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Narrative Report

Study Session Empowerment in Action: Young Refugees' Journey to Adulthood

VOICES OF YOUNG REFUGEES IN EUROPE (VYRE) in cooperation with the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg

15-19 September 2025



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.

1. Summary

The study session “*Empowerment in Action: Young Refugees’ Journey to Adulthood*”, held at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg from 15–19 September 2025, brought together 24 participants from 15 Council of Europe member states to strengthen youth workers’ and young refugees’ competences in supporting the transition to adulthood. Organised by VYRE in cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE), the session responded to persistent gaps in awareness, implementation, and practical support related to Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 and the Practical Guide *Turning 18 with Confidence*. Through non-formal education, participants explored the challenges young refugees face across legal, social, and psychological dimensions, and shared local experiences, good practices, and strategies for rights-based youth work.

The programme combined policy inputs, human rights education, and experiential activities with contributions from practitioners, researchers, and institutional representatives. A field visit to the Bernanos Centre provided a concrete example of impactful grassroots work. Participants identified gaps between policy and lived realities, deepened their understanding of human rights-based approaches, and expanded their professional networks. The study session strengthened cooperation, inspired future initiatives, and reinforced the meaningful participation of young refugees. Its outcomes directly contribute to the Council of Europe Youth Department’s priorities of ensuring young people’s access to rights and fostering inclusive, peaceful societies.

2. Introduction

2.1. The background to the study session

In partnership with the Council of Europe, VYRE has organised multiple study sessions designed to strengthen the capacities of young refugees and empower them to address the pressing challenges they encounter. These sessions consistently highlighted a significant gap: the need for greater awareness and support for the transition period to adulthood faced by young refugees.

As a (former) member of the Advisory Council on Youth, VYRE used insights from these sessions to advocate at the institutional level for stronger recognition of this issue. Over six years of sustained advocacy culminated in the adoption of the 2019 Recommendation on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood by the Council of Europe.

To enhance the practical implementation of this Recommendation, the Council of Europe published the Practical Guide “Turning 18 with Confidence” (2023), which provides guidance for supporting young refugees through this crucial stage. The current phase focuses on making the guide more actionable and widely implemented, ensuring it serves as a practical tool for youth workers, organisations, and policymakers.

In June 2024, VYRE joined the preparatory team for the seminar “Supporting Confidence at 18”, held at the European Youth Centre Budapest (20–21 June 2024). The seminar gathered practitioners, experts, and young people to exchange practices and initiatives aimed at assisting young refugees and migrants in their transition to adulthood. Discussions reaffirmed that this transition is a complex, multidimensional process shaped by legal, cultural, political, personal, and social factors.

Participants emphasised the importance of collaboration and mutual support among diverse stakeholders, as well as the recognition of the varied realities and experiences of young refugees. They strongly advocated for the meaningful participation of young refugees in both the development and implementation of policies and recommendations that affect them.

During the seminar, participants were asked to reflect on the question: “What have been the challenges in using the Practical Guide in your work?” The responses revealed that many had limited familiarity with the Recommendation and the “Turning 18 with Confidence” guide. Consequently, participants proposed a series of awareness-raising and educational initiatives to improve understanding of the guide’s existence, purpose, and applications.

The topic of transition to adulthood remains a priority for both VYRE and the Council of Europe Youth Department, as it represents a critical stage in the lives of young refugees; one marked by legal uncertainty, cultural adjustment, limited access to education and employment, and the lasting psychological effects of trauma and displacement. This vulnerability exposes many to risks of exploitation, abuse, and social exclusion.

Ensuring the protection of young refugees’ human rights during this transition is therefore essential. Through its refugee-led advocacy, VYRE remains steadfast in its commitment to empowering young refugees; helping them build confidence, understand their rights, and make informed decisions about their futures. VYRE continues to work toward ensuring that refugee-related policies are grounded in lived realities, shaped by the voices and experiences of those directly affected.

2.2. Aim and objectives

The study session had the aim of improving participants’ competences in supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood through youth work and human rights education, and the following objectives:

- To create space for sharing about experiences, local contexts and challenges faced by young refugees in transition to adulthood.
- To explore how the Recommendation 2019(4) “Supporting Young Refugees In Transition To Adulthood” and the Practical Guide “Turning 18 with Confidence” can support youth work with young refugees in transition to adulthood.
- To develop intercultural awareness and understanding of the key principles of human rights education in youth work with young refugees.

- To foster cooperation among organisations and participants and collect examples of good practices with relevance to young refugees' transition to adulthood.

