

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



Journeys to a New Life

Understanding the Role of Youth Work in Integrating Young Refugees in Europe

Background Information

The Situation of Young Refugees in Europe

In the last couple of years, and for the first time since World War II, Europe has been facing an unprecedented inflow of migrants and refugees, mainly due to the wars in Syria and Iraq as well as conflict and instability in countries such as Afghanistan. This reality brings new challenges that call for cross-sector integrated responses, where youth work also has a key role in promoting integration, inclusion and social cohesion in short, medium and long term.

According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) figures 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home and among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.¹ Regarding the European reality, accurate data remain a challenge, as every day there are new arrivals and the situation keeps evolving but the existing figures allows us to have an idea of the situation and, consequently, the challenges ahead. From January until September 2015, Europe had an increase in refugee numbers² from 3. 075,200 to 4.391,400.³ Turkey is the 2014-2015 major refugee-hosting country in Europe (and worldwide) with the number of refugees rising from around 1.5 million in the beginning of 2015 to 2.5 million by the end of the same year.⁴ A closer look to EU (European Union) countries, based on Eurostat data⁵, shows that the latest figures for 2015 marked an increase of 693 thousand first time applicants (from 563 thousand in 2014 to almost 1.26 million in 2015). The main countries of origin of these

¹ UNHCR [Figures at a Glance](#)

² Including refugees and "people in refugee-like situation"

³ UNHCR report [Global trends, forced displacement in 2015](#) (page 14)

⁴ *Idem* (page 15)

*All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

⁵ Eurostat – [Asylum Statistics at European level](#)

applicants are Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq and to a lesser extent from Albania, Kosovo* and Pakistan. In 2015, the number of first time asylum applicants from Syria rose to 363 thousand in the EU-28, which was 29 % of the total.

In the EU-28, more than four in five (83 %) of the first-time asylum seekers in 2015 were less than 35 years old and those in the aged 18–34 years represented slightly more than half (53 %) of the total number of first time applicants. Nearly 29% (3 in 10 applicants) were minors (less than 18 years old). This age distribution was common in almost all the EU member States, with the largest share of applicants usually being those aged 18–34. Thus, the development of solutions for integration and inclusion of young refugees is a priority for authorities, international organisations and civil society organisations, particularly the youth work sector.

Most of the refugees and migrants fleeing to Europe from armed conflicts, mass killings, persecution and all different kinds of violence (including sexual and gender-based violence) travel to Turkey, from where they undertake life risking journeys by sea to Greece. Between January and November 2015, 797,372 arrivals have been reported, according to UNFPA - (United Nations Population Fund). From Greece, they try to make their way through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria to reach their destination countries, that include Germany and Sweden.⁶

The journeys are dangerous as these people face extortion and exploitation, border closures, lack of housing and health support and single women travelling alone or with children, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, unaccompanied children, early-married children, persons with disabilities and elderly men and women, are among those who are particularly vulnerable to the hazards and that require a co-ordinated and efficient protection response.⁷ UN agencies such as UNHCR, UN Women and UNFPA together with different governments and civil society organisations have been providing the humanitarian emergency response but there is also the need to reflect and create proposals for faster integration and inclusion of these refugees and migrants. The youth sector, due to its longstanding practices and experiences in intercultural education, peer support, soft skills development and other areas, is certainly an important piece of the puzzle.

Integration of Young Refugees and Migrants in Europe – What has been done?

In January 2016, the Council of Europe Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland, appointed Tomáš Boček as his Special Representative on Migration and Refugees⁸ to gather information on how the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees are protected on the ground in the member States, and to develop proposals for action at national and European levels.

In May 2015, the Committee of Ministers adopted the [Council of Europe Action Plan on the Fight against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism](#) (CM(2015)74) that aims to develop targeted activities for the period 2015-2017, to support and reinforce the efforts of member States and to contribute to the objectives defined at international level. In addition, in March 2016 it was adopted the [Council of Europe's Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies](#) (CM(2016)25) that aims to assist member States in managing Europe's diversity through smart policies fostering mutual understanding and respect and it is organised around activities related with education, anti-discrimination and effective integration.

⁶ UNHCR, UNFPA and Women's Refugee Commission "[Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis - Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)"

⁷ *Idem*

⁸ News Archive 2015: "[Migration and Refugees: Secretary General appoints Special Representative](#)"

“The Council of Europe’s youth policy aims at providing young people with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop knowledge, skills and competencies and to play a full part in all aspects of society. In fulfilling our mission to secure and provide equal opportunities, specific attention is paid to vulnerable groups of young people such as refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.”⁹ The 2016-2017 Youth for Democracy Programme of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe encompasses several initiatives, related and with the involvement of young refugees/migrants and youth organisations.

