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Exploring the Frames of Altruistic Action

A Comparative Analysis of Volunteers' Engagement in British and French Pro-Asylum Charities (Jan 2017–Dec 2019)

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Content

Acknowledgements

Parliament Square, Westminster, London, UK 5 March 2016 – Hundreds of protesters stage a demonstration organised by London2Calais group against the recent events in the refugees camps in Calais (Photo: Shutterstock images).

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Executive Summary

This research project explores the logics of participation in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement and the transformation of the British and French refugee support sector since 2015. It aims to shed light on the logics of collective action based on values of compassion, hospitality, solidarity and humanitarianism in contemporary societies. The research is based on 147 in-depth interviews with volunteers involved in different charities and networks active in this field in Britain and France. The interviews were complemented with the observation of charity activities, informal discussions with volunteers and charity representatives, and a period of participant observation in Calais.

This report highlights five main findings:

- In the context of the 2015 'refugee crisis'[1], participants joining the refugee support sector were motivated by personal feelings of distress, outrage (and sometimes shame) as well as by feelings of proximity towards asylum seekers and refugees. For the majority of the participants, these motivations translated into an active engagement in the movement because of their time availability, often due to life changes;

- Although the majority of participants did not engage in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement for direct political reasons, many volunteers started to relate their involvement in the movement to broader objectives of political and social change once they gained experience in the field;

- The relations between volunteers and refugees are shaped by complex power relation processes about the role of each subject. These processes are often directly related to the ways volunteers construct, negotiate or subvert boundaries that are drawn between those who are perceived as 'deserving' refugees and those that are seen as 'undeserving' or 'less deserving' Others;

- Cross-national and local differences can be observed in terms of how participants justify their engagement. Overall, these differences show the impact of national and local contexts that relate to the laws on immigration and asylum (in particular on the criminalisation of solidarity), the visibility of the 'refugee crisis', and more generally the cultures of volunteering and civic participation in the two countries. One notable difference is that British volunteers tend to present their engagement as a community building practice, while French participants connect their engagement more directly to debates about public policies;

- Charities and individuals active in the refugee support sector face significant challenges due in particular to the scarcity of public funding and to the laws that make some of their activities illegal. Volunteers also face difficulties due to the emotional challenges of being involved in this field and sometimes a need for more guidance.

We make the following recommendations, aimed at the charities active in the field as well as policy makers and the public at large:

- That charities in the refugee support sector exchange best practices to tailor the training and tasks of volunteers, in particular through systems of mentoring and shadowing on the part of members of staff and/or experienced volunteers;

- That charities put mechanisms in place to improve the integration of volunteers who are themselves asylum seekers and refugees, including at the management level;

- That charities put mechanisms in place to prevent emotional tensions and fatigue among volunteers, and to better support them throughout their experience;

- That charities design and implement information and training sessions to discuss the negative impacts of dominant political and media discourses that lead to distinctions between 'deserving' refugees and 'undeserving' (or 'less deserving') Others;

- A closer cooperation between organisations and networks active in the refugee support sector, in particular between the large organisations established in the sector for several decades and the smaller more informal groups and networks that emerged in the context of the 2015 'refugee crisis';

- An end to austerity policies in the Third Sector, the allocation of adequate public funding to refugee support charities, and that governments guarantee the capacity of charities to campaign for refugees and migrants' rights (independently from their reliance on public funding);

- An end to policies that criminalise or repress the actions of solidarity towards migrants and refugees;

- A better visibility and a more positive representation in political discourses and mass media of individuals and organisations that demand more rights for migrants and refugees, an end to restrictive immigration and asylum policies such as the 'hostile environment' in Britain, and a general change of paradigm on these issues.

Introduction

Since the so-called 'refugee crisis' and the 'long summer of migration' in 2015, individuals and charities across Europe have demonstrated an unprecedented movement of support towards migrants and refugees arriving in the European Union. In particular, the picture of Alan Kurdi, the Syrian boy who died in September 2015 when attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, sparked a compassionate response from existing networks and charities, as well as many individuals who had not necessarily engaged into collective actions in the past. Often labelled as the 'Refugees Welcome' movement, this response has materialised into demonstrations and acts of protest to demand more rights and hospitable policies for refugees and migrants trying to reach the European Union or currently living in Europe. Furthermore, we have witnessed an increasing number of local, national and transnational initiatives of direct support such as organised hosting networks, language courses, food and clothes donations, befriending groups, legal assistance, or rescue missions at the European borders.

This movement emerged and developed in a difficult context. In the last decades, European member states have implemented policies that aim to deter migrants from entering the European territory and to make their life more precarious if they reach the European Union. These policies have affected all migrants – including those who flee conflict and persecution – and they have been justified by political and media discourses that create and increase divisions and anxieties around migration in society. In this context, those who participate in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement go against the grain: they concretely challenge policies such as the 'hostile environment' in Britain, the detention and deportation of migrants, and the closure of borders across Europe. They also resist policies that target solidarity networks directly by criminalising the rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea and the acts of support towards undocumented migrants. Overall, their engagement is thus also a concrete reaction to governments' management of the 'refugee crisis' and to restrictive migration policies more generally.

This report presents the findings of our ESRC research project on the individual actors who engage in the movement of support towards refugees and migrants in Europe, in particular through volunteering. The ESRC research project 'Exploring the Frames of Altruistic Action' (Jan 2017 – Dec 2019) analyses what motivates people to participate in charities and networks that support asylum seekers and refugees, as well as how they reflect upon their practices, values and morals. It aims to explore how the frontiers between different forms of engagement (e.g. political, humanitarian, compassionate) are constructed and negotiated. Looking at immigration and asylum politics 'from below', it also aims to question current debates on the 'refugee crisis' and how ideas of 'hospitality', 'compassion', 'humanitarianism' and 'solidarity' are defined and enacted.

The aim of this report is to present and share our findings with the organisations, networks and individuals who participated in the research in the UK and in France. We hope that this report can contribute to the sharing of ideas and best practices across different networks and organisations. More generally, we hope that this report can contribute to a wider public debate about migration, charity action and the mobilisation of civil society, in a context in which these questions have become highly politicised.

The context

In 2015, the world witnessed in shock as a series of tragic events unfolded at the Southern and Eastern borders of the European Union. In April, 1,500 people died over the span of a few days after two boats were wrecked off the coast of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean. During the summer, headlines were made on a daily basis with reports and images of migrants attempting the perilous journey to reach the European Union territory. In September, media across the world published the picture of Alan Kurdi, a three-year old child who fled Syria with his family and was found dead on a beach in Turkey. Very quickly, this image became the symbol of the deadly consequences of border crossing and of the inadequate response of EU institutions and member states. As the British Refugee Council (2019) puts it:

"The plight of Alan Kurdi highlights the urgent need for states around the world to respond to the growing Syrian diaspora by facilitating safe passage for refugees."

The International Office for Migration (IOM) reported that 990,671 people had reached the European territory in 2015 (nearly five times more than 2014), many of them escaping the war in Syria through the 'Balkan route' (IOM, 2015). At least 3,771 people had died in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea, making it the deadliest year on record (Lendaro, Rodier and Vertongen, 2019).[2] It is worth emphasizing that this situation is not new: the plight of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in Lampedusa or Ceuta and Melilla, and the dreadful living conditions of those stranded in Libya, in the camps in Calais and Dunkirk, as well as in the detention centres across Europe, have been documented for many years (Migreurop, 2017). It is also worth noting that this situation is not specific to the European context. In fact, the vast majority of refugees and migrants move to neighbouring countries, often in the Global South (according to the UNHCR (2019), 80% of the refugees in the world live in countries neighbouring their country of origin). However, the increased number of people trying to reach Europe in 2015 and the visibility of their plight was presented as an unprecedented 'migration crisis' or 'refugee crisis' in media and political discourses (Sirriyeh, 2018). In particular, questions were raised about the overall lack of humanity of European authorities and the inadequacy of policies foregrounding restrictive and security approaches to migration. For example, the role of member states and EU institutions was questioned by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants (2015):

"Let's not pretend that what the EU and its member states are doing is working. Migration is here to stay. [...] Building fences, using tear gas and other forms of violence against migrants and asylum seekers, detention, withholding access to basics such as shelter, food or water and using threatening language or hateful speech will not stop migrants from coming or trying to come to Europe."

