

## GENERAL ARTICLES

# Enacting “Bottom-up” Solidarity in Labor Market Integration for Refugees in England

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the role that third sector organizations (TSOs) play in supporting refugees' access to the labor market in England. TSO practices are conceptualized through the notion of “bottom-up” solidarity. Data gathered through interviews with refugees and representatives from charities, social enterprises, and public authorities are used to identify how TSO actors enact bottom-up solidarity and, in turn, facilitate integration of refugees into the labor market. The findings show how labor market transition is built on the transformation of the wider circumstances faced by refugees. Data also demonstrates how the creation of direct employment opportunities, coupled with intermediation and trust brokerage, and alongside episodic and extended coaching, is key to enacting “bottom-up” solidarity.

**KEYWORDS:** employment, labor market integration, refugees, solidarity, third sector organizations

Refugees face multiple barriers when entering the labor market (Campion 2018; Lee et al. 2020). Limited language skills and low levels of social capital are often substantial obstacles for refugees to access employment (Cheung and Phillimore 2014). The lack of adequate vocational training that recognizes their existing skills, qualifications, and distinct needs also restrict their employability (Aerne et al. 2021). Consequently, the employment rate of refugees is often significantly lower than that of other migrants (Fernández-Reino and Rienzo 2021). For example, in 2020 the unemployment rate of all migrants who moved to the UK for employment reasons was 6 percent; however, the unemployment rate of non-EU born migrants who moved to the UK seeking asylum was 14 percent (Fernández-Reino and Rienzo 2021).

Although refugees' individual agency and resilience are important in determining their engagement with work (Gericke et al. 2018), their labor market entry is often mediated by third sector organizations (TSOs), which can be defined as “formal or informal groups which have some structure and regularity in their operations . . . [and] have performed a key role in the implementation of UK policy” (Calò et al. 2022: 873). Service delivery is considered influential in integration discourses (Phillimore 2012: 7) and TSOs have important functions

in refugee settlement and integration, providing both emotional and instrumental support (Mayblin and James 2019). Previous work has highlighted the ongoing need to examine how TSOs mediate labor market transition for refugees (Lee et al. 2020), particularly as the flows and profiles of refugees and the policy dynamics of receiving countries are constantly evolving (Lugosi et al. 2022). Studies have also pointed to the importance of recognizing variations between refugees, considering how their unique profiles and experiences may shape their engagement with TSOs and, consequently, how TSO practices address their distinct needs (Garkisch et al. 2017). Research within the framework of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010) has focused on the intermediary role of service providers, including civil society actors and public officials (Siviş 2021; Üstübcici 2022). However, the work of TSOs in delivering services for migrants and refugees within the UK remains under-researched (Mayblin and James 2019). Only a few studies have been conducted in the UK and they mainly focused on conflicts between welfare-to-work policy and the ethos of assistance toward refugees, issues of solidarity and the provision of legal services, and the promotion of voluntary work (Calò et al. 2022).

Our study contributes to knowledge by exploring the role of TSOs in enabling refugee integration into the British labor market. More specifically, in response to the call by Eun Su Lee and colleagues (2020), it examines how “bottom-up” solidarity by TSOs manifests in social and organizational practices to address limitations in state-led service provision and how refugees have responded to the support offered by these actors. In so doing, it fills gaps in scholarly literature on the roles and practices of TSOs as the conduits for refugee employability.

Drawing on in-depth qualitative interview data from refugees and associated organizational stakeholders in the South of England, the article identifies key practices of support provided by disparate networks, which includes civil society and private sector actors. The article conceptualizes the support provided by TSOs through the notion of bottom-up solidarity, which is enacted to fulfil essential functions of labor market integration. We argue that bottom-up solidarity interventions by TSOs are tailored to refugees’ needs and that their responsive and flexible interventions help to create highly personalized pathways to labor market integration. More specifically, the data are used to identify four forms of TSO support practice that characterize the enactment of bottom-up solidarity facilitating refugee access to the labor market. We argue that these domains of practice seek to address the wider circumstances faced by migrants, thus removing additional stressors that interfere with their labor market transition. These practices also involve personalized activities, including the creation of voluntary opportunities, which seek to overcome barriers caused by the lack of past work experience. TSOs attempt to bridge gaps in social capital through intermediation with external actors and engage in tailored, instrumental coaching interventions to improve employability.

### **Contextualizing Integration: The Multilevel Dynamics of Migrant Integration Policies**

In the context of this study, integration is viewed as complex, ongoing, relational, and negotiated processes involving change among multiple actors, as opposed to one-way adaptation and simplistic category shifts from non-integrated to integrated (Klarenbeek 2021). Moreover, the focus in this article is more specifically on labor market integration processes associated with the capacity of refugees to access and remain engaged in decent work that supports their independence and wellbeing.

