

# BETWEEN INSECURITY AND HOPE

## Reflections on youth work with young refugees



Youth Knowledge #24

### Youth Partnership

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# BETWEEN INSECURITY AND HOPE

## Reflections on youth work with young refugees

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## Preface

# Youth work with young refugees – An enriching transformation and ongoing transition

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*Tanya Basarab*

In 2016, under the objectives of social inclusion and youth work recognition, the EU–Council of Europe youth partnership took inclusion, rights and participation of young refugees as a transversal theme in its work programme and began to explore more closely the situation of young refugees and what role youth work can play in their lives. This focus was an initial response to the increasing negative portrayal in the media of refugees (particularly young male refugees, representing the majority of those arriving in western Europe, mostly through Turkey), and the increased polarisation of society towards the role, place and rights of those young refugees upon arrival or in transit across Europe.

The EU–Council of Europe youth partnership launched a series of research initiatives and organised workshops on the inclusion and participation of young refugees in society and the specific role youth work plays. The initiatives involved a mix of stakeholders, including young refugees, policy makers, researchers, NGOs working on refugee rights and integration, and youth work practitioners, aiming to bring evidence on the realities of young refugees, the realities of youth workers and how youth work makes a contribution to the lives of young refugees.

The seminar *Journeys to a New Life* (November 2016) looked deeper into the findings of those research initiatives, developing messages on supporting youth work with young refugees. The key messages of the workshop highlighted that more research was needed to understand the inclusion processes, the role youth NGOs and youth work as a whole can play in those processes; specific dimensions of youth work with young refugees also needed further debunking, including how to approach trauma, what kind of support youth workers themselves need, which (if any) methods work better, intercultural and human rights dimensions, hate speech, xenophobia and discrimination, and the mental and physical well-being of young refugees, particularly during long periods of waiting for decisions of authorities about their legal situation.

The workshops also highlighted the importance of self- and peer-empowerment as well as initiatives of advocacy by groups of young refugees themselves: “nothing about us without us”, a motto often heard in the equality and anti-discrimination sector, was also echoed by representatives of refugee organisations. Furthermore, engaged youth workers and organisations shared frustration at how bureaucratic

processes were impacting the lives of these young people, dehumanising them and denying them the possibility to enjoy their rights and dignity. Ten researchers from countries along the refugee route explored in depth the tensions between the strengths of youth work and its limits in supporting young refugees, youth work in humanitarian situations, intercultural dialogue and the invisible young refugee women, hate speech and attacks on refugees and youth workers themselves as well as the mental health implications of “waitinghood”. Participants also called for further knowledge and supporting evidence in understanding the challenges young refugees face in Europe and the need to provide knowledge-based reflections and arguments for youth workers who engage with these groups. All of these papers and the policy recommendations from that workshop can be found on the seminar page.<sup>1</sup>

These reflections continued in 2017 with two learning workshops on the youth sector’s practices for the integration and participation of young refugees, on the basis of local practices from France, Germany and Thessaloniki, Greece. These workshops looked at inclusion and integration practices in these three countries and the extent to which the policy context supports educational, employment and other integration perspectives. An emphasis was placed on how young refugees themselves experience those realities. The 2016 expert seminar identified a number of salient themes, such as access to rights, outreach to young refugee women, participation and intercultural dialogue in the new communities, mental health and insecurities due to legal status.

The conclusions of the workshops found that youth work is definitely a support for individual empowerment, a safe space for young refugees to be young and also to be supported in the process of integration in host societies. It helps young refugees in developing their confidence, resilience and trust and in building positive relationships, also with their peers. Youth work with young refugees requires flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity and is linked with the aim of integrating young refugees into society.

Youth work can offer a space for young refugees to express themselves and participate in society. As it is a space for them to voice their ideas, concerns and aspirations, it can also be a space to uncover and value the resources that young refugees bring to society.

Youth work is also an important stakeholder in the necessary cross-sectoral cooperation between different services involved in young refugees’ integration (legal, education, housing, employment, etc.). Youth work is complementary to other services.

Youth workers need specific support to tackle complex situations when working with young refugees, thematically looking at intercultural learning, mental health and trauma, involving young women refugees and addressing other intersectionalities, access to social rights and participation in local life. Youth work practitioners also need space to exchange practices and thematic capacity building on the above-mentioned themes.

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1. EU-Council of Europe youth partnership website, page on Journeys to a New Life expert seminar, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/refugees-seminar?inheritRedirect=true>, accessed 22 September 2018.



International co-operation and peer learning can act as a support for practitioners' motivation and for the improvement of the quality of their work. Opportunities such as these workshops also counter the feeling of isolation of practitioners and support their reflective practice.

More resources and policy support should be in place for youth work interventions with young refugees on the themes of participation and inclusion and an ongoing reflection on how refugee-led initiatives enrich European youth work traditions is needed. Further information about these workshops can be accessed on the web page dedicated to them.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout these meetings and through an open survey, the youth partnership collected and analysed examples of youth work practice in a publication called "Step-by-step together – Support, Tips, Examples and Possibilities for youth work with young refugees". The publication is a practical handbook for youth workers and others involved in projects with young refugees. It also includes examples of practices, with information on how such practices could be adapted to other contexts. The publication focuses on youth participation and inclusion as key dimensions in building inclusive societies and, at the same time, creating an enabling environment for young refugees to be actors in their personal and community development. The publication explores the four themes from the workshops: intercultural learning, access to social rights, young women refugees, youth participation and mental health and trauma.<sup>3</sup>

The partner institutions have also put forward policy proposals targeting young refugees. The Council of Europe adopted the Action Plan on protecting refugee and migrant children,<sup>4</sup> the statutory bodies on youth took up further the idea of focusing on the support young refugees require in their transition to adulthood. The EU–Council of Europe youth partnership has contributed to that initiative by carrying out a literature review of definitions, challenges and initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

The EU member states launched an Expert Group on youth work with young refugees with a mandate to develop policy recommendations and practical examples until the end of 2018. By then, the Expert Group should submit its results for adoption to one of the Council meetings. The youth partnership contributes to the Expert Group with all the knowledge and examples of case studies gathered so far on this topic. Through the Erasmus+ programme, the EU is also supporting a large strategic partnership project, *Becoming Part of Europe*, aiming to support more concretely youth work with migrant young people in Europe.

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2. EU-Council of Europe youth partnership page on the learning workshops: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/refugees-workshops?inheritRedirect=true>, accessed 22 September 2018.
  3. Council of Europe and European Commission, June 2018: [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7110668/FINAL+step+by+step+together\\_reduced\\_size.pdf/8103c431-afc3-f978-9117-20776950bedf](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7110668/FINAL+step+by+step+together_reduced_size.pdf/8103c431-afc3-f978-9117-20776950bedf), accessed 22 September 2018.
  4. Council of Europe, [www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/council-of-europe-action-plan-on-protecting-refugee-and-migrant-children-adopted?desktop=false](http://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/council-of-europe-action-plan-on-protecting-refugee-and-migrant-children-adopted?desktop=false), accessed 22 September 2018.
  5. EU-Council of Europe youth partnership website: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9488616/Refugees+transition+to+adulthood.pdf/9a064fa1-ee97-be3f-84fd-5a27d85e15a6>, accessed 22 September 2018.

Finally, this Youth Knowledge book brings theoretical references and reflections on the experiences of young refugees and the way they reconcile personal hope with the tensions and cultural clashes within their host societies. It also explores learning from practices and their theoretical underpinnings around the role of youth work in the inclusion of young refugees. The book aims to be a reference for youth field policy makers, practitioners, researchers and all stakeholders working on inclusion, access to rights and the participation of young refugees through youth work.

The messages from the 2016 seminar formed the focus of the book and we are happy today to bring you the results with a mix of contributions from the three corners of the triangle in the youth field – research, policy and practice. Without a doubt all the contributors bring a very critical engagement with the reality of young refugees in today's Europe, where tolerance levels of negative phenomena such as human rights violations, hate speech and discrimination are on the rise. However, there is also a strong consolidation of those willing to engage in a human rights-based youth work practice that ensures safe space for being young, no matter who, no matter where.

We hope this book as a whole, and each individual contribution, will inspire youth policy makers and practitioners to take on board the complex realities of unfinished transitions and borderlands experiences and create a positive environment for an enriched and transformed youth work for the inclusion of young refugees in their host communities.

## Introduction

# Setting the context: some critical reflections and the contributions

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*Maria Pisani*

**F**or decades the Mediterranean Sea has served as a key route for refugees trying to reach Europe. The number of arrivals has varied over the years, depending on conditions in the country of origin, and in transit, the geopolitical context, and also EU policies (Human Rights Watch 2015). Since the turn of the century the numbers have steadily increased, but the phenomenon generally received very little international media coverage, the EU external border controls essentially ensuring that refugees remained contained in a transit country or at the EU external border states (Pisani 2016). The situation changed dramatically in 2015, wherein more than a million migrants requested asylum in Europe. Fleeing Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea and other war-stricken, violent and impoverished states, the refugees embarked on a desperate journey in search of safety, protection, and the possibility to fulfil their hopes for the future.

For more than a decade, the vast majority of refugees and migrants making the deadly journey across the Mediterranean were young people. This trend has remained consistent. In 2015 alone 96 000 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the EU. In the first half of 2017, 72% of the children who made the journey were unaccompanied or separated children (UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM 2017). Alarming as they are, these statistics just give us a part of the picture; the somewhat limited legal binary of “minor/adult” conceal the much broader categories of adolescents and youth. In November of 2017, the bodies of 26 young Nigerian women were recovered from the Mediterranean (Reuters 2017). Here’s the thing: Deaths in the Mediterranean have become the “norm”; such tragedies barely make headline news nowadays – another nameless face with no story. In 2015, Europol reported that 10 000 unaccompanied minors had gone missing from reception centres in Europe. In 2016, the figure jumped from 2% to 7% (Missing Children Europe 2017), and yet again the story no longer makes headline news. Fleeing war and poverty, young people are still dying to reach Europe. Thousands of young people remain “missing” in Europe. At the border, the young body is illegal first, child second; the enforcement of border patrols is prioritised over the states’ international and national legal obligations vis-à-vis the rights of the child. The vulnerable “child” in need of protection can be juxtaposed against the threat of the “illegalised” young body; the contradictions between these two extreme representations of young refugees come to the fore, negating the agency and contested politics of border crossings (Mainwaring 2016).

Beyond needless loss of life, there are other dangers resulting from the absence of legal migration routes and the closure of borders. Such policies have made for a lucrative business for smugglers, traffickers and other criminal networks. Given the option between remaining stranded at the border “waiting”, or seeking asylum elsewhere, many young people will go with the “elsewhere”, thus remaining in an undocumented and/ or irregular status, transiting through different countries. These secondary movements occur for many reasons, including, *inter alia*, limitations on availability and standards of protection between different member states, family separation or wanting to reach extended family and communities, risk of *refoulement* (being sent back home), labour market conditions and living standards. For those who apply for asylum, the decision is taken by the national authorities within the Member State (European Parliament 2017). Those who qualify for protection will be granted either refugee status, subsidiary protection or other kinds of protection status based on national law. Those who are denied protection face deportation, in the case of minors, their (albeit often neglected) rights according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are lost on transition to adulthood, thus exposing them to new risks, including deportation. Notions of youth and adolescence are absent from the legal minor/adult binary.

The humanitarian crisis unfolding at, and within, the European borders is a youth issue. For those of us working in the youth field the moral imperative to understand and to act cannot be more pressing.

Throughout 2016, the EU–Council of Europe youth partnership engaged in a number of actions geared towards exploring the situation of young refugees in Europe, and the role of youth work in their integration. It is this background that served as the impetus for this book. Preliminary explorative analyses (for example Bello 2016) suggests that the “youth work” and “young refugees” encounter has been very limited. There is much work to be done in strengthening and developing this relationship and learning more about the challenges, the strengths, and the numerous ways of moving forward. This issue of Youth Knowledge Books seeks to create a space in which to critically engage with the issue of young refugees and youth work, and to further advance a dialogue between policy, research and practice.

Young refugees, youth policy makers and youth workers do not exist in a vacuum. The day-to-day lived realities of young refugees are intrinsically linked to broader processes and relationships, including geopolitics, globalisation and neoliberal economic policies. While youth work and policy may respond at a local level, our response must also be informed by an understanding of the global, regional and national contexts and their interactions.

## The “refugee crisis”?

The term “refugee” is not new to any of us; as long as humans have walked this earth, history has recounted stories of persons fleeing their homes in search of safety. The 1951 Geneva Convention was adopted in response to mass displacement that occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War. In the years that followed, it was clear that new refugee situations continued to occur. In 1967 the UN added a new protocol; the new definition would be universal, applying to anyone who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of

his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (1951 Geneva Convention, Article 1A (2)).

The Geneva Convention lies at the heart of contemporary international refugee protection. This vital legal document not only defines the term “refugee”, but also sets out the rights of displaced persons, and the legal obligations of states to protect them. In recognition of the evolving nature of forced migration, complementary forms of protection, including relevant international, regional and national instruments (for example Subsidiary Protection and Humanitarian Protection, to name but two) have been developed in order to protect those who fall outside the scope of the convention or its protocol but cannot be returned home for various reasons.

We are living in particular times, representing the greatest number of displaced people on record. Of the displaced, 22.5 million are refugees, over half of them are under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2017). Contrary to popular beliefs in the EU and also beyond, in 2016 developing regions around the world hosted 84% of the world’s refugees, and 28% of the global total are living in the world’s poorest countries (ibid.).

These numbers stand in stark contrast with the dominant discourse emerging on refugees and forced migrants entering the European Union, and surely demonstrate the need for some perspective in the way the topic is discussed, and addressed. Such disparities also challenge us to critically reflect when terms such as “crisis” are bandied about. Bello (2016) has argued that the context might best be described as a “human rights crisis”, the refugee arrivals serving as a “litmus test” for the European Union’s asylum policy, and the human rights record for transit and host countries within and beyond the EU.

The European Commission’s response to the increasing number of arrivals has essentially revolved around a number of – somewhat incongruous – policies. Framed as “saving lives”, but couched firmly within a security framework, a key policy response was to break the smuggling industry by increasing external border security and supporting Libyan border patrols (European Commission 2017a). The externalisation of Fortress Europe to the Libyan coast forms part of a concerted attempt to stop boats from departing, thus effectively also denying access to protection. The human rights violations experienced by refugees and migrants in Libya are well documented. In the absence of safer alternatives to access protection and safety, such policy decisions have, it has been argued, exposed refugees to more violence, made the journeys even more dangerous, and also contributed to loss of life (Human Rights Watch 2016). Most certainly, in the “balancing act” the European Commission seeks to maintain between “securing borders” and “upholding international commitments and values” (European Commission 2015), the scales are tipped in favour of borders and exclusion.

Another key policy response is the relocation of refugees among the member states, thus providing protection to those who qualify, and also alleviating pressure on the Italian and Greek asylum systems (European Commission 2017a). The relocation mechanism provides for the distribution of persons in need of international protection and was established according to the specific context of each member state.

Progress on this process has been slow (by the end of 2017, less than a third of the total number committed) and has faced significant resistance by some member states (ibid.).

Ongoing actions to stop the refugee arrivals across the Mediterranean has had mixed results. Following the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 there has been a significant drop in the number of refugee arrivals on the Eastern Mediterranean route (ibid.). The same cannot be said for the Central Mediterranean route, however, where a humanitarian crisis continues, albeit largely ignored. The deadliest route in the world, the stretch of sea separating Europe from the coast of North Africa continues to claim the lives of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in their desperate efforts to reach safety, and to fulfil their hopes for a better life (Missing Migrants 2017).

At the height of the European “refugee crisis” media coverage was prolific, reporting on the desperate situation in camps and at borders all across Europe. The way refugees were received, in terms of political and public discourse, policy responses and service provision by state and non-state actors varied within and across EU member states (Bello 2016). Border violence, racism and far-right discourse and the reinstatement of internal EU borders in an effort to “contain” the movements can be juxtaposed with images of crowds embracing refugees at train stations, armies of volunteers immediately responding to the humanitarian crisis, and slogans such as “refugees welcome” proliferating across social media.

The external dimension of EU asylum and the securitisation of borders stands in contrast to the European Commission’s commitments as set out in the EU Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy and reaffirmed in the 2016 Action Plan. The Commission reminds the member states of their “legal, moral and economic imperatives to upholding the EU’s fundamental rights, values and freedoms” and that the “successful integration of their-country nationals is a matter of common interest to all Member States” (European Commission 2016). The consistent and clear common policy as set out in the European Agenda on Migration (European Commission 2015) remains tenuous at best. The EU and its member states have strengthened efforts to prevent arrivals by offloading responsibility for migration control to countries outside the EU’s borders, including Libya (a country that has not signed the Refugee Convention). This was happening despite irrefutable evidence of violence against refugees and migrants detained by Libyan authorities (see for example Amnesty International, 2017). Individual member states’ commitments to meet their international and ethical obligations, while working together in accordance with the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility remain disparate and, all too often, elusive. Attempts to “relocate” refugees across member states has served to reinstate the national borders, the “Dublin Rules” enacting the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

Fuelled by sensationalist and often alarmist media headlines, a critical element of the refugee crisis relates to the discourse adopted by far-right actors who framed the arrival of refugees as dangerous, exploiting a sense of insecurity by conflating immigration with terrorism and presenting both as a threat to the very fabric of European societies. At the end of 2017, the main concerns of Europeans remained immigration

and terrorism, at 39% and 38% respectively; both concerns are mentioned more than double that of any other issue (European Commission 2017c). These statistics are not to be ignored, but do require interrogation. At a national level, the management and distribution of refugees has become a political minefield. The political discourse on the securitisation of borders and the rise of the far right are distinct, but inter-related. The transition to a multi-ethnic Europe has been marked by tensions, and young Muslim male refugees in particular, framed as the contemporary “folk devil”, have become the target of “moral panic” reflected in a pervasive sense of fear of the “illegalized dark other” (Pisani 2016). This, within a broader sense of insecurity: Brexit, terrorist attacks, and indeed the challenges brought about by globalisation (including migration and refugee movements) are just some of the issues that the European Union, and those who call it home, must navigate and negotiate as it evolves and responds to these changes. Recovery from the 2008 economic crisis has been slow, and the consequences are still hard felt, and far-reaching. The rewards reaped by neoliberal economic policies are not proportionate: the gap between the haves and the have-nots is real and growing, and this is felt at a global level, at a national level, and also within our local communities. Across Europe, the effects of the economic crisis, including unemployment and austerity measures, discrimination, poverty and social exclusion, have impacted the lives of young people in particular. As noted by Schild et al. (2017), these are precarious times for many young people across Europe, so how will young refugees fare within a context that is marked by increasing demand and competition for limited resources? How will member states, and youth work providers, respond to these contemporary challenges?

In 2016, EU member states agreed on a European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018. The work plan strengthened youth work and cross-sectoral co-operation in six key areas, namely:

- ▶ increased social inclusion of all young people, taking into account the underlying European values;
- ▶ stronger participation of all young people in democratic and civic life in Europe;
- ▶ easier transition of young people from youth to adulthood, in particular the integration into the labour market;
- ▶ support to young people’s health and well-being, including mental health;
- ▶ contribution to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the digital era for youth policy, youth work and young people;
- ▶ contribution to responding to the opportunities and challenges raised by the increasing numbers of young migrants and refugees in the European Union (Council of the European Union 2015).

In making this pledge, the member states also committed to placing more emphasis on particular groups, namely, young people at risk of marginalisation, young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), and young people with a migrant background, including newly arrived immigrants and young refugees.

The priorities set out in the EU Work Plan for Youth demonstrate a commitment to enact a policy that benefits young Europeans and young refugees alike – this inclusionary approach stands in stark contrast to the exclusionary approach enacted at the EU

external border, and by individual member states, and as such, raises pertinent, but important questions. How, for example, does this inclusive approach correspond to the “race to the bottom” wherein member states are watering down rights, modifying legislation and adopting different actions to shift the responsibility onto other member states, potentially compromising access to basic human rights (ENOC 2016)? To what degree should the work plan, as stated in the document “contribute to the overarching priorities of the EU’s security ... agenda[s]”? How do “European values” measure up in relation to the EU external border policies, the detention of migrant children and, more broadly, human rights obligations? How has the fortification and racialisation of the national border (both literally and metaphorically) shaped the political and social identity of the nation? Of young refugees? How might the non-citizen migrant/refugee/undocumented or irregular migrant engage in the democratic process? How are youth workers to respond when the transition to adulthood is marked with a loss of rights and new risks, including deportation? How do the commitments taken at a European level pan out at a national level? How do public attitudes towards migration shape youth policy and youth work practice?

Certainly, individual member states are marked by their own historical, political, economic, cultural and social narrative that feeds into political and popular discourse, and also national youth policy and youth work practice. To what degree will youth work respond to the needs, priorities and expectations established at a national policy level? As directed by funding mechanisms? In relation to other policy fields? As determined through dialogue with young refugees? Indeed, “why” and “how” youth work is to engage with young refugees will be determined by how we define youth work, the key principles and values that drive youth work practices, and the theoretical underpinnings of our work.

## A note on terminology

Youth workers who are working with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants will be familiar with what, particularly at the beginning, will be experienced as an overwhelming plethora of legal terminology that accompanies the field. Indeed, a number of contributors to this book highlight the need for youth workers to have (at the least) a basic understanding of the different legal terms and processes that accompany the field. Such knowledge is critical since, in the case of the non-citizen, access to rights cannot be assumed. For example, in the case of young asylum seekers and irregularly residing migrants, the transition to adulthood is often accompanied by a loss of rights. Semantics matter, and some terms must be debunked from the outset. The term “illegal immigrant” does not exist in international law – a human being cannot be “illegal”.

For the sake of clarity, we provide some of the key terms and working definitions below.

**Migrant** is any person who is not living in their usual place of residence. This may be within a state, and also includes persons who are crossing, or have crossed an international border. An individual is a migrant, regardless of legal status and the reason for leaving. As such, the term includes, but is not limited to, asylum seekers, expats, refugees and undocumented migrants.



**Legal status** refers to the status of the individual in a migration context according to law. For example, this would include asylum seeker, refugee, irregularly residing, undocumented, among others.

**Asylum seeker** is an individual who is seeking international protection. An application for asylum will lead to a process wherein the claim is considered by the country to which the application is made. There are a number of possible outcomes, depending on the applicant country, including refugee status, subsidiary protection, rejection, among others. Within the EU, the asylum process is regulated by international agreements such as the 1951 Geneva Convention, the Dublin Regulation, and national law. Not every asylum seeker will be granted protection, but every refugee will go through the asylum process. Applicants whose claim for asylum is rejected and who are not granted some form of protection face deportation.

**Refugee** is a person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (Article 1(A)(2), 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as modified by the 1967 Protocol).

**Unaccompanied minor** refers to a person below the legal age of majority who is not in the company of an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for them, including parents and guardians.

**Undocumented migrant** refers to a non-national who enters or remains in a country without the necessary documentation. This may include a person who enters a country illegally without legal documentation, or using fraudulent documentation. It also refers to those people who enter legally but remain beyond the authorised time frame.

## Youth work

Across Europe, from the inner cities to villages, youth work initiatives are being developed and implemented – initiatives that are as diverse as they are plentiful. From the shorelines of the Mediterranean, to the virtual world that knows no borders, youth workers remain committed to their work – and yet, defining youth work remains a challenge, hard to pin down. Different actors, different agendas, different practices: from pan-national organisations such as the European Commission, to national youth agencies, youth workers and young people themselves, youth work in Europe is informed by “different realities and underlying theories, concepts and strategies” (Schild, Vanhee and Williamson 2017: 3). So does anything go? To respond in the affirmative would be to tread on dangerous ground. We do know that youth work can easily be instrumentalised for competing interests – and within the context described above, this may have grave implications for youth work practice, and critically, the lives of young refugees.

We do know that the needs and expectations of young refugees in Europe are diverse, multifaceted, often complex, and many. We also know that youth work cannot be “everything”, and cannot respond to all of these needs. As a working definition we

may be guided by the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (Committee of Ministers 2017)

But perhaps this definition does not go far enough. What are the core principles and values that inform youth work provision and practice? What does youth work stand for? If youth work stands for “nothing”, then it will fall for anything.

There are those who have argued that a shared understanding of youth work remains elusive because the theoretical foundations simply are not there (Siurala 2017; Williamson 2015). Theory and practice are not “stand-alones”, but evolve, inform and influence each other. While practice involves the “doing”, theory provides the possibility for evidence-based understanding, reflection, and importantly, a standpoint that does not claim to be value-neutral and apolitical. Theory then provides more than a foundation, it is the backbone, the critical structural support that keeps us upright and, to extend the idiom, courageous in the face of populist politics and injustice. If youth work is to be understood as values-based, then these values must be articulated clearly and unapologetically – a human rights-based approach, equality of access, participatory and inclusive, responsive to the expressed needs and demands of young people, and on their own terms – values that must not be limited to buzzwords or tokenistic gestures, but must go to the very heart of youth work policy and practice.

The arrival of young refugees brings new challenges and opportunities – and throughout Europe, youth workers, policy makers and researchers have responded with determination, and a commitment to make a positive difference in the lives of these young people, the communities they live in, and broader society. It has been said that the only constant in life is change. We live in an increasingly globalised world; the planet we call home is experiencing rapid change, integrating people, cultures, economic markets and nations. And, paradoxically, this process has also brought about new borders, new divisions, be they physical or metaphorical. Change, and new challenges bring opportunities for innovation and learning – and this is perhaps one of the themes that emerges so strongly in this book: youth work responds to change, and it does so with an energy and commitment that demands reflexive practice. This book seeks to be part of this process, providing the contributors as well as the readers with an opportunity to reflect on evidence-based research, to learn from our shared experiences, to learn more about ourselves as human beings, as youth workers, policy makers and researchers, and to learn more about the work that we do, the communities that we live and work in and, most importantly, the people we work with.

In the pages that follow, the contributors to this edited text share their experiences, research, and learning curves. This collection provides some fascinating insights and reflections on how different actors working in the youth field have responded throughout, from the shores of the Mediterranean, including Turkey, Malta and Italy, the contributions trace the routes taken throughout Europe, from Germany, to France, the UK, Finland and beyond. What follows are texts providing diverse perspectives from different contexts, adopting varied approaches to address multifaceted and evolving needs, new challenges and rich learning opportunities.

A diverse range of actors are involved in the delivery of youth work with young refugees, and many have contributed to this book: from the state, to faith-led organisations, NGOs, the formal education system and indeed young refugees themselves. Each of them brings particular perspectives, experiences, competencies, tools and skills to the field: making for a rich knowledge base and new issues for debate, to seek common ground, and also disagreement. Notwithstanding the diversity of authors, contexts and practices covered in the chapters that follow, the reader will note a number of emerging themes that are worth highlighting here.

Perhaps one of the most common themes was that of recognising and receiving young refugees as young people first and foremost, rather than a label imposed by the media, politicians, or asylum and immigration law. That is not to say that young refugees do not have particular experiences or specific needs. Indeed, these realities are clearly exposed throughout the book – and perhaps best demonstrated in how mainstream services are adapting and evolving, often developing tailor-made initiatives seeking to cater for these needs. This is particularly evident in the need to respond to the immediate and practical needs born out of the refugee experience, from housing, to accessing the formal education system and employment.

Education is also given prominence throughout the book, from working within the formal education system, including challenges related to accreditation and recognising the skills and knowledge young refugees bring with them, to non-formal education, informal learning and more critical approaches geared towards political mobilisation. The transformative element comes to the fore in many of the contributions, with an emphasis on working with young refugees, and creating opportunities to give voice – diverse theoretical paradigms, methodologies and tools feed into diverse practices, often responding to the particular and evolving spatial and temporal contexts.

Association – creating the space and opportunities to make friends, to hang out and to develop relationships, and to learn together – so central and particular to youth work, is reinforced throughout the pages that follow. The reference to racism and xenophobia is unambiguous, confronting the “othering” process and engaging in a humanising dialogue that transcends racialised borders and fear, and which has never perhaps been more urgent.

The emphasis on voluntary association and participatory approaches is more than evident, with a number of authors stressing the importance of dialogue, and reaching out across the borders that divide humanity. Social capital, broadly understood as the resources that are embedded within, and developed out of our networks and relationships, take on a new importance within this context. Young refugees, particularly upon arrival, lack this crucial resource, and youth workers are responding

by sharing and mobilising their own resources with young refugees as individuals, and collectively, to develop a sense of community and co-operation, and also to facilitate actions within the social structures, including working with different service providers and areas of expertise according to the needs of the young person.

If themes such as association and relationships evoke a common thread in youth work, the position and significance of human rights is perhaps what defines the unique element of youth work with young refugees. While of course not absent from youth policy, and youth work discourse and practice, the situation and experiences of young refugees demand a greater awareness, understanding, and skill set in relation to human rights on the part of youth workers. For example, many of the contributors highlight the long periods of waiting and ongoing displacement that accompany the refugee experience as they navigate the liminal realities imposed by legal frameworks and asylum policies. Youth transitions come to the fore here; for many young asylum seekers, the transition to adulthood can be marked by a loss of rights. The UN General Assembly has highlighted the complications that emerge from the legal threshold of 18 years, stating that the Convention on the Rights of the Child does not “fully take into account the reality of the transition from childhood to adulthood” (UN General Assembly 2014). The transition to adulthood exposes young asylum seekers (including unaccompanied minors) to human rights violations, exploitation and abuse, and new risks, including deportation. Such realities bring new realities, learning curves and challenges for youth workers, as they respond within a context where the right to rights cannot be assumed. Human rights violations cannot be divorced from the experiences of forced migration. The majority of young refugees, particularly those who are forced to take irregular routes, including crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, will have been exposed to trauma. Youth workers are witnessing the consequences of human rights abuses, exposure to violence, loss of loved ones and home, and the long, drawn-out periods of waiting. While distancing themselves from a simplistic victim/resilience binary, a number of contributors in this book address issues related to trauma, and consider the role (and limitations) of youth work in this regard.

Which brings me to hope – a theme that emerges throughout the pages of this book. Hope is what drives refugees to keep on going, it is the belief in a better tomorrow. And it is perhaps what defines youth work too: responding to new experiences, new realities and new challenges with a sense of purpose, with a commitment to service and the young people we work with, knowing that the smallest gesture can make a difference in a young person’s life, and knowing that collectively we can contribute to a more equitable and just world – this is what keeps hope and also youth work alive and relevant.

## **The contributions in this book**

In Chapter 1, Daniel Briggs and Rebeca Cordero Verdugo draw on ethnographic data gathered from a research project conducted across eight European countries to explore the perceptions and experiences of young refugees and their integration efforts in relation to housing, health, education and cultural adaptation within a given context. The chapter provides some harrowing insights into the experiences of young

refugees and migrants, many of whom are located both physically and metaphorically at the margins of European societies, and also, the authors argue, beyond the reach of relevant integration and intervention efforts, including by the youth work sector. Briggs and Cordero Verdugo also provide insights into the bureaucratic demands and expectations placed on young beneficiaries of protection (for example education and training) that do not respond to their needs and lived realities.

Working with young people who have been exposed to trauma is not something new to youth work. The cumulative experiences of refugees, from fleeing conflict, persecution and discrimination, ongoing exposure to violence, separation from family and loss, long periods of life on hold, or “waitinghood” as young asylum seekers await the outcome of administrative procedures, ongoing upheaval and life in a new country are documented throughout the chapters in this book. Such experiences are not only particular and complex, they are also beyond what the majority of us will ever be exposed to in our own lives. In Chapter 2 Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja reflects on her own experiences while working with young refugees and unaccompanied minors in shelters in France and Germany. In her chapter Lyamouri-Bajja raises some important questions vis-à-vis the role of youth workers, and indeed the limitations, in providing support and intervention, and fostering resilience. Lyamouri-Bajja draws on her reflections to provide some tentative guidelines on trauma-informed youth work.

Working with trauma continues as a key theme in Chapter 3, wherein Johanna Eicken provides some reflections on working with young asylum seekers in Karlsruhe, Germany. The project *Ankommen\_Weiterkommen* developed in direct response to gaps and needs identified by service providers working with young asylum seekers. Exposure to trauma and the impact of these experiences were perceived as having a negative impact on the youths’ education and general well-being, while there was also a recognised absence of age-specific, social and self-reflexive opportunities for learning and experiences out of school time, within the shelters. Drawing on the diverse and specialised training of team members, specific educational methods were developed in response to the needs of the young refugees, with a focus on individual counselling, along with outdoor, theatre and art activities. This approach seeks to provide individualised one-to-one support in challenging situations, including, for example, during the asylum process or in a new work environment.

Chapter 4 is an interview with Gaëlle Le Guern, Deputy Director of the DOMIE, a facility offering assistance to unaccompanied minors. The facility, based in Strasbourg, France, is one of three facilities operating in two key areas, that of providing educational support and the judicial protection of young people. Speaking to Mara Georgescu, a senior project officer at the EU–Council of Europe youth partnership, Le Guern describes the organisation’s mission, that of looking after the young people, ensuring their well-being, and accompanying them in a personalised plan towards autonomy. In the interview, Le Guern stresses how much of their work hinges on administrative regularisation and how this legal process impacts not only the right to remain once they have turned 18, but also the degree to which these young people can make plans for the future. A recurrent theme throughout this book, such drawn-out processes and the element of the unknown, are a source of stress for young people caught up in this legal liminality. The work of DOMIE is grounded in three key tasks: first, to provide a space where young people feel secure, and to explain the legal

and administrative processes, so that they may be empowered to speak on their own behalf. The second pillar is that of addressing health concerns, and the third is education. Participation in cultural projects is also seen as a meaningful way for unaccompanied minors to explore how they experience and might belong to the hosting society, both as migrants and young people.

In Chapter 5, Benjamin Henn and Niklas Gregull describe how a home for young apprentices in Munich, Germany, adjusted to including young refugees. Aptly entitled “Living under the same roof”, the authors, who both work with the faith-based organisation the Salesians of Don Bosco, provide a brief overview of the German refugee context, with a focus on young refugees, and then go on to describe the project itself. The focus is on the similarities and differences between the hosting of young apprentices, mainly from Germany, and unaccompanied minor refugees, the challenges they encountered and the lessons learned. The youth are all accommodated in the same building and are using the same areas for free- and leisure-time activities. The authors argue that the project has had positive effects on integration, as well as on building mutual trust and tolerance. Drawing on their personal observations and experiences, they also consider the limits and potential of youth work within such an institutional set-up. The chapter concludes with seven points of reflection for achieving a promising integration and on the future perspectives for youth work with young refugees.

Hope is a recurrent theme throughout this book, but is central to Simon Williams’ contribution. In Chapter 6, Williams engages post-colonial theory to explore the power of the media in influencing the construction of the “other”, namely young refugees within the UK context. The chapter explores the relationship between politics, the media and the identity of young refugees, which affect the educational experience and sense of hope within the UK context. Conceptualised as the aspirations and desires that seem achievable to the individual, hope is not understood as confined to individuals, but also by social and institutional structures in communities. Williams explores how youth work might contest the dominant media narrative, and can provide opportunities for a supportive experience, both within and alongside schools, in developing hope and the inclusion of young refugees.

