



VOICES OF YOUNG REFUGEES IN EUROPE

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# Local participation and inclusion of unaccompanied minor refugees

23 - 29 May 2016, Strasbourg



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

This report gives an account of the 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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## INTRODUCTION

The study session brought together unaccompanied minors (UAMs), young people from the host countries and civil society organisations to reflect on the situation of UAMs and start developing local initiatives and an international action plan.

The event aimed at linking unaccompanied minors with local youth and NGO activists in order to enforce their social inclusion through active participation. Developing local initiatives will positively contribute to integration of unaccompanied minors in host communities, but also to the image and position of young refugees in general, both in local communities and at the European level.

The ultimate aim of the study session was to empower youth including unaccompanied minors to be active participants integrated in their local communities.

The objectives set to reach the aim are the following:

- explore challenges in various European countries faced in regard to the social inclusion of UAMs within the local community.
- inspire organisations and the participating youth and equip them with necessary skills to effectively support the integration process locally.
- provide UAMs with tools to advocate for their social inclusion and participation in their society.
- share best practices and successful experiences among the participants.
- enable UAMs to network with non UAM youth both at local and international level and thus to feel included as citizens in European societies.
- develop a follow up strategy and support participants in the development of local initiatives/projects that leads to more inclusive and peaceful societies.
- create an international platform under VYRE, uniting organizations and local youth and unaccompanied minors.

Participants of the study session included UAMs, including those in transition to adulthood and professionals working with them travelling from 12 Council of Europe countries. They were selected based on their experiences, backgrounds and geographic diversity in order to ensure diversity.

## BACKGROUND

Through all of VYRE activities unaccompanied minors have been identified as an especially vulnerable category of young refugees and VYRE has put serious efforts in insuring they could be equally represented in each of VYRE events.

As the study "[UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED ASYLUM-SEEKING AND REFUGEE CHILDREN TURNING EIGHTEEN: WHAT TO CELEBRATE?](#)" conducted by UNHCR and the Council of Europe in 2014 concluded, their situation is particularly delicate due to lack of family support during and after the migration period and local communities play a crucial role in successful integration of unaccompanied minors in their new host communities. Transition to adulthood is also recognised as a challenging period for all young refugees, but it is even more challenging for unaccompanied minors who haven't been properly integrated in their host communities.

One of the clear recommendations made by unaccompanied minors interviewed in the framework of the European study "the transition of unaccompanied and separated children to adulthood: What to celebrate?" was that unaccompanied minors need more social inclusion and direct contact with other young people who are not unaccompanied minors, but citizens of the country.

VYRE and the Youth Department of the Council of Europe have co-organised this study session in order to explore with young people the support youth work practitioners need in order to address young people's participation and inclusion, especially as far as the participation and inclusion of unaccompanied minors is concerned.

## PROGRAMME

The study session programme focused on three thematic blocks :

- identifying and discussing the barriers to social inclusion in various countries and possible solutions to overcome these hardships.
- supporting participants in development of action plans and projects targeting their local communities.
- building of a safe environment for unaccompanied minor refugees to express themselves and to empower them in participating in process of solution finding.

### 1. Social inclusion: from barriers to solutions

The very first step of the study session was to agree on the frame and the marking notions among participants. Before discussing the obstacles to the social inclusion and contemplating on solutions, the participants jointly explored the definition of the social inclusion.

First, participants reflected on their individual identities and then related these to a wider group perspectives thinking about what enables all this individualities to coexist in a wider group, such as society. Two sessions - “flower power session” and “definition of social inclusion session” - were instrumental in starting the discussions over the social inclusion.

After agreeing on the definition of the social inclusion, participants discussed in small groups on what prevents social inclusion of unaccompanied minor refugees in their host communities. They were encouraged to go beyond identifying barriers to social inclusion and to determining the root causes of barriers. The team used the simplified version of the problem tree methodology from the Logical Framework Approach which helped participants develop their ideas in a structural frameworks.



### **1.1 : “The flower power session”**

Participants were encouraged to draw a flower and write down in the petals of their flowers characteristics that define them. Afterwards, each participant placed their flower on the wall creating a garden. They were then asked to link the common characteristics of different flowers together and discuss the outcomes.

