

# Migration, Human Rights and Inclusion:

Assessing the Role of Civil Society  
in the OSCE Region

ODIHR conference, 27 – 28 June 2022, Warsaw, Poland





# Event overview

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) hosted a conference entitled “Migration, Human Rights, and Inclusion: Assessing the Role of Civil Society in the OSCE Region” on 27 and 28 June 2022 in Warsaw.

The conference brought together 57 representatives of civil society, national human rights institutions and international organizations from across the OSCE region. This short report highlights key messages and insights from the event with an emphasis on issues that are particularly relevant for partners and allies of civil society organizations working in the field of migration, human rights and inclusion such as national and local authorities, national human rights institutions, international organizations and donors. The aim is to raise awareness about the potential and the needs of civil society organizations in times of crisis and beyond.\*

\*This report does not represent the official position of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Its content reflects opinions expressed by participants in the event.



# Key Takeaways



Prioritize partnerships and cooperation to be stronger in times of crisis and emergency situations



Understand the role and capacities of civil society in times of crisis



Support human rights monitoring at international borders





Plan beyond emergency and towards long-term integration



Engage host communities and empower migrants



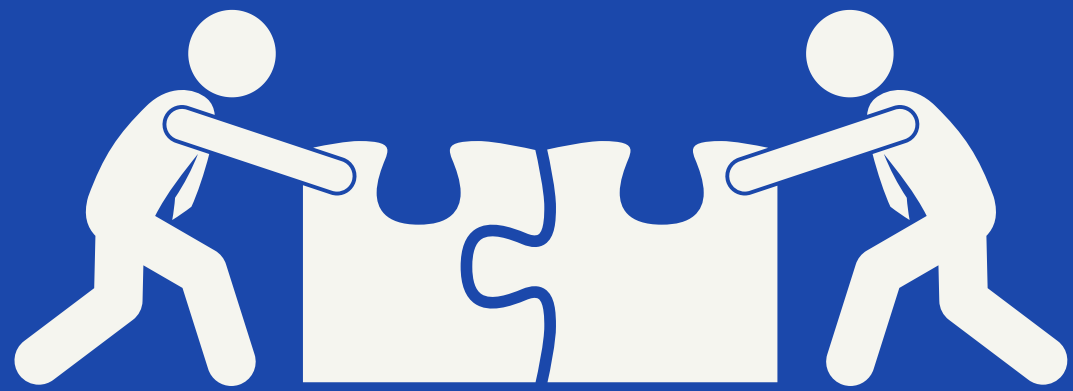
Tackle discrimination and racism



Promote balanced public debates about migration and refugees

# Key Takeaways

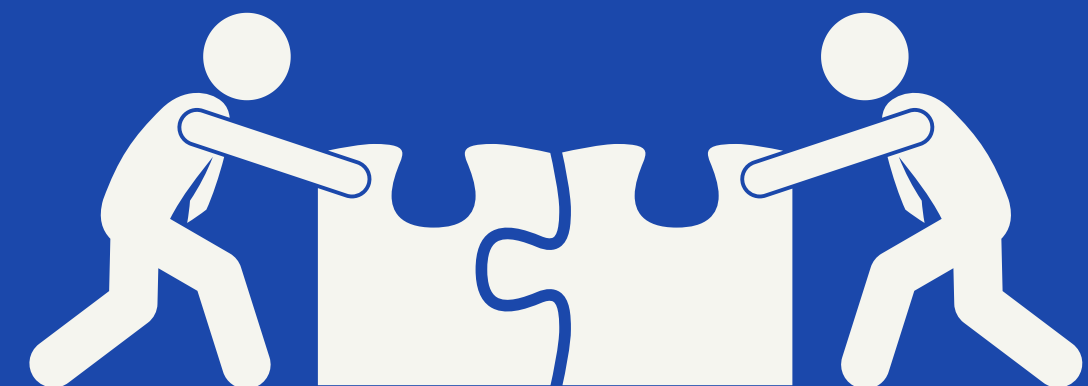
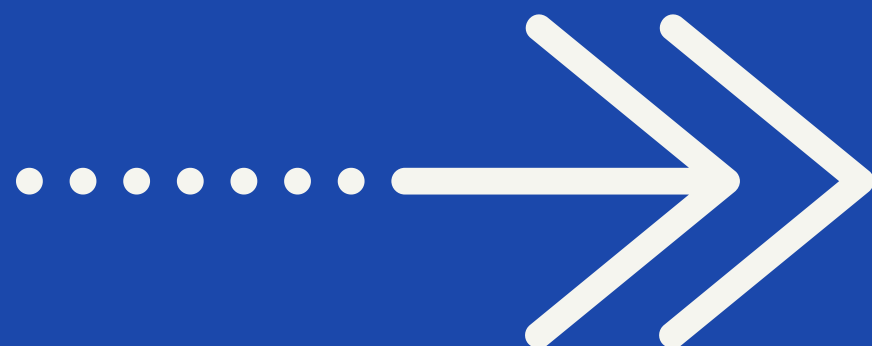




