



Building Futures: Legal Pathways and Psychosocial Support for Young Refugees and Migrants in transition to adulthood

Seminar on strengthening the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on
Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood

28-30 April 2026
European Youth Centre, Strasbourg



Report

Organised by the [Council of Europe Youth Department](#) in cooperation with the [Council of Europe Division on Migration and Refugees \(DMR\)](#), and the [Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants \(PICUM\)](#)

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Council of Europe.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction to the Seminar and its context	4
2. Seminar Day by Day	5
DAY 1: Hurdles faced by migrants and young refugees and legal uncertainties	5
DAY 2: Durable Solutions and Psychosocial Support	5
DAY 3: Strengthening cooperation across institutions	7
3. Innovative aspects of the Seminar:	8
4. Shared challenges	8
5. Resources from the seminar	8
6. Annex – Daily programme and background information	9

1. Introduction to the Seminar and its context

The seminar “Building Futures: Legal Pathways and Psychosocial Support for Young Refugees and Migrants in Transition to Adulthood” was designed as a direct follow-up to the findings of the first review of the implementation of [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)4](#) (the Recommendation) on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood. It focused on the interconnection between legal barriers and psychosocial support, with particular attention to the ways in which legal insecurity can disrupt access to education, employment, housing, health care, and social inclusion.

The Recommendation calls on member States to reduce legal barriers by ensuring that residence permits and administrative procedures do not abruptly interrupt young refugees’ and migrants’ transition into adulthood. It emphasises the need for flexible and secure legal statuses (residence statuses) so that uncertainty, delays, or administrative obstacles do not jeopardise access to essential rights and services. This is especially relevant for young people who arrived in Europe as unaccompanied or separated children, whose vulnerability is widely recognised in European human rights standards and case law.

At the same time, the Recommendation highlights the importance of continuous psychosocial support. Many young migrants and refugees face trauma, isolation, stress, and uncertainty during their transition to adulthood, and they require accessible, culturally sensitive mental health services and longer-term support systems rather than short-term interventions. The seminar therefore addressed both the legal and emotional dimensions of the transition into adulthood, recognising that stability in legal (residence) status and stability in wellbeing are closely connected.

The event adopted an inter-agency coordination approach, bringing together actors from the legal, migration, youth, social, research and mental health sectors, as well as governmental and non-governmental organisations. This approach sought to promote coordinated responses that strengthen implementation of the Recommendation, especially in relation to legal barriers and psychosocial support measures.

A key purpose of the seminar was to connect policy with practice. Many participants stressed that laws, policies and recommendations are useful only if they can be applied in practice and services can provide a safe transition to young people with diverse experiences of/in migration (migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented, etc). This meant learning, sharing and reflecting about guardianship systems, accommodation models, access to education, and psychosocial support structures, as well as the ongoing negotiations on a common European Union return framework, and the criminalisation of solidarity that exists in several contexts.

Another key purpose was to bring lived experience into the centre of the discussion. The seminar was designed from the conviction that young migrants and refugees are not just service users or ‘beneficiaries’, but clear sources of action, change, insight and expertise. This was especially important in a field where policy can easily become detached from everyday realities, particularly when the voices and agency of certain groups are neither recognised nor valued.

The seminar had the following objectives:

1. To examine the psychosocial impact of legal insecurity, including the ways in which uncertainty and administrative obstacles affect the mental health and well-being of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
2. To identify integrated approaches that combine legal support, youth work, and psychosocial or mental health services to better support young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
3. To facilitate exchange of practices and experiences among governmental institutions, civil society organisations, youth organisations, and service providers working with young refugees.

4. To contribute to strengthening inter-agency coordination between actors working in migration, youth, social, legal, and health sectors representing governmental and non-governmental structures, including local authorities and youth organisations.

2. Seminar Day by Day

DAY 1: Hurdles faced by migrants and young refugees and legal uncertainties

The first day established the overall spirit of the seminar and participants began with important discussions on the topic of transition to adulthood involving difficult questions about protection, key legal statuses (particularly childhood and residence status), exclusion, and the limits of existing systems.

One of the main messages of Day 1 was the importance of representation. Participants stressed the need to include young migrants, refugees, and undocumented people in conversations about policy and practice, rather than speaking about them from a distance. The seminar was seen as an opportunity to make their voices visible in European and national discussions and to strengthen advocacy for their rights..