At the same time, campaigners started calling for a more compassionate response on the part of public authorities. After the publication of Alan Kurdi's photo, this campaign also included – at least for a few days – mainstream media, even those that were traditionally hostile to migrants. In the UK, for example, headlines stressed that the picture "raises questions over the EU's response" (The Guardian), that European leaders were "in denial" (The Independent), and that governments needed to "deal with the biggest crisis facing Europe since WW2" (The Sun). Images and reports about the 'refugee crisis' were also widely circulated in social media and increased public awareness on these issues.

It is in this context that the 'Refugees Welcome' movement emerged. Over the spring and summer of 2015, citizens across Europe mobilised to show their compassion and solidarity towards refugees, and to denounce "the failure of empathy" (Head, 2016) on the part of member states and EU authorities. In August 2015, people marched in Dresden under the banner 'Refugees Welcome'. On the 12th September, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in many European capitals demanding to 'open the borders'. In September 2016, thousands more marched in London under slogans such as "No-one is illegal", "Stop the drowning", "Choose love" and "Be human". In February 2017, at least 160,000 people marched in Barcelona to demand that Spain takes in more refugees.

Beyond these public protests, citizens mobilised to provide direct support to refugees and migrants arriving in Europe. New networks and charities were created, and volunteers joined in to give assistance in different places and through different means. For instance, volunteer groups in Lesbos, Calais, Athens and Rome provided shelter, food and clothes to migrants stranded in the camps and in the squats. Others joined established charities to provide legal advice to refugees or to participate in rescue missions to save the lives of people at risk in the Mediterranean. Volunteers also set up informal and more formal networks to host refugees in their home and to provide emotional support as well as language courses. Bike repair workshops were formed to give second-hand bikes to refugees, theatre and circus performances were created to entertain children, visits in detention centres were organised to provide psychological support. All these initiatives emerged as attempts to fill in the gaps in governments' asylum and migration policies. They were also a message sent to authorities: an "outpouring of expressions of compassion" (Sirriyeh, 2018: 4) which highlighted the inadequacy of governments' responses to the situation.

The actions of individuals and groups mobilising for the support of refugees since 2015 unquestionably constitute one of the most significant and innovative movement of compassion and solidarity in recent years. This movement challenges the common idea of citizens' increased political apathy, individualism and lack of solidarity. It is rooted in a tradition of refugee and migrant support groups that had been already active for many years. It also led to the emergence of new types of actors, engagements, and forms of support. To quote a charity representative who was interviewed one year after the beginning of the 'refugee crisis', "the whole model of humanitarian work has been challenged and adapted and improved by a group of individuals who are passionate and care" (Kingsley, 2016).

This ESRC project explores the 'Refugees Welcome' movement to generate new knowledge and understanding about the transformations of civic engagement in contemporary societies. It analyses the significance and novelty of this movement from the point of view of its participants. In a context in which charities and volunteers face increasing difficulties, this report aims to contribute to practical debates about the work done by volunteers and charities in the field. The findings of our project thus aim to inform recommendations on refugee-support volunteering in Britain and France, and in Europe more generally.

Calais (2019) (Photo: Nerina Boursinou)

Research aims

In this research project, we used a sociological approach to explore who are the 'ordinary' volunteers engaged in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement. We wanted to understand their motivations, and how they sustain their engagement over time, by analysing their life trajectories, their values, the role they play in their networks and charities, and their concrete experience in the field. Very few studies have explored the construction of meaning among these actors: how they present their motivations, how they perceive their role, and how they justify their actions. It is, however, crucial to examine how they talk about and reflect upon their engagement. Through an analysis of their narratives about who they are and what they do, we aimed to map this uncharted territory and to contribute to generating in-depth knowledge on debates related to notions of compassion, solidarity, hospitality and humanitarianism in contemporary societies.

We were especially interested in exploring the political dimension of their engagement. Do participants present what they do as a form of political action, as a form of protest? Do they address public authorities and demand social change, or do they perceive what they do as a more 'neutral', private and non-contentious form of action? In other words, do they see a difference between what they do and what social and political activists do?

We were also interested in the ambivalences of volunteering in the field of migration and asylum. In particular, we wanted to explore the tensions between discourses and practices of compassion and repression, of care and control. In recent years, European governments have involved civil society actors in the governance of undocumented migration, for example in the assessment of the eligibility of refugee status. We wanted to understand how volunteers perceive and negotiate the relation between different – sometimes contradictory – injunctions.

We investigated volunteering in two different contexts: the UK and France. From a cross-national comparative perspective, we focused on how different socio-cultural and political factors shape the way these actors reflect upon their engagement. Do they justify their engagement through different values in France and the UK? How are they influenced by specific laws and policies in the two countries? Is their engagement shaped by the media coverage of migration and refugee issues in the two settings? Finally, we also aimed to contribute to policy debates at the national and EU levels, by considering the effects of funding shortages in the pro-asylum sector and the consequences of policies that criminalise solidarity towards migrants and refugees. More generally, we intended to increase the social and political recognition of collective action in support of refugees and migrants, especially by amplifying the voice of actors who are rarely heard in political debates.

How to understand the 'Refugees Welcome' movement: some insights from the literature

The literature published so far on the 'Refugees Welcome' movement (and on the actions in support of refugees and migrants more generally) has used different concepts and approaches, reflecting the diversity and novelty of this mobilisation. For example, this movement has been explored through the notions of 'compassion' (Sirriyeh, 2018), 'solidarity' (Della Porta, 2018; Agustin and Jorgensen, 2019, Lahusen and Grasso, 2018), 'hospitality' (Agier, 2018), and 'humanitarianism' (Sandri, 2017; Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019). These ideas reflect different dimensions of the movement, and they show how it emerged out of distinct traditions of collective action. For instance, the idea of hospitality implies a direct and generally individual relationship between a 'host' and a 'guest', in which each person plays a specific role (Derrida, 1999). In contrast, the notion of solidarity implies a form of action rooted in everyday transformative practices, and in which state policies become an object of contention (Agustin and Jorgensen, 2019). The idea of compassion puts the accent on the emotional dimension of volunteers' engagement (Nussbaum, 1996), while humanitarianism implies a focus on the immediate needs of the refugees and migrants (Fassin, 2010). Beyond these differences, these notions underline three general ideas, which also guided our own research:

- The individual acts of support constructed by those who engage in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement create a relation between themselves and the refugees and migrants who reach Europe. This relation is based on specific perceptions of who the recipients of their acts of support are. As compassionate subjects, volunteers engage in this movement because they want to respond to the 'needs' of some individuals and groups (Nussbaum, 1996). They therefore evaluate who these individuals and groups are, and what are their needs. These are complex and often ambivalent processes: how do they distinguish individuals and groups that are perceived as vulnerable from those that are considered as less vulnerable (and therefore less in need of support)? How do they tackle widespread stereotypes in the media and political discourses about refugees and migrants?

  The relationship between volunteers and refugees is based on the construction of specific roles. Throughout their experience in the field, both volunteers and refugees learn and negotiate how they relate to each other. They engage in specific practices (sharing a meal or a roof, talking and listening to each other, learning a language…) within and through which they define 'who' they are to each other (the host and the guest, the gift giver and the gift recipient, the teacher and the pupil…). Again, these are complex and ambivalent processes: how do these actors learn about each others' expectations? How do they define and adjust their role in the course of their activities? How do they deal with unequal power-relations, for example in terms of race and gender?

- The collective actions of the 'Refugees Welcome' volunteers and charities are also constructed within and through a direct or indirect relationship with public authorities, whether at the local, national or supra-national level. First, acts of compassion, solidarity and hospitality are designed to fill in the gaps of government action (and inaction): civil society actors feel the need to intervene to support migrants and refugees because public authorities refuse or do not have the capacity to do so. This is mostly visible in the camps in Greece or Calais, where migrants and refugees are brutally abandoned by national governments. Moreover, volunteers and charities decide to mobilise because they want to show their disagreement with restrictive immigration and asylum policies. For instance, they want to resist and construct alternatives to the 'hostile environment' measures in the UK, and they oppose the policies and discourses that legitimise the notion of 'Fortress Europe'.

