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# Transnational welfare within and beyond the nation-state: civil society responses to the migration crisis in Greece

Isabel Shutes <sup>a</sup> and Armine Ishkanian <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK; <sup>b</sup>Department of Social Policy and International Inequalities Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

## ABSTRACT

This article advances understanding of how transnational welfare has emerged in practice within and in relation to the nation-state framework, focusing on the responses of civil society actors to the European migration crisis in Greece. It draws on in-depth interviews with different types of civil society actors engaged in activities in Greece during and since the 2015 period of the migration crisis, including national and international NGOs, local solidarity groups, and international volunteers. The findings point to the ways in which transnational welfare through civil society actions arose in relation to the perceived crisis of the national state and inter-state system, in failing to address the needs of migrants and refugees but also Greek residents. However, transnational welfare also emerged through forms of collective action and identification that sought to counter the social boundaries of nation-state systems in relation to migration and welfare. It is argued that analyses of transnational welfare require attention to both those dimensions – that is, how civil society actions forge new meanings and ways of ‘doing’ welfare that may be *trans*-national in contesting the boundaries of nation-state systems, but also the limits to those actions in relation to the state.

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## Introduction

The movement of people across nation-state borders has brought about increasing attention to the transnational dimensions of welfare, including migrants’ strategies for social protection (Faist et al. 2015; Levitt et al. 2017). While transnational practices to meet the needs of people on the move have been conceptualised as encompassing a diversity of mobile and non-mobile actors (Levitt et al. 2017), including civil society, the situated experiences of those actors have been relatively underexplored. At the same time, in moving beyond a national to a transnational framing of welfare, there has been a tendency to focus on the *cross*-national with respect to connections across the territorial borders of one state and another. More limited analysis has centred on the ways in which transnational principles, activities and relationships in addressing social needs emerge within and in relation to the nation-state framework.

**CONTACT** Isabel Shutes  [i.h.shutes@lse.ac.uk](mailto:i.h.shutes@lse.ac.uk)

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This article develops an understanding of transnational welfare as forms of collective action and identification that potentially counter the boundaries of the nation-state framework. It draws on the findings of qualitative research on the responses of civil society to the so-called European migration crisis in Greece, involving in-depth interviews with people engaged in different types of civil society organisations and activities in Greece in this context, during and since the 2015 period of the crisis. These actors include national and international NGOs (INGOs), local solidarity groups, and involved Greek residents and people coming to Greece from other countries, not only people defined as migrants and refugees but also humanitarian workers and international volunteers. In the article, we adopt the term ‘migrants’ to refer to people whose mobility into Europe through Greece was severely restricted by state and inter-state immigration controls. This includes refugees and other migrant groups, recognising that the categorisation of the refugee/migrant is central to those controls (Allen et al. 2018; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Sigona 2018). Indeed, Greece became a site of the inequalities of mobility, including a ‘multitude of thousands of [civil society] newcomers mainly from the “West”’, whose mobility took place under contrasting conditions to migrants from the ‘East’ (Papataxiarchis 2016, 7).

The article proceeds as follows. First, we consider approaches to conceptualising and analysing transnational welfare in relation to migration, arguing for an approach that situates transnational action to address social needs with regard to the boundaries that nation-state systems in the realms of migration and welfare produce. Second, we discuss the context of the migration crisis and civil society action in Greece, and then examine the ways in which transnational relationships and practices took shape with reference to the situated experiences of different civil society actors. The analysis addresses, first, the identities, motivations and relationships between INGOs, local actors and international volunteers; second, the ways in which civil society actions were shaped by and sought to counter state and inter-state bordering practices in relation to mobility and social welfare; and third, how those actions emerged in relation to the absence of the state in meeting the needs of different social groups, migrants and Greek residents, within Greece. We argue that analyses of transnational welfare require attention to those practices within and in relation to the nation-state framework – that is, how civil society actions forge new meanings and ways of ‘doing’ welfare that may be *trans*-national in contesting the boundaries of nation-state systems, but also the limits to those actions in relation to the state.

## Migration and transnational welfare

Welfare, broadly defined, encompasses the level of resources to which people have access; the individual and collective activities people engage in to secure resources; as well as the wider social and institutional relationships through which the recognition of needs and the distribution of resources take place (Daly 2011; Dean 2015). Against the backdrop of a wide variety of research on migration and transnationalism, which addresses the connections between people and institutions across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec 1999), recent research has engaged with the transnational dimensions of migration and welfare. This includes attention to migrants’ cross-border strategies for social protection, focusing on the ways in which people actively seek to secure resources and

opportunities through mobility and other types of transnational activities (Faist et al. 2015). But while people actively seek a better life through mobility, they do so within structural contexts in which state policies exert considerable influence both on people's mobility and the wider organisation of welfare. Transnationalism in terms of migrants' cross-border activities is situated within the political enactment of national territorial boundaries by states alongside inner boundaries of citizenship and stratified rights (Waldinger 2017).

