



# **Read my story, hear my voice: refugees' contribution to democratic citizenship**

Report of the study session held by  
Voices of Young Refugees in Europe  
in co-operation with  
the European Youth Centre  
of the Council of Europe

11 - 18 May 2014  
European Youth Centre in Strasbourg

This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This chapter includes the most important facts, issues, conclusions and recommendations from the study session “Read my story - hear my voice: refugees' contribution to democratic citizenship”. It also gives a complete overview of the information in the report about the study session in brief.

"Read my story - hear my voice: refugees' contribution to democratic citizenship" was the fourth study session of the network Voices of Young Refugees in Europe (VYRE). In previous projects the main VYRE's focus was on the social inclusion of young refugees and the challenges faced towards the active participation of young refugees in shaping their European societies. With this study session VYRE decided to move from the challenges faced towards the active participation and empowerment of young refugees through creative writing and storytelling.

During the study session, participants discussed the issue of citizenship where they touched upon citizenship as a social role and as a legal status, what it means to be an active and responsible citizen, and contributions of young refugees to their host societies. The study session also provided an opportunity to share and learn about obstacles and support mechanisms for refugees in different countries regarding citizenship as a legal status, in terms of rights and responsibilities. Participants also explored the concept of identity and its different aspects linking it to active citizenship in Europe. Participants were provided a space to learn about what determines our identities by looking at their own identity and articulated on how does personal identity differs from group identity.

Moreover, together with guest speakers, participants elaborated on the power of the storytelling and narratives paying particular attention to the framing. Framing the issue of young refugees can influence public perception about them, which is an important skill in their story telling when they attempt to show their contribution in their host societies. Refugees are often portrayed very negatively in mainstream media which influences the creation of stereotypes and prejudices against them. Proposing alternatives to the existing negative associations linked to the young refugees and transforming them in positive ones can contribute to the image of young refugees. Participants also articulated on ways of using creative writing as a valuable tool for expression and effective citizenship and understanding of how individual written stories can be a valuable contribution and positive effect. Participants discovered an innovative and useful way to motivate other young refugees to also share their stories, with a particular focus on everyday accomplishments as young European citizens.

Furthermore, this study session was very important for VYRE as a network. VYRE was launched in February 2008, during an international meeting co-funded by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in Budapest, and it was officially registered as a legal international network at the beginning of 2013, counting members from all over Europe and beyond. This was a transition period for VYRE, with elections for the board members set for the end of 2014, which is why VYRE wanted to give place to new participants who would contribute and take part in elections, as well as in the future of the network.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The aims and objectives of the study session**

The fundamental aim of the VYRE network is “to positively change the lives of young refugees/exiles through unifying our voices in order to influence policy change at national and European level and to realise our equal human rights and dignity”.

The study session aimed at using storytelling and creative writing as a tool to empower young refugees to take an active role in shaping European societies.

The objectives were the following:

- To explore the concepts of identity, citizenship and democratic citizenship in relation to young refugees in Europe
- To exchange experiences on the daily contributions of young refugees in shaping and changing European societies
- To develop participants' competences in story-writing and storytelling through concrete workshops online before the session and on spot during the session
- To reflect on storytelling as a powerful tool to use with young refugees in local communities in order to motivate them to become active citizens
- To create a booklet with short stories by young refugees on their contribution to democratic citizenship.

### **The profile of participants**

The most important criterion concerning the profile of participants was to somehow be involved in the lives of young refugees. Therefore, we decided participants should be either young refugees/ IDPs / migrants / asylum seekers themselves, or young professionals working with mentioned groups. The second criteria concerned their experience and interest in storytelling and creative writing. The application was open to the VYRE members who have already participated at previous study sessions or other VYRE projects, as well as to new applicants who fulfilled above mentioned criteria.

The organising team has taken into consideration age, gender and geographical balance of participants. We have also tried to make a good balance between the old VYRE members and new applicants, this time leaving more space for the new comers, in order to refresh the VYRE network before the elections scheduled for late 2014.