Literature on integration often focuses on just one scale of analysis—European, national, or local—and does not explore the interactions between levels. However, studies on multilevel governance consider the relations between different layers (Scholten 2013). Scholten proposed four configurations of relations between levels: centralist (top-down), localist (bottom-up), multilevel, and decoupled. The top-down relationship between the different levels of government implies “a clear central codification of the division of labor between levels and control mechanisms to ensure that policy implementation at the local level follows central rules and reflects the central policy frame” (Scholten and Penninx 2016: 93). This approach embraces the idea of “national paradigms of migration or integration,” that is, nation-based approaches to integration (*ibid.*). In contrast, the bottom-up approach is a localist perspective where local government actors “formulate policies, respond to local policy agendas, and exchange knowledge and information horizontally with other local governments” (Scholten and Penninx 2016: 94). This approach frames integration policies in terms of specific local modes (Borkert and Caponno 2010; Penninx et al. 2004).

Multilevel governance refers to “interaction and joint coordination of relations between the various levels of government without clear dominance of one level . . .” It “is thought to be most effective” and “in terms of policy frames . . .” it “is likely to engender some convergence between policy frames at different levels, produced and sustained by their mutual interaction” (Scholten and Penninx 2016: 94). The fourth type, decoupled, is “characterized by the absence of any meaningful policy coordination between levels” and it “can lead to policy conflicts between government levels” (Scholten and Penninx 2016: 94). National and local integration policies are seen to be diverging (Jørgensen 2012; Poppelaars and Scholten 2008).

Such a complex framework of migration governance policies across various levels and settings requires a “local turn” to foster integration and ensure both take-up and local implementation (Scholten and Penninx 2016; Siviş 2021). Literature has recognized the crucial role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private organizations (Calò et al. 2022). Researchers have argued that a more polycentric, decentralized, and consensual approach is more responsive and effective than “top-down” regulatory methods (Gunningham 2009). Whilst part of the governance literature reflects on the shift in the regulatory methods from a “command and control” approach to soft law mechanisms (Gunningham 2009) and the interactions between different layers of government (Scholten and Penninx 2016), scholars have called for a “local turn” in migration and integration studies (e.g., Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011).

Research in this area has considered how state actors—so called “street level bureaucrats”—support refugees more generally through service provision (Hinger et al. 2016; Ulutaş 2021). Studies have also examined how these actors rationalize their actions in their selective enactment of support (Üstübcici 2022). However, it is important to stress that “street level bureaucrats” refers to state actors (Lipsky 2010), while support for refugees, especially for labor market integration, relies on collaborative arrangements with actors from commercial and third sector organizations (İçduygu and Diker 2017; Lugosi et al. 2022; Siviş 2021). These actors enact interrelated practices and are, arguably, proxy actors of the state, but they do not have the same resources; nor are they bound to state institutional arrangements in the same way as government ones (Bagavos and Kourachanis 2022; Lugosi et al. 2022; Üstübcici 2022). Their support service often goes beyond narrowly defined institutional roles or practices (Strokosch and Osborne 2016). Consequently, to better understand how localized support for labor market integration operates, it is necessary to examine how TSO actors enact “bottom-up” solidarity.

## **The “Local Turn”: Bottom-Up Solidarity and the Role of TSOs in Providing Services to Refugees**

Despite the abundance of studies on refugee access to the labor market, there have been calls for research exploring different aspects of labor market integration, including cross-sector partnerships, successful forms of engagement, and collaborative efforts between different actors (Lee et al. 2020; Lugosi et al. 2022). The bottom-up solidarity concept adopted in this study responds to these calls, focusing on the role of the TSOs, and is consistent with the spirit of the local governance literature. Although scholars identify difficulties in establishing a single unifying definition of “solidarity,” affirming that there are different forms (Bauder 2020), we argue that referring to solidarity in this context is appropriate. Hence, our categorization and the concept in governance literature are complementary but differ in their focus. Foregrounding our interpretation of bottom-up solidarity stresses the importance of understanding the everyday practices through which it is enacted according to the specific needs of particular refugees. Within this setting, the bottom-up approach contributes to an understanding of practices of organizing the integration of refugees into the labor market.

Solidarity captures “bonds, expression and experience in which constitutional (legal) and existential (sociological and political) dimensions predominate and are at the very least in a mutual (if not always directly causal) and dynamic relationship”; indeed such “a complex notion, with no clear-cut normative dimension or consensual conceptualization” offers “diverse possibilities in terms of meaning, scope, expectations and implications” (Morano-Foadi 2017: 227). Importantly, when solidarity is employed in the context of integration and, more specifically, in labor market integration for refugees, it presents some peculiar organizational connotations as many dynamics and actors shape its processes. It is thus characterized by the capacity to tailor services, which enables TSO actors to address refugee experiences, capabilities, and needs.