Fausta Scardigno also explores the role of youth work with young refugees within the formal education system, but from a different perspective. In Chapter 7, Scardigno describes how the service offered by the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Bari in Italy has met the challenges that arise in the absence of original documentation of formal qualifications. Specifically, the service operates as an institutional youth work service that seeks to evaluate the cultural capital of young refugees and to recognise their formal, informal and non-formal competences in order to find employment or to apply for an educational course. The programme engages young refugees as beneficiaries of the programme, and also as tutors for other young refugees and migrants. Scardigno’s role within the project, and narratives from the young refugee participants, provide the reader with some interesting insights into how educational services can respond to new situations and specific youth needs, and how such experiences can impact the lives of young refugees.

In Chapter 8, the focus shifts to Turkey, a country with a relatively high youth population that faces a significant challenge in integrating young refugees and migrants – almost two-thirds of the Syrian refugees being under the age of 30. In this chapter, Gökay Özerim and Güldan Kalem provide an overview of the history of youth work in Turkey, and then shift to focus on the work of NGOs active in the field of youth work and migration, in particular with young refugees. The chapter provides some fascinating insights, and also a dose of perspective, into how the country that hosts the world's largest refugee population has responded to this reality over the years, making the transition from emergency aid to integration initiatives, with a focus on access to the labour market.

In Chapter 9, we journey up north to explore the situation in Finland. Veronika Honkasalo begins the chapter by framing it within the Finnish policy context and the broader public discourse. Echoing a theme that emerges throughout the book, Honkasalo argues that youth migration is rarely inspired by the framework of youth policy that is grounded in rights, engagement and participation, but rather, is couched within an environment of fear and control. The author draws on two studies conducted in Finland, the first focusing on how young asylum seekers and refugees were welcomed into youth work practices both by professionals and other young people. The second study consisted of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a centre for unaccompanied refugees and draws on interviews with unaccompanied minors and professionals. The chapter seeks to explore the effects of migration policies and migration law in the contexts of youth work and youth policy. It also looks at leisure time in the lives of young asylum seekers from two perspectives, namely transnational ties including contact with family members and friends in the country of origin, and in relation to practices, professional assistance, friendship networks and leisure activities. The chapter highlights the importance of meaningful leisure time, school and friendship networks in the lives of young refugees, and that such processes need to be supported. Honkasalo also stresses the right to education for all refugee youth, regardless of age.

Writing on the UK context, Davina Gateley and Refugee Youth also highlight what they describe as an increasingly hostile environment towards asylum seekers and refugees. Chapter 10 presents the findings of a small, qualitative study focusing on the support provided by Refugee Youth, a London-based voluntary organisation which was established for young people with a refugee background. The chapter, which is grounded in critical approaches to youth work, explores the human agency of young people, an area, the authors argue, that is often neglected in research and policy. Specifically, the chapter looks at young asylum seekers and refugees' experiences of autonomy and the degree of choice they perceive they have over central life decisions. Gateley and Refugee Youth argue that participatory models of youth work are central to assisting young refugee and asylum seekers. The authors maintain that the challenges that young refugees face are real and must be acknowledged – while not undermining their agency.

In Chapter 11, Maria Pisani provides some critical reflections on how Integra Foundation, an NGO working with and for young refugees in Malta, has developed in response to evolving and multifaceted realities and needs. Positioning critical youth work in the "borderlands", Pisani considers youth work as a space and opportunity

to transcend borders, to create safe and democratic spaces, and to co-create opportunities for young asylum seekers and refugees to speak out on their own terms. The chapter also looks at how different approaches and models to informal and non-formal learning may respond to different learning needs, from the practical, to those that seek to transform by challenging the inequalities and injustice that many young asylum seekers and refugees experience on a daily basis.

Catherine Raya Polishchuk is the co-founder of the Geneva-based organisation *Essaim d'Accueil*, an organisation set up by eight young adults that seeks to put local residents of varying legal status (including refugees) in touch with each other. In Chapter 12, Polishchuk draws on research conducted with the organisation to provide some reflections on the role of youth work values in working with young refugees. She provides some contextualisation to the work of the organisation, describing a hostile environment wherein the young refugee is "othered". Polishchuk's chapter focuses on the organisation's attempts to counter such discourse and practices. She describes a youth work practice that is grounded in voluntary participation and a non-hierarchical approach. Polishchuk describes horizontal collective sense-making processes as an approach which removes the necessity to differentiate between "us" and "them" by offering alternative ways of seeing each other, and also as a means of indirect advocacy for comprehensive social inclusion.

In Chapter 13, Wilke Ziemann looks at the situation for young refugees living in Germany. Describing a context that is becoming increasingly unreceptive to refugees, Ziemann argues that youth work has a particular responsibility to bear here since its aim is to address the individual interests of young people and to empower them towards self-determination and social participation. Locating participation as a human right, as established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Ziemann makes the point that young refugees should be able to get involved and participate – to express their views and be heard in matters that affect their interests. Ziemann goes on to argue that active participation requires a bottom-up approach, and describes how youth workers in Germany have responded by fostering political awareness through educational work, by working with young people to develop the skills they need to stand up for their own interests and become involved in shaping their environment. In conclusion Ziemann makes the point that while youth work may provide for a unique and particular knowledge base and practice, youth work cannot be understood as a stand-alone service for a specific target group, but rather, as an equal partner and an integral component of a local network.

Chapter 14 is the first of two short contributions describing initiatives developed specifically in response to the arrival of young asylum seekers. Maura Ryckebusch and Loes Steegmans present the project *Altochtonen van de Toekomst*, initially set up to provide support to accompanied minors in Belgium. The project developed over time, as unaccompanied minors and young refugees over the age of 18 asked to be included. From the outset the initiative sought to provide information on asylum procedures and educational opportunities through organised play encounters in asylum centres. The aim is to empower young refugees and asylum seekers so that their voices will be heard by policy makers.



The final contribution to this book is written by Paul Galea and Bakary Kanteh. In Chapter 15 Galea introduces Spark 15, a refugee youth-led organisation set up in Malta that aims to promote the integration of refugee communities, to raise awareness on youth refugee issues, and to combat the challenges faced by young asylum seekers and refugees in Malta. Now established as an NGO, the organisation provides a safe space for young refugees to meet, and a medium to reach out to other young people. Over the years Spark 15 has worked closely with other NGOs and UNHCR on a number of issues, including advocacy and education. Bakary, a member of the youth organisation, explains how he was introduced to the group, and how being an active member of the organisation has impacted his life, from making new friends, to learning and developing a deeper understanding of the legal and policy issues surrounding asylum and migration, to speaking out as part of a youth-led organisation.

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## Chapter 1

# Young refugees, youth work and a call for political energy: notes from an unfunded ethnographic study

*Daniel Briggs and Rebeca Cordero Verdugo*

### Introduction

**N**o one can ignore the hundreds of thousands of people who continue to risk life and limb to come to Europe: many having left with next to nothing, selling all their belongings in their home country, and along the way some have fought off hostile police, paid smugglers, been humiliated, physically and sexually victimised, all the while clambering across EU borders hoping that Europe would welcome them. Their arrival in overcrowded, squalid camps and in city centres, often sleeping in streets, has since triggered a political panic and exposed holes in Western “social democracy” as a political model. In some European countries a puerile nationalistic panic about “who will pay for them” and “whether they are ISIS terrorists” dominate the political discussions. In the meantime, little serious, long-term strategic attention is being given to what this large-scale influx may mean for the social and cultural demography of Europe.

The focus in the chapter therefore is how all this relates to the young refugees’ circumstances and integration efforts. The chapter first presents a series of contextual facts and figures regarding the refugee crisis, providing some contextual statistics relating to young people in particular. We then offer a brief but succinct review of how this has all been managed at national and European institutional levels.<sup>6</sup> This allows us to draw on our ethnographic data gathered from an ongoing unfunded project under way in eight different European countries to discuss the perceptions and experiences of young refugee “integration” efforts in relation to housing, health, education and cultural adaption procedures used by various countries. In particular,

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6. When we refer to the “institutional level”, we mean to the responsibility of public institutions across different levels (nation states and the corresponding collaborations of the European Union). These public institutions are recognised by the citizen at local, regional, national and international levels. For this reason, we feel it is important to mention that in this respect they must function in a global context in the reduction of victimisation and collective vulnerability.

this section will identify how they perceive and live these realities, and will get close to how young refugees perceive how they are viewed by those around them where they settle, and look at their progress on particular courses and training programmes. Our sample size of 85 refugees – 45 of whom are aged between 18 and 30 – may be small compared to perhaps large-scale survey approaches but conversely offers an in-depth insight into their predicaments, in particular because many of our sample have had irregular contact with formal mechanisms and some almost none. Indeed, none of them knew of youth work support or even what youth work was. In this respect, and because our sample is distinct in this way, we think this allows us to offer some new thoughts on how Europe, its nations and institutions can improve its support and what this may mean for youth work. We begin first by providing some necessary context to the refugee crisis.

## **A refugee crisis or political crisis? Why here, why now**

Increased global instability resulting in the displacement and migration of millions of people is not simply happening as a result of processes like globalisation, but rather how international political entities are creating the rationale to destabilise certain countries for their own political and economic interests (Žižek 2016). For example, among the many exploited African countries, Chinese businesses have stepped up their quest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to enable them to continue to secure a steady supply of metals, mainly copper, cobalt and gold. However, the use of Chinese labour and the continual lack of investment in DRC public agencies and infrastructure has starved the domestic economy and furthered its neglect, even after millions died in regional wars related to power struggles. This has led to a substantive population exodus which continues to have social ramifications (Kabemba 2016). Similarly, most of the political destabilisation of the Gulf region, which accelerated in 2011/2, has been linked to the West's direct political pursuit of rich minerals and resources in the vacuum of democratic governance (Rother et al. 2016). This is notwithstanding the billions of dollars earned by countries like the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia among others which sell weapons to those very countries, thus perpetuating war and violence (Jones 2012; Sadowski 2010). Or in other words:

This produces the fateful miscalculation, mishap and calamitous military expeditions in Afghanistan and Iraq which culminated in the substitution of the old dictatorial regimes with a theatre of indiscipline, and frenetic violence, instigated and supported by the commercial global arms trade and inflated by the weapons industry, which are both thirsty for profit, notwithstanding the tacit support of governments obsessed with improving their GDP. (Bauman 2016: 13)

In spite of the global economic crisis of 2008, from which one might expect strong lessons to be learned about the current political and social trajectory (Harvey 2010; Winlow et al. 2015), a correlation can be made with its financial and economic downturn and an increase in conflicts and global instability (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016: 22, Figure 1.2). The upshot of this has been the political and social deterioration of places like the Middle East followed by the global failure to provide a solution to the people displacement and large increases in deaths associated with terrorist incidents (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016). In particular, while it is

clear that some conflicts have been going on for over a decade, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq, the development of other violence in countries such as Syria, Libya and Yemen has substantially added to this instability, as widespread social protest and discontent has evolved as a consequence of despotic and corrupt political regimes (Winlow et al. 2015).

Coupled with a diminishing labour market as domestic economies wither in the shadow of foreign investments and company streamlining (Harvey 2010; Standing 2011), more than ever in the history of our planet people are being displaced. This has continued to gather momentum since 2011 and seemingly shows little sign of ceasing. Indeed, mid-year statistics according to the UNHCR (2016b) estimated that, year after year, record levels of people were being forced from their home countries and that the main refugee source countries were Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and the Syrian and gulf region from which each year since 2013 the numbers have steadily increased (UNHCR 2016b).

For many of these displaced people, the obvious destination is somewhere else within their country (UNHCR 2016b) but for some countries like Syria and Iraq, which have been internally ravaged in the collapse of repressive regimes, there is simply nowhere else to go. For this reason, over the last five years, many have sought – or tried to seek – refuge within the strong and stable European economies. This has led to the widespread opening of refugee routes, many of which traverse numerous countries, and requires them to endure inhuman conditions and make them vulnerable to exploitation (UNICEF 2016). Indeed, the arrival of thousands of people is unsurprisingly reflected in asylum applications which, across all 28 member states, have tripled from 259 395 in 2010 to 1 117 330 in 2015 (EY 2016).

However, not all applications can be accepted and reports suggest that Europe has struggled to manage such an influx (UNHCR 2016b).<sup>7</sup> For example, even though around 750 000 people presented applications for asylum in Germany in 2016, only 631 000 were accepted (CEAR 2016). Equally, some countries develop a reputation for rejecting applications, such as the United Kingdom and Hungary, which in the same year only accepted 32% and 8% of asylum applications respectively (CEAR 2016). This problematises the refugee situation further, as we will discuss in the chapter, as refugees neither return home for obvious reasons nor are they able to stay in their new host country, leaving many bereft from support and provision.

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7. The reasons for this are complex and political. First, various EU countries simply cannot accommodate the number of people crossing their borders and, from what we can see, priorities are made vis-à-vis the country of origin (some refugees told us that EU countries classify countries like Iraq as “safe”), which means that their applications are more likely to be rejected and priority given to someone from, for example, Syria. Second, other EU countries do not want to have the financial and social responsibility of more people, at a time when social welfare spending is being squeezed and public healthcare as well as investment in social housing is diminishing. For this reason, the most deserving are those who are more/most qualified so they will be those most ready to compete in a meritocratic system which requires them to work themselves into stability (Bansak et al. 2016). There also seems to be an element of political fear associated with the “refugee” even though, as we have discussed, this has been quite deliberately instigated to keep alive the problem of the “other” at a time when nationalist projects continue to gather momentum and the risk of terrorist attacks undertaken by EU citizens continues (Winlow et al. 2017).

## Refugees: some statistics on the youth context

To date, official figures relating to the increasing numbers of forced displaced persons across the world naturally vary, however numerous sources put this figure at around 60 million people at the end of 2016 (CEAR 2016). Of these 60 million, 19.5 million were estimated to be refugees, 38.2 million were thought to be internally displaced from their homes, and 1.8 million represent asylum-seeking claims. However, at the end of 2016 this figure has since grown to 65.5 million (UNHCR 2016b). Here we must have caution because the “refugee” and “economic migrant” are often muddled in statistics and political discourses and this is important to acknowledge since the latter is unprotected by the 1951 Geneva Convention or EU subsidiary protection. Consequently, this raises problems for who is “deserving of protection” (see Squire et al. 2017).

Perhaps even more concerning are the high numbers of young people and children among these figures with 51% thought to be under 18 years of age (CEAR 2016). Minors – or those considered to be children under the age of 18 – are particularly vulnerable and are often exposed to trafficking, drugs and various abuses, and lack basic support in the countries from which they escaped, along the way in transit and on arrival in the destination country. These young people come from Afghanistan, Angola, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burundi, Croatia, Eritrea, Iraq, Kosovo, Liberia, Ruanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan (UNHCR 2016a). The fact that many travel alone also makes them particularly vulnerable in this respect: for example, it is estimated that 92% of the children who arrived recently in Italy travelled by themselves (UNICEF 2016). To be able to afford this journey – because the majority come from poor areas – many have little alternative but to make “step-by-step payments” to mafias and organised gangs and travel from city to city, country to country, suffering along the way from abuses, violence and sexual victimisation (Rojas 2016).

While there is clear attention given to refugee minors (House of Lords 2016), very few reports and articles, however, focus on young people upwards of 18 years of age, likely because they are considered to be adults and responsible for themselves, hence their inclusion in data recording age brackets of 18-59. The Norwegian Refugee Council and Mercy Corps (2016) report, however, is one exception. In their report, they note that such young refugees aged 15-24 rarely have access to education and skill-building courses, have minimal access to healthcare services and protective and safe housing; of particular concern, they note, is that many do not qualify for international assistance. Nevertheless, they are motivated and ambitious young people, as the report goes on to identify, because they demonstrate:

- ▶ overwhelming interest in wanting to continue education;
- ▶ a desire to work and learn skills to meet market demands;
- ▶ disappointment over healthcare;
- ▶ significant stress and concern about psychological well-being;
- ▶ disillusionment with human rights principles;
- ▶ safety concerns and gender-based violence.

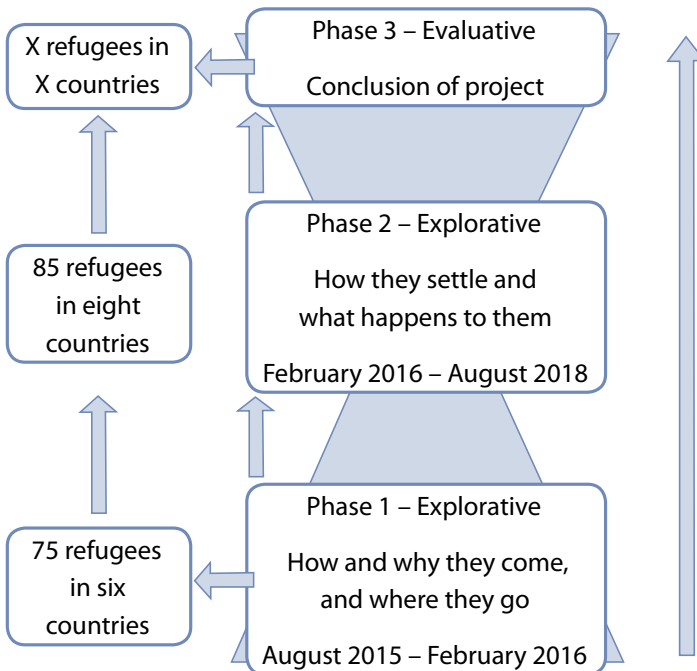
The evidence highlighted in this report, however, is also very much echoed in our research, to which we now turn.

## A note on methods

The data for this chapter is based on an ongoing unfunded ethnographic study which began in August 2015 and will conclude in August 2018, and which to date has recruited 85 refugees, almost all of whom are from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. We use the term “refugee” here loosely to describe people we came to talk to who had either been granted asylum, and therefore had access to protection, along with those who had not qualified for it and consequently been rejected, or others who had not applied for it. In this respect, there were no particular criteria to participate in the study other than they were in circumstances of vulnerability and need, having fled their home countries and were now caught up in the process of starting up a new life in another country and culture.

The project has made use of observation in refugee camps and border crossing points, in housing projects and immigration centres, with NGO associations and in general city centre spaces and poor suburban peripheries. To date, the research fieldwork has been undertaken in eight European countries (France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Norway, Hungary, Turkey and Holland) and the main project’s objectives are to: a) examine how and why these people are leaving their home countries; b) follow and analyse what happens to them when they do leave and how they arrive; and c) evaluate how they settle in the new countries and what happens to them as a consequence. As the project evolves, we envisage that the sample will continue to grow (see Figure 1.1).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1.1 – Sampling strategy for our refugee study**



8. Figure 1.1 shows the general sampling strategy for the whole sample and how this relates to the project’s aims.

Ethnographic research normally adapts itself to particular fields of study: how people behave, the circumstances in which they live and the various social pressures around them. For this reason, there has been no specific sampling strategy attached to the study given that its evolution has had to adapt itself to the precarious circumstances of the refugees. The study started in Melilla – a Spanish city in the north of Africa – where a base sample of 25 refugees were recruited from border crossings and the city's immigration centre. They were interviewed using open-ended questions which related to our research aims so our approach was inductive. Participants were told about what the study aims were and gave verbal consent to talk about their perceptions and experiences. These open-ended interviews were conducted *in situ* and lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Where necessary, a translator was used in the case that the refugees spoke neither Spanish nor English.

After the interviews, participants were then asked if they wished to remain in contact via phone, WhatsApp or Facebook and five consented. Contact was maintained with these people as they settled in countries like France, Belgium and Germany, for even though many had sought asylum in Spain, and thus according to the Dublin Convention were obliged to remain, many simply left for these countries where the economy was perceived to be stronger and/or where they already had family/friends. When they arrived and started to settle, we visited them and recruited people they had come to know in the same area via the snowballing sampling method (whereby research participants recruit new research participants through their own contacts). We also asked them, and the new participants, if they knew anyone in other countries and who might be interested in participating. Consequently, refugees were then recruited from Turkey, Norway, Hungary and Holland.<sup>9</sup> Where possible we have visited those people in these other countries and interviewed them, and in the absence of this, we undertook telephone/Skype interviews.

As is well known, especially using this sampling method, it is difficult to make weighted decisions on how to ensure a balanced sample is achieved, especially in relation to gender, age and country of origin. We therefore make an admission here and concede to this since 32 of the 45 young refugees were young men. We acknowledge this is a limitation of our study, which has simply attempted to document the perceptions and experiences of these refugees. Of these 45 young people, 20 were from Syria, 15 were from Iraq, 5 were from Afghanistan and 5 were from Iran.

Since then, we have maintained regular contact with these people, mostly via WhatsApp and Facebook. When interviewing them, and even in the conversations which have followed, we have been sensitive to their needs and feelings since many of these people have been significantly traumatised. We avoided just taking information from them and, as commonly undertaken in ethnographic research of this nature, demonstrated empathy and helped them as we could by translating papers and assisting them in understanding legal processes. Youth workers perhaps may recognise this as a form of “youth work” per se, but without complicating anything, it was something which should be second nature to people in circumstances such as ours; certainly, helping is something which all researchers should do when they are studying vulnerable populations (see Briggs and Monge 2017).

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9. We have pending fieldwork in Vienna in Austria and Athens in Greece during 2017.



## Welcome to Europe and its social and political landscape

The large numbers of undocumented people flooding into Europe year after year is causing continual challenges for the continent, as well as its respective nation states, at a time when its democratic legitimacy has started to stutter (Winlow et al. 2015). This, in part, is related to its failure to offer security to ordinary working people and society's most vulnerable, who are now becoming increasingly restless and discontented (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell 2017). As European economies continue to struggle to shake off the hangover of the 2008 financial crisis, many people continue to be left behind and increasingly social ills have been blamed on people like economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, all of whom are often projected as a social and economic threat to nation states' livelihoods and collective well-being (Garcés 2015). Instead of, for example, the collective media and political attention being focused on how refugees have come to seek a better life, they are blamed for having left what they had – even if it had been destroyed in front of them (Briggs 2017). This is why it is common to find present in European discourses a reference to a “crisis of values” which, according to Onghena (2015: 7) is that: “While on one hand border closure initiatives and restrictive migration policies come about, on the other, messages of unity, resistance and moral panics come about.”

The growth in nationalistic rhetoric therefore pertains to this supposed crisis of European values – even though the same Europe is responsible for leaving its own citizens behind in the wake of the financial crisis, having imposed austerity measures on the working population in exchange for allowing inequality to continue to expand at a rate never before witnessed in history (Fisher 2009). This provokes, suggests Žižek (2016), a kind of “ideological blackmail” in the way in which Europe is both welcoming refugees in with “open arms” while at the same time “pulling up the drawbridge”. For example, hundreds of thousands of people have been given asylum in countries such as Germany – given the potential for their contribution to the economy – yet at the same time, countries such as Denmark, the UK and Norway have deployed a political rhetoric of almost absolute rejection coupled with revanchist social policies against “foreigners”.

This has also been provoked by the recent spate of increased terrorist attacks across Europe over the last few years which, argues Žižek (2016), have been carefully exploited by political factions to increase social alarm about the pseudo enemy which is ISIS and the “Islamic terrorist”. Curiously, concern has continued to be exercised about the “refugee” even though in numerous cases the attackers/perpetrators of these very same attacks have almost all been European-born citizens (Briggs 2017; Žižek 2016). Hence a sort of self-punishing rhetoric has evolved in which Europe blames its own free movement approach for the installation of radicalisation and related problems to the seemingly never-ending influx of people from outside its borders. This has translated into a kind of warped social fact which has since evolved into increased nationalistic policies and social attitudes, and has resulted in increased hate crimes across Europe, particularly against those who follow Islamic faith (EUAFR 2016).

## Managing the crisis: a European perspective

The response to the refugee influx from a European perspective has been in the main reactive. For example, in 2016 the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund made available nearly €300 million to improve the effectiveness of asylum procedures, fight organised crime across borders, and to assist in the control of external European borders (European Commission 2016a). Given that Turkey is one of the main refugee hubs – almost 3 million Syrian refugees alone reside in the country (UNHCR 2016a) – particular funding and support has been directed at Greece, since it is one of the main refugee reception countries, receiving mainly refugees who cross over from Turkey. Even though smuggling routes have been open since the late 1990s, €3 billion has been given to Turkey to deal with the recent influx of people over the last five years – with a further €3 billion due at the end of 2018 – so that measures could be taken to prevent further numbers coming into Europe (European Commission 2016). The only thing this seems to have done, however, is change the dynamics of the Mediterranean routes: so instead, refugees increasingly risk a more dangerous and treacherous sea route from Libya to Italy because of the increased intervention in Turkey and along its coastline (Parkes 2017).<sup>10</sup>

Sadly, thousands of people continue to die on this journey (Dearden 2017). For example, it was estimated that 132 891 have made sea journeys into Europe in 2017, and 2 442 are suspected dead or missing (UNHCR 2017). Notwithstanding, the thousands of others who have their asylum application rejected leaving them homeless and stateless (or “denizens” as Standing (2011) refers) are perhaps indicative of a complete political failure and emphasises what Crawley (2016) calls the crisis in “political solidarity” in Europe. Indeed, many countries in Europe are unwilling to shoulder the burden and take in refugees, and in countries like Hungary, refugees spend lengthy periods in detention (EY 2016). Notwithstanding, the overcrowded nature of many immigration centres is also of concern, as well as inadequate relocation and poor integration efforts (Amnesty International 2016; Dutch Council for Refugees 2016; Squire et al. 2017). For this reason, formal work opportunities are almost non-existent (Aiyar et al. 2016).

As we have said, as nation states shore up their borders, there are implications for migration flows as routes change, and across Europe there is additional potential for exploitation, all pointing to a lack of collective European solidarity on the issue. As highlighted by Squire et al. (2017), this affects the efficiency of a collective response, and has local logistical ramifications related to how reception and asylum centres are run, and how and whether refugees are able to access rights and respective provision. Notwithstanding, repeat applications become commonplace as refugees are turned away from one country and present in another. More than anything, Europe lacks an insight into the root causes of the crisis and the wider geopolitical factions which are stirring up conflict, war and malaise in the very countries from which the refugees flee (Ruhmann and Fitzgerald 2016; Žižek 2016).

All this suggests that the long-term management of people displacement seems to be missing and the main approach being adopted at national and European levels is

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10. Other statistics and sources do not necessarily indicate this is the case (see Squire et al. 2017).

what we would describe as “constant emergency maintenance”. Similarly, while there have been various intelligence-gathering exercises to eradicate organised crime and mafias which traffic and victimise refugees, the EU response also seems to have been ineffective. For example, even when in September 2015, an emergency relocation programme was set up to help 160 000 refugees on entering Europe, three months later in December of the same year only 300 people had benefited from the scheme (EY 2016) and this rose very slightly in February 2016 to 481 (Crawley 2016). Some member states are now rejecting proposals to receive more refugees, even capping the number they are willing to receive. For this reason, only recently, the EU has started legal proceedings against Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic for refusing to take in refugees, the latter of which has accepted only 12 people (Wintour 2017).

Moreover, the Dublin Convention – set up to support refugees in the country where they present their asylum – means that states like Italy and Greece disproportionately shoulder the responsibility at a time when economic stability has all but disappeared in these respective countries. Even then, when some refugees initially present in these countries, they quickly move on, knowing the economy is weak, present in another country, only then to be sent back to where they initially presented asylum. It is probably of no surprise then that in the absence of strategic intervention, much of the burden of assistance has fallen on civic society, the voluntary sector and NGOs who have been proactive in providing accommodation, courses, shelters and food banks in addition to other basics (Zugasti 2016).

## Young refugee integration: the realities

The lack of strategic and practical management of the refugee influx in Europe can be felt in the way these people now experience their new lives in Europe. In this section, we reflect on their perceptions and experiences using data from the 45 people in our sample. Importantly, we must remind readers that having spent time in the shadows of Europe’s finest cities and among nooks and crannies of its most forgotten outposts, our observations suggest that our cohort do not really reflect a typical engagement with support services and provision offered by youth work that other studies might.<sup>11</sup> Having been at the mercy of those processes we have discussed in the preceding sections, it seems clear that many refugees survive in the margins and have been subject to what Pisani (2016) calls an “illegalisation process” as a result of being forced to take irregular routes (in the absence of safe and legal alternatives) and as a consequence of poverty, social marginalisation and human rights violations that are complemented by democratic exclusion.

The 45 young people all experienced traumatic experiences in their home country and suffered some form of victimisation, abuse or threat on the journey to Europe. Almost all queued eagerly outside registry centres in the hope of getting processed, only then to be told that their case may take months, or perhaps years, to resolve. Many also travelled alone, a phenomenon which made them extremely mistrustful,

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11. We would expect that a traditional approach of recruiting young people through youth work services would reveal a very different set of findings compared to one who had piecemeal contact and engagement.

and this had consequences in some cases for what they declared when they presented for asylum. This fear was evident in their temporary allocation in immigration centres and housing projects where they started to learn about the political, economic and social pressures around them; particularly in the way terrorism and terrorist attacks had started to become more frequent occurrences in Europe. Indeed, after one fieldwork expedition to Paris in November 2015, after undertaking a series of interviews and observations of a housing project in the *banlieues*, we were sent a photo three days later from our contact Mohammed (25 years old), which depicted 30 refugees nervously huddling around a small television on which was live coverage of the terrorist incidents which were under way in the city.

In fact, in these housing projects – which, by the way, range from old sheds to broken-down housing estates – where young people are often kept for months waiting on their asylum application decisions and/or move on to other accommodation, patience can be jeopardised by the political and social feeling around them. Delays in managing cases drastically influence young refugees' motivation to stay, as is also the case of rejected asylum applications, and in some cases, a few of our cohort have either returned to countries like Algeria or Syria, often with tragic consequences:

Najid, who we met in Melilla, North Africa in August 2015 was sent back to Spain after losing an asylum appeal. The Dublin Convention obliges refugees to stay in the country where they present themselves and once processed they can't present as a refugee elsewhere. However, given the fragile nature of the economy in Spain, most people we have met leave straight away for France, Belgium and Germany. Many actually tried to go back to Germany, even having been sent back to Spain. However, when Najid returned to Spain, he found no work and had no support so took an arduous trip back to Syria via North Africa. Before Christmas 2016, Najid was killed by the Syrian army. The only photo we have of him from Melilla is him celebrating freedom on the beach.

When administrative processes reject young refugees, many do not understand why and, in some cases, they may also resort to legal means in the wake of being ordered to leave, back to their home countries. Any possibility of otherwise intervening in assisting these young people disappears once their asylum applications are rejected, as we were to find while walking around a quiet Belgian coastal town:

We walk back to the church in Zeebrugge at about 8 p.m. and sitting in the shelter are two young men while another who talks on his mobile seems to disappear as we approach. We say hello and smile and shake their hands as they emerge from the shadows and the dim streetlight brings alive their stubbly faces. They both stand there in several thick coats, hats and any kind of clothing which will stave off the cold wind. The man with the best English is just 24 years old and his name is Iman, while his friend in his late 20s with a few missing teeth is called Hossein. They are both from Iran and have already spent six months in the "Calais Jungle" having left it because they had had no success in finding a way to the UK: "no chance" repeatedly says Iman. Interestingly, they say they spent only one day in the Dunkirk camp because they said that the Kurdish mafia groups who control the camp area told them "if you don't pay, you don't stay". "Jungle not good" mumbles Hossein in his

best effort to speak English before producing out of his pockets a piece of paper which we tip into the dim streetlight. It is an order to leave Belgium. Iman then produces his: they have until the 26th February 2016 to leave the “territory”. Today is the 21st of February so in five days they should not be here. They were already fearful of deportation so news about this doesn’t quell their motivation to hide on a lorry or ship. Indeed, when we ask them about how they will get to the UK and between them they can’t remember how many times they’ve tried. One reason why they say they haven’t tried this evening is because Iman’s body is in pain all over because of having put a plank no wider than 25 cm and no longer than a metre and a half under the underside of a lorry they had boarded. They waited for 20 hours and the ferry went ... but the truck they hid under didn’t.

Once stateless, risks multiply and some of our participants sought refuge in other countries while others joined the ranks in the expanding camps in and around the French and Belgian coasts. We have spent time in three such refugee camps in these countries and have seen the consequences of this, reflected in these notes taken from a conversation we had in a wooden shack in the Calais Jungle in France:

The plastic tarpaulins flap violently in the wind making it difficult to hear him while he continues to sit and make cigarettes on the floor: his name is Sadar and he is 24. He talks about war in Afghanistan and how he had left to find a place where he couldn’t “hear bombs and firing”. He says he hasn’t heard from his brother for months and suspects he is dead, and recalls how the Taliban came to his community to recruit one person per family to fight for their cause. Sadar then invites us to have some tea and climbs under his wooden counter and in between another into a kitchen area where he fills an old kettle with water and lights up the gas stove. Though we try to inform him about the improved circumstances of applying for asylum in France or Belgium, he is not interested because he says they are “problem” for him, which we interpret to mean he has exhausted asylum avenues there. He says his only option now is the UK. Each night, he makes his way down to the docks to try to board lorries or even boats, anyway he can. He hands us the tea in a plastic cup and we sip it welcomingly. Though it seems he has been here for some months, he has had no success – “even less so now because since five months they build a fence and now it is almost impossible”.

During our study, the Calais Jungle was destroyed by the French authorities and 8 000 refugees were essentially moved on to a place other than where they were, even though according to recent reports, they still occupy the area, only in worse conditions (Goddard 2017).

This is obviously not the experience for everyone, but the way this research has been done specifically highlights the shortfalls of intervention and integration efforts because the fieldwork has been in precisely the places outside official government premises and formal processes. We also spoke to young people who had been granted asylum and almost all were required to sign a contract that many did not clearly understand, which legally binds them to a series of commitments they need to make, to courses and training. Many experience major difficulties concerning the language, culture, education and work opportunities, and find it complicated to

simply culturally adjust to what is expected of them (see Table 1.1). This was mainly to do with unfamiliarity with the meritocratic cultural expectation to work – a concept which was almost alien to most, since they had come from countries where social capital was more prevalent than human capital (see Bourdieu 1984).

To get some bearing on this, we asked our main contacts some questions related to their experience so far in the countries which had accepted them.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1.1 – Responses of the main young refugees in the sample to our questions**

Research participant	Wissam	Rami	Shizar	Fidel	Mohamed	Tariq	Mukhles
Information according to participant in respective country	Austria	Germany	Germany	Spain	France	Norway	Turkey
How many young refugees aged between 18 and 30 do you know around the area where you live?	40	60	25	10	10	30	200
Of that number, roughly how many at least speak a basic level of the host country language?	15	15	25	5	3	10	120
Of that number, roughly how many attend language and/or educational courses?	12	40	25	10	5	8	120
Of that number, roughly how many have friends from the host country?	2	2	4	0	3	0	200
Of that number, roughly how many have a formal job in the country?	3	10	0	0	0	0	100

As a general observation, we can see that these young people know a pool of refugees around them. Most attend some form of education and/or training but significant numbers struggle with the host country language and far fewer have jobs. Wissam, a 25-year-old man who was tortured for four months in Syria and who has physical deformities as a consequence, now lives in Vienna. He has been there for the last 18 months and in that time has, like 15 of the 40 refugees he knows, picked up some basic German. Though a few have jobs, he very much keeps himself to himself – partly because he is mentally scarred – but also he has been attacked three times by local

12. We concede that these are not necessarily survey questions and we ask our contacts for estimations but consider them a useful way of highlighting certain issues related to the settlement and integration process.

Austrians. This has all but confined him to his apartment and sometimes he does not make it to the language courses because of the social rejection he has experienced:

But you can see a lot of people here are racist, as you know this is the Germany speaking countries, and unfortunately some of them are hate us because they think were came to their countries to take their job and money ... I hate to stay in country like this one, I always feel afraid, I don't know what I should do.