The selected participants came from various backgrounds - all were residents of Council of Europe member states, yet their countries of origin were very diverse: Egypt, Vietnam, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Mali and many others. Participants were aged from 18 to 30, with the average of 24 years of age, which is much lower than on the previous VYRE study session. Due to the high number of applications received this year, VYRE was able to choose among a number of outstanding applications and form a group of enthusiastic, motivated young people willing to actively contribute not only to the study session and its follow-up, but also to the lives of young refugees back in their home communities.

### **Overall topic and main contents/issues discussed**

During the study session, participants discussed the issue of citizenship where they touched upon citizenship as a social role and as a legal status, what it means to be an active and responsible citizen, and contributions of young refugees to their host societies. The study session also provided an opportunity to share and learn about obstacles and support mechanisms for refugees in different countries regarding

citizenship as a legal status, in terms of rights and responsibilities. Participants also explored the concept of identity and its different aspects linking it to active citizenship in Europe. Participants were provided a space to learn about what determines our identities by looking at their own identity and articulated on how does personal identity differs from group identity.

Moreover, together with guest speakers, participants elaborated on the power of the storytelling and narratives paying particular attention to the issue of framing. They articulated on ways of using creative writing as a valuable tool for expression and effective citizenship and understanding of how individual written stories can be a valuable contribution and effect positive social influence. They noted that it was crucial that we focus on successful stories of young refugees and their contribution to the European citizenship in order to break down stereotypes and prejudices about them.

### **Background to the theme of the study session**

Since its creation in 2008, VYRE has been focusing on the social inclusion of young refugees and on ensuring that they are given a voice to participate actively in society. Through previous activities realised by VYRE and through close discussion with VYRE's previous participants and other young refugees, we learnt that very often, when talking about and to young refugees, people expect to hear about their past, their trauma, their difficulties, without asking about their success stories and their great contributions to their new "home societies". Therefore, VYRE felt the need to move from the challenges young refugees are facing towards their active participation in shaping European societies.

Creative writing and storytelling can be powerful tools to share experiences and motivate young people to take an active role and share their contributions with others. These are also tools that can be spread to raise awareness of people on the role of refugees and to change attitudes towards them. Storytelling gives a human touch to challenges in society and gives a space for the "unheard" to raise their voices in a playful and artistic way. Storytelling is used more and more as a way to bring the usual citizen back to the public space and to allow discussion around current topics through personal life experiences.

VYRE therefore believed that a study session which focuses on empowering young refugees through creative writing and storytelling for democratic citizenship could be an innovative and useful way to motivate young refugees to share their stories, with a particular focus on everyday accomplishments as young European citizens.

## THE PROGRAMME AND MAIN CONTENTS

### Citizenship

This session aimed at exploring citizenship in its two dimensions; the one related to participation, interaction among citizens and its associated skills and attitudes and the other one the legal dimension in terms of rights and responsibilities.

For exploring citizenship as participation we run an exercise called **Our village** in which participants in several steps (individually, in couples and in the big group) had to design on a big posters the village in which they would like to live. Several issues were discussed and explored linking the exercise with the situation of young refugees in Europe: the attitudes towards participation, the dialogue and compromise between different interest and views, the importance of spaces of participation and for deciding together the future, the processes of inclusion and of using the complementary competences of everybody.

For exploring citizenship in its legal dimension, participants grouped by countries elaborated a poster describing the current situation of young refugees regarding the legal dimension of citizenship, the associated challenges and strategies to overcome them. A big amount of information, grouped by countries, was collected on very concrete issues like the legal status of refugees, access to employment, education, housing, social services, organisations and support structures and the differences between migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

### Identity

This session aimed at exploring different aspects of identity and towards the end slowly moving the storytelling focused part of the study session. We have tried to encourage participants to think about their perception of others through their own experience. For this purpose, we made participants take a part in the activity in which they were drawn a sign on their forehead (spade, clubs, hearts or diamonds). Participants were given an only instruction - to enter the room and interact with others without talking. Using each other's' reactions or help, without talking, participants quickly formed the groups based on the signs drawn on their foreheads. Some of the participants (who did not have a sign, or whose sign was different than the others ones) were not taken into groups.