2.3. A description of the profile of participants

The study session had 24 participants coming from 15 Council of Europe member states, representing a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives on young refugees' transition to adulthood. The participants were either practitioners/youth workers working with young refugees and asylum seekers on a grass-root level, or young people with refugee background and/or with lived experience of forced displacement. Many of them had both perspectives, as they have had lived migration experience and are now working with young refugees and migrants on grass-root level. Other than youth workers, the group consisted of lawyers, psychologists, people working within humanitarian aid, supporting young refugees. Some of them were experienced with NFE and the methodology, for many this was their first contact with this approach, VYRE and the CoE.

The participants were selected by the preparatory team based on their applications, especially considering their motivation and learning expectations. The selection took into account the balance between genders, age, and geographical regions, as well as diverse types of (lived) experiences, cultural backgrounds, and organisations. The Call for Participants was widely shared with VYRE's members (mailing list) & network, on VYRE's social media (Facebook and Instagram), and via team-members' relevant networks and groups.

2.4. VYRE and team members

VYRE - Voices of Young Refugees in Europe is a refugee-led network created by, with, and for refugees in the effort to strengthen the voices of individual refugees and refugee-serving organizations in Europe. Through Capacity-Building and Advocacy, VYRE promotes young refugees' rights & agency, and supports them in developing their competences to reinforce their meaningful participation in society.

The study session team consisted of four skilled and experienced trainers trained by the Council of Europe (TOTHRE and TRAYCE). Team members have extensive hands-on experience working with young migrants and refugees, with focus on the topics of migration, inclusion, youth participation and human rights education. The team members have been linked to VYRE for many years, either as former board members or as trainers cooperating with the organisation and working on previous study sessions, organised by VYRE in cooperation with the Youth Department.

3. Programme – inputs and discussions

The main issues discussed during the study session were the issues faced by young refugees in transition to adulthood, as well as the role of youth work and human rights education, and how these can support young people in this transition process. The study session focused on the grass-root level work and what participants can do in their local contexts. The programme was

based on non-formal education principles with participants heavily contributing with their experience and knowledge to all the programme points.

The study session followed the following flow:

Day 1 and 2 focused on setting the ground - the principles of non-formal education were introduced; participants had the opportunity to get to know each other. Additionally, a trust building activity focused on intercultural learning was implemented. As introduction to the topic, the focus was set on exploring the local contexts of the participants, as well as discovering the official Council of Europe documents linked to the topic and creating a connection between these two. On next days, participants got to explore different levels of supporting young refugees - from local NGO, through European level advocacy, to official interventions and frameworks Council of Europe uses. Finally, a focus on human rights education and how it can be used in the grass-root level work, has been set. On the last day participants got to share their own practices, formalise the created networks and plan their future activity, using different creative methods.

Additionally, contributions from highly relevant speakers - Amy STAPELTON (Pool of European Youth Researchers), Syrine REKHIS (VOCIFY) and Viktoria KARPATSKZI (Division on Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe) provided participants with interesting insights. For many participants, the visit to the BERNANOS Centre and meeting with its director Thomas WENDER, was the highlight of the programme, as it allowed to link the theoretical approaches and their own experiences, addressed during the sessions with a real-life example of supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood.

The programme also included the Council of Europe and Youth Departments work, as a big part of the study session focused on working with the 2019(4) Recommendation, as well as the Practical Guide "Turning 18 with Confidence". Furthermore, the preliminary examples of the review process of the 2019(4) Recommendation were presented and discussed.

Each of the days concluded with reflection groups, where participants were able to summarize the day, reflect on their learnings and provide some feedback to the team members. Each day a different reflection method was used, i.e. Dixit cards or Five Fingers Feedback. At the end of each reflection group meeting, participants wrote down their main learning of the day to put on the wall in the training room.

I - Day 1

Session 1.1 & 1.2. - Introduction

Session 1.1 and 1.2. were together considered as introducing the study session, the team, VYRE and the CoE Youth Department to the participants, as well as creating a base for the group-learning and group dynamics. Some of the participants got to know each other on the arrival day, however many of them arrived late, so this was the first exchange moment for them to meet each other. The session consisted of the following elements: welcoming, getting to know who is in the room and a short name game, presentation of the aim and objectives, as well as the programme

of the study session, short introduction to VYRE, as well as official welcome from the Council of Europe.



After a coffee break the introduction session continued. The participants, using elements of theatre, explored the non-formal education and its principles. It was relevant to introduce the methodology and separate it from formal and informal learning, as for many of the participants this was the first contact with NFE. This part of the session was concluded with a short input on NFE principles and making a bridge to the next elements of the programme. The second part of the

session focused on collecting Learning needs, Contributions and Expectations of the participants, who got a chance to first reflect on these by themselves and afterwards share with the group and the team members in a World Cafe style. The session was concluded with creating common grounds for cooperation and participation during the study session, which were developed based on participant's needs.