Similarly, in Oelde – a small town in Germany – lives Rami, a young man of 26 years old who was not able to complete his business degree in Syria because he did not want to face the choice of fighting for the government or the freedom fighters. He says he has “committed” to Germany as he was almost sent back to Spain where he registered his asylum, so he worked hard to get voluntary work in a school and learn the language. Nevertheless, he said some of the parents of the children at school complained they employed him because he thought he was a terrorist. However, he is one of the very few who has made such an effort with the local people and now has German friends. When we went to see him, we found that almost all the 40 young refugees with whom he lives in a ramshackle, disused hut in the centre of a wealthy area of the town lose hope as they wait for lengthy decisions on their asylum. This was the case for Ahmad:

When we ask Ahmad (aged 27) about learning German, he says he struggles and can't access the courses yet because it is related to his legal status. While he concedes to being safe which is the main thing, he is worried for his fiancée and family who are still trying to survive in Syria. He bites his nails as Rami sits next to him on the bed with a cigarette.

Shizar, aged 24, who initially came into Europe through Norway but fled to Germany in the wake of the political pressure to send refugees back to Russia, because technically they had not come from Syria, has had similar difficulties, made worse by changes in medication for his multiple sclerosis. This affected the commitment he could make to the language courses and has slowed his progress, given that he says, according to his contract, he has only 18 months to complete the language course and embark on a training programme. He is not the only one struggling with respect to language courses, as we were to find out when we visited Fidel and some of his friends in Córdoba in Spain:

As we start to talk, the main problems come to the surface immediately: they say the language support and training is at best extremely poor. It relies on volunteers, since there is no direct funding for refugee language courses, so it means as Denra says “some weeks there is a class, other weeks there isn't”. “It is just not serious, you cannot call this serious, I can learn Spanish from my friends but if I want to learn it so that I can take a course to then be able to take a job, then it is just not enough,” says Wasel. They have been in Spain nearly 8-9 months now, a few having been sent back from Germany. Even then, they say, that even if they were to be able to improve in the language, there are no real courses which they can take to be able to get work. They compete with tens of thousands of other Spanish people who are unemployed in the region.

When we met Mohamed in Strasbourg, he told us something similar. In the 18 months he has been in France, he has just recently received the first basic



French qualification, but not without its difficulties. As we chew on our kebabs, he tells us how the cultural courses and integration efforts run by the French government are “not serious” enough and feel more like a “tick-box exercise”. The next day, Mohamed then called Ganal, a friend of his who came on the same boat from Turkey to Greece in 2015 and who now lives in northern France. As we talked on handsfree, we find out that he and the 40 other young refugees Ganal knows share similar circumstances:

Ganal, a young man of 24 years of age, has some things to say about his tenure in Amiens. He arrived two years ago having left his fiancée and her family in Syria. There they wait until he can get a job because the conditions of his asylum mean that until he has work, he can receive no other families. He has a long way to go as well, as he speaks only very basic French. “There is no work in my town, and even if there was, the job centre need me to get a certain level in French,” he says, before launching a scathing attack on the quality of the languages courses, adding “there are not enough hours and it is like they just give you a test every week which the translator tells you the answers to, this is not preparing us for work”. Of the 40 people he knows, only three have jobs.

The placement of refugees is key in this respect, for a common feature found in our data was that when young refugees were placed substantial distances from opportunity, in communities which struggled to accept them, this affected their motivation to attend courses and indeed “integrate” as expected. This was the case for Tariq, who lives with dozens of other refugees in a village near Gottenborg in the middle of rural Norway, who said:

Of course they cannot tell you to go home but they remind you that you are a refugee. We live inside the meaning of “refugee”. Everyone I know here [refugees] wants to integrate. We have made many attempts from open cafés to Syrian nights, we have tried but [local] people are not interested.

Perhaps the only exception in our ongoing study was Turkey, where millions of Syrians fled. Given that it is a neighbouring country, many Syrians simply did the best they could in cultivating a new life: in short, they had no choice but to embrace the language and this was certainly the case for Mukhles, a Syrian of 22 years of age who lives now in Izmit in Turkey. Mukhles left with many other young Syrians who were able to convert their studies after passing challenging Turkish language courses. Naturally, now at a university, he and his friends have come to know other Turkish and international students, and all may appear to be in order. That said, even the very qualified he knows do extremely low-paid, borderline exploitative work: “A friend of mine has a PhD in Electrical Engineering but he is working ridiculous hours as a warehouse guard,” he tells us. In other fieldwork we did in Istanbul, we came across Syrian young people sleeping in bus shelters and children begging barefoot in the streets. And even in interviews we had with Syrian and Iraqi families who had managed to get housing in the worst part of the city, their children who were aged between 16 and 25, some of whom even as young as 12, were working long hours in clothes factories for as little as €212 a month, just under €8.50 a day.



## Discussion

In the limited but important space afforded in this chapter, we have tried to present an alternative picture of the refugee crisis. The “crisis” we recognise as that which is related to refugees is in reality the crisis of capitalism and how, as a consequence of the 2008 economic crash, it has continued to pillage the world’s natural resources, increase inequality, and in the process, stimulate wars and political and economic instability. This has, in turn, led to the large-scale increase in the number of people who have been displaced from their countries. This is therefore not a humanitarian crisis but one generated by political and economic interests.

We feel the content of the chapter, which uses refugee narratives, perceptions and experiences across Europe, are important at a time when not enough forethought is put forward to the refugee integration challenges which now face European countries. This is partly because governments are behind the rapidly changing European demography of what is happening within their borders as well as outside them. Though we have not alluded to the good work done in the youth work sector, among NGOs and other helping services – anticipating that other contributions in this book will aptly and skilfully cover this – we think it would be useful to engage in a series of open and public debates with the refugees in their new communities, and undergo a programme of consultative and evaluative research where the refugees have been housed, in order to learn more about their experiences and integration efforts.

Our findings suggest that failure to engage with young refugees will reproduce what we now see in the suburbs of Paris, where heavy policing of stagnant and socially excluded migrant communities is stimulating social tension and unrest. We feel that we first learn about the people who are coming, their cultural background, border experiences, and ambitions and expectations. This must be framed against the current climate, the increased popularity of the political right, media scaremongering and, likely as a consequence, their potential social rejection in neighbourhoods which are either too far from decent resettlement infrastructure or too much immersed in inner city sink estates.

There is then the issue of the structure of integration programmes, the quality of which naturally varies from country to country. While there were practical logistics which made it problematic to attend the courses, for example, related to their housing location and resources available to participate in the programmes, many questioned how exactly they would benefit from them. Part of this dilemma seems to relate to the sociocultural demands made on refugees: after all, life in Europe is very different. From what we can ascertain, many of these young people come from countries where social life and work and related expectations function horizontally (social capital) while here in Europe it is more vertical (human capital). That is to say, in Europe, as individuals, we are charged with more responsibility for our own success. Now outside their home networks, refugees are required to engage in bureaucratic processes, educational programmes, training and language courses which require their individual motivation, because meritocratic philosophies drive all elements of European legislation and social policy as well as the structure of almost all youth work and forms of helping service.

All this is jeopardised when young refugees are housed in isolated areas, where they see little ambition for potential opportunity, and when they are housed in forgotten outposts and/or substandard housing projects. This, combined with delays to asylum decisions and/or rejections, had significant repercussions for their motivation levels and explained why many felt ambivalent about their new lives in Europe. We have no doubt that good voluntary and charity work is helping the refugees with these issues but the real and serious intervention needs to come from European institutions.

The other side of this is the urgent need to change the collective image of the “refugee”, and eradicate the negative stereotyping as this too, we show, is having significant implications for integration in Europe, and if not taken seriously, will have major social ramifications in the future. This would mean considerable intervention to tackle media bias as well as deal with problematic geopolitical and social relations. This is because European citizens seem to have made their mind up about whom they prefer to stay in their countries. Research based on 18 000 people randomly assessing 180 000 asylum applications found that they prefer:

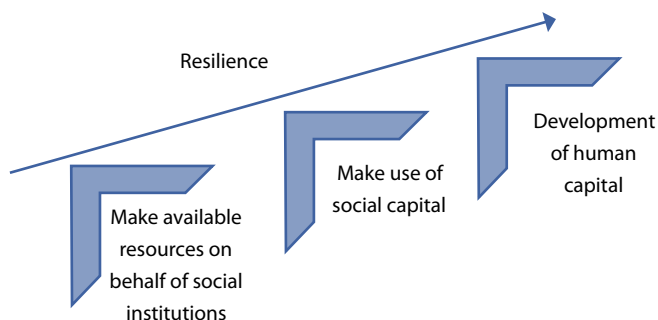
An applicant with a profession like a doctor or teacher, that has come from their country for humanitarian reasons not economic, that speaks the language of the country in which they settle and are not Islamic have the best chances of being received in Europe. (Bansak et al. 2016: 44)

Lastly, we are not youth workers, nor pretend to be experts in the youth work area, but feel that our data based on young refugees – many of whom have fallen through the cracks of the asylum system – offer useful insights into the wider structural and political forces which jeopardise integration, and play a very direct role in these young people’s lives and decisions. It is therefore imperative that youth work helps to embed notions of personal resistance in these young people so that they can overcome such barriers and help them adapt to cultures where human capital precedes cultural life. This, as Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) note, would require young refugees to:

- ▶ surpass negative consequences of exposure to risk;
- ▶ face up to past traumas in a successful way;
- ▶ free themselves from negative influences/trajectories associated with risk.

The challenge of youth work in this respect then is to help young refugees equip themselves to take advantage of new opportunities which their new country of reception may offer them; the most beneficial being related to education and training. In this respect, by doing so, they reduce the risk of exposure to negative influences and potential deviant or criminal networks. This must be balanced with support from the respective social institutions (Fuentes and Torbay 2004) which should foster a “culture of resilience” (UNISDR 2012). One way forward could be to make use of refugees’ familiarity with social capital, and, if given the right support, could go some way to constructing personal resilience and human capital, thus improving their chances of integration (see Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2 – Potential model for the development of human capital**



That said, perhaps there is a simpler way forward for youth work which is that it needs to throw itself into the real structural and social key issues which the most vulnerable young people in our study see and experience every day. Youth work needs to rediscover its political edge and this means it needs to engage in high-profile activism on behalf of those young people and not be a passive reactive structure which only tries to whisper words of wisdom into young people in the hope they can realise their own potential. Of course, this is beneficial but this alone will not help the most vulnerable who need real, reliable and tested structures of support around to help them so that they can escape their positions. To us, this sounds like youth work.

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## Chapter 2

# The role of youth work in working with trauma of young refugees

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*Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja*

### Introduction

**T**his chapter is based on the experiences of the author, working with young refugees and unaccompanied minors for over 10 years both as an international trainer in the youth field and as a psychologist/psychotherapist. It brings a combination of reflections based on youth work practice and solution-focused psychotraumatology. The reflections are mainly based on the author's work with unaccompanied minors and refugee youth in shelters in France and Germany. The work consists in helping young refugees to create a new comfort zone and to overcome trauma related to exile and to their present situation. The young men in these shelters are aged between 11 and 21, originally mainly coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Iraq and Guinea. Their reasons for leaving their countries, coming to Europe, and their stories vary greatly. The chapter looks into tendencies observed within a majority of these young people, but cannot be taken as a general truth for all young refugees. It should therefore be read as guidelines for reflection and an opportunity to look at trauma from a different perspective.

### The role of youth work in working with trauma of young refugees

Trauma is not a new topic in youth work and does not exclusively concern young refugees. However, with the arrival of many young refugees in Europe in the past years, the awareness about trauma seems to have grown in various spheres of society. The reasons why young refugees leave their homes vary greatly. Some are fleeing war or prosecution, some have no family left. Some come to seek a better educational or economic situation. For most young refugees arriving in Europe, the exile route has been particularly traumatic: many experience detention, death, torture and losses in the sea. For most young refugees who come alone, separation from family and home is traumatic too. Additionally, the long "waitinghood" in European countries upon arrival, combined with the uncertainty about being able to stay, adds on a form of re-traumatisation.

Youth workers are confronted with young people showing particular symptoms of trauma and requiring particular support. This leads to questions about the role and limitations of youth work in regards to psychological trauma. Youth workers are not psychologists, but can be confronted with trauma in their daily work with young

people. This chapter proposes a reflective introduction to the topic of trauma and to the specific situation of young refugees. It then looks at resilience as an approach to addressing the situation of young people who have experienced trauma. Finally, some concrete proposals are made in regard to how youth workers can support and accompany traumatised young refugees.

## What is trauma?

The DSM-5<sup>13</sup> defines trauma as:

exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic event(s); witnessing, in person, the traumatic event(s) as it occurred to others; learning that the traumatic event(s) that occurred to a close family member or close friend (in case of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental); or experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s). (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 271)

Most people self-heal from traumatic experiences within a few weeks following the event. If a traumatic event still produces the same physiological reactions and triggers three months after the event, the DSM-5 speaks about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

This means that a person is triggered in his/her daily life and reacts as if the threatening event was happening now. This can manifest itself through flashbacks, nightmares, difficulties with sleep, fear, aggressiveness or violence, but also a form of lethargy, self-exclusion and isolation.

Many young refugees arriving in Europe have had to face an important number of traumatic events:

- ▶ separation from family, friends, country, habits, language, religion;
- ▶ conditions of exile with regular experiences of loss, fear, harassment, sexual and physical aggression, torture;
- ▶ transit of sometimes many months and years between departure from home and final settlement, creating a feeling of insecurity about the future;
- ▶ experience of war, prosecution, violence. (Lyamouri-Bajja 2017: 23)

Unfortunately, the arrival in Europe does not always end the traumatising journey. Rather, additional difficulties or potential repeated trauma often take place. This may include:

- ▶ institutional violence of the asylum conditions and procedures;
- ▶ long waitinghood: depending on their administrative situation upon arrival in the host country, some young refugees have to wait a long time before being sure that they will be granted the right to stay. In the case of an asylum procedure, for example, young refugees often have to wait for months before having a first interview, and sometimes for additional months before getting a first positive or negative response;

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13. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.*



- ▶ uncertainty about the future, particularly in transition to adulthood (turning 18);
- ▶ regular relocation from one shelter/city to another;
- ▶ long and difficult access to family reunification;
- ▶ cultural pressure to integrate;
- ▶ discrimination.

Young refugees arriving in Europe have, in most cases, lost their comfort zone.

## What can youth work do?

The elements mentioned above need to be considered by youth workers and social workers who work with young refugees. It is important for youth workers to be able to recognise trauma in order to refer these young people to specialists who can then help them confront and heal the trauma.

While forced migration is often accompanied with danger, violence and loss, not all young refugees are traumatised. Indeed, not all young refugees went through the same journey, not all young refugees had the same reasons for leaving their country, and not all refugees respond to traumatic events in the same way. Also, traumatised young refugees are more than their trauma and should not be defined by their temporary difficulty to deal with past events.

In 2017, the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth ran two international workshops on the role of youth work with young refugees. In this context, participants discussed the specificities of youth work with this particular group. One of the observations was that many practitioners do youth work without calling it that, so in many cases youth work and social work are strongly linked, and in various European countries the concept of youth work as such does not even exist. It also showed that youth work with young refugees is not exclusively done by youth workers. Based on this, one particularity of youth work with young refugees is the need for pluridisciplinarity and co-operation with other sectors or professionals (Council of Europe and European Commission 2018).

But then, what is or can be the specificity of youth work when working with young refugees and trauma? How far does it differ from social work or other forms of social support? The Council of Europe defines youth work as:

a broad term, with different focus in different contexts. It usually covers a variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people. Such activities can also include sports, leisure time activities or services for young people.

Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. The main objective is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large.<sup>14</sup>

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14. Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on youth work.

Based on our experience working with young refugees in the shelters, youth work can provide a space for young people to develop competences such as intercultural learning, critical thinking and tolerance of ambiguity. It can also be a space for young people to move beyond the “refugee” label, and simply “be young”, and share experiences with other young people.

Youth work might also provide the opportunity, space and approach to disregard the label of “victim” so often associated with refugees and trauma, but rather to recognise young refugees as survivors, and therefore as young people with a high level of resilience.

Young refugees have managed to overcome various situations, dangers and borders in order to reach safety and in the process they have developed and used various resources. If we consider their situation from this perspective, the image of young refugees changes from that of “victim” to one of competent, strong and resilient young people.

Resilience can be defined as:

the capacity of a system, be it an individual, a forest, a city or an economy, to deal with change and continue to develop. It is about the capacity to use shocks and disturbances... to spur renewal and innovative thinking. Resilience thinking embraces learning, [and] diversity.<sup>15</sup>

(Psychological) resilience is the ability to cope in a positive way with stress and spring back quickly from adversity (failures, setbacks, losses, etc.) on an ongoing basis. Ideally, steps should be taken to enhance resilience before being challenged by a disaster or emergency (Local Public Health Institute of Massachusetts 2015).

The refugee experience does not end with arrival in the host country. Beyond the ability to survive exile and a challenging journey, young refugees mostly learn one or various new languages, integrate new school systems, develop an understanding of culture and habits, develop new relationships and, in many cases, with strong enthusiasm and determination.

Various studies show that 75% of people who survived trauma self-heal within two to three months after the event, even without any therapeutic support (Essentia 2015). The most important conditions for this are:

- ▶ social support;
- ▶ the feeling of being useful and busy;
- ▶ not talking about trauma;
- ▶ being secure and having access to basic needs.

In the following section, we will use these criteria as a basis to explore how youth workers can support and work alongside young refugees who have experienced trauma.

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15. <http://whatisresilience.org>.

## What can youth work do to help young refugees facing trauma?

Youth workers are neither psychologists nor therapists. Their role can consist in spending time with young people, providing opportunities for them to take control over their lives, and skills to shape their own future.

Based on our experience, the role of youth work can and should be to help young refugees connect to their resources. It should see them, become aware of them, so that they feel empowered enough to go on and live their lives. Youth work can contribute to facilitating the integration of young refugees in host societies.

In other words, youth work can contribute to providing new comfort zones for young people who have lost their own. A comfort zone can be defined as a place to just be, to feel safe, without having to produce documents, tell their stories or learn something.

It can consist of a regular activity or ritual organised with the young people. It can also be a physical space in a youth centre with a possibility to sit, have a hot drink, play or do nothing. Providing young refugees with simple time and spaces like these may contribute to their feeling of belonging.

For some reason, in Western societies, there seems to be a tendency to believe that traumatised people should talk about their trauma. Young refugees are faced with long and painful administrative procedures, in which they have to tell their traumatic experiences again and again. Youth workers should not ask about trauma or invite young refugees to talk about it. Of course, if it comes up, they can be present and listen, but trauma does not heal by talking about trauma. Rather the opposite, research shows that talking about trauma activates the traumatic networks in the brain and thus emphasises the physiological reactions even more (Brewin 2001).

One difficulty youth workers may face when it comes to traumatised young people is the fact that adverse reactions can be triggered at any time or in any situation. This can lead to strong reactions such as emotional outbreaks, violence, or self-harm. These are physiological reactions. Just as youth workers need to be trained in physiological first aid, there are very simple ways of stabilising a person in these moments. This requires basic training in psychological first aid. Youth workers should have the possibility to be trained to use these simple exercises and gestures to accompany a distressed young person and also to calm them down in these extreme situations. Various associations and organisations provide this type of psychological first aid training.<sup>16</sup>

Young refugees are first and foremost young people. The role of youth workers can be to allow them to live like any other young person. It can be to help them identify their interests, passions, needs and objectives. Therefore, youth workers should focus on what works well, and on young refugees' competences and interests. By finding out about what they used to do in their home country, the past is connected to positive memories, allowing young people to feel valued to share and be recognised as a person beyond an administrative category.

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16. The Intercultural Institute for Systemic Competences (IICoS) provides one-day training on psychological first aid to volunteers, youth workers and NGOs. Find more information on [www.iicos.org](http://www.iicos.org).

For example, the Scouts of Greece strongly mobilised on the islands in summer 2015. Some Syrian young people arrived on the coasts and immediately recognised the Scouting community, having been Scouts themselves in their home country. Being able to become active in the Greek Scouts movement to help others created a bridge between cultures, provided them with a comfort zone, with a useful task, and with a feeling of belonging. Many of these young people shared how life-changing this opportunity had been to them.

In 2017, The World Scouts Movement started an Erasmus+ KA3 funded European project called *Time to be Welcome*<sup>17</sup> together with various European youth organisations. The project aims at encouraging young volunteers and youth organisations all over Europe to welcome young refugees and migrants and support their integration process through the use of non-formal education and youth work. In this context, over 40 young volunteers working with refugees in Greece and France are being trained in a two-day course on Introduction to Psychological First Aid. This course enables them to learn concrete tools to identify trauma and be able to react in a stressful situation in order to calm down others and themselves.

As a trauma therapist working in a shelter for unaccompanied minors in Strasbourg, I meet with the young refugees once a week. Many of them face sleeping problems. One day, as I arrived and asked them, "What is new since we met last time?", all of them answered, "I slept so well last night!". I was surprised and asked how they managed it. Their common answer was "Real Madrid won the football game!"

This of course does not solve everything, but it shows clearly that, when dealing with themes that young people deal with, and when connecting to their interests, youth work may contribute to a feeling of well-being.

Social inclusion plays an important role in overcoming trauma. Many young refugees in the care of the state show a great motivation to learn. This motivation can also be used by youth workers to get young people involved, for example, in activities, sports and volunteering.

However, youth work with young refugees should not be limited, neither in the content, nor in the target group. Young refugees need to have an opportunity to meet young people from the local community, to mingle, and to find out about life in the new country. When young refugees live together in shelters, they face the difficulty of being surrounded exclusively by other young people with similar problems, with similar trauma and life experiences. Having an opportunity to meet with other youth may open their perspectives and contribute to healing.

Some young people are not able to engage. As already described above, trauma can manifest itself in various ways. Some young people close up and isolate themselves. In this case, it is important for youth workers not to force them or blame them for lack of motivation, but rather to show particular attention to their needs, and possibly to refer them to a specialist if appropriate. Here again, helping these young people to connect daily to the little things that worked well can be a highly enriching exercise.

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17. [www.timetobewelcome.eu](http://www.timetobewelcome.eu).

Finally, another important dimension to be taken into account in youth work with young refugees is cultural diversity. Young people have different beliefs, life experiences, traditions and religions, different ages, interests, socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientations and life stories. In some cultural settings, for example, black magic, witchery and so on are common practices, and young refugees often share traumatic experiences linked to such events. Youth workers should avoid questioning such practices and beliefs, but rather adopt a non-judgmental, understanding approach and enter dialogue or open spaces for exchanges of perspectives and experiences.

All in all, the role of youth work is and remains to provide young people with space and opportunities to grow and develop in a healthy, encouraging environment. Youth workers cannot treat or address trauma. However, they can recognise signs of trauma and co-operate with professionals who can tackle the therapeutic aspect. In parallel, youth workers can support young refugees by recognising their competences and their strong resilience skills, involving them, providing opportunities to meet local youth, talking about past and present successes, and about future dreams, and making sure young refugees can be... young.

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## Chapter 3

# Ankommen\_Weiterkommen: impressions and reflections on working with young asylum seekers in Karlsruhe, Germany

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*Johanna Eicken*

### The context

In 2014, unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers reached Germany. Many of these asylum seekers were under the age of 18, and some of them had travelled on their own. For many of them, experiences of adversity and hardship have amassed over months and years, making general support, as well as support to cope with physical and psychological wounds inevitable. Such support is of particular urgency in the case of children travelling on their own. In all German federal states, in fact, unaccompanied minors seeking asylum receive distinct types of support through the Youth Support (Jugendhilfe). While the obligatory support ensures the minimum protection of these young persons, there are gaps in terms of supporting them within their highly complex life situations. There are various organisations and associations throughout Germany that monitor and stimulate the improvement of services and the filling of gaps in the support of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

In this text, I aim to reflect upon and draw examples from my work with young asylum seekers through the project Ankommen\_Weiterkommen in Karlsruhe, Germany. I introduce the general context within which the project occurs, the project team, the methods and activities involved. I then touch upon a number of topics and examples, drawing on my own reflections of working with these young people.

### The Ankommen\_Weiterkommen project

The project Ankommen\_Weiterkommen came into being in response to the needs surfacing from the practical work done with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers at Parzival School Centre and Parzival Youth Support (Parzival Jugendhilfe) in Karlsruhe, Baden-Württemberg. Besides several kindergartens and schools, the centre also has a crisis unit which caters for the needs of children suffering from stress as a result of experiencing adversity. With its focus upon recovery and the facilitation of self-healing processes, the Parzival School Centre observed that among the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, psychological stress

was particularly high. There was a general feeling that such levels of stress were having a negative effect on the young learners' school performance, social skills and personal development. Parzival Youth Support (Parzival Jugendhilfe) also observed that between school and leisure time in the youth shelters, there would be substantial gaps in age-specific, professional, social and self-reflexive fields of learning and experience.

The Ankommen\_Weiterkommen project accordingly started off with the aim to respond to this need, and fill the gaps between the support offered by school staff and social workers.

## **Team, methods and activities**

The Ankommen\_Weiterkommen project focuses on age-specific and individual development tasks concerning self-reflexivity, social skills and professional orientation. I formed part of a team made up of four practitioners. We are a multidisciplinary team, with knowledge and skills that include agricultural design, asylum and migration, outdoor educational activities, vocational guidance, performing arts, mediation, visual arts and music, among others. The team works with around 50-80 unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and almost all of them are males between 16 and 20 years of age.

The main therapeutic and educational methods that were chosen, which were informed by the insights gained by some of the team members into the life situation of newly arrived children and young refugees, were individual counselling in addition to outdoor, theatre and art activities. In practice this means providing individualised one-to-one support in challenging situations, such as may occur in relation to asylum processes, professional orientation, new or challenging life situations. The use of excursions and outdoor activities are meant to facilitate relaxation, connection and fun. These activities include sports, arts, games as well as reaching out to German young people, and organising short excursions to Karlsruhe and other cities to allow for a variety of social settings to be explored. And finally we also use group sessions within the school, actual school lessons at the premises of Parzival School Centre, along with workshops at the youth shelters too, for example to aid civic orientation, reflections on peace and conflict, and opportunities to explore individual means for artistic self-expression. Performances as a result of music and theatre educational processes add another space for self-exploration and social learning.

To give some practical examples: As a summer excursion, one of the activities the young men experienced has been canoeing. Body control and co-ordination, personal skills and teamwork are only some of the competences required to manoeuvre the canoe safely. Such an activity further allows for experiencing self-efficacy, relaxation and fun.

Theatre provides another important educational practice. The young men were taught theatre methods and wrote and performed their own play on stage. As part of this activity, they could experience and train their ability to use mime, body language and voice consciously. They could reflect upon their strengths



and fears within playful interactions and in performance. They could experience themselves and their peers in unfamiliar situations and roles. And of course, they could experience completing a complex creative process (and product) and receiving recognition for it.

## **Impressions and reflections from my work**

My work with young refugees has provided many rich learning opportunities for me as a practitioner. What follows are some of the more salient observations that have informed the development of my practice.

### **Being adolescent**

Almost all of the young men I work with are adolescents. They are right in the middle of a highly complex developmental process where everything seems to change. Adolescence marks a period of transformation. If I think of how long and complex even just the physical and psychological processes during adolescence are, I sometimes wonder how adolescents find the energy for all the other challenges related to their refugee experience. Among the young men I work with, their focus is largely around defining their gendered identities, their sexuality and their social environments. Some of them redefine their looks, their ways of talking, walking and acting. They demand this self-work from themselves while coping with other social transitions, including finishing school and finding a job training or internship. I get a glimpse of their strength, but also their struggles: there are some days when they simply hide in their shell, the environment is perceived as scary, tiring and overwhelming.

### **Asylum, uncertainties and contradictions**

Adolescence and the transition to adulthood itself can be very difficult, even when experienced with the support of those who love us the most. For the young men I work with, the complex changes within adolescence are accompanied by the insecurities of not knowing much about their social, cultural and legal environment, as well as the highly bureaucratically and emotionally challenging asylum process. This seems to magnify their lack of orientation while also increasing their irritation and feelings of insecurity. On the one hand, they feel the overwhelming responsibilities of adulthood, while on the other hand experiencing the dependencies and vulnerabilities of a child.

Most of the young men I work with struggle with a discrepancy between their dreams for their ideal future and meeting the requirements at present to get there. At times, they have to take decisions which do not reflect their aspirations for their future, particularly where there is the need to increase chances to achieve long-term protection and residency. Going to school is one key example of this. Samir (17 years, from Iraq) considers going to school as seemingly not making sense:

Why should I go to school? I want to be a social worker. I can just go and do it.

Having to prioritise things they do not wish to do themselves solely to increase their chances of residency may lead to a lack of ownership of decisions taken, as Amal (16 years, from Algeria) describes:

I struggle to go to school. I was already an adult like any other adult. It is hard to go to school again. Work is so much easier. You can just do something and at least you earn money for it.

The normal questions related to what to do in life, what to prioritise and what profession to choose are distorted in the face of lacking orientation, lacking residency and unclear responsibilities. At times this may lead to contradicting visions of their future, such as in the case of Wako (17 years, from Ethiopia):

If I can stay in Germany, I will study hard and I will become a politician. I will become president. President of Germany. Better than Merkel. And if they send me back to Ethiopia, I will help my father there. You know, we Oromo have many sorrows. My father and my brother they fight for us. They kill every day. Every day they have to kill people. When I have to go back, I will help them killing.

Wako is a young man of a repressed ethnic minority. His childhood and youth are deeply impacted by the experience of violence and oppression due to his cultural and ethnic identity. It is hard to imagine how it must have felt for Wako, being raised as male and to face the distinct family responsibilities to be assumed given the very dynamics of such conflicts. It seems even harder to envision how Wako deals with the daily challenges and opportunities of life in Germany, while holding such contradicting visions of his future. In addition to the complexity of such inner processes, one would have to try to understand the impact of the outer state of affairs, particularly experiencing the ups and downs of the asylum status within a life of already unknown and new challenges.

The uncertainties of the asylum process constitute a heavy burden and I certainly see the asylum process as a source of discomfort, negative emotions and anxiety. They voice worries concerning the insecurities or lacking prospects of long-term residency as well as of family reunification. This in turn impacts their school performance, social skills and general trust in their environment. Besides the final asylum decision, there are other aspects related to their legal stay and rights in Germany that are also influential.

As a result of declining numbers of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Karlsruhe, most of the young men I work with are affected by changes in their immediate environment. An example is when their classmates are transferred into other homes or cities, at times far away. Another example is that of shelters and school classes for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers being merged or closed, often with great abruptness, like in the case of Abbas (17 years, from Afghanistan) who shared this news during our Christmas party:

My home will close. They will transfer me and my friends to different homes. I will lose my friends, my home and since I will be moved very far, also my job.

For the young people like Abbas, such changes mean losing an environment they got familiar with and have learned to trust and face yet again a new and

unknown situation – the disruption of forced migration is ongoing. Such changes happen at the expense of the young men and their sense of community, security and of feeling at home. I feel at times helpless in the face of such changes. They weigh upon young people, who already have to handle the challenges of adolescence, of the separation from their families and of orienting themselves within highly complex societal and legal systems. Rather than experiencing loss and unforeseen change over and over again, I wish for them to experience the relative stability, calm and predictability of an environment they know and trust, and to be able to deal confidently with all the challenges and opportunities life has in store for them.

## **Breaking points in the transition to adulthood**

Alongside the uncertainties and contradictions within their environment, the young men are passing through their own individual maturing processes as adolescents approaching adulthood. Each of them goes his way in his very unique way. Some seem to easily find the questions and answers they need to take the next steps towards who they want to be, what standards they choose as benchmarks for their actions and how they choose to interpret the world around them. Others seem to pause their individual quests in order to dig deeper, ask again, rest. They all seem to have their distinct breaking points in their different maturing endeavours: managing to go to school on a daily basis; achieving a job-orienting internship; getting their first girlfriend; combining old and new values and aspirations to articulate new dreams. Some of these breaking points are empowering breakthroughs, some are turning points to reorient themselves and ask further questions.

From the perspective of asylum and power over decision making, these young men experience two distinct breaking points in their transition from child to adult. One is at the age of 16, where they reach asylum maturity and the other at the age of 18, where a person achieves adult status and where Youth Support for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers usually ends. Depending on where the young men stand regarding their own individual inner and outer processes, I observe such breaking points in some cases which leave the young men facing overwhelming responsibilities and uncertainties. I experienced a good example of this with Thoko (18 years, from Eritrea) who almost ended up in court, due to not knowing about required changes to his public transport ticket and not understanding the urgency of payment deadlines.

Facing a number of challenges in reaching adult age, while still learning to gain the knowledge and confidence to oversee and assume all responsibilities tied to it, is normal. Any adolescent going through this legal transition faces this problem. The difference with these young men is that there is no family structure which smooths out the challenges. There is a high risk of being overwhelmed by the load of responsibilities. This may lead to neglect or failures in the young men's decisions and actions which may, for example, reduce their chances of achieving a positive asylum decision.

## Dealing with a multitude of transitory processes

The young men's current lives seem to be characterised by competing transitory processes. They are still adjusting to the rules, laws and customs of a different society while trying to find their place in Germany. The here and now seems to demand a high performance in a variety of roles: achieve a positive asylum decision, learn German quickly, find friends, be cool, find work, earn money, be a hero and support the family. I often get the impression in my work with these young men that the here and now – the present moment – is competing with other layers of their reality, such as information reaching them digitally via phone, or through media, their memories, or even flashbacks. At times, these other layers appear to be overwhelming, or contrast their feelings and experiences of the present moment.

Whenever I dare to smile, whenever I experience a short moment of joy, I am immediately punished for it.

Salman (17 years, from Pakistan) contemplates the message of the death of his brother-in-law, which he received only minutes after the final applause of our first theatre play performance. In this situation I felt angry about the excessive burdens these young men have to carry. At the same time, situations such as this one have opened doors for these young men, and for us, through the release of locked-away pain, fear and desperation. Through such experiences, we could talk in even more depth about loss, guilt, inner division, frustration and pain. Through this situation and through others of this kind, I learned that it is not so much about me doing the right thing in these moments but rather simply having the time to listen and to just be there. In many of these situations, I also experienced that the young men are themselves the first and best support for one another. In the support they give to each other, I often admire a very unique way of listening and their mutual understanding. This mutual understanding and help between them is a vital part of their support system which aids them in mastering all these complex transitions and developments, while coping with the hardships of their daily lives.

**Figure 3.1 – Young men's first experience in the theatre**



Relief and joy among the young men during the final applause on their first play, written by the actors.

## Trusting relationships and mutual learning

In trying to understand the complex realities of the young men I work with, it was very important for my team and me to get to know the young men, and they us, within a variety of situations and roles. Many of the activities and methods we use allow the young men to experience themselves in different roles, such as during role plays in theatre improvisation, when cooking for an event, during our parties, when visiting a job fair and when posing for photographs. This leads to a great variety of encounters between the different roles which we all assume, and it allows us to experience very different facets of one another, with very different qualities of connection and encounters. This on the one hand ties up with what I mentioned before concerning the stories the young men share with us about themselves and their perceptions, and also to alter their stories about themselves with stories of gains and achievements. On the other hand, a very important reason for these activities is to strengthen trusting relationships. Deepened understanding for each other and strengthened relationships of trust and mutual learning in turn help the young men to dare to further approach their new social and cultural environment and to establish a deeper sense of confidence and security within themselves.

