

## Reflections and Call for Accountability: Toward a More Just EDGE Conference

I am an African migrant living in Europe, founder of International Women Space — a migrant-led, feminist, anti-racist, anti colonial political group in Berlin.

At the last EDGE Funders conference in Berlin, grassroots organizers — especially from the Global Majority — arrived full of energy and hope, believing this could finally be the moment when philanthropy truly shifted. We came with the hope that this time, the toxic ‘Grantee vs. Funder’ divide, which so often suffocates our voices and Agency in these spaces, would not define us again.

We came not just for ourselves, but as ambassadors for our communities, bringing urgent struggles and visions for real change. We expected dialogue, solidarity, and support. Instead, we found ourselves tokenized, squeezed into pre-set agendas, given a few rushed minutes to speak, with no real space to be heard.

Always, travelling across borders is a battle — navigating racist visa systems, facing humiliating border controls, all while carrying the burden of being made to feel like outsiders. And once we arrive, it is clear we are not often in these spaces to lead or co-create; we are there to fit into someone else's plan.

Too often, these trips feel like extraction—our stories, our presence are used to validate support for mainstream organisations, while grassroots needs are overlooked. Our struggles are often reduced to symbols and our agency ignored.

Most of the time, when activists from the GlobalMajority are invited into these spaces, it is not to shape agendas, but to be spoken at—to be told what the priorities are, and how we are supposed to fit into them. If philanthropy truly cared about justice, it would stop managing us and start listening.

The issue is not just about listening— it is about **acknowledging** the lived realities, the diversity of our experiences, and the deep interconnectedness of our visions for justice. If funders truly cared about justice, they would stop building the vision of justice and social transformation in **BOARDROOMS**, with communities and **recognize** that we all have a critical role to play in

shaping the future. Right now, there is no real transformation—just the same old power structures, dressed up in new words.

Some of us are not in the positions of power, but we seat in positions that empower.

**Funders have the money to work the systems, grassroots organisations have the systems to work the money.**

This wasn't just a conference failure; it's part of a deeper, ongoing system that continues to dismiss the power of grassroots organizers. The 'Grantee vs. Funder' dynamic is built into the very fabric of these spaces, designed to keep us in a subordinate position. The 2025 EDGE conference, "From Pledge to Action: Accountability in Philanthropy," must confront this injustice head-on. **It's time for real change, not more tokenism and power games.**

Accountability means that the commitments made to racial, migrant, and social justice are upheld with clear actions, equitable funding, and shared power. It is not enough to invite grassroots leaders into spaces.

We must be resourced, supported, and empowered to shape the agendas that affect our communities. We must be treated not as beneficiaries but as partners and experts.

The urgency of this transformation is underscored by the broader political context. Across Europe, we are witnessing a disturbing rise in authoritarianism, xenophobia, and state violence. European migration policies increasingly mirror fascist ideologies, targeting racialised communities through a combination of bureaucratic cruelty and technological surveillance. Asylum seekers face unprecedented barriers, from the suspension of basic rights in countries like Poland, to offshore asylum processing in Italy, and the restriction of family reunification in Austria. Germany's introduction of payment cards (Bezahlkarte) for asylum seekers and pilot programs to deport individuals to third countries such as Greece reflect a broader strategy of deterrence and displacement.

The EU's proposed "Return Regulation" takes this even further. It institutionalises racial profiling, encourages surveillance, and even allows for child detention. These legal shifts are not isolated. They are backed by a rapidly expanding infrastructure of repression: border walls, high-tech surveillance systems, and the externalisation of borders to countries like Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. These developments are fueled by massive funding streams, showing that Europe prioritizes investment in control over investment in care.

We are witnessing increased criminalisation of protest and solidarity. Across Europe, authorities are responding to dissent with heightened police violence, the aggressive surveillance of activists and organisations, and the systematic repression of grassroots movements. Rather than addressing the root causes of injustice, governments are investing in mechanisms of control, targeting those who stand in defense of human rights and community dignity. The so-called Facilitators Package weaponises anti-smuggling rhetoric to target migrants, activists, and humanitarians. Police brutality is on the rise, with stark examples in Germany and the Netherlands, where peaceful resistance has been met with violence.

