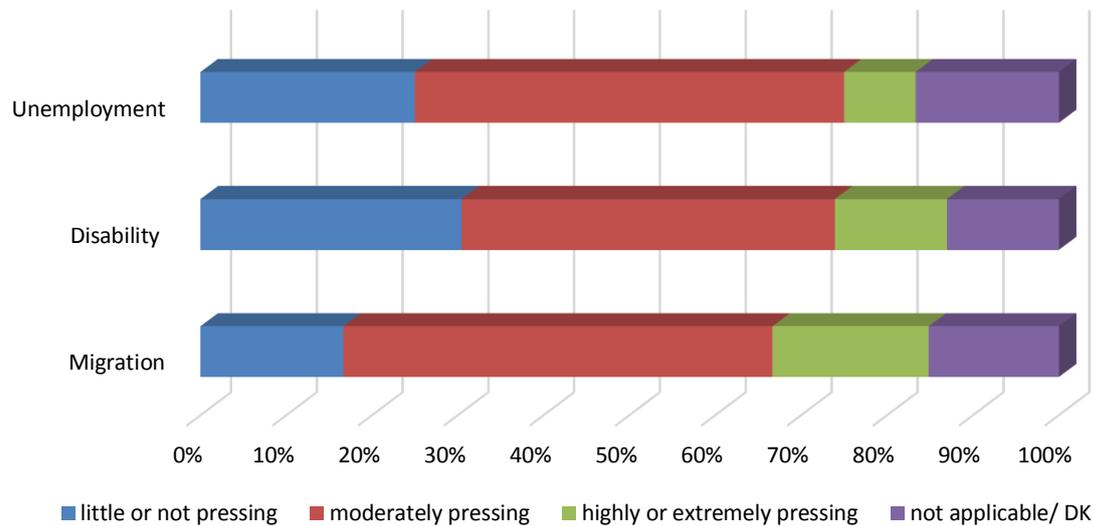
**Figure 10: Lack of support or cooperation from EU agencies**



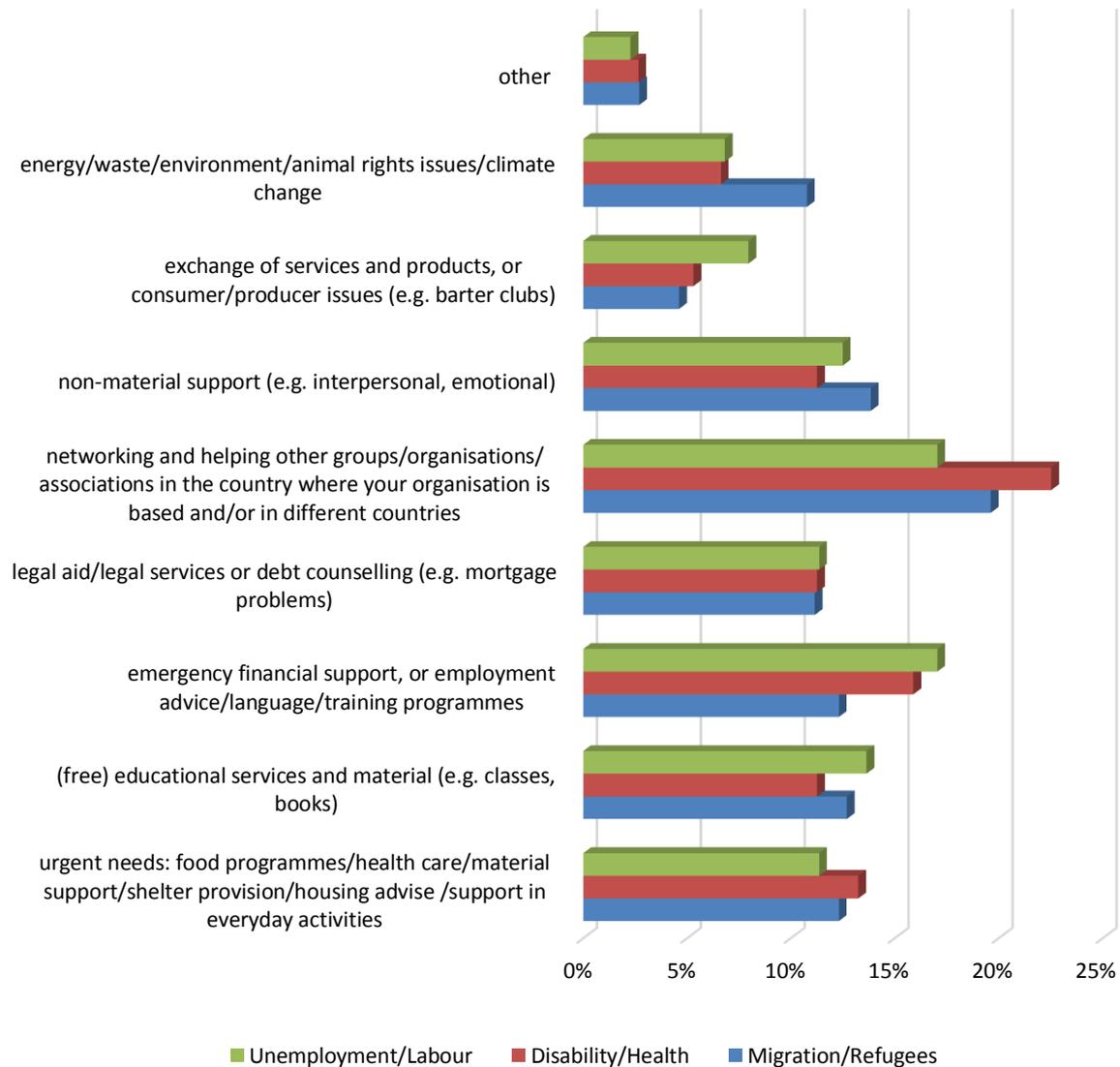
**Figure 11: Lack of support or cooperation from non-state organisations**