My work is strongly shaped by the lessons I learn from these young people. I trust that I learn as much and, at times, more from the young men than they do from me and from our activities. At times, the lessons are not that straightforward and I have to reflect and sleep over them a number of times before I truly become aware of their meaning.

### Life is hard without women

As explained above, trusting and understanding each other are key in establishing a close, relaxed relationship with the young men. The openness and trust these young men manifested towards my team and me is a great gift. As part of a greater understanding of how we can support the young men in their developments, we also find out about the limits of our support. Learning about the shortcomings of the young men's new social environment, including our support, was part of the mutual learning endeavour for me, my team and the young men. Besides other important lessons, one important lesson in this regard was taught to me, starting with the statement by Goitom (17 years, from Eritrea):

Life is hard without women!

The statement reached me when the young men were busy creating a photo-collage of their theatre performance. I ask Goitom to elaborate and he explains that there are too few women near them. At first, I truly struggled to understand what he meant, as most of their teachers, most of our team and most workers at their shelters are women. Only after discussion with two other young men and my colleagues did I understand what he meant. There is no mother. No big sister. No aunt. The youngsters live together and the social workers, legal guardians and teachers who support them do this also to earn a living out of their support. This cannot replicate the quality of connection to a family member who listens, gives

advice, embraces and gives affectionate love. When we are engaged in fun activities, deep conversations and reflections and when we plan and dream of their future, I often have to think of how different this could have been at the kitchen table among their loved ones.

I wonder how the young men can build real trust and ease within an environment that does not welcome those they love the most. What do I tell Samir (18 years, from Iraq) who imagines his family taking part in his small daily life successes, such as asking that we:

please reserve a seat for my mom and my sister. They really want to come and see me perform.

I can tell him that his classmates, care workers, teacher would be proud of him. What can I tell him in the face of family reunification for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Germany that it is close to non-existent? His mother and sister were not invited to the show. They are not welcome.

## **Self-inquiry**

Getting to know the young men is a challenging endeavour, as they themselves are still discovering and shaping who they are and want to be. Unfortunately I get the impression that the stories the young men I work with tell about themselves often take a position of a newcomer, an outsider or a learner. Many times their achievements are forgotten in the face of all the challenges and demands of the present. The stories I have heard and experienced so far in our work which challenged these views of themselves are invaluable, as they constitute part of a positive, empowered self-image the young men are at times still in the process of creating. In fact, many of the young men we work with have achieved decent levels of German language, have found friends and manage to cope with the demands of school and internships. They play soccer and basketball and have learned to care for themselves and others. Some of the boys even cook for everyone at their homes. Their self-perception changes with the progressing of their self-exploration. They perceive the range of understanding, new skills, roles and potentials they tapped into. This allows them to also at times change the storyline, framing themselves as capable and highlighting simple gains as achievements, like Shuuriye (17 years, from Eritrea):

In Somalia only the women are allowed to cook food. If we are in Eritrea, we cannot cook. Here we are allowed to cook ourselves. We cook every day. We also bake our own bread. We are very good chefs.

I am very grateful for these storylines and perceptions, as they seem to soften their self-images as dependent, overwhelmed and over-burdened. It teaches me how crucial it is, in my work with the young men, to facilitate the right experiences and find the right questions to aid their self-inquiries and to highlight their gains and potentials.

## **Creativity as value and self-empowerment**

Getting to know the quality of support among the young men was already a great lesson to me. Another lesson I learned concerning their support was that the young men at times know very well what helps them most to cope with the challenges of their lives. One strategy which I taught and promoted to the young men was creative methods, only to learn that several of them already know well how to use them to their benefit. I know creative processes, depending on how they are used, can be of great therapeutic value. I learned that several young men use different forms of creative self-expression as a means to relax, contemplate, or calm themselves, find new forms of self-expression, or as a kind of valve to cope with stress or other challenges. An example of this is Salman. The young man had received the negative asylum decision shortly between having to cope with deaths and other tragic events in his family. He told me that he found poetry and painting two very crucial tools in processing difficulties in his life. He writes in his mother tongue, in English and in German, responding to experiences of pain and helplessness with creative agency.

### **The way ahead**

Throughout the numerous inquiries, adaptations and transitions which these young men undergo, they further ground themselves in their new environments, defining their individual spaces and directions. Through the connection to them, I learn what motivates them, what they aspire for and what they value. I learn what their daily life looks like, how their school and leisure time is structured, what key persons shape their direct social and educational environment and what main challenges they currently face. I also learn how many insecurities, contradictions and unforeseeable surprises their daily life holds and how they continuously have to prove a high degree of flexibility and strength to cope with sudden changes in many areas of their lives. They have to cope with challenges and experiences of adversity waiting just around the corner: as memories, as fears and as continuous realities. Neither they, nor my team and I can impact upon the bureaucratic machinery of the German asylum apparatus, to ensure the prevention of experiencing further adversity.

As this project started only in March 2017, our work and the project itself are still in their infancy. Since then, the relationships between us and the young men were developed and have strengthened in quality and trust. Some men left us and new ones joined in. My hope is for us to sustain this familiar, trusting and humorous atmosphere as well as the quality of connection that has developed between us. It is my hope that we can continue to bring about through these qualities a great number of precious processes of physical, artistic self-exploration, social learning and fun. I am unspeakably grateful for the trust I receive from these young men and for being allowed to work with and listen to them, and to learn how to best accompany this crucial stage of their life journeys.





## Chapter 4

# Working with unaccompanied minors: preparation for inclusion

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**Interview by Mara Georgescu with Gaëlle Le Guern, Deputy Director of the DOMIE (a facility offering assistance to unaccompanied foreign minors in Strasbourg)**

**T**he Oberholz association is an educational outreach centre, that is, an association which takes in young people placed there either by the Child Welfare Services or Youth Judicial Protection Services. These are children with serious family problems. They may be the victims of abuse or neglect by their parents and/or have committed crimes. The association mainly takes care of boys from 13 to 21 years old.

The centre, which was established in 1936, has been officially authorised to operate in two main areas (educational support and the judicial protection of young people) and at present comprises three facilities, one of which is the DOMIE which provides assistance to unaccompanied minors in Strasbourg, France. The DOMIE currently provides assistance to 125 unaccompanied male minors, accommodated in apartments shared by three to four young persons in a variety of locations. The DOMIE provides them with educational support in order to enable them to integrate into French society. It is funded by the *département* council.

Gaëlle Le Guern is the Deputy Director of the DOMIE, the Oberholz association's dedicated facility for assisting unaccompanied minors in Strasbourg, France.

**MG:** *What is the typical pathway followed by a young person arriving in your facility?*

**GLG:** When a young person comes to us, their unaccompanied minor status has been confirmed by the children protection authorities and the judicial authority. They will have spent between one and six months in other departments being assessed.

When the young people arrive, our mission is to look after them in their day-to-day activities, to ensure their well-being, to accompany them in a personalised plan towards autonomy.

The question of their administrative regularisation does not feature as a priority in our terms of reference. However, young foreigners whose situations have not been regularised cannot do anything: they cannot make long-term plans nor can they work; quite simply, they can no longer live in France once they turn 18. That is why we have to sort out this issue because this is an essential aspect that makes the rest possible. The issue also has significant psychological repercussions because the whole question of having papers causes severe distress to the young people. From the moment they feel reassured that we will deal with this key issue, they know that they can count on us and that there is no doubt that they will obtain their residence permit. Even if less acute, this anxiety is there until they obtain the permission to stay. This makes it possible to work on a project with the young persons by first taking into account their needs and abilities, and their wishes and personality.

Our first task is therefore to make the young people feel secure, to explain to them that since their situation has now been assessed, we will be able to work together to ensure that their plans come to fruition. It is very important to inform young people about how we work and about their current situation. We do not do anything without first explaining to them the reason why and getting their opinion on the issue. We try to make sure that they understood what we were trying to communicate by asking them to reformulate what they have just learned. Unless they are properly informed, they will be unable to give their opinion.

An important part of the assistance we give them is to prepare them, as soon as they arrive, for when they will have to leave our facility. Time is of the essence because we have at best two years to put their plans into action, to give them some reassurance and to transmit the codes of the hosting societies, before they reach the age of majority.

The second most urgent aspect is health, to ensure that they are in good health, that they do not have an illness requiring urgent medical attention, or that they are not chronically ill. Psychological trauma is an essential issue and they require a specialised response.

The third priority is schooling. In order for the young people to be able to have some hope that their situation will be regularised and that they will be able to stay in France, and also for them to be taken care of by the *département* after they turn 18, it is absolutely essential that they follow a course of education. They therefore need to get to school as soon as possible. However, this remains a problem as we receive young people who are over 16 and who are therefore no longer at an age when attending school is compulsory. Moreover, French is not the language of many of these young people and so we have to find places in institutions that teach French to non-native speakers who are older than 16. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education, there are very few such places to be found. Finally, we are confronted with a more recent problem: that of young people who are illiterate. For the last two or three years, we have been receiving an increasing number of young people who arrive without being able to read or write in their mother tongue, or indeed in French if they are French-speaking. These young people have never acquired the learning instinct.

Each year, whatever their starting point, nearly all of them get their diploma. This is an excellent outcome, a result of the young people's energy and motivation and of their teachers' commitment.

When they turn 18, they leave our facility. At present, this transition to the age of majority is a complicated issue, as the *département* council has decided that we will no longer be responsible for monitoring the progress of these young adults. This means that they will leave our facility and get transferred to another one before a decision is made on their administrative situation and before all the conditions are in place for them to be able to integrate into society.

**MG:** *What kind of educational assistance does your facility put in place?*

**GLG:** Each one of our educators is in charge of eight young people. The educators are the constant in the life of the young persons; they are responsible for their progress and for ensuring that the whole process runs smoothly. It is essential that they are able to build trust with the young people in order to make a dynamic educational relationship possible.

The educators are responsible for the young persons' schooling and for monitoring their progress.

One of our educators' most important tasks is to provide transcultural and transitional support for the young people. The educators must be able to guide the teenagers in this country which is new to them, to give them the cultural keys to this new environment and help them move between their culture and that of the host country, France, and vice versa while trying to ensure that they have a coherent and comprehensive view of their experience between "before, over there" and "now, over here". The aim is to also to try to help them limit any conflicts of loyalty they may face between the cultural system in their country or the education they have received from their families, and the cultural system in their host country and the new experiences they may have, away from their relatives and friends. It is crucial for the young people to be able to understand and learn to use the codes of their host country in order to successfully integrate. However, the objective is not to assimilate them, but to make it possible for them to integrate in accordance with their personal choices: they will then be able to choose what to keep from their culture and what to take from the culture of the country they are living in. It is up to the young people to decide how to reorganise these various elements in their lives. But in order to do that, they must be assisted by an educator.

We have an "open-door" duty system in place five days a week. This is a way of enhancing the independence of these young persons who know that they can come and meet the educators at any time they need. In addition, given the limited assistance we can give them, we thought it important to guarantee the presence of educators. I think that these young people appreciate the fact that they are able to interact with several people, knowing that there is a whole team assisting them, and that they are able to be in touch with players outside our structure belonging to a network set up by different professionals of our team. This is specifically the case for our cultural or participation projects which are run together with our partners. Finally, the way things are organised helps them prepare for their future lives in France in which it

will be important for them to know how to become part of a professional or social network, and establish a network of friends. When they are with us, they are in fact practising for their future lives.

The educators are constantly in touch with the other colleagues who provide psychological, legal and administrative assistance to the young persons or assist them in obtaining employment.

**MG:** *What is the place given in your activities to projects on youth participation?*

**GLG:** These projects are carried out alongside our main task. We decided to implement this type of project because we think that they are very important. For us, they are a means of strengthening an individual's capacity to take action. The idea is to make these young persons play a part in the community and be active citizens, to enable them to find and take their place in society whatever their project is (whether they will stay in France during a short or long period or if they will go back to their country or to another country). The aim is firstly to teach them to express themselves, to take ownership of their environment and not be afraid of how others see them.

By expressing themselves through participation in cultural projects, this creates a less austere but more profound way for them to think about how they fit into this new society both as migrants and as young people. Theatre, documentaries and dancing enable them to present and portray themselves and to understand who they are and how they see themselves. In the photo exhibition project, the young people are each presented through three photographs and a text. Their presentations are profound and give an idea of who they are, and challenge preconceived ideas. One of the aims sought is to enable them to make some sort of a plea on behalf of young people in a similar situation addressed to the authorities and the public at large. Through these experiences, they feel qualified to act in the place they are now. One of the young people that we have been monitoring set up a youth organisation after writing a book on his experiences and another one set up a sports association.

Another project that we are developing, through various partnerships, concerns the direct participation of young people in aid organisations or neighbourhood associations. The idea is once again to make them players, to help them take their place in the local community, in their neighbourhood. They could engage in charities as volunteers or participate in the organisation of local community events, for example. They are no longer only recipients of assistance, they also provide assistance. They become part and parcel of the life of the city.

**MG:** *What results have these projects yielded?*

**GLG:** We have been able to see different types of results.

The first result is the changes that they bring to the young people themselves, to their personal development. They are more confident, and ask to take part in other activities that we propose. Some say they feel less shy and more proactive thanks to these experiences. They can then become active in different associations or create their own project.

These projects are also an opportunity for the educators to get to know the young people, as some topics are, in these contexts of artistic creation, with other materials,

broached in a very clear manner whereas that is not usually the case (migration-related issues, their relationships with their parents and the life they had in their country, etc.). This makes it possible for the educators and the young people to get to know each other in a different way. As a result, the educational support is very often enhanced.

The third result is the communication with the general public to make them understand who these young people are and why they are here. The aim is also to make them understand that if these young people had had an alternative not to migrate, that is, staying in their country with their families, they would never have left. It causes them great pain to leave and be separated from their families and friends. Most of them will not see their loved ones for at least five years and people need to understand what that means. The young people themselves are best able to explain their journey and the pain of exile. It is important to explain this as empathy changes views.

When we make presentations in schools, for example, the experience is very interesting. Firstly, for the children, as they will remember this experience and, we hope, be less receptive to depictions and prejudices. Secondly, for their parents, as the children will talk to them about this experience in a positive manner, which will, perhaps, make it possible to challenge certain preconceived ideas about young migrants. Finally, for the young people because the experience is very rewarding and the contact with the children is always very positive. Therefore, it is a win-win situation for everyone concerned.

**MG:** *Can you explain how you are organised?*

**GLG:** There are 26 persons working here, in two units, the educational unit and the resource unit.

The educational unit comprises the educators.

We have put in place a resource unit in order to provide psychological, legal and administrative support and assist in securing employment.

The psychologist is an essential post. For many years, we have noted that the issue of the trauma caused by their travel conditions and the course of their migration has become increasingly significant. Upon their arrival with us, there is a mandatory interview with the psychologist so that she can introduce herself and explain the nature of her work. Weekly meetings may thereafter be put in place for those who so wish, but the approach can be more flexible if the young people so request.

The psychologist is also very important for the educational team, to help them decipher some of the young people's behaviour, beyond the apparently obvious. She also helps the educators maintain a degree of detachment in some situations.

A lawyer provides legal support to the young people. Her role is to inform them and explain the procedures to them to enable them to become stakeholders in the path they follow. She is also responsible for ensuring that they obtain their identity papers from the authorities in their country of origin. The lawyer must also inform her educator colleagues of the legal issues in order to enable them to answer the young people's questions and to ensure that they keep in mind the administrative constraints to which these young people are subject.

The resource unit also comprises a post of vocational integration officer. We are asked to ensure that these young people are independent as soon as possible, whatever their profile, and to foster their social inclusion. The role of the vocational integration officer is to create a network and to be able to support the young people in their integration into the labour market.

Unfortunately, these young people sometimes come to France thinking that they will become doctors or engineers, but in reality, they will study to become plumbers or bricklayers. It must be recognised that the young people are increasingly less able to choose the type of studies that they will undertake. They will take up places in vocational courses which are not in demand by pupils in general and which correspond to fields in which employers have trouble recruiting. We try as much as possible to start from the project which they have in mind in order to build a plan in several steps, in order to put it into practice. But we have to take into account the opportunities which are actually available to them and the constraints which they face. Priority is given to sandwich courses because they provide them with a livelihood even if they are no longer taken care of by the Child Welfare Services. We therefore try to leave as many doors open as possible so that they can define their plans themselves over time. For those who have to continue their studies directly, we help them find a job after they graduate. We must also be able to explain the link between these employment opportunities and the regularisation of their administrative circumstances. The role of the vocational integration officer is also to help them prepare their CVs, their covering letters, etc.

A social worker also works in the resource unit to ensure that the young people have access to the social protection system and to their social rights. As our goal is to help these young people become independent, an important part of the social assistant's tasks is to provide access to housing. Her role is to prepare them for when they leave our facility. It is crucial for our team that the young people have access to accommodation or housing and that they have the means to a decent standard of living.

In addition, a teacher of French as a foreign language is also part of this resource unit. We also have an agreement with the association Agir ABCD to supplement this educational work and we can call on volunteer students who provide further learning support.

One of the tasks of each person working in the resource unit is to develop networks outside our facility.

In the resource unit we have a technical sub-unit, a housemother and a technical educator who help the young people in managing the apartments where they are housed. This also helps develop their independence.

We all work together, so the issue of communication is very important. What really matters to us is to have an interdisciplinary outlook, to make sure that everybody, from their own position, role and training can give their opinion on the young person in question in order to find appropriate and comprehensive solutions to their situation. This enables us to carry out work that is both complex and finely tuned. The aim is to ensure that all the staff meet on a weekly basis and exchange ideas in order to benefit from this richness of different professional cultures.

**MG:** *What are the problems or challenges that come up in your work?*

**GLG:** The main problems are limited funding, the short period of time available for providing assistance which plunges us into a constant state of urgency, and in view of the number of young people that we take care of, difficulties in continuing to guarantee individualised assistance. I would also add the exhaustion of the staff assisting them.

These young people are always first considered as migrants and only then as young persons. This is underscored by the March 2016 reform of the Child Protection Act, which introduces provisions for special rules for these minors as the system entails an assessment which acts as a filter for acceptance into the child protection system. This assessment is carried out by the *département* council in co-operation with certain organisations, to prove that the young migrant is unaccompanied or a minor, based on criteria such as the consistency of their story, their physical appearance, etc. The assessment of their age is based on a range of indicators. There may be errors because this assessment is not an exact science. It is most worrying that the higher the number of applications for protection, the higher the application rejection rate.

The overwhelming majority of these young people are very determined. Those among them who have been sent by their families without having a say are sometimes very angry and may find it difficult to be motivated to invest in a project in France which they did not choose. They miss their country.

The administrative difficulties which they all encounter take up much of the time and energy of the professionals who assist them and affect the quality of the essential educational work with them. The young people pass their exams, are very committed, have to find work and housing without any support from their families, but are constantly held up by obstacles of this type.

**MG:** *What would be your message for change in the future?*

**GLG:** Firstly, I believe it is crucial that we change our outlook: these young people need to be seen as children or teenagers and assisted as such, their status as foreigners should no longer be the key element to helping them. Providing assistance to these minors flows on from our international commitments, but this assistance remains a problem for the public authorities. Unfortunately, in France, the administrative authorities fail to adopt a pragmatic stance *vis-à-vis* these young people. We need to stop looking at them in terms of charity or obligations and take on board the value of investing in them.

Secondly, I think it is important to see the advantages of welcoming these young persons. The better the reception and assistance provided to them, the more motivated they will be, as real players in society. Some of the young people arrived with the idea that France is the country of human rights and of security (physical, economic, etc.) and they feel a lot of anger after two or three years of constant anxiety about their future and their administrative status which remains rather precarious. This system creates a lot of anger. Is that helpful? Could we not say that as soon as these young people are in our country and are placed under the child protection authority, we should consider them as our children and assist them as such?

The presence of these young people is an asset for society in every respect. Most of these minors will build their lives in France and start a family here. Welcoming them today will bear fruit in their adult lives and in what they will transmit to their children.





## Chapter 5

# “Living under the same roof” – A home for young apprentices and unaccompanied minor refugees right in the centre of Munich

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*Benjamin Henn and Niklas Gregull*

### Introduction

Since 2015, the German youth welfare system has gone through many challenges when thousands of unaccompanied minor refugees arrived in Germany. Immediate help was needed, therefore quick and improvised solutions were set up, and with great effort, from both local organisations and municipal authorities, they were able to provide support to the young people from (mostly) Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and Eritrea. Furthermore, schools in Munich started to offer special classes for young refugees to learn German within a short time. Many volunteers helped with guidance through daily life and the bureaucratic jungle.

However, after the first steps in Germany were successfully made, big questions came up: How could integration work in a long-term sense? What do young refugees need in order to settle down and have promising future prospects? Which concepts of youth work have been successful and enduring? In this chapter, we try to give answers to those issues.

Since 2009, the Salesianum in Munich has accommodated both unaccompanied minor refugees and local apprentices. After giving a brief overview of the German context and the project itself and its history, we argue that housing unaccompanied minor refugees with the same-aged local youth has positive effects on integration as well as on building mutual trust and tolerance. At the same time, we analyse the limits and potential of youth work in relation to the concept of co-accommodation of unaccompanied minor refugees and local apprentices. At the end, we provide seven keynotes for achieving a promising integration and future perspectives for the work with young refugees. These seven keynotes, including the whole chapter, are based on the experiences, observations and daily work of Benjamin Henn, social worker in the project, and Niklas Gregull, who is active as a volunteer in the project. We have also used project reports and project applications as resources.

## 1. A few explanations

### Minor unaccompanied refugees and the youth welfare sector in Germany<sup>18</sup>

In accordance with the Directive 2011/95/UE:

“unaccompanied minor” means a minor who arrives on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for him or her whether by law or by the practice of the Member State concerned, and for as long as he or she is not effectively taken into the care of such a person; it includes a minor who is left unaccompanied after he or she has entered the territory of the Member States.

After arriving in Germany and staying in a reception centre for a few weeks, unaccompanied minor refugees are taken under the youth welfare office’s care. A legal guardian is appointed who looks after the young person, especially concerning the asylum application and an appropriate place to live within the welfare system (charitable institutions and Christian organisations, like the Salesians of Don Bosco). In general, minor refugees are treated like German young people – all social facilities, from nursery schools, to sports activities provided by youth work initiatives are open for them.

“Youth work” within the context of this chapter is linked to the German youth welfare service, the institutional and legally structured part of youth work. The main objectives of the youth welfare service, according to the social act, are supporting children or young people and their families by offering, among other things, the following:<sup>19</sup>

- ▶ child and youth protection;
- ▶ educational offers for families;
- ▶ residential care;
- ▶ foster care system;
- ▶ legal guidance.

### Receiving an apprenticeship in the German vocational training system<sup>20</sup>

The German vocational training system is based on the co-operation between companies and public vocational schools. Around 50% of all school leavers are doing an apprenticeship in this “dual learning system” which is regulated by law and recognised all over Germany. By both learning at work and at school, young people benefit from the beginning of their apprenticeship. The learning matter at the public vocational schools matches with their work. After receiving their certificates at the end of their (mostly) three-year apprenticeship, many trainees start a regular job in the same company. So getting into an apprenticeship is a first step towards a good future job prospect.

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18. [http://europa.eu/youth/de/article/39/30519\\_en](http://europa.eu/youth/de/article/39/30519_en).

19. [www.gesetze-im-internet.de/sgb\\_8/\\_2.html](http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/sgb_8/_2.html).

20. [www.bmbf.de/en/the-german-vocational-training-system-2129.html](http://www.bmbf.de/en/the-german-vocational-training-system-2129.html).

## 2. The Salesianum in Munich – Description of the project<sup>21</sup>

The Salesianum is run by the Salesians of Don Bosco, a Catholic congregation founded in the 19th century in Italy by Giovanni Bosco. Since 1919, the community of the Salesians of Don Bosco has settled in Munich and takes care of disadvantaged young people. Of course, the word “disadvantaged” has several meanings and depends on different points of view. The core target group of the project has always been young apprentices who have received an education and been hosted at the Salesianum since the 1970s. They were disadvantaged because they could not live with their families or find work in their home town. After 1975, the in-house workshops were closed down, but there were still over 400 young people every year living in the Salesianum close to the city centre of Munich during their apprenticeship.

In the early 1990s, the Salesianum faced challenges when hundreds of young people from the former German Democratic Republic came to Munich looking for apprenticeships. A lot of them finally found a place to stay in the Salesianum. In those days, an estimated 50% of the inhabitants of the Salesianum came from Eastern Germany. Suddenly, the project and the Salesian community had to open themselves to young people with different backgrounds – a lot of them had grown up in a non-religious dictatorship and now they came to a traditional Catholic city like Munich. Although the Salesianum is run by a Catholic congregation, most of the workers are lay people and not members of the congregation, however the basic principles of the project were based on Christian values – and they still are today. From today’s point of view, this was an important chance to show how open the project really was. In this chapter we will have a closer look at the basic values informing the project and the educational approach.

The next big shift – not in numbers but in content – came 20 years later. The Salesianum had also hosted disadvantaged young people who were supported by the local youth welfare service. In 2009, after discussions about the core question of what “disadvantaged” meant in the current situation, the first residential group for unaccompanied minor refugees was opened. Eleven young people from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia moved into their new home for the next year. You could say, in a project with 400 young people, what difference will 11 new residents make? However, this was the beginning of a new era which has been both successful and challenging for the project, its residents (the “new” and the “old” ones) and the community of the Salesians. The Salesianum understands itself as a “learning organisation” which also means that it has been through many processes of change in its history and daily work.

Today, the Salesianum provides the following facilities:

- ▶ hostel for 72 apprentices and 269 vocational students;
- ▶ four residential groups for 50 unaccompanied minor refugees;
- ▶ social educational residential groups;
- ▶ individual case assistance for 60 young people;

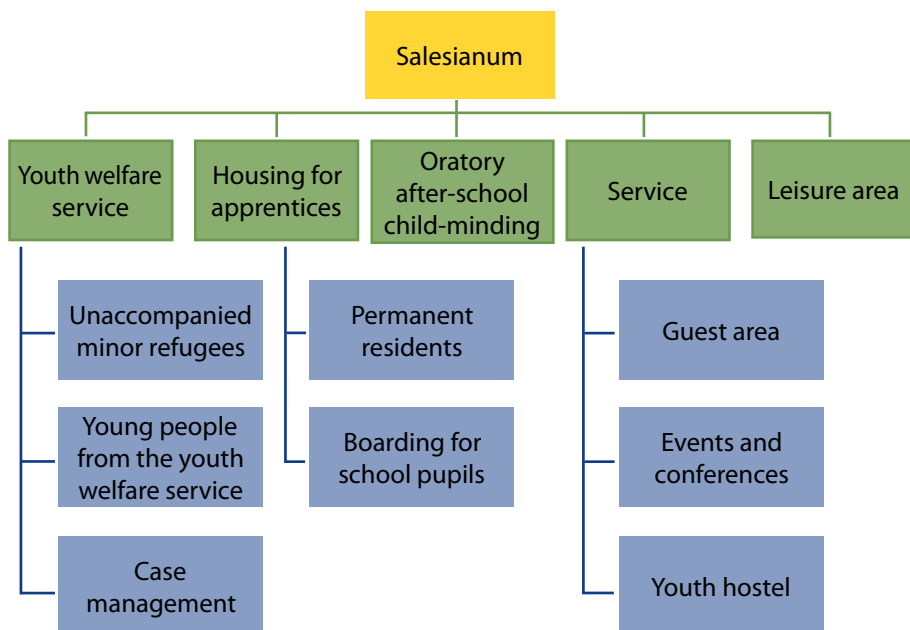
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21. [www.salesianum.de/](http://www.salesianum.de/).

- ▶ pastoral work;
- ▶ leisure-time facilities and educational opportunities;
- ▶ conference/event area and guest rooms for outside groups;
- ▶ after-school child-minding service for 50 pupils;
- ▶ youth hostel for youth groups.

Possibilities for leisure-time activities which can be used by all residents and guests include a football field, basketball court, sports hall, billiards, football tables, climbing wall, music and creativity rooms, gym, bowling alley, swimming bath and a lounge (named “Sales-Lounge”) with a bar and many board games.

**Figure 5.1 – Organigram of the main facilities of the Salesianum**



**Table 5.1 – Overview of unaccompanied minor refugees in the Salesianum by January 2018 (young boys aged 15-21 years)**

Country of origin	Number
Afghanistan	22
Iraq	5
Syria	1
Somalia	6
Eritrea	9
Senegal	1
Albania	1
Nigeria	1

Country of origin	Number
Democratic Republic of Congo	1
Guinea	1
Ghana	1
Sierra Leone	1

The overall goals of the Salesianum are:

- ▶ to support young people’s social and professional integration;
- ▶ to support integral adolescent development (in personal, social, ecological, professional, political and religious terms) through individual aids and social group work, so they become self-confident, responsible persons who are able to deal with conflicts and the challenges of daily life in school or job;
- ▶ to guide young people in an apprenticeship or in school and help them to develop realistic future perspectives;
- ▶ to create a helping network for young people which helps them even during the transition to independent living;
- ▶ assistance.

### 3. Educational approach – The preventive system<sup>22</sup>

Our overall approach, the preventive system, is a values-based educational system, which was developed by Don Bosco, a Catholic priest and founder of the Salesians of Don Bosco, during the 19th century. We have already mentioned Assistance as one of the goals of the Salesianum, which also forms the core of the youth workers’ working style. Within Assistance, the educator should have eyes for the group as well as for the individual, focusing on those young people who need the most attention, without forgetting about the group. Attendance, Reason and Values are three key elements in Assistance.

**Attendance** means to be actively present among the young people and to take part in their daily life. The following attitudes demonstrate attendance: authenticity, trust, approachability, concern, sincere interest, full of life and unconditional.

**Reason** means that youth workers associate with young people in a reasonable way. For this, the following seven attitudes are crucial: positive reinforcement, affinity to youth culture, realism, flexibility, adaptability, patience and rationality.

**Values** means that youth workers need to create space and a common ground to talk and to discuss values. At the same time, the educational approach has to be based on values, therefore the youth worker is also a role model for the young people. To achieve this, the following seven attitudes are important: sense of transcendence, respect, openness, kindness, empathy, forgiveness and optimism.

22. This chapter is mainly a summary of The Don Bosco Style. See Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw (2015), *“Few words and a lot of action ...”: an introduction to the working style of Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw*. For further reading: Braido, Zuliani and Fox (2013), *Prevention, not repression: Don Bosco’s educational system*.

Next to the educational system itself, the (learning) environment is very important. We call it the Oratory criterion and it consists of four places, each one connected with a value and an educational goal. The origin of this is the structure of Don Bosco's first youth centre in the 19th century in Turin, which was called Oratory:

Oratory (4 places)	Oratory criterion (Salesianum)	Values (Educational goals)
Home	A place of their own	Freedom
School	A place to learn	Responsibility
Playground	A place to play	Solidarity
Parish	A place of sense	Meaning

It is important that there is a balance between the four places. This means a young person should not spend the whole day in his or her room or, for example, in the sports hall, but also in the other areas and places.

## **Insights into the lives of young refugees and German youth in the Salesianum**

When we talk about the challenges and opportunities concerning the work with different groups of young people, we need to take a closer look at their personal needs. The first question is: What is the difference between an unaccompanied minor refugee and a young apprentice from Munich – both living in the Salesianum?

According to German social legislation, all minors are equal, no matter where they come from and whether they have a residence permit or not. Depending on the municipality, this often changes when they turn 18 (Parusel 2009). In the worst cases, from one day to the next, they have to leave residential care and protection under the social and welfare system and are placed in mass accommodations for refugees only, often with older refugees and dissimilar-aged youth (UNHCR and Council of Europe 2014).

A minor refugee who comes to Germany without parents (most of whom are young men) has the right to accommodation in a safe place and he gets a legal guardian, who is responsible for him like his parents and looks after things such as his asylum application and other administrative challenges. After his arrival, the young person is transferred to the so-called "clearing process" place. This involves a total check-up on mental (trauma, psychological issues), medical and personal issues (family background, flight story and so on). If the minor comes to Germany without a passport, the youth welfare officer tries to estimate his age, often using medical examinations. While living together with many other minor refugees at this reception centre, the residential staff try to recommend a suitable home for the young person after the clearing process. For a young man who has just arrived in a completely new country and new culture, this impersonal and standardised process is often his first big challenge for his new life in Germany.

If the young person does not need any intensive therapeutic care and he is 15 years of age or older, he can move to the Salesianum once the clearing process is

finished. In his new home he will find a safe place to stay and professional staff who will help him with all daily issues, such as bureaucratic matters, finding a place in school, learning how to use a washing machine and an electric oven, how to handle his money, going to the doctor and prophylactic medical care. The young person shares a room with another minor refugee who does not need to have the same origin and language. In this way, step by step, the young person learns to manage his daily routine and new life in Germany.

Despite the different cultural background, his personal history and, not unusually, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, an unaccompanied minor refugee has also a lot in common with a young 16-year-old boy who has just moved out of his parents' home, located in the Bavarian countryside, to the big city of Munich to start his apprenticeship at a local company.

Of course, the apprentice (both the young refugee and non-refugee) does not move into a small group with just a few people. The area for him in the Salesianum is a corridor, sometimes with up to 20 bedrooms, so it has the feel of a youth hostel. One residential staff member looks after him, such as checking that he is coming home on time at night, writing his record book and ensuring he lives in harmony with his next-door-neighbours. The staff member may also be in contact with his teachers and staff at work. For the young apprentice the higher level of freedom in the Salesianum, compared to living at home, means a higher level of responsibility for himself and his behaviour. Every day, the residential staff are concerned with all the little upsets and challenges of adolescent life: having no money after the first week of the month, getting caught travelling without a valid ticket, forgetting to take the lunch from the stove in time, smoking in their room while drinking vodka, lovesickness and so on.

But there are also bigger issues in life when a young person needs assistance: family issues like the new boyfriend of the mother who does not want to see him around, losing the Skype contact to their parents in Syria and not knowing what happened to them, getting thrown out for not attending school, feeling alone and not being accepted by people of the same age, language barriers, perceived and real exclusion by strangers.

Apart from the family problems, most of this is an issue for both unaccompanied minor refugees and young people who have grown up in Germany. This means many adolescents experience similar problems, which have effects on their lives. Nevertheless, in a place like the Salesianum they can learn from each other how to deal with these problems. It is therefore not always necessary or possible to talk to an educator but they can help each other, a bit like peer-to-peer-education, as they are young people in the same transitional period to adulthood. Through our preventive approach, Assistance, we try to create a family-like atmosphere where everybody is treated with the same respect and attention; it does not matter whether they are a young person or staff member or what their background is.

There are still a lot of challenges – especially in the contact between young refugees and German adolescents, such as language problems in dealing with the difference between academic German, which is learned in school, and the Bavarian dialects. There are also cultural differences. To improve intercultural understanding and living

together is one of the main goals in guiding the young people, both the unaccompanied minor refugees and German apprentices, but also for the other residents of the Salesianum. It is always easier to stay within one's own circle of friends with the same language, same opinions and same habits. To break these circles up, the huge range of leisure activities help the young people to get to know each other in the Salesianum: playing football and volleyball, table tennis, watching sports, playing games while having a drink together (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) in the "Sales-Lounge", cooking with friends, using the swimming pool and climbing wall together, a holiday trip during the summer holidays and, very important, to celebrate feasts together.

