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Taking young refugees and asylum seekers seriously

Knowledge, policies and youth work practices

European reflection and discussion workshop

REPORT

Youth Partnership
Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



SALTO
INCLUSION &
DIVERSITY

REPORT

The European workshop and discussion was organised by the Council of Europe (CoE), the VUB and the Flanders Department Foreign Affairs & Flanders Department Culture, Youth and Media, in close co-operation with SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre (Jint vzw) and the EU-CoE youth partnership.

The event was organised around two main elements: the [Youth.Together](#) project (CoE) and the main findings of the research of Minne Huysmans (VUB): “Young newcomers, a contextual framework of experiences in urban Belgium”.

This is a short summary of the main inputs and discussions.

The opening words from VUB (Professor Dominique Verté) and the Flanders Foreign Affairs Department (Julie Bynens) highlighted the importance of co-operation between different actors (academia and practitioners, national authorities and Council of Europe) and of bottom-up and participatory approaches for the engagement of young people. Youth work was mentioned as a key tool for inclusive societies.

The [Special Representative](#) of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (CoE) – Ambassador Drahoslav Štefánek - referred to his mandate to undertake fact-finding missions and collect information on the situation of refugees and migrants. He highlighted the importance of looking at the existing practices and conditions from a human rights perspective and he called member States, including youth work organisations, to contribute to the implementation of relevant policy documents such as the Recommendation on [Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood](#).¹

A youth perspective on the overall theme of the event was also shared by two young speakers from [The Young Republic](#) (Zaher Barood was also a participant of Youth.Together project) and of the [Advisory Council on Youth](#) of the Council of Europe (AC CoE). The former participant of the CoE long-term training course, underlined the need to move from looking at young refugees and migrants as target groups to start working with them as equal partners. He also stated that youth work should approach working with these young people from a human rights perspective (rather than a needs-based one). Pegah Moulana, representing the AC CoE, briefly explained what co-management and the AC is; asked the audience to look at young people as experts; and reminded everyone that refugees and asylum seekers are not a new phenomenon. She also referred to the Recommendation mentioned above and the role of youth work in its implementation and to the [European Youth Foundation](#) as a possibility to fund youth initiatives with young migrants and refugees.

Rui Gomes (Youth Department, Council of Europe) underlined that social inclusion is a task for the entire society. He shared about Youth.Together project, its link to the CoE Recommendation and how the project’s bottom-up approach had the different realities on the ground as its starting point. A reference was made also to the [CoE 2030 Youth Strategy](#) and its priorities, which include supporting young people’s access to rights.

Main findings of Minne Huysmans’ [research](#) were briefly shared. 2015 was a key year to define the theme and the approach of this research. Researchers were challenged to be less abstract and value practice and engagement, and to focus on human/individual. Based on a convoy model of social relations, the research explored the importance of social networks and social

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 24 April 2019.

support on inclusion of accompanied/unaccompanied minors. The research included conducting two stages of interviews to a total of 125 participants. The difficulty to connect with the outside world (sometimes networking is limited to other newcomers and care providers) and the creation of segregated realities, are some of the challenges/conclusions identified by the research.

Tanya Basarab shared the resources and results of the work of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership in the field of inclusion and participation of young refugees and migrants (including creating links between research, youth policy and youth work as well as cross-sectoral cooperation). The resources include a dedicated webpage on the [rights, inclusion and participation of young refugees](#); the youth knowledge book [Between Insecurity and Hope](#), reflections on youth work with young refugees; and the handbook for practitioners [Step by step together](#) – Support, Tips, Examples and Possibilities of youth work with young refugees.

The group of participants had the possibility to exchange ideas and share practices in smaller working groups. This exercise was divided into two workshops, below the questions asked to participants and a summary of their reflections.

Workshop 1

Do the findings of Minne reflect the realities you deal with? If yes, how do you address the mentioned challenges? If no, in which way, please share.

What can be done by us, to enlarge the diversity, quality, and quantity of the young newcomers' network? What can be done to deepen social relations of young newcomers? What is our role in this?

How can we stimulate better cross-overs and connections between newcomers in special settings for them (like reception classes, refugee organisations), and local youngsters in regular schools and youth networks?

Participants shared that support networks are dispersed and that youth work can have a role in supporting young newcomers in building their network, especially in connecting them with the local community.

When young people turn 18, was identified as a key challenge and the moment to have a strong network supporting them, as there is the possibility to loose rights. Networking above 18 years can also be more difficult. Buddy-systems was mentioned several times during the workshop as a possible solution and youth work can have a role in developing such networks. Volunteering to help meeting new people is also another way to support the enlargement of young people's networks. Youth work can also encourage newcomers and support them on what they want to do (studying, cooking, enjoying leisure time) - taking into account individual needs.

Youth work can build bridges with the local community, it can raise awareness and propose activities to foster relations. As language remains a challenge for inclusion of young people, leisure, sport and non-formal activities can create a more comfortable environment. Food and cooking initiatives can also be an entry point to foster relations. Open youth work is key, it is important to invest in reaching out to these young people. It would be good if co-operation between different sectors is strengthened to facilitate also the development of support networks. This would also allow to work closer to families. Working closely with others is something that everyone can do.

Workshop 2

What should be done so that youth work with young refugees is better recognised and supported. What can you do in this respect?

Which barriers do young refugees face in accessing their rights concretely, for example right to housing, education, non-discrimination, information and legal advice etc.? How are your interventions with young refugees are relevant for this?

How important the international instruments about refugees' rights for your work with young refugees?

There is the need to showcase what youth work can do and advocate to have better conditions to allow projects and support to young people to become continuous and sustainable. Everyone can improve the way they are working – it is important to involve young newcomers in all stages of programme and policy development and implementation. Support people in what they want to do. Change the way to approach young refugees: “you can” rather than “you should”.

International instruments may be too far to young people. Not knowing own rights is a huge barrier. A lot of information is out there and it would be important to make it more accessible. Youth and social workers (which can be an entry-point to reach out), as well as young people, could be trained on these tools and on how to use them in practice. Another barrier is the fact that many times young people are on the move or keep being moved – if it is not possible to work in a continuous and sustainable way, it is difficult to support them in accessing their rights. Building trust it is important and it can be affected by those changes, as well as by the difficulty in having funding and sustainability to continue with projects. In addition, legal status and language still remain some of the main barriers that young refugees and migrants face when trying to access their rights.

Refugee groups are coming together and getting a seat at the table of policies that affect them. This should be supported by youth work, other sectors, local and national governments and institutions, as it is important for policy makers to be more aware of the situation of young refugees.

Closing words by:

- Andreia Henriques - SALTO Inclusion & Diversity RC – briefly referred to [Erasmus+](#) and [European Solidarity Corps](#) as funding opportunities. Inclusion is and will continue to be a priority on EU youth programmes. Shared about the publication from the European Commission on [youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters](#).
- Andreia Casamenti – [European Youth Forum](#) – briefly explained what the Youth Forum is and shared about its work on young migrants and refugees such as the creation of an internal working group. He also shared about the [European Youth Initiative Fund](#), a joint project with UNHCR. Casamenti also highlighted the importance of engaging young people in the decisions that affect them and the need to better support youth work and youth organisations in the work that they do.
- Jan Vanhee – [Flanders Department Culture, Youth and Media](#) – highlighted the importance of welcoming everyone in our society and how challenging this can be. Referred also on how, at EU level, member States succeeded in 2018 to reach [Council Conclusions on youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters](#). Thanked all participants of Youth.Together and all partners of the event and underlined the importance of different stakeholders to work together.