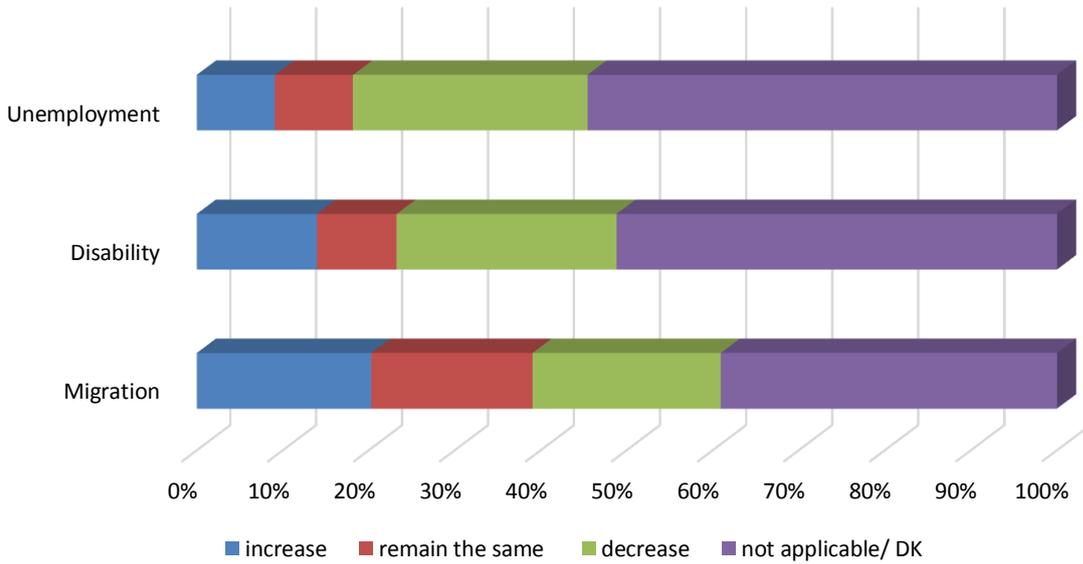
**Fig. 12: Lack of support or cooperation from international organisations**