## **Integration – Similarities between young refugees and German youth**

"Integration" is a highly sensitive topic. Throughout society, there are many different points of view on how it needs to be defined and who needs to be integrated and how. Despite all the controversial discussions, one thing is certain: looking back in history, integration has always been an important topic for many countries. At the same time, integration is the challenge of present and future society, because diversity and migration are given facts.

In the following part, we want to describe four important goals of integration for unaccompanied minor refugees. We consider these goals as crucial for a successful educational process, which should be achieved at the end of a young man's stay in the Salesianum.

### **Four goals of integration**

1. Language and communication skills (being able to communicate and express myself confidently)
2. A home (having a place of my own)
3. Education (getting a school-leaving qualification, an apprenticeship and later on: a job)
4. Social contacts/network (to local people)

These four goals also apply to the German apprentices; certainly they do not have to learn a new language, but communication skills like speaking with self-confidence and appropriately, and suitable for a particular purpose, person or occasion, are still important to learn in this age and time of transition.

Young refugees, and indeed young people in general who fall under the support of the child and youth welfare service, need to be integrated into the Salesianum project, which can be seen as the first step towards integration into society. Young apprentices also face various integration challenges that are quite similar to those of other young people: integration into work life, a future job and often an unknown big city and environment.



Within the structure of the house, there are other facilities which are integral to the system of the Salesianum. There are guests, seminars, conference groups, as well as small groups for the swimming pool and staff, which also use the same areas and facilities for leisure activities. Similarly, the young refugees and the permanent residents of the Salesianum are interacting as well and in this way we are bringing together people from different backgrounds. There are studies for Germany that show that prejudice and xenophobia are higher in areas where nearly no foreigners are living, for example, the "Mitte-Studie" (Zick, Küpper and Krause 2016), which has been done every two years since 2002. The last "Mitte-Studie" published in 2016 is a representative survey for Germany which analyses right-wing extremism, misanthropy, xenophobia and authoritarianism. Also, the 2017 published study about right-wing extremism and xenophobia in Eastern Germany from the Göttinger Institute for Democracy Research on behalf of the Commissioner of the German Federal Government for the newly formed German states (Michelsen et al. 2017) gives the indication that prejudice and xenophobia are higher in areas where comparatively few or no foreigners are living. Therefore, the best way to prevent prejudice and xenophobia is to bring people together, so that they come to know each other.<sup>23</sup>

Bringing together all these different groups with different backgrounds, expectations, needs and wishes also means a challenge for the youth workers and staff members working in the different areas: Who else is in the house? What do I have to take into account if I plan something?

## Local partnerships and co-operation

Important stakeholders are the local youth welfare office, medical institutions, public vocational schools and companies. For all our partners it is important to know that there are contact persons in the Salesianum and that they know them and how to get in contact with them.

With the youth welfare office we need to develop concepts regarding the special needs of young people who have been taken into care. They are also responsible for the allocation of young refugees to the Salesianum, the control of the case management and the basic financing. There are regular meetings every six months with all relevant partners – the young person, teaching and residential staff, youth welfare officer and legal guardian. The Salesianum is responsible for the process, but the overall control and responsibility lies with the welfare office. The latter is informed by educational reports on a regular basis.

Due to the fact that urgent medical care can be quite difficult to access if the right papers are not there at the right time, we are in close contact with a few doctors and therapists who support us in an uncomplicated way. They know us, our house and our residents and give the necessary treatment first and then ask us to present the needed papers from the government. They are also a bit more aware of the cultural backgrounds of our young people than other medical institutions. One doctor even joins us with his wife for special feasts to celebrate with us and the young people.

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23. For "othering" and intergroup relations: Tajfel (1982), "Social psychology of intergroup relations" and Hewstone, Rubin and Willis (2002), "Intergroup bias".

Our young people attend 15 different public vocational schools. The co-operation with them varies. The best way to prevent drop-outs because of not attending school, bad marks and psychological issues is to maintain close contact with both the (head) teachers and the social workers at the school. In problematic situations the social worker can mediate between all sides and is an important contact person for us and the young person.

The companies are important for young people for job placement and vocational training. The contacts with the companies start with the application mostly and are followed by a meeting with the young person, the educational and support staff of the Salesianum and the responsible instructor at the company. Later on there are regular meetings or telephone calls with the company if needed. The decision is taken by the young person when he wants to be supported; the staff are always there to support, but at the same time the young person should slowly learn to live, learn and work on their own. The staff represent a backup or safety net which allows the young people to try, fail or succeed and learn from the experience.

## **Limits of integration or just intercultural challenges?**

### **► Food issues and religious practices**

So far, we have explained how we bring together unaccompanied minor refugees and other young people under one roof and that the different groups have many things in common. We also mentioned challenges we are facing with the different groups. At the beginning, we defined Salesianum as a learning organisation: to constantly learn from the work with and for young people in order to inform the organisational development and change processes. This means considering most of the challenges and difficulties as opportunities for organisational development. In the next section, we want to point out some more challenges for the different groups involved, young people, staff and the organisation itself, and the process of mutual learning.

For many young people food is an emotive issue. Two residential groups of unaccompanied minor refugees with less intensive care take their meals in the common dining hall together with all other residents and guests of the house. The other two groups have their own kitchen. At the beginning, the young people taking their meals in the common dining hall were complaining about too many potatoes (more or less traditional Bavarian/German) for example, but that's often an issue for young people in general, as we have mentioned. It is not as if the young people have to adjust to everything, it is also a learning process for the kitchen and cooks. Today, the cooks always keep in mind to also have pork-free meals for the Muslims in the group, which some years ago was not obvious.

Strict religious practices can be more challenging. In one case, for example, leaving school earlier for the Muslim Friday prayer often produces conflicts with the teachers and school, where we have to mediate and impart; and that is again a learning process for the residential staff, guardians and the school. Religion is a basic issue with two key questions.

Religious freedom is a human right and guaranteed through the basic law – how can we bring together religious observance and the existing structures? Where are the limits and boundaries?

We have already mentioned the topic of food. It is quite easy to provide meals without pork and bring together religious observance and the basic conditions, but there are also more tricky challenges. There is the case of a young person from Eritrea who is devout Orthodox. As he fasts often, he asked to sign off from the common meals for his fasting period and to get the allowance for food paid off for this time. We agreed to this, however this resulted in a conflict where he asked to sign off from the common meals in general and to get all the allowance for food.

### ► A learning organisation

During Ramadan, some of the unaccompanied minor refugees follow different rules and schedules. For this the young people appoint themselves a Ramadan commissioner with certain responsibilities. To keep the kitchen and living room clean, which they use late in the night or early in the morning, and to pay attention to the needs, for example, of the sleeping times of the other residents who do not fast and celebrate Ramadan. Also, because the Salesianum is a Christian institution it is important for us that we celebrate the feasts of the different religions represented in the house together. In this way, the staff are also a role model for the young people regarding tolerance, living together and can show respect and interest for the life of the young people. Again, it is a learning process, acknowledging and working with the diversity within the organisation.

### ► Discussing gender roles and diverse opinions

Another challenge is the acceptance of the female staff members, the perception of women and gender roles. If you have grown up in a society with strict gender roles and norms, which are more or less different to the gender equality in Germany, for more than 10 years, you cannot change this perception overnight. It is a learning process for the young people and a challenge for the female staff members which requires a lot of patience, energy and professionalism. Assistance might be the best way in this to approach the young people.

With more than 400 young people in the house, it is obvious that we have a wide social spectrum. This means that there are also young people with prejudices, bar-room clichés, far-right thinking and supporters of the right-wing populist and Eurosceptic *Alternative für Deutschland* who have an explicit opinion against refugees. There is a potential for conflict, but we see and handle it as an opportunity for exchange and reduction of prejudices. There is, for example, the case of an unaccompanied minor refugee and an apprentice who became best friends and the minor refugee is spending a lot of time with his friend and his family outside of Munich.

From our experience, there are no major conflicts between the unaccompanied minor refugees and the other residents of the house. Our preventive approach and the Oratory criterion give enough space for everybody and his or her personal development. There is space and time for retreat and leisure-time activities, and

people who are there to accompany and assist the young people. Through this, we prevent major conflicts. The biggest potential for conflict is often during a football match, but it also helps to reduce aggression and stress.

Another positive aspect of young people living together is their view of each other's way of life. For young refugees it is very important to get a realistic sight of their own perceptions early on. When they share experiences with their German cohabitants about their plans after moving out, it helps them to develop a down-to-earth perspective for themselves. To realise how hard it is even for German youth to find an apartment – especially in a big and popular city like Munich – is basic. So most of the young people in Germany try to find a room in a shared apartment, often together with friends they know from the Salesianum.

## Conclusion

“Living under the same roof” right in the centre of Munich: After nine years of providing a home and care for unaccompanied minor refugees within a big place with over 400 young residents – a small village – living together has become very normal. Over the past few years the number of young refugees receiving support in the Salesianum has grown – from 11 people in 2009 up to over 50 residents today, which is 40% of the permanent residents.

The open atmosphere in the house, the big leisure area with lots of opportunities for coming together and enjoying time, an educated staff in intercultural group work and a step-by-step integration process according to the described goals has helped to provide a safe but lively place for young people. A few conflicts over the years are not worth mentioning if we look at all the experiences young people from different backgrounds share in common. Most of the residents learn a lot from each other, prejudices can be diminished and different people who would have never had contact in any other context can be linked together.

At the same time, we must not forget that young minor refugees have certain needs, which cannot be dealt with in every residential setting. For example, language barriers and cultural barriers, traumatic experience during or before their escape, uncertainty regarding relatives or friends left behind and bureaucratic and legal obstacles, as explained. Especially at the beginning, it is important to give them time and their own place until they can settle down in the Salesianum and society itself.

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## **Keynotes for achieving a promising integration and future prospects**

In this chapter, we gave an overview of our central educational idea and goals in the work with young people. We described the challenges of the Salesianum as a place for many young people from different backgrounds. At the end, we want to point out seven keynotes that seem to be important to us in helping young people to create promising futures. These keynotes have all been operating in the Salesianum for more than eight years and are still up to date.

### **Create networks**

Successful youth work needs networks and networking, so it is one of our main tasks at work. Political decisions, revisions of statute, a limited budget and a broad range of requirements make it necessary to get in touch with similar organisations, schools, companies, lawyers, doctors, therapists, politicians and others. The cross-sectoral dimension is always present and necessary for successful youth work; either the government (local or national) creates platforms for this or the organisations on the ground have to do it on their own.

### **A familiar place is not a family**

We work with young refugees, who have sometimes been away from their families for years, to search for a place where they can experience the feeling of home and security. The latter we try to provide them every day but the group and the workers cannot replace a proper family. So we support the young people's contact with their family members by organising travel and phone calls.

## **Help to create realistic work prospects**

On the job side, placements are the best way to get a feel for working life, so we try to look for different companies which are open to young people. Moreover, we help to reflect on someone's expectations in relation to his economic position once he has left the social welfare system. The contacts with German young people help refugees in the Salesianum to know more about an apprentice's life in Germany.

## **Leisure time and learning time is no contradiction**

The big leisure area in the Salesianum provides many opportunities for all young people in the organisation. A team of several workers and volunteers sets up a well-mixed programme throughout the year, which ranges from sports activities to political events like discussions with local politicians.

## **Talk and write about what you are doing – Advocacy**

At the moment, only a few of our youth work activities are funded by public money. However, there are good opportunities to speak about our work so potential donors and volunteers get a picture of what they could support. The guest area in the Salesianum is a good way to get in contact, even in a passive way through flyers or wall charts. This also includes advocacy towards local, national and international stakeholders.

## **Conceptual work is important**

Many youth work projects have appeared in Munich over the past two years. They range from leisure activities to private lessons. A good concept, which is established and adapted by the workers, is important if we want to stay sustainable and work with quality (especially regulated standards and qualifications for volunteers and staff).

## **Co-accommodation together with same-aged youth**

Through the co-accommodation we bring together young refugees and German youth. In this way, they get in touch and make contact at a very early stage of their integration. This helps them to form realistic perspectives and insights into the life of young people in Germany and, correspondingly, helps German youth to understand the reality of young refugees' life in Germany.

## Chapter 6

# Learning to hope and hoping to learn: a critical examination of young refugees and formal education in the UK

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*Simon Williams*

### Introduction

**W**hile the “purpose” of youth work is contested (Williamson 2015), youth work plays an active role within formal education environments, while also engaging young people outside of that formal structure (Bright 2015). This chapter suggests that youth work is a skill set that is used to build trusting, participatory relationships with young people, wherever they are found; engaging informal education, group work skills and anti-oppressive practice to promote critical, political discussion and action to create change (Curran and Golding 2013). This chapter is set within the context of the UK including reflections on my own practice.

Education’s different forms are discussed later in the chapter as education is a powerful social and cultural force in individuals’ lives. The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP (Schools Minister) suggests that “Education is the engine of our [UK] economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it’s an essential preparation for adult life” (Gibb 2015). Formal education, however, is not only about adult life, but is also about engaging with transition and coping with adolescence. Save the Children (2015) highlighted that out of 8 749 refugee children, 99% saw education as a priority, because young refugees perceive education as a place of protection, which improves their well-being, and raises earning potential, highlighting the hope placed in education. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2016) reports that young refugees are disadvantaged in education and their needs are often invisible, hope is often stolen. This can be seen within the UK when “implementation of specific support programmes for refugee learners tends to be patchy at best” (Brown and Gladwell 2016: 5). Therefore, this chapter seeks to explore the relationship between politics, media and the identity of young refugees, which affect both education and hope within the UK; and how youth work can be a supportive experience, both within and alongside schools in developing hope. The idea and role of hope is critically analysed, and the idea of hope is defined as aspirations and desires that seem achievable to the individual, however hope is not confined to individuals and can be affected by

social and institutional structures in communities (te Riele 2009). Young refugees and their families have hope for their new futures in the UK, often embedded in education. The current UK education system can help develop hope and inclusion for young refugees or, instead, enforce media and political stereotyping.

## Power of the media

Young refugees can often be represented in the media as people in need, or scroungers of benefit systems providing a deep contradiction, producing a moral panic and negative discourse which shapes public and political debate. White (2015: 2) argues that the lack of positive media attention given to refugees is related to this negative discourse, because “decision makers pay attention to the media”. However, “independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path” (ibid.). This highlights the impact of the media on public and political discourse.

Young refugees are often portrayed in the media with a variety of labels, with “migrant” being the most common in the UK (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore 2015). This can be seen when people use terms covered in the media such as “bogus asylum seekers” (Clark 2015), or the way “migrant” and “refugee” are used interchangeably (Diedring and Dorber 2015). This confusing labelling, coupled with a lack of accurate information, encourages an even more confused public debate that is reinforced by social media (Goldstein 2011).

Youth workers can often also find themselves confused by terms and labels surrounding young refugees influenced by media representation, or treating young refugees as a homogenous group. Therefore, youth workers need to be engaging effectively in building trusting relationships with young refugees to explore this, but also working with other organisations to respond and challenge effectively the different needs of different groups (Adams 2012).

## Social construction of young refugees in the media

The media’s presentation of refugees has influenced political debate with headlines such as “266 000 asylum seekers stay in Britain illegally” (Whitehead 2011); of course, if they are asylum seekers then they are not here illegally as they have followed a legal process. However, the term “illegal immigrants” can be another labelling term associated with migration. The mainstream media, affecting policy and public opinion has been seen with other groups – such as Roma – to perpetuate prejudices (Bello 2012). Refugees have become a scapegoat for political, social and cultural upset. This can be seen where a right-wing party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), used a provocative poster of refugees saying “Breaking Point”, despite the original image being taken in Slovenia (Mitchell 2015).

Legally, according to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951: 14), a refugee is someone who has fled a country of origin “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion”. While the United Nations has provided a legal definition of a refugee, upon closer inspection, the term evokes a more nuanced



debate – what is a well-founded fear? What is the difference between perceived fear and reality? What is persecution? Are the list of reasons limited, and if so what about the other factors such as sexuality? Squire et al's (2017) report highlighted these issues calling for a change in recognition to the categories that drive people to move. Although updates have been added to deal with some of the issues such as sexual orientation (UNHCR 2012), the original UN Convention's (1951) definition can be seen as somewhat outdated and open to interpretation. It is interesting to note that the concept of an "asylum seeker" is not introduced or discussed in the Convention, adding another layer of complexity to definitions.

The general public, guided by the media, tends to define a refugee less in terms of international law or conventions but more often in a hegemonic fashion, often rooted in racism and fear. Wike, Stokes and Simmons (2016) identified that across Europe some people believe that refugees increase terrorist activity and negatively affect local jobs. Those that held these views were often advocates of right-wing political parties. Thus, we see that socially refugees are labelled in different, yet negative ways, leading to "media imperialism" (Fejes 1981), which sets up a culture of pushing stereotypical ideologies and hard-line policies fuelled by fear. The confusion in terminology and images leads to greater misunderstanding and yet, at its root, "refugee is a bureaucratic identity assigned by outsiders" (Rutter 2006: 27). Thus we see that media labelling reduces young refugees to a stereotypical group with little personal value, which in turn impacts directly on young refugees' hope of engaging with society that is confused about their identity.

Youth workers can often feel powerless against the giant media corporations, but they should be challenging the power of media and calming moral panics created by the media. This often requires youth workers to work outside of their local environments and be engaged in more national or even global debates supporting young refugees to gain a sense of hope in a new place (Towler 2015). However, to be able to make a critical response, an understanding of the political discourse of migration is needed.

## **The UK and migration**

The UK is a nation founded on migration, yet, the UK has a long history of colonising other people's lands, historically presenting other countries negatively, suggesting their populations are odd, different and less human (Said 2003); this process has enabled an ethical standpoint from which to subjugate, steal and abuse.

These ideologies of the UK being "better" have become culturally entrenched, reinforced by the power of the media, which has resulted in action. For example Komaromi and Singh (2016) reported that during the EU referendum campaign the language used by politicians and media led to a significant increase in hate crimes across the UK,

this exclusive nationalism has no doubt encouraged a sort of post-referendum xenoracism centred on an idea of "Englishness" that is exclusively white and Christian ... The demonisation of immigrants as undesirable, sometimes even criminal combined with ongoing Islamophobic scaremongering created an oppositional enemy for Leave voters. (Komaromi and Singh 2016: 10)

The political agenda has become the arena of blame, blame directed at the “other”, instead of an arena of progress and hope for a better future.

## Young refugees’ identity in the UK

Understandably many young refugees choose not to engage with labels, instead taking control around their own definitions of identity:

Some young refugees choose not to read UK mainstream media due to a lack of language skills or interest, being more concerned with home matters and lost family. Many young refugees that I have worked with, when asked about how they would identify themselves often identified themselves as British; they would show me their clothes to highlight this, or discuss the language they spoke and the music they listened to. (Youth worker)

Ife (2009: 216) argues that a balance of positive and negative stories is needed to enable a “sense of hope and a sense of urgency”. However, Louw-Potgieter and Giles (1987) suggest the powerful impose identities on the powerless. Therefore, youth workers can respond by supporting young refugees to exercise human agency and critical thinking in challenging societal labels and present positive stories. However, some young refugees will sometimes adopt a fake identity through which they portray what they believe is expected of them, but which is often nothing like their real self. Youth workers can respond by providing open access space for positive well-being and the development of hope. Also youth work with young refugees should engage in critical theoretical debate on identity and its impact on well-being.

## Theory of national identity

As discussed, British identity is based on its relationship with colonised people and place. Said (2003: 1), examining the social construction of the Orient, claims that Europe constructed the identity of the Orient, introducing the concept of the “other”; this established an ideological, social and political difference between “us” and “them”. This historical “othering” has led to distinctive labelling which ultimately seeks to separate and divide. Perception of the “other” is clouded by people’s social and historical position (Hall 1996), leading to a default labelling response instead of engaging in a critical evaluation of the portrayal of “others”. This theory enables an understanding of the power of the media to influence the perceptions of the “other”. We see that people are defined by others not themselves and, therefore, are constricted by what others think of them. This is the legacy of colonialism – the historical “othering” that feeds into the present.

Colonialism is domination of an area, both of its people and economy (Kohn 2012). Bhabha (1992, cited in Childs and Williams 1997) argues that this domination has led to a superior representation of “us” in relation to “them”, laying the foundation for oppression and labelling. Colonised people were forced to adopt British values and culture, while other cultures and ways of living were pushed out of existence (Hill 2004). This relates to orientalism, as colonialism became the active subjugation of others’ lands, by a more powerful force, justified by an identity of superiority and entitlement. This stemmed from a discourse of “uncivilised countries” that needed the more powerful to educate them and is a discourse prevalent in British society

today. Post-colonial theories explain the perceptions that some people may have of “others”, seemingly justifying the notion that those who are more powerful should dominate the less powerful.

## Agency

Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration can be used to gain further insight into the idea of a national and social identity, arguing that individuals, groups and communities have the power to change, and are not determined by social structure but have the capacity for action. Giddens (1984) suggests that individual and collective agency can create and desist the social structures that are woven throughout society, whereas individuals and communities devoid of agency are constrained by the social structures of society; thereby, human action both individually and collectively can resist and create change. However, to create change requires power, and an example of the power relationship can be found in the story of an anonymous Somali young refugee (cited in Arbabzadah 2007: 124): “I forget that I was born in Somalia and I am only reminded about it when people ask me where I come from.” Despite the young person’s power to change her life course, the power of others brings her back to be labelled as “other”. Subsequently, Giddens’ (1984) theory, applied by youth workers, offers hope that change can happen at micro and macro levels, harnessing the power of human agency and recognising the pliability of structures.

Youth workers can have a significant role to play challenging oppressive social structures alongside young refugees, challenging macro levels of oppressive structures and engaging in political discourse.

## Education

Young refugees with constrained choices and limited agency are often defined through the historical and social powers of the host country; these definitions of “others” influence the education of young refugees and raise the question of how hope is experienced within the British educational system.

Smith (2015) defines education as “deliberate and hopeful. Informed, respectful and wise. Grounded in a desire that all may flourish and share in life”. Nevertheless, the UK Department for Education (2017) describes education as “safety and wellbeing ... achieving the best of their ability ... prepared for adult life”. Two contrasting definitions of education derive from the philosophical view of how people learn, which impacts on delivery. Education can be delivered in a variety of forms, such as formal, non-formal and informal education. Formal education is seen as an organised activity established by a formal system to deliver specific identified learning outcomes, often attached to a certified achievement (Coombs et al. 1973). Non-formal education is viewed as flexible, non-linear and person-centred with a set of clearly defined purposes (Fordham 1993) with a certified outcome (Council of Europe 2017). Whereas, informal education is “learning that flows from the conversation and activities involved in being members of youth and community groups” (Jeffs and Smith 2005: 5).

Youth workers might use non-formal learning to register outcomes for funders or easily identify learning. For example, a youth group might make pizza with the defined purpose of young people learning about healthy eating. However, the bedrock of youth work is its ability to engage in informal education which allows learning between individuals using a democratic process (Jeffs and Smith 2005). This is core to relational development as education and conversation are communicative acts (Bright and Bailey 2015). Informal education's processes of conversation enable learning about life for all those that engage in the process (worker and service user). It is not the delivery of "correct information", defined by outcomes, or established by a formal environment. For example, a youth worker might organise a non-formal session that meets a funder's requirement; but engages young people with informal learning that might relate to lifestyle, anti-oppressive practice or cultural heritage. However, youth work that is involved in targeted intervention and focusing on "vulnerable" young people could "be regarded as contributing to negative labelling of young people" (Coburn and Gormally 2015: 200).

## Identity and education

Therefore, in this conflicted world of hostile media portrayal, socially pressured inauthentic identities and attempts to develop new social and personal identities, youth workers as educators should offer hope to young refugees: a hope for a better future, providing opportunities to learn not just academically but culturally and politically. Youth work also provides those who are not young refugees with opportunities to challenge the racist ideologies presented to them. The UNHCR (2016) states that education is pivotal to integration, as it provides a hope of fitting into a new environment and culture; nourishing a hope of developing in work and society and maintaining a hope of a future, of "normality" and acceptance. This takes a very functional approach, however youth work is more than a functional approach and should be about transformative change. Hope is often placed upon young refugees in formal education environments because it is believed they will integrate socially at an earlier stage (Watters 2008), however this "hope" can place tremendous pressure on young refugees and could lead to ill health (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Therefore, it is vital for youth workers to recognise the value of individuals to their own education. By engaging in transformational educational processes we might find that we are the ones that change, not the individuals we are working with. This is highlighted by Belton, describing his interactions as a youth worker with Milky, a young person:

Milky had in him all he needed to become all he could be and what he was, was much, much more than good enough. He was beautiful and I could not, with any effort of mine, "educate" him or make him "better". In fact, Milky educated me. (Belton 2010: 38)

## Young refugees and formal education

Young refugees entering formal education in the UK often meet many barriers, such as not having the knowledge of the education system's structures and cultures, and making education another world that young refugees have to enter and adapt to. Young refugees are often subject to labelling and seen in deficit and therefore requiring more work and resources, but this fails to consider the strengths of the

young person and the social contributions that can be made. Young refugees are not homogeneous and arrive at education at different points and with different perspectives, dependent on their age, life experiences and educational experiences. Some may have been travelling for a long period of time and not engaged in formal education for several years. Others may have been heavily involved in scholarly activity, or educational opportunities may have been limited due to war, poverty, political unrest or social attitudes and expectations. The rigid structure of formal education, however, often cannot provide for such a wide variety of needs, as schools' emphasis is placed on academic achievement over integration and normality, especially with a lack of funding (Rutter 2003; UNHCR 2016). The UK education system, in the current climate of austerity and marketisation, is focused on the principle of learners achieving the highest academic standard. While many schools try to move away from the view that individuals are empty vessels that must be filled with fixed expert knowledge (Freire 1993), the structure of the system and its resourcing do not allow for flexible, compassionate and integrated approaches. School might have a "special centre" which contains young people with learning difficulties, young people with poor mental health, young refugees, young people with behavioural difficulties and other needs who are all treated homogeneously, rather than dealing with individual needs, often due to the lack of financial support (Department for Education 2015). Walker (2011) suggests that admissions procedures, confusion over financial support and discriminatory policies prevent young refugees from accessing and participating fully in mainstream education, leaving them bereft of key connecting steps for integration.

Youth work can be a lifeline into a culture and society that usually seeks to exclude young refugees. The formal education system should not be responsible solely for educational outcomes, but should be closely linked with social and personal experiences, relationships and achievements (Swann et al. 2012), which are, in turn, linked with the creation of identities. Demirdjian (2012: 11) argues that effective education should be provided by a range of professionals including youth workers, whose approach to informal, non-formal and integrated education provides a counterbalance to formal education and enhances cohesion; however, this is closely linked with the idea of hope.

## Hope

A positive sense of self is extremely important to well-being (Chase, Knight and Statham 2008); it influences interactions with others (Jenkins 2008) and impacts on the sense of hope. The educational experience (in all its forms) should involve a building of hope. Many authors within the youth work field do not critically assess specifically the idea of hope; yet its presence underwrites youth work practice. Hope is more than a desire, it is a driving force that creates change; it allows individuals' imaginations to take them beyond oppression to challenge injustice, beyond barriers to realise possibilities, and beyond failure to recognise the value of self (Freire 2014). This hope can be seen in the youth work principles of social justice, social change and collective action.

There are many hopes placed upon young refugees from different perspectives. There are hopes that they will learn English and become fully integrated and active citizens (Houghton and Morrice 2008). Some hope that they will successfully return and integrate to their home country. There is the hope that young refugees place upon themselves to be accepted by society (Chase, Knight and Statham 2008) and hope for normal progressive lives.

It is true that people who flee accept becoming refugees and experiencing life's uncertainties, but one should not doubt that the same people have high hopes of a better future. (Demirdjian 2012: 23)

However, a lack of hope or destruction of hope can be devastating to a person's well-being; no matter what progress they have made, young refugees can still be viewed to be beyond hope, stuck in a discourse of trauma, or viewed as inferior to others, resulting in limiting the hopes and aspirations of young refugees. Youth work can inspire hope which has an immediate and deep effect on people's personal identity, self-esteem and confidence. Thus, there needs to be recognition of youth work professional power and the effect it can have upon people's identity and hopes for the future and also the role of human agency to create change. Education and identity are closely interrelated and underlying this is the hope that education can provide a better future; however, the reality for many young refugees is very different. "It made me understand that a refugee to them was an uneducated, vulgar parasite. I would come across this condescending attitude often in mainstream UK." (Maysia 2007: 170). However, youth work is primed to make effective responses which will now be considered.

## Youth work responses

Youth workers can be "genuine change-makers" by using both non-formal and informal education and a wide range of core skills to enable young refugees to gain hope, to encourage change and challenge oppressive practice within the education system (Salter 2010: 53). Youth work might happen within a school setting, but it might also be an open access provision not formally connected to school that young refugees access. Both of these have a part to play in working with young refugees, and working with non-refugees, challenging oppressive ideals.

## Skills of youth workers

Informal education is different to formal education, as it is not focused on accredited and assessed approaches, and prescribed curriculums, but on a value base which starts at where young people are at, is focused on dual learning, and is embedded in relationships (Curran and Golding 2013). Informal education is often based in conversation; Jeffs and Smith (2005: 51) argue that youth workers use the skill of conversation to create change and develop hope. Te Riele (2009) adds that the development of hope needs to be a collaborative effort, with clear ideas of ownership of hopes. Conversation is a step to forming relationships which are an important factor in young people's lives, affecting positively and negatively individuals' ability to cope, change and adapt. Young refugees starting a new life face many serious challenges to

their well-being, not least the imposition of identities by some sections of the media. One such imposed identity emerges, especially in the media, from the discourse of trauma, resulting in an attitude of pity (Freedman 2007). Although trauma is central to many young refugees' narratives, most often they do not want to display their stories for all to see as this keeps a focus on trauma instead of creating a new home and life (Nickerson et al. 2016). Youth workers therefore need to be sensitive and skilled in their conversational approach.

Schools often have large intakes of students receiving induction at the start of the school year which forms a common group identity, but young refugees entering at different times of the school year experience a rushed induction (or none at all) and must integrate into the existing culture of the classroom group (Rutter 2006). The British educational system has its own culture and therefore can take a long time to navigate (Rubenstein 2006). This is seen in an example from my practice:

One family raised concerns that the school was not caring for their child. When this was examined more closely it became clear that the school in the family's country of origin sent home a weekly report about the child; however, here that was not the case. Rather than thinking this was a cultural difference, it was seen as the school being racist.

Youth work should use effective group work and open spaces to help fill some of the gaps that are produced by staggered induction and create spaces for cultures to be discussed.

## Youth work as a relational practice

Effective group work with skilled youth workers plays a central role in enabling young people to develop new narratives. However, if young refugees are not supported in the formation of personal identities, identity may be formed in relation to others, such as racist pupils and irritated overworked teachers, within an anti-asylum-seeking culture. This could lead to a personal identity of destructive rebellion or one of conformity to racism. Trusting relationships provide a safe environment to re-examine identity. One of youth work's principles is the developmental potential of trusting and safe relationships which are based on respect and a two-way process of learning (Sapin 2013). These informal, yet professionally circumscribed relationships allow the exploration of cultural boundaries, as they enable an exploration of the young person's world and their development within it (Beck and Purcell 2010).

Building trusting relationships is not an easy process, especially with individuals whose experiences may lead to a reluctance to trust and suspicion of authority. Therefore, workers need to be aware of power, committed to the time required and focused on the young person's development. Many young refugees encounter relationships where they do not think others listen to them, requiring extra effort from workers to form positive relationships.

## Multi-agency working

Despite the building of trusting relationships with youth workers, individuals must encounter school systems driven by national, local policy and regulations. Many



recommendations and suggestions for schools working with young refugees are idealistic, not based in the reality of the working environment, and call on extra non-existent resources. Instead, schools are focused on marketisation, lacking a focus on individual care (Benn and Downs 2015). Young refugees often arrive with a specific set of needs that schools do not have the resources or skills to support (Doyle and McCorrison 2008). All of this could lead to oppressive working which is based in assumptions rather than individual needs. Therefore, there needs to be co-operative partnership working with young refugees. Multi-agency working, however, hosts its own difficulties, such as clashes of professional values, power and personalities (Bright 2015). For effective delivery of care there has to be a joint agreement between agencies that young refugees are entitled to a safe, productive working environment to enhance personal development and learning; this means challenging inherent racism and continually reflecting on practice to engage in anti-oppressive work. Youth workers play an essential part within multi-agency teams, valued for their skills in building relationships and advocating for young people.

Even with multi-agency teams, valuable support and information also comes from the communities around the child, such as: the local community, religious community, family network and school communities. However, communities working together will encounter difficulties created by hostile narratives about cultural diversity and the “other” evident in media representations. Despite the desire by individuals to form good community relations, there can be a conflict between an individual’s conscious desire for mutual respect and the lengthier process of identity formation which can reflect the racist culture in which the individual develops (Phillips, Simpson and Ahmed 2008: 92). Youth work practitioners can work with community development projects to support people who are wrestling with these concepts, but need to be allocated time to involve the different communities in working to meet the needs of young refugees.

Time is often used in communication and language is often a barrier to engaging different communities and yet is a significant part of identity (Hall 2002). Being able to speak in one’s first language is important to help deal with cultural change (Capstick and Delaney 2017). However, some young refugees are prevented from speaking their home language while at school, due to a concern about the development of spoken English (Arnot et al. 2014). Youth work responses to this issue can be limited, especially as youth work is based in conversation; however, it is not impossible, as the following example from my practice demonstrates.

One young person who came to our Youth Club couldn’t speak English and I couldn’t speak their language, but they sat next to me, and we communicated through grunts, signs and drawings. Each session she came back and sat next to me and we engaged with each other and formed a relationship, despite it being several weeks before we could communicate through words.

## Youth work and social capital

Once language skills develop, building social capital becomes easier. Social capital, the building of reciprocal social contacts for support and development (Kay 2005), is vital for young refugees as it develops hope for social settlement (Cheung and



Phillimore 2013). However, young refugees have additional barriers to social settlement, for example, language and cultural difficulties and financial pressures. Social capital is often shattered by the current policy of dispersal which can move young refugees to different towns and schools. Moving can lead to social deprivation and isolation, which in turn affects relationships and self-confidence. For youth workers, who need time to build trusting relationships, this can have a disrupting effect. When young people suddenly vanish, with no trace, this raises serious concerns about their well-being; however, sometimes no information is passed on to youth workers about dispersals.

The foregoing discussion shows why youth workers need to respond quickly, helping young refugees feel welcome and engaging in relationships as soon as possible. They need to make sure there is a plethora of activities so that young refugees can engage with group work, both within their own communities and across others (Wood 2009). However, youth workers need to be resilient to the changes that happen, making full use of supervision to be able to handle adversities and maintain ethical practice.

## **Anti-oppressive practice**

Affecting all of the above practice are the roots of racism, producing fear instead of hope. People who live in fear find it harder to learn and may become disengaged from their, and other, communities (Chase, Knight and Statham 2008). Anti-oppressive practice is key to good youth work and should challenge inequalities wherever they exist. However, it is harder to tackle indirect, hidden and institutional racism. Despite this, youth workers need to fight against institutional racism that is infecting thoughts and actions; this involves critical reflective practice (Thompson 2006). Young people should be encouraged to be involved in highlighting their concerns and making responses, but workers need to also raise these challenges at higher levels, engaging young people in policy making, political and academic conferences and making people's voices heard in institutions and parliament (Batsleer 2009).

