

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

2 – 4 October 2017, Strasbourg

Workshop conclusions

From 2 to 4 October 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. 45 participants, youth workers, young refugees, representatives of public services, youth researchers, representatives of young NGOs, exchanged on the theme and learnt from each other's practices, with the aim of learning about approaches that youth work and youth policy use for supporting the inclusion and participation of young refugees.

During each workshop, the group of participants:

- Identified challenges related to youth work with young refugees and ways to address these challenges
- Analysed a local practice of youth work and/or youth policies supporting the inclusion and participation of young refugees
- Had the space to exchange views with young refugees and with other youth sector's practitioners and network
- Identified support measures needed for youth work with young refugees.

Challenges identified

Participants identified challenges that young refugees face, which influence also the approaches youth work can adopt. Among the challenges, those that were mentioned repeatedly were:

- transition to adulthood, especially the situation of young refugees turning 18, when their status changes from being a child (and the related protections under the UNCRC) to being an adult. This implies a loss in legal protection and lack of access to rights.

- the burdensome processes related to bureaucracy and obtaining a legal status in the host country
- lack of information accessible for the young refugees, especially on their rights, in languages they understand
- emotional trauma, both given the circumstances of reaching the host countries, as well as due to the procedures and instability in the host country (institutional violence)
- precariousness of internships and other measures supporting young refugees to access the labour market
- political developments affecting the public opinion and policies in the host countries, in the sense of xenophobic developments
- the burden of “waitinghood”, in other words, the unstable situation of not knowing whether the legal status of refugee will be granted, or whether the young person will need to be sent back to their country of origin, but also not knowing what will happen after the status is granted
- little possibilities and spaces for young refugees to express themselves and be active in local life, as citizens
- difficulties related to intercultural relations, as well as discrimination and stigma that young refugees suffer, including the language barriers
- difficulties in reaching out to and involving young women and girls.

Main conclusions

Youth work is definitely a support for individual empowerment, a safe space for young refugees to be young and also to be supported in the process of integration in host societies. It helps young refugees in developing their confidence, resilience and trust and in building positive relationships, also with their peers. Youth work with young refugees requires flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity and it is linked with the aim of integration in society of young refugees.

Youth work can offer a space for young refugees to express themselves and participate in society. As it is a space for young refugees to voice their ideas, concerns and aspirations, it can also be a space to uncover and value the resources that young refugees bring to society.

Youth work is also an important stakeholder in the necessary cross-sectoral cooperation between different services tackling different aspects of young refugees’ integration (legal, education, housing, employment, etc.). Youth work should not take up tasks that fall under other sectors’ roles (cases where youth workers were asked to provide also legal assistance or psychological assistance), but rather act as a complementary support to other services.

Youth workers need specific support to tackle complex situation when working with young refugees, thematically looking at intercultural learning, mental health and trauma, involving young women refugees, access to social rights, participation in local life. Youth work practitioners also need spaces to exchange practices and thematic capacity-building on the above mentioned themes.

International cooperation and peer learning at international level can act as a support for practitioners’ motivation and for the improvement of the quality of their work. Opportunities such as this workshop are also a tool to avoid the isolation of practitioners and support their reflective practice.

More resources and policy support should be in place for youth work interventions with young refugees on the themes of participation and inclusion.