TSO activities potentially span a variety of roles that directly and indirectly mediate the transition of refugees into work; they facilitate interaction, the exchange of information, and mobilize resources, thus creating opportunities for refugees, which are conducive to employability (Mayblin and James 2019; Morano-Foadi et al. 2021; Perna 2019). TSOs thus act as conduits that interpret and enact state responsibility; however, their services are often sporadic and underfunded, and their enactment of solidarity can take diverse forms that need to be better understood (Bagavos and Kourachanis 2022; Morano-Foadi et al. 2021; Siviş 2021). Our study thus contributes to knowledge by examining how bottom-up solidarity is performed by UK TSOs.

## **The Role of TSOs in Labor Market Integration for Refugees in England**

The UK government has devolved responsibility for integration from central or local authorities to regional or localized organizations and networks, encompassing TSOs and other non-state actors (Morano-Foadi et al. 2021). Reflecting the “decoupling” concept adopted in multilevel settings (Scholten and Penninx 2016), coordination between national and local levels and civil society organizations has decreased (Morano-Foadi et al. 2021). Consequently, TSOs have a wider set of roles and range of responsibilities in facilitating labor market integration.

In England, TSOs dealing with refugees are “often small, local, volunteer run organizations which often fill gaps of public services” (Calò et al. 2022: 874) and remain the only source of support (Mayblin and James 2019). Moreover, in the last decade, a noticeable reduction in the

availability of tailored support for asylum seekers and refugees is more evident (Mayblin and James 2019). Funds allocated to local authorities and refugee community organizations have been cut significantly (Mayblin and James 2019; Phillimore and Goodson 2010).

The government has gradually moved to deliver services for refugees through outsourcing and multisector partnership arrangements (Mayblin and James 2019; Strategic Migration Partnership n.d.). Critics have argued that the state has increasingly functioned as an “enabler,” delegating some procedural functions to commercial service providers while also promoting the role of civil society organizations (Calò et al. 2022; Haugh and Kitson 2007). The state’s aim was to encourage greater levels of voluntarism with the involvement of charities, private enterprises, and social enterprises in the running of public services (Calò et al. 2022: 873; Lugosi et al. 2022). TSOs were considered as being “locally embedded or better able to articulate the needs of local communities” (Haugh and Kitson 2007: 983) and to thus better understand specific societal needs than many state actors.

TSOs provide migrants and refugees with basic services, especially at the time of their arrival in the host country (Garkisch et al. 2017). Yet, TSOs generally have limited resources; they depend on governmental or other forms of funding that are restricted in terms of timescales, objectives, and the activities they support; and they must often compete for funding (Garkisch et al. 2017). However, the ability of UK local authorities to support and engage in service coordination has diminished (Bales and Mayblin 2018; Darling 2016). The Refugee Integration and Employment Support (RIES), which provided refugees with “a personal development worker who facilitated access to key social welfare agencies such as Jobcentre Plus” (Phillimore 2012: 7), was dismantled. The MIF (Migration Impact Fund) was also scrapped (Thomas 2019: 13). Welfare and employability support across the whole welfare system and tailored support from employment agencies and Jobcentres diminished (Anderson 2013). In the context of these dynamics and contrasting forces, our study examines how TSOs enact bottom-up solidarity to support labor market integration for refugees.

## Methods

This research adopted a pragmatist approach that sought to develop context-sensitive understanding of organizational processes and actionable knowledge (Kelly and Cordeiro 2020). Consequently, the study focused on TSO actors and their activities in a specific county in the South of England, considering the local dimensions of refugee labor market integration. The decision to examine this service ecosystem was driven by the potential relevance of the data to our objective to identify and assess inter and intra-organizational support mechanisms. This setting represented what Michael Patton (2015) referred to as a “data rich” empirical case, insofar as refugee labor support was provided by a network of TSOs working in combination with local authorities and social enterprises. Studying this context thus enabled us to analyze activities at the level of individual actors, organizations, and among networks of organizations. Moreover, we could examine individual experiences in their social and organizational context to understand the key domains of practices through which local TSOs supported refugee labor market integration.

The project was approved by the university’s ethics committee. Participants were invited directly by members of the research team; they were given information sheets and informed written and/or verbal consent was obtained. Twenty-nine people were interviewed. Six organizational participants were recruited based on their personal knowledge of and involvement in

different domains of refugee reception and processing. They included representatives from the local authority responsible for managing the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Program for the city; two different refugee charities based in the city; a local education and training provider; a local social enterprise supporting refugees; and the International Organization for Migration, which also collaborated with these actors.