In advancing understanding of 'transnational social protection', Levitt et al draw attention to the question of 'when and how are people on the move protected and provided for outside the traditional framework of the nation-state' (Levitt et al. 2017, 3). Setting out a framework of transnational social protection, they refer to the 'resource environment' available to migrants, encompassing state, market and third sector sources of social protection alongside social networks, all of which may cross borders.<sup>1</sup> An individual may have limited access to state provisions in the country to which they move, but retain access to some state provisions in their country of origin; they may rely on the services of an NGO in the country they move to, while relying on other social ties to care for family members in the country of origin; their family members may also rely on provision via an NGO programme, with funding from a grant provided by the government of another country (ibid). These cross-border connections involve different types of 'mobile' and 'non-mobile' actors, including 'non-mobile actors who provide for and protect people who move transnationally; transnational actors who provide for and protect non-mobile individuals; and transnational actors who provide for and protect transnational individuals' (ibid, 6).

While the 'transnational' evidently involves connections across the territorial borders of nation-states, those relationships and practices also take shape within and in relation to the nation-state. As noted by Clarke (2005) with respect to analyses of globalisation that view global processes as external to nation-states, those 'processes, relationships and institutions are also *materialised* within the borders of nation-states' (409). Transnational policies and processes relating to migration and welfare, such as bi-lateral agreements between states regarding the rights and entitlements of their citizens, are not simply enacted across states: how they are implemented on the ground will shape transnational rights in practice. Likewise, forms of mobilisation may emerge at the local level based on the articulation of shared experiences and needs, which forge political identities that cross the boundaries of national identity and citizenship (Isin 2008; Anderson 2010).

While critiques of methodological nationalism have highlighted the limitations of a nation-state framework, in confining 'the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 578), states are key actors in transnational processes (ibid; Waldinger 2017; Faist 2018). At the same time, people's experiences of organising to meet needs within and across nation-state borders may forge transnational principles, identities, practices and relationships that counter the social boundaries of nation-state systems in relation to mobility and welfare. The term 'social boundaries' emphasises that borders are not simply territorial (Faist 2018, 19), creating social divisions between groups of people, e.g. in terms of their status, access to services, sense of identification and belonging. It is therefore important to examine how relationships and practices may be *trans*-national by contesting the boundaries of state systems.

With regards to state-civil society relations, the emergence of transnational civil society has been defined as including organisations which operate within the state system, such as international and national NGOs, which contract with state and inter-state agencies to deliver services and programmes, as well as associations and movements that involve direct action and protest, while within those groupings there is considerable diversity of actors (McIlwaine 2007). Civil society actors have often played a prominent role in relation to the welfare of migrants, through mobilisation on migrants' rights (Piper and Grugel 2015) and service provision: where access to state provision is restricted by immigration controls; where citizenship, immigration and asylum policies and programmes separate out particular groups, e.g. refugees, from citizens and other 'non-citizens'; and where state policies determine the 'illegality' of status and associated exclusion and detainment of particular groups. Concurrently, civil society activities, for example in the context of the sanctuary cities movement, have evoked transnational principles and practices of solidarity in opening local services to undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, in opposition to national immigration controls (Lundberg and Strange 2017). Civil society practices at different sites and scales can thus give rise to new understandings, identities and ways of addressing social needs that contest the national boundaries of states and citizenship.

With these issues in mind, in the following sections we draw on the findings of research on the responses of civil society actors to the migration crisis in Greece, to examine how transnational welfare takes shape both within and beyond the nation-state.

### **The migration 'crisis' and civil society in Greece**

The so-called migration crisis in Europe involved a rapid increase in the number of people crossing the Mediterranean into Greece in 2015, and moving onwards to other European countries. According to UNHCR figures, some 856,700 people arrived in Greece by boat that year, while many other people died at sea or were considered to be missing (UNHCR 2016). Over half (57%) of the arrivals in Greece were on the island of Lesbos (UNHCR 2015). The majority of people came from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, though also a wider range of countries (UNHCR 2016), while the journeys of people involved movement through different countries, not simply direct movements from areas of conflict (Crawley et al. 2017). Factors affecting onward movement into Greece/Europe involved a variety of social needs, including a lack of rights; limited access to employment; healthcare and education related needs; experiences of discrimination, harassment and safety concerns, indicating the often more complex interactions of the drivers of migration (ibid).