Youth work is in a unique position to encourage informal learning and the development of trusting relationships. However, youth work in the UK is engaged in internal debate as a profession, with a move away from statutory, government-funded youth work to voluntary provisions that rely on short-term funding, due to the UK's current climate of austerity which removes government financial support of youth work (Bright 2015). This climate makes work with young refugees harder as it requires long periods of time, commitment and stability; these are often not high on outcomes for funders' lists of priorities. Despite this, youth workers engaging in informal learning can provide a valuable service to young refugees. Good formal education paired with active youth work – person-centred working and voluntary participation – can provide an effective and supportive base for change (Demirdjian 2012). Youth workers need to be engaged not only at an individual, group and community level but also critically at a social policy level in relation to the lack of resources, poor policies and lack of political will to ensure that integration happens (de St Croix 2016). Without commitment for change at government and organisational levels, young refugees could continue with poor well-being, lower achievement levels and low levels of hope, despite being active agents in their lives and communities.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored generally the circumstances surrounding young refugees and the difficulty they have in accessing and participating in the British education system. It has argued that the media has affected political and social definitions leading to confusion and homogeneous labelling. There needs to be greater awareness of the impact of incorrect terminology, in the media and by politicians, on public perceptions and this should be corrected by politically active youth workers.

Without political commitment, hope in young refugees will be undermined. Education can be a place of hope and youth workers, as informal educators, need to work closely and yet independently with formal education to enhance the development of hope. Education providers should not be fighting ego wars, but need to be working for the betterment of young people. Through theoretical critique of media and political discourse youth workers can make appropriate responses that seek to engage with institutions and government. Theoretical analysis which recognises the role of human agency in bringing about change creates the space for action and the need to strengthen human agency in those experiencing inequalities. The role of youth work skills in making effective responses to young refugees has been discussed, recognising the difficulties posed by social pressures and lack of social capital, again highlighting a need for workers to be politically active. Throughout this chapter there has been a focus on hope, how it underpins youth work practice but also its importance in the lives of young refugees. There must be change and youth workers are responsible for fighting for change: failing to do so is to disrespect the profession and disrespect the people we work with.

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## Chapter 7

# Recognition of the cultural capital of young refugees: the CAP (Centre for Lifelong Learning) as an academic experience of inclusion in Italy

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*Fausta Scardigno*

### Introduction

**Y**outh work is, for the European Union (European Commission 2010a: 11), a form of “out-of-school education managed by professional or voluntary youth workers that contributes to the development of young people”. Exchange between youth workers has been, since the Treaty establishing the European Union in 1992, one of the actions aimed at developing the European dimension of education policy. Over a period of two decades, European Community institutions have given priority to the professional development of youth workers, with particular attention to the validation of their skills and the development of “innovative services, pedagogies and practice” (European Commission 2009b: 11). Indeed, youth workers and their educational practices are called upon within all intervention areas of European youth policy. In particular, the European Commission recognises the role of youth work in youth policies aimed at employment, health, social inclusion and entrepreneurship, (European Commission 2009a).

The recognition of youth work as an educational agency, however, is still tied to the ability to demonstrate its working methods and the impact on the lives of young people (European Commission and Council of Europe 2004), and this demands evidence-based research. Nevertheless, the current formulation of European Union youth policy is not sufficient for a full understanding of what distinguishes youth work operators from other services with whom collaboration is required.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the youth work service with young refugees and migrant people launched in 2015 at the University of Bari. Called CAP (Centre for Lifelong Learning), the service promotes lifelong learning, including the recognition and validation of formal and non-formal learning that migrants acquired in their country of origin. The service is open to all EU and non-EU young students and its mission is the enhancement of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1971; De Feo and Pitzalis 2015) as a fundamental and strategic asset for humanity.

Youth work with young refugees practised at the CAP service faces specific challenges at an operational level, especially in dealing with the absence of original documents of formal qualifications. Refugees who fear being persecuted cannot go to the authorities of their own country as well as to the consulate representatives abroad. It is the responsibility of the host country to take care of the refugee and to start all the procedures necessary to understand the judicial status, the educational and professional situation, and to gain comparability of these qualifications.

The policies for integration and inclusion based on the enhancement of cultural and professional capital of people, refugees and migrants are growing in importance (Ambrosini 2011, 2017; Timm 2016). More specifically, the acknowledgement of cultural differences as constitutive and emergent features of social reality greatly impact transitions in education and social mobility (Besozzi 2015; Santagati 2011).

The CAP service acts as a formal and institutional place for youth work that is able to evaluate the cultural capital of young refugees, and recognise their formal, informal and non-formal competences. The author is the President of CAP and Chancellor's referent to the relationship with foreign students. During the first project implemented in 2015 by the CAP, called *Fondata sul Lavoro*, a service of recognition of formal and non-formal learning was offered to young migrants and refugees. Furthermore, during this first project, a group of 20 refugees started to play an active role in CAP by helping other migrant people to apply for its services. They continued, therefore, to play a role of tutor during the second project called *Work for You* from 2016 up to now. In the meanwhile, a part of this group of young refugees became students of the University of Bari. Thanks to the services offered by CAP, therefore, they had the chance to have their educational qualifications recognised in order to be admitted into a university course.

This chapter first presents the CAP services and the main two consecutive projects, *Fondata sul Lavoro* and *Work for You*, where the group of young refugees started to be involved. It then focuses on the biographies of some of the young refugees actively involved in the CAP activities – both as beneficiaries and as a tutor for other migrants that needed recognition of their formal and non-formal learning in order to apply for a job and/or for a university course.

## **The CAP: an institutional response grounded in rights**

The CAP has an integrated methodology: in the first phase, it collects the life stories of young refugees and then, working with an interdisciplinary team, collaboratively works towards the recognition of professional competences and soft skills. The work of CAP also included the development of a proposal for a unitary university service for the recognition of equivalence of foreign academic qualifications. Indeed, a university degree legally recognised as equivalent to a similar Italian qualification helps to provide weight to a curriculum vitae, as well as recognising specific professional postgraduate skills and qualifications. At the University of Bari, there is no specific orientation service, nor a unified procedure for the recognition of the equivalence of foreign academic qualifications. Italian universities, due to their autonomous status, evaluate foreign academic qualifications through the application of Articles 2 and 3 of Law 148/02 (and, therefore, the Lisbon Convention) to grant analogous



Italian qualifications. Through this innovative approach the Centre attempts to give an institutional response to the demands for cultural acknowledgement as a formal and substantial mechanism for integration and inclusion within the tertiary academic paths of learning (McBrien, Dooley and Birman 2017).

In this way, the CAP has been oriented according to the principles of the Geneva Convention and the Lisbon Convention, which guarantee young refugees the right to recognise their titles and competences even in the absence of original and legally translated documents. In particular, Article VII of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in higher education in the European region stipulates that:

every party within the framework of their education system and in accordance with their constitutional, legal and regulatory provisions, will take all possible and reasonable steps to develop procedures to evaluate equitably and effectively whether refugees, and persons in similar conditions to refugees meet the requirements for access to higher education or work, even in cases in which the qualifications awarded by one of the parties cannot be substantiated by the relevant documents.

Moreover, Article 22 of the Geneva Convention provides that:

Contracting States shall grant refugees, as far as primary school is concerned, the same treatment accorded to their nationals. With regard to teaching in schools that are not primary schools, notably on admission to studies, the recognition of study certificates, diplomas and university degrees issued abroad, the exemption of tuition fees, awarding grants, the Contracting states grant refugees the most favourable treatment possible and in any case a treatment no less favourable than that granted in the same circumstances to foreigners in general.

Through social research applied to the analysis and intervention in the field of social policies for young refugees, the CAP seeks to work towards the recognition and certification of soft skills; the recognition of prior learning “on the job” and their translation into professional qualifications and/or *Credito Formativo Universitario* (CFU) (University Credits) expendable in university courses; the promotion of equivalence or recognition of training credits for EU and non-EU citizens. It offers financial support for refugee students and operates through networking with institutional and university representatives working on these issues.

## **From theory to international practices: the programmes *Fondata sul Lavoro* and *Work for You***

The Italian education and vocational system is currently undergoing a remarkable process of reform. Based on some of the most recent agreements between the government and the social partners (1993; 1996; 2001; 2002-05), the outline of a more comprehensive and national Italian system can be detected. This is particularly clear in the law on “promotion of employment” (Treu Law 1996-97), in which the basic principles of a (vocational) lifelong learning system are described. The 1996-97 law introduces the principle that competences can be certified irrespective of the way they were acquired. Competences acquired through work should be assessed and potentially recognised in the same way as competences acquired through formal

training institutions. For this reason, the Italian Ministry of Employment in 2003 made a further step ahead with the promulgation of the “citizen training portfolio”, a personal portfolio where all formal and informal experiences and competences acquired in the lifelong learning process, throughout internships too, are registered and certified by regional institutions, as also advocated by the European Union. To date, this certification tool has been tested in 13 Italian regions and is still developing in many others.

In 2006, the Italian Ministry of Employment also promoted a national meeting to discuss professional standards of certification in order to define a common national qualification framework. Since 2010, many regions have adopted these standards and others are still working in this direction. Most recently, in 2012, the reformation of the Italian labour market (Legge Fornero) generated further discussion on lifelong learning education and certification, providing important contributions towards developing a coherent model of validation. Italian efforts to develop a certification model and a concrete procedure can be summarised in this way: a modular system of training, a system of training credits, and tailored assessment and certification procedures.

The aim is to integrate and interconnect the various systems (initial vocational education and training, and continuing vocational training) and achieve “a personalisation” of learning routes. Tools developed to achieve such aims include an “individual training record book” (which can be combined with formal certificates to form a portfolio), and a “skills audit”, not based on one centralised model applied throughout the entire country, but according to various regions. At an early stage of implementation, certain tensions have already occurred. If a “personalisation of learning routes” has to be successful, procedures and methodologies for assessment and recognition of competences are of crucial importance. The questions: who is going to measure it? Which methodologies are necessary? are at the core of current reforms, while various stakeholder groups (school, employers, employees) cautiously observe initiatives and progress.

Undoubtedly, many key issues remain to be solved: first, there is a predominance of academic content and curriculums in the proposed assessment procedures; this raises issues in the treatment of non-formal learning elements (for example, from the workplace) in a fair and valid way. As long as assessments are exclusively based on reference points defined within a formal system, learning experiences following a different logic and leading to different content (for example, based on work experience) can easily be overlooked or not taken into account.

A further weakness is represented by the lack of clear-cut definitions/regulations of the tools in question, and moreover, the lack of a system of national standards to promote consistent and comparable practices. While being the most significant obstacle to reliable and valid assessments, the lack of a national standard is not the only obstacle to be dealt with.

An ultimate, yet highly significant, obstacle is the difficulty in involving Italian entrepreneurs in the discussion on the relevance of formal and informal learning certification. Therefore, although recognised as a priority, Italian managers often doubt the practices and methodologies, as well as those involved in awarding

certification, believing that allowing competences to be measured in such a way can lead to their mismanagement and misuse. Therefore, a common framework balancing the interests of the individual and the enterprise is still necessary in Italy.

Finally, the Italian situation is contradictory. On the one hand, there is a clear development in the direction of a competence-based system for education and training, where various learning pathways, both internally and externally, to formal training institutions can lead to formal qualifications. On the other hand, there are still several practical/economic obstacles, as well as those of a more general nature. The lack of a national standard reference clearly belongs to the second category and future developments must in some way provide an answer to this challenge.

Moving from the premises above, within the two programmes *Fondato sul Lavoro* and *Work for You*, funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals 2007-2013 and carried out in 2012 and 2014, the CAP developed new services for the validation of informal learning and recognition of qualifications acquired by immigrants in their country of origin. While the first one was a pilot programme, the second one has been extended to 229 refugee and migrant people.

The activities of the CAP resulted in a free support service for preparatory work on the recognition of qualifications and/or credits already acquired by non-EU citizens in their country of origin, as well as a service for the transparency of learning acquired in informal and non-formal settings within previous work experience. More specifically, the services provided by the CAP intended to guarantee:

1. Information and guidance on the recognition of previously acquired qualifications for the purpose of study and/or work;
2. The evaluation (self/hetero-evaluation) of soft skills acquired in informal and non-formal settings useful for inclusion in the labour market;
3. The development of transparency of professional learning informally acquired on the job and their translation into CFUs, possibly redeemable in university courses.

In operational terms, the CAP developed a consultancy procedure divided into three phases, generally relating to three meetings with the user.

## **Phase 1 – Pre-diagnostics**

The first phase involved initial contact and welcome. During this time, the operator carried out a preliminary screening of user motivations in order to direct them towards a specific functional consultancy service. Through a registration card developed ad hoc, having identified the specific needs expressed by the user, the operator began consultancy with the signing of a consultancy agreement. During this phase, information was gathered to produce an initial profile of the life experience and professional training of the candidate.

## **Phase 2 – Diagnostics**

Following the initial screening, the user had the opportunity to take advantage of a process of analysis of soft skills acquired through previous informal learning and/or professional experiences, useful in the process of an active job search. Through a

leaderless group discussion – a group discussion technique without a leader that is widely used in the context of assessment and training – a group of six to eight users was created in order to discuss a case, also created ad hoc, which required decision making within an hour. The discussion of a case was obviously a pretext to observe group dynamics and the emergence of “spontaneous” areas of expertise, as described above. The output of these two evaluation phases was the result of the weighted average of scores which allowed for developing the skills profile of the user.

### **Phase 3 – Final phase**

A feedback meeting was held in the final phase in order to provide results of the pathway to the user, summarised in a skills folder, which is a final summary dossier on strengths/weaknesses, useful to support the user in the definition of a life plan for education and/or professional training, its phases and operational strategies.

During the second programme, the CAP advisory path was concluded in 2017 for 229 young migrants and refugees. Among them, 66 were women and 166 men, aged between 16 and 35. The cultural capital of those people is medium-high: they often have a degree and a masters, though largely misrecognised by the Italian learning system. Among the 229 young migrants, only 33 attended elementary school, 39 middle school and 98 high school, 57 have a degree and two a PhD. They mostly come from Pakistan, Georgia, Albania, Nigeria and Bangladesh. Another goal of the service has been the possibility for 102 people to start a certification process of soft skills (for example, communication, team work, decision making, etc.) acquired through prior learning and working experience even in informal settings. They have actively participated in self- and group-assessment sessions, taking to the definition of a professional profile that for most of them has been useful in their job search.

### **Life stories of a group of refugees and migrant people involved in the CAP**

On the basis of these legal principles which clearly recall the broadest theme of the “right to study” guaranteed by individual universities, in 2016 the University Service of Permanent Learning of the University of Bari (CAP) launched a path of transparency and validation of the qualifications of students, professional skills and soft skills of 20 young refugees (all beneficiaries of protection). These were refugees who had enrolled on a course but were unable to provide the full documentation normally required for the recognition of the foreign title (primarily legal translation of the title).

Today (February 2018), in addition to the nine refugee students enrolled in 2016, 11 university students have started their university academic training with the help of the CAP service. The majority of these young people crossed the Mediterranean Sea and applied for asylum in Italy. All 20 young people were eligible for a scholarship from the Ministry of Interior and CRUI (Italian Chancellor’s Conference) which exempts these young people from paying taxes and allows them to have their residence and accommodation at one of the university colleges, as well as the use of the canteen, libraries and university sport services.

The pioneering work of Italian universities has been recognised by the International Organization for Migration (OIM) and the EUA (Welcome Map Refugees), as it has provided “finalised recognition” foreseen by the labour market reform, as well as enhancing the professional skills and soft skills of young refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Every day, as academics, we listen to the stories of migrants and refugees that come to our university. Through the life stories that we compile, we try to give the Permanent Education Services advisers a formal (and substantial) response which produces a document/certificate of equivalence or academic comparability. This is done in the form of a postgraduate transfer document that is submitted to the university's governing bodies. The document highlights the professional skills and individual soft skills necessary to obtain a qualification recognised by the regional professions register and responding to European and international guidelines.

At the methodological level, since the start-up phase, the service has used the tools of ethnographic research, especially during the initial reception phase, with particular reference to the reconstruction of the life story to gather, through a dialogic and empathic mode, useful information to reconstruct the feelings and experiences that characterise the difficult transition experienced by young refugees.

The thematic areas investigated in the life stories were: the migratory experience, the current situation, integration conditions that can facilitate the processes of economic, cultural and social integration, and expectations for the future. In order to develop trust, each interview was conducted individually, and lasted an average of one hour. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently shuffled and subjected to content analysis. The group of 20 refugees involved in the CAP service consists of young adults (aged between 18 and 25 years old) distributed almost equally along the gender variable. Interview transcriptions allowed for the organisation of content that emerged from the salient topics investigated in the interview.

Nine of the refugees had migrated in order to flee the crisis in their country, and to improve their cultural, economic and working conditions. Two participants cited family and personal reasons for leaving. Nine participants expressed their desire to stay in Italy, while two hoped to return home in the future, when the situation improves. Those who wish to stay described language and regular employment as barriers.

The following excerpts of interviews capture how the expatriate project has been painful for everyone, not only in terms of fractures in their personal life path, but also in relation to the hospitality and community life.

I. is 19 years old and from Cameroon. He has been living in Italy since 2011. He is not employed, despite following a four-month course upon arrival in Italy. He maintains school engagements but finds difficulty in creating relationships and friendships, mainly due to religious differences. He played football for a while, and then had to leave due to ankle problems, but his intention is to resume. He receives economic support from his father in order to bear the costs of his stay here:

I'm in Italy for family reasons, I went to find my brother in Libya, then the war started and I came to Italy. Especially for my mother, she did not understand and did not accept

how I grew up. We have had different parents my brother and I, I came home from my natural parents when I came back things had changed and I did not feel better, so with my dad we decided to let me go. With the ship, in Tripoli, then in Lampedusa I was taken to Bari. When Libya started war, both my brother and I thought it was too late. Then no one could go out, the frontiers were closed and then thanks to my father who helped me I managed to come to Italy. I did not come alone, but I did not know anyone. In Italy, I did a course lasting four months. After all, they told me to wait little for me, but meanwhile I continued attending school and did not know if they changed their minds. But they knew that I was able to do the job for which they prepared me and I proved to be able to work together. Now I study all the time, I wanted to study and I wondered what to do, I would also like to come to university. By committing myself to this, I was able to show how much I was, what I was doing and what I wanted to do. It's not that I have many friends, I know different people, but it is difficult to see people who have my own religion. I live with other people: an Italian and an Afghanistan.

The analysis of narrative data collected during this field of research has proved to be particularly valuable in reconstructing the conditions under which the expatriate projects of young refugees and migrants in Italy experience this difficult transitory experience. Regardless of the intrinsic or extrinsic motivation that led to the choice to rethink their life project in a different cultural context, the stories have highlighted the challenges experienced by young refugees at personal, family and professional levels:

Since I was little I liked Italy, it was a normal and quiet country, even when my father who was in Libya told me about Italy, and all of Italy spoke in Libya. I came here with other compatriots but there was no hook from my country, there are many drug trafficks and they started to use me, then to stay away from them I went to Florence where they tried to seriously understand how they could hit me, for example with smoke, but I still do not smoke. There was a Red Cross lord who helped me, my compatriots left me alone. (R., 22 years old, Pakistan)

An emerging theme in all the stories collected is the difficulty associated not only with the need to re-read his or her transnational youth identity in the experience of passage and expulsion following the expatriation, but also of the need to adapt to a new context made up of norms, values, stereotypes and prejudices associated with the image of the refugee that remains widespread in Italian society. This tension between the desire to "achieve a dream", both at a personal and professional level, and the desire to relate to distant affections and ties that ensure continuity and cohesion with their own identity, characterises all the stories. In this context, education, employment and professional experiences are not only a means of subsistence but a concrete opportunity to legitimise their own social and personal identity, a way of being socially visible, to be accepted as members of the community, legitimately engaged in their own development and growth.

The voices of the participants in this exploratory research, which obviously does not claim exhaustiveness but attempts to open a small gap and read the inner world of these subjects, confirm the urgency of enhancing the human capital of young refugees. Recognising the training and professional experiences, cultural and academic titles of the young respondents has shown the richness of the cultural heritage possessed by these subjects, a precious treasure potentially available to enhance the communities in which they are living. Moving from this evidence, and the awareness

that the future of our society will depend to a great extent on the ability to value all citizens, the project and the subsequent establishment of the Centre for Permanent Learning at the university in 2016 were born.

The theoretical framework pushing towards the enhancement of cultural, human and social capital of migrants and young refugees is based on the acknowledgement of cultural differences as constitutive features of social reality. Educational choice may provide opportunities for social mobility, while also producing divides within ethnic minorities and across generations. This is one of the main mechanisms of discontinuity between generations in the processes of educational choice that might influence access to opportunities for social mobility. Recent studies have underlined how the structural variable of ascribed cultural capital impacts life chances more than socio-economic status, even if at the same time it is not a protection factor that might assure a definite continuity. If this double transition of both ethnic belonging and neglected cultural capital is not taken into account by social inclusion policies, a perverse and foreseeable effect of feedback inequality risks being reproduced (McBrien, Dooley and Birman 2017), even in front of choices of hospitality that are necessary, useful but not sufficient for the development of the whole Mediterranean Europe and for many other countries.

Working towards the enhancement and enrichment of the cultural capital of refugees represents a turning point for inclusion policies, an alert to an unforeseen effect of inequality (Peterson et al. 2017) which could be inbuilt into some processes that even if addressed to give hospitality do not actually acknowledge the human capital and the economic and cultural benefits implied in the enhancement of integration.

## **Conclusions and future directions of working for young refugees**

The programmes carried out by the CAP contribute to the implementation of a service for the recognition and certification of prior learning in formal, informal and non-formal settings, which is also extended to a larger population, not only of migrants and refugees but also youth in general.

In particular, in relation to the service offered by the CAP helpdesk of assistance in the gathering of information and the initiation of procedures for recognition of learning acquired in formal settings, the experience of CAP has led to a handbook on the legal recognition of academic qualifications for citizens from outside the EU. This provides a summary of the procedures to be followed in the event that the user is resident abroad and about to commence residence in Italy, or is already resident in Italy with a regular residence permit and seeking recognition for qualifications formally acquired in the country of origin in order to continue with their studies in Italy. The second significant output of the CAP relates to the setting up of a unitary university lifelong learning service, which is useful in supporting not only the immigrant people but also a wider range of users, in the recognition of prior learning in non-formal and informal settings. The transparency of non-formal and informal skills, through both self- and hetero-evaluation tests, can help to find employment. The CAP helps young people to learn or improve skills of active job searching with a greater awareness of their own resources but, above all, the enhancement of knowledge acquired on the job that can then result in the recognition of university

credits, potentially redeemable on training at the University of Bari. The possibility of establishing a unitary university service for the development of a lifelong learning culture, which will result in the enhancement of a more articulate definition of skills, as not only practical experience or theoretical knowledge, but how the two components may be integrated, is certainly an indicator of modernisation at the university.

This clearly connects one of the most significant outputs of the project and of the CAP service: the definition of a memorandum of understanding between departments including the Department of Youth and Social Citizenship (Immigration Office) and the Department of Training and Education – Schools, Universities, Vocational Training (the Vocational Training Service of the Puglia Region) in the dissemination, development, promotion and co-ordination of services for the certification of learning developed in non-formal and informal settings, acquired by refugees in their countries of origin. This protocol aims to gather the considerations previously outlined and lay the foundations for fruitful collaboration and co-ordination with regard to certification and, above all, with reference to the work of establishing a Regional System of Competencies (Law DGR no. 2273 of 13 November 2012) and the definition of a Regional Repertoire of Professional Figures (Law DGR no. 1277 of 2 December 2013). This step is undoubtedly a crucial step in the pathway proposed by the CAP in terms of developing the transparency of skills acquired on the job, difficult to certify in terms of formal qualifications acquired, but valuable for the recognition of professional qualifications. The implications of this evidence can be seen both in relation to the actions of active job searching but also in relation to the previously discussed possibility of the translation of specific skills into university training credits, which the regional repertoire could then help in terms of placement in very specific sectors.

Based on this model, the CAP centre operates, therefore, both as incubators of youth skills and as vehicles for their potential for social change, especially for young refugees. This perspective has led the present work to conceiving of youth work as an agent of social equality, basing its work on the interaction between youth and adult youth workers (Morciano and Scardigno 2014). Youth work in services for lifelong learning, therefore, can be designed and developed as places in which young people and adults together seek to identify the mechanisms of social inequality in their life contexts (Coussée 2008; Morciano 2015), and to build networks of participatory action that aim to contain or inhibit them.

In this sense, the CAP is increasingly characterised as a youth work service that somehow “uses” the opportunity to work with the target of refugees, a challenger target for legislation and accreditation systems and certification of qualifications, or formal educational credentials that cannot be highlighted in many cases precisely because of the protection status enjoyed by such students. These aspects are particularly relevant to sociology of education and to the international debate on the issue of the loss of the economic value of the degree, the so-called credentialing theme and the progressive loss of value of formal titles that have become excessive in relation to demand and hence subject to a write-down, like any other economic asset.

Young refugees who come to our service present an amazing opportunity to consider our work in the field and to rethink the tools that often should not simply



answer to external and internal validity criteria, but more than this, should give useful and usable solutions of youth work practices addressed to young refugees. This is a micro perspective of analysis on the process of integration that actually enhances concrete and contextual practices and experimentations, able to act on positive mechanisms that might push away new forms of populism and racism, as expression of a diffused sense of communitarian disorientation and fear (Zanfrini 2015). Experience of academic integration of young refugees at our university could be considered as a contextual (micro) experience of youth work, particularly considered by some organisations (macro) such as the International Organization for Migration for instance in the programme “skills2work” or by the European Network of Universities (EUA) through the project HERE, as good practices of inclusion of some challenging categories of targets, such as young refugees. From our point of view, what should be further investigated in European policies and programmes in the processes of enhancement of cultural capital is that independently from the fact that they address young refugees, the multiplication of the value of trust is the real agent of the success of this experience of local integration and inclusion. It is an exchange value, a “relational good” (Donati and Solci 2011) that although free is so difficult to find in programmes and policies of integration all over Europe.

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## Chapter 8

# Transformation of youth work for young refugees in Turkey: a shift from emergency aid to integration initiatives

*Gökay Özerim and Güldan Kalem*

### Introduction

**T**he recent economic and financial crisis of Europe has coincided with an unprecedented refugee flow that has created the so-called “migration crisis”. This has increased the number of difficulties facing young refugees in their host communities. As a result, integration of these groups has transformed into a permanent challenge both for them and for the host societies. Within this picture, Turkey represents a distinctive example, as it has been hosting around 3.2 million Syrian refugees since September 2017 and, according to existing data,<sup>24</sup> almost two-thirds of the Syrian refugees in Turkey are under the age of 30. As a result, Turkey, already a youthful country, is faced with the challenge of integrating young refugees into society and into the labour market.

While a diverse group of stakeholders in Turkey have been involved in the process of formulating policies and strategies to resolve the challenges faced by young refugees, youth work and youth volunteerism have become one of the supplementary mechanisms for producing quick responses. In spite of the economic and social challenges and relatively short history of refugees in the country, several initiatives by various NGOs in Turkey have managed to provide services and implement projects addressing obstacles that young refugees face. Within these projects, youth work has a prominent role.

The purpose of this study is to provide examples from initiatives and projects in Turkey for young refugees that demonstrate the changing characteristics of youth work for refugees in Turkey, and thereby underline the significance of youth in refugee integration. The data collection process for the study comprised a literature review on youth work and migration in Turkey in order to give an overview of the history of youth work and recent developments of migration in Turkey. In addition, the

24. Turkish Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management, [www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma\\_363\\_378\\_4713\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik).

desktop research method was used in order to collect information on NGOs active in the field of youth work and migration as well as projects focused on supporting refugees. Projects with links to refugees and youth work administered by the Turkish National Agency<sup>25</sup> (a sub-programme of the Erasmus+ programme) over the past five years were also investigated. After the relevant projects and organisations were identified, the authors contacted their co-ordinators/implementers via telephone or e-mail or derived information from their online resources.

Using this framework, this study first presents the link between youth work and refugee support, and then discusses the case of young Syrian refugees in Turkey based on the existing situation, historical process and the development of related initiatives in the field.

## **What links youth work with refugee support mechanisms?**

Youth are a notable group in the integration process. They not only constitute an important part of the immigrant and refugee population, but also are part of the possible solution mechanisms for refugees and migrants. At the same time, the elements that make youth work an essential part of the support mechanism for young refugees varies beyond the demographic data and numbers.

First of all, youth work is accepted as essential in citizenship and citizenship formation. By leading to social participation, it contributes directly or indirectly to youth political participation, and thereby increases representativeness and democratic culture (Dolejšiová and López 2009: 9). Youth work can also actively contribute to extending the traditional understandings of many issues, such as the borders of citizenship and of rights (Pisani 2016: 93). Youth work can also support refugees by reshaping identities with host societies. Hudson recommends that youth work should not only work directly with refugees but also with the host society, since it is in host societies that anti-foreigner and anti-immigrant discourse often abounds (Hudson 2014: 10). Beyond having a central role in inclusion policies and multicultural policies within the local community, youth work can build trust between young migrants/refugees and their host society. Therefore, youth work with young refugees can have a multifaceted impact, touching on aspects of identity, citizenship, inclusion and integration among two communities, both refugees and host society members.

In its reports, the European Commission underlines that youth work has convergent dimensions with some other policy areas such as formal education, social work, health, justice, sports, guidance and counselling and culture (European Commission 2014: 60). All of these areas constitute channels through which youth work can support young refugees. Via these channels, youth work brings added value for refugees through four components in which youth work contributes towards young persons' personal development. These components are self-determination, self-confidence, self-esteem and socialisation, which also enhance the empowerment of young refugees (European Commission 2014: 5).

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25. The Turkish National Agency (Centre for European Union Education and Youth Programmes) is responsible for managing the Erasmus+ programme in Turkey ([www.ua.gov.tr/en/home](http://www.ua.gov.tr/en/home)).

In particular, youth work can support refugees by increasing awareness of equality, social justice and equity through its strong ties with the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, it also constitutes an indispensable part of refugee support mechanisms.

## Youth work in Turkey

The available literature on youth work and youth policy in Turkey can be reviewed starting from the early days of the Republic. An overview of the literature on youth studies in Turkey conducted by Yaman reveals that academic work on youth mostly focus on youth problems, youth research, conflict between generations, education of youth, youth culture, and youth identity problems (Yaman 2013). In their comprehensive study on youth work and policies in Turkey, which is one of very few such studies, Yentürk, Kurtaran and Gülesin (2008) define youth work as “an endeavor to create a learning environment designed for meeting young people’s needs with the aim of realizing their self-fulfillment”. However, there is no official definition, accreditation or certification process for youth work in Turkey.

The academic study of youth work is a recently developing area. Studies on youth in Turkey after the 2000s have become varied in both quantity and quality by expanding to new subjects such as youth unemployment, youth concerns and expectations about their future, youth’s relationship with technology and social media, youth as consumers and youth subculture. When youth work in Turkey is reviewed historically, it is clear that youth work is typically performed by members or volunteers of civil society organisations. The history of youth work is closely related to the development of civil society organisations in Turkey. Youth work in Turkey expanded remarkably between 1999 and 2001, when young people started to benefit from international training and mobility opportunities and the Euromed Youth Programme, marking a major milestone. The visibility of youth work increased with the massive earthquake of 1999, after which many NGOs and volunteers were mobilised for search and rescue efforts. In the 2000s, the growth of voluntary activities organised through associations and foundations accelerated. Curriculum changes introduced “voluntarism programmes” into primary schools. In addition, some universities added civic engagement or social responsibility projects to their curriculums in order to involve young people in civil society.

The period after 2000 is characterised by the advancement of youth work and non-formal education. The establishment of the Turkish National Agency in 2002 and its support of EU-funded programmes created more training and international co-operation opportunities for youth workers. Turkey’s participation in the EU Youth and Education programmes contributed to an increase in the number of young people who work as volunteers in national and international projects. The concept of youth work became more visible within the academic circle, as well, especially after Turkey’s inclusion in the EU programmes Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth in 2004. Turkey has continued to benefit from EU-funded projects with Life Long Learning Programmes and now Erasmus+, and more and more academic studies have begun to focus on the effects of these EU-funded youth, volunteering and youth work programmes. Increased international co-operation in the field of youth

resulted in a change in the development of youth policies in this period. The World Bank, UN and national agency-funded projects and provided training focused on civil society capacity building, in particular concerning youth policies.

In line with this historical process, increasing refugee movements towards Turkey in the 2010s constitute another important milestone for youth work in Turkey. Before discussing how this refugee movement transformed youth work in Turkey, the current refugee situation in Turkey will be explained.

## Young refugees in Turkey and challenges

As one of the neighbouring countries of Syria, Turkey implemented an open-door migration policy for Syrians between 2011 and 2015. By respecting the *non-refoulement* principle,<sup>26</sup> the country witnessed an unprecedented flow and accumulation of Syrian refugees within its borders. As a result, Turkey has become the leading host country for Syrian refugees, hosting a population of around 3.2 million, which is almost half of all Syrian refugees that have been internationally displaced since the beginning of the civil war in 2011. According to available data, only 10% of all Syrians are in camps while non-camp Syrians, who are spread around Turkey, constitute 90% of the Syrians in the country.<sup>27</sup> Almost half of the Syrians in Turkey are female and almost two-thirds are below the age of 30.<sup>28</sup>

These developments brought new migration and refugee-related challenges to Turkey by casting it in a new role as a destination country. This has been the largest immigrant flow in the history of the country, and the necessity of a rapid response to the needs of the Syrians sped up the institutionalisation process of migration management in Turkey. On the other hand, management of migration flows is just one aspect of the issue. Such a large refugee population also requires initiatives in the social, economic and political spheres. Furthermore, by 2015 it became clearer that the Syrians in Turkey under temporary protection are not guests but permanent members of the community as a result of the prolongation of the conflict in Syria. In addition to the ongoing civil war in Syria, the EU's policies and initiatives to limit

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26. "Non-refoulement is a concept which prohibits States from returning a refugee or asylum-seeker to territories where there is a risk that his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." UNHCR, [www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/419c75ce4/refugee-protection-international-law-scope-content-principle-non-refoulement.html](http://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/419c75ce4/refugee-protection-international-law-scope-content-principle-non-refoulement.html).

27. Turkey is a signatory of both the Geneva Convention on the Legal Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol on the Legal Status of Refugees. However, Turkey applies "geographical limitation" to the Convention, which means refugee status is only given to the people coming from member countries of the Council of Europe. For others, a limited protection status is provided and in light of these principles, Turkey embraces 3.2 million Syrians with the status of "temporary protection". The major motivation of the regulation was to clarify the status for the Syrians in Turkey and to strengthen them by regulating the services and rights for the Syrians, including health services, work permits, education facilities and social assistance. By giving an identity document to all registered Syrians, it was also an attempt to encourage all Syrians in Turkey to be officially registered to the Turkish authorities in order to take advantages of these benefits under temporary protection.

28. Turkish Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management [www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma\\_363\\_378\\_4713\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik).

and restrict transit to European countries, such as the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, contributed to the permanency of the Syrians in Turkey.<sup>29</sup>

The major needs of the Syrians can be clustered under four distinctive categories: housing, education, health and work (Orhan and Gündoğar, 2015: 2). The first generation of initiatives for helping and supporting Syrians in Turkey mostly focused on basic needs such as housing, food and health. Yet both the increasing number of refugees and the transformation of their status from a “temporary visit” into “permanent stay” necessitated the production of initiatives and policies that not only provide immediate aid but also consider long-term integration (Erdoğan and Ünver 2015: 9). As a result, initiatives and mechanisms for education and work have recently started to develop in Turkey.

