

Youth Partnership

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



EUROPEAN UNION

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Journeys to a New Life

Understanding the role of youth work in integrating young refugees in Europe

Expert Seminar

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Key Messages

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Introduction

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"](#) analysed the role that youth work can play in supporting young refugees in Europe and provided related evidence for enhancing youth policy and youth work practice. The analytical papers and case studies presented and these key messages 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.

Over forty participants attended the seminar: young refugees, youth workers, policy makers, and youth researchers came together to discuss the contribution of the youth sector in promoting inclusion and integration of young refugees and to identify proposals to strengthen this work. Four workshops allowed the discussion of eight analytical papers and plenary sessions were an additional space to share more research findings as well as youth work practices on inclusion and integration of young refugees. Youth work has a longstanding and key role in promoting human rights and value based activities, and this specific characteristic of the sector clearly framed the discussions during the seminar and, subsequently, the key messages.

During the plenary sessions and workshops, some topics were highlighted several times and, therefore, it is important to briefly share them before listing the key messages:

- Intercultural competences, especially empathy, are key for inclusion and integration of young refugees, youth sector can work with inclusion while the mandate for integration and legal aspects should be taken up by other actors whose responsibility it is to deal with it;
- Waitinghood implies concrete specificities and challenges to programming, as it is a new concept and reality for the youth work sector, it is also a question on the role youth work can play for young people who are primarily in the focus of humanitarian work actors;
- Individual empowerment of young refugees is important but there is the need to go beyond and promote systemic change (challenge power relations);
- Cross-sector approaches, multidisciplinary teams, and adequate funding need to be strengthened.

The key messages bring together the inputs from the researchers, policy-makers and practitioners and the discussions with the participants.

Key Messages

Based on the presentations and discussions of the first working day, the key messages were identified and clustered into eight themes. On the second day, the proposal of key messages was shared with the group that had the possibility to consolidate the messages and reach a consensus. It was also given the opportunity to send by email suggestions for further improvement of the proposal.

The key messages differentiated by theme are listed below (in bold) and followed by a short explanation.

1. Inclusion programmes for young asylum seekers/refugees and hosting communities

- **Work for inclusion since the first day** – It is important to work with every person since the first day of arrival, no matter how her/his process will evolve. Participants highlighted the need of working towards inclusion since the very beginning so the young refugees gain knowledge, skills and attitudes that would serve them in any future context. To learn the hosting country/community language together with development of communication skills was identified as a priority.
- **Youth work can contribute to other inclusion initiatives** – There are already existing good practices in youth work and further initiatives can be developed in the following areas: delivery of language courses; organisation of culture courses (both for young asylum seekers/refugees and for hosting communities); development of life and vocational skills and intercultural dialogue competences; supporting initiatives of legal literacy; promotion of healthy lifestyles from an harm reduction perspective (e.g. prevention and reduction of alcohol and drug abuse); education on sexual and reproductive rights; sports & recreation; and citizenship and human rights education.
- **Engage local communities in inclusion programmes** – Youth work and young people are well positioned to assure the engagement of local communities in inclusion programmes. The participation of local communities is key to success.

2. Youth work in transit and hosting countries

- **Acknowledge vision and aspirations of young refugees** – It is important to be aware of the needs and aspirations of young refugees and to reconcile those by actively involving them in the development, implementation and evaluation of initiatives.
- **Promote appropriate solutions for different situations** - Youth workers need to be aware that there are different beneficiary needs and competences to be developed also during waitinghood¹ and in transit situations, in addition to the traditional transition to adulthood that young refugees undergo as any young person does.

¹ Refers to the (often extended) waiting period that an asylum applicant goes through until there is a decision regarding his/her legal status.

- **Take into consideration the diverse background of beneficiaries while programming** – status and age are important to take into consideration while programming, as well as prior experiences and cultural background of young refugees. Attention should also be given to gender and LGBT issues.
- **Be aware of your mandate and capacity to contribute** - Youth work has a role in assuring short but also medium and long term solutions, within its mandate. It is important that youth work providers are aware of the needs and their capacity, expertise and resources available to promote appropriate and efficient solutions.

3. Support for self-developed initiatives

- **Promote peer-to-peer approach between young refugees** - It is important to involve young refugees as role models for their peers in the initiatives - they can work as project leaders and mentors and they can motivate others to become active.
- **Change the narrative about young refugees** - There is the need to support the change of narrative about (young) refugees, giving visibility to positive examples. These stories and case studies should be widely shared with the support of ICT tools and media. In addition, it is important to use communication tools easily available to young refugees.
- **Create spaces for participation of young refugees** – Youth work has a role in promoting bottom-up initiatives of young refugees, especially at the community level. These initiatives are key for personal empowerment and community development – and to see young refugees as actors for change.
- **Support self-developed initiatives by young refugees** – Initiatives promoted by young refugees should be backed to become sustainable and visible. Youth work can have a role in supporting the step-up of organisations (registration, development of statutes) and its further development (access to funds, volunteer management).
- **Initiate outreach programmes to young refugee women and inactive groups** – participants agreed that while involving young women in youth work is challenging, additional efforts should be made to integrate them in activities and put in place necessary support mechanisms that would allow for their participation and development.