During the debriefing, participants pointed out that they were all unique but also shared a lot of common characteristics. It opened the debate on what makes this diversity work, how they could feel included - member of a wider group while they were all individuals? At first sight, it seemed that common identity features shared by participants were the cement for the society. One of the things that enable us to co-exist while keeping our individual uniqueness was mentioned to be the human rights that make the social inclusion possible. The session caused a discussion that led to the next session on definition of social inclusion.

### **1.2 Definition of social inclusion and main findings:**

Social inclusion was not considered as a frozen concept, but rather a dynamic one. From their own experience and the underlying reflection arising from the exercise on identity (see above: flower power session), participants were asked to write down on paper notes, elements of social inclusion. Sharing these notes on the floor of the plenary, they were invited to gather paper notes from other participants that were similar. The aim was to single out elements of the definition of social inclusion.

Participants stressed that social inclusion requires elements such as equal access to public goods (with a major focus on education), equal rights (usually led to the issue of documents and permit to stay), equal access to financial support from the State in case of economic exclusion. To close the circle on the reflection of social inclusion, facilitators proposed to the participants the following definition of social inclusion by the Council of Europe, which transposed a lot the participants' findings.

“Social inclusion... means on the one hand that institutions, structures and measures should be designed positively to accommodate diversity of circumstances, identities and ways of life. On the other hand, it means that opportunities and resources should be distributed so as to minimise disadvantage and marginalisation.”

### **1.3 Challenges to social inclusion**

Discussing the challenges to social inclusion of young refugees, participants identified following obstacles:

- Limitations of access to labour market
- Restrictions to continue education
- Difficulties in accessing the rights due to complicated procedures, lack of support mechanisms and awareness among young refugees
- Discrimination and xenophobia reinforced by mainstream media and rise of the populism
- Lack of awareness among local communities about young refugees leading to misconceptions
- Lack of coordination and cohesion among the Council of Europe member states on dealing with young refugees
- Absence of opportunities for meaningful participation of young refugees in decision making process

Following the identification of causes of problems, small groups moved on to finding solutions. Solution tree from the Logical Framework Approach again was used to guide the discussions in addition to following methods:

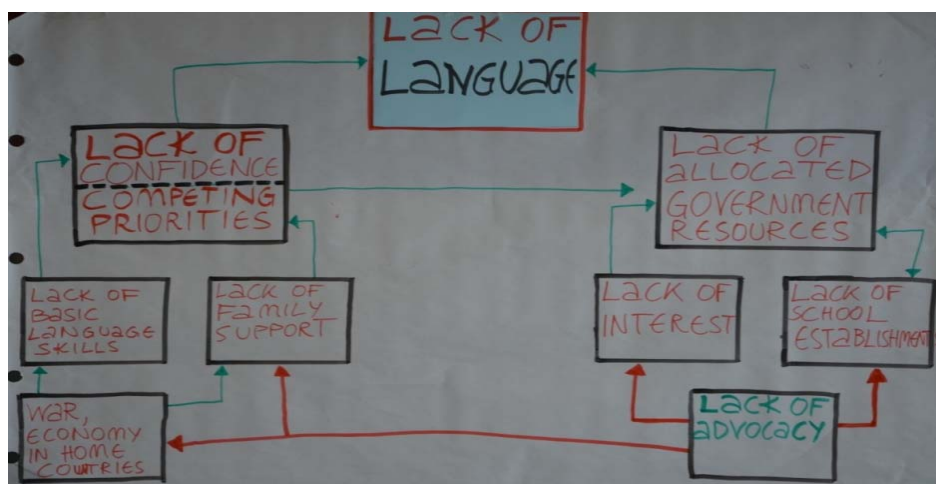
- exchange of good practices from the work of the organisations of the participants: peer-to-peer meetings between participants who could introduce, using flipchart, the context of their organisation and the actions they put in place to integrate new comers.
- meeting with major stakeholders, such as the Council of Europe (Special Representative of the SG for Migration, the European Youth Foundation), the City of Strasbourg, the UNHCR, to exchange on the possibilities of cooperation, joint actions and funding.
- working on each participant's motivation by showing them good examples of young people with a migration background who succeeded and became human rights defenders (Emmanuel Jal, Malala Yousafzai, Thierno Diallo...).

As a result of this reflection on possible solutions, solution trees and concrete local-level action plans were developed by the participants.