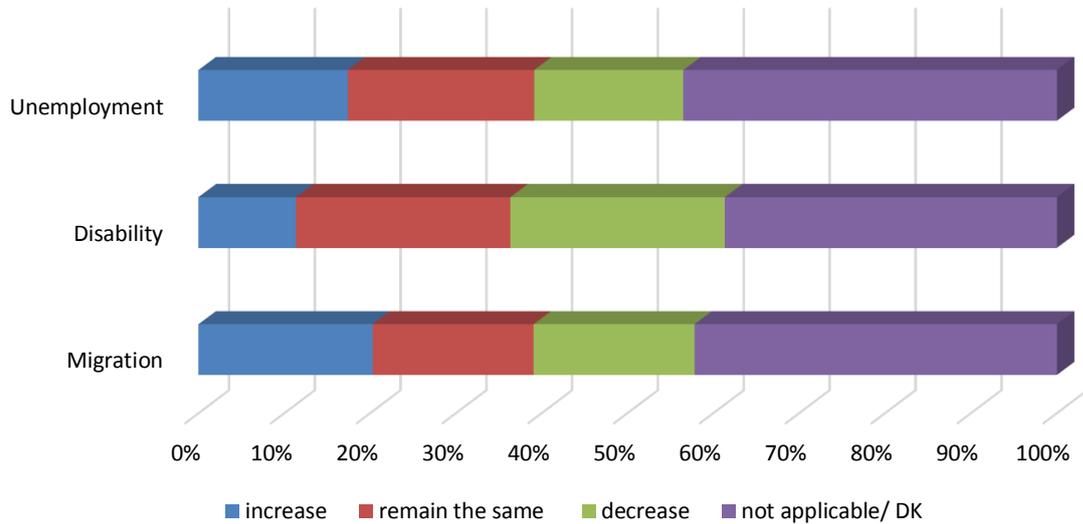
**Figure 13: TSOs experienced an increased demand since 2010**



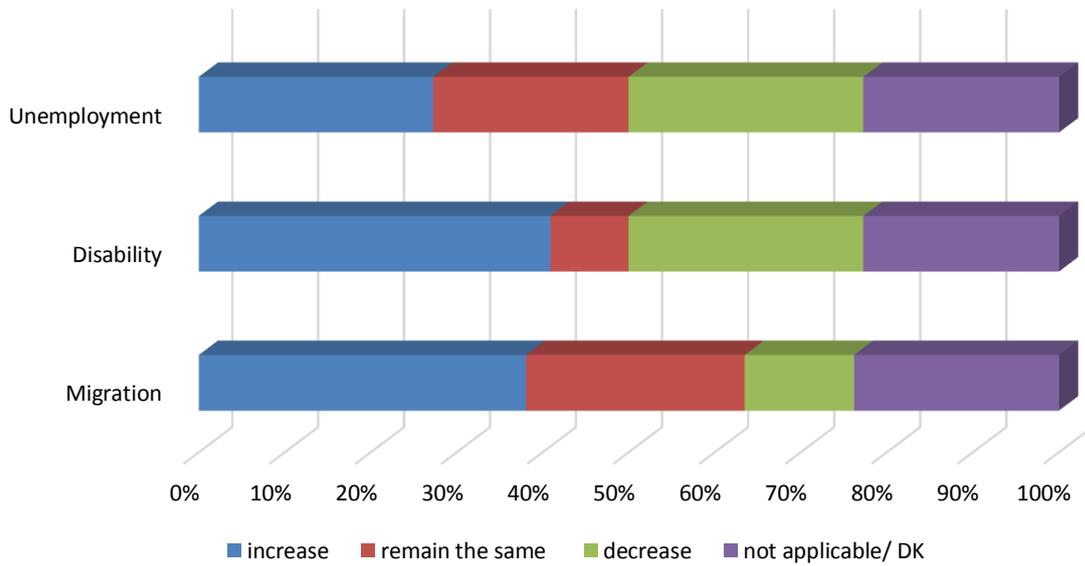
**Figure 14 : Changes in state funding since 2010**