During 2016, the Youth Department has organised, for example, a seminar on the [Social Inclusion of Refugee Students and their Role in Intercultural Dialogue](#) that also strengthened co-operation with partner organisations such as the Global Platform for Syrian Students, Kiron Open Higher Education and Voice of Young Refugees in Europe (VYRE). Furthermore, a study session was organised in May 2016 with VYRE on the theme of [Local Participation and Inclusion of Refugees](#). This session brought together unaccompanied minors (UAMs), youth workers and social workers from the services working with UAMs to reflect on their situation and to start developing local initiatives as well as an international action plan to ensure their social inclusion through active participation. More recently, in October 2016, a “[Thematic Debate on the Integration of Young Refugees and Migrants](#)” was organised in the framework of the 35th meeting of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) of the Council of Europe.¹⁰

During the 2016 World Forum for Democracy, the Council of Europe’s Democracy Innovation Award went to [Kiron](#), a German initiative in favour of worldwide higher education for refugees.¹¹

The [No Hate Speech](#) Movement, a youth-focused initiative that fights online hate speech and promotes human rights initiated in 2012 has been prolonged until the end of 2017 as part of the Action Plan on the Fight against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism. In addition, the campaign contributes also to the Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies. Furthermore, young refugees and migrants are also now clearly stated as a 2017 focus for pilot activities of the European Youth Foundation, a division of the Youth Department that provides grants for youth related activities.¹²

The [European Agenda on Migration](#) (COM(2015) 240) adopted in May 2015 put forward concrete actions to respond to the immediate crisis and save lives at sea, and proposed EU’s structural responses for the medium and long term. Moreover, the [Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals](#) (COM 377/2016) adopted in June 2016 as part of the European Agenda on Migration outlines the specific actions the European Commission will undertake to promote active participation and social inclusion of third country nationals. These actions involve exchanges with the receiving society through volunteering, sport, culture and other projects which facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding. The fact that both the newcomers and the hosting societies can benefit from such actions is highlighted (the two-way integration process).

Following on from a series of initiatives to tackle the current refugee crisis announced by the European Commission, the Erasmus+ Programme has had a clearer focus on supporting refugees and other marginalised groups in 2016. The European Commission launched two webpages for Erasmus+ on this topic: one¹³ that looks at the issue across all sectors participating in the

⁹ CoE Portal – Youth-Peace-Dialogue: [Inclusion of Refugees](#)

¹⁰ CMJ(2016)21rev: “Thematic debate on the integration of young migrants and refugees” – 18/10/2016

¹¹ CoE Portal - Newsroom “[Democracy Innovation Award](#)”

¹² [European Youth Foundation 2017 Focus for Pilot Activities](#): “a) Initiatives contributing to the Council of Europe Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies, notably those supporting social inclusion and participation strategies for and with young migrants and refugees and involving the local communities; b) Initiatives combating gender inequalities and gender-based violence, with a special focus on the vulnerability of young women refugees and migrants. (...)”

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/migration/index_en.htm

programme and shares good practices related with Higher Education, Schools Education and Migrants and Multilingual Classrooms, Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and Dealing with Multilingualism; and the second looks specifically at helping refugees through Higher Education.¹⁴

Furthermore, for 2016 and 2017, the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) has been updated to address issues around social cohesion, and the integration of refugees and migrants: *"Europe needs more cohesive and inclusive societies which allow citizens to play an active role in democratic life. Education and youth work are key to prevent violent radicalisation by promoting common European values, fostering social integration, enhancing intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community. Erasmus+ is an important instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds, especially newly arrived migrants, in response to critical events affecting European countries."*¹⁵ Youth projects across the programme key actions have updated priorities to enable organisations to work with these identified target groups.¹⁶

In the Erasmus+ projects' database it is possible to identify several youth initiatives tackling the young refugees and migrants' issues. For example, in Germany, a Key Action 3 project (Support For Policy Reform) entitled "[Escape Europe](#)" empowered young people with Kurdish roots to take an active role in the political processes that determine the European refugee policies. A Key Action 1 project (European Voluntary Service) called "[Refugees](#)" mobilised 5 volunteers to support the integration of refugees in Rieti (Italy).

National Agencies (NAs) of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme (YiA) also have a role in promoting the necessary skills in youth work to contribute for the integration of young refugees and migrants, for example, *JUGEND für Europa* (German NA) together with the NAs of Belgium, Poland and Croatia, organised the training course "[Let's Explore – Refugees today in Europe. Educational Challenges and Opportunities for Youth Workers](#)" in Berlin in June 2016. The Italian NA also promoted recently (November 2016) the peer meeting "[How to use E+ YiA in Helping Refugees?](#)" on developing activities benefiting young refugees/newly arrived migrants. The meeting was open for the NA inclusion and diversity officers and all other NA staff working on this topic. Furthermore, a Key Action 3 project promoted by the Italian NA¹⁷ will be running between 2016-2018. The project aims to promote the integration and the social inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants as well as to foster understanding, tolerance and respect among people, through the development of youth work activities, non-formal education methodologies and new inclusion practices.