The first day also raised important questions about evidence and accountability. Participants discussed available data, evidence, and research, including their sources, reliability, use, ownership, and role in supporting decision-making. This matters because policy improvements depend not only on good ideas, but also on reliable information and clear structures of responsibility.

Age assessment was identified as a key challenge. Participants noted that age assessment should only be conducted when there is serious doubt about a person's age, and that it must respect child-rights principles, informed consent, privacy, and the best interests of the child. The discussion made clear that age assessment is a **sensitive process** that can have significant consequences, particularly where an erroneous assessment may result in a child being treated as an adult and consequently exposed to additional risks.

The first day also touched on the **use of digital tools and artificial intelligence**. While participants recognised that AI could help with translation, administration, and access to information, they stressed that it cannot replace human judgement or human relationships and must be used with proper safeguards in place. This reflects the seminar's broader emphasis on dignity, empathy, and personalised support.

DAY 2: Durable Solutions and Psychosocial Support

The second day of the seminar focused on the practical conditions that shape the transition to adulthood for young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The discussion moved between legal protection, residence status, accommodation, guardianship, psychosocial support, education, and employability, showing that these issues cannot be separated in practice. Participants shared examples of practices that are working in their contexts while also identifying the barriers that prevent those practices from reaching the young people who need them most.

Day 2 looked at the Recommendation and the 'Turning 18 with Confidence: Practical Guide to the Recommendation', exploring how the Guide can help practitioners make the Recommendation more tangible and support action across different sectors and levels of intervention. This framing was important because it positioned the Recommendation as something that should inform day-to-day practice, rather than remaining a purely formal or advocacy-oriented instrument.

The next part of the session focused on practices relating to the guardianship of unaccompanied children. The presentation by *KIND* of a newly developed [toolkit](#) for guardians highlighted findings showing that children often feel excluded, while guardians themselves feel under-supported. This led to a discussion about the need for practical tools that help guardians address concrete issues such as housing, education, finances, and transition planning. The emphasis was not only on improving the work of guardians individually, but also on strengthening the broader support ecosystem around them.

This discussion highlighted the importance of collaboration across organisations. Participants noted that good tools exist, but they are not always known or used, especially by smaller non-governmental organisations that do not have direct connections to larger networks. This pointed to an important implementation gap: knowledge is often available, but it is not distributed in ways that make it accessible to all actors working with young people.

Several country examples illustrated what coordinated support can look like in practice. From France, participants learnt about [Centre Bernanos Strasbourg](#), which presented a holistic model of reception that combines shelter, food, training, health, sports, and a strong sense of community. The project was described as culturally responsive, creating a network of “brothers and sisters” around young migrants and offering a setting of belonging as well as practical support. At the same time, funding constraints were identified as a serious challenge, showing how vulnerable even strong models can be when resources are limited.

The practices currently implemented in Greece, presented by the *International Relations Unit, Ministry of Migration and Asylum*, highlighted child protection as a key policy priority. Several elements of the Greek system were mentioned, including guidance for minors and guardians, rules for accommodation centres, contact mechanisms between guardians and young people, vocational training, school attendance, independent living apartments, and specific criteria for longer-term accommodation. Greek language lessons were also noted as part of the integration process, underlining the importance of linguistic inclusion in preparing young people for adulthood.

An example was the [HELIOS Junior programme](#) in Greece, which supports young adults aged 18 to 21 who arrived as unaccompanied children. The programme offers accommodation, monthly financial assistance, integration services, support for training, community participation, and monitored goals. This was presented as a comprehensive model of transition support that does not end abruptly at 18 but instead provides continuity into early adulthood.

The *Compass Project* in Greece was another example of good practice. It was described as providing specialised day centres for minors and young adults, with legal, psychosocial, and employability services. The involvement of mentors who were themselves former unaccompanied children and/or who have similar backgrounds was highlighted as especially valuable, because peer-based support can build trust and help young people navigate systems that may otherwise feel distant or intimidating.

The importance of field visits to accommodation settings, as well as awareness-raising in schools and communities, was also mentioned as a promising practice. Such initiative can help professionals and communities better understand why young migrants need protection and how they can be supported to settle down and build their lives.