Session 1.3 - Team building

Following the first two sessions that laid the foundations for the study session, the day continued with a team-building activity designed to prepare participants for cooperative learning and collective exploration throughout the week. The objective of the session was three-fold: 1) to enable participants to get to know each other better in an informal and interactive way using creativity and collective problem-solving; 2) to explore the Youth Centre as a common learning environment; 3) to foster positive group dynamics and encourage active participation to lay the foundations for teamwork during the study session.

Working in small mixed groups, participants took part in a photo quest around the youth centre, completing creative challenges such as "Music in Action" (group photo with musical instruments) and "Human Rights in the Room" (photo of an object or space symbolising human rights for them).





Based on participants' feedback, the activity generated a lot of positive energy. It also allowed them to begin exploring their shared understandings and associations with the study session's themes (empowerment, solidarity, human rights) while practising teamwork and group decision-making.

Session 1.4 - Trust building and intercultural learning

This session deepened group cohesion and intercultural understanding by creating space for participants to reflect on their own identities and values while developing empathy for others. It built naturally on the previous team-building session and set the tone for the human rights and intercultural learning that followed in the programme.

Using the "Onion of Identity" activity from All Different – All Equal, participants explored the multiple layers of their identity. They individually filled in concentric-circle worksheets with aspects of who they are, later sharing in pairs or trios what they felt comfortable to disclose. The group then created a collective "onion garden," displaying their drawings in a gallery walk that visually represented the richness and diversity of the group.

The closing reflection connected personal sharing to broader themes of trust, diversity, and youth work with refugees, highlighting how recognising both differences and common ground is key to building safe and brave spaces. The impact of the session is highlighted by the fact that several participants mentioned it in their final evaluations as one of the most beneficial sessions of the week, and a few of them particularly appreciated the method and expressed interest in using it in their own youth work with young refugees.

II - Day 2

Session 2.1. - Challenges in Local Contexts

In this session, participants built on their understanding of the realities faced by young refugees in their transition to adulthood. The session began with a plenary discussion using Slido, where participants shared their thoughts on the main challenges young refugees encounter in their local contexts. This collective brainstorming transitioned into the main activity, which was the Problem

Tree exercise. Participants worked in small groups to analyse challenges they encountered. Using the Problem Tree, they identified the key issues, explored underlying causes, and mapped out consequences, creating a visual representation of the factors influencing young refugees' lives.

After completing their trees, participants put them on the wall and created a small gallery. They walked around observing and comparing the different groups' work. In the debriefing they noticed similarities, differences, and surprises in the patterns that emerged. They also identified youth work, human rights education, and community action as how to address these challenges.

To build on this, we emphasized the importance of shared understanding and key terminology to be able to better act on such matters. Following, in small groups, participants matched key terms such as refugee, asylum seeker, and integration with their definitions and reflected on how these concepts were understood and applied in their own contexts. The activity concluded with a short plenary input with reference to the UNHCR Glossary for these terms – a booklet which was referred to the participants as a reliable resource.

The session ended with dedicated time for reflection and question creation, as the next session was with Amy Stapleton, researcher and co-author of the Guide “Turning 18 with Confidence participants”.

Session 2.2. Turning 18 with Confidence: Research, Policy and Practice

In this session, participants built on the previous sessions' discussions by connecting the challenges faced by young refugees to existing local and European policy frameworks. The session began with a short group discussion where participants exchanged knowledge about local policies supporting young refugees in their transition to adulthood. This helped participants to warm up to the rest of the session.

The session continued with an input from guest speaker Amy Stapleton, researcher and co-author of the “Turning 18 with Confidence” guide. Amy presented key findings and policy recommendations from her work, offering a broader European perspective on the challenges young refugees face as they reach adulthood. Her presentation provided practical insights and policy-level knowledge, followed by a Q&A session where participants had the opportunity to ask questions and connect her research to their local realities.

The session concluded with a short plenary harvest where key insights from the input were shared, followed by a group picture with Amy. By the end, participants deepened their understanding of how research and policy connect to practice and gained the guidelines' insights in supporting young refugees' transitions to adulthood.