The response to these movements at the level of the EU and national governments, it is argued, reflected a political failure to collectively accommodate and address the needs and rights of migrants and refugees, evidence of the shortcomings of the Common European Asylum System (Crawley et al. 2017; Niemann and Zaun 2018). Pries (2018) describes this response as one of 'organised non-responsibility' in that national governments attempted to shirk responsibilities to refugee protection while criticising the failings of other states with reference to a need for a common frame of action. The framing of these movements into Europe as a 'crisis', Ansems de Vries, Carrera, and Guild (2016) argue, shaped the nature of the EU response as one of emergency and border security that

required extraordinary and exceptional measures, as opposed to protecting the needs of people in search of international protection or better opportunities.

That response included the reinforcement of national borders, with the closure of borders between Greece and the Western Balkan countries and the reinstatement of national borders between other EU countries, to stop onwards migration from Greece (Guiraudon 2018). ‘Emergency measures’ were adopted by the EU Council in 2015 and 2016, with funds for humanitarian assistance in Greece channelled through approved humanitarian partner organisations, including UNHCR and INGOs (European Commission 2018). Internal borders within Greece were also, in effect, established. Refugee camps on the Greek islands were identified as ‘hotspots’, where asylum applications were registered and processed by EU agencies alongside the Greek authorities (European Commission 2015), with movement to the mainland restricted. While the hotspots were intended to contribute to a plan to relocate 160,000 refugees from Greece and Italy to other EU countries, the numbers actually relocated were much more limited (European Commission 2017). With the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016, processes were also established to deport those whose asylum applications were considered inadmissible from the islands to Turkey, and to restrict further migration into Greece.

Within this context, a diversity of civil society activities emerged to address the needs of migrants contained in Greece. Civil society actors included INGOs who, alongside inter-governmental agencies such as UNHCR, received EU funds to deliver humanitarian aid to refugees. At the same time, a range of activities took shape outside the humanitarian system, through the actions of people within Greece as well as people coming to Greece from countries across Europe and beyond. Indeed, the scale and diversity of civil society actors – described as ‘protection providers’, ‘professional and volunteer humanitarians’, and ‘ordinary people’ – was seen to be exceptional (Papataxiarchis 2016; Sandri 2018; Stevens and Dimitriadi 2019). Initiatives also emerged elsewhere in Europe (Kanellopoulos et al. 2020), and in sites where government support was lacking (Sandri 2018), including the provision of food, healthcare and education, as well as wider protest by migrants and others against the actions of governments (Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016).

Prior to 2015, civil society had more generally been playing an increasing role in addressing social needs in Greece in the context of the economic crisis, including wide-scale protest against austerity measures and solidarity initiatives providing support to local communities (Cabot 2016; Simiti 2017; Ishkanian and Glasius 2018). These measures involved a ‘bailout’ loan from the International Monetary Fund/European Commission/European Central Bank to the Greek government and accompanying reforms, with dramatic cuts in public funding and provision, and dramatic increases in levels of poverty (see Papadopoulos and Roumpakis 2012). Within this pre-2015 context, some NGOs in Greece already providing support to migrants, among other activities, extended their provision to wider social groups impacted by the economic crisis and cuts to social provision (Skleparis 2015). In spite of declining state funding available to NGOs, this expansion was possible for some through private resources, including donations and sponsors, supported through transnational connections with funding sources in other countries (Skleparis 2015).

In the post 2015 context, civil society actors working to support migrants have been identified as predominantly informal groups (Kousis et al. 2020), whose expansion was

likely shaped both by the lack of state funding available to civil society organisations but also the rise of grassroots solidarity initiatives in 2015 to address the urgent needs of new arrivals and the limits to the Greek state authorities' response (Kalogeraki 2020). Lahusen et al. (2018) examine transnational civil society organisations during the migration crisis, based on a definition of 'transnational' that includes organisations with one of more of the following dimensions: cross-national organisational, staff/volunteer or funding structures; actions in more than one country; beneficiaries from more than one country. In analysing the websites of 297 organisations in Greece, including both formal NGOs and more informal solidarity groups, they find that a large share explicitly refer to values of transnational solidarity and also collaboration with partners in other countries. However, most are active mainly at the local and/or national level rather than across national borders.

Below, we examine the experiences of those actors as regards how transnational relationships and practices materialised *within* Greece, and in relation to state and inter-state actions and inactions towards the needs of migrants and wider social groups.

## Data and methods

The research comprised in-depth interviews with civil society actors who had been involved in activities in Greece during and since the 2015 period of the migration crisis.<sup>2</sup> An initial mapping exercise was carried out to identify different types of civil society groups in this context. From this, a purposive sampling approach was adopted to select actors from across the different groupings in terms of size and scale (including international and national NGOs and more locally organised solidarity groups); formal/informal (registered NGOs and informally organised groups); organisations established in Greece and other countries; and those that had been involved in supporting migrants on the islands and on the mainland of Greece. These selection criteria allowed for a diversity of civil society organisational structures, scale of activities, and potentially different relations with the state and other actors at the local/national/international levels to be represented in the sample.