Twenty-three refugee participants were selected and recruited through their involvement with one of the refugee support charities and refugee networks. The charities disseminated information about the project among their clients, and the refugees were approached personally while at the charities, given information about the project and its ethical protocols, and invited to participate. The refugee cohort consisted of 13 females and 10 males, 12 of whom had come to the UK via the resettlement program, and 11 of whom were recognized refugees who had gone through the asylum process in the UK. Their ages ranged from 20 to 50, and their nationalities included Afghans, Algerians, Egyptians, Indonesians, Iraqis, Syrians, and Yemenis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English to explore experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of the refugee cohort regarding their labor market access. Different interview protocols were created for the key stakeholder groups, but they all utilized an open questioning approach to elicit rich accounts of institutional, organizational, and other factors facilitating and inhibiting transition into and within the labor market.

Interviews with state and TSO stakeholders explored their views regarding factors that supported or limited refugee access to work, and their activities and experiences in supporting refugees. Interviews with refugees began by exploring their backgrounds, education, and pre-migration work, before examining post-migration experiences of trying to access work, for those who had paid or unpaid jobs, and their career plans.

The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed. Transcripts were anonymized with pseudonyms and adjustments to any data that could identify the participants. Data analysis was conducted manually and began during the fieldwork. The data were analyzed thematically (Saldaña 2016) over several cycles, with three researchers initially scrutinizing and coding the data independently. The multidisciplinary nature of the team, with backgrounds in law, social sciences, and organization studies, enabled us to identify different issues at different cycles of analysis. During the initial analysis cycles, the team adopted an inductive, data centric approach, using line-by-line "open" coding (Saldaña 2016). However, we remained conscious that the refugees and organizational stakeholders had shared transformative ambitions, that is, the desire to facilitate labor market transition. This acted as a broad sensitizing concept for our initial analysis, and we focused primarily on examining a) what forms support took for different organizations, and b) what types of practices individual actors engaged in. The analysis subsequently adopted "focused" coding (Saldaña 2016) of individual experiences, where participants highlighted incidents, actors, organizations, processes, and actions that they saw as influential. Through this process, attention was placed on specific aspects, such as the consequences of different practices, including the challenges and opportunities they created.

The team met at interval periods to discuss similarities and differences in our interpretations of the data. We reviewed individual findings to identify overarching subthemes reflecting key dimensions of support activities and behaviors. At this stage, we agreed that the data pointed to the everyday enactments of support, as manifested in the social practices and experiences. This encompassed practices that addressed labor market entry directly and indirectly. It also considered practices that were aimed at refugees, as well as at external actors and organizations.

## Enacting bottom-up solidarity

Previous studies have discussed how support is enacted in everyday practices of state and non-state actors working with refugees and asylum seekers in relation to their wider reception and settlement (Ulutaş 2021; Üstübici 2022). However, research focusing on labor market interventions often point to generalized areas of activity, such as acting as informational hubs, rather than examining how support is enacted (Siviş 2021)—hence the importance of identifying how it manifests in practice and distinguishing its different forms, based on evidence from frontline practitioners.

More specifically, the data made it possible to distinguish between interventional practices that directly aimed at labor market interventions and those that were indirect forms of interventions. These were key to facilitating access to work, addressing peripheral factors that often inhibited the refugees' ability to focus on employment. The data also enabled us to distinguish between interventions that were aimed specifically at refugees and those focusing on employers or other types of organizational stakeholders, who either employed or mediated the refugees' transition into work.

Regardless of the practice, a distinct value of the solidarity enacted by TSOs was in their flexibility. For example, charitable organizations providing support for refugees and asylum seekers could be very efficient in offering tailor-made services to refugees in assisting their job searches. Their services were adaptable and responsive to specific individual needs—taking into consideration varied backgrounds, gender, and language skills, as well as other factors like past traumatic experiences. While these represented individualized enactments of solidarity, it is also important to stress that the diverse actors involved had limited resources and specific domains of expertise, which was reflected in the scope and focus of the support they offered. However, their individual practices, when viewed holistically, addressed a wide range of needs, providing indirect and direct forms of intervention.

### *Transforming Circumstances*

Transforming circumstances reflects an explicit recognition of the multidimensionality of challenges for refugees and the corresponding need to address them holistically. This is advocated by contemporary researchers and practitioners who stress the need to adopt a multipronged strategy for refugee support service provision (Boenigk et al. 2021). In short, it was necessary for TSOs to overcome a range of inhibitors that compromised refugees' capacity to find, obtain, and sustain employment.

