

Turning 18 with Confidence – Supporting Migrant and Refugee Children in Transition to Adulthood

International Launching Event

Report

This report was funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Council of Europe.¹

On 18 April 2023, the Council of Europe launched a set of practical tools to support young migrants and refugees in their transition to adulthood.

The event was co-organised by the Council of Europe's Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (SRSG), the [Youth Department](#) and the Co-operation Programmes Division – [Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law](#) (DGI), under the auspices of the **Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers**, and with the participation of **Ásmundur Einar Daðason**, Iceland's Minister of Education and Children. He stated that *"we normally define childhood up until the age of 18, it is of utmost importance that we as governments continue our support beyond that age, strengthening our systems in co-operation and conversation with the young people themselves."*



The event gathered more than 160 participants, both in presence and online, who exchanged experiences, drew inspiration from good practices and the new tools presented, and improved their knowledge and capacity to help migrant and refugee children along their path to adulthood.

Speakers acknowledged the importance of effectively supporting migrant and refugee children in their transition to adulthood in order to ensure respect for their fundamental rights, prevent social exclusion, build inclusive and resilient societies, and promote peaceful coexistence. Unaccompanied migrant children and youth offer resources, motivation and ambition and it is important to support them reach their full potential.

¹ The content of this report represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for the use that may be made of the information it contains.

Tools and standards

The event underlined the importance of empowering young refugees and migrants while strengthening their autonomy, so that they become active participants in society, have opportunities to progress, and positively take part in the development of their new communities. **Council of Europe tools and standards contributing to such empowerment** were presented. These include the [Recommendation \(2019\)4 on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood](#) which provides guidelines to ensure that young refugees receive temporary additional support after reaching the age of majority. It also underlines the role of youth work in enabling young refugees accessing their rights.



As foreseen in the [Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe](#) and the [Youth for Democracy](#) programme, the [practical guide](#) of the aforementioned Recommendation (2019)4 will now contribute to its effective implementation.

The findings and the tools of the **multilateral project** [“Building Futures, Sharing](#)

[Good Practices: Migrant Children’s Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures,](#)” funded by the European Union’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Council of Europe, were also presented. These, among others, include **videos** with young migrants and refugees² and a [Roadmap to Adulthood](#). In the videos, former unaccompanied migrant children share their experience, fears and dreams related to their transition to adulthood. The Roadmap highlights significant and strategic milestones aiming to facilitate the smooth transition of unaccompanied children to adulthood with a focus on access to accommodation, legal support and basic rights, education, labour market and healthcare.

Furthermore, **Council of Europe instruments focusing on migrant and refugee children** were presented as useful tools to support the smooth transition of young migrants and refugees into adulthood: the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2007\)09 on life projects for unaccompanied minors](#) adopted in July 2007, the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)11 on Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration](#), adopted in 2019, and the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)22 on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration](#) adopted in December 2022.

² [“I woke up 18”](#) – video developed by SolidarityNow (Greece) in the framework of the Project *“Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children’s Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures”*.

[“I dreamt you yesterday”](#) – video developed by Fundación Cepaim-Convive (Spain) in the framework of the Project *“Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children’s Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures”*.

Challenges

Speakers underlined that the main challenge young people face when they turn 18 is the loss of the rights and protection they received as children. They are, thus, at risk of becoming undocumented when they age out of protection, as it was underlined, among others, by the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (**PICUM**) in its [Report](#) “Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood”. They also risk disappearing and falling prey to trafficking networks.

Speakers also underlined the need to consider the basic and interconnected needs, such as the prerequisite for accommodation in order to have access to education; the importance of language proficiency to effectively access employability (tools relevant to [linguistic integration](#) and [recognition of Qualifications](#) were presented) as well as the value of access to healthcare, including psychological support. Showcasing the experiences of young undocumented migrants in Strasbourg (France), representatives of **La Cimade** and the **Conference of INGOs** also underlined the importance of vocational training.

In a dialogue between **Fares**, a former young refugee, and **Pierre-Alain Fridez**, **Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, the need for building welcoming societies and creating a safe environment for youth on the move in which access to, *inter alia*, education and psychological support has a leading role was highlighted.