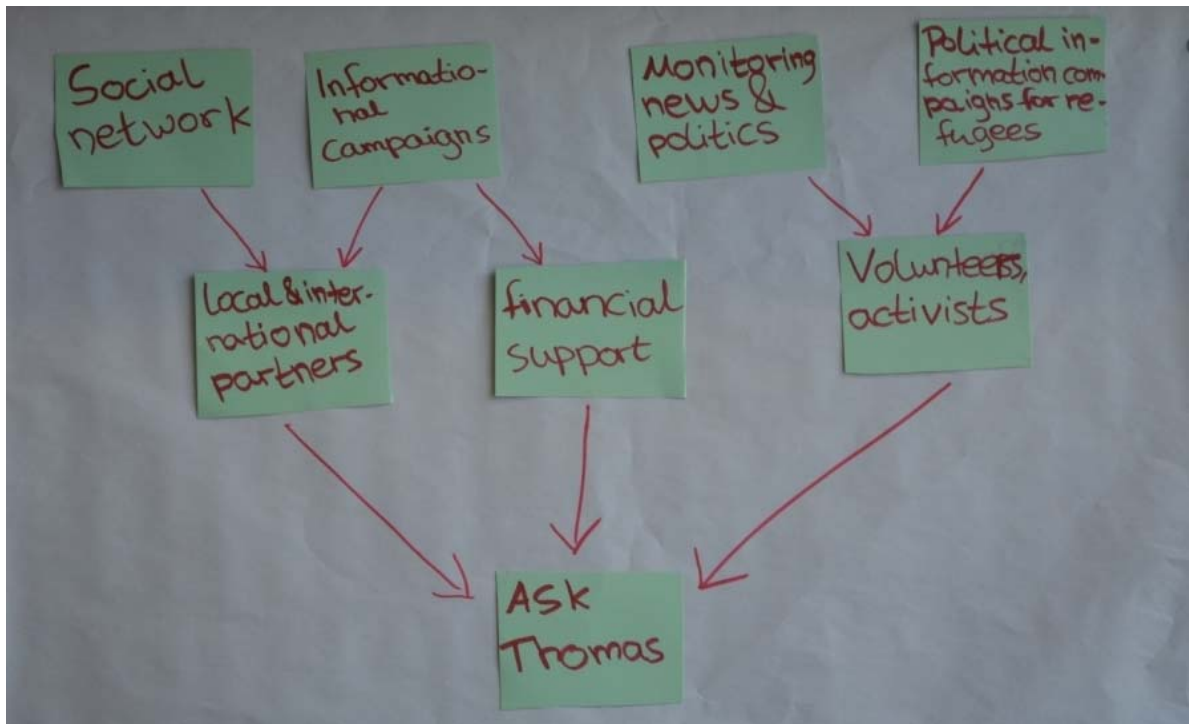
## 2. Developing sustainable grassroots projects

To increase the sustainability of the projects developed during the study session and implemented afterwards, participants were introduced basic methodology of the project management. The content of sessions followed the different steps of project cycle management during the week:

1. Programming: exchange with the participants on the situations regarding social inclusion of UAMs in their countries and defining the concepts of the study session (session on day 2).
2. Identification: identifying the root causes behind a lack of social inclusion. Participants brainstormed on challenges to social inclusion focusing on root causes As a result, each group of participants came up with their own problem tree based on their local realities. Each group selected one problem that they have the highest ability to positively influence.



3. Formulation : participants were invited to think of solutions adapted to the problem they decided to work on, and not copy pasting already existing and common solutions. They were invited to go back on their problem tree, turn the root cause into work objectives and define actions and means from those objectives. Solutions trees were then hang up next to the issue trees and introduced in the plenary to increase the exchange of practices and ideas between participants. Solutions drawn at that point were relevant to each participant's national context.



4. Implementation : small groups developed action plans to address one of the issues identified in the problem tree producing a flipchart including aim, objectives, actions and means required to address the issue. The European Youth Foundation provided a presentation talking about opportunities for funding of these project ideas.

Participants came up with action plans including range of activities which could be grouped as following:

- Community transformation: the aim was to level down the negative perception on refugees by the locals. Actions targeted either the media and school systems (campaigns, civic course, history books reviewed) or the daily life and coexistence with locals (common sport events, local events where UAMs cook for locals their traditional dishes...)
- Economic empowerment and access to labour market: a major importance was given to professional trainings, help to know how to find a job in different countries, creation of a “refugee-friendly” label for firms working with refugees.



