

Executive Summary

This paper is the result of a mapping exercise across 6 countries in Europe (Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia), to identify changemakers who are welcoming and supporting refugees from Ukraine. The aim is, first, to inform and inspire the sector by showing the work going on, and especially highlight the role of changemakers with a migrant background, as well as to highlight some of the challenges they face. Second, we hope to provide actionable ideas to support and activate changemakers in this field. The effort is part of Ashoka's Hello Europe Refugee Fund, launched in early 2022 to support social entrepreneurs and changemakers across Europe doing systemic work around the large movement of refugees from Ukraine.

Using a 'snowball' data collection model through in person interviews, it analyzes 365 changemakers work from around Europe, looking at their work, barriers, opportunities, and desired societal changes. The data that emerged pointed to interesting trends:

Who are the changemakers?

One third of all changemakers analyzed are migrants themselves. This shows a powerful resilience and changemaking, as they overcome significant obstacles to start their organizations and achieve funding to support fellow migrants. Regarding gender, 70% are women, reinforcing the observation that 'help has a female face', and often, despite balanced gender distribution, they play roles traditionally associated to women. Regarding age, youth are very active, especially those from "Millennial and Gen Z" generations, despite significant challenges to access resources. Finally, the majority work in NGOs or other non profits, with 74% holding key leadership roles. Half of them are involved in relief work in Ukraine itself.

Self-identified as changemakers

All respondents identify themselves as changemakers, which is a key factor for ongoing change. The degree of self-identification varies according to factors such as gender identity, location. Lived experiences, especially overcoming personal and work-related barriers, significantly shape one's self-perception as a changemaker.

What are the barriers and challenges they face?

Respondents spoke mostly of lack of funding, difficult relationship with government authorities, mental health challenges, workforce deficit, lack of

awareness, prejudices and negative narratives. In addition, the report points to long-term financial stability for changemakers' organizations as a major need, as well as an increased awareness in society about their work, and an urgency to address harmful narratives about refugees. Opportunities emerge also around building strong community, the continued sense of urgency many feel, the untapped potential of people on the move as changemakers themselves, and general goodwill towards refugees require the contribution of the whole spectrum of actors.

What are changemakers hoping to change in the long term?

Interviewees point to a deep need for a shift in mindsets and values to start with empathy, recognize the value and contribution of refugees, overcome biases, and address fears of personal neglect ("if the other gets something, I might lose it"). There should be a more intentional focus on community-based changemakers. They also talked about raising awareness about mental health and celebrating the efforts already made as a way to move forward. They also highlighted the need for better information on migrants, responsible media narratives, political will, promotion of diversity, direct interactions between migrants and locals, and more resources and assistance for the sector and refugees. Finally, there is a latent desire for more spaces to participate.

There are specific challenges experienced by the six countries included in the research and detailed by local authors:

Czechia



accepted the largest number per capita of refugees compared to other countries. Challenges include housing, employment, and long-term integration of refugees. The country also notes tensions among vulnerable groups and the importance of shifting refugee narratives.

Hungary



Despite its multiethnic history, currently there is an imaginary connection between ethnic homogeneity and economic success. The country's approach to migration is mostly short-term, with a lack of long-term strategies for integration. This calls for a paradigm shift in migration narratives, strategies, and hiring practices.

Romania



Characterized as a country of emigration, Romania was unprepared for the influx of Ukrainian refugees following the outbreak of war. NGOs and civil society played a significant role, but there is a need for effective state migration policy, and addressing the impact of the crisis on various societal levels.

Germany



has a rich migration history and large migrant communities. Overall, it seems the country recognizes young migrants as powerful contributors to society and calls for a shift from a deficit-oriented view to a resource-oriented perspective. The importance of education and addressing socio-economic disparities among migrant children is emphasized.

Poland



Due to migration patterns and dynamic societal changes in Poland, it has recently become an immigration hub, particularly for those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The challenges and opportunities include the growing role of civil society organizations and the need for improved migration and refugee legal system.

Slovakia



responded to the challenge of an unprecedented influx of refugees through the contribution of local municipalities, NGOs, and international organizations to the humanitarian effort. Issues of political leadership and public opinion regarding refugees are especially visible.

The report concludes with **five key recommendations** to strengthen the changemaking ecosystem in Europe for refugees and migrants.



There is a need for **more leadership from underrepresented communities** such as those with a migrant background, women, and youth. These leaders bring invaluable insights and resourcefulness, but often face additional barriers including funding challenges and isolation. Therefore, stakeholders must intentionally identify and support these leaders, potentially through dedicated funding mechanisms and diversity checks in organizational leadership structures.



New resources are required urgently to support changemakers aiding refugees, particularly long-term financial support to sustain organizations and their leaders. A shift in focus from emergency relief to long-term investment is crucial, and funding must be accessible, flexible, and focused on key long-term topics such as migration narratives and community support.



There must be **more connection spaces** to foster significant personal and professional connections between changemakers and the communities they work in. This involves networking and co-creation opportunities, as well as deeper connections to overcome feelings of isolation.



The **narratives surrounding migration need to change**, focusing on contributions and hope rather than pity or compassion. This involves building empathy, countering propaganda, and celebrating success. Migrants need to be seen as the changemakers they are.



Pointing forward, organizations need **to intentionally activate more changemakers** and provide support to them and their organizations. This involves developing specific strategies to cultivate changemaking within organizations and communities, and dedicating resources and effort towards this.

As we look to the future and the new challenges that loom on the horizon, this report suggests a need to prioritize activating changemakers broadly across society. Increasing changemaking skills and confidence, especially from a young age, is the only way to build a world where Everyone is a Changemaker, and where solutions outrun the problems that emerge.

Targeted at changemakers, social entrepreneurs, policy and business decision-makers, journalists, researchers, and the general public, this report aims to spread the understanding and importance of changemaking across Europe. While the refugee movement was caused by tragic events, it has also spurred positive change in communities and fostered a spirit of entrepreneurship that could benefit Europe in the long run.