At the beginning of the discussion we learnt from participants about what happened, if it was them choosing a group or a group choosing them, if they were pushed away and for what reason... Some different questions emerged for those without a sign who did not find their place in any group: how did their experience differ from the others and why didn't they find their place? We have also tried to identify examples from the real life (label vs. identity), talk about judging other by one single characteristic and identify a difference between who we really feel we are and how we are seen through the eyes of the others. Participants realised how easy it is to fall into a trap of determining someone's identity by one single element and placing a person in a box. Experiences of those who belonged to groups were rather positive (they formed groups very quickly, had no problem finding their place and felt rather good), while 3 participants who had no signs and were left aside were rather confused, not sure of why they were rejected, nor if they had the right to join the others.

This exercise determined participants to think about the diversity and discrimination issues and also a lot on self-reflection. They have quickly made the parallel between this activity and real life, taking refugees as an example of persons who are often being labelled. They discussed how the term refugee does not define who the person is – identity of a refugee also depends on his/hers beliefs, sexual orientation, profession, dreams and many other elements. Participants expressed deep dissatisfaction by the difference



between who they think they are and the way people see them, underlining that the way they are seen often affects how they feel about themselves.

At this point, we decided to switch to the activity Identity circles. Firstly, participants made groups of 5-6 persons in which they discussed different aspects of identity. They wrote them down on post-its and then shared with the other groups. Some of the same aspects appeared in many groups (language, ethnicity, religion, gender), and there were some less general ones such as: my respect for the others, box you set yourself in, expectations and hopes, physical conditions etc. Now that participants understood the meaning of the term "identity" they started individual work on Identity circles. Identity circle was presented on a sheet with sun with 8 rays in the middle of which participants wrote his/her name. On each of the rays they were asked to write some of the most important and unique aspects of their identity. Couple of sun rays had tips written, such as "share the thing you are the most proud about" or "share one thing you want the group to know about you". When done, they shared their identity circles in groups of three. Some of the sharing was deeply personal and very emotional and for many it was the first story telling experience in front of other people. Each person was given a chance to share a story that carries important aspects of his/her identity, which led to realising how unique each person is. A safe environment helped participants share their opinions and feelings. It also contributed to trust building among participants and appreciation of diversity.

After sharing in small groups, all together we briefly discuss the important identity factors for our group, which turned to be race, ethnicity, social class, education etc. We also turned to the first day activity "Who am I" and made comparison between the personal and group identities.

The session on identity was closed by a video **Danger of a single story** by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who gives an inspirational story talk about how dangerous it can be to have opinions based on "a single story" and about our responsibilities to not accept a single story and search behind. Participants were touched and expressed their feelings about dealing with being refugees with a single story in the eyes of others.

### **Creative writing**

With this session we really switched the focus from the identity and citizenship to **creative writing**. The session "Creative Writing as Democratic Citizenship: Why Stories matter" used creative writing as a tool for expression and effective citizenship. The double-session was held by our guest speaker Tausha Johnson. Tausha provided participants with an understanding on how their stories can be a contribution and effect positive social influence. Through different activities Tausha worked with participants on also analysing how stories have impact on their own lives. Participants were given an opportunity to express thoughts, feelings, experiences, through creative writing.

The session was composed of 4 main parts:

**Introduction - Creative writing as active democratic citizenship.** To introduce the idea of creative writing as a powerful tool for encouraging citizenship, Tausha used a very brief, informal PowerPoint presentation. Participants were given space to share what they knew about creative writing, tell their previous experiences and their understanding of why we write and how we can use writing as a valuable social contribution.

**Stories that have stuck with me** is the activity that followed and allowed participants to reflect on stories that were meaningful to them and are with them through the years. This allowed them to discover how stories have impacted them personally. To break the ice, Tausha gave a personal example and told her own story in front of the participants. Participants were then asked to take 3 post-its and to write a title of

the story that was meaningful to them. They were asked to stick the post-it to the part of the body that the story can be associated with: for example, many deep and meaningful stories were stuck next to the heart, dreams on the forehead, and secret ones over the lips. With their post-its stuck to them, participants mingled, found partners and shared one of the stories.