There is a general wisdom that labour market integration is one of the most crucial aspects of overall integration since it is a significant tool for providing long-term integration of refugees by increasing their engagement in the hosting society (European Parliament 2016: 11). On the other hand, the inclusion of new members in society and in the labour market can raise questions related not only to their integration but also to their acceptance by the host society. Since Syrians have been arriving in Turkey, starting in 2011 and, more importantly, since 2016 when they were able to receive work permits, it can be asserted that Turkey is still on the bottom rung of the ladder in the labour market integration process of Syrians. Existing studies confirm that labour market integration of refugees takes time and can vary according to the local employment parameters of host countries. For instance, according to a study from the European Parliament, the average period for the integration of migrants into the workplace in the EU can extend to six years, while it takes around 15 years to increase migrant employment rates to 70% (European Parliament 2016: 22).

While young Syrians constitute a new workforce in the Turkish labour market, they also provide competition for the young Turkish workforce. Moreover, Turkey, with its young population and labour surplus in certain sectors, is already coping with structural problems in the employment market. This fact can further complicate the labour market integration of Syrians, in particular, by the obstacles that lower-skilled Turkish citizens are also facing (Ercan 2016: 4).

Integration challenges identified by the European Parliament include lack of language skills, lack of education, restricted access to the host society labour market, cultural barriers, lack of social networks as well as health problems and traumas as a result of the conflict and violence refugees faced in their homelands (European Parliament 2016: 27). Young Syrians in Turkey encounter many of these problems. Studies have found that Syrians’ labour market integration is inhibited by their lack of proof of vocational skills (that is, a diploma or certificate) or by low levels of education (Ercan 2016: 5), as well low levels of Turkish language competency, all of which often result in Syrians receiving only difficult, low-wage and often unregistered jobs (Özpinar

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29. The deal aimed at returning irregular migrants on Greek islands who had arrived via Turkey after 20 March 2016. The resettlement of one Syrian in the EU in exchange for each Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands was foreseen by the scheme. In return, the EU guaranteed to increase its refugee facility aid from €3 billion to €6 billion and follow a conditional visa liberalisation roadmap for Turkish citizens.

et al. 2016: 2). The challenges are highly interrelated, and the mismanagement of any one of these obstacles to integration may complicate the solutions for related problems. For instance, if language competency is not addressed, Syrians cannot be fully integrated into the education system. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 2.2% of Syrian refugee youth are enrolled in higher education in Turkey (UNHCR 2016).

Turkey has provided various programmes to encourage the school enrolment of Syrians under temporary protection. Despite these efforts, higher education attainment among young Syrians remains low due to lack of information on the opportunities available, the pressure many youth face to work and support themselves rather than receive an education, a low level of participation in skill-building and language courses and insufficient civil society capacity (UNHCR 2016).

## Youth as a key group

In this regard, youth should be considered a key group among both Syrians and Turkish communities in addressing these problems. The importance of youth in both Syrian and Turkish society can be explained by two aspects.

First, the ratio of young people is very high among Syrians in Turkey, and they constitute one of the most fragile groups within that community. Their specific needs require rapid and tailor-made policies and actions. As of June 2017, 1 967 294 Syrians, more than two-thirds of all 2 764 500 Syrians in Turkey, are youths. Almost half of all Syrians in Turkey are under the age of 18.<sup>30</sup> The mobilisation of civil society and the utilisation of youth work can contribute to creating solutions for integration problems. Increased involvement of youth and NGOs in the management of this process can strengthen existing efforts and institutional structures. There are about 280 000 registered NGOs in Turkey. Although only around 5% of the board members of these NGOs are under the age of 30,<sup>31</sup> the rate of youth membership is much higher. Initiatives aimed at refugees are a fairly new issue for most of these organisations. These NGOs, particularly those driven by young people, can be encouraged to do more youth work for Syrian refugees by raising awareness about refugees' problems and also by developing their solution-building capacities. Youth work and youth volunteerism can be more concentrated on problems faced by Syrian youth. Youth initiatives can be developed to increase Syrians' level of education, language proficiency and vocational skills, which eventually will make them more employable and facilitate their integration into the labour market in Turkey. The failure to integrate youth groups into the labour market can cause poverty and deprivation by creating social exclusion and marginalisation. By contrast, responding adequately to the education needs of this group will contribute not only to their general integration into society but also to their employability prospects in the medium term.

Second, Turkey is a fairly young society and it is crucial to create a dialogue between Syrian youth and Turkish youth in order to facilitate social cohesion in the future. Of the total population in Turkey, 16.6% is between the ages of 15 and 24 (TUIK 2013),

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30. [www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma\\_363\\_378\\_4713\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik).

31. [www.dernekler.gov.tr/tr/AnasayfaLinkler/organ-uye-yas.aspx](http://www.dernekler.gov.tr/tr/AnasayfaLinkler/organ-uye-yas.aspx).



a higher percentage than EU28 countries on average. Taking children into account, Turkey's relative youth becomes even clearer. More than half of its population is under the age of 30. As previously mentioned, Syrian refugees in Turkey also constitute a young demographic. This fact can create both opportunities and challenges for the labour market integration of Syrians in Turkey.

Without long-term strategies to address labour needs and an education system that corresponds to these needs, Syrian and Turkish youth may perceive each other as competitors in the same labour market rather than the members of the same society. Increased unemployment rates in the provinces in which Syrian refugees are highly concentrated may create a societal conflict by fostering the idea that Syrians are stealing the jobs of the Turkish community. Indeed, this perception may already exist. A 2014 study found that 56% of Turkish respondents carry fear on this issue while almost half of respondents felt negatively about Syrians' entrance to the labour market (Erdoğan and Ünver 2015: 58). Although, to date, none of the political parties in Turkey have taken advantage of the presence of Syrians in Turkey by scapegoating them for economic or social problems, tension between the two societies has become more apparent both in related field studies and in observed cases of conflict. However, these prejudices and related problems can be managed. Youth NGOs and youth groups can play a primary role in preventing conflicts resulting from such misconceptions by creating common platforms to bring Turkish and Syrian youth together.

## **What is going on in youth work for young refugees in Turkey?**

Youth work for refugees and migrants in Turkey is a recently developing area, and even the work and activities of civil society on this issue have a relatively short history relative to some European countries. As previously mentioned, this is largely explained by the fact that, in spite of some previous small-scale episodes of mass migration, Turkey has recently transformed into a migrant and refugee hosting society, following the arrival of Syrians starting in 2011.

Nonetheless, the size of the youth population represents tremendous potential for civil society. According to the comprehensive analysis of the "youth map" study, there are more than 450 organisations in Turkey specifically working on youth issues,<sup>32</sup> including federations, youth centres and youth parliaments, unions, university youth groups and communities. Despite the short history of refugee flows to Turkey, there are several active NGOs and youth organisations in the field that have been supporting refugees by providing legal consultation, food, support in finding shelter, healthcare, and accessing their rights (Kutlu 2015). During the first years in which Syrians were in Turkey, alongside the voluntary philanthropy of the Turkish community, several NGOs have provided necessary complementary assistance, in particular for the non-camp Syrians.

Since the flow of Syrians has now become a permanent stay in Turkey, and following the change in work permit regulations for this group in 2016, it can be expected that a new generation of NGO activities will respond to the long-term integration needs of Syrians, beyond immediate aid. In fact, there are already existing youth

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32. [www.genclikharitasi.org/istatistik-s4.html](http://www.genclikharitasi.org/istatistik-s4.html).

related initiatives in Turkey that directly or indirectly support the labour market integration of Syrians.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 8.1 – Reviewed examples of youth work initiatives for refugees in Turkey**

Organisation	Type of organisation	Fields of activities and projects for refugees
Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG)	NGO	Personal development of young refugees
Support to Life Association	NGO	Health support, skills development and legal consultancy, Relief Aid for Syrian Refugees programme Combating Child Labour
Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM)	NGO	Legal consultation, food assistance, courses for refugees, awareness-raising activities
YUVA	NGO	Development of professional skills for labour market integration
Research Centre on Asylum and Migration (IGAM)	NGO	Harmonisation of refugees, field studies and research
Yaşar University	University	Developing capacities of youth workers in the field of refugees
Turkish Red Crescent	NGO- Humanitarian Organisation	Children and youth programmes, volunteering programmes for refugees in the fields of intercultural learning, empathy, volunteerism, peer learning, effective communication, children’s rights, time management, stress management and hygiene
Ministry of Youth and Sports in Turkey	Public body – state level institution	Funding of projects for young refugees
The Syrian Forum	Umbrella organisation for Syrians’ associations	Direct humanitarian aid and assistance, vocational training, cultural-awareness activities, civic training and research

The Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG) is one of these NGOs. It was established in 2002 for the purpose of encouraging young people to participate in social

33. In the scope of this study, the initiatives organised directly by youth groups, or organised for youth groups, are analysed as “youth work”.

responsibility projects and to support the personal development of young people.<sup>34</sup> They initiated the Young Refugees Support Project in 2015 in co-operation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The project aims to support the integration processes of Syrian youth between 18 and 30 years old in two provinces of Turkey (Hatay and Diyarbakır) by reinforcing them through youth work and humanitarian work. As part of the project, field research was also conducted by TOG to identify the employment and education needs of Syrian youth.

Another NGO, Support to Life Association (Hayata Destek Derneği), operates in Istanbul, Hatay, Batman and Diyarbakır where it provides financial aid and protection programmes to reduce poverty among Syrian refugees.<sup>35</sup> Since 2012, it has implemented the Relief Aid for Syrian Refugees programme, and expanded this programme in 2014 by transforming it into a wide-scale protection project including health support, skill development and legal consultancy. The association also focuses on raising awareness of child labour. Since 2014, it has been co-ordinating a project entitled Combating Child Labour.

The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), which was established just after the Iraq War in 1995, supports asylum seekers as one of the implementing partners of the UNHCR Turkey office.<sup>36</sup> The association provides not only regular support, such as legal consultation and food assistance, but also delivers language, music and art courses, conducts awareness-raising activities about refugees in society, administers activities aimed at increasing harmonisation between refugees and the local community, and provides skill-development training courses such as in web design, handicrafts, carpet weaving and cake decoration. The association has active employees in addition to the support of volunteers.

YUVA, another Turkish association, has designed and implemented activities on social integration and intercultural dialogue for Syrian refugees under their Syrian Refugees Programme since 2013.<sup>37</sup> Their target group includes young refugees. Through vocational training at their two community centres in the provinces of Hatay and Gaziantep, YUVA provides support to refugees by improving their self-sufficiency and developing their professional skills. The association also delivers Turkish language training for Syrians with the aim of facilitating their access to public services, healthcare and the labour market. They also provide psychosocial support and social integration activities.

Several NGOs in Turkey also implement activities and projects for the integration of Syrian youth through EU-funded programmes. There have been various initiatives developed within the scope of the Civil Society Dialogue programme of the European Union, which aims to bring together civil society organisations from Turkey and the EU to exchange knowledge and experience. One of these associations is the Research Centre on Asylum and Migration (IGAM), which implemented the Harmonisation of Refugees project to adapt the Refugee Integration Evaluation Tool to Turkey.<sup>38</sup> The

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34. [www.tog.org.tr/en](http://www.tog.org.tr/en).

35. [www.hayatadestek.org/?lang=en](http://www.hayatadestek.org/?lang=en).

36. <http://en.sgdd.info>.

37. [www.yuva.org.tr/en](http://www.yuva.org.tr/en).

38. <https://en.igamder.org>.

organisation also has several other projects, including a comprehensive study on the activities of non-governmental organisations for Syrian refugees in Turkey, which was prepared and published by IGAM in 2014 (Çorabatır and Hassa 2014). The study emphasises that national, local and international civil society organisations have made enormous efforts in order to contribute to the lives of refugees in Turkey. However, the lack of the necessary legal tools for regulating the activities and functions of civil society organisations in the field complicates their efforts and presents an important challenge. Moreover, the study reports that the number of active civil society organisations in the field is still low when compared with the number of refugees, and they mostly focus on humanitarian aid activities such as providing food, clothing and partial shelter. The study also highlights the major challenges faced by active civil society organisations in the field: lack of knowledge and lack of resources.

Another EU-funded youth project, titled Empowering Youth Workers to Reach Out Young Migrants and Refugees (REACH-OUT), is funded by the Turkish National Agency and co-ordinated by Yaşar University (Turkey) in co-operation with five partner organisations from Italy, Greece and Austria. The REACH-OUT project aims to develop and test an innovative training curriculum to support youth workers in reaching out to young migrants and refugees, and to increase youth workers' competences and foster their professional development.<sup>39</sup> The project stems from the idea that youth workers can play an important role in helping migrants overcome problems they encounter in a new society. To do this, they not only need to understand the needs and anxieties of refugees but also how to provide solutions.

This two-year project is an important means of encouraging youth workers to start initiatives for refugees and gain the skills necessary to work with refugees and migrants. During the project, youth workers' skills and knowledge concerning work with refugee and migrant groups will be analysed through a survey and in-depth interviews. The results of the project were published in 2018. The related research demonstrates that most of the youth workers working with migrants and refugees do not have special training for working with such groups. The most important training needs of the youth workers identified in the research were migration terminology, building of trust, empathy and acceptance, providing emotional support, working with different groups, working with traumatised people, communication, conflict management and intercultural skills. Based on these results, a training curriculum was prepared and implemented as a pilot by international partners in 2018. The project will indirectly contribute to the integration of refugees since the target groups of the project are youth workers, youth leaders, youth organisations, people and NGOs working with young migrants, social workers and community workers, which can work directly with refugees.

The Turkish Red Crescent is another example of an active organisation both in youth work and also refugee support.<sup>40</sup> Young people can be engaged in the refugee and immigrant aid programmes of the Turkish Red Crescent through its youth organisations. Indeed, the organisation encourages youth volunteerism in many issues. The Turkish Red Crescent conducts its activities for youth groups between the ages of 14 and 18 within its Children Programme, which is co-ordinated in collaboration with UNICEF.

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39. <https://reachout.yasar.edu.tr/>.

40. [www.kizilay.org.tr/neleryapiyoruz/education-and-youth-services](http://www.kizilay.org.tr/neleryapiyoruz/education-and-youth-services).

The organisation has a directorate for immigration and refugee services that provides shelters, health services, nourishment and education facilities in refugee camps. It also collaborates with local administrations to deliver vocational training. In 2016, it organised a workshop that brought NGOs and public bodies in Turkey's Şanlıurfa province together to discuss and produce solutions to Syrian refugees' employment problems.<sup>41</sup> It also has in-camp activities for young refugees.<sup>42</sup> For instance, with the use of articulated lorries it organises "Mobile Child Friendly Zones" to provide mobile services for them in camps, which aim to contribute to their psychosocial development. The Turkish Red Crescent also provides training in teaching Syrian young people how to work as a volunteer. In this context, the organisation delivers training for Syrian youth in a wide range of fields including intercultural learning, empathy, volunteerism, peer learning, effective communication, children's rights, time management, stress management and hygiene. It also organises sector-specific courses for vocational skills such as computer literacy, robotics, sewing, and Turkish and English language courses. It determines the field and context of the training according to the needs of each specific group and also the region that the young refugees are settled in. It organises focus group meetings to reveal the group's needs, and it also trains and encourages their young volunteers to produce their own small-scale projects for other young refugees. Furthermore, it provides basic psychological support for young refugees. If further systematic assistance is needed, young refugees are directed to other related NGOs or public bodies. In the field of public education, it organises schooling activities by providing assistance in school enrolment for young refugees.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Turkey also provides funding for youth projects related to refugees. According to the data provided by the Ministry, six different youth projects were funded in 2015 alone, providing around €200 000 of financial aid to around 2 250 Syrian young people.<sup>43</sup> The projects funded by the Ministry aim to deliver language courses, vocational training and education consultancy to young refugees to help them cope with their social integration problems.

Other initiatives were initiated directly by Syrians themselves. About 40 of these associations came together under an umbrella organisation called the Syrian Associations Platform. Another similar initiative entitled The Syrian Forum includes six different organisations providing direct humanitarian aid, vocational training, cultural awareness, civic training and undertaking research related to Syrian refugees.<sup>44</sup>

It is expected that young refugees will also establish their own initiatives in the future, although such initiatives are not yet visible. Understandably, young refugees are likely to be preoccupied by other urgent needs including integration into the education system and employment market. Therefore, at this stage, rather than establishing their own initiatives, they are engaged in the work of other NGOs and groups which are already working actively on related issues.

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41. [www.kizilay.org.tr/Haber/KurumsalHaberDetay/3042](http://www.kizilay.org.tr/Haber/KurumsalHaberDetay/3042).

42. The details about the work of the Turkish Red Crescent is provided by Merve Renan Türkkulu, Project Manager at the Turkish Red Crescent.

43. [www.gsb.gov.tr/HaberDetaylari/1/53033/suriyeli-gencler-genclik-ve-spor-bakanliginin-destegiyle-hayata-tutunuyor.aspx](http://www.gsb.gov.tr/HaberDetaylari/1/53033/suriyeli-gencler-genclik-ve-spor-bakanliginin-destegiyle-hayata-tutunuyor.aspx).

44. <https://us.syrianforumusa.org>.

## Conclusions

As a result of the migration flows following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Turkey has transformed into one of the leading refugee hosting countries in the world, with around 3.2 million Syrians. Contrary to initial expectations, after several years it became clear that the Syrians would be permanent members of Turkish society rather than temporary guests. Turkey developed immediate responses and legal tools at a state level to provide the required services for Syrians both inside and outside the camps. However, the size of the Syrian population in Turkey and the permanency of their situation necessitate the involvement and contribution of other actors. Integration policies for the Syrians in Turkey could only be properly developed and implemented by the complementary contributions of these actors.

Within this picture, youth work in Turkey constitutes one of the primary complementary elements, and the involvement of youth in this process through the activities of non-governmental organisations can facilitate the integration of Syrians. Based on the examples analysed in this chapter, the following conclusion can be drawn regarding the involvement of youth in the refugee integration initiatives in Turkey.

First, youth and youth work can play a pivotal role in creating necessary dialogue between Syrian refugees and the Turkish community owing to the existence of large cohorts of young people within both communities. While focusing on the educational needs of Syrian youth in Turkey can be an essential step to guaranteeing their further integration into society and the labour market, the involvement of Turkish youth in this process could also break down prejudices and stereotypes.

**Table 8.2 – Challenges and opportunities for youth work with refugees and migrants in Turkey**

Challenges	Opportunities
<p>The high number of young refugees.</p> <p>The limited number of experienced youth workers in the field of migration and refugees.</p> <p>A general lack of knowledge and skills among those working with young refugees.</p> <p>The rarity of nationwide initiatives.</p> <p>The lack of concrete policies and legal tools.</p> <p>Being a relatively new area of work for youth workers in Turkey.</p>	<p>The number of experienced civil society organisations in different fields, which can transfer their knowledge into the migration sector.</p> <p>Active, young population.</p> <p>Existing best practices since 2011.</p> <p>Involvement of different stakeholders such as universities, research centres, etc.</p> <p>International funding programmes and grants for the dialogue and exchange of experience.</p> <p>Experience with project-based activities in the youth sector under EU funding and programmes.</p>

Second, although this is a relatively new experience for Turkey, there are already several distinguished examples of youth work contributing to the integration of Syrians.

Many non-governmental organisations which have been traditionally involved in youth work transferred their experience to initiatives for refugees. Since an immediate response was required for Syrians at the beginning of the flows, these initiatives mainly focused on basic needs such as housing, food and other humanitarian aids. However, as the Syrians' situation in Turkey gradually transformed into a permanent stay and after the development of legal tools for their employment process, the initiatives for their labour market integration became equally necessary. It can be assumed that the "second generation" of refugee work in Turkey will further focus on integration aspects rather than just immediate aid.

Finally, existing examples of youth work focusing on Syrians' labour market integration in Turkey mostly include vocational training, skill-development training and language training, which were their primary needs for their first steps into the labour market. However, additional steps now need to be taken in order to ensure further integration. Moreover, youth work could be a valuable tool for encouraging school participation, in particular, in higher education, by providing information on entrepreneurship and developing dialogue with society. It should also be noted that youth workers working with refugees rarely seemed to specialise in certain areas such as health, education and employment. Most of the existing initiatives do not have a specific focus but have comprehensive activities and aims.

One important common characteristic of the analysed youth work initiatives for refugees and migrants in this study is that they were mostly developed within the structure of NGOs and universities rather than youth organisations or other specific settings established by youth. However, this is very consistent with the development of youth work in Turkey, which has relied on the efforts of NGOs for many years. An increase in the number of youth-based initiatives can be expected in the short term, in particular with the help of EU programmes and university students' further engagement in the process.

Another important note regarding youth work with refugees is related to the geographical development of initiatives. All 81 cities in Turkey (as of 2017) have been hosting different numbers of refugees. As might be expected, the initial youth work efforts for refugees were observed in the border cities and the three big cities of Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir) due to the high number of refugees settled in those areas. However, as refugees have become a part of the social fabric in almost every city in Turkey, nationwide policies and practices are becoming more and more necessary. There is also a need for state level policies addressing the nexus between youth and refugees in Turkey, in particular in the realms of education, social policies, integration and mutual interaction.

There are undoubtedly many other youth initiatives in Turkey that were not included in this study but are very much worth examining. The development of platforms to share the best practices of youth work with refugees in Turkey could encourage other NGOs and youth workers. The integration of refugees is a multidimensional issue and it is open to contributions from all NGOs, rather than just those which are specifically established for migrants and refugees. Providing guidance to Turkish NGOs on how to work with and for refugees could increase the number of youth workers and boost the involvement of youth.

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## Chapter 9

# Young refugees and the role of youth work – The Finnish perspective

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*Veronika Honkasalo*

### Introduction

**E**uropean countries faced a sizeable increase in asylum seekers during 2015. In Finland, in particular, the number of asylum seekers increased remarkably during 2015. According to the Finnish Immigration Service's data, 83% of the asylum seekers who arrived in Finland between January and September 2015 were under 35 years old. Thus, the recent humanitarian immigration in Finland should be seen as a specific issue concerning the younger generation, whether as a political, administrative, social or personal issue. The same is true for global migration: children, adolescents and young adults in particular are on the move across countries and continents (see also De Graeve 2015).

The debate in Finland concerning responsibilities in relation to global migration is only rarely inspired by the framework of youth policy, such as intergenerational justice and equality, or young people's right to a home, meaningful engagement and participation. Rather, the public discussion around recent immigration has been framed by fear and control – regarding the Finnish authorities' resources, the redistribution of services and money, and the recognition of newcomers as a legitimate part of Finnish society. This similar trend and contradiction between humanitarian arguments versus political in granting asylum, and in relation to immigration debates, can also be seen elsewhere in Europe. In this context, unaccompanied minors often form a group on behalf of which people mobilise more easily than for other asylum seekers, a group whose vulnerability is reflected in feelings of pity.

This chapter is based on two studies carried out in Finland in 2016 and 2017. The first study was conducted by a large national NGO (Finnish Federation of Settlement). It concentrated, for example, on how young refugees, and specifically young asylum seekers, were welcomed into everyday youth work practices both by professionals and other young people (Bahmani and Honkasalo 2016). In the 20 interviews conducted with NGO workers around Finland, we asked what

practices had been developed in the field of youth work in order to promote multiculturalism, equality and affirmative action. Most of the interviewees reported that tension in society's atmosphere had increased in Finland since 2015, which manifested in their everyday work becoming more demanding and threatening due to hostility and overt racism towards migrants. The youth workers reported that they were, for example, analysing media coverages and research on immigration together with young people, in order to break down young people's stereotypes and stigmatising attitudes related to refugees and asylum seekers.

The second study consisted of ethnographic fieldwork carried out at a centre for unaccompanied refugee youth in 2016. Both the young asylum seekers and professionals working with them were interviewed for this project. The research process was repeated in 2017, and the same informants were interviewed as in 2016. The research project concentrated, for example, on the everyday lives and life trajectories of the young asylum seekers. Behind this particular study was a research and voluntary project carried out by the Finnish Youth Research Network in co-operation with Save the Children Finland and the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs. Later in 2017, the research group developed taking into account professionals' policy recommendations regarding unaccompanied youth, which the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs later presented to the Ministry of Education and Culture. In this regard, the research project's social impact was highly prioritised (Honkasalo et al. 2017).

The focus of this chapter is mainly on unaccompanied minors. An estimated 95 000 unaccompanied minors arrived in the European Union in 2015, of which 35 000 sought asylum in Sweden, 14 000 in Germany and around 3 000 in Finland. Many of these children and adolescents had faced inhuman behaviour and treatment during their journey, and attacks to asylum centres around Europe were reported in the media (Kuusisto-Arponen 2016). Unaccompanied minors are in a vulnerable position due to their age and asylum status. The UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out that the special status of children must be taken into consideration in asylum processes. Despite the fact that the Finnish Immigration Service's (MIGRI) policy is to expedite the residence permit processing for minors (MIGRI processing times 2016; section 5 of the Act on the Reception of Persons Seeking International Protection), in practice this has rarely happened.

The chapter addresses the following issues:

1. The effects of migration policies and migration law in the contexts of youth work and youth policy.
2. Transnational ties in the context of the leisure activities of young asylum seekers, including contact with family members and friends in the country of origin.
3. The role of leisure time in the lives of young asylum seekers, including practices, professional assistance, friendship networks and leisure activities.

## 1. The effects of migration policies and migration law in the contexts of youth work and youth policy

During the residence process<sup>45</sup> unaccompanied minors live at group homes for minors or in supported living units intended for minors. The reception phase is co-ordinated by the immigration office and group homes are maintained both by municipalities, NGOs and even private profit-seeking companies. According to our study, however, the most difficult circumstance in the lives of unaccompanied young asylum seekers in Finland is that no official authority alone is responsible for these young people; rather, the responsibility is scattered among different official institutions (see, for example, Honkasalo 2017). This lack of co-ordination and responsibility often makes the lives of young asylum seekers unpredictable and chaotic. In our fieldwork, for example, there was one young person who had been moved from one reception centre to another while awaiting the decision regarding his residence permit. This young boy stated that this translocation had been very traumatic for him, since he had been deprived of his friendship networks, school, hobbies and a safe environment. In the interview, he said that he would not wish the same destiny on any other unaccompanied minor. Furthermore, the fact that many young people, once they have received a residence permit, are moved from the reception centre to another institution or registered in a municipality somewhere else in Finland is problematic. During the move, the often fragile social network that the young person has managed to build is broken. These transitions can also be frightening and can cause tremendous stress.

In the current political situation in Finland, many immigration laws that affect young asylum seekers directly have been made even stricter. One example is the law regarding family reunification. Owing to new income limits, the criteria for family ties and the fact that the process itself has been made even more difficult than before, it is nearly impossible for an unaccompanied young person to get his or her family members to Finland. The child has to be a minor on the date when the residence permit is decided (Björklund 2015). However, many of the young people turn 18 during the long waiting process, which in our study took approximately 1.5 years. Therefore, there is a growing generation of young asylum seekers for whom practically no official institution is responsible and there is almost no support from family networks. Furthermore, the wait for a residence permit is very long, even though the Finnish Immigration Service states that the process for unaccompanied young people should be shorter than that for other asylum seekers. In our fieldwork, some of the young

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45. The residence phase prior to asylum of unaccompanied minors in Finland has changed recently to the following: The asylum application is filed at the board or the police station and an asylum interrogation is then carried out by the police. If the asylum seeker's age cannot be confirmed by their documents, an assessment of age is submitted by the police or border guard. This assessment and the processes linked to it have been criticised by academics and professionals for being imprecise and unethical. The application is then transferred to the Finnish Migration Services. Previously, the residence permit was normally granted for four years, but recently the Finnish Migration Services changed their procedures and the majority of first residence permits are only granted for one year. This is especially the case with those minors who have turned 18 during the process. Also, the waiting times for initial decisions have been criticised for being too long (one to two years) (Björklund 2015).

people had been waiting for their residence permit for nearly two years. Many of the interviewees stated that this time of “waitinghood” was the most unbearable thing they had endured since moving to Finland. It frustrated the interviewees. Moreover, the professionals working with the youth said that the waitinghood even disturbed young people’s daily rhythms due to their insomnia. Therefore, it is important that we find tools for analysing the life circumstances of these children and young people in order to deepen our understanding. This, in turn, will make it possible to develop good practices and tools in order to make unaccompanied minors’ lives easier and enable them to live with dignity.

In the study focusing on the viewpoint of a Finnish NGO on how civic society had welcomed young asylum seekers, it seemed that the new situation had been discussed at a societal level, but not at the level of care, rights and justice. For example, the youth workers in Finland mentioned the worsening xenophobic attitudes, especially in cities where reception centres had been opened (Bahmani and Honkasalo 2016). Some of the youth workers had even faced direct threats and avoided sharing information about where they worked. However, even among the youth workers, their attitudes towards asylum seekers were not always welcoming. In some interviews, the youth workers considered, for example, whether their youth club was meant for young asylum seekers at all, even if, by law, communal services were meant for all inhabitants of the municipalities.

## **Recommendations for youth work practices**

- ▶ The youth work field needs more information about global immigration and its consequences. More information is also needed about how the everyday lives of young asylum seekers are shaped and how legal changes and immigration policies affect the daily lives of young people.
- ▶ The possibility of affirmative action in relation to recruiting more asylum seekers to undertake leisure activities should be considered. In addition, knowledge of the basic rights of asylum seekers should be discussed both among youth workers and young people.
- ▶ Many interviewees said that the stereotypical media coverage of refugees directly affected the attitudes of the majority of young people visiting youth clubs and, therefore, many youth workers wished for more tools based on critical media analyses.
- ▶ Youth workers also need more education about the psychological experience and effects of the asylum process on unaccompanied minors, especially in cases where family reunification is not possible or where young people risk the rejection of their residence permit application.

## **2. Transnational ties in the context of the leisure activities of young asylum seekers, including contact with family members and friends in the country of origin**

Many of the young people that we interviewed in our second study concerning unaccompanied minors had left their home country several years earlier. Thus, the journey to Europe and Finland was often framed by experiences in other countries.

For example, many of those who were originally from Afghanistan had been living for months in transit countries doing small jobs and staying with relatives. After arriving in Finland, they maintained contact with relatives mainly through phone calls and social media. However, such contact and networks were often fragile and changing. Some of the young people had chosen not to be in contact with their family, because of the sensitive situation or because such contact made everyday life unbearable – it reminded them of how far away and in what circumstances their family members were living. Some of the young people did not know where their relatives were, and some did not want pressure from their parents (for example, expectations of regular news, family reunification and a positive residence permit acquisition process). However, many of the youth workers that we interviewed in our other study were unaware of the fragility of family ties and transnational networks of young asylum seekers.

In the context of Finnish youth work, young people's lives are often seen too rigidly from the perspective of Finnish society solely, and not only is there a certain blindness towards transnational ties but also to the political and global reasons behind exile and escape (see also De Graeve 2015). Finnish youth workers might also be unaware of the traumatic experiences that young people had during their journey to Finland (for example, relatives being killed).

### **Recommendations for youth work practices**

- ▶ Tools targeting transnational networks and ties should be developed in the context of youth work.
- ▶ The professional identity of youth work should be contested; youth workers often concentrate too closely at the individual level and forget about the importance of intergenerational relations in the lives of young people.
- ▶ There should be recognition of the role of youth work in offering secure adult roles and protection to young refugees, whose family members are scattered around the world or with whom contact has been cut.

### **3. The role of leisure time in the lives of young asylum seekers**

The young people reported that waiting for the residence permit was the hardest thing to cope with in their everyday lives – it disturbed their concentration, caused anxiety and made it difficult for them to fall asleep at night. According to the interviewees, not only was the waiting itself hard but waiting for any information about the process made it even more unbearable. Some immigration researchers have noted that “waitinghood/waithood” (for example, Honwana 2014) as an analytical tool should be used in order to produce new and critical insights into how young asylum seekers' everyday lives are affected and managed. Attention should also be paid to how Western states receive young people who are fleeing poverty and conflict, and how immigration laws and policies are sensitive to age, gender and intergenerational relations (Sirriyeh 2013). Waitinghood might also have important consequences for migrants' physical and mental health and well-being, as well as for their inclusion in society as a whole (Kuusisto-Arponen 2016). In addition, waitinghood adds to the usual focus on time, the dimension of uncertainty and fragility in the face of an unknown future (Onodera 2016).

The young, unaccompanied minors said that the best way to resist the consequences of waiting was active participation in school and leisure activities. Going to school gave a rhythm and meaning to everyday life and the opportunity of making contact with Finnish youth. The reception centre where we conducted our second study focused intensively on finding suitable hobbies for all the young people. The Ministry of Education also gave financial support to NGOs in late 2015, especially for leisure activities for refugee children and youth. When we interviewed some of the representatives of these organisations, they told us that they had been surprised how much co-ordination the leisure activities for young refugees required. According to the informants, special attention had to be given, for example, to guiding young people towards leisure activities and ways of developing trustful relationships with other young people in this environment. On many occasions, obstacles to fruitful participation were invisible to those adult professionals belonging to the white majority. Many of the young people whom we interviewed stated, for example, how hard it was to find Finnish friends in school and during their leisure time.

## Recommendations for youth work practices

- ▶ Meaningful leisure, school and friendship networks frame the everyday lives of young refugees. However, these contacts and practices do not develop by themselves; young people need special support and understanding.
- ▶ Tools that promote friendship networks with the majority of young people should be used at the beginning of the waiting process in the reception centre and elsewhere in the community.
- ▶ The right to basic education should be implemented for all refugee youth irrespective of age (in Finland, compulsory education ends at age 17).

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## Chapter 10

# Refugee and asylum-seeking young people in the UK: human agency as a central principle of youth work

*Davina Gateley and Refugee Youth*

### Introduction

**D**espite the increase of refugees in Europe, the United Kingdom (UK) remains relatively untouched by the events of 2015. These events were termed as Europe's "migrant and refugee crisis", whereby the largest movement of people since the end of the Second World War occurred, with the majority from Syria and Afghanistan. By way of a response, the UK has ramped up its refugee resettlement programme with the introduction of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), with the aim of resettling 20 000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees by 2020 (Refugee Council 2016). The UNHCR predicts that for 2018 alone, there are more than 475 200 Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey who are in need of resettlement (UNHCR 2017). Therefore, 20 000 is very low vis-à-vis the actual need. As for asylum seekers, a mere 3% of all asylum claims in Europe are hosted in the UK. A large amount of these asylum applications are refused refugee status after going through the UK asylum determination process (Refugee Council 2016).

Despite these relatively low numbers, UK public perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees are overwhelmingly negative with numbers believed to be much higher than the reality (Stewart and Mulvey 2014). This has been in large part due to the political rhetoric of previous UK governments and right-leaning media, with public opinion by and large scapegoating refugees for many of society's ills (Bloch 2007). UK legislation relating to asylum has, corresponding to public opinion, become increasingly restrictive, focusing on the control of individuals. For asylum seekers there are restrictions on work and access to services, and the constant, looming threat of detention and removal (Hek, Hughes and Ozman 2012). Austerity measures have also severely impacted support services available to recognised refugees. Therefore, refugees exist in an increasingly hostile environment, with policies that maintain or indeed increase their marginalisation (Mulvey 2009), and asylum seekers are experiencing a distinct lack of control in many areas of their lives (Bolloten 2003).

