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Governance **WILEY**

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Negotiating autonomy in the public sector and nonprofits "collaborations" in politically contested fields

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Abstract

Nonprofits are increasingly involved in cross-sectoral collaborations with the public sector. However, we know little about the dynamics behind these collaborations and what happens to them in politically contested fields where actors may have divergent positions. In this article, a multi-country comparison of data gathered from semi-structured interviews ($n = 68$) with representatives of nonprofits involved in the labor market inclusion of newcomers is presented. Our findings indicate that, in politically contested fields, the possibility of participating in cross-sectoral collaborations (political autonomy) is influenced by nonprofits' financial and ideological autonomy. Welfare models and migration regimes play a fundamental role in shaping the inclusion of these organizations in collaborations, and in most cases, the collaborations are based on latent conflicts. Our article discusses that if the costs of autonomy associated with cross-sectoral collaborations are not offset, the collaboration in a politically contested field becomes a liability for nonprofits (and their beneficiaries).

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the last 30 years, increasing attention has been paid to collaborations between nonprofits and public sector organizations in designing, managing, and delivering public policy and services. Nonprofits have often been engaged to represent the interests of citizens in the form of collaborative governance or coproduction (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Their increasing role has resulted from neoliberal trends that have reduced the state's role, developed market competition, and included private actors in delivering public services through the creation of welfare pluralism (Baglioni et al., 2022). At the same time, nonprofits have been promoted as including a plurality of voices (Andrews & Entwistle, 2010; Mazzei et al., 2020) and achieving a wide range of policy outcomes and services (Calò et al., 2018). Whatever the reason behind the increasing role of nonprofits in public service design and delivery, it is without a doubt that in the current development of the European welfare state, these organizations have become essential players in welfare pluralism (Johnston & Brandsen, 2017).

The importance of cross-organizational, cross-sector, and multilevel collaborations has been recognized both by scholars and policymakers (Calò, Teasdale, et al., 2023; Peters et al., 2022; Steiner et al., 2022). Although a vast array of studies has focused on conceptualizing and empirically testing forms of governance that include various actors (see, e.g., Cristofoli et al., 2022; Douglas et al., 2020; Vantaggiato, 2022), little research has focused on empirically exploring the dynamics between nonprofits and the public sector Calò, Teasdale, et al., 2023; Cheng, 2019; Nederhand, 2021). This scholarship is even scanter if we focus on politically contested fields where there may be divergent positions among the actors involved (Peters et al., 2022).

We address this research gap by focusing on cross-sector collaborations on the inclusion of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (newcomers) in the European labor market, which is an exceptionally politically contested field (Ambrosini, 2021; Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018). The inclusion of newcomers in European labor markets reflects the existing relationship between the public and civil society sectors, which is affected by the specific social, cultural, political, and economic contexts that underpin the different countries (Author, 2023). We collected data from four countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, and the United Kingdom) representing different welfare and migration regimes (Federico & Baglioni, 2021). The lessons learned through our research provide insights into the dynamics of cross-sectoral collaborations in politically contested fields from the perspective of nonprofits, often aiming to protect or negotiate their autonomy vis-à-vis the public sector and government (Hustinx et al., 2015). Our findings show that the desire for collaboration, often imprinted into the normative language of policymakers, does not necessarily materialize in politically contested fields. Therefore, we confirm that the context affects nonprofits–public sector dynamics (Calò, Teasdale, et al., 2023; Steiner et al., 2022), dynamics that are potentially rather than inevitably collaborative. We found that the financial and ideological autonomy of nonprofits influences political autonomy, intended as the possibility of becoming part of cross-sectoral collaborations and effectively influencing policy and services. However, our findings also show that sometimes the costs of collaborating, in terms of nonprofit ideological autonomy, are too high to justify nonprofit involvement.

This article unfolds as follows. Firstly, we provide an overview of studies that focus on the interplay between the public and nonprofit sectors, particularly in the migration field. Secondly, a description of the methods employed in our research is provided, including the rationale for selecting the included countries. In our findings, we explore the dynamics of cross-sectoral collaborations in a politically contested field and the ideological and financial tensions that nonprofits might face. We then conclude by comparing those dynamics with the mechanisms explored in

the literature, reflecting on how the different countries' contexts might affect those dynamics, and by proposing future research.

1.1 | Cross-sectoral collaborations in a politically contested field

Cross-sectoral collaborations have drawn policy and scholarly attention in recent decades (Alonso & Andrews, 2022; Calò, Scognamiglio, et al., 2023; Steiner et al., 2022; Wang & Ran, 2021). They have been increasingly employed to deal with the growing complexities of problems European welfare systems face and the recommodification trends European countries deal with (Rauhaus, 2022). The necessity of including a wide-ranging network of stakeholders, both horizontally and vertically, in designing and delivering public services has often been highlighted by policymakers and scholars (Bryson et al., 2014; Steiner et al., 2022). Cross-sectoral collaborations have been defined from several perspectives, such as collaborative governance, coproduction and cocreation, new public governance, and public-private partnerships. A common thread in these literature strands is the focus on relationships between the public sector and other societal stakeholders (Ansell et al., 2022; Bryson et al., 2006; Steiner et al., 2022). Among various potential actors, nonprofits have been recognized as the preferred partners in service management and delivery and often policy formulation (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2006; Cheng, 2019; Cornforth et al., 2015). Involving nonprofits in cross-sectoral collaborations with the public sector has been shown to potentially enhance and promote citizen participation (Mazzei et al., 2020; Pestoff, 2012).