  The relationship between the actors of the 'Refugees Welcome' movement and public authorities can take different forms. For instance, it can be politicized and contentious. In this case, volunteers and charities publicly voice their disagreement with governments that, in some cases, respond through repressive measures targeting these actors.[3] Differently, volunteers and charities can choose to cooperate with governments: public authorities can delegate responsibilities to (some) charities, who depend on public subsidies and tend to act as service providers rather than vocal opponents.

Finally, this relationship can be more distant: charities and volunteers can choose to act under the radar of public authorities and avoid making their engagement a matter of public interest. The frontiers between these different types of relation (contention, cooperation, distance) are complex and sometimes blurry: how does the dependence on public funding impact charities' activities? How do volunteers react when their collective actions are criminalised, and therefore become a form of civil disobedience? What happens when immigration and asylum policies change?

• Whether framed in terms of 'compassion', 'humanitarianism', 'solidarity' or 'hospitality', the acts of support towards refugees and migrants are based on general principles as well as daily practices that are learned throughout the experience of volunteering. The volunteers who engage in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement are moved by general values: they believe in the respect for human dignity and human rights; they are committed to justice and equality across society; and they abide by personal values of generosity, humanity or cosmopolitanism. However, the translation of these values into daily practices of support is not a straightforward process. In fact, volunteers can encounter conflicts between the values that guide their engagement and the actual practice of support towards refugees and migrants. They face difficult questions about who and how to help in particular. For instance, the general principle of 'unconditional hospitality' is different from the practice of hospitality, which is often based on unequal power relations (Derrida, 1999). Also, compassion can be exclusionary when put into practice because it is based on the evaluation of people's suffering (Nussbaum, 1996). To understand the dynamics of the 'Refugees Welcome' movement, it is therefore crucial to pay attention to the ambivalences, contradictions and dilemmas that participants encounter in the course of their experience 'in the field', and also how they adjust and deal with them.

As this brief overview highlights, the questions raised by the 'Refugees Welcome' movement are broad and relate to critical moral debates about the logic and forms of inclusion and exclusion in contemporary societies. Our project was premised on the need for further research exploring the narratives and experiences of those who participate in the movement. This is what we aimed to do through our in-depth qualitative analysis of a large sample of volunteers in Britain and France.


Idomeni, Greece, April 15, 2016 – A refugees waits in line to get food. The camp for refugees and migrants at the Greek-Macedonian border near Idomeni (Photo: Shutterstock images).

Methods and sample

Our research is based on a comparative approach and on qualitative research methods. We analysed volunteers' engagement processes in two contrasted settings: France and the UK. Our in-depth interviews of different participants aimed to explore the influence of a range of diverse factors: their life trajectories and moral values; the organisational culture of their charity; the local and national cultures of volunteering; the relations between civil society actors and public authorities; the content of immigration and asylum policies.

Between May 2017 and December 2018, we conducted 147 interviews in total: 62 in the UK; 64 in France; 21 in Calais (a point of connection between the French and British cases) (see Figure 1). In the UK, the interviews were conducted in London, Birmingham, Sheffield and the Midlands. In France, they took place in Paris and Nantes. As for the case of Calais, we interviewed participants who volunteer regularly in 'the jungle', active in either Anglophone or Francophone groups, and who were based in different cities in France and Britain. During the interviews, participants were asked questions about their life trajectory, their motivations for volunteering and their experience in the field.[4] The interviews were complemented by a short questionnaire that participants were asked to fill in, and in which we included questions about their profile and past activities (i.e. age, gender, profession, previous experience of volunteering…). The interviews were also integrated with an observation of charity activities (distribution of food, information sessions, fundraising events…), a group interview with several participants in London, as well as informal discussions with volunteers and charity representatives in multiple organisations. Finally, a period of participant observation was conducted in Calais in 2019.
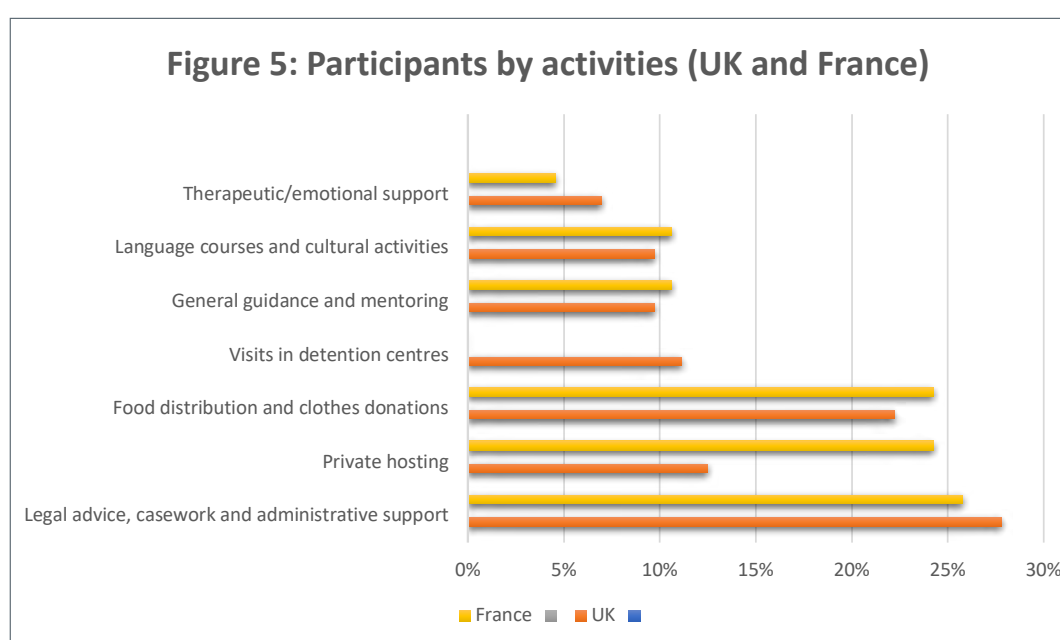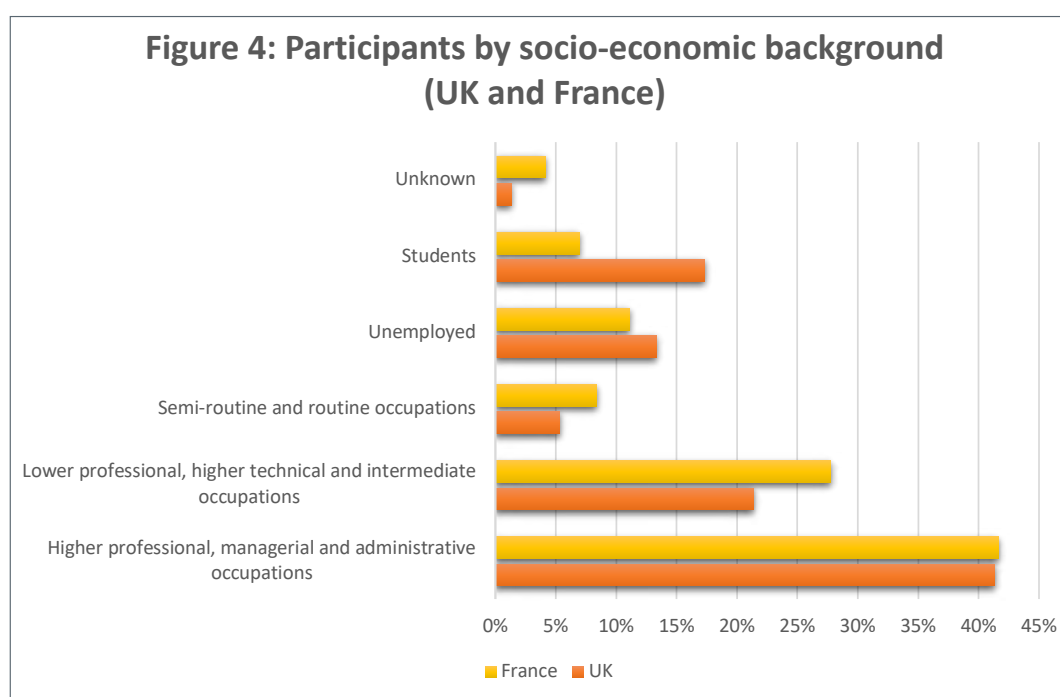

