

Youth Partnership

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



Workshop on the role of youth work for the inclusion and participation of young refugees

4 – 6 December 2017, Thessaloniki, Greece

Workshop conclusions

From 4 to 6 December 2017, the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth organised a workshop on the role of youth work for the inclusion and participation of young refugees. 43 participants, representatives of NGOs, youth and social workers, volunteers, representatives of public services, youth researchers, exchanged on the theme and learnt from each other's practices, with the aim of learning about approaches that youth work uses for supporting the inclusion and participation of young refugees.

During the workshop, the group of participants:

- Identified challenges related to youth work with young refugees and ways to address these challenges
- Analysed three local practices of working with of young refugees, from Thessaloniki, and reflected on the links to their own realities
- Analysed five themes that are relevant for the situation of young refugees (intercultural learning, involving young women, participation, access to social rights and mental health and trauma)
- Had a space to exchange views with other youth sector's practitioners and network
- Identified support measures needed for youth work with young refugees
- Contributed their ideas and experience for the publication currently under preparation.

Challenges identified

Participants identified challenges that young refugees face, which influence also the approaches youth work can adopt. Several of the challenges have specific elements related to the situation of

young refugees in transit through different countries. Among the challenges, those that were mentioned repeatedly were:

- Incomplete or lacking legal frameworks and heavy bureaucratic processes.
- Lack or poor implementation of national integration strategies, approaches and support, with NGOs and migration related international organisations sometimes delivering services that usually fall under the responsibility of national authorities
- Lack of appropriate guardianship system for unaccompanied minors.
- Problematic age assessment procedures.
- Lack of coordinated action between different NGOs, institutions etc.
- Hostile political environment towards those working with refugees, and health problems of those working with refugees, such as burnout.
- Local societies are changing their composition with the arrival of refugees, so they are also changing in terms of ideas, how people live together, how they learn from new experiences, etc. In some places, this is seen as a challenge.
- Stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and isolation of young refugees, in societies where there is a hostile feeling around refugees.
- Challenge to involve local communities in developing links with refugees.
- Difficulties in intercultural relations and misunderstandings related to gender roles
- The language challenge and the lack of professional interpreters to support the communication process.
- The problems that refugees face are also a reflection of community problems in the countries concerned (high unemployment rates).
- Difficulties in the transition to adulthood, even more so in transit countries.
- Problems related to the lack of recognition of education diplomas.
- The integration of young people in the education system in the transit countries
- Legal limitations for young refugees to be involved in community or youth work projects (such as mobility).
- Young refugees are not that motivated to participate in activities in the countries which they are transiting, as they hope they can leave those countries.
- Generally, working with a long-term perspective with young refugees in transit countries represents a challenge.
- The overall vision of young refugees as refugees first, and only marginally as young people, poses questions in relation to the possibilities for youth work.

Main conclusions

In the context mainly of the transit countries, the current situation of refugees and how the support system is organised poses systemic problems in relation to the possibilities for young refugees to be involved in youth work.

However, youth work can support in many different ways, despite of the question whether young refugees want to move on to other countries or stay.

What youth work could have as an important role is to inform the refugees and also advocate for changes in the way the situation is coordinated or the types of programmes that are put in place for refugees.

Youth work could also have a role in bridging refugees and the local communities.

Youth work can also develop personalised and individualised approaches in the support for young refugees. In transit countries, youth work can also offer a feeling of stability and a “home” for the young refugees.

Cultural mediation, language support and skills development were identified as some of the important roles for youth work.

Youth work can offer a space for young refugees to be young people and to enjoy activities. Through non-formal education, they can benefit and be involved in activities that could also be similar across countries, as following up a learning process.

The relation between youth work and community work when working with refugees is important. In the local examples shared, it seemed that having a whole community approach, across ages, could also be very beneficial for all the groups, including for the young people.

More support and recognition of youth work are needed in order for youth work to be able to act in a more stable way, and go beyond responding to emergencies. This includes also the training for youth workers, so that they can develop youth work initiatives that respond to the needs of young people.