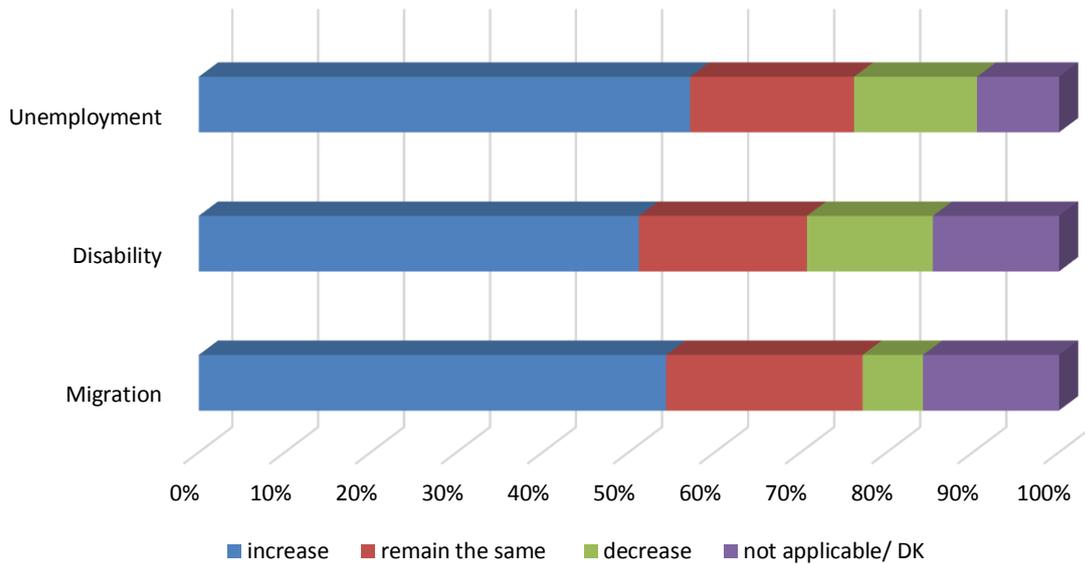
**Figure 15 : Changes in EU funding, or funding from other international agencies since 2010**



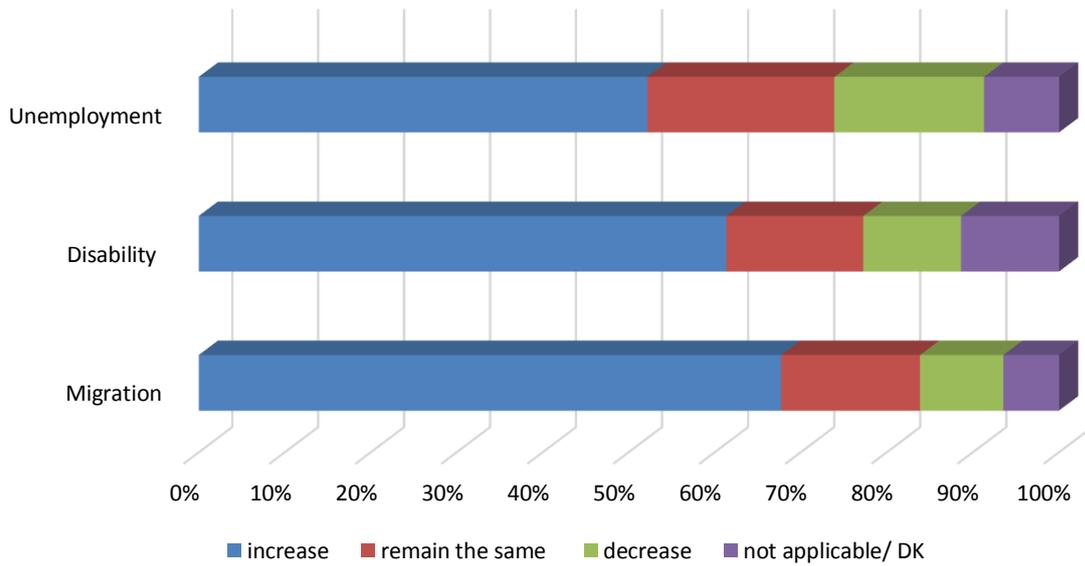
**Figure 16: Changes in non-state funding since 2010**