Notwithstanding the increasing scholarly and policy interest in public-nonprofit collaborations (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Nederhand, 2021), we observe the absence of systematic research focused on the dynamics of collaboration (Calò, Teasdale, et al., 2023; Cheng, 2019). The scarcity of research is even more evident if we focus on the contextual role in affecting the dynamics (Steiner et al., 2022) and how the collaborations might work in politically contested fields, where the actors involved have competing views on what is just, fair, and beneficial for society (Peters et al., 2022). Undertaking comparative research on the interaction between the public sector and nonprofits in different welfare regimes has been identified as a way of exploring this research gap (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Hustinx et al., 2015; Steiner et al., 2022).

We do this by focusing on a politically contested field: in this case, the inclusion of newcomers in the labor market. Migration literature describes the migration field "*as a battleground upon which different actors engage with their own interests, values and frames*" (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020, p. 3). European governments have addressed migration primarily through border management and security policies for decades, whereas integrating newcomers has remained an ancillary policy concern (Baglioni et al., 2023; Geddes & Scholten, 2016). Integration policies have become residual in some European countries following a peak in requests for asylum in 2015, and political entrepreneurs have used migration instrumentally across the continent (Dennison & Geddes, 2018; Montgomery et al., 2022). On the other hand, stakeholders at both local and transnational levels, including the public sector and nonprofits, have called for a more open, tolerant, and supportive integration model (Pries, 2018; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019).

There is scarce research on the dynamics of collaborations between the public and nonprofit sectors in the integration field. Some literature has focused on the potential response to local needs derived from these cross-sector collaborations (Fry & Islar, 2021; Moutselos & Schönwälder, 2022; Veronis, 2019), as well as the possible lack of systemic change these collaborations achieve (Fry & Islar, 2021). Other scholars have instead explored the potential tensions the collaborations raise, focusing more on integration processes (see Khan, 2003; Larruina et al., 2019), the sense-making of coproduction by volunteers (Siede & Münch, 2022), and the engagement of asylum seekers

in coproduction processes (Strokosch & Osborne, 2016). Fehsenfeld and Levinsen (2019) instead focused specifically on the role of politics in collaborations in the migration field, concluding that "*political activity is misplaced in the collaborative relationship and that it should be addressed at a higher organizational and political level*" (p. 431).

The contribution of this article is, therefore, threefold. First, we aim to contribute to the relatively scarce debates concerning collaboration between the public sector and nonprofits. Second, to do so, we aim to understand how the nonprofits' autonomy vis-à-vis the public sector is protected and negotiated (Evans et al., 2005; Hustinx et al., 2015) by exploring how organizations deal with potential tensions and conflicts. Third, we use the case of migration and comparative evidence from four European countries to develop further the debates on how these dynamics might change in a politically contested field.

2 | METHODS

Our article is based on qualitative data from four European countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, and the United Kingdom). Data were collected between 2018 and 2019 and are based on qualitative interviews with representatives of nonprofits concerning the interaction and interplay between their organizations and the public sector. The four countries were selected because of their differences in migration and welfare regimes.

The Czech Republic (CZ) represents a country in which economics primarily drove immigration policy; the influx of migrants was viewed instrumentally as a cheap labor force tool to tackle a shortage (Drbohlav, 2011; Freidingerová & Nováková, 2021). Newcomers were commonly viewed as a danger that had to be controlled with repressive tools (Čada & Hoření, 2021). In this context, the migration policy of the Czech government and public administration contributes in a very marginal way to the sociocultural integration of migrants (Leontiyeva, 2020; Mazzei et al., 2020).

In Finland (FI), although anti-immigration discourse has gained a foothold, especially after the 2015 increase in asylum seeker arrivals, migration is not just perceived as a border management and security issue. In contrast to the other countries in our study, there has been a stronger state/municipality-led focus on migrant integration, with a comprehensive (in comparison) integration policy framework created. The state has taken a decisive role in organizing integration services targeted at unemployed migrants, whereas employed migrants have to rely on nonprofits' services (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2021).

Greece (GR) is a country used as a gateway to the Schengen Area by newcomers. Since the 1990s, the Greek state has implemented an oppressive immigration policy, which intensified from the summer of 2015 onwards (Kourachanis, 2018). Substitutes for residual state social policy are the solidarity initiatives of nonprofits, which attempt to cover the widening gaps and weaknesses observed over time in the Southern European welfare regime (Papadopoulos & Roumpakis, 2013). During the economic and refugee crisis especially, nonprofits became crucial in social support actions (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2021).

In the United Kingdom (UK), anti-migration and anti-refugee narratives were placed at the center of the Leave campaign in the 2016 EU membership referendum (Cummings, 2017; Goodman & Narang, 2019; Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Policies and legislation prioritizing the control of borders instead of the inclusion of newcomers have been favoured in recent decades (Calò et al., 2022). In terms of welfare pluralism, public authorities have engaged in more contractual relationships with nonprofits, but this has been complemented by sharp cuts to public service budgets (Wiggan, 2012). Spending cuts have resulted in a significant level of voluntarism combined with the marketization of third-sector providers (Han, 2017; Zimmermann et al., 2014).