Session 2.3. - Exploring the Guide and the Recommendation

The session consisted of three key elements, first the 2019(4) Recommendation as well as preliminary results of the review of it, together with the Guide - Turning 18 with confidence were presented, creating a good base for the work done by the participants on the documents. As the second part of the session participants could choose one of the five thematic areas they wanted to work at:

1. Access to education
2. Access to healthcare and psychological support
3. Social services, accommodation and welfare benefits
4. Access to employment
5. Participation and decision-making

During group work they could explore the recommendation's chapter and link it to the realities of young people, as well as the role youth organisations play in applying it. The main focus was on the ways the recommendation can be useful in their daily practice and work. Additionally, the participants were supposed to identify the elements that from their perspective are missing from the official documents. The conclusion of the group work was presented in the plenary, so everyone got an overview of all the thematic areas.

As each of the participants could choose which topic area they work at, they had the possibility to explore topics and recommendations close to their work and practices. They appreciated this and recognised some of the things they know in their local context there. Many of the participants had not had any contact with the documents before and thus expressed the need and interest in exploring the document further, as they saw the potential added value it could bring to their grass-root level work.

Session 2.4. - Linking the documents to the local context

The objectives of this session were to identify gaps and opportunities between the documents' Recommendations and what is happening locally, and to reflect critically on the Guide "Turning 18 with Confidence" and Recommendation 2019(4). The session used silent discussion, a method many participants were not familiar with, however appreciated it, especially towards the end of an intensive day. Some of the questions discussed were:

- What resources, structures, or allies already exist in your context that could help implement the ideas presented in the official documents?
- What are the key challenges or obstacles we would need to overcome to make these Recommendations a reality?
- Which parts of the Guide/Recommendation feel most urgent or relevant for young refugees in your context?

For the second part of the session, participants worked in groups, identifying the main points collected during the silent discussion, which they afterwards presented in the plenary. This activity allowed us to dive even deeper into the content of the CoE documents and link them to the context

of the participants. It has been recognised as crucial in the study session’s program, as it created a base for participants’ future actions planning.

III - Day 3

Session 3.1. - Youth Work with Young Refugees on the European Level: Perspectives from the Council of Europe and VOICIFY

Day 3 opened with a focus on the European dimension of youth work with young refugees, linking local experiences explored at the beginning of the week to regional frameworks and cooperation. The session featured in-person contributions from Viktoria Karpatszki (Council of Europe Division on Migration and Refugees) and Sulkhan Chargeishvili (Youth Department), alongside an online input from Syrine Rekhis, President of VOICIFY.

Viktoria Karpatszki’s input provided an overview of CoE action in the field of migration and asylum, highlighting the Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum (2021–2025) and the forthcoming Action Plan on Migration and Refugees (2026–2029). In addition, Sulkhan Chargeishvili presented the preliminary findings of the review process of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood, which resonated strongly with the study session’s core theme.



The VOICIFY input offered a youth-led perspective, showcasing how young people with lived migration experience organise at the European level to advocate for participation, representation, and the recognition of their rights.

Following the presentations, participants worked in buzz groups to reflect on key messages and formulate questions for the speakers, which led to an active Q&A and exchange on cooperation between youth-led initiatives and institutional actors.

Session 3.2. - Youth Work Competences Framework for Working with Young Refugees

By the start of the session, we held a moving debate where participants explored key questions and dilemmas related to youth work and the competences needed (when working with young refugees and migrants). Some of these statements were:

- Youth work should primarily focus on empowering individuals rather than influencing social structures.
- Young refugees are seen as beneficiaries of help, but rarely as contributors to society, and youth work does little to change this.
- Youth workers working with young migrants and refugees need a different set of competences than the ones working with the broader society.

Through the statements, they reflected on the balance between attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge, as well as the role of youth work in empowering individuals and addressing structural issues. The debate also included participants reflecting on how to consider ethical responsibilities, the perception of young refugees in society, and whether working with this group requires a distinct competence framework or not. The format allowed everyone to physically express agreement or disagreement, and many participants joined the discussion, showing reflection, dialogue, and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives within the group.



Following the debate, a short input introduced the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio and the publication “The Contribution of Youth Work in the Context of Migration and Refugee Matters (2019)”. The input defined what youth work is, its key characteristics and functions, and how the identified competences align with these functions. Then, participants, divided into smaller groups to discuss the realities of youth work in their own contexts. Leading questions helped them share experiences about the role of youth workers, the specific competences required in their context when working with young refugees, and strategies for strengthening self-representation of young people with refugee and migrant backgrounds in practices.

The session concluded with the introduction to the Self-Assessment Form (SAF), explaining its purpose and how participants could use it individually to reflect on and develop their competences. An online version was shared for those wishing to explore it further.



By the end of the session, participants had examined the purpose and ethics of youth work, deepened their understanding of the competences required for inclusive practice, and reflected on their personal and professional growth as youth workers in intercultural and refugee-related contexts. The day closed with a short reflection using Blobs.