From across the selected organisations and groups, interviewees were selected to include people working as paid staff, volunteers/solidarians<sup>3</sup>; those with experience of working outside and/or inside Greece; those working within Greece before as well as those who had come to Greece in response to the 2015 events. As shown in Table 1, the sample included 26 participants.<sup>4</sup> With respect to gender, 16 were women/10 men. Regarding nationality/country of origin, the majority were Greek nationals (17); international volunteers were all nationals of other European (6) or North American (2) countries. While the categorisations of these actors seemingly locate them as

**Table 1.** Civil society actors in Greece: interviewees.

Civil society group	Number of interviewees
International NGO (INGO)	9
Greek/local NGO (NGO)	5
Greek/local solidarity group	4
International volunteer	8
Total	26



transnational/national/local in terms of the scale and sites of their organisational activities, our analysis sought to examine the transnational dimensions of identities, relationships and practices that emerged through interviewees' experiences within a particular context – revealing more complex interconnections between the local/transnational (discussed in the following section). This contrasts to a multi-sited approach, where the focus has been on interviewing migrants in countries of destination and members of their families/social networks in countries of origin (e.g. Barglowski, Bilecen, and Amelina 2015).

In-depth interviews were carried out with the 26 participants (in English or Greek) between 2017–2019 in Athens and Lesbos, and in London, allowing participants to reflect on the development of activities and changes since the 2015 period.

Interviewees and their respective organisations had been involved in a range of activities to address the needs of migrants, including search and rescue operations to assist people arriving by sea; the distribution of clothing, sleeping bags and food; accommodation outside the refugee camps; medical and mental health services; educational activities and language classes for children and adults; work-related activities; daycentres providing a variety of services; and legal assistance with asylum and immigration processes and access to social rights, such as housing. Some of the organisations had been involved in providing services within the refugee camps on the islands (the hotspots), while others worked solely outside the camps.

The above activities were evident across the different types of organisations. However, the funding of these organisations and their activities varied. In the case of the INGOs, all were partly resourced through funding from headquarters elsewhere, and most also received EU funding (via the emergency measures for humanitarian assistance in Greece). In the case of national NGOs, similarly, some had access to EU funds, with all receiving private funding from foundations in Greece or foundations and refugee NGOs in other European countries. Limited public resources in Greece included accommodation sites provided through Greek local authorities. In the case of local solidarity groups, sources of funding were more informal and not associated with either state or NGO systems, including online crowd-funding and other private donations. At the time of interview, many NGOs were going through a shift in their funding sources as EU 'emergency' funding was coming to an end, with the management of the hotspots shifting to the Greek government authorities, and new EU sources of funding being directed towards 'integration' or 'maintenance' activities.

The analysis below reflects on the above institutional and resource mix as regards the transnational relationships and practices that emerged in this context. Pseudonyms are used for research participants.

### **Transnationalism from inside and out: INGOs, local actors and international volunteers**

Civil society activity comprised different scales of action, including the response of INGOs within a system of humanitarian assistance; forms of mobilisation that emerged within Greece; and the participation of international volunteers in initiatives in Greece.

Interviewees working with INGOs, all of whom except one were Greek nationals, defined themselves as international humanitarian workers, whose actions were shaped



by the principles and protocols of humanitarian aid in different country contexts, previously outside Europe. Some had returned to Greece to work on INGO operations concerning the migration crisis; others had returned for family or holiday related reasons and subsequently stayed, drawing upon both their transnational professional experience and national identities in conveying motivations for working in Greece as the migration crisis evolved.

[It was] also a sense of duty. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to work in Greece ... there are not many Greeks who have experience of this kind of crisis to respond. I mean, there are many people who are willing and they have a good heart, but obviously that is not enough, so I thought it is important to bring more expertise. (Andreas, INGO)

I came back from Brussels because I wanted to be part of the effort. This is being part of Greek history, even world history. I know many of my friends who were also working abroad returned to Greece to be part of the effort. (Ionna, INGO)

More informal spaces in which transnational principles and practices emerged were located by interviewees in relation to the self-organisation of people within Greece – involving migrants who were mobile in moving across nation-state borders, but also local actors who mobilised from within in addressing social needs. Some interviewees had been involved in activities that had developed prior to the 2015 period, including the creation of solidarity groups that sought to bring together long-term local residents and migrants.

In 2012, we started to connect all of the different groups and initiatives and NGOs on the island, the Church as well, Red Cross, all that we had on the island, including rescue teams, to make a solidarity network to support the locals and the refugees as well. It was not divided, between locals and refugees, it was the same. (Nikola, solidarity group)

Others referred to the 2015 period and the local initiatives that emerged to address the needs of people arriving in cities such as Athens, as being the driving force behind the development of a wider social movement.