While the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic have instrumental migration regimes focusing on reducing the number of migrants, Finland has focused more on inclusion and integration. In contrast, Greece, as a first destination country, has dealt with the emergency needs of refugees and asylum seekers while, at the same time, developing an oppressive migration policy. The four cases are also different in terms of welfare regimes. Finland represents a Nordic welfare model where the public sector has traditionally had a central role in providing public services. The UK instead represents a liberal model in which nonprofits (and, more generally, private organizations) are involved in designing and delivering public services. The Czech Republic alternatively exemplifies a hybridized welfare model with no strong ideology underpinning social policy; it combines post-socialist legacies with neoliberal pressures (Sirovátka & Ripka, 2019). Finally, Greece is an example of the Southern welfare model, where nonprofits (and, more broadly, civil society) respond to weaknesses in the public sector by providing services.

Across the four countries, we undertook sixty-seven semi-structured interviews with nonprofit organization representatives (out of which 15 were in the Czech Republic, 19 in Finland, 16 in Greece, and 18 in the UK) actively involved in the inclusion of migrants in the labour market. The organizations included in our research provided a wide variety of services related to the employability of migrants, such as language courses, training and education activities, employability services, and policy advocacy activities. We included local, regional, national, and international organizations. Informed by desk research providing a systematic and complete picture of nonprofits dealing with migration in the four analyzed countries, we pursued a maximum variation sampling strategy to increase the heterogeneity of perspectives and nonprofit experiences. Table 1 provides further details on the interviews.

The interview guidelines consisted of questions covering a broad range of topics, such as the perceived enablers and barriers to newcomer inclusion in the labour market, the interplay between the public sector and nonprofits, and the challenges nonprofit organizations face in designing and delivering services in a politically contested field. Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed intelligent verbatim. The confidentiality and anonymity of each of our interviewees were protected throughout the interview process. In doing so, the interviewee number and country are used in detailing the quotes presented in this article. Upon request, the [Name of the project] Ethics Board approved the ethical stature of the study. The interviews were analyzed both manually and with the assistance of qualitative analysis software. The analysis employed open and selective coding to evaluate the interplay between the public sector and nonprofits as well as to group concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2015). During the first coding step, we identified data related to collaboration between the public sector and nonprofits. After the identification of the dynamics of the relations between the public sector and nonprofits, we combined the concepts and topics in three higher mechanisms, identified in the literature through an abductive reasoning, political autonomy, ideological autonomy and material autonomy which can explain how cross sectoral collaborations work in different contexts. During the second round of selective coding, we focused on comparing and contrasting the findings in the different contexts and in understanding how the three mechanisms interplay among each other in those contexts.

3 | FINDINGS

Our analysis identified three recurring middle range theories: how the nonprofits were able (or not) to influence policy and services and how they were included in cross-sectoral collaborations (political autonomy); how the potential tensions in ideological autonomy influenced the

T A B L E 1   Interviews details.

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 1 CZ	April 18, 2019	Director	National service provider	Language courses, employability, and integration support
Interview 2 CZ	October 11, 2018	Head of methodology	City-wide service provider	Language courses, legal counseling, policymaking on local level
Interview 3 CZ	July 25, 2019	Social worker	Crisis intervention	Material support to migrants in need, counseling, research and policymaking in the field of employment
Interview 4 CZ	October 19, 2018	Coordinator of services for migrants	National service provider	Language courses, courses on employability and integration support, services for refugees
Interview 5 CZ	May 30, 2019	Social worker	Organization specialized in education	Language courses and support for students with migration backgrounds, research, policymaking in the field of education
Interview 6 CZ	May 15, 2019	Coordinator	Policymaking organization	Policymaking, networking, research
Interview 7 CZ	May 2, 2019	Social worker and director	Regional service provider	Language courses, counseling, cultural events, policymaking on regional level
Interview 8 CZ	July 27, 2019	Social worker	Regional service provider	Social and cultural events

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 9 CZ	April 24, 2019	Social worker	City-wide service provider	Language courses, legal counseling, cultural events, support groups
Interview 10 CZ	November 13, 2018	Director	City-wide service provider	Language courses, legal counseling, policymaking on local level
Interview 11 CZ	June 25, 2019	Board member	Migrants' association	Social and cultural events, informal counseling, after-school activities for children with migration backgrounds
Interview 12 CZ	May 2, 2019	Director	City-wide service provider	Legal and employment counseling, policymaking on national and city levels
Interview 13 CZ	July 25, 2019	Projects managers (group interview, 3 persons)	Nationwide service provider	Information support for migrants, courses, cultural events
Interview 14 CZ	May 6, 2019	Social worker	City-wide service provider	Language courses, employability and integration support, therapy for migrants and refugees
Interview 15 CZ	December 8, 2020	Director	Nationwide service provider	Information support for migrants, courses, cultural events, advocacy

