



Roundtable and Workshop at the Neuchâtel Graduate Conference

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Tuesday, 8 July 2025

NGOs in the Migration Field: Research, Practice and Early-Career Opportunities

Vanessa Ballarin, Swiss Red Cross (SRC)

Maelle L'Homme, Médecins Sans Frontières Suisse (MSF)

Catherine Woollard, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

11:45 – 13:30

This roundtable and workshop will be held in person at the University of Neuchâtel, [Avenue du 1er-Mars 26](#), Room C56. Both the roundtable and the workshop have a limited capacity of 30 participants, who will be accepted on a first served basis by way of the conference registration form.

Description

This side-event consists of two interlinked parts: a panel discussion followed by an interactive workshop. Together, they aim to explore the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the field of migration and to create a space for dialogue and collaboration between practitioners and researchers.

The first part of the session aims to explore the critical role of NGOs in shaping contemporary responses to migration, while creating a space for dialogue and collaboration between practitioners and researchers. Bringing together representatives from diverse NGOs – including a humanitarian organisation engaged in border operations such as search and rescue, a migrant rights advocacy group focused on legal and policy protections, and a humanitarian organisation providing support to migrants at national and local levels – the panel will offer a grounded understanding of how these actors operate within the complex and multi-directional landscape of migration and mobility. Aligned with the conference's overarching theme, the session will delve into the strategic and ethical considerations NGOs navigate in their day-to-day work, including operational challenges, organisational structures, funding dynamics, and historical trajectories. By centering both practice and scholarship, this panel seeks to foster meaningful exchange and open up new avenues for co-producing knowledge that bridges the gap between academia and on-the-ground work in the field of migration.

The second part of the event will take the form of an interactive workshop aimed at early-career researchers interested in engaging directly with representatives from NGOs working in the field of migration. Featuring the same practitioners participating in the panel, the session will offer a practical and behind-the-scenes look into career opportunities in the NGO sector. The workshop will also provide guidance on how young researchers can align their academic expertise with the skillsets and values sought by NGOs, and explore possible entry points into the sector through internships, fellowships, and collaborative projects. Framed by the broader conference theme of migration's multi-directionality, this workshop creates a space for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and professional development – bridging the gap between research and practice in the field of migration.

Speakers

Vanessa Ballarin holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and a Master's degree in Migration and Citizenship from the University of Neuchâtel. In 2018 she also obtained a CAS in operational management of social and health structures, followed by a Certificate in Humanitarian Diplomacy in 2023. After working as a social worker in the asylum sector in the canton of Bern, she joined the Swiss Red Cross in 2014. She first worked as an advisor on humanitarian visas, before contributing to setting up the specialized family reunification service and developing the coordination of cantonal services in the field of migration. In her current role as Migration Expert, she develops analyses and positions to defend the interests of Swiss Red Cross target groups through advocacy and lobbying. She also represents the Swiss Red Cross at international level in various platforms and networks dedicated to migration and supports the international department in developing its engagement in the field of migration.

Maelle L'Homme holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master's degree in Public Affairs from Sciences Po Paris, as well as an MSc in Health, Population and Society from the London School of Economics. She joined Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in 2015 and has since accumulated extensive field experience, working as a Health Promotion Manager and Project Coordinator in various humanitarian contexts including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad,

Yemen, and Sudan. Since 2021, Maelle has been serving as a Research and Operational Support Officer at MSF's Research Unit in Geneva, Switzerland. In this role, she contributes to enhancing the implementation of MSF's field projects and supports critical reflection on humanitarian and medical action through the production of publications and the organisation of conferences and debates.

Catherine Woollard is Adjunct Professor of Law at the Brussels School of Governance. Since 2016, she has served as Director of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), a pan-European alliance of 110 NGOs across 40 countries. ECRE is dedicated to defending the rights of refugees both within Europe and in the context of Europe's external policies, with a strong emphasis on the legal foundations of asylum policy and practice. The organisation's work spans litigation, advocacy, and strategic communications. From 2008 to 2015, Catherine was the Executive Director of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a Brussels-based network focused on peace and security policy. Prior to that, she led international programmes and advocacy initiatives at NGOs such as Conciliation Resources, Minority Rights Group International, and Transparency International. Her diverse career also includes experience as a civil servant, university lecturer in political science, and consultant advising governments and international organisations.

Roundtable and Workshop organised by:

Robin Stünzi, University of Neuchâtel, nccr – on the move
Great Udochi, University of Neuchâtel, nccr – on the move