Figure 1: Participants by location
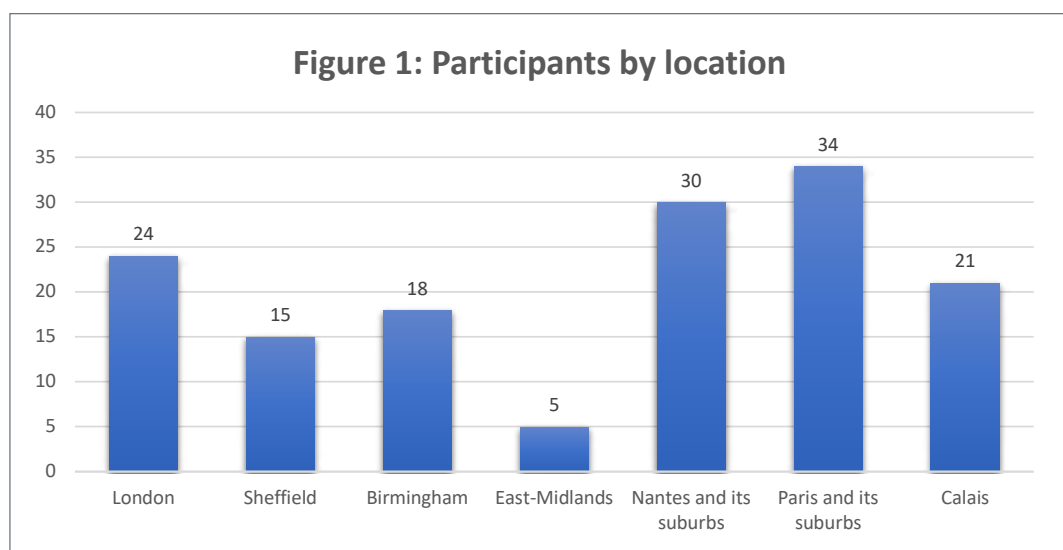
The participants were recruited through the charities and networks that we contacted for this project. In total, more than 30 groups are represented (about 15 in each country).[5] These include: established charities that have a national (and international) scope, with comparatively high levels of human and material resources and formalised structures; local charities that have comparatively lower levels of human and material resources and less formalised structures; networks that mostly emerged in the context of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 and that are loosely structured. Some of these charities work closely with public authorities (i.e. they get access to public funding and can sometimes act as service-providers on behalf of the government) while others are not directly connected with public authorities.

Our sample comprises of volunteers from different age, gender and socio-economic backgrounds. However, the sample shows that women (especially in the UK) and people over 65 are highly represented (see Figures 2 and 3).[6] Also, we observed that some socio-economic categories were more represented than others: in both countries, more than 40% of our participants are (or were) highly qualified professionals (whether currently working or retired) (see Figure 4).[7] Overall, we noticed a high number of teachers, journalists, psychologists and researchers. Only a minority of the participants were ethnic minorities. We interviewed six volunteers

Figure 2: Participants by age and gender (UK)

Figure 3: Participants by age and gender (France)
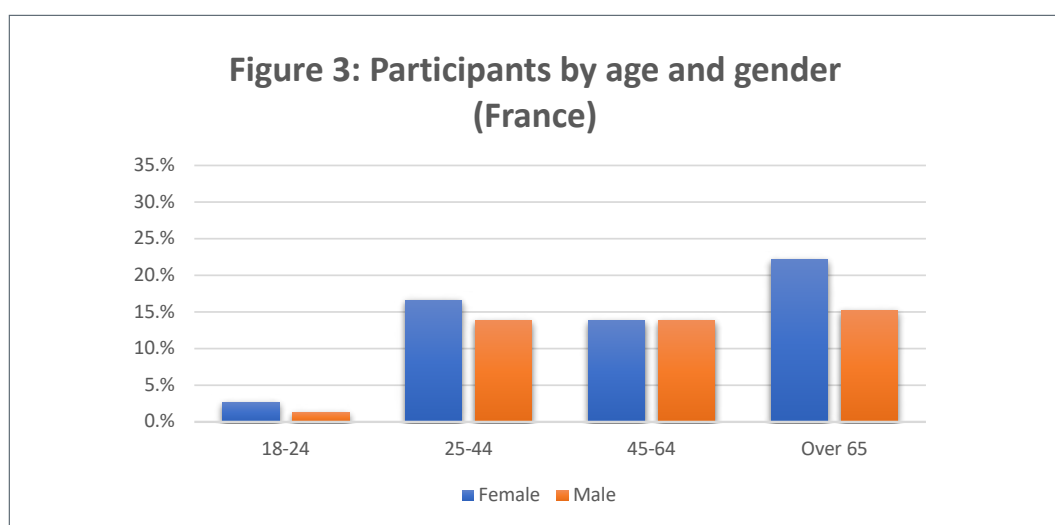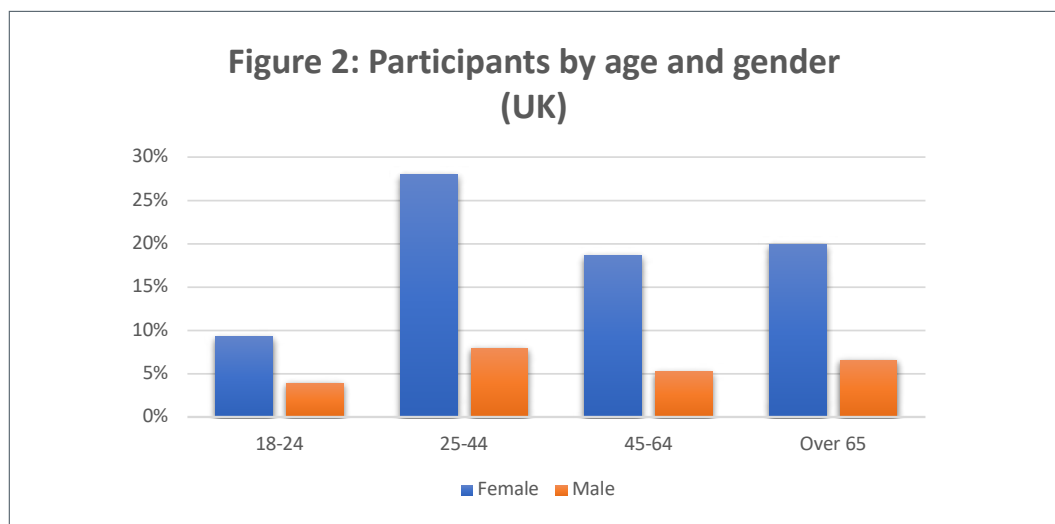
who were themselves asylum seekers or refugees in Britain, and three in France. Finally, almost two thirds of our participants started volunteering in the refugee support sector during or after the 2015 'refugee crisis'. As it has been confirmed by charity representatives, this is a representative picture of the profile of volunteers in the sector.

Our participants were engaged in different types of activities: legal advice and casework; private hosting; food distribution and clothes donations (in particular in Calais and Dunkirk); visits in detention centres (in the UK); general guidance and mentoring support; language support and cultural activities; therapeutic and emotional support. Due to questions of access to the field, all these activities are not represented equally in the two countries (see Figure 5).

Figure 4: Participants by socio-economic background (UK and France)

Figure 5: Participants by activities (UK and France)

Findings

Our findings show that the participation in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement is based on complex and multi-layered dynamics that involve different actors (volunteers, charities, refugees and migrants, public authorities). Overall, our findings highlight the heterogeneous and fluid nature of the movement. Although it emerged through pre-existing organisational structures and modes of engagement in the refugee support sector, it is also based on highly innovative and somewhat spontaneous forms of collective action, networking and participation. As a 'new' movement, it is therefore subject to transformations, tactical experimentations, internal debates, and sometimes contradictions. In this context, the features and boundaries of the movement are not clearly defined, and volunteers position themselves, construct and negotiate their own role, and more generally give meaning to their engagement through learning and experimenting. The emergence of this movement is thus an excellent vantage point to analyse how participants come to see themselves as compassionate, humanitarian, hospitable or solidarity actors. More generally, the focus on the individual actors of this movement allows us to shed light on the motivations, experience and dilemmas of volunteering. In this section, we highlight five general findings, which relate to different dimensions of the 'Refugees Welcome' movement:

Marseille, France – September 26, 2018: Rally to support unaccompanied minors migrants. "Solidarity is a weapon, let's use it!!" (Photo: Shutterstock images).