Fundación Cepaim (Spain) presented its work at individual, group, and community levels. One practice mentioned was a flat in Barcelona for young people aged 18 to 23, supported by caregivers and a professional team. This model was described as a good practice because it combines small-scale housing with human support and a focus on everyday life, rather than relying on large institutional environments. The discussion also noted legal improvements in Spain, including changes in 2021 that ensured that unaccompanied children secure provisional residence permits within 90 days, while those who do not seek asylum can access residence and work permits after reaching the age of 18. These developments were presented as reflecting the importance of legal certainty for a well-supported transition into adulthood.

The *Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth* presented some of the practices from [Escolhas project](#), highlighting the importance of supporting youth workers, especially those with psychological training, as residence insecurity and social stress can significantly affect young people’s mental health. The Portuguese example also pointed to the role of public budgets, district-based mental health service offices, and university partnerships with junior psychologists, showing how psychosocial support can be organised within broader systems.

The discussions of the day also brought up several challenges. One major concern was funding insecurity

and the fact that some of these projects receive limited funding despite their social importance. Private funding was discussed as a potential source of support, but participants also reflected on ethical questions concerning the values and mandates of potential donors.

The discussions also reflected on the importance of legal and procedural fairness. Several interventions questioned how fast-track asylum processes and border procedures can adequately protect young people when decisions must be made quickly and under pressure. Related concerns were raised about the burden placed on professionals, including the difficulty of doing accurate vulnerability or persecution assessments in systems that are overstretched and under-resourced. Lastly, the fact that not all countries have adopted diverse pathways for children and young people to acquire secure residence status was identified as a key challenge, although [civil society guidance](#) exists.

Age assessments and access to education were also repeatedly brought up in the discussions. Participants noted that, in practice, young people often face barriers to education, including higher education. These barriers create inequality and make financial independence and social integration more difficult in the short and long-term. Unstable or insufficient resources, as well as frequent changes in staff, were all seen as obstacles that make it harder to guarantee safe access to accommodation, support in resolving administrative issues, and continuity in education.

Day 2 ended with a presentation from the consultant responsible for collating practices on supporting the transition to adulthood, who introduced the new Council of Europe webpage collecting [promising practices](#) on transition into adulthood. The practices featured on the dedicated webpage include supported apartments, foster-family models, mentorship, guardianship toolkits, and community-based support structures. These practices indicate that meaningful support is possible when services are flexible, relational, and practical, and when preparation begins well before the young person turns 18. The repository of promising practices also allows organisations to share and update examples over time, making knowledge more accessible and dynamic. This kind of platform helps practitioners learn from one another and avoid working in isolation.

DAY 3: Strengthening cooperation across institutions

The third day was more practical and focused on looking ahead on possible practices that could be transferable, adapted, improved or implemented with each other's support. Participants worked in groups and looked at the topic from different sides through various questions, which helped make a complex issue easier to understand.

Two groups looked at community-level support: one from the perspective of young people, and one from the perspective of the services and institutions involved. The group that looked at local community work from the point of view of the young people receiving support involved two care experienced young people. The lived experiences shared by the two young refugees showed how important it is to have continuity, trust, and support that responds to each person's needs, regardless of their age at which they arrived (as a 17- or 18-year-old). Their experiences also showed that young people often depend on different kinds of help at any given time, including family, foster care, non-governmental organisations, legal support, and community networks, and that informal ties to the local community are especially important when systems fail.

The second group discussed community-based support and the many people involved, such as governments, local authorities, cultural centres, NGOs, hospitals, volunteers, and migrant communities. They emphasised that that better communication and coordination are needed so that responsibilities are clear and nothing gets lost.

A third group looked at how local, national, and regional levels can work better together. Participants said that good local practices already exist, but they are not always supported by national systems. They suggested more consultation, better oversight, more research at the local level, and clearer ways of sharing information.

The last group focused on legal support. They pointed out that asylum and migration procedures are very different from one country to another, including differences in who conducts the interviews and how legal aid is organised. They also raised concerns about limited funding, a lack of specialists, and staff turnover, which make it harder to support children and young people throughout their residence procedures.

3. Innovative aspects of the Seminar:

The seminar brought together people from the legal, migration, youth, social, and health sectors, from both government and civil society. This **inter-agency approach** was especially innovative for the Youth Department and was well-received by all as it helped provide a full picture of a complex issue and fostered rich discussions.