IV- Day 4

Session 4.1. - Human rights education in youth work with young refugees I

With a clearer understanding of the European context, Day 4 turned to human rights education, linking rights-based principles to practical methods for empowering young refugees in their daily realities. The first morning session introduced participants to HRE through an experiential learning activity adapted from the Council of Europe’s Compass manual. The session aimed to 1) encourage critical thinking about access to education as a human right; 2) help participants experience and reflect on non-formal education methods; 3) lay the groundwork for understanding HRE principles and their relevance to youth work.

In small groups, participants engaged in an adapted “Education for All?” memory game, matching global education facts with situations of young refugees facing barriers to education. The activity combined game playing with reflection, allowing participants to uncover inequalities and connect them to real human rights issues.

The debrief highlighted links between access to education and the transition to adulthood for young refugees, leading into a short input on human rights education: its definition, core instruments (such as the UN Declaration and the Council of Europe Charter), and the principles of learning about, for, and through human rights. During the evening reflection groups many participants pointed to the activity as one of the highlights of the day both in terms of content and method.



Session 4.2. - Human rights education in youth work with young refugees II

Building on the experiential learning activity from the previous session, this session focused on applying Human Rights Education (HRE) principles to real-life youth work practice. The aim was to help participants identify how rights-based approaches can support young refugees’ empowerment and transition to adulthood.

Participants worked in small groups analysing six real case studies from across Europe, featuring initiatives such as the VOICIFY Training and Mentorship Programme, study sessions at the European Youth Centres, and projects by Oxfam Italy, the Youth Social Rights Network, and other NGOs. The cases highlighted themes of advocacy, inclusion, leadership, access to housing and education, and participation in democratic life.

Groups discussed each case using guiding questions on HRE elements, empowerment strategies, and transferability to their contexts, followed by a plenary sharing. The session was positively evaluated by participants, but they expressed their need to have more time for discussing and receiving feedback on their ideas how the practices could be adapted to their context.

Sessions 4.3. & 4.4. - Visit to Bernanos Centre

After exploring the work of the Council of Europe and VOICIFY on Day 3 and getting some input on human rights education and practical examples of its implementation, the afternoon focused on grass-root level work. We visited the Bernanos Centre, where the NGOs director engaged in conversation with us and told the history of his organisation, as well as shed some light on how it is functioning. After receiving a very brief input on the organisation in the morning of day 4, participants prepared questions to discuss, many of which got covered during the input provided by Thomas. The exchange and discussion focused on grass-root level work and how much impact a small action can have. Issues faced by young refugees in transition to adulthood - housing, access to education or job market, and how one can support the young people. This element of the programme was perceived by many participants as the most inspirational one, as they could see how much impact one can make within the community, without many means, providing (what may seem) basic services to the ones in need, starting from zero and building up a system which can support many young people in need. Creating a link between the big institutional work done on the European level - when it comes to education or advocacy, and the local work done by a small NGO and understanding mechanisms behind their work, rounded up the study sessions programme, gave us a lot of hope and faith, and was considered one of the highlights - both by the participants and the team members.



V - Day 5

Session 5.1. - Open Space

In this session, participants were given the space to share their own good practices, projects, or experiences in an open format. The structure and timing were created using a timeslot sign-up flipchart earlier during the study session. After participants signed up, it was adapted to what they wanted to present, creating an open and collaborative atmosphere. The goal was to encourage good practice sharing and peer learning, allowing everyone to showcase their work or methods in a relevant and supportive environment.

The participants' sessions reflected the study session's main themes, connecting directly to youth work, migration, and intercultural competences. A participant presented a project on developing digital competences among young people, highlighting its relevance for inclusion and access to opportunities. Others offered an insightful input session on working with unaccompanied children, bringing attention to the specific needs and challenges of this vulnerable group. Other participants also contributed by sharing tools, methods, and reflections from their local contexts, enriching the discussion with practical and diverse perspectives. By the end of the session, participants exchanged practical insights, learned from each other's experiences, and strengthened their ties for collaboration within the group.

Session 5.2. - Future Thinking

The session started with a guided reflection where participants were guided through a meditation-esque journey to envision the future they wished to see and the actions they could take to bring it closer. The calm, guided thinking invited participants to imagine their desired future, not necessarily one that changes the world, but one that reflects the small, meaningful shifts they want to experience in their lives, communities, and work. They focused on what they would like to see more of, such as kindness, understanding, or collaboration, and carried a personal image or feeling from that vision back into the present moment. After the reflection, participants were given time for individual reflection questions, writing down their thoughts about the changes they envisioned and the actions they could take to make them real.