1. Who volunteers and for what reasons? The life trajectories and motivations of volunteers

Our analysis shows that volunteers engage in the refugee support sector for a range of different reasons. In their narratives, participants mix what can be framed as apolitical humanitarian motivations (focusing exclusively on the provision of immediate help) and more political motivations centred on general objectives of social and political change.

Emotions were often evoked. In the interviews, volunteers often referred to the picture of Alan Kurdi and to the feelings of empathy that it generated in them. They also underlined the feelings of distress when they gained more information about the situation of refugees in the UK and in France, often during the first meetings in their charities. For many participants, these feelings were related to some form of proximity to the plights of asylum seekers and refugees. Some volunteers argued for example that 'they could be us' and that 'this could happen to anyone', referring to the idea that the war in Syria was perceived as sudden and unexpected. In this respect, some of the motivations for volunteering resonated with mass-media and political discourses, which depicted the Syrian conflict and the 'refugee crisis' as a humanitarian emergency focused on the representation of Syrian refugees as similar to Western European middle-class and highly-educated families (Holzberg, Kolbe and Zaborowski, 2018).

Feelings of proximity to refugees were often related to the individual experience and family history of volunteers. For instance, many participants explained that they felt close to the refugees because they had personal experience of living abroad and/or had strong linkages with other countries and cultures (for example speaking other languages, having a family member with a migration background, or living in a multicultural environment). Others mentioned that members of their family were refugees during WW2 and that the 'refugee crisis' resonated with their family history. Finally, others related their motivations for volunteering to a personal experience of injustice in the past. In the French case, we observe that these feelings of proximity were sometimes triggered by local dynamics: volunteers living close to a camp or a squat where migrants live (for example at Porte de La Chappelle in Paris) explained that they felt they had to help because they could not ignore the living conditions of refugees 'on their doorstep'. As the interview extract below illustrates, these feelings of proximity are often linked to the notion that they have a 'duty', a 'responsibility' to help.

For many participants, the participation in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement was also motivated by feelings of outrage (and sometimes shame) against the absence of an appropriate response from their government. Volunteers felt that 'they had to step in' because public authorities did not do the necessary to protect refugees. They also expressed feelings of injustice because they observed that refugees and migrants could not access basic services that they, as citizens, could easily access. This was particularly the case for participants volunteering in Calais, who underlined how refugees were abandoned by the French and British governments, as well as by European institutions. For some participants (especially in the UK), these feelings of outrage and shame were also amplified by the fact that governments' funding to charities had been cut significantly in recent years (Mayblin and James, 2019). More generally, some participants argued that their engagement was also motivated by a personal reaction against the political and social climate in which they live. British volunteers mentioned, for example, how debates around Brexit and the rise of populist parties affected them and how they perceived volunteering as a way to look for alternatives and to defend the values they believed in.

> **The feelings of proximity to refugees:**
>
> **"It's perfectly normal to flee war and oppression, you don't have to be weird, or dysfunctional. You just need to be a normal person around whom things have changed. We all have in our backgrounds, we could all be them, therefore we have a duty to help."**

The volunteers who are themselves refugees or asylum seekers referred to other types of motivations. For them, one of the main reasons for volunteering was the idea to 'give something back'. After having received support from their charity when they arrived in France or Britain, they sought an opportunity to help in return, for instance, through translation and general guidance offered to other refugees in their community and beyond. For them, volunteering was also a way – often actively encouraged by the charities themselves – to gain new skills and to facilitate their integration into the country of destination. Volunteering can indeed help them to learn the language, to get to know the city where they live, and also to develop professional skills that could be used in future jobs. For asylum seekers in particular, volunteering was also a way to fight feelings of isolation and boredom as they are not allowed to work during the examination of their asylum demand. These motivations resonated with charities' objectives to empower asylum seekers and refugees through volunteering (see below).

Personal motivations (i.e. gaining new skills and experience) were mentioned by many participants.[8] Many younger participants, for example, pointed out that they would like to work in this field in the future, or that they wanted to gain a first professional experience. Some participants also explained that they saw the emergence of new networks during the 2015 'refugee crisis' as a way to construct their own professional project, sometimes presenting it as a form of start-up business. A number of volunteers also reported that they were interested in learning from other cultures or that they saw volunteering as an opportunity to continue using their professional skills after they retired (for example, those providing psychological support or legal advice to refugees). Finally, many participants referred to the more general idea of 'doing something new'. They evoked the need to have a change in their personal, social or professional life, to go beyond their own social circle and to 'expand their horizon'. Some participants mentioned that they wanted to disengage from certain values unwittingly shaping their everyday life (i.e. consumerism and professional competition), and that they were looking for something 'meaningful' to do. Finally, some participants mentioned their religious values as their main motivation for volunteering.

Volunteering as a reaction against the current political climate:

"It's been building up for quite a while, but I was basically very upset that nobody was challenging remarks about immigration being a problem. I couldn't believe it and I was thinking "why are they not stopping it" and for me a lot of the hate crime, the language now goes back to people not picking people up regularly on the fact that this is a problem. This is a problem. And I just thought the debate was tipping into something very unpleasant and I felt I needed to do something about this because if I stepped into this world, I would expect a better world than this. It was a sudden decision but it had been groomed for a long time, the narrative about refugees and immigration."

For the majority of our participants, these motivations translated into an active engagement in the movement because of their time availability, often due to life changes – sometimes suddenly. For instance, many participants who hosted refugees mentioned that they started volunteering when their children left home and they had an empty room in their house. Others mentioned that the beginning of their involvement in the movement coincided with their retirement or taking up a new job that gave them time and flexibility for volunteering. For them, the way charities presented the experience of volunteering was crucial: when they approached organisations with the idea of doing something, they were convinced – and often reassured – by the fact that they would receive guidance and support, and that they would gain personally from the experience (see the Refugee Council 'volunteering story' below). The fact that charities presented the activities of volunteers as being adaptable to their needs and availability emerged as a significant factor that made many participants join. Also, the fact that new (more informal) organisations and networks emerged in the context of the 'refugee crisis' was a decisive factor for many volunteers as they felt that these groups offered new forms of participation (i.e. hosting), which could easily adapt to their own needs and availability.

Parliament Square, Westminster, London, UK 5 March 2016 - Hundreds of protesters stage a demonstration organised by London2Calais group against the recent events in the refugees camps in Calais (Photo: Shutterstock images).

2. The everyday politics of volunteering: participants' relation to politics and the transformation of their engagement over time.

The analysis shows that participants have different ways to present their engagement, especially when it comes to its political dimension. Overall, three different positions can be underlined:

- **First**, a significant number of our participants drew a clear distinction between volunteering and social or political activism. They did not consider their experience of volunteering as an explicit political act, in the sense that it was not related to broader objectives and demands for social or political change. Despite being often critical of current immigration and asylum policies and in favour of more welcoming measures, these volunteers argued that the main purpose of their activities is to make concrete immediate changes to the lives of refugees rather than addressing public authorities and governments and demanding systemic change. Also, although they could sometimes be involved in activism and in political activities – for example attending demonstrations or meetings with local political representatives – they distinguished between these activities and their volunteering in their charities. This is, for example, explained by a participant active in a refugee hosting network (see page 19).

- **Secondly**, in contrast, some participants argued that their engagement into refugee support charities was part of a broader struggle for social and political change. These volunteers presented themselves as being closer to activists and they highlighted the political dimension of their activities. For example, they argued that their activities were part of a broader fight for social justice and against racism, and they sometimes had connections with activist groups on these questions. Many of these volunteers had past experience of social activism and they were often involved in collective actions in other fields, such as the environment or social equality. For them, acting in support of refugees and asylum seekers is a political and contentious issue, as it is a way to address the injustices of the Home Office. As one participant puts it, volunteering and activism 'can go hand in hand' (see page 19). These participants also argued that their work is political because it is a way to 'change attitudes' about questions of immigration and diversity in their community and in society more generally.