Bottom-up solidarity aimed at labor market integration should be viewed in the wider context of TSO support services, representing indirect interventions. This helps to appreciate how TSO expertise was both sensitive to and responsive to refugee needs. Moreover, it reinforces that labor market integration does not and cannot function as a standalone activity, disconnected from the wider personal and organizational challenges that refugees encounter. Many of the refugees noted the importance of TSO support in addressing basic psychological, social, and administrative hazards, which enabled them to concentrate on employment-related activities. For example, as Zara, a female refugee, stated:

When I went [to the charity] for the first time, it was the only hope for me. They [the charity] helped me a lot during my immigration process for the first time, like in documentation, when I applied for medical exemption to make a medical exemption certificate. They helped me to fill a form . . . for the housing benefit as well. And now they're still helping; they're

trying to find me a job. And the other thing, they give me other support: they organized me a teacher, a teacher for my English. Which is free.

Zara was a graduate in her late twenties who had never worked in her country of origin and had been residing in the UK for approximately one year at the time. Her reflections highlight how employability and support for labor market transition should be thought of as a bundle of practices that encompass building capacities that will eventually facilitate entry into work and career progression (Calò et al. 2022). TSO interviewees often discussed their labor market support in the context of their wider activities that sought to eliminate additional barriers. For example, Adele, who was part of the service delivery team at a local educational provider, observed:

First of all, we start doing the bills, sorting out gas, electricity, and if the family or the people or the children had been put in the right benefit, if not we need to change their benefit. . . . And child tax credit, sometimes they send the letter: “you are not eligible for it” and this kind of stuff. All this process takes time. But anyway, bills, Internet, schools . . . the children will be already allocated to specific schools but doing their free school meals if the children need to, if they need to buy any bus pass, if they’re eligible for it or not. And school uniforms as well, all these.

In principle, the educational provider had a relatively narrow brief, focusing primarily on developing refugees’ work-related capabilities, especially their language skills. However, as Kirsty Strokosch and Stephen Osborne (2016) have argued, TSOs regularly redefined their roles in practice, extending the scope of activities to encompass wider areas beyond narrow conceptions of training and education. Refugees encountered multiple challenges, which were unique to them, for example, concerning their immediate families. Family separation was an understandable source of stress, and many of the refugees without recourse to funds had to dedicate considerable time and effort to raising money to support legal claims and trying to negotiate the country’s immigration system. This also had several notable consequences for their labor market transition. For example, less time could be dedicated to learning and attending English language classes, which could have improved their chances for gaining employment; and their family separation could have increased the risk of social isolation and psychological stress, inhibiting work.

Bottom-up solidarity in relation to labor market integration should therefore be seen as embedded within a wider set of support practices. These practices sought to remove potential risks and barriers, which then enabled the creation of pathways to employment. Importantly, the removal of inhibitors and mitigation of risks was based on the ability of TSOs to understand the specific needs of refugees. However, bottom-up solidarity often involved active facilitation practices that sought to help refugees progress along those pathways. A key set of practices focused on creating direct opportunities.

### ***Creating Direct Opportunities***

Creating direct opportunities refers to the capacities of TSOs to provide paid and/or voluntary work for their clients in their organizations to enhance their employability. De-recognition of qualifications, restricted network capital, lack of language skills, and limited work experience in the localized labor market are strong barriers to accessing work and career mobility for refugees (Lee et al. 2020). Recruiting refugees represents potential psychological and economic risks for organizations, which are consequently reluctant to hire them out of a fear that their



integration into the workforce would require additional time and resources at the expense of organizational performance. This risks perpetually excluding refugees from labor market participation because of restricted opportunities to gain any relevant experience and, subsequently, to develop employability competencies. Addressing this substantial constraint was a central feature of bottom-up solidarity, which involved making direct interventions targeting refugees.

In line with previous research (Calò et al. 2022; Siviş 2021), many of our participants pointed to the support of various actors and networks in facilitating their access to the labor market. However, our findings also helped us understand the practices through which such support was enacted by TSO actors. Specifically, short, informal volunteering opportunities were leveraged to secure part-time work, which could be used to gain full-time employment and subsequently expedite transition across employment sectors (cf., Martin 2012; Tomlinson 2010). TSOs were again in a unique position to facilitate these developmental journeys, in part because they understood their clients' specific needs and exclusionary factors. Moreover, TSOs had the capacity to negate the associated risks and, being functioning organizational entities, their premises and operations could be mobilized as resources to support refugees. This was illustrated by one of our female refugees, Ola, a graduate in her early forties who had been residing in the UK for less than a year. Ola explained the constraints of seeking paid work:

To be honest, I didn't try to ask for paid work, because it meant commitment and I'm looking after my mother at the moment, so I can't commit to part-time or full-time job. But I'm working as a volunteer with an organization . . . which helps and supports new Syrian families.