Examples and good practices

The presentation of the **European Migration Network (EMN)** [Inform](#) on the transition of unaccompanied minors to adulthood in EU Member State, was an opportunity to explain the different legal statuses linked to minority and transition to adulthood in the EU member States and Norway. In this context, the importance of evaluating young migrant’s needs and elaborating an integration plan was underlined.



Promising examples and practices included the presentation of the Regulation for youth care leavers reaching majority in Spain highlighting the importance of residence status and work permits by **Fundación Cepaim-Convive**. **SolidarityNow**, shed light on the employability service and methodology developed based on the experience of former unaccompanied migrant children in search of employment in Greece.

Ms Davidovic, member of the Congress of Local and Regional authorities of the Council of Europe underlined the pivotal role of local authorities in supporting young migrants and refugees to access education and safe accommodation. The Congress’ 2018 [report](#) on “Unaccompanied refugee children: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities” encompasses guidelines on how local and regional governments can protect young refugee rights by developing services and encouraging positive community attitudes towards refugees.

The role of youth work

During interactive working sessions, participants shared experiences and underlined challenges related to four different themes:

- The **role of youth organisations** in supporting young refugees: participants highlighted the importance of language courses, outreach activities, training, volunteering, peer support and mentoring.
- **Reaching out to young refugees**: strategies to be implemented include the creation of safe spaces, emotional connection and support through sport.
- **Fostering participation and inclusion** of young migrants and refugees: participants underlined the need to address discrimination and ensure access to information, education, accommodation and psychosocial support.
- Support strategies to establish trust in **mental health** services: include the importance to have person-centred approaches, to accompany people to get the help they need, to establish support networks, organise educational activities, trainings and exchanges for psychologists and counsellors.



Concluding remarks

In their concluding remarks, speakers highlighted the interconnection among the thematic areas and young migrants' and refugees' needs. Progress was observed in several Council of Europe member states, underlining the need to continue the exchange of good practices. Co-operation programmes such as the [UACFutures](#) Project offer an avenue for meaningful progress in the field by promoting the exchange of good practices and solutions across sectors and borders. Speakers also echoed the importance of continued support from national and local stakeholders. Council of Europe representatives reiterated their commitment to streamline information sharing opportunities for practical solutions at the European level, highlighting the role of the [Recommendation](#) on transition to adulthood and its [practical guide](#), as well as that of co-operation programmes as a key step for a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach in building inclusive and resilient societies for refugee children and youth.



TURNING 18 WITH CONFIDENCE

SUPPORTING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN
IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

International launching event

[European Youth Centre,](#)

30 rue Pierre de Coubertin, Strasbourg, France

And online

Tuesday, 18 Avril 2023

9:00 – 17:00

English and French

AGENDA

The event is co-organised by the Council of Europe's Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, the Youth Department and the Co-operation Programmes Division (DGI), with the support of the Icelandic Presidency of the Council of Europe and the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)³

SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL
ON MIGRATION AND REFUGEES



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by the Council of Europe

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08:15 – 09:00	Arrival and Registration of Participants
09:00 – 09:15	Welcome and Introduction of Participants “ I woke up 18 ” – video developed by SolidarityNow (Greece) in the framework of the Project “ <i>Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children's Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures</i> ”
09:15 – 09:45	OPENING REMARKS <p>Marja Ruotanen, Director General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe</p> <p>Spyros Papadatos, Chair of the Joint Council on Youth, Council of Europe</p> <p>Leyla Kayacik, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Migration and Refugees</p>
09:45 – 10:00	KEYNOTE SPEECH <p>Ásmundur Einar Daðason, Minister of Education and Children of Iceland</p>
10:00 – 10:40	TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: PRESENTING COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS AND LAUNCHING THE NEW TOOLS <p>Moderator: Ambassador Fakhraddin Ismayilov, Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Education, Culture, Sport, Youth and Environment of the Committee of Ministers (GR-C), Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe</p> <p><i>Guide to the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood</i></p> <p>Rui Gomes, Head of Division Education and Training, Youth Department, Council of Europe</p> <p>Amy Stapleton, International Consultant</p> <p><i>Roadmap to Adulthood developed under the Project “Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children's Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures”</i></p> <p>Gelly Aroni, Head of the Unit for Integration and Support of UAMs, Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Greece</p> <p>Questions and discussion</p>
10:40 – 11:10	TESTIMONIES AND EXPERIENCES FROM YOUNG MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