- Access to rights: some groups discussed projects on legal counselling, social support and language class for unaccompanied young refugees to support them in accessing their rights.

To ensure that the learning outcomes of the study session were relevant to the participants' need and learning pace, programs of the study session was reviewed and modified, based on the needs and expectations of participants expressed in reflection groups at the end of the day.

A “parking lot” was put in place on day five to enable participants to go deeper on some issue/skills with a facilitator, according to their needs. Groups focused on how to communicate effectively in a project, how to advocate for structural changes (the No Hate Speech Movement campaign, learn more about the work of VYRE and the Council of Europe), going deeper on the project cycle management methodology and how to ensure the participation of UAMs in projects.

### **3. Creating a safe environment for unaccompanied young refugees**

The learning methodology was at the core of the study session, with a major concern on the capacity for UAM's to freely express themselves, feel safe and comfortable among other participants, including professionals working with them.

During the study sessions, one could notice that all participants, including unaccompanied minors, freely expressed their opinion and actively took part in all activities of the study session thanks to the followings:

- Trust building activities (willow in the wind, blindfold game...) were organised in the beginning of the week. They were scheduled to take place during the entire first day of the study session with a strong emphasis given to the debriefing time to create group cohesion and enable participants to feel safe and heard.
- A session on the young human rights activists was organised to inspire participants using the stories of unaccompanied minors with similar stories who succeeded in their causes.
- Exercises in small groups were run mixing unaccompanied minors and professionals together in small groups. The small groups make the participation and expression of participants easier. The team has tried to divide unaccompanied minors and adults accompanying them during the small groups to facilitate the inclusion of former.
- Facilitators in reflection groups at the end of the day also paid attention to the ideas of unaccompanied minors and made sure that they were heard.

## CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the study session, participants discussed social inclusion of unaccompanied minor refugees and young refugees in general talking about challenges and issues they face and sharing success stories. Below is the summary of their conclusions:

***Participants are the driving force:*** the study session showed once more that participants have got so much to offer to each other from their own experiences. Therefore, study sessions should focus on teambuilding to lay the foundation of a successful week and to allow for enough space for participants to network, to talk to each other and to spent time with each other. Teambuilding and networking activities were regarded the highest among participants.

***Education remains a very big challenge:*** some refugees, including unaccompanied minors, are not able to continue their education in their new communities, while any other refugee youth with already completed education are not recognised by their host countries. This prevents them from joining the labour force ultimately hindering their social inclusion. Language abilities and sometimes lack of special programs to support young refugees also obstructs their integration.

***Social inclusion through employment:*** finding a job is very important for social inclusion of young refugees. Very much linked to education and language issues, integration into the labour force is a key for social inclusion of young refugees.

***Discrimination is there:*** refugee youth are one of the most frequent targets of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion or social status. Participants noted that often their host communities are not aware of their backgrounds and cultures. Many talked about successful projects (cooking for their local communities, playing sports together, celebrating national holidays etc.) that brought together refugee youth and youth from local communities which helped reduce discrimination. One participant noted that *people see everything they don't know about as enemies, but once they get to know you, they realise that you just like them.*

***Young refugees should be part of the process:*** labelled as "victims" and viewed as burden on society, young refugees are often left out of the decision making process. Even in youth projects and initiatives, refugee youth are not included in the planning and implementation stages, and are viewed only as participants or target groups. Therefore, empowerment of young refugees and ensuring their participation in decision making is needed for more effective results. Young refugees should be consulted and included in discussions at the local, national and international level.

### Outcomes for the organisers

- The study session has helped some of the pioneer volunteers of the network to get back and be active in the VYRE network. The study session has also aided to increase the number of members of VYRE through the addition of new volunteers in the network. The organisation has had the chance to implement the newly adopted mentorship system. This new system enables VYRE to be in periodic contact with its members on the ground which would prevent the main problem of member sustainability that the organisation has faced.
- The input from the study session will also help the organisation to raise the issue of the situation of young refugees in the Advisory Council on Youth. The focus of VYRE during the Advisory Council of Youth would be underlining the main challenges that the refugee youth are facing and this study session has provided a great input for a possible documentation of grass-root approaches to overcoming the challenges that the refugee young people are facing.