Afterwards, participants had a chance to explore one of their stories by writing. They were introduced to the basic principles of **free-writing** - a technique that is used to stimulate creative writing. Free-writing is a very simple, yet very effective method where participants are given 8-10 minutes to write continuously, without thinking about the exact correct words. They are asked just to keep moving the pen on at any moment - not to edit, not to cross out and to keep writing even when it does not make sense any more. In the case there was really nothing on their mind - participants were still asked to write why they thought that was. They were writing in their mother tongues if they wanted, either in 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person - anything was possible as long as they were writing. When the time was up some of the participants shared what they have written and discussed why they had written it. The majority of stories were very emotional and very important for the people who wrote them and we could spot that the fear of writing is slowly disappearing.

Tausha continued with another activity called **Character Carousel** that actually served to create a character for the final activity **Stepping into Someone Else's Skin**. Each participant was given a photo of someone. This is the person that they had to “become” and for whom they created a story. Participants were asked to give their person a name, an age, a profession, and a country of origin. After inventing this information, participants formed two circles, one inside the other so that each person in the inner circle is facing one person in the outer circle to form a pair. Circles were then rotated around each other and partners had to present their characters as themselves in a mini-interview. Tausha was asking a number of questions and participants had to answer as if they believed that their character would respond. This activity allowed participants to look through the perspective of someone else.

The last activity **Stepping into Someone Else's Skin** was an activity in which participants worked in groups: after they have briefly exchanged information about their character, they were given a piece of flipchart paper. On one half of the paper they drew a body outline of their character (after choosing one of the characters participants had). Tausha then asked participants to imagine that their character has had an important life changing experience that they had to share with the world. As a pair, they had to decide on a story and write about it. Once they have decided on a character and their “incident/story” pairs had to use the body outline as a brainstorming mind-map.

Tausha then distributed copies of Rorschach Inkblots test<sup>1</sup>. Pairs were given only a minute to write down the words of any images they could see in the inkblot. They were then asked to begin to write a poem about their character's incident, adding words and phrases not only from the body outline, but also from the ink blots. Those ink blot words allowed them to make creative connections that are unique and not usually associated with the incident they are writing about. Participants were encouraged to use this type of imagery in their poems to help the reader make connections and feel more drawn into the poem. When time was up, pairs shared their writings on their characters with the rest of the group.

The activities proposed by Tausha were very entertaining for the participants, yet they said it helped them reflect on how stories have impacted their lives, how have influences their change of thinking and how they could be used to share something important. The activity where the participants were presenting their own characters allowed them to see through another perspective. Also, participants saw that experiences

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<sup>1</sup> The Rorschach inkblot test is a method of psychological evaluation. Psychologists use this test to try to examine the personality characteristics and emotional functioning (<http://www.rorschachinkblotest.com/> )

that were too personal or painful could have been expressed through another's person voice. After this session participants were very motivated to put their stories down on a paper and share it with the others.

### **Narrative design and storytelling**

The session was led by Jan Kuitenbrouwer, expert in linguistics and Director General of the Netherlands-based Taalkliniek organisation, who started his presentation by explaining the power of narratives and words in forming the public perception and sometimes defining the political outcome of important debates. He stressed that framing of an issue or a debate can often influence lives of many people, including young refugees using the example of how right wing Populist Party for Freedom and its leader Geert Wilders managed to capture the political agenda by framing the debate and depicting the immigrants negatively. Another concrete example was the success of Republican Party in the US to frame the debate in a favourable way using the keywords such as “tax relief” instead of tax cuts during the elections.

The aim of the session was to explore the importance of linguistics and framing of the issue, particularly the issue of young refugees in influencing the public perception about them and encourage participants to use those skills in their storytelling when they will attempt to show the contribution of young refugees to their host societies.

The presentation was followed by an activity where participants were asked to point out 5 negative perceptions/words about young refugees in their countries and to propose alternatives to transform those negative associations to positive ones. Participants presented their work opening the floor for feedback from others and the guest expert. Overall, participants noted that terms like “illegal immigrant/refugee”, “benefit seekers”, “queue jumpers”, “danger for public health”, “immigration wave/invasion”, “soak up welfare”, “criminal”, “unproductive”, “unemployed”, “opportunists” and others that are used to describe refugees in a very negative way. They came up with proposal to promote the usage of new words like “newcomers”, “new citizens”, “hardworking”, “residence appliers” to break down the stereotypes and prejudice against refugees in the society. If refugees are associated with the education experience, or the cultural diversity that they bring to host countries, they would be received in a friendlier manner. Several participants noted that the expression “illegal immigrant/refugee” should be replaced with “persons without documents” since a human being cannot be illegal.