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 1 FI	October 19, 2018	Executive manager	Migrants association	Information and integration support for migrant women
Interview 2 FI	October 24, 2018	Executive manager	Multicultural association	Meeting a place for migrants and natives, activities, classes, language courses, volunteering opportunities
Interview 3 FI	April 03, 2019	Coordinator	National Non profit NGO	Courses, classes and leisure time activities for migrants and natives; a meeting place for migrants and natives
Interview 4 FI	April 05, 2019	Career councilor	Non profit umbrella organization	Labor market integration services for migrants
Interview 5 FI	April 17, 2019	Expert	International/multinational non profit	Wide variety of support for MRAs, such as housing and language learning; volunteering opportunities.
Interview 6 FI	April 18, 2019	Coordinator	Migrants umbrella association	Integration support, leisure activities, lobbying on behalf of migrant groups
Interview 7 FI	May 08, 2019	Head of employment	Employment association	Labor market integration support for refugees and migrants

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 8 FI	May 08, 2019	Head of business program	Employment association	Labor market integration support for refugees and migrants
Interview 9 FI	May 08, 2019	Development manager	Refugee organization	Asylum seekers and refugee support
Interview 10 FI	May 22, 2019	Director	Employment association	Labor market integration and social system navigation support
Interview 11 FI	June 04, 2019	Director	Multicultural association	Versatile integration support for migrants, inc. labor market integration support.
Interview 12 FI	October 29, 2019	Coordinator	Multicultural association	Versatile integration support for migrants, inc. labor market integration support.
Interview 13 FI	November 04, 2019	Project manager	Non profit umbrella organization	Integration and labor market integration support and services for migrants
Interview 14 FI	June 12, 2019	Teacher	Non profit umbrella organization	Integration and labor market integration support and services for migrants
Interview 15 Fi	June 12, 2019	Vice-director	Migrants association	Cultural activities and activities to maintain culture of origin country

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 16 FI	July 04, 2019	CEO	Employment association	Entrepreneurial support
Interview 17 FI	August 21, 2019	Project employee	Multicultural association	Labor market integration support and services
Interview 18 FI	August 23, 2019	Communication and organization assistant	Employment well-being related association	Working life rehabilitation
Interview 19 FI	October 02, 2019	Team leader	International/multinational NGO	Support for migrants, volunteering, and employment opportunities.
Interview 1 GR	June 06, 2019	Project Manager	National Non profit	Social integration services to vulnerable groups
Interview 2 GR	June 21, 2019	Social scientist (social worker)	National Non profit	Social integration services to vulnerable groups
Interview 3 GR	June 05, 2019	Project manager	National Non profit	Social integration services to vulnerable groups
Interview 4 GR	June 03, 2019	Employment coordinator	National Non profit	Employability and social integration services to vulnerable groups
Interview 5 GR	June 11, 2019	Employment coordinator	National Non profit	Employability and social integration services to MRAs
Interview 6 GR	July 08, 2019	Social scientist (policymaker)	International Non profit	Employability and social integration services to MRAs

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 7 GR	June 14, 2019	Social scientist (HR officer)	National Non profit	Employability and social integration services to MRAs
Interview 8 GR	June 28, 2019	Coordinator of a specific project	International Non profit	Employability services
Interview 9 GR	July 01, 2019	Volunteer	Grassroots initiative/community-based organization	Housing and social support
Interview 10 GR	June 25, 2019	Volunteer	Grassroots initiative/community-based organization	Housing and social support
Interview 11 GR	July 10, 2019	Volunteer	Grassroots initiative/community-based organization	Social support and employment
Interview 12 GR	June 20, 2019	Volunteer	Grassroots initiative/community-based organization	Social support
Interview 13 GR	June 05, 2019	Coordinator of a specific project	Social enterprise	Employment opportunities to vulnerable groups
Interview 14 GR	July 05, 2019	Founder and managing director	Social enterprise	Employment opportunities to vulnerable groups
Interview 15 GR	June 12, 2019	Manager	Social enterprise	Employment opportunities to vulnerable groups
Interview 16 GR	June 27, 2019	Social enterprise administrator	Social enterprise	Employment opportunities to vulnerable groups
Interview 1 UK	May 08, 2019	Founder	Social enterprise	Work integration of social enterprise that employ migrants and refugees

(Continues)

T A B L E 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 2 UK	May 20, 2019	Coordinator	Faith organization	Information, advice and guidance for community faith groups and policy campaigns on labor market inclusion
Interview 3 UK	May 24, 2019	Founder	Social enterprise	Support and advice to set up migrant and refugee enterprises
Interview 4 UK	April 08, 2019	Founder and managing director	Social enterprise	Work placements for refugee professionals
Interview 5 UK	April 17, 2019	Founder and director	Social enterprise	Wide variety of support for migrants, such as advice in setting up businesses, training organizations for diversity, support for women entrepreneurs
Interview 6 UK	May 09, 2019	Founder	Community-based organization	Community based English classes and volunteering opportunities
Interview 7 UK	April 17, 2019	Coordinator of a specific project	International NGO	Volunteering activities in charity shops and coaching activities for migrant women
Interview 8 UK	May 09, 2019	Volunteer coordinator and senior case worker	National NGO	Housing and benefits assistance to