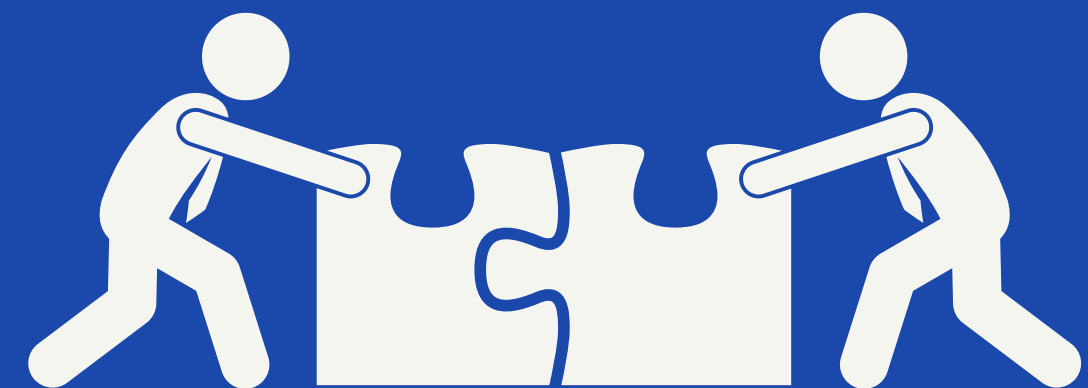
Prioritize partnerships  
and cooperation  
to be stronger  
in times of crisis  
and emergency  
situations



- If cooperation and coordination between civil society organizations and their partners functions well in non-crisis times, it can be quickly and effectively mobilized in times of crisis. When trust is absent, the crisis response will suffer and people in need of assistance will fall through the cracks.
- People in need of international protection have different needs based on gender, age, ethnicity, and other characteristics. If these are considered early enough, assistance will be more efficient. Civil society is well placed to recognize special needs and characteristics of beneficiaries. It can provide crucial feedback and data about various vulnerable groups that can inform policies and the flow of assistance and resources organized by national authorities and international organizations. Information sharing works best if trust is in place.



- When responding to emergencies linked to rapid increases in migration and refugee flows, each actor should reconsider their main roles and limitations, be prepared to learn from others as well as from their own mistakes.



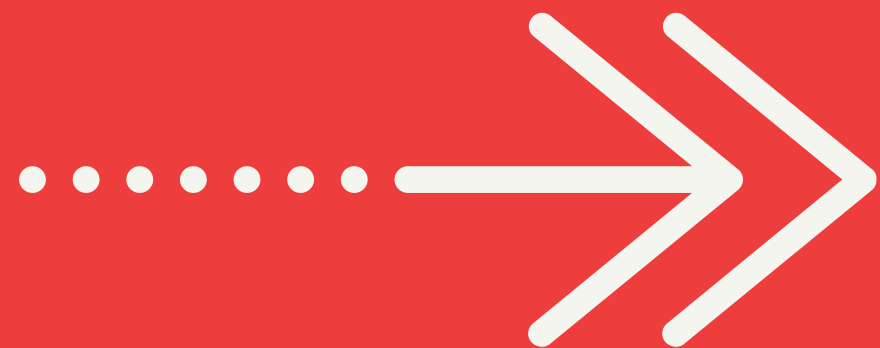


Understand the role  
and capacities  
of civil society  
in times of crisis





- Civil society activists and volunteers need protection against criminalization for their human rights activities. When much of the emergency assistance rests on their shoulders, they also need continuous mental health support.
- National and local authorities should not assume that during emergency response, civil society can take care of everything nor that it can be completely replaced by state-run services. Complementarity and coordination are key ingredients for success.



- While generally scarce, funding can be temporarily plentiful in times of crisis and comes with reporting, due diligence and other requirements. However, during emergencies, funds need to be available quickly and respond to dynamically evolving needs. Donors and funding bodies could jointly consider how to make their requirements simpler, more predictable and therefore easier to comply with when human resources in civil society organizations are stretched to the limit. Funding can enable organizations to hire additional staff who can help with finance and reporting.
- International organizations and national human rights institutions can act as mediators between state and non-state actors and can create neutral spaces for working out goals and solutions. They are also promoters of international standards that should frame the work of state authorities as well as civil society organizations. This applies in times of crisis and beyond.