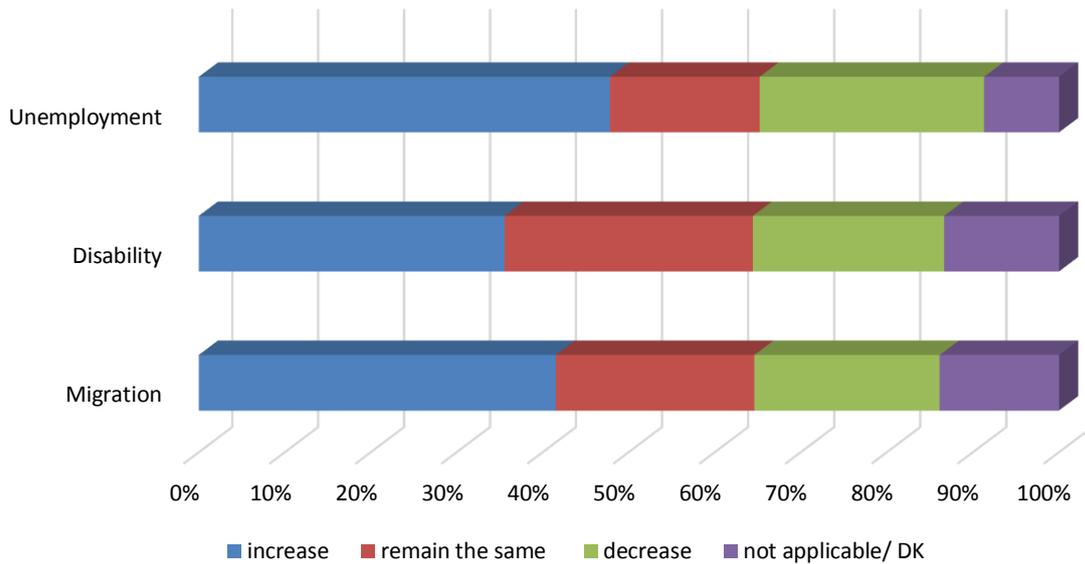
**Figure 17: Frequency of conducting main types of action**



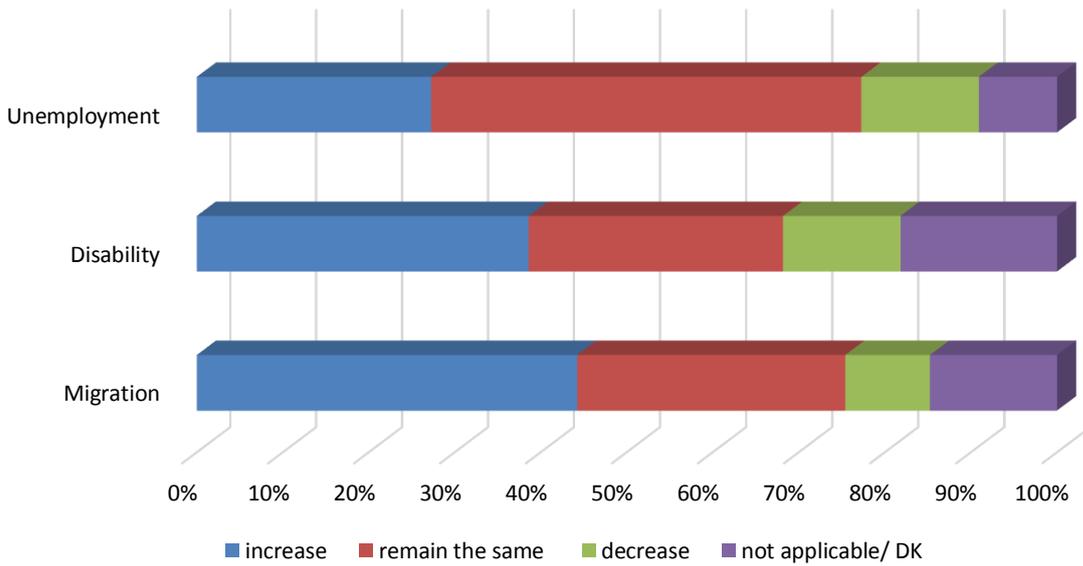
**Figure 18 : Number of beneficiaries or participants**