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Date of interview	Function/Role	Type	Description of services provided
Interview 9 UK	April 17, 2019	Evaluation officer	Regional NGO	Housing and benefits information and advice about employment for policy campaigns, and support
Interview 10 UK	July 02, 2019	Coordinator of a specific project	Regional NGO	Holistic integration services and a safe space for developing social capital
Interview 11 UK	June 19, 2019	Coordinator of a specific project	Community-based organization	Adult learning opportunities and family and employability support
Interview 12 UK	October 29, 2018	Deputy director	Regional NGO	Representation of ethnic minority interests at the policy-level
Interview 13 UK	November 27, 2018	Director	Regional NGO	Employability and integration support
Interview 14 UK	October 08, 2018	Employment coordinator	Local NGO	Language and employability support
Interview 15 UK	October 08, 2018	Chair	Local NGO	Representation of ethnic minority interests at the policy-level
Interview 16 UK	December 04, 2018	Director	Local NGO	Employability programs
Interview 17 UK	December 17, 2018	Policy officer	Regional NGO	Policy-level representation of the interests of vulnerable population including
Interview 18 UK	December 13, 2018	Manager	Local NGO	Advocacy services for ethnic minorities

dynamics of the collaboration; and, finally, how financial precarity might mediate the involvement of nonprofits in cross-sectoral collaborations. Each theme is discussed below, exploring the meaning of these dynamics and how they differed across the four countries.

3.1 | Political autonomy: Between actual inclusion and Tokenism

The first mechanism is understood as the possibility of nonprofits to sit at the table with the public sector as an actor that might, in fact, influence policies and services. Across the four countries, the inclusion of nonprofits in actual cross-sectoral collaborations and the possibility of influencing policies and services varied, both within and between countries, from a tokenistic approach in Greece and, in some contexts, the Czech Republic, to collaborative influencing, with some examples of coproduction at the local level in the United Kingdom, and a higher level of inclusion in Finland.

Some Czech nonprofits were involved in decision-making through membership in the Committee for the Rights of Foreigners, a standing committee founded by the Czech Council for Human Rights. However, their role was rather advisory, and their position was nonbinding (Calò et al., 2022), as suggested by Interviewee 1 (CZ): "We are invited regularly to the ministerial working groups for migration, but it is difficult to make them [the Ministry of the Interior] see our point." The key political role in the Czech nonprofit migration context at the national level was played by the umbrella organization, the Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations, representing the whole migration-related nonprofit sector in negotiations with state bodies and aiming to influence policymaking. However, given the highly contested nature of the migration topic and the hostile, anti-migrant attitudes in the analyzed period, the policy impact of the association was rather marginal. Rather than being involved in designing policies through counselling and collaboration, the position of the consortium represented a contentious social movement organization. Involvement in policymaking at a local level took place rather rarely.

In the United Kingdom, almost all the organizations included in the research advocated for improving policy through different instruments. Some of them often participated in consultations at the UK Government level, or they worked in collaboration with specific all-party groups or commissions to improve Home Office procedures and future policies. Interviewee 4 (UK) pointed out that the type of advocacy role they did could be called "collaborative influencing." As the label suggests, they perceived themselves as collaborative, aiming to improve the system without taking a political stance, which could cause reduced relationships with other stakeholders. However, some organizations declared that although they were involved in different consultation events with a collaborative lens, they recognized that their contribution was not taken into consideration:

> So, within that discussion, you contribute and participate and all that, and you realize that your contribution is not valid. So yes, they give you the power to make a decision and to be engaged and hold, but the recognition is not there. (Interviewee 5, UK).

Only a few organizations identified the relationship with the government as a space to reform policies and services. Moreover, this happened only at the local level, in contexts with convergent views among the public sector and nonprofits. For example, Interviewee 2 (UK) stated that "the Scottish Government and the New Scots strategy and the good partnership happening with the voluntary organizations, the third sector, the local government, the Scottish Government, it's a really nice working environment. It feels really positive, it feels like everyone's pulling in the same way."

The Finnish system was instead characterized by consensus and collaboration between the public sector and nonprofits (Pirkkalainen et al., 2018). Many organizations interviewed for this study underlined the importance of their advocacy role and reported being actively contacted by policymakers, especially at the municipal and governmental levels. At the same time, they also emphasized their nonpolitical alignment. The interviewees felt that their voices were heard, and their positions were included in the agenda-setting. Several interviewed nonprofit representatives were frequently invited as experts to discuss drafting legislation or policy. Through this, the organizations influenced political outcomes and extended their advocacy role. One interviewee, for example, suggested, "We constantly try to affect political outcomes. When something is being planned at the government or city level, we try to make them aware of our statement or opinion, how things should, in our view, best be dealt with" (Interviewee 6, FI). Another interviewee suggested they "function as experts in various groups and committees that directly influence decision-making. We try to meet with political decision-makers and directly bring to them information and advance the deployment of good tools developed in our projects" (Interviewee 18, FI).

In Greece, the main goal of nonprofits was to be included in the consultation processes with the public sector to have more chances of receiving funding from the European Union and Greek government, as suggested by Interviewee 3: "We try to get involved in the consultation processes with the state and other bodies. To achieve this, we often form alliances with other NGOs with the same goals." On the other hand, the public sector was interested in including a few nonprofits in the consultation processes, and there was a superficial interest in pluralistic dialog with civil society. However, there was usually no meaningful interaction between the involved actors. On the other hand, grassroots initiatives often refused to participate in a social dialog with the government, considering it their ideological and political enemy, as suggested by interviewee 10: "We believe that the EU and the Greek Government's refugee policy are part of the problem. We prefer to cooperate and receive support from other social movement initiatives abroad rather than to cooperate with a Greek government that implements policies that violate human rights" (Interviewee 10, GR).