- **Thirdly**, many participants displayed a form of 'in-between' position in which politics was presented through the more subtle and mundane dimensions of their engagement. From this perspective, volunteering was perceived as a personalised political action because it allowed them to embody and demonstrate values, attitudes and lifestyles that are alternative to dominant views and ways of life. They stressed, for example, that the anti-racist and tolerant values that they embodied through their engagement sent a positive (political) message to their community and to society more at large. They also argued that opening their home to strangers or giving time and energy to their cause was a way to concretely demonstrate the possibility of alternatives to widespread feelings of fear and isolation in their society. For these volunteers, the political dimension of their engagement did not consist of contesting public authorities and making demands for systemic change, but, rather, in addressing diffused prejudices and sentiments in our societies. For instance, their engagement was presented as a symbolic way to fight against negative attitudes becoming increasingly visible in the Brexit debate in the UK or the rise of populist parties in France and Europe. As a participant puts it, volunteering is 'part of my way of demonstrating how I feel about other people' (see page 19).

Paris, France, 2018 – Poster by the group Accueil de Merde: 'Did you know that there are more police officers than people in exile in Calais?' (Photo: Elsa Rambaud).

These different positions imply different relations to the state. The first and third positions can lead to a distant relation or to a cooperation with public authorities. Volunteers who presented their engagement as apolitical or as a form of personalised politics often expressed the idea that they filled in the gaps of governments and that they could work either independently from public authorities, or in cooperation with them. Differently, volunteers who had a more politicised engagement were more critical of public authorities and they found it more difficult to work in charities that depended entirely on government subsidies as they saw it as a risk of being co-opted and enrolled in restrictive policies. However, what all these three positions have in common is a form of transformative everyday politics that takes place in and through encounters with refugees. Throughout their experience of volunteering, participants interact with refugees and learn about their condition as well as how immigration and asylum policies negatively affect their lifelives. For instance, many volunteers explained that it was through their exchanges with asylum seekers that they have learnt how not being allowed to work can affect their life in many ways (financially, socially, psychologically…). Volunteers also learned new values and reflected about their role and position throughout their interactions with refugees. For example, participants reported that this experience helped them reflect about their own privilege and that it changed their views about their position in society. These processes led many participants to shift the ways they saw their engagement, and in particular its political dimension. Although it is often ambivalent and non-linear, we observe that many volunteers became more politicised throughout the course of their experience in the field, showing thus that criticisms about the apolitical nature of the 'Refugees Welcome' movement should be nuanced. In fact, the narratives of participants in France and the UK showed the potential for the 'Refugees Welcome' movement to directly address power-holders and demand systemic changes in the construction and implementation of immigration and asylum policies.

Three different views about politics and activism:

"We decided that we weren't going to be lobbyists and campaigners. We are starfish flingers. You might not have come across this term so I will tell you the story. So, there's this boy on a beach and the tide washes in and it leaves millions of starfish stranded on the beach, flapping around and dying. And he flings them back. And a man who wonders alone says "This is completely futile, there are million of starfish here, what can you do, you're making no difference". And the boy flings a starfish back and says "I'm making a difference to that one", he flings back another one, "I'm making a difference to that one" etc. And the man looks at him and he picks up a starfish and he throws it back. All I'm doing is flinging back starfish and that's what we decided to do. We're not lobbyists or campaigners."

"The more people get out there, the more people realise it's serious. That's why I sign petition, I go to demonstrations, because I think it's essential. It's a way of making your voice heard. But now, the hands-on stuff is something else and you can do both, why sticking to one or the other."

"I have my views on politics but inevitably this, the volunteering work that I do is part of my way of demonstrating how I feel about other people. I've got no other way of doing it I suppose I, I do it because they need it but I also do it as a way of saying I think we should be looking after these people not separating them. We shouldn't be building great big fences in Calais, that's not what I believe in and so I will do my best to show what I feel by doing what I do."

3. The 'hosts' and the 'guests': volunteers' relations to the refugees and the question of deservingness.[9]

It emerges from the interviews that volunteers base their engagement on different – and sometimes contradicting – representations of who the asylum seekers and refugees are. These representations affect how they relate to the individuals they seek to help. We distinguish three different ways through which participants depict asylum seekers and refugees:

- **The refugee as a vulnerable victim**
  In their narratives, many participants presented refugees as vulnerable people who were victims of circumstances that happened to them through no fault of their own. Participants referred, for example, to the plight of children and women and highlighted the extent of their suffering. This view – which focuses on the suffering and helplessness of individuals in need of help – is common in humanitarian and compassionate forms of collective action (Fassin, 2010), and it resonates with media representations of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015.

- **The refugee as a resilient actor**
  Refugees were also portrayed by participants as courageous individuals who managed to move on with their life despite unfavourable circumstances. In this representation, volunteers acknowledged that the refugees endured horrible situations in their country of origin, in the course of their journey to Europe, or once they have arrived in Europe. However, in contrast with the previous image of the refugee as a vulnerable individual, difficulties are not used to stress victimisation but to highlight their determination, bravery and mental strength. Participants especially stressed how refugees managed to overcome the obstacles they encountered during their journey to Europe, and how they adapt to life in France or the UK.

- **The refugee as an entrepreneurial agent**
  A third (less common) representation of refugees consisted in portraying them as proactive and productive individuals that should be enabled to express their full potential as economic agents and in terms of their more general contribution to society. For example, participants referred to refugees they know who are well-educated and had highly valued professions in their country of origin and claimed that this could positively contribute to French and British societies.

A warehouse in Calais (2019) (Photo: Nerina Boursinou).

Overall, volunteers use these different representations as ways to counter negative images of asylum seekers and refugees that are widespread in media and political discourses, as well as in everyday conversations that they have in their own social circles. When they refer to these positive representations, they aim to resist stereotypical images of refugees as 'bogus asylum seekers', 'scroungers', 'smugglers' or 'dangerous individuals'. Moreover, the positive representations that participants used were also a way to underline their proximity to the people they seek to support. More generally, these representations are related to processes of evaluation of who 'deserves' support. Therefore, they can also construct or reinforce exclusionary distinctions between different types of refugees and migrants. When supporting refugees, volunteers engage in processes through which they distinguish between those they want to help (the 'deserving refugees') and those that remain excluded from their acts of compassion (sometimes presented as the 'undeserving Others'). They explain, for example, that some individuals take advantage of the system or display behaviours they disagree with. They also sometimes question the needs of the individuals they support. These evaluation and distinction processes can take place at the level of the charities, for example when organisations select the refugees that are going to be hosted by volunteers.[10] Participants are also led to evaluate the needs of refugees and distinguish between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' recipients directly in the course of their acts of support, sometimes without being properly prepared for the difficult questions that these processes raise.

Our findings show that processes of evaluation and distinction need to be analysed critically, in particular for two reasons. First, distinctions between different types of recipients can reproduce and reinforce categories created by governments for the purpose of border controls (i.e. 'refugees' versus 'economic migrants'), and so risk perpetuating restrictive migration policies. Second, these forms of evaluation and distinction can lead participants to experience difficult emotional processes in the field, sometimes leading to episodes of burnout. Our interviews revealed that volunteers experience significant emotional tensions when they interact with refugees who do not necessarily match their ideal representations of 'deserving' recipients of their support. Indeed, several participants shared with us their personal difficulties in accepting the idea that refugees can display behaviours that they did not expect or did not agree with, often leading them to question their support role in a fundamental way.

4. France and Britain: the 'Refugees Welcome' movement in different national contexts

The findings above underline the similarities of participants' involvement and experience in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement across different national (France and Britain) and local (London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Paris, Nantes and Calais) contexts. Looking more systematically at the comparison between the French and British cases, some cross-national differences in terms of volunteers' engagement can be underlined. We also noticed that participants' experience in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement vary within each country depending on the cities in which our fieldwork took place. Overall, these differences show the impact of national and local factors that relate to the laws on immigration and asylum (in particular on the criminalisation of solidarity), the visibility of the 'refugee crisis' and presence of migrants, and more generally the cultures of volunteering and civic participation in the two countries.