During the discussion following the group presentations, participants noted that overall refugees were portrayed very negatively on the mainstream media which influences the creation of stereotypes and prejudices against them. One participant pointed out that “when a crime is committed by a non-refugee, media usually does not pay attention to the details about the perpetrator, but when a refugee commits a crime, they repeatedly mention the fact that he or she is a refugee.” Another participant mentioned that it was not only the words that are used to describe the refugees in the media, but also the images are very negative. “When they talk about refugees, they show the images that are associated with crime, illiteracy and poverty, while ignoring the ability of refugees to contribute to societies” – he added.

To close this topic, in the evening we watched a movie "Freedom writers", based on a true story, that talks about youth with fewer opportunities who, with a help of their English teacher, start writing down their dairies and manage to publish them in a form of a book. The movie shows how empowering the writing can mean and was very inspirational element for our participants who were also about to start working on their personal stories for the final booklet.

### **Social media**

The main objective of this session was to explore how various social media networks can be effectively used as a tool for storytelling. The session incorporated elements of the previous day's creative writing session by using an image of a young refugee. Participants were given a brief background on the young refugee's story including both negative and positive aspects of her journey. The purpose of the activity was to use the narrative design and creative writing skills that were taught the day before to tell the story of the young refugee focusing on what they felt was an important part of her story, how they would use social media to tell the story and which social media networks they would use.

During the presentations of each group, it was evident that most of the participants were already using social media best practices without realising it. Some participants chose to use one social media network that they were comfortable with whilst other groups combined various social media to tell different aspects of the young refugee's story. The best practices from each group were placed on a flipchart and further explored with other story scenarios. The activity ended with a brief discussion on visual storytelling.

The session was ended on a practical exercise with all the participants logging into the study session tumblr account. The participants were guided in creating their first posts on tumblr with the aim of getting them to start using a social media network that could allow their storytelling to be presented in various mixed forms.

### **UNHCR and Council of Europe report**

In this session, guest speakers Samuel Boutruche from UNHCR and Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja, consultant, introduced the report "Unaccompanied and Separated Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children Turning Eighteen: What To Celebrate?", a field research jointly organised by the UNHCR and the Youth Department Council of Europe on European States' practice regarding transition to adulthood of unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children. The report collected data and examples about practices in four Council of Europe's Member States (Austria, France, Hungary and Sweden) concerning the situation of unaccompanied and separated asylum seeking children, and more specifically how four of these States address the challenges faced by this category as a result of this critical change of legal regime.

The report argues for the harmonisation of existing legal frameworks and practices, strengthened with comprehensive guidelines for member states. Key safeguards for children should be extended after the age of majority. This includes ensuring access to education, housing and support with entering into employment. The speakers stated that the most concerning finding was the lack of clear and transparent information about the consequences of reaching the age of majority. Young unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugees in transition are also in need of adequate psychological support. Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja stated that in absence of clear guidelines and information from the state officials, unaccompanied minors turning 18 rely on rumours which further complicate the situation.

The presentation was followed by comments and questions from participants who shared similar experiences to the ones described in the report. Several participants, particularly two young refugees turning 18 recently, underscored the need for establishing a transition period which would guarantee housing, health care, the right to a guardian along with other basic rights for young refugees turning 18 in order to ensure proper transition to majority.

### **Follow up and outcomes of the study session**

Towards the end of the study session, we arrived to the point where participants had been given enough tools and it was the time to use the skills learnt throughout the week to develop their own stories. Participants were already familiar with the idea of publishing their stories in a form of a booklet as a follow up of the study session. We decided to give them the freedom to express themselves as they imagined, rather than to burden them with the planned booklet structure the team has developed during the preparation period. The team had pretty clear image on the booklet structure, yet we were aware it was made before we knew our participants and that it will much depend on their ideas and works.