The starting point for me in regards to the migration crisis was Pedion tou Areos [a park in central Athens], where, with hundreds of refugees from Lesvos, a grassroots movement was born. A movement created by the refugees, because their presence there created the movement ... because suddenly in the middle of the city there were 300 people with 150 children without anything, without blankets, without food, without doctors, nothing. There, a grassroots movement began with some anarchists in its core who had the know-how of self-organising from the political squats and they helped a lot. There were also other people – especially people from Downtown who were close and it was also August – who said ‘let’s go give a hand’. It was highly local it had a local character. Street workers also came to help, the Greek Council for Refugees, doctors ... and this started getting bigger. (Xanthe, solidarity group)

While located at the local level, the collective actions of people within Greece in supporting migrant arrivals were perceived by all interviewees as powerful markers of solidarity along transnational lines. Those actions were contextualised in relation to the impact of the economic crisis and austerity measures, noting people’s willingness to assist ‘others’ in spite of their own needs. (We later explore the perceived shift in this willingness).

Solidarity was beyond expectations here and in other cities I believe ... nobody was expecting this, nobody [...] I had made a Facebook post asking for money and collected 1000 from

strangers. In the midst of the financial crisis, from people who don't know you. (Xanthe, solidarity group)

Indeed, the informal actions of people within Greece to assist migrants were perceived as a direct response to the impact of austerity on their own humanity.

There were so many grassroots initiatives that popped up, not all of them useful, not all of them efficient, not all of them professional, whatever. But people felt that they need to do something for something that was not their daily reality. But this was helping them feel better, feel more humane because they were losing, over the past few years, their basic humanity. Their dignity. (Sofia, INGO)

Civil society actions also connected with people from outside Greece through the participation of international volunteers in initiatives within Greece and fundraising in other countries. Interviewees included people from other European and North American countries who had moved to Greece to provide assistance, some with specific skills e.g. as lawyers, NGO workers, lifeguards, teachers. Motivations for doing so were framed by international volunteers in terms of a sense of duty to act in response to media images:

If you remember, Aylan Kurdi drowned in September ... I have a friend who watched the TV showing these images they said we must go. That is how we started. (Claudio)

I felt a really strong sense of moral obligation to play an active role in it and not just watch it on TV. (Mathew)

A sense of European identity and the close proximity of the events within Europe were also referred to in terms of the identification of volunteers from other European countries, while one interviewee referred to the history of his family as Jewish refugees from Germany. International volunteers also spoke of collective action among people in Greece as a source of inspiration and motivation for them to stay, for longer than initially envisaged, and develop initiatives, including formalising activities through establishing NGOs. At the same time, the actions and inactions of the Greek state authorities and inter-governmental agencies (UNHCR) had prompted people to stay to provide relevant assistance that was lacking, including reliable information and legal assistance, and education for children and young adults in the camps on the islands, excluded from access to mainstream schools.

This was driven a lot by Greeks ... And I worked all throughout Greece, and I remember that winter, they make 5 euros an hour, but these people would be in the clothes warehouse 10 h a day, still sorting clothes, sorting things ... and then they would drive all the way to Idomeni [near the northern border] in the middle of the night to make sure that somebody had a sleeping bag. And this really inspired me, I think it inspired a lot of groups to stay and to do things. Then I think it all came back on UNHCR because they weren't doing this. There is a lot of anger against UNHCR. (Elizabeth)

Relationships with international volunteers and solidarity networks outside Greece were seen by some local solidarity groups as a principal resource, in terms of fundraising and supporting local initiatives. However, the transience of international volunteers also created challenges, as did individual preferences for assisting with particular activities and not others. The unrestricted movement of the international volunteer in and out and within Greece (unlike the 'migrant') was also seen to be problematic where there was a lack of understanding of the local context regarding the impact of the economic

crisis on people in Greece. The latter was seen as indicative of a lack of transnational solidarity.

[This project] is one of the best examples in the sense where you have foreign and local working together, and Greeks coming from Athens are working here for a long time, and it is mixed. And there are other places like this around the country, but I think that there has to be more focus on where we are ... We are in Europe so it is very easy to travel to another country, and there are people here who have been here for a year or year and half and they have absolutely no idea what is going on with the economic crisis and they don't give a shit! They don't know and they don't care and they don't show solidarity. (Zena, Greek solidarian)

### Working within and countering state bordering practices

Civil society actions took shape in relation to the bordering practices of states – practices taking place from within as well as across the territorial borders of the nation-state. Interviewees that were active prior to and during the 2015 period referred to the ways in which, with the closing of Greece's external border to the North and the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, the environment had shifted from supporting people on the move, in transit through Greece to other European countries, to supporting people who were 'stuck here'. Many of the activities that interviewees referred to developed in relation to the 'hotspots' on the islands. The camps were viewed as spaces of containment, creating a border between migrants on the islands and the mainland; a border between migrants and residents on the islands; and also a border between people in the camps and organisations and volunteers not permitted entry. NGOs faced a tension between working within the camps in order to provide assistance to migrants, while at the same time contesting the containment of people in camps and their separation from public space and services.