First, policies and practices of public authorities have an impact on some aspects of participants' experience. For example, many respondents in France mentioned that the political debates around the 'délit de solidarité'[11] and the 2018 reform of the immigration and asylum law affected the way they perceived their engagement. In their narratives, they often referred to these political debates to highlight the government's responsibility for the increasingly difficult living conditions of migrants and refugees in France. In some cases, participants argued that volunteering in the context of the 'délit de solidarité' was not only about showing support to refugees but also about constructing a form of civil disobedience against the government. In the UK, many volunteers referred to the 'hostile environment' policies and to the Brexit context when discussing the reasons for participating in the 'Refugees Welcome' movement. Similarly to the French case, this context was at times evoked by British volunteers to underline the responsibility of the state. However, the analysis showed that participants in the UK more often referred to the 'hostile environment' policies and to Brexit to stress what they perceived as a rising intolerance in their community and in British society more generally. In other words, their engagement was more often constructed in reference to the society or community level rather than as a response to the governmental and public policy level as was more often the case in France. More generally, these findings reflect comparative studies that show how volunteering in the UK – whether in the field of refugee support or in other fields – is often thought of as a community building practice, while it is more directly connected to debates about public policies in France (Giugni and Passy, 2001; Grönlund et al., 2011).

Second, our findings point at the cross-national differences in terms of the visibility of the 'refugee crisis' and how this has an impact on volunteers. By visibility, we refer both to what participants directly see in the area in which they live or work and indirectly in the news and through social media. In the French case, the immediate visibility of migrant camps and squats such as in Calais, Dunkirk and at Porte de La Chappelle in Paris has led many participants to engage in refugee support networks because of what they witnessed 'on their doorstep' (see below). Also, participants in France evoked the immediate visibility of the 'refugee crisis' when referring to the media coverage of border crossings at the French-Italian border (Vintimille) for example. Differently in the British case, when participants were asked about the reasons that motivated them to volunteer, they referred to situations that were perceived to be more distant geographically. For them, humanitarian emergency situations were mostly associated to other countries, and this is one of the reason why British participants who wanted to engage in humanitarian work decided to volunteer in Calais, Paris and Greece. Although participants in the UK referred to the living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees in Britain, their situation was often presented as less precarious than in France and in other European countries.

Finally, beyond these national differences, our findings also reveal the local dimensions of volunteering. In the interviews, participants often referred to their local (mostly urban) context when explaining their motivations and experience of volunteering. For instance, many volunteers in the UK were very critical towards state government but less so when discussing about actions and initiatives of local councils, which in their opinion have limited autonomy because of the austerity measures and the 'hostile environment' policy adopted by the central government. Also, we observed that volunteers active in areas and cities where associational networks are dense (like Sheffield) are more often engaged in multiple charities and groups. Finally, in Nantes, we observed a significant religious dimension in the engagement of volunteers, due in particular to the strong presence of religious organisations in the pro-asylum field, especially in relation to housing, food distribution, or general guidance and mentoring activities.

> **The experience of the 'refugee crisis' in France:**
>
> **"I live in the 18th arrondissement [in Paris], so it is an issue that is there in my neighbourhood. (…) Every day when I went to work I crossed the camp on Avenue de Flandre, under the bridge, close to Stalingrad. And, little by little, I have seen more people arriving in the camp. Little by little, I have seen more people staying. And after a while it became impossible not to mobilise because it was unbearable. I mean, personally, it affected me more and more every day. And one day I told to myself: actually you can't do nothing."**

5. How participants relate to their charities and to the refugee support sector

Our final set of empirical findings show that volunteers in Britain and in France are reflective about their own role in the charities and networks in which they are involved. Participants have different expectations about the type of support and the kind of strategies that their organisations should put forward. More generally, volunteers' views about the charities and networks in which they are involved show that the field of refugee support solidarity is changing significantly since the 2015 'refugee crisis'.

- **Participants' perceptions of the refugee support sector**
  In many interviews, volunteers make a distinction between bigger and established charities and more local and informal groups or networks. In particular, many of the participants who are active in the informal networks that emerged in the context of the 'refugee crisis' seem to have negative views about bigger charities, and more specifically the organisations that act as service providers on behalf of the government. In their view, these organisations are less flexible and thus less able to respond to some of the needs of refugees (and also volunteers). They also feel that the dependence of these charities on public funding limits their ability to criticise governments' policies (see below). However, participants involved in bigger charities argue that these organisations are easier to identify for people who don't know the field, and that the activities of volunteers are usually better defined and monitored. Nevertheless, many argue that strategic alliances between different types of organisations are necessary. For instance, participants explain that the more established charities may serve as a supporting structure for the more recent and informal groups in their first years of existence. Likewise, larger charities could rely on these more recent and informal groups to help with specific activities (for example in relation to the housing of asylum seekers and refugees).

During the interviews, many participants also highlighted the difficulties faced by their charities in the context of austerity, and they pointed out the need for more paid staff and material resources across the sector. Several participants – in particular in the UK – especially blamed the cuts to charity funding in recent years and explained how this has affected their work. They felt that, as volunteers, they were sometimes given responsibilities for which they were not fully trained, and that they did not always receive the support and guidance that they needed because of a lack of resources and staff. More generally, many volunteers insisted on the scarcity of public funding in the field of refugee support and argued that charities and civil society were doing the job that the government should be doing. The difficulties faced by charities affected participants' in many ways. We found a high turnover of volunteers, both in France and in the UK. Although we did not interview individuals who had left the refugee support sector, our respondents stressed this point and suggested possible explanations, which are often related to the lack of funding in the sector: insufficient matching of skills and tasks; training that did not prepare them for every aspect of their work; periods of very intense and emotionally draining activities that could lead to episodes of burnout (for the case of Calais and Dunkirk in particular).

> **The impact of funding shortages:**
>
> **"So there should be more people volunteering and working here, there would be more time to help everybody."**

- **Participants' integration in their charity**
  Whilst most participants explained that they were aware of the personal problems that can emerge when working with refugees who are in very difficult situations, they also mentioned that their organisation was not always able to provide appropriate guidance on how to deal with these issues. Some participants suggested the idea of having more regular interactions with other volunteers and the management team in order to express their concerns and find solutions together. Some others referred to the existence of networks of counsellors that could be reached to discuss possible emotional difficulties related to volunteering in the sector. Finally, some participants mentioned the idea of having more personalised training, for example through mentoring and shadowing processes involving paid staff or more experienced volunteers. Overall, many participants

felt that there could be more connections between the volunteers and the organisation in which they are involved, as well as more information about the way their organisation works (i.e. its structure, its points of contact, its different services). This was the case in particular in the bigger charities in the two countries. As for the more informal networks that emerged since 2015, we observed that many of them are currently undergoing a process of institutionalisation and formalisation of their activities. This further leads participants to discuss the objectives of their groups as well as their situation in the broader refugee support sector.

Generally, our findings show that most volunteers were somewhat disconnected from the campaigning or lobbying work that was being done by their organisations. In some cases, participants argued that they were interested in the practical support to refugees rather than the political claims put forward by their organisation. In other cases, participants felt that they lacked the information and expertise to follow in detail the claims that were made by their charity. Finally, some participants argued that this was mainly due to a lack of integration of volunteers in the structure and agenda setting of their organisation. Overall, the interviews show that volunteering is perceived as something with a different timing from campaigning or lobbying. Participants argued that the priority for them was to make concrete changes to the life of refugees 'here and now' rather than in the longer term through claims making. Although most participants mentioned that they agreed with the mandate and strategy of their charity, a minority of them was more critical. Some questioned for example the reliance of their organisation on government funding or the fact that their work was limited to the support of asylum seekers and refugees (and not other groups who are destitute). These participants were aware of the constraints and dilemmas that refugee support charities were facing. They explained, for example, the tensions between practices of compassion and repression or control, and the risk of co-optation for some organisations within the immigration detention and deportation system.