- **Mentoring** was highlighted as an especially important and practical form of support, especially when mentors have similar backgrounds to the young people involved.
- **Small-scale housing projects** were also presented as a good practice, since smaller-scale and more personal living arrangements can offer more needs-based support than large institutions, and help young people develop key life skills and becoming self-sufficient.
- **Holistic, trauma-informed and needs-based support** was identified by several participants as important, with proposals ranging from extending formal youth care to training youth workers in first aid psychological support.
- The importance of **non-formal education and youth work** in creating opportunities to develop skills, contributing to a sense of belonging and empowerment, and building relationships was also highlighted.

4. Shared challenges

Several common challenges were discussed across the three days:

- **Gap between policy and implementation.** Participants shared that while several conducive policy frameworks and recommendations exist, their effectiveness is limited by funding shortages, institutional complexity, and political commitment.
- **Fragmentation.** Young people need support across legal, educational, psychosocial, and housing domains, but institutions often work in silos.
- **Pressure on frontline workers and organisations.** Frontline actors often have the closest relationship with young migrants and refugees, yet they are among the least resourced.
- **Complex legal frameworks.** The complexity of procedures and legal frameworks, and the risk that young people may fall outside of them, were a recurring theme throughout the seminar.

5. Resources from the seminar

- Convive fundacion Cepaim, [Modelo Tranvía, Transito a la vida adulta: Bases para un modelo de intervención comunitaria con juventud extutelada](#)
- Council of Europe, [Promising Practices](#), webpage
- Council of Europe, [Toolkit on the transition of unaccompanied migrant children to adulthood](#)
- Council of Europe, [The transition of unaccompanied migrant children to adulthood: a compendium of good practices](#)
- Council of Europe, [The Transition of migrant and refugee children to adulthood](#), HELP online module
- KIND, [Practical Toolkit for Guardians: Supporting Children Transitioning to Adulthood](#)
- PICUM, [Guidance for policy makers and practitioners on regularization mechanisms for people transitioning into adulthood](#)
- PICUM, [Stepping up: A collection of projects and practices helping migrant children transition into adulthood](#)
- PICUM, [Turning 18 and undocumented: supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#)

6. Annex – Daily programme and background information

Monday, 27 April 2026

Arrivals of participants

Tuesday, 28 April 2026

Arrivals of participants (continued)

13:30 – 14:15 Registration at the lobby area of the European Youth Centre
Lunch starts at 12:30 and ends at 14:15

14:30 Opening of the seminar with

- **Sophie KWASNY**, Head of the Education, Training and Cooperation Division, Youth Department, Council of Europe
- **Nikolaos SITAROPOULOS**, Head of the Division on Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe
- **Laetitia VAN DER VENNET**, Senior Advocacy Officer, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
- **Omid HOTAK**, VOICIFY and Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe

15:00 Getting to know each other and introduction to the seminar

16:00 Break

16:30 Supporting young refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in their transition to adulthood – Presentation of the work of partners from policy and grassroots perspectives with

- **Sulkhan CHARGEISHVILI**, Youth Department, Council of Europe
- **Viktoria KARPATSKYI**, Division on Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe
- **Angela GARABAGIU**, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- **Laetitia VAN DER VENNET**, PICUM
- **Omid HOTAK**, VOICIFY, Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe
- **Theodora KRISTOFORI**, Human Rights and Justice Cooperation Department, DGI, Council of Europe