### Main learning points for participants

- Participants understood the importance to know more about each other and learned from each other's experience to work effectively together. The participants explored challenges in various European countries that the unaccompanied minor refugees faced in regards to the social inclusion within the local community. They learned to listen to each other and follow indications from the others and they developed trust and accept to go out of their comfort zone to work with others.
- Participants learned the academic definition of social inclusion and they fathomed that social inclusion is not a set of given elements but also a dynamic process linked with participation. Likewise, the participants have also learned about exploring and identifying how they can make their voice heard and how they can influence different situations. Related to this, the participants have also explored ways to increase the participation of unaccompanied minor refugees to their local communities.
- Participants learned about the best practices in other organisations and they had a better understanding of peer-to-peer learning. The participants have also learned about some of the individuals who have fought for human rights in different countries. The unaccompanied minor refugee participants were equipped with tools to advocate for their social inclusion and participation in their society. Likewise, the participants were equipped with necessary skills to effectively support the integration process locally.
- Participants have also learned about communication models and elements to help them communicate successfully and understand the importance of effective communication as effective listening. Additionally, participants have learned about how planning and organising would be helpful in daily life and they have also learned about how to use the idea generation method. Last but not least, the participants have also learned about problem tree and open space methods.

Based on discussions during the study session, VYRE recommends the following to the Council of Europe and the Youth Department:

***The issue of transition of unaccompanied minor refugees to adulthood should be addressed***

Challenges faced by unaccompanied minor refugees when they turn 18 remain one of the most pertinent, but yet one of least addressed by member states. Unaccompanied minor refugees lose all the rights and protection provided to them by the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” of 1989 including housing, education, legal guardian and even food overnight when they reach the age of 18. While many celebrate their independence when they turn 18, unaccompanied minor refugees enter a nightmare.

Therefore, VYRE and the study session participants recommend the Council of Europe to bring the issue back on the political agenda and focus on initiatives to improve the situation of this vulnerable group. The study session participants also suggest the Youth Department to organise and to support initiatives targeting unaccompanied minor refugees, and for example:

- To advocate for the resolution/recommendations on the transition to adulthood of unaccompanied minor refugees by the Committee of Ministers, including the establishment of transition period from 18 to 25 years of age;
- To support and initiate projects targeting unaccompanied minor refugees in transition;
- To address the crosscutting issues of the target group, such as LGBTQI, access to education and job market, trafficking among unaccompanied minor refugees.

***Improving project management skills***

The study session showed that many grassroots organisations and activists, as well as the young refugees themselves, have innovative ideas, in-depth knowledge of the issues and access to the target group, but lack the project management skills which prevent them from carrying out local level initiatives. Through the adaptation of the Logical Framework Approach (Problem tree -> Solution tree -> Action plan) combined with non-formal education methodologies, the participants were able to develop their ideas into concrete projects during the study session. However, the study session once again highlighted the need for project management skills.

Therefore, VYRE suggests the Youth Department to organise trainings or seminars on project management for grassroots organisations and activists working with young refugees.

If required, VYRE will be willing to help with development of the programme and conduct of the event.

***Joint seminar of the Youth Department and Children's Department on participation of unaccompanied minors in decision making process:***

Very often, policies targeting unaccompanied minor refugees are developed without their involvement in the process. Therefore, VYRE and study session participants suggest organising a seminar on UAMs' participation in order to raise the issue and prepare those working with young people to support and facilitate their participation. Such seminar would result in much more effective policy development and empowerment of unaccompanied minor refugees.

## **FOLLOW UP**

The team designed a follow-up mechanism to keep the link with participants, to continue providing support and to monitor the impact of the study session in local communities. Participants were divided into four geographical groups each of which was assigned a team member to follow-up and support participants to implement their action plans. Team members will contact participants on monthly basis to monitor the development of their action plans. Team members will also ensure their connection to VYRE and other participants, and provide advises on project management.

Furthermore, participants also addressed to themselves a letter to be delivered in six month time after the study session. In the letter, they wrote about their plans and wishes to themselves regarding the community transformation.

## APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### Participants

Country of residence	Organisation	Name
Austria	<i>Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Wien</i>	Hofbauer Antonia
		Witek Jenni
		Karam Kassab
		Mohamad Obaida Shaiban
Azerbaijan	<i>VYRE</i>	Zibar Huseynova
Bulgaria	<i>Reachout Programme Bulgaria</i>	Gologanova Kristina
	<i>VYRE</i>	Aljanabi Wisal
		Svoboda Stoeva
Cyprus	<i>Future World Center</i>	Martin Oliveira
France	<i>Apprentis d'Auteuil</i>	Hendricksen Laura
		Fode Diawara
	<i>France Terre d'Asile</i>	Azar Sandrine
	<i>Ministry of Justice</i>	Marc Charman
		Cheick Vakaba Toure
		Coulibaly Abdoulaye
Hungary	<i>Károlyi István Child Centre</i>	Zsofia Roszik
Ireland	<i>National Youth Council</i>	Zawadi Kabongo
Italy	<i>CESIE, European centre of studies and initiatives</i>	Lo Banco Roberta
		Arestivo Claudio
		Bah Mamadou
		Jammeh Demba
		Cezsay Ebrima
	<i>Cooperativa Progetto Tenda Servizio Minori</i>	Francesca Ambrosoli
Republic of Moldova	<i>International Organization for Migration</i>	Miriam Ricevitu
Slovakia	<i>Medzilaborce - Children`s Home for Unaccompanied Minors</i>	Jaroslav Lukac
Sweden	<i>VYRE</i>	Mohammed Abdullahi Mahmoud
	<i>Migrant Women in Europe</i>	Abdillahi Hodan
	<i>Sigtuna Municipality, Unit for Unaccompanied Refugee Children</i>	Roshna Mahmoudi
	<i>Varljus, Rehabilitation Center</i>	Elvis Divalic
		Hosseini Seyed Moein
		Walid Mohammed Kiar
		Omar Ahmed
		Sandra Johanson
United Kingdom	<i>Jawaab</i>	Large Zoe

<b>Country of residence</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>Ukraine</b>	<i>VYRE / UNHCR</i>	Karimi Harifa
	<i>VYRE / Civic Organization “Desyate Kvitnya”</i>	Bulgakova Ievgeniia
	<i>UNHCR</i>	Marianna Kippa

***Preparatory team***

<b>Country of residence</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	<i>VYRE</i>	Emin Mammadli (course director)
<b>France</b>	<i>VYRE</i>	Camille Thomas
<b>Romania</b>	<i>VYRE</i>	Madalina Popan
<b>Turkey</b>	<i>VYRE</i>	Cihan Kilic
<b>France</b>	<i>Council of Europe</i>	Mara Georgescu (educational advisor)

## APPENDIX 2. DAILY PROGRAMME

### **Monday, 23 May 2016**

- Arrival of participants
- 20:30 Welcome evening

### **Tuesday, 24 May 2016**

- 9.30 Opening and introductions to the Council of Europe  
Getting to know each other
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Group building  
Fears and expectations
- 13:00 Lunch break
- 14:30 Welcome to VYRE
- 14:45 Group building through graffiti painting
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Group building through graffiti painting
- 17:45 Daily reflection groups
- 19:00 Dinner
- 20:30 Mission Possible groupbuilding game

### **Wednesday, 25 May 2016**

- 9.30 Identity and inclusion: flower power
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Defining the social inclusion
- 13:00 Lunch break
- 14:30 Barriers to the social inclusion of UAMs
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Guest speaker Tomas Bocek, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Refugees and Migration
- 17:00 Introduction to the problem tree
- 17:45 Daily reflection groups
- 19:00 Dinner

### **Thursday, 26 May 2016**

- 9.30 Developing the problem tree
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Sharing good practices
- 12:40 Guest speaker: UNHCR representative
- 13:00 Lunch break
- FREE TIME
- 19:00 Dinner in Strasbourg

### **Friday, 27 May 2016**

- 9:30 Sharing good practices
- 10:30 Actor mapping: finding allies
- 11:00 Break



11:30 Guest speaker: City of Strasbourg  
12:00 Motivation for future actions  
13:00 Lunch break  
14:30 Finding solutions to social inclusion: solution tree  
16:00 Break  
16:30 Funding opportunities: European Youth Foundation  
17:00 Action planning  
17:45 Daily reflection groups  
19:00 Dinner

**Saturday, 28 May 2016**

9.30 Open Space: parallel sessions on communications, project management and No Hate Speech Campaign  
11:00 Break  
11:30 Action planning  
12:30 Presenting action plans  
13:00 Lunch break  
14:30 Networking  
15:00 Follow up and support available  
16:00 Break  
16:30 Evaluation and closing  
19:00 Barbecue dinner

**Sunday 29 May 2016**

Departure of participants