The European youth movement is strongly engaged in promoting the inclusion of young refugees and migrants. The European Youth Forum (YFJ) adopted the Resolution on "[Protection and Integration of Young Refugees in Europe](#)" in November 2015. The document highlights specific concerns towards minor and young refugees, in particular, unaccompanied minors; underlines the importance of promoting inclusive societies and the role of media and politics in this task; and proposes a holistic and cross-cutting approach for the inclusion of young refugees that should take into consideration: civic participation, education and language, occupation and work, as well as

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/migration/higher-education-refugees_en.htm

¹⁵ Erasmus + Programme Guide (page 7)

¹⁶ Erasmus + UK Portal News: [Erasmus+ to support more projects focused on assisting refugees and marginalised groups in 2016](#) - *"For youth projects, the award criteria given in the Programme Guide have been updated to reflect this priority. For example, for Key Action 1 projects, the award criteria under 'relevance of the project' now includes criteria linked to reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants along with criteria linked to social inclusion and preventing the violent radicalisation of young people. For Strategic Partnerships (Key Action 2) organisations working in the education, training and youth fields are encouraged to undertake activities aimed at inclusion, combating radicalisation and helping migrants and refugees."*

¹⁷ In partnership with the national agencies from Belgium, France, Germany, Malta, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden, and plus seven associated partners.

culture and leisure activities. The resolution states the important role of youth organisations in promoting inclusive societies and lists a set of demands addressed to different actors, including governments and international organisations.

Member organisations of YFJ have launched the Migration and Human Rights Network of the European Youth Forum, with the overall aim to advocate for the rights of young refugees and migrants and to promote their inclusion in society. Recent activities of the network include network meetings, arrangement of thematic squares and gathering knowledge and information on the topic. The Network has made available the paper "[Access to Education, Vocational Training and Labour Market for Asylum Seekers](#)" that identifies several good practices promoted by youth organisations, such as the language courses promoted by Don Bosco Youth Net and the co-ordination role of the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations for the involvement of youth organisations in the reception of refugees in the country. In addition, they have created a [mapping tool](#) of existing initiatives promoted by youth organisations for inclusion of young refugees and migrants.

Integrating Young Refugees in Europe – What can be the role of Youth Work?

The EU-CoE youth partnership has initiated a process of gathering knowledge on the situation and integration of young refugees at the Symposium [\(Un\)Equal Europe? Responses from the Youth Sector](#), which took place in Budapest on 30 May-2 June 2016. The analytical paper [A look at the "refugee crisis" across Europe: challenges, debates and projects](#) collecting national contributions across Europe from EKCYP (European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy) correspondents was published in September 2016.

Under Objective 2.1 of the 2016 work plan, "Follow-up to the European Youth Work Convention", the EU-CoE youth partnership proposed to analyse the role that youth work can play in supporting young refugees in Europe and to provide related evidence for enhancing youth policy and youth work practice. The Expert Seminar on "[Journeys to a New Life: Understanding the Role of Youth Work in Integrating Young Refugees in Europe](#)" aims to analyse the role that youth work can play in supporting young refugees in Europe and to provide related evidence for enhancing youth policy and youth work practice. This analysis should support youth sector stakeholders across Europe to better understand the current reality, the potential in co-ordinated intervention and to discuss adequate policy measures. It is also meant to inspire youth work practitioners and local authorities to adapt their youth work and policy responses to some of the challenges brought by youth migration.

The discussions around the analytical papers and practices of youth work in the integration of young refugees will be the starting point to identify characteristics specific to this type of youth work and research themes relevant for policy-makers and practitioners in the field of youth; and to recommend follow-up initiatives and develop proposals on strengthening youth sector engagement with young refugees. There is an ongoing reflection on how to promote a more co-ordinated and efficient integration of young migrants and refugees. Themes such as the contribution of youth work for refugees' integration in labour market, citizenship and participation, integration in the schooling system (and intercultural schools) and the role of information technology will be tackled during the seminar.

Furthermore, issues such as the recognition of the skills and qualifications of young refugees, access to education and employment opportunities, provision of language and other courses to facilitate integration and autonomy in the new context, initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue (at schools, other public institutions or community level) are key challenges that call for collaboration

between different stakeholders, including the youth sector. Additionally, the promotion of policies and practices that assure the access to rights (such as to housing, education and health care) should also be addressed.

Youth work providers have a key role in this context as they have the capacity to read and adjust quickly to new realities, a longstanding experience in working towards inclusion and diversity in societies and the capacity to put forward innovative ideas that link knowledge, policy and practice.