We believe the camps should be closed and evacuated, all of them. Like most NGOs, at the same time, we have been providing services in the camps while they exist because the population has needs, but our main policy target is to close them down. It doesn't make sense, it is a farce to have the camps, it is 30,000 people. [...] They can move people to apartments, hotels, somewhere in the urban context, there is no need to have camps right now. (Rena, NGO)

The camps were described not simply as spaces of containment but of inadequate conditions in which the basic needs of people were not met, including the inadequate supply of food, clean drinking water, shower facilities, security and privacy, as well as a lack of information on legal status and rights. Following the EU-Turkey Statement, one INGO had withdrawn from working within the camps in protest towards that agreement, while still providing services outside the camps. Concurrently, the camps created boundaries of access for organisations and people from outside – between approved NGOs permitted access and those that were refused entry. This was seen by respondents as a way of restricting civil society actions to support migrants in the camp and protest against the conditions in which people were living.

Then when they put people in the camps, they forbid anyone to have access to the camps. Like if you go to Lesbos now, they won't even give you permission to get in. And it is so difficult to go to Moria or to Kara Tepe, to the camps [on Lesbos]. But it is totally illegal

because these camps, according to the laws, must be open reception centres for refugees. And when it is open no one can legally forbid you from going inside ... They decided on such kind of things to limit access of people to these places. (Darius, solidarity group)

Those refused entry had, however, found ways of contesting these boundaries, by providing services in the immediate area outside the camps, and also by entering without permission.

When [one of our] lawyers was denied access, she went and bought a card table and she printed out little signs saying 'free lawyer' and she just sat there next to the entrance for three weeks, and that's one thing that we do. When we've had to, I've given the OK to jump the fence, but that's usually for like when two individuals died from the gas explosion and there was no response from management about fire safety [...] I often don't throw down everything, because I have to be sustainable, but I went on Facebook and I asked a group of people to come with me into Moria, to jump the fence. I remember that during the course of those few weeks we removed something like three dozen bad canisters. (Elizabeth, international volunteer)

Outside the camps, organisations had pursued other initiatives that sought to counter processes of containment and division. These included the provision of housing within urban areas using private or publicly owned buildings or land, set up by solidarity groups involving local actors, migrants and international volunteers. Some initiatives also distributed resources to both migrants and other local residents, so as not to be perceived as solely benefiting migrants. This included the distribution of resources by some INGOs to local organisations providing services to Greek residents – services that were faced with the challenges of meeting the expanding needs of people affected by the economic crisis and austerity measures. For INGOs, assisting organisations in Greece that were supporting local residents was seen as important in connecting international organisations and the scale of their resources to the local context in which they were working.

we have been working with local institutions, like most recently in Lesbos with a shelter for elderly Greeks. This is completely different to our programmes and we've been donating wheelchairs to institutions ... we have donated more than half a million Euro worth of equipment to local institutions. During the winter all the big national NGOs that deal with homeless people in Athens, they got thousands of blankets from us. This winter was very cold.[...] And that is what I mean by solidarity [...] What is very tricky is when you are international and have lots of resources and have international staff and get institutional money. It is important to remain connected with the grassroots movements. (Andreas, INGO)

National NGOs had also developed services that intentionally connected migrants and Greek residents in addressing social needs. Providing 'open door' services included solidarity centres in the cities, which provided welfare support in one place for all groups. This was seen as important in recognising the needs of Greek people affected by austerity measures alongside those of migrants. Not being seen as solely serving the needs of migrants through a policy of 'open doors' – as opposed to separated provision – was viewed as a means to maintaining the support of the wider population.

One of the main issues NGOs have right now is that we are being targeted as providing only help to refugees and not for Greeks, for example, that have been hit by the financial crisis. For a society that does not know distinctions of how funds are used, this is a very valid

argument. So, we are trying as much as we can to maintain this balance by also funding activities and services for the general population. (Rena, Greek NGO)

Those relationships were seen by interviewees within local solidarity groups as integral to developing a wider social movement that connected the politics of austerity to the migration crisis regarding the impacts on people (Darius, solidarity group). Developing other activities, such as local theatre performances, that involved the participation of different groups – ‘refugees, locals, internationals, and solidarity people’ – were also seen as important to countering hostilities towards migrants (Nikola, solidarity group).

As discussed in the following section, at the time of interview there was, however, a concern that these transnational connections between different social groups were now increasingly under strain in the absence of adequate state action to address the needs of people.

### Transnational action in the absence of the state

Transnational relationships and actions were framed by the perceived absence of the state as coordinator and provider in meeting social needs. Indeed, the actions of ‘ordinary citizens’ from within and outside Greece were considered to be a response to the limits to national government and inter-governmental action: ‘we are the civil response to a political failure’ (Claudio, international volunteer).