Still, we decided to stick to some basic ideas: the stories should talk about the contributions of young refugees, and not their sufferings. To avoid language problems, the participants could also write in their mother tongue if they felt like it, and translation was planned to be done later that evening or the day after with the help of other participants who shared the same mother tongues. Before letting the participants write we also left some time for their questions and open discussion among everyone that empowered the group and the individuals that it was possible to achieve what we had planned.

Since writing is a creative process, the team has tried to give enough free space and to create a friendly relaxing environment in the plenary room during the work time, playing instrumental music in the background and keeping participants quiet. The team members were available for consultations, questions, language dilemmas and so on. As the time went by, we were impressed by the determination of participants and their dedication to work: each one of them was writing down the lines, very few accepted to go to a coffee break, many found a corner for themselves, some came to ask if it would be possible to hand more than one single story.

At a certain point, we decided to regroup all the participants and share everyone's progress, check if they had particular problems with something or needed support from the team. As the stories were getting done, participants would do the proofreading with Rosina (the native English speaker) and send them to the VYRE email where all the stories were collected. Each participant sent at least one writing and there were a total of 37 poems, stories and other writings received. The team was overwhelmed with the work done, as well as with the fact that everyone contributed to the creation of the booklet.

The team decided to present the preliminary booklet structure, based on the writings received the previous evening and during morning. Among the stories, there was one called "My head, my heart, my hands", which gave us the idea of the booklet structure, that would be organised in those 3 chapters. With the help of participants, their works were preliminary placed in one of those categories and the idea of the booklet was concretized.

We were now ready to move to the follow up part and see who was willing to get involved in what project and how much contribution could we expect. The team organised 4 different corners:

- **Booklet** - a corner where participants could sign for the work on the content, structure, design and distribution of the booklet in which all of their stories would be united and published. The initial idea was that participants finalise the booklet, assisted by some of the team members who would give provide guidance through the process, but with the high quality of the works received, we knew we would love to extend the booklet in terms of distribution and have not only digital versions, as previously planned, but also hard printed copies if the funds are found.
- **International Refugee Day / No Hate Speech Movement campaign** - for participants who wanted to volunteer and run a social media campaign in cooperation with the Council of Europe during the International Refugee Week. In the past, VYRE has already been actively involved in this event and some of the participants had previous experience with online activism. As this was something VYRE

was planning on continuing with, throughout the study session there were already many videos recorded for the purposes of the NHSM campaign and the International Refugee Week. Two team members, Emin and Abdi, decided to take the guidance role for this task and be the ones to form the groups on the last day and continue working with them towards the International Refugee Week.

- **Project "H.O.M.E: Higher opportunities for migrants in Europe"** - for participants who wanted to join the new project on which VYRE is currently working and that also applies the techniques of storytelling, but through the video form. Participants could get information either on how to apply for a junior trainer position, or how to join the project as participants.
- **VYRE elections** - this was a corner with no concrete action for the moment, but rather something to be worked on towards the end of 2014. Participants were given concrete information on who to contact or how to proceed if they would want to apply for a position in a new board of VYRE or to supervise the elections.

## MAIN OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW-UP

### Main learning points for participants

According to the evaluation the study session was a rich learning experience for all participants in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The identified main learning points for participants were:

- A deeper understanding of the concepts of identity, citizenship and democratic citizenship in relation to young refugees in Europe
- Getting to know the experiences on the daily contributions of young refugees in Europe
- Gained competences in creative story-writing and narrative design
- Knowledge on how to use story writing as a tool to use for active citizenship.

### Main results of the study session for VYRE

At the end of the study session the team identified the main results of the study session:

- At the end of the study session all participants submitted a draft text for being a part of the planned booklet. Some of them signed up to work on finalising of the booklet after the study session.
- A group of participants signed up as volunteers for the work around the International Day of Refugees in the frame of the No Hate Speech Movement.
- Videos – testimonies for the No Hate Speech Movement have been recorded by more than 10 participants.
- Personal follow up plans at local and national levels have been presented.
- Conclusions and recommendations to further develop this topic in VYRE were also put forward.