As we mentioned in the first section, participants who were themselves asylum seekers and refugees have distinct motivations for volunteering. Most of them highlighted that they got involved in their charity to 'give something back', to facilitate their integration, and to fight isolation and boredom in their daily life. Therefore, their relation to their organisation was slightly different from the other volunteers that we interviewed. In most organisations represented in our fieldwork, we observed that asylum seeker and refugee volunteers were mostly working in specific tasks, such as signposting and general guidance offered to service users or translation services. Few of them were involved in more managerial task or were integrated in the management team of their organisation. This question was discussed with organisation representatives, who acknowledged that there is a need for a better integration of refugee volunteers in their organisation, at all levels.

The significance of the 'support system':

"When I worked in [name of the organisation] (…) there were people who trained us (…). This current project at the [name of the organisation] is now on the way to get like that. You know, in terms of supervision, training resources. Now they've got paid staff since the last financial year. So it's not just volunteers and in my initial experience in [name of the organisation] team there were 4-5 of us volunteers but each had a staff member who was a mentor. And that's coming into this project. It's that support system which attracts me both to this project and the other project I'm working on another day of the week, they have the same structure."

The role of volunteers who are asylum seekers or refugees:

"The thing I don't like is that no one in the senior management team is a refugee. And I have said that. I can't see any refugee in the [name of the organisation] structure going any further than people like [name], who manages the project. And I find that shocking. I've said that because we had the staff and volunteers day last year and I've said that."

Recommendations

Our research showed the transformations of the refugee support sector since 2015 and the new forms of solidarity that emerged in the context of the 'refugee crisis' in Britain and in France. Our findings also showed the challenges that the individuals and organisations active in this sector are facing. Several points can be highlighted, which lead to specific recommendations. The first five recommendations are aimed at the charities active in the field. The last three recommendations are aimed at policy makers and the public at large.

- Our findings highlighted the variety of refugee support volunteers' profiles, backgrounds, motivations and expectations in France and Britain. Over the course of the interviews, many volunteers stressed that their experience in the field did not always match their motivations, skills or expectations. This can affect their motivation and lead to a high turnover in the sector. Some charities have put in place personalised systems of skills screening and training, which were valued by participants. In particular, we found that mentoring systems and the shadowing of staff and/or experienced volunteers allowed new volunteers to more quickly find their place in their organisation and adapt their experience to their needs. In contrast, more traditional forms of training such as information sessions and classes were considered by participants to be useful but not personalised enough. Therefore, we recommend that charities active in the refugee support sector exchange best practices to better tailor the training and tasks of volunteers.

- Our findings showed that asylum seekers and refugees who are themselves volunteers tend to have a limited range of activities in their organisations. We therefore recommend a better integration of this group of volunteers, including at the management level.

- Our findings showed that many participants experienced emotional tensions and fatigue (including burnouts) in the course of their experience. We recommend that mechanisms are put in place to prevent these difficulties and to support volunteers who face them. We found that participants appreciated the possibility to attend regular de-briefing sessions or talking/listening groups where they could share their difficulties. Also, our findings suggest that participants found more informal regular events helpful, as they enabled them to socialise and to learn from each others' experience. These events also allowed them to strengthen their feeling of belonging and therefore to sustain their engagement over time.

- Our findings showed that dominant political and media discourses that lead to distinctions between 'deserving' refugees and 'undeserving' (or 'less deserving') 'Others' have an effect on volunteers in the sector. They can lead to processes of exclusion and they can also create false expectations about the relation between volunteers and refugees. We recommend that charities address these questions actively, for instance through information and training sessions in which dominant representations of refugees are critically discussed. In particular, we recommend that these sessions address questions of power-relations between volunteers and refugees.

- We recommend mechanisms that enable a closer cooperation between the different organisations and networks active in the field. Our research showed that more cooperation is needed between the larger organisations already established in the sector for several decades and the more informal smaller groups and networks that emerged in the context of the 2015 'refugee crisis'. For example, the cooperation and exchange of best practices between these different organisations could be facilitated by the inclusion of more recent groups and networks in multi-organisational platforms, such as the Coordination Française pour le Droit d'Asile in France. Also, we recommend the use of social media and websites to centralise the information about the different groups active in the field. For example, the mapping of the different charities and networks active in different regions of Britain and France would be useful for the organisations and the public at large to identify the different actors present in the field. Finally, in the context of Europeanisation of immigration and asylum policies, we suggest that these types of initiatives could be used to create and reinforce linkages and exchange of best practices between charities across countries.

- Our research showed the negative impacts of austerity policies on the refugee support sector. The significant cuts on charities' funding over the last decade have put the sector under high pressure, in a context in which the needs of asylum seekers and refugees have increased. This has affected organisations, and in particular their staff and volunteers, who find it increasingly difficult to respond to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Also, our research showed that some of the charities depending on public funding find it more and more difficult to campaign for refugees' rights. We recommend an end to austerity policies in the Third Sector, the allocation of adequate public funding to refugee support charities, and that governments guarantee the capacity of charities to campaign for refugees' rights (independently from their reliance on public funding).

- Policies and practices that criminalise or repress solidarity towards migrants and refugees have a significant and negative impact on organisations and individuals active in this field. They make the actions of many groups and networks difficult or impossible, they lead to the exclusion of some groups of migrants from the services provided by refugee support charities, and they feed into a climate of suspicion and fear towards migrants and refugees in general. In line with the idea of the 'hostile environment' in Britain, governments justified these policies by saying that solidarity actions are a 'pull factor' as they encourage people to migrate to Europe. Many studies have shown that there is no evidence for this claim.[12] We urge governments to end these policies and support the work done by organisations and volunteers in the field.

- Finally, through the narratives of volunteers active for the support of migrants and refugees, our findings illustrate the increasingly difficult living conditions of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Britain, France and across Europe. We hope that our research can add to the many voices of individuals and organisations that demand more rights for migrants and refugees, an end to restrictive immigration and asylum policies such as the 'hostile environment' in Britain, and a general change of paradigm on these issues.

Endnotes

[1] Although we refer to the notion of 'refugee crisis' in this report (as an idea that was widely circulated in media and political discourses in 2015), we argue that the idea of 'crisis' should be understood critically and that it reflects a failure of EU member states and institutions to respect the rights and dignity of refugees and migrants.

[2] It is estimated that 35,000 people have died in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea between 2000 and 2018.

[3] This is the case of the measures taken by the Italian government in the summer 2018 to penalise migrant rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

[4] Throughout the project, we were mindful of ethical issues and we observed a high level of sensitivity in the collection and handling of data. In particular, we guaranteed the anonymity of our participants at all stages of the research process.

[5] These figures are approximate as some of the more informal networks we accessed have overlapping structures.

[6] Although we followed a snowball sampling strategy throughout the data collection process, we insisted on recruiting a range of volunteers who are of working age as they have usually less time for interviews and are therefore more difficult to reach.

[7] We have used the classification by the INSEE in France and the ONS in the UK to design this chart. For the case of the participants who are retired, we have used their past occupation.

[8] Overall, our findings show that very few participants presented their engagement as a totally selfless act that did not benefit them in any way.

[9] We have presented these findings in: D'Halluin, E., Maestri, G., Monforte, P. and Rambaud, E. (2020), "Comment (ne pas) Juger des Réfugiés? Déstabilisation et Réévaluations des Cadres du Mérite chez leurs Soutiens", in L. Ruiz de Elvira and S. Aurore Saeidnia (eds.), *Les Mondes de la Bienfaisance: Une Approche Comparative des Pratiques du Bien*, Paris: Editions de l'EHESS.

[10] For example, some charities ask for references before accepting to host refugees, and they can check their legal status, which can lead to exclude undocumented migrants from their services.

[11] The law that (until July 2018) made it illegal to help or facilitate the entry, circulation or residence of undocumented migrants in the French territory under certain conditions.

[12] See for example the study by Cusumano and Villa (2019) on the effects of Sea Rescue NGOs on migrants leaving Libyan shores.

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We welcome your feedback!

We hope that this report will generate debates and exchanges with individuals and organisations active in the field of refugee support and beyond.
We would be happy to receive your feedback, comments and reactions. Please visit the project website: **https://altruism.hypotheses.org**,
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