This connected into an artwork creation activity where participants created their imagined futures through art. Most of the participants chose to collage, but some of them also created paintings



and two participants even collaborated to create a dance. These artworks represented the impact of their own actions in shaping positive change.

The artworks were then displayed on the wall to create a gallery, allowing everyone to walk around, observe, and appreciate each other's visions. The session concluded with a short debriefing focusing on how participants could carry the lessons and inspiration from the study session into their daily and professional lives. By the end, participants had not only visualized the futures they hoped for but also connected those visions to concrete actions.

5.3. - EYF, networking and start of the reflection

Session 5.3. was the starting point of concluding of the study session. Participants received information about the European Youth Foundation and possible funding opportunities and engaged in a Q&A session with the foundation's representative. Afterwards they have received short input on possibilities to join VYRE and stay connected in the organisation's network. From this, creating a map of connections between the participants followed. In a pre-prepared flipchart, the participants had the possibility to connect their names with different topics, areas and methodology connected to the topics of the study session, to ensure they know who else is working on a similar area, or where to look for expertise among other participants. This element was supposed to directly contribute to the objective of fostering cooperation among organisations and participants.

After the networking element and getting familiar with other engagement possibilities, the rest of the session was devoted to starting the reflection on the learning of the week. To do so, the aim and objectives of the study session were presented again, and together with the participants, the team recreated the study session's programme, to refresh participants' memory on all the programme's elements. Afterwards, participants had the opportunity to go back to their fears, needs and contributions collected during the first session, and reflect on these individually with the following guiding questions: Which of my fears or needs from the beginning have shifted? What was a challenge I overcame, and what did I learn from it? The session concluded with participants sharing their reflection in smaller groups.

5.4. - Evaluation and closing

The final segment of the study session provided space for reflection, evaluation, and closure. Its objectives were to gather participants' reflections on the week, collect feedback for organisers,



and celebrate the learning journey while encouraging participants to apply their insights in their future work with young refugees.

The session combined individual reflection, collective evaluation, and symbolic closure. Participants first engaged in the “Postcard to Myself” exercise, reflecting on key learning moments and personal takeaways, and writing a message to themselves to revisit later. This was followed by the “River of Learning”, an informal and creative evaluation method where participants visualised their highlights, challenges, and what supported their learning using drawings and symbols.

The session continued with the formal evaluation through a Google Form, and concluded with the “Commitment Wall”, where participants wrote one

concrete action or intention for applying their learning after the study session. The study session concluded with the distribution of certificates and a group photo.



4. Results and conclusions

The key topics discussed were:

1. Challenges in the Transition to Adulthood: Examination of the main difficulties faced by young refugees as they move into adulthood, along with the underlying causes of these challenges.
2. Human Rights and Education Approaches: Exploration of how human rights and human rights education can support young refugees during their transition to adulthood.
3. The Role of Youth Work: Discussion of the role, functions, and required competences of youth workers when engaging with young refugees and facilitating their integration and personal development.
4. Good Practices at Multiple Levels: Presentation of effective initiatives and practices at local, national, and international levels that contribute to supporting young refugees in their journey to adulthood.
5. Institutional Perspectives: Overview of the work carried out by the Council of Europe and VOICIFY in supporting young refugees and the organisations assisting them. The session also explored how institutional frameworks and official documents align with, or differ from, the realities of on-the-groundwork.

Key Outcomes and Results:

- Recognizing the importance of a human rights-based approach in youth work with young refugees: Participants deepened their understanding of how human rights principles can guide practice and enhance impact.
- Identifying gaps between policy and lived reality: Through dialogue and exchange, participants explored discrepancies between official frameworks and the actual experiences of young refugees, highlighting diverse challenges across countries.
- Learning from inspiring practice: The visit to the Bernanos Centre showcased how meaningful impact can be achieved through commitment and creativity, even with limited resources.
- Empowerment of participants: Many felt capable of initiating positive change within their communities.
- Improved focus and programme flow: Streamlining the objectives to only four (instead of five or more) allowed for deeper exploration, avoiding superficial coverage and ensuring a coherent flow. This also enabled the team to manage time effectively and maintain clarity throughout the programme.

Main Learning Outcomes for Participants:

- **Deeper Insight into Refugee Challenges:** Participants gained a clearer understanding of the complex issues young refugees face during their transition to adulthood—particularly in relation to identity, education, and housing.
- **Understanding Non-Formal Education:** An introduction to the principles of non-formal education and guidance on how these can be adapted and applied in participants' own professional contexts.