While some participants emphasised working outside the state system in the sense of contesting state actions towards migration, conversely, many interviewees emphasised the role and responsibility of the state in addressing the needs of people, migrants and Greek citizens. This was particularly emphasised with regard to moving beyond an initial emergency response to the needs of migrants arriving in Greece towards a longer-term plan of action.

There was no response! The earlier the later, especially the earlier, there was no response. There was zero assumption of responsibility and willingness to do anything [...] At some point the state should take its responsibilities, I cannot imagine NGOs, civil society organisations, volunteer groups, and solidarity groups, they are trying to do what they can and will continue to do so. But to have a change at the broader level at some point the state should come in and say, ‘This is the plan, this is what is happening’. (Rena, NGO)

The perceived absence of a plan at the EU and national government levels was commented on by those working within INGOs who contrasted their experience of the migration crisis in Greece to more familiar experiences of humanitarian crises in country contexts seen as having more limited state capacity.

There has never been a plan ... When there is a vacuum in governance, like in most crises, or you have weak states, normally the UN are obligated to play this role. And they do come up with some sort of plan and again it's always far from perfect, but at least it brings some thinking on the table. In this case, there hasn't been anything, and what was developed by the Greek Government and the European Commission two months ago [...] it is called the Financial Plan, it's like 10 pages long and it's not a Strategic Plan followed by a Timetable, Focal Points, it's just bullet points on a piece of paper. (Andreas, INGO)

While the establishment of a Greek Ministry for Migration in 2016 was viewed favourably by interviewees working for national NGOs, it was perceived to have been an empty

measure, lacking staff to take any leadership, the absence of staff at local coordination meetings on the islands being noted. This contrasted to experiences of a stronger lead from some (though not all) of the local authorities, including in Lesbos. The absence of the national state in 'taking responsibility' was perceived as partly due to the impact of the economic crisis, and the conditions of the bail-out loan, given related cuts in public spending and restrictions on public sector recruitment. It was, however, also perceived to be an approach of deterrence in the governance of migration.

They didn't want to take any responsibility, any service provided was considered a reason that the people would have an incentive to stay. (Evanthe, INGO)

INGOs, while highlighting their ability to have a voice with some influence towards the EU institutions, emphasised the limits to their capacity to influence agendas at the national level, and the need for a political lead from national governments in terms of how the migration crisis was narratively framed not as a 'problem' but in as something that was 'manageable', with a collective response being 'what every society should do'.

The limited role of the national state was also seen as inhibiting effective cooperation among NGOs due to the lack of central planning and coordination of activities in Greece. With the recent shift in EU funding from emergency humanitarian assistance to integration funds, and with the management of the reception centres being taken over from UNHCR by the Greek authorities, the withdrawal of NGOs (whose contracts for services in the camps had ended) was seen as leaving fundamental gaps in provision.

The state is absolutely not taking responsibility and we see that in a devastating way, with the change in the funding structure. So with funding being funnelled by the Government, who have now said that they'll be taking over all refugee services, you have all of the major NGOs leaving because they don't have funding specifically for this ... you're facing a massive service gap ... That means that mental health services, child protection, right down to food distribution are leaving and the Government does not have a plan. (Abi, international volunteer)

At the same time, civil society actors were seen as increasingly subject to control by the Greek state authorities as regards the prosecution of NGOs for supporting people on the move through sea rescue operations.

We've been forced to replace the Government and all their basic duties. Now they're targeting the movement more, like I feel the criminalisation of NGOs who save or do rescue operations in the Mediterranean. In different places you see, it's more targeting, it's more pressure, it's more intimidation that is crushing the movement, it's difficult to always pick yourself up again and keep going and step it up even a bit more from humanitarian to political in a way. (Tabitha, solidarity group)

The limits to the state as provider, in addressing the needs of migrants and Greek residents, was also seen as ultimately undermining the extent to which transnational principles and practices had been forged through the collective actions of people.

On the islands and in Athens many Greeks have shown solidarity with the refugees by giving them clothes, food, blankets. People connected and this is due to the human nature of when you are faced with someone who is suffering, you try to help them. But really people are getting somewhat tired of this, there is fatigue setting in. (Khloe, INGO)

This willingness to assist, which marked initial reactions, was seen as now under threat, creating spaces for anti-immigrant politics to gain traction through the mobilisation of far-right groups.

In most of 2016, it was astonishing reactions of solidarity from the Greek people. [...] But now it is a turning point, in the past few months it is not like that. People have become hostile, they are tired, they want somebody to deal with their problems as well. [...] It's not the welcoming sense that they got one year ago. (Rena, Greek NGO)

## Conclusion

Civil society mobilisations in the context of the migration crisis in Greece involve forms of collective action that can be understood as transnational not only, or necessarily, in crossing the territorial borders of the nation-state but in contesting the social boundaries of the nation-state framework in relation to migration and welfare.