In this difficult situation, grassroots migrant-led organisations are not just surviving. They are also resisting. They are holding their communities together, building lifelines of care and resistance, and advancing bold political visions grounded in justice, dignity, and the uncompromising demand for self-determination. Yet these very organisations, doing the most vital work, are systematically underfunded. Many survive without stable resources, deliberately pushed to the margins by rigid funding systems, burdensome bureaucracy, and donor frameworks that refuse to recognise their leadership and political power.

The philanthropy model is built on a false distinction between mainstream and grassroots organizations. While in reality, these roles should be **complementary**, working together to build strong, resilient communities, the system instead creates divisions that weaken the movements we need. Mainstream organizations, with their ability to meet donor requirements and speak the language funders want to hear, continue to absorb the bulk of funding. But too often, they are out of touch with the grassroots, relying on academic frameworks instead of the lived realities of the communities they claim to serve. They might offer services, but they aren't fighting to dismantle unjust systems or pushing for liberation.

**The real work—the hard, courageous, visionary work—is being done by grassroots organizers on the frontlines.** We are the ones risking everything to build new futures, yet the funding still flows to those who maintain the status quo.

**Funding must be directed to the grassroots**—unconditional and recognizing our ability to define our own priorities and success. Monitoring and evaluation should be co-designed, not imposed.

Funders need to **reimagine themselves** not as gatekeepers, but as **partners** in a shared political vision.

**We all have a seat at the table.** Funders have the money to work the systems, but **grassroots organizations** have the systems to work the

money. We share the same vision for change, and it's time we work together to make it happen.

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The Migrant Justice Community of Practice (MJ CoP) is a bold coalition of migrant-led organizations fighting to transform European migration policy. We reject punishment and control, and demand a shift toward care, protection, and community. MJ CoP is a space for racialized and migrant-led groups to unite, strategize, and learn together. Through our meetings, discussions, and shared mapping, we are building a powerful, transnational movement rooted in solidarity and resistance.

Alongside this, the MJ CoP has built a Solidarity Group — a network of NGOs, funders, and allies committed to working in **active solidarity** with migrant-led struggles. This group exists to respond directly to the urgent needs of grassroots actors, helping bridge gaps in resources, support, and expertise — on our terms. Both the MJ CoP and the Solidarity Group are coordinated by Equinox, the Greek Forum of Migrants, and International Women Space, ensuring that **migrant leadership stays at the center**, not pushed to the margins.

We also honor and recognize the unwavering commitment and powerful work of many others whose names may not always be spoken out loud. Their voices, struggles, and leadership must also be at the center — **at the table**, shaping the conversations, not waiting to be invited.

**My call today is simple: recognise, respect, and resource.** We call on EDGE Funders and all philanthropic actors to reflect deeply on what **true accountability** really means. This goes beyond listening sessions or diversity panels. **It requires a real shift in power, process, and purpose.** Philanthropy must stop managing marginalization and start **co-creating liberation** with us. We are not here to be managed, we are here to build the future together.

The 2025 conference theme provides a powerful opportunity to move from rhetoric to reality. But this can only happen if funders are willing to be uncomfortable, to listen, to share power, and to take risks. We need funding models that are flexible, long-term, and politically aligned with the movements they aim to support.

We also need conference structures that enable genuine dialogue and relationship-building. Panels should be co-designed with grassroots actors. Funding should be allocated to enable follow-up activities. And activists

should be given the space to speak to their realities, not just perform for donor expectations.

Ultimately, we are not asking for favors. We are **demanding** a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between funders and grantees. We are demanding to be **seen, heard, and resourced** as the agents of change we are. We bring the lived realities, the visions, and the strategies that real transformation needs. The time for pledges has passed. **The time for action, for real power-sharing and accountability, is now.**

Across the world, the rise of far-right politics is not just attacking migrants — it is attacking the very right to organise, to resist, and to dream of a different future. Grassroots movements are under siege. Human rights are being dismantled piece by piece. And philanthropy cannot claim neutrality.

If EDGE and its members are serious about accountability, they must do more than listen — **they must act, boldly and now.** These are not reflections for polite discussion; **they are urgent demands forged in the fire of daily struggle.**

The future of migration justice — and the very soul of philanthropy — depends on whether funders are ready to stop hiding behind the process and start standing shoulder to shoulder with those risking everything for justice.

There is no “Migration crisis” it is a crisis in distribution of Resources.  
Let us stand for Humanity and dignity for all.