### Recommendations for the European level

In the context of European youth work and in cooperation with the Council of Europe it would be interesting:

- To support and make use of the booklet with stories on the contribution of youth refugees to democratic citizenship
- To reinforce the advocacy activities around the UNHCR – Council of Europe field research on transition of refugees to adulthood.
- Starting by the participation in the World Refugee Day activities in the frame of the No Hate Speech Movement, to reinforce the participation in this campaign.

The main follow up activity is to publish a **booklet** that will feature a collection of short stories and poems that were created by the participants during the study session.

Furthermore, there have been participants who signed up as volunteers for the **International Refugee Day** in the frame of the No Hate Speech Movement. During the study session already, there have been more than 10 testimony videos recorded. Some volunteers applied for online activism, more videos recording as well as processing of the videos we have got.

Some participants are also involved with **H.O.M.E. project**, as well as **VYRE elections** organising. VYRE's next action is to smoothly hand the core positions of the network to the new generation of participants and members, in order to keep the flow of new ideas, projects, actions that would contribute to better daily lives of young refugees.

## **FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The fourth study session of VYRE helped apply what we have realised in previous study sessions – the importance of creative expression in the lives of young refugees.

The study session raised capacities of the young activists working already on democratic citizenship with new tools and strategies. It contributed to empower youth refugees and young people working with young refugees so that they can use storytelling and creative writing as a tool for promoting democratic citizenship and as a tool for social change.

VYRE is aware that there is a need for support and changes in policies and strategies concerning young refugees and recommends that the Council of Europe promotes rights and supports the marginalised groups through its No Hate Speech Movement and other future projects. Among others, special attention needs to be given to the problematic of refugees turning 18 and the need for establishing the transition period which would guarantee housing, healthcare, the right to a guardian along with other basic rights, in order to ensure proper transition to majority.



## REFERENCES

- "Unaccompanied and separated asylum seeking and refugee children turning eighteen: what to celebrate?" - UNHCR / Council of Europe report sent to the participants as a prep material for the study session
- "Danger of the single story" - TED talk shown during the study session as a part of Identity session (available at [http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story))
- "Creative writing as active citizenship: changing the world one story at a time" - presentation by Tausha Johnson (available at <http://prezi.com/dppx9djayzns/copy-of-creative-writing-as-active-citizenship/>)
- "No hate speech on a refugee day: Milen Eyob" - a short video by one of the VYRE members shot in the frame of NHS campaign (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01kHtJ2SfGo>)
- "She is a poem" - spoken word poetry video by one of the VYRE members Joujou Bola - a poet and an active activist for refugees rights. Video shown during the session on how to use the social media to raise the awareness about different important issues (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxjXJfr3NoM>)
- "Help us to break the siege on the civilians at Yarmouk camp" - a video shown by one of the participants during the session on how to use the social media to raise the awareness about different important issues (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNKeucNXk8A>)
- "Freedom writers" - a movie based on a true story on how youth with fewer opportunities from one class started using writing as a way to express their problems and encourage mutual tolerance (trailer available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhXMJlm852A>)

### **List of links where information about the study session was posted online to ensure visibility**

- VYRE's official Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/WeAreVYRE?fref=ts>
- Mladiinfo (an initiative dedicated to promoting and enhancing youth opportunities): <http://www.mladiinfo.eu/2014/03/18/refugees-contribution-to-democratic-citizenship-session-strasbourg/>
- Migration for Development / Joint Migration and Development Initiative : <http://www.migration4development.org/content/call-participants-study-session-organized-voices-young-refugees-europe-%E2%80%9Ddread-my-story-hear-m> and on the <http://www.migration4development.org/> (in the spot light), as well as on the official facebook page of Migration for Development: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Migration-4-Development/314363641070?ref=ts&fref=ts>

### **List of links to the videos recorded for the No Hate Speech campaign**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifg1vXvFdis>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6MnipyURYA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRK8EWTMLF4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ughWKdZSqqM>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68\\_7lasvBQU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68_7lasvBQU)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPPQeMzyEF8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8hyzhwtQDI>