3.2 | Ideological autonomy: Between tension and consensus

Political autonomy was highly interconnected to the ideological autonomy of the nonprofits, highly important in the context of politically contested policy fields such as migration. Ideological autonomy was determined by the possibility of having, bringing, and including divergent views to the collaboration. The interviewed nonprofit representatives had different levels of ideological autonomy that varied from a high level of alignment and consensus with the public sector agenda, as was the case of more established organizations in Greece, to more careful considerations of the agenda. Here difficulties existed in bringing a different ideology to the table, as in the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, or, adversely, the possibilities of bringing different instances and opinions to the table, such as in Finland, were stronger.

Many Czech organizations did also not engage in advocacy work, explicitly acknowledging that more substantial involvement could hinder their day-to-day activities, direct contact with newcomers, and the funding they received. Their advocacy work was delegated to the aforementioned umbrella organization, the Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations (Calò et al., 2022), opting to disclose their political activism indirectly rather than directly. They found advocacy work dangerous due to the frequently occurring hostile approach toward migration in the public debate, as suggested by Interviewee 10 (CZ): "The topic [of migration] is thankless for the mass media as well as for the leadership of our Church [...] We do not engage in those big public campaigns."

Similar challenges were identified in the United Kingdom. Whereas the organizations acted, at least in the past, as potential service providers, delivering services for the UK Government, this did not come without tensions. These tensions became most visible particularly in cases where a lack of participation among newcomers in some of the provided workshops or services could result in the sanctioning of beneficiaries, reducing their benefits and rights. Thus, Interviewee 7 (UK) suggested that nonprofits should be "aware of the risks of working with the UK Government and be very clear about the conditions connected to the programs." Lower ideological tensions were instead highlighted in providing services for the Scottish Government or the local council resettlement schemes. Other organizations instead took a more political stance, promoting their ideological independence, aiming to influence the system through campaigns (e.g., the "Lift the Ban" campaign to allow asylum seekers access to work) or event organization. More established organizations tried to use their profile to access politicians and policymakers as well as give voice to people struggling to be included in policy dialogs.

A higher level of independence in terms of ideological autonomy was identified in Finland, where nonprofits often advocated for the rights of migrants by, for example, speaking out about issues that matter to them on social media and through press releases, drafting and signing petitions, lobbying political decision-making, giving statements, and acting as advising entities on boards and committees. One interviewee (6, FI), for example, emphasized that they do advocacy work and speak about important issues publicly "all the time, it is our job. Our job is to represent. We are a migrant organization, and every time migrants are discussed. This pertains to us directly, and we must participate in the discussion." The interviewees noted, however, that shifts in the general societal/political climate have made their advocacy role more difficult. One interviewee, for instance, noted that "the public atmosphere makes our job more difficult because it is so polarized and it leads to unnecessary imprinting. Because of this, we do not get to talk about real issues." During the interview period, the nationalistic party True Finns had considerable influence on the government agenda. The organizations expressed worry about how this might influence their long-term prospects and, particularly, their funding. However, they did not relate this to their advocacy role, nor did they express a worry that voicing their opinions would influence their funding from official sources, such as the government or municipalities.

In Greece, ideological independence was instead determined mainly by the nature and institutional entity of the nonprofits. There was a large contrast between more prominent organizations and grassroots initiatives. High ideological dependence on the prospect of funding from European or national institutions affected the agendas of large organizations (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2021). At the level of advocacy, larger nonprofits acted only in cases in which human rights were violated and did so by filing complaints and requesting meetings with the minister of migration and asylum. In grassroots solidarity initiatives, the exact opposite was observed; there was great independence in terms of ideology and agenda-setting. Through collective consultations, interventions were decided upon, and then public calls were put forward for collecting money or essential goods (Kotronaki et al., 2018): "Our actions stem from our ideological values and from the discussions we have on an equal basis" (Interviewee 9, GR).

3.3 | Material autonomy: Between precariousness and existential stability

The collaboration between nonprofit and public sectors was also mediated by the material autonomy of the nonprofits, in other words, the financial resources these organizations have at their

disposal. Most nonprofits involved in the research shared their concerns over having enough resources to secure their existence. In all four countries, they frequently operated in highly financially precarious contexts. Due to their limited material autonomy, their collaborative potential and, consequently, the possibility to change policies and services were hindered. This precariousness derived especially from austerity measures in recent decades and, to varying degrees in the different contexts, from the political climate toward migration.

In the case of the Czech Republic, for example, nonprofits involved in collaborations with the public sector significantly depended on public funding. They were often only involved in providing temporary services and short-term projects. The risk of precariousness in both nonprofits and their individual employees even increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as suggested by Interviewee 15 (CZ): "The whole third sector is worried about the future; there is a high uncertainty about the months to come as some cuts in public finances will be inevitable and the NGOs can be first to feel it" (Interviewee 15, CZ).