Importantly, volunteering was viewed by the refugees and the organizations as part of longer processes that unfolded over time, through which refugees gradually built their confidence, developed employability-related capabilities, widened their social networks, and constructed career profiles that could be appreciated by employers embedded in the locality. These opportunities were also transformative insofar as they helped to build trust between different actors. For example, volunteering with a charity acted as a facilitative space to expand Zeinab's employability, as she explained:

I will say the first [job] with [the charity] was because I volunteered, then the volunteering helped them and helped me. So the volunteering helped them to see me and see my skills and, you know, use me. And of course [the colleague] was saying—this is a good person; I'm now going to take her.

Zeinab was a graduate in her thirties with a background in a specialist technical service field who had been residing in the UK for approximately two years. Her observations pointed to her reflective learning and development, but it also showed how these facilitated subsequent labor mobility. Depending on the organization and the skills of refugees, they could morph into longer term, paid positions, as Zeinab affirmed:

I started my job at [the charity]. It was a translation job. I was accompanying . . . at that time the person who was a program officer for this resettlement program. . . . They said—we need someone to help us basically with the resettlement things. So I've done that. And basically with [other] people. The council also was so happy with what we have done. . . . And gradually it became a three-day-a-week job.

The data suggested that practices of bottom-up solidarity involved flexibility and the mobilization of resources in direct response to the needs of their clients (see also Strokosch and Osborne 2016). Dedicated asylum and migration charities were in a unique position to perform or enact solidarity because they knew and appreciated their clients' distinct requirements. More

importantly, they had the organizational resources and capabilities to create bespoke learning and developmental opportunities. Arguably, they also had a certain level of risk appetite, insofar as they were prepared to give refugees work opportunities (for example, in frontline service provision) that commercial organizations would have resisted because of the reputational or financial risks presented by refugees’ limited language skills. Solidarity thus involved the creation of pathways and supporting refugees to traverse them. The examples above point to the role of creating direct opportunities. However, bottom-up solidarity often involved intermediation, where TSOs sought to exert their influence beyond their organizations in support of refugees.

### ***Intermediation and Trust Brokering***

Intermediation and trust brokering refer to the ability of TSOs to create positive representations of refugees and to negotiate on their behalf with third parties, which were often central to the enactment of solidarity. These forms of intervention were aimed at employers or employment agencies that facilitated access to work, rather than at refugees themselves. It typically took the form of “sponsorship,” which was “episodic and focused on creating opportunities” (Ayyala et al. 2019). For example, Zeinab explained how charities acted as intermediaries so that the experience, confidence, and trust gained through voluntary employment at the TSO could then be leveraged to gain further work: “. . . they called me because some people went to [another charity], to ask for help and were given my number at [this charity]. They called me to translate the form.”

These types of brokering utilized the resources and network capital of TSO actors in representing refugees, in effect mobilizing “bridging social capital” (Putnam 2000) across multiple organizations. The extent to which this bridging capital was operationalizable depended on the existing credibility of the recommending actor and the presence of an established relationship of trust between the organizational actors. More important was the purpose for which bridging capital was mobilized within the context of bottom-up solidarity. TSO actors sought to generate advantages for refugees, helping them to traverse social, cultural, and psychological obstacles inhibiting their transition into work. These obstacles often stemmed from employers having preconceptions of refugees or poor understanding of the risks (and opportunities) involved in employing them. For example, Mary, a member of a local social enterprise, constantly searched for and sought to exploit opportunities to engage with different employers:

Well, for example, I met with the MD of a big construction company. . . . So I suddenly say, “have you thought of recruiting someone from the Syrian refugee population? . . . Have you thought of building a pathway for Syrian refugees into work? I’d like to talk to somebody who would be willing to start thinking about a pathway.” And he said to me he hadn’t even given it a thought.

These were arguably longer-term, strategic forms of sponsorship, which sought to establish pathways for multiple refugees to obtain jobs. However, intermediation often took more tailored, tactical forms, insofar as TSO actors sought to protect refugee interests, as Mary explained:

. . . there was much more liaison work with support agencies, you know, it wasn’t just they’ve turned up here today and everything is fine. It was, “this problem’s arisen, can you help?” And all of that. So there was more liaison, I think, than we had anticipated. We hadn’t factored in the fact that their regular ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] learning, if I can call it that, clashed with what we were doing and, yeah, and our tutor was just brilliant because as she did a lot of one-to-one, she did a lot of juggling of times and days. And because the pilot project ran over Easter, there were no ESOL classes over Easter, so in fact that in a

way turned out to be a good thing, because then they could come and do the work experience. And do it that way round.