Transnational relationships and practices to address the needs of migrants emerged within Greece through the engagement of informal and formal civil society actors at the local level as well as across national borders. Those relationships and practices took shape in relation to state actions and inactions towards the needs of migrants and other social groups in Greece, in the dual contexts of the migration and economic crises. However, civil society actors invoked different understandings of and relationships to the state, and different types of state institutions at the local, national and international levels. For some, the practices of civil society were framed as 'filling the gaps', compensating for a lack of effective collective action taken by governments at the national and EU levels, in response to state 'organised non-responsibility' (Pries 2018). For others, they constituted forms of mobilisation against state policies and actions, in connecting a politics of no borders in relation to migration to a politics of anti-austerity in relation to welfare.

In developing theoretical and empirical understanding of transnational welfare, it is necessary to look within as well as beyond the nation-state framework. Our analysis of civil society actions in the context of the migration crisis in Greece, and the findings of wider research (Lahusen et al., 2018), suggest that the practice of transnational welfare may arise through informal mobilisations at the local level that are not contingent on organisational structures and activities across national borders. Experiences of organising to address social needs in Greece underline how transnational identities, principles and relationships can be forged *through* those actions – through the practice of welfare. However, mobilisations at the local level are not locally or nationally contained in the sense that these initiatives may engage international volunteers, Greek nationals returning from other countries, as well as migrants and local residents in search of security. And they may evolve to channel sources of private and public funding from individuals and organisations located in other countries, thus evolving in ways that extend the social and institutional relationships of welfare across national borders.

Recognising that the nation-state is not simply about territorial borders but social and institutional relationships, the analysis reveals the ways in which civil society actions can be *trans*-national through processes of recognition and redistribution, of needs and resources, in ways that contest the boundaries of nation-state systems in relation to migration and the provision of welfare. The distribution of resources from some



INGOs to local organisations working to support the needs of social groups impacted by austerity in Greece, alongside direct provision to migrants; the opening of local support services to migrants and Greek residents in search of security, are examples of the ways in which the social boundaries of nation-state systems were contested. Building on conceptual approaches to transnational social protection that refer to state, civil society and market actors in terms of the ‘resource environment’ available to people on the move (Levitt et al. 2017), we propose a conceptualisation of transnational welfare that attends to how transnational frameworks can be forged through collective actions to address needs – potentially reconfiguring the social boundaries of welfare.

However, we also recognise the limits to civil society action to address those needs, in terms of resources but also the exercising of state power and authority. Formal and informal civil society actors in this research, while critical of state actions in relation to migration, conversely underlined the ultimate responsibility of the national state in addressing social needs. At the same time, state control over civil society actors, through denying access to refugee camps and preventing sea rescue operations, point to the entrenchment/hardening of state authority. Since the research was carried out, civil society activities, with the ongoing arrival and containment of migrants in Greece, continue to take shape under conditions that have arguably worsened. There is fatigue among local communities, but also the current Greek government has adopted more restrictive measures both towards migrants and civil society. While transnational solidarity at the local level was seen to be a marker of the 2015–2016 period, the ongoing containment of migrants in camps has, more recently, been met with violent protest on the islands, by migrants in the camps and local Greek residents, and far-right groups. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown measures introduced by the government have further restricted the movement of migrants inside the camps, confining people to already overcrowded and inadequate conditions (UNHCR 2019), and the movement of civil society. More restrictive state regulation of civil society, requiring NGOs working on migration and their members to be registered and certified in Greece<sup>5</sup>, has implications for the curtailment of civil society activity. However, inter-state cooperation through the relocation of refugees within the EU remains very limited. While EU funding continues to be channelled into Greece, as this research and other studies indicate (Lahusen et al., 2018), informal civil society activity to support migrants more often relies on private resources, which can fluctuate and is not necessarily sustainable in the longer term. How civil society actions are able not only to forge new ways of doing welfare within and beyond the framework of the nation-state, but sustain those relations, remain questions for future research.

## Notes

1. The term ‘social protection’ is used by Levitt et al. In this article, we refer to welfare as previously defined, to convey a broader understanding of the individual and collective activities to address social needs.
2. Research ethics approval was obtained through the London School of Economics. Written informed consent was obtained from research participants.
3. The term ‘solidarian’ was used by some Greek participants, as opposed to volunteer, to convey the principle of solidarity in relation to their actions.

4. An additional two interviews were carried out with people working with UNHCR and the Greek refugee Reception and Identification Service.
5. Article 191 of Law no. 4662/2020, Ministerial Decision 3063/2020 and Article 58 of Law 4686/2020.

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## ORCID

Isabel Shutes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5325-3541>

Armine Ishkanian  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6449-8966>

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