- **Recognising Intersectionality:** Acknowledgment that many of the challenges are intersectional, sharing common root causes and consequences. Addressing them requires both collaborative strategies and context-specific, targeted interventions.
- **Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach:** Emphasis on the idea that “human rights are the basis of everything”—highlighting the importance of integrating human rights and human rights education into all aspects of work with young refugees.
- **Practical Support Strategies:** Development of actionable methods to support and empower young refugees effectively in their personal and social development.
- **Impact Without Extensive Resources:** Reflection on how meaningful change can be achieved even with limited financial means, reinforcing that dedication and creativity can significantly improve the lives of young people in need.

Furthermore, by engaging new participants who had not previously taken part in VYRE activities, the study session successfully expanded the network’s reach. Many of these new participants expressed a clear interest in future involvement, both as active members and as contributors to VYRE’s ongoing work. Additionally, potential cooperation partners were identified among the organisations represented by participants, opening opportunities for future collaboration.

The topic and conclusions of the study session are strongly aligned with VYRE’s strategic priorities and will inform the planning of future actions and initiatives, based on the needs identified by both young refugees and youth workers directly supporting them.

Contribution to the Council of Europe priorities

A substantial part of the study session was dedicated to exploring the work of the Council of Europe (CoE) and its Youth Department. Participants engaged with key CoE documents and resources, which formed the backbone of the programme's structure and methodology.

Key components included:

- **Working with Core Documents:** A big focus was placed on the 2019(4) Recommendation and the Practical Guide “Turning 18 with Confidence.” These materials guided the participants’ learning and discussions throughout the study session.
- **Presentation of Revision Process:** the educational advisor presented the preliminary results of the revision process of the 2019(4) Recommendation, linking this work directly to the objectives and overall content of the study session.
- **Use of CoE Educational Resources:** The programme was built upon various Council of Europe resources, including adapted activities from Compass and All Different – All Equal. A dedicated session on Youth Work and Youth Workers’ Competences, based on the CoE Youth Work Portfolio, was developed and delivered to introduce participants to these frameworks and demonstrate their practical application.
- **Guest Speaker Input:** Viktoria Karpatszki, representing the Division on Migration and Refugees, presented the Division’s work and established clear links to the study session’s topic and objectives.

This study session contributed directly to two central priorities of the Youth Department: Young People's Access to Rights and Living Together in Peaceful and Inclusive Societies. Participants developed a deeper understanding of these priorities, with a strong focus on the rights of young refugees in transition to adulthood and the challenges they face in accessing those rights. For participants with migration or refugee backgrounds, the study session also served as a valuable tool for understanding and navigating their own rights.

Learning in the study session and take-aways

Introducing the distinctions between formal, informal, and non-formal education, as well as discussing the principles of non-formal education (NFE) at the beginning of the study session, was a crucial component of the programme. For some participants, this was their first direct encounter with the methodology. This introduction had a positive impact, helping participants set realistic expectations and, from the team's perspective, enhancing their active engagement throughout the session.

The field visit was one of the programme's highlights. Experiencing real-life examples and engaging with professionals working in similar contexts proved highly beneficial. The visit to the Bernanos Centre reinforced a powerful message: meaningful impact does not require large-scale funding or extensive resources. This takeaway was particularly valuable for participants working at the grassroots level.

The feedback received in several forms from participants was very positive. Most objectives were fully achieved, and participants appreciated the variety of methods, the supportive learning environment, and the sense of community fostered by both facilitators and peers. They described the experience as empowering, motivating, and enriching; helping them acquire new tools and knowledge relevant to the topic.

Participants reported a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by young refugees, as well as the resources and strategies available to support them. Key highlights included the visit to the Bernanos Centre and the inclusive atmosphere throughout the study session. Many emphasized the value of learning about human rights education (HRE) and the connections drawn between theoretical rights and the lived realities of young refugees.

5. Conclusion

The study session "*Empowerment in Action: Young Refugees' Journey to Adulthood*" provided a vital and much-needed space for reflection, learning, and collective action at a time when the realities of young refugees in Europe remain marked by uncertainty, structural obstacles, and fragmented support systems. Over the course of five intensive days, participants engaged deeply with the principles of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4, examined the Practical Guide *Turning 18 with Confidence*, and connected these policy frameworks to lived experiences and frontline youth work. This process revealed both the strengths and limitations of current approaches while affirming the essential role of youth workers, youth-led structures, and young refugees themselves in shaping more rights-based and coherent responses. The field visit was a highlight of the

program, both from the participants and team's perspective. It was beneficial to see real-life examples and talk to others working in the same area. From this specific visit to the Bernanos Centre, the main message and take-away was that there is no need for huge fundings and resources to make a real impact, which is an important conclusion to take home for our participants working at the grass-root level.