Mary's reflections highlight the challenges of intermediation. Her considerations help us to appreciate the dynamic, improvised, and adaptive character of support practices. Solidarity was constructed toward and performed according to the specific needs of individual refugees. This relied on TSO actors understanding the circumstances faced by refugees and being willing and able to respond to them in their enactment of solidarity. However, solidarity in the form of intermediation was not enacted by TSOs alone. It is also important to recognize the refugees' own agency, resources, and practices (see also Borkert and Caponio 2010; Strokosch and Osborne 2016). One of the respondents, Nabila, observed in her role as the leader of a self-initiated "women's group" how important it was to create a supportive environment that could infuse trust and enact solidarity for refugees. She explained:

When I first arrived, I asked my friend [to find me volunteer work], she wrote an email. I rent a room in the community council. I start inviting people. We start just for fun but then the project became bigger and bigger. And now offer a lot of things. We also do training . . . The city council gave me money for three months, through an English lady [who] helped me. She helped me to find a consultant to write the constitution of the group. . . . In our group we have also organized a [language] class for women who have little children. . . . We run the class in partnership with [local educational provider] for women with children with a volunteer from [charity]. We have also started to help people to find job experience, help with references and other stuff.

Nabila was a graduate in her thirties who had worked as a social worker and had been residing in the UK for approximately one year. Her reflections illustrate how solidarity networks actively assisted in promoting English language services, voluntary work, and other forms of support to respond to the immediate needs of newly arrived refugees. Solidarity was thus more than service provision carried out exclusively by TSOs; it was resource integration for a common set of goals, which operated on the principles of co-production as diverse stakeholders mobilized their resources in pursuit of mutually desired outcomes (Strokosch and Osborne 2016; Lugosi et al. 2022). Nevertheless, TSOs had key roles in these networks because of the reputational and social capital that they could mobilize. Their expertise and capacity to mobilize resources in support of refugees often took the form of targeted coaching.

### ***Coaching***

Coaching was a direct form of intervention aimed specifically at refugees. Following Tatiana Bachkirova and colleagues (2010), coaching is conceived here as a developmental process, involving focused interactions and the deployment of techniques and strategies to promote desirable goals, in this case concentrating on labor market access domains. In this context, coaching can be seen as a "person-centered approach," insofar as it is "non-directive" (avoiding simple prescription) and seeking to facilitate self-determination (Joseph 2010). Stephen Joseph (2010) has argued that this type of coaching concentrates on goals and focuses on helping coachees to develop effective solutions to attain them. Within bottom-up solidarity, coaching can thus be viewed as "solution-focused," underpinned by brief interactions that stress the role of coachees in self-directed learning (Cavanagh and Grant 2010).

Coaching is a complex phenomenon that can assume multiple forms (Bachkirova et al., 2016), but we foreground these features (i.e., development orientation, narrow domain scope, person-centric, and solutions-focused) in relation to bottom-up solidarity for two main rea-

sons: first, to distinguish it from therapeutic and counselling activities that may have been provided by other actors in the same or different organizations, which addressed refugee trauma and psychological problems; and second, to distinguish it from mentoring, which we view as a related but different set of developmental practices involving longer and more substantial interactions aimed at reflective transformation (De Cuyper et al. 2019).

The refugee charities and social enterprises in this empirical context set up employment advice services and helped refugees to navigate administrative problems, for example, concerning driving licenses. They often encompassed a range of employment-related activities as suggested by Zara, who we quoted previously, who had not worked previously in her country of origin:

They helped me with drafting a CV and they also helped me to apply for a job. Because I have applied, I've submitted my CV throughout the country but I haven't received any response, but [the charity] helped me on how to apply using a specific form, how to fill a form, and how to deal with an interview, like these kind of things.

Coaching was a dimension or manifestation of bottom-up solidarity that emerged as a surgical intervention in a narrow field of practice for a specific goal. Coaching was constructed and performed around refugees' individual needs and circumstances. Therefore, the coaching engagement of TSOs was built on sensitivity toward and understanding of the unique challenges that refugees face. For example, as Mary, the social enterprise representative, highlighted:

... in practice, one of the refugees had much more caring responsibilities for his family than any of the support agencies were aware of. So he found it difficult to attend on the specific days that the program was planned in for. So he had one-to-one support and one-to-one coaching. That was his issue. One of the other refugees who is not in settled accommodation is moving from one place to another, so this made his attendance difficult. The third refugee, who was also known to other statutory services, as they were trying to address concerns with his family. So we arranged meetings with other organizations, with ESOL learning, and explained that they were doing things elsewhere, we were trying to juggle all of that and make them attend here [at the social enterprise].