Similarly, in Finland, the struggle for the material autonomy of these organizations was related to the funding structure: to be able to organize the migrant integration services on behalf of the public sector, they needed to apply for funding, which was mainly provided on a fixed (and short)-term project basis. This funding system prevented cross-sectoral collaborations from developing long-term and sustainable integration services, thus limiting nonprofits' overall role in the integration of newcomers. Interviewee 4 (FI), for example, critically reported, "We run this with project money, so it is not permanent, and the projects are always changing. And that is a big challenge, that there are no permanent services. Projects and the people working in them come and go, and then we have to start all over again."

In the United Kingdom, resources scattered among different funders were also perceived as highly affecting the long-term sustainability of the available services. As identified by Interviewee 8 (UK), "Almost every year charities have to design projects to fit the funding, which means that if the following year they have to go for another funding source, they have to treat their project in another way. So it's difficult to bring stability."

A similar context was identified in Greece, which had been governed by precariousness for a long time (Sotiropoulos, 2017). In the last decade, nonprofit organizations have taken on greater responsibilities as a substitute for the sharp cuts in the Greek state due to austerity policies (Dimoulas & Kouzis, 2018):

> Social policy has been one of the first victims of the fiscal adjustment programs imposed on Greece by the Troika since 2010. Cuts in state social spending have been accompanied by a worsening of social inequalities. Expanding the social initiatives of civil society organizations was the only way to manage the humanitarian crisis. The same thing happened in refugee management from 2015 onwards. (Interviewee 1, GR)

Although material autonomy is a well-known characteristic in the design and provision of public services, in the politically contested field of migration, the precariousness and financial challenges that these collaborations usually have were amplified even more. In the United Kingdom, for example, funding reductions in integration services over the years completely "shut down" (Interviewee 4, UK) the entire refugee sector:

> There were several agencies we used to refer to. They have been downsized a lot. They don't have many resources. They do some schemes for refugees for doctors, they run a few activities, but it is nothing compared to what it was running before.

> Some organizations have closed. There is less infrastructure to help people from our country find jobs. (Interviewee 13, UK)

Finally, interestingly, in Greece, some smaller grassroots organizations deliberately accepted precarity in exchange for higher decisional and ideological autonomy. They declined financial support from the public sector (state or the EU), as they considered them responsible for social inequalities (Kotronaki et al., 2018). Instead, they received funding from European and Greek labor unions or similar grassroots solidarity initiatives, as well as from citizens who wanted to support their activities: "The aim of our interventions is to point out that the EU's immigration policy violates human rights. We do not want any institutional or informal relationship with those actors who are making people drown in the Aegean" (Interviewee 11, solidarity collective initiative representative, GR).

4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our research question was to explore how cross-sectoral collaborations between the public sector and nonprofit organizations work, particularly when the actors involved have competing views on what is just, fair, and beneficial for society. To do so, we conducted a comparative cross-country analysis of cross-sectoral collaborations in a specific politically contested field: the inclusion of newcomers in European labor markets. In our discussion, we will first reflect upon the mechanisms of cross-sectoral collaboration in the labor inclusion field, focusing as well on potential practice recommendations. We will then discuss how the four different contexts have influenced those mechanisms, and we will conclude by highlighting the limitations of our research and further possible studies. Table 2 summarizes our results, displaying general trends in political, material, and ideological autonomy that, however, vary among contexts within the same country.

TABLE 2 Summaries of results.

	Migration regime	Welfare pluralism	Political autonomy	Material autonomy	Ideological autonomy
Czech Republic	Instrumental and hostile migration regime	Central and Eastern Europe: Hybridized and diversified context with neoliberal and post-socialist influences	Low, rarely high at local level	Low	Medium, context dependent
Finland	Inclusion-led migration regime	Nordic country model—public sector central role	High	Low	High
Greece	Emergency-led migration regime	Southern welfare model—nonprofit organizations respond to weaknesses	Medium for big organizations. Smaller organisations are not involved for their decision	Low	Low for big organizations, high for grassroots organizations
United Kingdom	Hostile migration regime	Liberal model—role of private organizations	Low, high at local level	Low	Medium

Our findings confirm that the collaborations between the public sector and nonprofits in the selected politically contested field were often undermined by latent conflictual tendencies and ambiguities, deriving from the struggle of nonprofits to maintain their autonomy (Ambrosini & Van der Leun, 2015; Fehsenfeld & Levinsen, 2019). With the Finnish nonprofits as the exception, most in Greece, the United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic struggled to have political autonomy and influence agenda-setting; policies and services, at least at the national level; and getting their voice heard and implemented. At the national level, they perceived their involvement in a mainly tokenistic way, promoted to address a narrative of collaboration in line with new governance structures and ideas rather than a real collaboration that might be helpful in effectively rethinking policy options and including the voices of vulnerable populations. In other cases, such as in Greece, some organizations chose to avoid completely influencing the agenda-setting in order to decrease the risk of becoming aligned with organizations they considered lied at the heart of the problems they were trying to address.