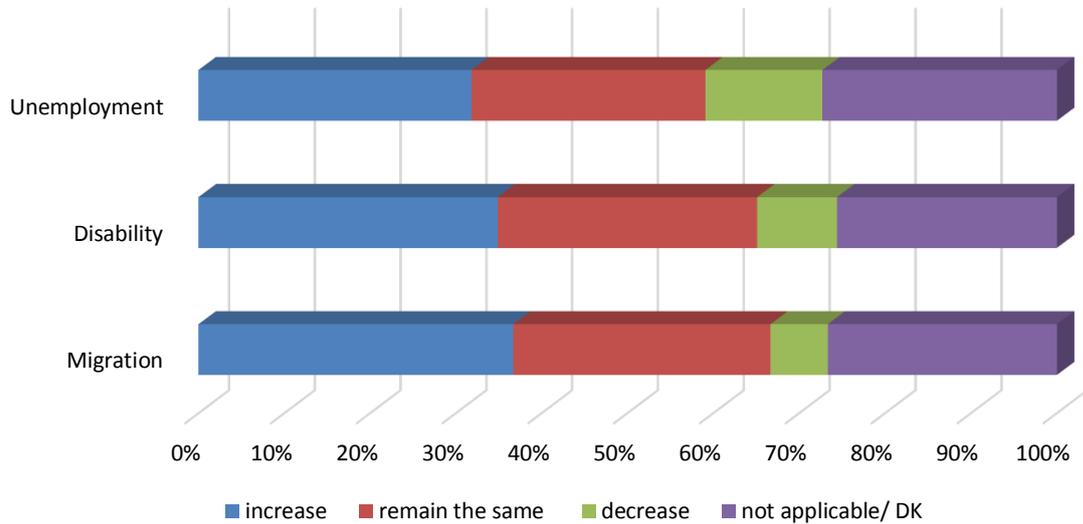
**Figure 19: Number of members or volunteers**



**Figure 20 : Involvement in policy and decision-making procedures**



**Figure 21 : Involvement in international policy and decision-making procedures**



**Table 1: Dimensions of transnational solidarity: selected levels (in %)**

<i>Dimensions</i>	by Country							
	FR	GER	GRE	IT	PL	DK	CH	UK
<b>Activities</b>								
local	21.6%	94.9%	84.2%	95.6%	36.6%	65.1%	82.6	96.7%
regional	19.6%	47.3%	55.9%	41.6%	53.4%	44.5%	77.2%	66.2%
national	45.2%	19.6%	48.5%	26.2%	40.6%	86.3%	29.3%	39.1%
European	2.3%	17.9%	7.4%	13.1%	17.4%	42.5%	3.3	2.7%
non-European	2.3%	1.7%	1.0%	14.4%	4.7%	24.3%	9.1%	2.7%
global	12.3%	10.8%	3.7%	4.4%	5.0%	31.2%	11.9%	5.0%
<b>Beneficiaries</b>								
local	2.0%	94.6%	80.1%	98.4%	35.2%	64.4%	80.8%	96.0%
regional	10.3%	44.6%	60.3%	42.8%	52.0%	43.1%	78.3%	65.6%
national	45.5%	18.2%	51.5%	26.2%	43.3%	85.3%	34.1%	38.8%
European	1.0%	14.9%	5.4%	5.6%	12.7%	14.0%	4.4%	2.3%
Non-European	6.6%	2.0%	5.4%	10.0%	11.1%	26.4%	11.9%	3.3%
global	21.9%	9.1%	8.4	10.9%	7.7%	19.5%	15.9%	4.7%
<b>Value frame</b>								
transnational/global	17.8%	46.3%	54.6%	43.1%	49.8%	20.5%	24.9%	53.1%