The enactment of solidarity was based on TSO actors' capacity to adapt their individual and collective practices in close collaboration with their clients (Strokosch and Osborne 2016). In part, their responsiveness was driven by their client focus, and their desire to perform localized solidarity through flexible, multi-dimensional interventions. However, it is important to stress that adaptability was also made possible because these actors operated outside of the institutional constraints faced by actors working in state-run or state organizations, who are usually subject to their governance regimes and institutional logics (cf. Hinger et al. 2016; Siviş 2021; Üstübcü 2022).

## **Conclusion**

Extant literature has identified the general domains of practice through which TSOs may support labor market integration for refugees (Bagavos and Kourachanis 2022; Garkisch et al. 2017; Siviş 2021). Our research contributes to this body of knowledge by showing in detail how TSO actors develop the employability of refugees and facilitate their constructive engagement with work and employment. Our study is one of only a few conducted in the UK that identify and distinguish the forms of support enacted by TSOs in their service provision (Calò et al. 2022;

Mayblin and James 2019). Specifically, our findings show how the enactment of support could take direct and indirect forms of solidarity and focus on refugees and those who employ them or mediate their pathways to work.

Furthermore, past work has suggested that, in England, these services are often delivered by small, local, volunteer-run organizations with limited resources, whose work compensates for the inability or unwillingness of the state to engage directly in supporting labor market integration for refugees (Morano-Foadi et al. 2021; Phillimore and McCabe 2010). Consequently, we have conceptualized the dynamics of this form of service provision through the notion of bottom-up solidarity. The invocation of bottom-up solidarity stresses that, in the context of fragmented state engagement, TSO actors take active responsibility in interpreting their roles and in mobilizing their resources to create bespoke interventions.

However, it is important to emphasize that bottom-up solidarity reflects a state of affairs rather than a prescriptive model of intervention. Bottom-up forms of support may be understood as being components of a constructive strategy, as TSOs might be better in understanding and responding to refugees' distinct needs. Recent shifts in the scale and forms of global migration have raised new challenges that states and their agents have not been able to adequately comprehend and which, coupled with other economic and political pressures, have constrained their ability to develop comprehensive responses. By exploring how bottom-up solidarity manifests in practice in compensating for limitations in state-led service provisions, our study has reflected on the potential role of TSOs as agents of change.

Regardless of whether the notion of bottom-up solidarity is read as an opportunity or as a failure of state provision, the findings of this study have highlighted some of its potential forms and dimensions. Moreover, it has recognized that enactments of solidarity intersect with, and directly address, needs associated with refugees' unique characteristics. Importantly, invoking the notion of bottom-up solidarity stresses the importance of several characteristics of TSO practices: first, that they are underpinned by ambitions to support refugee empowerment and successful labor market transition; second, that they are built on specialist competencies, which are attuned to and enacted in relation to the distinct needs of specific migrants; and third, they are agile, insofar as they can be tailored to achieve distinct work-oriented goals, but they are embedded in a wider set of practices supporting refugees' settlement holistically.

Based on this understanding of bottom-up solidarity, we note that further research is needed: first, to better understand refugees' pathways to integration and, in particular, their engagement with the labor market beyond simply access to work; second, related to the previous point, to understand the institutions, actors, and the "touchpoints" when refugees engage with them to identify practices supporting and inhibiting labor market integration. Such mapping exercises, examining TSO practices and refugee agency and experiences, can help to identify what and how resources are mobilized by different actors in their enactment of bottom-up solidarity in other organizational and national contexts. Moreover, future work can help to assess the effectiveness of different practices, moving beyond cross-sectional analysis and subjective indicators of success to evaluate their impacts over longer periods, including their influences on incomes. However, such longitudinal research could continue to use subjective wellbeing or other psychological indicators to assess efficacy.

Assessing the impacts of bottom-up solidarity could also help to identify where greater levels of investment and coordination are required. Even if governments seem politically and ideologically driven to limit immigration, understanding the effectiveness of mechanisms helping integration activities and best practices among existing service providers could be valuable for the UK and beyond. Improved support may require the establishment of new governance structures, which can better coordinate the activities of individual actors and agencies within a holis-

tic strategy. However, support may be most effectively delivered by valuing refugees' experiences and enabling them to realize their potential to contribute to the communities in which they settle. Focusing on improving targeted funding for specialist service provision and investing in knowledge transfer and knowledge management activities could be part of government strategy in the medium term. Specifically, charities and social enterprises may already have capacities to address specific needs, such as CV development or job matching, alongside the provision of other forms of support, including counselling as well as coaching and mentoring. Service development may, therefore, rely on more effective forms of knowledge management, where networks of organizational agents are better informed and where local or regional providers offer more targeted services for refugees, and bottom-up solidarity is enacted as an ecosystem of TSO actors.

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