	<p>“Jano & Shiro, a brother’s journey” – extract of a short documentary part of the “Shadow games” project, co-produced by Prospektor</p> <p>Moderator: Tatiana Termacic, Head of Secretariat of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe</p> <p>Farès Nahlawi, Former Young Refugee</p> <p>Pierre-Alain Fridez, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe</p>
11:10 – 11: 40	Break
11:40 – 12:20	<p>EUROPEAN, NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES AND CONTEXTS</p> <p>Moderator: Lilit Daneghian, Deputy Head of the Co-operation Programmes Division, Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe</p> <p>Adolfo Sommaribas, Senior Legal Migration Expert, European Migration Network (EMN) – Inform <i>on the transition of unaccompanied minors to adulthood in EU Member States</i></p> <p>Pau Vidal I Gil, Head of Legal Services, Fundación Cepaim (Spain) – <i>The reform of the Regulation for youth care leavers reaching majority in Spain</i></p> <p>Dusica Davidovic, Deputy Mayor of Nis (Serbia), Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe – <i>Local practices and experiences of service provision to young adults</i></p> <p>Questions and discussion</p>
12:20 – 13:00	<p>SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AGING OUT</p> <p>Moderator: Andreas Wissner, Representative to the European Institutions in Strasbourg, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</p> <p>Maria Asensio Velasco, Policy Officer, Children’s Rights Division, Council of Europe - Life Projects, Guardianship, Age Assessment</p> <p>Cedric Christian Kamgaing, Voice of Young Refugees in Europe</p> <p>Laetitia Van der Vennet, Advocacy Officer, PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) – Report <i>“Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood”</i></p> <p>Pierre Greib Co-president <i>La CIMADE Grand-Est</i>, President of the Strasbourg collective <i>“For another migration policy”</i>; Fernand Jehl, Committee <i>“Rights of Persons who are Migrants”</i>, Conference of INGOs, Council of Europe</p> <p>Questions and discussion</p>
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch Break

14:20 – 14:30	<p>“I dreamt you yesterday” – video developed by Fundación Cepaim (Spain) in the framework of the Project <i>“Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children’s Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures”</i></p>
14:30 – 15:15	<p>FACILITATING ACCESS OF YOUNG ADULTS TO SERVICES: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY</p> <p>Moderator: Liliya Elenkova, Advisor on youth issues, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Republic of Bulgaria</p> <p>Marta Mędlińska, Administrator, and Samir Hećo, Project Officer, Education Department, Council of Europe – Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, European Qualification Passport for Refugees</p> <p>Domniki Georgopoulou, Child Protection Expert, SolidarityNow, Greece</p> <p>Zain Bouch, Representative of “Voices of Young Refugees in Europe” in the Advisory Council on Youth</p> <p>Omid Hotak, Networking and Learning Opportunities, United Kingdom</p> <p>Questions and discussion</p>
15:15 – 15:30	Break
15:30 – 15:45	<p>THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK IN SUPPORTING YOUNG REFUGEES</p> <p>Moderator: Ida Kreutzman, Educational Adviser, Youth Department, Council of Europe</p> <p><i>Introductions by:</i></p> <p>Kinda Khazaal, Tumult vzw, Belgium</p> <p>Samantha Zodwa Mhlanga, CDYS Youth Work, Ireland</p>
15:45 – 16:45	<p>THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK IN SUPPORTING YOUNG REFUGEES</p> <p><i>Sharing experiences and challenges in working groups:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation and inclusion (<i>online participation possible</i>) - Support to wellbeing and mental health (<i>in presence only</i>) - Reaching out to young refugees (<i>in presence only</i>) - Supporting youth organisations (<i>in presence only</i>)
16:45 – 17:00	<p>CLOSING REMARKS AND WAYS FORWARD</p> <p><i>Summing up of the youth session</i></p> <p>Lilit Daneghian, Deputy Head of the Co-operation Programmes Division, Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe</p> <p>Rui Gomes, Head of Division Education and Training, Youth Department, Council of Europe</p>
17:00	Closing Cocktail