Our results highlighted that political autonomy was related to two interconnected mechanisms: the material independence of nonprofits and the ideological tension between the public sector and nonprofits. The financial precarity and short-termism that nonprofits suffer from are very well-known in the literature (see, e.g. (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Evans et al., 2005; Sandberg et al., 2019). Our research confirms that due to precariousness and lack of material stability, nonprofits and, consequently, cross-sectoral collaborations struggled to develop strategic planning and provisions on long-term temporal horizons, reducing the possibility of leading long-term policy changes, fairer and equitable outcomes, or the inclusion of beneficiary voices. The context of politically contested fields in the majority of countries contributed to the exclusion of nonprofit voices incongruent with governmental politics. This happened in the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom in particular, both of which had instrumental and hostile migration regimes. Our analysis added to the existing literature that the financial precarity is extremely high in politically contested fields, which often have been even more affected by austerity policies, such as in our case.

Material precarity was significantly linked to the second mechanism explored, ideological autonomy, which, to our knowledge, has been scarcely researched. Ideological autonomy is a fundamental dynamic in cross-sectoral collaboration processes in politically contested fields where nonprofits, like in our case, may have more inclusion-driven views in comparison to national governments pushed toward more border control policies. However, the literature shows that due to the public funding dependency, the agendas and objectives of nonprofits are commonly defined from above, and that policy priorities across national contexts shape their activities (Evans et al., 2005; Hustinx et al., 2015). It is then clear that an almost unresolvable tension is at the heart of cross-sector collaborations, in which nonprofits need to balance financial sustainability with ideological autonomy. Many organizations struggled to juggle and resolve this tension. In some cases, organizations found new ways to do their advocacy work, whereas others chose a lighter approach to advocacy and collaboration without a political stance being taken (as suggested by Fehsenfeld & Levinsen, 2019; Fyall, 2016). And still, others instead decided to accept precarity in exchange for higher ideological autonomy deliberately, or they opted only to collaborate with the public sector at the local level, where there was no political divergence. Our findings then highlight that this tension raises doubts about the possibility of nonprofit organizations being involved in cross-sectoral collaboration in the migration field, at least at the national level, without affecting their sustainability, their reputation, or their social mission and advocacy work. Therefore, our study confirms the literature, which emphasizes that if the costs associated with collaboration and forfeiting autonomy are not offset, the collaboration becomes a liability (Nederhand, 2021), and

practitioners should not become involved so as to avoid the risk of being diverted from their social mission.

Comparing the different contexts provided further reflections on the mechanisms and the potential costs behind cross-sectoral collaboration in the labor market inclusion of newcomers. Our analysis suggests that the collaborations are situated and have to be understood both in the context of national welfare regimes as well as in the context of local interactions between nonprofits and the public sector, which can differ. We further suggest that autonomy across the three layers is not only continuously hindered but also negotiated. Whereas material precarity was identified in all four countries independent of migration and welfare regimes, ideological autonomy and the capacity to influence policies and services varied based upon the collaborations' contexts. Inclusion-led migration regimes with a Nordic welfare model, such as Finland, acknowledged as necessary the inclusion of nonprofits in influencing policies and services alongside promoting a higher level of ideological autonomy, which led these organizations to take stances in the collaborations. Conversely, due to the highly divergent views between the public sector and nonprofits, more hostile or instrumentalized migration regimes, such as those of the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, affected the possibility of influencing agenda-setting and fostered high ideological independence. While this is true at the national level, at the local level, in some areas of both the UK and the Czech Republic, there was more space for developing cross-sectoral collaboration processes. Finally, in Greece, the weaknesses of the public sector in the Southern welfare model, combined with an emergency-led migration regime, developed different strategies. On the one hand, the more established nonprofits aiming to sit at the policymaking table tried to influence agenda-setting via low ideological autonomy. On the other hand, grassroots organizations ultimately refused to become involved with the public sector, showing a higher level of ideological autonomy and a low level of influence over the agenda. Interestingly then, we can conclude that a high level of ideological autonomy was identified in nonprofit organizations that have more consensus and alignment with policymakers and the public sector, whether at the national level, as in Finland, or at the local level, as in the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, but also in cases where they rejected collaboration entirely, as in Greece.

Our conclusions can have implications for future scholarship dealing with cross-sector collaborations in the politically contested field of migration policy in other national contexts. Moreover, the focus on autonomy can also inspire further exploration of nonprofits and public sector dynamics at transnational and local levels and, at the same time, inspire a more detailed analysis of these dynamics in the context of multilevel governance. Furthermore, our findings and conceptual elaborations are relevant not only to the field of migration but also to the exploration of other areas representing politically contested fields, such as gender or disability policies.

There are several limitations to our study. First, we showed that nonprofits and public sector characteristics could vary widely in different contexts and settings. Thus, our results and mechanisms would benefit from being tested and refined in different contexts before our findings can be applied more generally. Our findings could be, for example, tested in countries with different migration regimes and welfare models to better explore whether there are further differences in the dynamics analyzed. Secondly, further exploration of the levels of autonomy can be undertaken by analyzing the relations between material and ideological autonomy and their relationship to political autonomy. It could be, for example, important to analyze the perspective of public sector officials and policymakers to better understand the dynamics of cross-sectoral collaborations in politically contested fields. Further research on the topic would also benefit from further methodological development, including consideration of the public sector perspec-

tive, for example, via interviews with public officials and other relevant stakeholders. Moreover, a thick description and more in-depth focus on the interactions between nonprofits and the public sector could be provided through ethnographic observations. Finally, future studies could explore what happens in collaborative governance processes in other politically contested fields or when different kinds of organizations (such as social enterprises and/or for-profit organizations) are included.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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