# Support human rights monitoring at international borders



- Systematic and reliable human rights monitoring is essential for effective advocacy. Networks of monitoring organizations, particularly transnational ones, can be powerful in providing comparable cross-national data and ensure the legitimacy and accuracy of reports of human rights violations occurring at international borders.
- National human rights institutions not only act as monitors themselves, but can also help build bridges between civil society organizations that carry out monitoring and the state.
- Human rights monitoring has an important preventive function. Experience shows that where monitors have unrestricted access to a territory, there are fewer human rights violations.

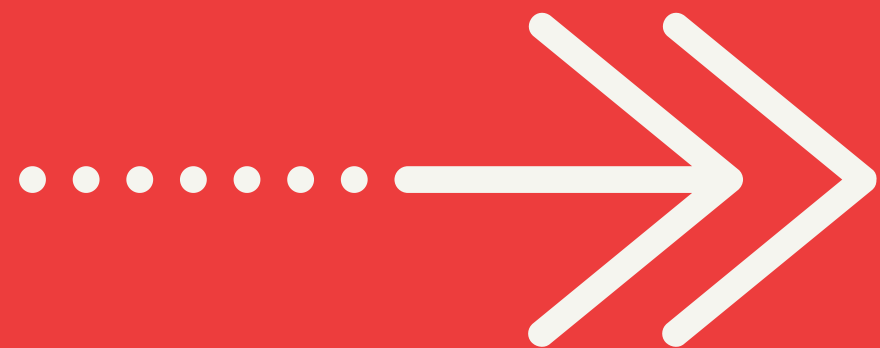




Plan beyond  
emergency  
and towards  
long-term  
integration



- Even when it is not clear how many people on the move will want to settle in a host country and to what extent states should invest in long-term integration, welcoming and inclusive policies put in place by national authorities from the very beginning can go a long way to prevent social exclusion and to avoid future high costs of integration.
- Moving from emergency responses to medium- and long-term policies can be challenging. All stakeholders need to realize that integration is a long-term process that requires planning and a strategy with a clear definition of short-, medium- and long-term goals.



- A participatory approach to planning and implementing integration strategies, engaging various state and civil society actors as well as beneficiaries as partners rather than tokens, is demanding but pays off in the long run.
- Migrants and refugees can find themselves particularly vulnerable due to their gender, age, ethnicity, or disability. But such characteristics should not make them vulnerable by definition. Welcoming and integration policies need to be set up in a way to limit or eliminate those periods of vulnerability.





Engage host  
communities  
and empower  
migrants





- Emergency responses as well as long-term integration strategies are more effective and less contested when host communities are well informed and can participate in shaping and implementing them.
- State authorities and civil society organizations should provide opportunities for local organizations, including migrant and refugee organizations, to engage in assistance, mediation, advocacy and service provision during and beyond emergencies.
- People who have experienced human trafficking, hate crimes or discrimination need help transitioning from being victims to survivors. Engaging mentors with similar experiences can facilitate this process and ease access to the assistance and services needed by communities in vulnerable situations.





# Tackle discrimination and racism



- Racism does not take a break during a pandemic or at wartime. To the contrary, its targets become more vulnerable and the perpetrators more emboldened in times of crisis. Independent bodies are needed to investigate instances of police brutality and other human rights violations, ensure penalties and prevent violence occurring with impunity.
- The rights of internally displaced people and Roma refugees, including those who are stateless, should be respected and secured without discrimination.
- All actors including civil society organizations must take measures to prevent discriminatory treatment of some groups of refugees based on their ethnicity or religion. All actors should carefully examine whether, even if inadvertently, they perpetuate a hostile environment for discriminated groups.





Promote  
balanced public  
debates about  
migration and  
refugees



- It is better to frame public debates about migrants and migration by focusing on the needs of the whole society/community rather than by singling out migrants or refugees as a special group. For example, when discussing housing needs, focus on affordable housing for all.
- Experience shows that linking welcoming attitudes towards migrants and refugees to positive national values is more effective than focusing on the human rights of migrants.
- Local governments, in cooperation with civil society organizations, should provide accurate and timely information to the media and help build their capacity to report on migration, including by inviting journalists for field visits.





"In line with its mandate, ODIHR regularly engages with civil society organizations working in different areas related to human rights and democratic institutions. It creates a platform for discussion, exchange of experience and good practice and facilitates cooperation with national and international bodies, for example, by highlighting key takeaways that emerge from such encounters."

**Matteo Mecacci,**  
ODIHR Director



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