# STUDY SESSION PROGRAMME

## VYRE STUDY SESSION 2014

"Read my story - hear my voice" - Refugees' contribution to democratic citizenship

EYCS 11-18 May 2014

Sunday 11.05	Monday 12.05	Tuesday 13.05	Wednesday 14.05	Thursday 15.05	Friday 16.05	Saturday 17.05
Breakfast 08:30 → 09:30						
Circle time + Pesca Lonja + intro of the day						
	Introduction to the study session + HFE + Do's and Don't's	Citizenship	Creative writing	Social media	UNHCR + Coe Report Transition to the Adulthood	Planning / Doing follow up - BOOKLET
Coffee break 11:00 → 11:30						
	Team building	Citizenship	Creative writing	Social media	Booklet structure	Booklet + VYRE - follow up
Lunch 13:00 → 14:30						
Arrivals	VYRE + CoE	Identity	Inspiring practices (NHS, Autobiography, Living library)	Travel reimbursement	Producing by pax - working groups / individuals	Evaluation
Coffee break 16:00 → 16:30						
Arrivals	Team building and group life	Identity	Narrative design and story telling	Free afternoon	Producing + Sharing - where do we stand	Closing
Daily evaluations						
Dinner						
Welcome evening	Up to you :)	Info on VYREs future	Movie night	Dinner in the rest.	Up to you :)	Farewell party

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE / ORIGIN	ORGANISATION
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>			
ABO YOUNES	MOHAMMED	Sweden / Palestinian-Syrian	integration for all İFALL
ADIGOZALOV	VUGAR	Azerbaijan	The Do School, peace Project
ALI	AYAN	Sweden / Swedish	Voices of Young Refugees in Europe
BULARDA	DANIELA	France / Romania	
BULGAKOVA	IEVGENIIA	Ukraine	“DESYATE KVITNYA” (“The tenth of April”)
CHANTLADZE	RATI	Georgia	Centre for Protection of Constitutional Rights in Georgia (CPCR)
DRAME	FODE	France / Mali	France Terre d'Asile / Maison de Jeune Réfugié
ELFEKY	AHMED	Germany / Egypt	
FOZO	NGWANA CHRISTIAN	Turkey / Cameroon	
HRADILOVA	KATERINA	Czech Republic	Palacky University in Olomouc
HUSEYNOVA	ZIBAR	Azerbaijan	
KAVVADIA	MAGDALENA	Greece	Greek Council for Refugees
KOANG	MIRI	England / South Soudan	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chance
MOSAVI	SYED RAZA	Hungary / Afghanistan	Útilapu Hálózat- SCI Hungary
MUKHTOROVA	DILORA	The Netherlands / Uzbekistan	
PALLASKA	NITË	Kosovo <sup>2</sup>	Environmentalists Without Borders - EWB
PAPAZISI	GRETA	Albania	
POPAN	MADALINA STEFANA	Romania	
PRINZLEVE	JONAS	The Netherlands / Germany	
REZAI	MOHAMMAD AMIN	Hungary / Afghanistan	Útilapu Hálózat- SCI Hungary
STOEVA	SVOBODA	Bulgaria	Cooperation for Voluntary Service (CVS-Bulgaria)
TADESSE	WEINESHET	The Netherlands / Ethiopia	

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this text, all reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

THOMAS	CAMILLE	France	France Terre d'Asile / Maison de Jeune Réfugié
TIRLEA	ADRIAN	Denmark / Romania	
TOURE	CHEICK VAKABA	France / Ivory Coast	France Terre d'Asile / Maison de Jeune Réfugié
TRUONG	HAI NGOC	Ukraine /Vietnam	
<b>TEAM MEMBERS</b>			
ABDULLAHI	MAHMOUD MOHAMMED	Sweden / Somalia	Voices of Young Refugees in Europe
GARCIA LOPEZ	MIGUEL ANGEL	Germany / Spain	Council of Europe External educational advisor
GRINVALD CHOLLET	MAREA	France / Serbia	Voices of Young Refugees in Europe
MAMMADLI	EMIN	Azerbaijan / Spain	Voices of Young Refugees in Europe
MWANAHIBA	ROZINA	The Netherlands / UK	Voices of Young Refugees in Europe