Reflections and reactions from participants in the seminar

18:00 End of day 1

Wednesday, 29 April 2026

- 09:30 Introduction to the day
- The Hurdles of Legal Transitions: What does it mean for young refugees and migrants?**
- Panel discussion moderated by Ana MORGADO, consultant, Council of Europe
- Speakers:
- **Elisa POTHÉE**, Kids in Need of Defense, France
 - **Father Thomas WENDER**, Centre Bernanos Strasbourg, France
 - **Mohammad Hadi MOHEBI**, Mentor of unaccompanied minors, Greece
 - **Georgia ANGELAKOUDI**, International Relations Unit, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Greece
 - **Osman HALICI**, Network and Learning Opportunities (NLO), Netherlands
 - **Clyde BONNICI**, Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), Malta
- Reactions and reflections from participants in the seminar
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 **Living with Uncertainty: Status, Access to Rights, and Daily Obstacles**
- Panel moderated by Mariana DIMOU, Youth Social Rights Network, Italy
- **Eirini GRAVANI**, VELOS YOUTH, Greece
 - **Laetitia VAN DER VENNET**, PICUM, Belgium
 - **Mariia BROVDI**, Gent University (Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy), Ukraine/Belgium
 - **Haizea DEL CAMPO SAEZ**, Fundación Cepaim, Spain
 - **Kouame KOUASSI KAN ESAIE**, BreachBuilders e.V., Germany
- 13:00 Lunch Break
- 14:30 **Carrying a Lot: Talking About Mental Health**
- Panel moderated by Viktoria KARPATSKZI, Division for Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe
- **João MATELA**, Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth, Portugal
 - **Özge SILAV ÖZ**, Ministry of Family and Social Services, Türkiye
 - **Naila BELHAOUARI**, Association "Antenne", France
 - **Obaidullah SHINWARI and Vladyslav MORHUN**, SOS Children's Villages, Hungary and Ukraine
 - **Mohammad ZIA**, Sveriges ensamkommande förening, Sweden
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Exchange of practices

17:40	Presentation of the dedicated webpage developed by the Council of Europe Youth Department featuring promising practices and additional resources related to the transition to adulthood of young refugees and migrants with Amy STAPLETON (online), Council of Europe expert
18:00	End of day 2
19:00-20:30	Dinner at the association Stamtish <i>The Strasbourg-based non-profit organisation aims to facilitate the socio-professional integration of people with a migrant background and strives to combat the discrimination they face.</i>

Thursday, 30 April 2026

09:00	Introduction to the day Interactive working groups exploring integrated responses combining legal and psychosocial support including presentations
11:00	Break
11:30	Discussion on strengthening cooperation across institutions. Identification of follow-up actions and ideas for the future
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00	Presentation by the groups and discussion in the plenary
15:30	Break
16:00-16:30	Conclusions of the seminar and closure , with: - Laetitia VAN DER VENNET, Senior Advocacy Officer, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) - Omid HOTAK, Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe - João MATELA, Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth, European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), Council of Europe

Departure of participants (after 16:30)

Friday, 1 May 2026

Departure of participants (continued)

About the seminar

Building on the findings of the first review of the implementation of the Recommendation, the 2026 seminar will focus on the interconnection between legal barriers and psychosocial support.

The Recommendation encourages member States to reduce legal barriers by ensuring that residence permits and administrative procedures do not abruptly disrupt a young refugee's transition into adulthood. It emphasises the need for flexible and secure legal statuses so that access to education, employment, and housing is not jeopardised by uncertainty or delays. At the same time, the Recommendation highlights the importance of continuous psychosocial support, recognising that many young refugees face trauma, isolation, and stress during this transition. It is especially relevant for children who arrived in Europe as unaccompanied and separated children due to their vulnerability. As noted in the 2025 DMR Thematic Paper ["Vulnerability of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees: Council of Europe and European Union standards"](#), the European Court of Human Rights consistently recognises children as belonging to a category of vulnerable people, particularly in a migratory context. This applies even more strongly to unaccompanied or separated children, especially when they face detention or risks of violence and abuse. The intensifying focus on vulnerability, which is often multi-layered, in the context of migration presents a demanding challenge for Council of Europe member States: to take into account, in an individualised and contextualised manner, the fragility arising from characteristics pertaining to specific groups such as migrant children and those transitioning into adulthood.

The Recommendation calls for accessible, culturally sensitive mental health services and long-term support systems rather than short-term interventions. Together, these measures aim to create stability both in legal standing and emotional well-being, enabling young refugees to integrate more effectively into society.

The event will explore the above-mentioned themes and apply an inter-agency coordination approach, bringing together actors from legal, migration, youth, social, and health sectors representing governmental and non-governmental structures.

Seminar aims to promote coordinated responses that strengthen the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood focusing on legal barriers and psychosocial support measures.

Objectives of the seminar are:

1. Examine the psychosocial impact of legal insecurity, including the ways in which uncertainty and administrative obstacles affect the mental health and well-being of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
2. Identify integrated approaches that combine legal support, youth work, and psychosocial or mental health services to better support young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
3. Facilitate exchange of practices and experiences among governmental institutions, civil society organisations, youth organisations, and service providers working with young refugees.
4. Contribute to strengthening inter-agency coordination between actors working in migration, youth, social, legal, and health sectors representing governmental and non-governmental structures including local authorities and youth organisations.