4. Capacity-building and support to youth workers

- **Create learning opportunities for youth workers** - There is a need to improve skills of youth workers on new issues for the sector such as trauma, conflict management, legal actors and frameworks, religious freedom and gender & migration.
- **Promote exchange initiatives** – Create peer learning opportunities within youth work and with external stakeholders working with young refugees, to share experience and good practices.

- **Make better use of existing funding opportunities** - Youth work should look at Erasmus+ chapter for capacity-building of youth workers as an opportunity to fund initiatives; as young migrants and refugees are clearly identified as programme priority for 2017.
- **Access to structural funding for youth organisations should be secured** – Youth organisations need improved access to funds available to work with young refugees, beyond project-based opportunities.

5. Advocacy work by youth organisations with young refugees

- **Invest in citizenship education of young refugees** - Youth work has a role in citizenship education and awareness raising about young refugee rights at local, national and regional levels. It is important that these young people become aware of the existing practices on democratic participation and how to get engaged.
- **Assure spaces for dialogue between different stakeholders** – Linking bottom-up initiatives with spaces that allow the participation of young refugees in public life and decision/policy-making is essential to make the voice of young refugees heard. This link is key to go beyond personal empowerment and community development and to be able to promote systemic change.
- **Promote a youth rights approach** – Young refugees are marginalised youth and there is the need to assure their access to rights. The work of several stakeholders, including humanitarian actors, sometimes lacks the perspective of young people in transition from childhood to adulthood. There is significant youth research and youth work experience on this issue to support advocacy initiatives.
- **Work with the media to advocate for young refugees' rights** – Advocacy work should involve collaboration with the media, to produce accurate and knowledge based information and to change the narrative about young refugees.

6. Role of youth work in strengthening accountability

- **Rediscover the political voice of youth work** - Youth work should rediscover its political voice, challenge systems and hold decision-makers and organisations more accountable on the impact their decisions have. Youth organisations should increase their watchdog function particularly on the rights and realities of young refugees across Europe.
- **Needs and responsibilities should be clarified** – Refugee-targeting initiatives must respond to needs and every actor involved (such as governments, local public authorities and humanitarian organisations) need to assume their share of responsibilities. Situations where the NGO sector stepped in to carry out the state responsibilities should be limited to ensure appropriate legal protection and respect of relevant international conventions.
- **Improve public-private partnerships** - There is the need for accountable contracts in public-private partnerships related with hosting and management of young refugees. Contracting regulations should include principles and practices that respect the rights of young refugees.

7. Research and practice coming together

- **Reinforce co-operation** - Co-operation between youth sector actors should be reinforced (researchers, practitioners and policy makers).
- **Recognise the role of research** - Research is important to assess the needs and understand the reality; to contribute to systematising youth work experiences, further theorisation/modelling and development of tools; and to support evidence-based policies.
- **Develop research focused on youth policy makers** - There is the need to develop research focused on youth policy makers; for example, on how do they understand and experience the context and the decision-making process.
- **New themes for further research** – Participants identified the need to further explore new research themes related to refugees such as: waitinghood, mental health, young refugee women's non-participation, unaccompanied minors, young refugees' aspirations and reality, power relations and concept of whiteness.
- **Promote participatory methods** – Researchers should consider participatory methods in their work, with the objective to further engage young refugees in their research projects.

8. Added value of youth work and cross-sector approaches

- **The role of youth work in inclusion and integration of young refugees should be recognised** - Youth work has a longstanding experience in promoting inclusion of marginalised youth (including with disadvantaged and migrant background) and there are already existing good practices in including young refugees. Those should be shared widely and better used for the inclusion and integration of young refugees.
- **Involve youth work taking into consideration its specific added-value** - Youth work actors are educational providers, used to promote non-formal education and informal learning opportunities, intercultural dialogue initiatives and work based on a peer learning and co-developmental approach that are key for successful inclusion programmes.
- **Improve co-ordination between inclusion and integration actors** - There is the need for better cross-sectoral approaches and for co-ordination of actors working in the inclusion and integration of young refugees, especially between youth work providers, local public authorities and humanitarian organisations.
- **Promote strategic partnerships and multidisciplinary teams** – Collaboration efforts that bring together research, policy and practice and that allow contextualisation and needs-based programmes and activities, should be promoted, especially within youth work sector. In addition, synergies between non-formal and formal education settings and work in multidisciplinary teams should be encouraged.