The participants highlighted the variety of methods and the supportive space created by both team members and other participants. They saw it as an overall positive experience which helped them learn, grow and get to know new tools, methods and gain knowledge on the topic. Participants mentioned feeling empowered, motivated, inspired and fulfilled, as well as gaining a deeper understanding of challenges faced by young refugees but also what tools and resources are there to empower them. Furthermore, for participants with migrant or refugee backgrounds, this study session served as a valuable resource in supporting them to understand how they can support and engage more actively in their communities. Also, this study session offered the opportunity for youth workers and young refugee leaders and activists to get acquainted with the learning activities of the Council of Europe Youth Department and its approaches.

Based on feedback gathered during the closing session of DAY 5, and according to the final online evaluation, the following key learning outcomes were identified:

- Participants better understood the challenges young refugees in transition to adulthood face, especially in connection to their identity, education, housing
- Participants experienced and gained a deep understanding of non-formal education, its principles and how it can be adapted and used in their work and contexts
- A big take-away from the study session is that the challenges faced by young refugees are intersectional, sharing common root causes and consequences requiring both joint strategies and context-specific, targeted responses.
- Participants gained a perspective on a human rights-based approach and human rights education - In the evaluation form one of the participants wrote: "Human rights are the basis of everything" as their main learning of the study session
- Learning and understanding practical strategies for supporting and empowering young refugees
- The visit to Bernanos Centre and other initiatives presented during the session led to, for many of us, the most relevant conclusion: Even without many financial resources, one can make an impact and change the lives of young people who are in need of support

Appendices

Final Programme

Sunday, 14th of September 2025

Arrival of participants

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Welcome Evening

Monday, 15th of September 2025

09:30 Introduction

Overview of the programme and objectives of the study session

Getting to know each other

Welcome and Official Opening with *Stefano DOMINIONI*, Executive Director of the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg

11:00 Coffee Break

11:30 Introduction to the non-formal education

Expectations, learning needs and contributions of participants

Group Agreement

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Team building

16:00 Coffee Break

16:30 Intercultural learning and trust building

18:00 Reflection Groups

19:00 Dinner

Tuesday, 16th of September 2025

09:30 Key terminology

Local contexts and challenges in youth work with young refugees

11:00 Coffee Break

11:30 Turning 18 with Confidence: Research, Policy and Practice with Amy

STAPELTON, Pool of European Youth Researchers

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Exploring Council of Europe's standards and resources on Turning 18 with Confidence

16:00 Break

16:30 Linking the documents to the local context: Youth work with young refugees in transition to adulthood

18:00 Reflection Groups

19:00 Dinner

Wednesday, 17th of September 2025

09:30 The work of Council of Europe and partners on supporting young refugees with Syrine REKHIS (online), VOCIFY, Viktoria KARPATSKZI, Division on Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe and Sul Khan CHARGEISHVILI, Youth Department, Council of Europe

11:00 Coffee Break
11:30 Youth work competences framework for working with young refugees
Presentation of the Revised Council of Europe Portfolio for Youth Workers
13:00 Lunch break

Free afternoon

Thursday, 18th of September 2025

09:30 Human rights education (HRE) in youth work with young refugees I
11:00 Coffee Break
11:30 HRE in youth work with young refugees II
13:00 Lunch
14:30 Youth work and HRE with young refugees – visit to a local NGO in Strasbourg
[Centre Bernanos](#)
16:00 Coffee Break
16:30 Youth work and HRE with young refugees – visit to a local NGO in Strasbourg
[Centre Bernanos](#)
Closing of the day at EYCS
18:00 Reflection Groups
19:00 Dinner

Friday, 19th of September 2025

09:30 Open space
11:00 Coffee Break
11:30 Future thinking I
13:00 Lunch
14:30 Future thinking II
Presentation of the opportunities by the European Youth Foundation with Olga BALTAG
Opportunities to stay involved in VYRE
Reflection on the learning of the week
16:00 Coffee Break
16:30 Evaluation and Closing
19:00 Dinner

Saturday, 20th of September 2025

Departure of participants

Aim and objectives of the study session “Empowerment in Action: Young Refugees’ Journey to Adulthood”

Aim: The study session aims to improve participants' competences in supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood through youth work and human rights education.

Objectives:

1. To create space for sharing about experiences, local contexts and challenges faced by young refugees in transition to adulthood.
2. To explore how the Recommendation 2019(4) “Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood” and the Practical Guide “Turning 18 with Confidence” can support youth work with young refugees in transition to adulthood.
3. To develop intercultural awareness and understanding of the key principles of human rights education in youth work with young refugees.
4. To foster cooperation among organisations and participants and collect examples of good practices with relevance to young refugees’ transition to adulthood.