This chapter presents the findings of a small, qualitative study focusing on the support provided by voluntary sector interventions working with refugee and asylum-seeking young people (aged 18-29) in London, UK. The research looks to the human agency of the young people, aiming to explore their experiences of autonomy, and their degree of choice and control over central life decisions. The human agency of refugees is often overlooked, both in research and policy. This is, however, a crucial aspect that demands more attention. Even from the beginning of the exile experience, spontaneous flight implies a high degree of human agency (Korac 2003). Moreover, research has shown that the agency of migrants and refugees cannot only impact upon the micro, daily level, but also on a macro level where “migrant agency can have causal and constitutive effects on state relations and power” (Mainwaring 2016: 289).

## Refugees in the UK

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2015 the number of displaced persons reached unprecedented levels, an upheaval of 65.3 million people, young and old. Of these, 21.3 million are recognised refugees with over half under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2015). Globally, only 6% of refugees are hosted in Europe (UNHCR 2015). Only a tiny proportion of those migrating to the UK are seeking asylum. In 2016, for example, immigration (including all foreign nationals) to the UK was estimated to be 596 000, yet only 7% of those were intent on claiming asylum. In 2016, the UK hosted only 169 100 refugees and asylum seekers – 2 refugees per 1 000 UK inhabitants (Refugee Council 2017b).

The UK has adopted the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There are also numerous provisions in the UK in order to offer protection to individuals who are seeking asylum, and generally the process begins at the border. The exceptions are where refugee status has already been determined by UNHCR. The UK operates several programmes like this, such as the Gateway Protection Programme, a resettlement programme operated in collaboration with UNHCR, with a quota of 750 refugees per year. The second, the Mandate Resettlement Scheme, resettles individuals who have been recognised as refugees by UNHCR and have family members willing to accommodate them, though only very few are accepted. In 2014, an emergency programme was announced by the UK Home Secretary in order to give emergency protection to especially vulnerable Syrians, the VPRS. A final scheme was introduced in 2016, in order to identify and bring at-risk children from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

For those who claim asylum at the UK border, the system is strictly controlled and very complex; it is extremely difficult to have a successful outcome to an asylum claim. In 2016, only 28% of initial decisions made were granted protection (Refugee Council 2017a). It should also be noted that new restrictions are currently being put forward by the Conservative government. Once refugee status has been granted in the UK, employment, education, social welfare, health and other rights are granted. Those who are refused asylum, and have no appeals outstanding, are deemed to have no basis to stay in the UK and have to make arrangements to leave. Some may end up in detention or deported. However, many cannot leave for a variety of reasons, such as statelessness, lack of travel documentation, or fear of their safety upon return to their

country of origin. They are not entitled to any form of support in the UK and struggle to survive, relying in the main on charitable handouts. Homelessness is common and many live in limbo, with deleterious effects on their physical and mental health (Blanchard and Joy 2017; Crawley, Hemmings and Price 2011).

## **Refugee and asylum-seeking young people in the UK**

In 2016, the number of asylum applications made by unaccompanied children in the UK was 10% of all asylum claims, with the majority aged 16-17 (65%) (Refugee Council 2017b). Because of the dearth of research on refugee and asylum-seeking young people in the UK, it is challenging to know exact numbers of a specific age (Arnot, Pinson and Candappa 2009; Candappa 2007). However, the majority of asylum seekers coming to the UK are young, with the estimated average arrival age in years of those arriving as adults, both male and female, being 30 and 31 respectively (Cooper et al. 2014). In 2016, 3 175 separated or unaccompanied children claimed asylum in the UK, with the majority coming from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Albania, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Vietnam with 86% male (Refugee Council 2016). The highest numbers of asylum seekers, 36%, reside in the Greater London area (Rutter and Alexandrova 2012). There is speculation that there are high numbers of young people in the UK, and particularly in London, who are invisible, undocumented or irregular. They remain as such due to the belief that their asylum claim will be rejected or that they may be deported (REAP 2016). There are many different categorisations of refugees and labels applied in the UK. For example, in the case of "asylum seekers", this would include unaccompanied children, dependent children, age-disputed cases, under appeal, or refused asylum seeker. For those that are recognised refugees, their status is defined as permanent or temporary.

## **Challenges faced by refugee and asylum-seeking young people**

Refugee and asylum-seeking young people in UK are diverse; they come from many different socio-economic backgrounds, have varying religious beliefs, some with little or no education while others come with university-level qualifications and mixed English language ability. The top asylum applicant-producing countries in the UK of children are Afghanistan, Albania, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Vietnam, Syria and Ethiopia (Refugee Council 2017b). They have arrived to the UK via many different means, with or without family, are different in age and length of time spent in the UK (Candappa 2007; Dimitriadou 2006; Walker 2011). However, what seems to be common is that asylum-seeking and refugee young people "are a growing minority of vulnerable young people in the UK" (Chapman 2002: 3). Refugee and asylum-seeking young people face a plethora of problems such as social and cultural adjustments that can be exacerbated by racism and xenophobia. They are also more likely to suffer from physical health problems, isolation or, in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) resulting from previous experiences living in war zones, violence or loss of family members (Rossiter and Rossiter 2009).

Age 18 represents many difficulties for asylum-seeking and refugee young people in the UK, with many of the conventional issues relating to youth transitions compounded by multidimensional challenges. Those that are unaccompanied and are aged 16-18 have access to the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, but often they

receive insufficient support in pathway planning (Wade 2011). When refugee young people reach age 18, their lives can change significantly as they are no longer classed as minors under UK Immigration Rules (Crawley 2012). The asylum process causes stress and uncertainties about the outcome of asylum claims (Burnett 2009), given that final decisions on asylum applications are made when young people approach 18, and there is no certainty that they may remain in the UK. If a claim is refused, it can result in detention and deportation. Detention has been found to have deleterious effects on well-being, including lack of access to mainstream education and health care, depression and attempted suicide (Hek, Hughes and Ozman 2012).

Even in cases where refugee status is given, uncertainties can remain due to the dispersal policy. Initially introduced in 1999, the policy of dispersal was intended to reduce high concentrations of immigration in London and the South East. Where a refugee young person wishes to continue receiving support with accommodation, dispersal is compulsory yet many destinations are ill-equipped to deal with the diverse issues of refugees. Many young people are also in temporary accommodation, with repeated relocations occurring; it can mean that friendships suffer, thus emotional support and isolation can increase. Feelings of loneliness and isolation are commonly found in research pertaining to refugee young people (Doyle and McCorriston 2008; Norton and Cohen 2000; Refugee Youth 2010; Rutter and Alexandrova 2012).

Refugees have also been identified as a key group of being at high risk of social exclusion, and they commonly experience higher rates of material poverty, poor housing, discrimination, poor nutritional intake, as well as problematic access to social care and health services (Beirens et al. 2007). Indeed, refugees face poverty and disadvantage worse than other marginalised groups in the UK (Mulvey 2009) and these young people face difficulties “meeting their basic needs such as food, housing and healthcare...these need to be met before the educational needs are addressed” (Doyle and O’Toole 2013: 6).

## Research study

This chapter is based on a qualitative doctoral study that used a case study approach. There were two case study organisations: the UK’s Refugee Council and the London-based Refugee Youth NGO. The Refugee Council is an established UK-wide charity, operating numerous support services and advocacy projects with a large staff and volunteer base.

Refugee Youth is a very small, London-based charity, which was established by, and for, young people with a refugee background in 2002. It is difficult to estimate the entire amount of young people that the organisation has worked with, although in a given four-month period almost 200 young people are involved in activities, with 155 participating on a regular basis. Refugee Youth is consistent in attracting new members with the majority being male (60%). Two-thirds of the young people are refugees, with the remainder being second generation refugees. Refugee Youth has no organisational hierarchy, and the refugee young people who benefit from its activities also manage the day-to-day operations (including advocacy, refugee outreach, fundraising and budget) and are responsible for all decision making. It provides communal activities as well as a responsive and holistic support service.

It employs one development officer and a number of youth workers (up to three or four part-time) who support the refugees. Some of the youth workers are themselves from a refugee background.

## Research methods

Most of the discussion in this chapter revolves around the work of Refugee Youth. It was chosen for the research because it offered a conduit to access refugee young people for interviews. The researcher spent three years involved with Refugee Youth in a voluntary capacity and, therefore, a degree of participant observation was employed. However, the main data collection research methods were face-to-face interviews, a small-scale, open-ended questionnaire and a focus group. It was also necessary to conduct expert interviews with organisational staff such as advisers and volunteers, as well as experts in the field of refugee education and youth work (seven in total). Many of the findings are based on the expert interviews, given that the focus is on models of engaging with refugee young people. It should be acknowledged that the term “expert” is only used in a functional sense to describe the type of interview, reflecting terminology used in social sciences. This research recognises that the refugee young people are themselves the experts over their lives and experiences.

The total number of refugee and asylum-seeking young people reached through the research was 42 (24 male and 18 female), aged 18-29. This number includes interviewees from the Refugee Council as well as members of Refugee Youth. The young people were from Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia, Syria, Uganda and Eritrea. Some arrived in the UK with their family as dependants, others as unaccompanied children, as well as recently arrived adults (over 18) who had been in the UK for less than a year. There were varying levels of English language proficiency and some had university education while others had barely completed primary level.

Those research participants from the Refugee Council were all recognised refugees, having gone through the UK asylum determination process and granted protection. Receiving support from the Refugee Council is contingent on being granted refugee status. Those research participants reached through Refugee Youth were both asylum-seeking and refugee young people with participation in the organisation's activities not determined by immigration status. It should be noted, however, that many of Refugee Youth's members also received support from the Refugee Council's youth service (for those who have refugee status). Anonymity, informed consent and strict research ethics were ensured throughout the research.

## Theoretical lens

### Disciplinary spaces: refugee research and critical youth work

Refugee research has sought to delineate itself within the social sciences in a fundamental way. It is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary: multidisciplinary as a field though interdisciplinary in its approach (Voutira and Doná 2007). Research on issues relating to refugees denotes that a multidisciplinary approach is utilised and reflects the “multi-faceted nature of what one could call the refugee world, which is beyond

the expertise of any one discipline" (Colson 2007: 322). The rise of refugee research correlates to the "massive uprooting" of the 20th century, and includes disciplines as broad as law, anthropology, economics, sociology and international relations (Colson 2007). The theoretical approach used in this research encompasses a postdisciplinary space (Sayer 2011) within the critical social sciences.

Therefore, this chapter engages critical approaches to youth work that embrace a social change and a social justice orientation (Davies 2005). Refugee and asylum-seeking young people face immense structural constraints in the UK, and powerlessness is a marked feature of their experience in many spheres of their lives (Bolloten 2003). A critical perspective of youth work with consideration to power relations and wider political and social inequalities (Bamber and Murphy 1999) should be a central component of youth work with refugee and asylum-seeking young people. Certainly, there is an argument by Cooper (2012) to search for more "radical" ways of engaging with young people to enable their capacity to overcome the restrictions that limit their chances in life. This might be achieved through exploring possibilities that "facilitate collective resistance to oppressions and social change" (Cooper 2012: 53). Youth are a powerful source for change on a local and community level (Campbell and Erbstein 2012) with potential for change at a macro, political level (Bamber 1999). However, as asserted by Pisani (2016) there is a "citizenship assumption" in many of the debates in youth work where all young people are seen as citizens or potential citizens. This has created a social schism, "citizens and non-citizens, those with rights (and a right to rights), and those without" (Pisani 2016: 93) which are defined as "illegal bodies". Although this chapter looks towards human agency, and ways in which control can be enhanced, one of the central vulnerabilities faced by asylum seekers and refugees is their marginalisation and existence outside "patterns of states and citizenship" (Crawley 2000: 87).

## **Conceptual scheme: human agency**

The primary conceptual focus of this research is on relational autonomy, the chosen theoretical base to define human agency. Human agency has different meanings, though broadly is the ability to make strategic choices and control decisions affecting central life outcomes (Malhotra 2003). This interpretation of autonomy does not view agency as being undermined by the exile experience. It rests on the conviction that people are socially embedded, and an individual's identity is shaped by intersecting social determinants (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000). Self-determination is recognised as an essential value and critical in order to flourish. Autonomy is a social capacity with the skills and capabilities a person needs for self-determination acquired in and through social relationships. Specific attention is given to relational, social and political conditions essential for autonomy (Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway 2007).

## **Findings**

### **Moving beyond assumptions of vulnerability**

One of the first areas that was discussed by both the young people and those working with them, related to perceptions regarding refugeehood that are rooted in a discourse of vulnerability. Indeed, there is a dominant assumption regarding



refugees whereby they are associated with victimhood and vulnerability, especially among researchers, charities and within advocacy debates (Judge 2010). More often than not they are associated as passive victims of circumstance or indeed helpless recipients of welfare or relief aid (Essed, Frerks and Schrijvers 2004). Refugee and asylum-seeking young people are specifically seen as a group that is vulnerable and therefore problematic (Clark-Kazak 2009). Much of the existing research on refugee children and young people in education and social work disciplines is needs based, psychosocial and medical that focuses on vulnerability and trauma (Hart 2009; Newbigging and Thomas 2011; Warr 2010; Warwick, Neville and Smith 2006). Nonetheless, there has been a recent emergence of literature that puts the human agency of refugee young people at the centre (Chase 2010; O'Higgins 2012).

Researchers and those working with refugee and asylum-seeking young people have been called upon to change their simplistic assumptions and take a multifaceted approach in regard to trauma and vulnerability being the only reactions to war and conflict (Boyden and de Berry 2005). Such alternative approaches have the potential to change the lens of vulnerability, and instead advocate a view where refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people can have a degree of control over their own lives and environment, even where disempowered or marginalised (Hart and Tyrer 2006). "Persons ... whose social and political environments are highly restrictive, may nevertheless be able to express their autonomous agency in some aspects of their lives" (Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway 2007: 310).

During the interviewing of the young people, their viewpoint as experts of their own lives was observed. The interview was opened with a brief question regarding their experience since coming to the UK, thus allowing them the space to choose what areas were important for them to discuss. There was significant discussion regarding the term "survivor", applied often to define experiences of exile and refugeehood. The young people disowned the term "victim" and were critical of those working closest with them, such as teachers, youth workers and social workers, and called for professionals to not focus on the exile experience and its associations with victimhood. It certainly displays an attempt to move beyond vulnerability discourse and while recognising past experiences and their impact, not allow those experiences to predetermine their future.

How can you say that a person is a victim when they have been through so much? I am a survivor, I am not a victim ... You are the one who is making me a victim ... you put this label on me. (Interview participant, female youth refugee)

Refugees will survive, because they have very good survival skills. (Expert interview participant, refugee employment specialist)

Do you see people as vulnerable, helpless victims? Or on the other hand do you see people as resourceful, as capable, or as insightful, as creative ... it is not to say that the impact of war, political violence, persecution, exile doesn't have ... consequences ... [but] it has to be understood who they are as individuals. (Expert interview participant, refugee education specialist)

It is therefore of importance that those engaging in youth work with refugee and asylum-seeking young people are flexible in their understanding of vulnerability and

its meaning to different people in various situations and relationships (Clark 2007). Vulnerability can shift and is dynamic, and a refugee young person can be both vulnerable as well as have human agency, “vulnerability does not preclude agency and similarly where young people show agency, one cannot assume that they are not vulnerable” (O’Higgins 2012: 85). It is essential to rethink binary assumptions in terms of vulnerable/resilient and passive/active in order to establish a more complex and nuanced view, and thus “by recognizing young refugees’ abilities to identify their individual strengths, needs and vulnerability, it supports them to engage constructively with appropriate services and professionals and make better decisions about their needs” (O’Higgins 2012: 88).

## **Participatory action research: getting young people involved**

An important area of focus is to encourage the participation of the refugee and asylum-seeking young people from the outset. It has become popular to encourage participation within youth work (Hart 1992), with youth at risk (Furlong et al. 1997) and especially with refugee young people (Couch and Francis 2006). However, there have been times that such programmes have placed refugee young people at risk when programmes have been under-researched or ill-conceived. Participation should not necessarily be seen as the ideological absolute, although it is a tool that can be used to empower young people and improve their self-esteem (Couch 2007). Approaches should be targeted to the specific needs and contexts of refugee young people in order to have the best benefit for them.

From the inception of Refugee Youth, their work has involved using Participatory Action Research (PAR). Indeed, the founding of the organisation was the result of a PAR study and published book (Norton and Cohen 2000). PAR is iterative and cyclical, where data are generated, analysed, discussed and applied in action, and from this form further data to be considered, essentially a cyclical process. What is of utmost importance is that the research participants themselves are involved in the research process itself. The research is conducted with and by refugee and asylum-seeking young people, and that they are able to develop responses to their needs – themselves (Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway 2011). The PAR working model used by Refugee Youth is defined as “insider” research, conducted by and for those that it directly concerns, and is more directed towards producing change rather than research reports (Stringer 2013). Their work has a clear direction focusing on wider social change and advocating for refugees. Through a youth work lens it has a transformative element, with the intention of enabling personal as well as wider social change. It is designed to impact change on an individual, group as well as the community level to “resist, reduce, or eliminate differences stemming from structural and social disparities, rather than reproducing them” (Schensul and Berg 2004: 79).

The values and the methodology that we base our work around is principles of PAR which is about everyone coming together as learners and recognising and valuing the knowledge that comes from everybody’s different experiences ... if we all come together from very different and diverse backgrounds and bring our own knowledge to the table then we can be really powerful. (Expert interview participant, paid worker with a refugee background)

Specifically, the working model that has been adapted for day-to-day work involves self-empowerment, with the refugee young people themselves inspiring and supporting one another. Added, all projects, activities and youth groups are led by the young people to improve their own lives and those of their peers. They are supported by a small team of paid workers, who are mainly trained youth workers. One of the central ways of ensuring shared ownership is that decision making is open and shared. A main issue reflected upon is the power the paid workers may have, and how to ensure that decision making involves everyone.

If you want to create an organisation that everyone has an ownership of, then you need to make all the functions ... as open as possible ... I suppose as the paid workers we hold a lot of the power ... what we've tried to do is rather than have formal structures like (committees) ... is to have very open meetings ... whoever is in the room can get involved. (Expert interview participant, paid worker)

There are also various working tools that are used in order to engage with young people, especially those that may be arriving at the organisation for the first time. Usually, young people will learn about the organisation through referrals from other larger organisations or institutions but also by word of mouth. Arts-based activities and games are often utilised to involve newcomers, and therefore if there is an issue of language, people can still engage with each other. These sorts of encounters, such as arts-based projects, shared meals, sports and recreation give the space for young people to discuss and relieve tensions, and have also been found to be successful in other interventions with refugee young people (Ingamells and Westoby 2008).

We use loads of different forms of art, films, drama, art, planting, music, fashion, drumming, dancing, yeah, eating (laughing). (Interview participant, female youth refugee)

It's really important that everyone can get involved no matter what ... it's not like you have to be a young leader to get involved but it is very much about trying to create as many opportunities as possible for people to get involved in ways that suits them. (Expert interview participant, paid worker)

However, in such a sensitive working environment there are inevitably situations where an individual may not want to become involved. Some young people need more time than others to become involved in activities. Indeed, there were instances where a young person did not wish to engage at all. This is very much in line with the voluntary principle as laid out by Davies (2005) whereby a young person is allowed to choose to become involved through voluntary engagement. As Davies states, the "voluntary principle" ensures that, in their dealings with the institutions which provide youth work and with the practitioners who deliver it face-to-face, "young people possess and retain a degree of *power* which is *intrinsic to the practice*" (Davies 2005: 8, emphasis in original). One might surmise that this is a means through which a young person can regain control over an aspect of their lives, in the context of having experienced a distinct lack of control as a result of the asylum determination process in the UK – as well as the exile experience.

In cases such as these, the youth workers will attempt to engage with the individual on whatever level is suitable. However, the degree that a young person becomes

involved was left to the individuals themselves. For some, just knowing that support was there was enough in and of itself.

I think everyone gets involved at their own pace, some people have been around for six years and they are only just starting to... and then some people will come and take leadership straight away. (Expert interview participant, paid worker)

We are not perfect at it but if this is everybody's space and if ... all they want to do is sit in front of the computer then they should be allowed to. It is not like we would leave them forever ... Everyone is here for each other. And it is up to the person to decide. (Expert interview participant, paid worker with a refugee background)

## **Rebuilding lives of refugee young people**

Institutions can play a pivotal role in enhancing opportunities and increasing the control that refugee young people have over their lives. Charities have been seen to add value because of the resources they offer, how they are organised and procedures they employ which are value-driven (Flanagan and Hancock 2010). Research pertaining to refugees has suggested that interventions should be structured so that they address the psychological, emotional and social challenges that refugee young people face (Boyden and Hart 2007). Organisations providing support for refugee young people ought to aspire, not only to increasing opportunities for individuals, but also to providing a social context in which they can remake themselves (Agier 2008). The remaking of an individual is cited in relational autonomy research where a survivor of a traumatic event is simultaneously autonomous but socially dependent, "vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathetic others" (Brison 1997: 12). Relocations of a person can be challenging, as in the situation of a refugee arriving in a new country, given that one has to "rebuild" oneself in new surroundings, culture and language, coupled with a loss of control in one's environment and possibly one's own self. There may even be a new self, a different self from that which existed before exile (Brison 1997).

Feelings of loneliness and isolation can arise, and this occurred as a strong theme throughout the data analysis, as in other research (Norton and Cohen 2000). In the context of an asylum-seeking or refugee young person, this can be an even more acute issue. One young woman, who had been in the UK for less than a year, felt acutely alone and yearned for social interactions. Connections and relationships are very important for young people; especially peer support and a sense of looking out for one another.

Most of the time I feel really lonely. I'd really love to have lots of friends to go out with, to hang out with. I don't know. Maybe here I'll make some. (Interview participant, female youth refugee)

Baker's (1983) relationship web, further developed by Rutter (2001) and Bolloten and Spafford (1998), provides a philosophical approach where remaking might occur. Baker, himself a refugee, developed the relationship web as a result of his personal experiences and working with refugees in the UK. A person that is socially

“embedded” has linkages including education, work, family/friends, religion, home, culture as well as role and status, with the person placed at the centre of the web. An asylum seeker or refugee may well have lost all relationships and links with other people, organisations as well as support structures, and is left effectively stripped of their “relationship web”. Baker finds that refugees may only have linkages to family/friends, and possibly not even those. The web should be remade, but it is also the remaking of the self, of “the ‘internal’ and ‘subjective’ aspects such as loss of trust in the self and others, loss of self-esteem, self-respect and personal identity” (Baker 1983: 1). As such, a young refugee or asylum seeker might exist in a vacuum, which can have detrimental effects for many aspects of their lives. One participant who was passionate about getting an education had much of her relationship web stripped, meaning that she no longer had the support and encouragement of a close family structure.

I lost my parents ... Then, when they were no more that was the end of it, because we had nobody to push us on. We had nobody to help. (Interview participant, female youth refugee)

In youth work an important feature is developing personal relationships and “young people need and benefit from relationships ... These relationships can provide resources and benefits – social capital – that helps youth connect to and eventually make the transition into the adult world” (Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins 2005: 42). Bolloten and Spafford (1998) and Rutter (2001) find that individuals and organisations providing support to refugees might also assist in the reconstruction of the links in the web, especially those related to rebuilding personal relationships. Such relationships can offer the personal support and encouragement that a young person might need. This was exemplified by one of the paid staff of Refugee Youth.

One of the biggest things when people first come here is they lose the network and that is a fundamental thing that needs to be built again and have a support around it. So eating together, cooking together ... just having a conversation and build a relationship and a place of belonging. (Expert interview participant, paid worker)

## **The whole person**

The institutional ethos of organisations, that is the collective disposition, character and fundamental values (Williams 2010), has a very high level of impact on the type of experience or provision given to a refugee or asylum seeker. Therefore, the type of support and the way in which it is administered can have an influence. By acknowledging the fragility of humankind, while viewing actors in their social and historical contexts, and that autonomy is a characteristic of agents who are also emotional, desiring, creative, feeling as well as rational persons (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000; Nussbaum 2001) could transform personal experiences. Therefore, the aim would be to work in a multidimensional way, viewing individuals as a whole: their strengths, experiences, aspirations and expertise as well as the necessity of emotional “rebuilding”.

There is a range of needs, and experiences that young refugees have, therefore good practice logically would be that we ourselves work in a multidimensional way. (Expert interview participant, refugee education specialist)

The only thing that, in a sense, you really need support and help with ... is to work out who you want to be in life." (Interview participant, female youth refugee)

Everything we do is supposed to make a change, if it is on a personal, on a group level, an organisation level, service level, advocating for people. (Expert interview, paid worker)

Emotional support and encouragement from organisational staff has been found to be essential for many young refugees (Stevenson and Willcott 2007) and the environment found in value-driven, third-sector organisations aims to provide such surroundings. For an institutional environment that also employs staff that do not view refugees with hostility, nor pity, but with compassion and humanity might be the optimum (Arnot, Pinson and Candappa 2009; Nussbaum 2001). Those who have direct contact with the young people are key. During the research, one paid staff member believed that the informal way of working at Refugee Youth allowed her the space to deliver necessary support, while also creating a community feel. Her reference was to other services available to refugee young people in the London area.

I think the main difference is ... trying to shape yourself as a community or shape yourself as a service ... sometimes we are, more kind of "servicey" but I think the aspiration is to be a community so ... you see people as people. People ask for support and help, and it is one to one ... they know here there are individuals who care and this would be the first place they would come and ask, "Can you help me?" (Expert interview, paid worker)

The founding aim is for Refugee Youth to be of young people rather than a service for them. The aim was very much about trying to create a space for young people to come together and build community. It was important for young people involved in the organisation to take action and make change in their own lives, change that might also impact on the lives of other refugees and asylum seekers. An area that was often discussed was how certain services for refugee young people instead of empowering them actually had the opposite effect. That is, making already vulnerable individuals more so, becoming passive recipients rather than active participants.

There is a lot of service provision for young refugees ... a lot very valuable ... the side effect ... is that it can be quite dehumanising ... makes people marginalised because they become a passive recipient of a service ... we are trying to do the opposite of that and try and create a supported and resourced spaced where people can come together and be powerful and take their own action. (Expert interview, paid worker)

Often, the organisation would work in co-operation with other services; sometimes signposting services though more often actively assisting the young people to access the services in person. There is certainly an advantage in co-ordinating and delivering services, especially through networks of NGOs in the area (Wren 2007). However, what many young people needed was an advocate, someone to attend official meetings with them in regard to their immigration status or meetings at a Jobcentre or gaining advice from a careers service at college/university.

What we try to do is try to refer, or if someone is scared we will go with them to places and not necessarily do anything except sit in the waiting room with individuals. (Expert interview, paid worker with a refugee background)

Central in shaping the overall experiences of refugees can relate to the degree of institutional trust and belief in refugee service providers (Hynes 2009). Reciprocity and trust were also very apparent in this study as over time the young people would place a high level of trust in Refugee Youth. Indeed, securing the trust of the refugee young people was attempted from the outset. When a new young person walks through the door they will be welcomed as a young person first and foremost. This creates a different experience where they can exist as a youth, rather than labelled as a “refugee” youth.

We are not taking on people as cases, we just create a space for people to be, to not be refugees really, actually just to be people, and to be young people ... they are always being put in a box and categorised and scrutinised ... people’s identity isn’t defined by their immigration status. (Expert interview, paid worker with a refugee background)

## Conclusion

This chapter attempted to discuss the importance of placing the human agency of refugee young people at the centre of youth interventions. For refugee young people to become actors of their lives their preferences are crucial and youth work should balance the necessity to address constraints without undermining human agency. Youth work employing participatory models of working is more able to assist in the delicate process of supporting refugee and asylum-seeking young people, in the context of human agency, and also in other life dimensions (Ager, Strang and Abebe 2005; Brough et al. 2003). Nonetheless, an agency approach does not entail dismissing the very real problems and needs that refugee young people have (Doyle and O’Toole 2013).

Through the sort of institutional environment as that provided by Refugee Youth, young people may be able to become their own agents of change. Given the range of constraints that refugee young people face it is good practice for interventions to work in a holistic way. Therefore, viewing individuals as a whole, their experiences, aspirations and expertise, without focusing on vulnerabilities. For an individual to make truly autonomous decisions, their strengths should be focused upon rather than only their weaknesses (Hopkins and Hill 2010). Interventions should enable the agency of vulnerable groups, through engaging “their agency and participation, wherever possible and to the greatest extent possible” (Rogers, Mackenzie and Dodds 2012: 25).

## Recommendations for European youth work with refugee young people

The translation of a human agency-oriented approach into youth work practice has potential complexities. Nonetheless, consideration must first be given to the institutional environment. Refugee-specific initiatives operated by value-driven, third-sector organisations are better suited to deal with the multiplicity and diverseness of the exile experience. This kind of support requires that sustainable funding be provided for youth interventions, and in turn, the funding and accompanying deliverables should not restrict the autonomy of the organisations themselves.

Second, a transformative youth work agenda that aims to impact on the lives of refugee and asylum-seeking young people as well on the community and political levels is necessary. Through aiming to impact the “wider community”, existing negative stereotypes can be mitigated regarding refugees and asylum seekers. The combination of PAR with critical youth work provides a platform for asylum-seeking and refugee young people to regain a degree of control over their lives at the same time as addressing wider issues of politics and power. Through considering power relations within an organisation and by creating shared ownership is a first step towards balancing issues of power.

Third, this can only be achieved using a multidimensional approach, which entails building trust through voluntary engagement and a social network for emotional rebuilding. Peer support is a necessary prerequisite in this respect. Of the utmost importance is that an environment is provided where a young person can retain some power over their life. They should first and foremost be seen as a young person, and not defined by their immigration status. This is most succinctly stated by the experts on this topic, Refugee Youth:

If you can also experience being in an environment where you do have some power, and people do respect you and see you as a person and listen to what you say, then hopefully that can impact on how you feel about yourself and how you see yourself in the world. But that is a big hope ... (interview participant, female youth refugee)

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## Chapter 11

# Youth work in the borderlands: reflections from Malta

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*Maria Pisani*

### Introduction

**A**s Malta is located at the centre of the Mediterranean, migration is a familiar part of the Maltese narrative. The languages, the food, the architecture, customs and traditions all bear witness to the 7 000 years of colonisation and the myriad of people who have made the Maltese islands their home. Despite migration movements to and from Malta, until a few years ago, the Maltese population was perceived as relatively homogenous. Accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004 brought new possibilities for migration, new opportunities for the Maltese to look beyond the blue borders, and also for others from the EU and beyond to make Malta their home. For the majority, migration has afforded the possibility to seek adventure, to explore different lifestyles, and to pursue employment prospects. For others, migration has served as an escape route. Since 2002, Malta has witnessed the arrival of asylum seekers, departing from the coast of North Africa. The vast majority are young people. They have risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea in a desperate effort to flee violence, war, persecution, insecurity and human rights violations. They have made the journey in the hope of finding safety, security, and the promise of economic opportunities and a dignified future.

For more than a decade, the dominant policy framing the “refugee crisis” has been constructed as a security threat to the EU and individual member states. This perceived “threat” has been used to justify the militarisation of the Mediterranean region, and deterrent border policies enacted to keep the “other” out (Vaughan-Williams 2015). Walls and fences, both metaphorical and physical, have re-emerged at Europe’s borders, an ongoing effort to “secure” the borders against unwanted migration.

For many years, successive Maltese governments implemented policies aimed at deterring asylum seekers from landing in Malta (Pisani 2016). This included a harsh detention policy followed by the housing of thousands of refugees in “open centres” – essentially makeshift camps – in remote parts of the island. Dehumanising spaces that mark the extension of the border coincide with a catalogue of racialised representations, delineating who belongs, and who does not belong (Grech 2015). Disassociating itself from a colonised history, a new narrative is embraced in Malta: Maltese (read Christian) and European (read white). The border provides an ideological symbol to construct a new identity, a new “Malteseness”. As national amnesia sets in, the oriental gaze rotates onto the incoming threatening “other”, paradoxically extending the violent bordering practices, dividing, separating and influencing the lives of both the “illegalised” refugee and the Maltese citizen.

Ongoing attempts to securitise Malta's borders and control the migrant "other" are violent, divisive and dehumanising. This is not a phenomenon particular to Malta alone. Europe is fortifying its fortress when it comes to the politics of asylum, and too many member states are competing in a race to the bottom on refugee protection. At the border, the young body is illegal first, and the enforcement of border patrols and the voting booth are prioritised over the state's human rights obligations. The situation is nothing short of toxic, placing young people at a heightened exposure to trafficking, labour and other types of exploitation, and homelessness, restricted access to health care, education and basic public services, and immigration enforcement practices, including raids, detention and identity checks (see also Global Migration Group, UNICEF and OHCHR 2013). The "right to rights" cannot be assumed, and this has implications for youth work practice in an evolving, disparate, globalised world. As noted in the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, youth work is an "existential necessity" in addressing "concerns about social inclusion, cohesion and equal opportunities, and commitment to values of democracy and human rights" (European Youth Work Convention 2015: 10).

But this is only part of the picture. This narrative does not account for the agency young refugees exercise in navigating, negotiating and challenging the "border" apparatus (Mainwaring 2016). Nor does it acknowledge the border as a site of contested politics, embodying a creative, exciting and humanising space that may provide the possibilities for transformative practice.

In this chapter, I will be reflecting on the practice of Integra Foundation, an NGO working with young refugees in Malta. Specifically, I will be critically reflecting on how the services have developed over more than a decade in response to the evolving and multifaceted needs of young refugees. The chapter looks at youth work in the borderlands, a liminal space that seeks to struggle with, confront, and transcend the arbitrary borders imposed on young people's lives, including young refugees. It provides a space for young refugees to no longer feel "lonely" or "alone", to make new friends, and to co-create a sense of belonging that embraces fluidity and multiple subjectivities. The chapter also considers different approaches to informal and non-formal learning – initiatives and programmes developed to respond to the immediate, practical needs of young refugees, and also those that seek to transform and to challenge inequalities and injustice. Finally, the chapter explores how youth work may contribute to developing social capital, transcending institutional borders to provide young refugees with opportunities to develop their own contacts, a critical resource in their own political and social development, and also in carving out spaces to speak out on their own terms.

The theoretical approach of this chapter is informed by my experience and observations as a youth worker and activist. I engage elements of critical border studies (Vaughan-Williams 2015), borderlands theory (Anzaldúa 1999), critical race theory (Crenshaw 1989), post/neo-colonial theory (Said 1978) and critical pedagogy (Freire 2001; hooks 2003) as resources that provide for critical thinking and reflection, and as a framework for advancing transformative youth work practice. The chapter seeks to advance a "grass-roots" approach to youth work that is understood as young person-centred, focused on relationships, forging a democratic space conducive to dialogue and mutual learning, grounded in voluntary engagement, localised (see



also de St Croix 2016; Batsleer and Davies 2010), but also attentive to transnational discourses, geopolitics, the workings of power, and how this influences and sometimes limits the lives of young refugees, broader society, and indeed, a youth work practice that is committed to social justice.

## Malta: the carceral archipelago

The year 2002 is generally acknowledged as the one when asylum seekers started arriving on the shores of Malta. The “klandestini” (clandestines) as they were colloquially known at the time, embodied the “other”, the unwanted “invaders”, uniting elements of Maltese society, political parties and much of the mainstream media. The arrival of (in the majority) young African men stimulated a new discourse on national identity that witnessed the emergence of nationalist discourse, far-right political parties, racism and xenophobia. In his theoretical elaborations on discourse, Foucault (1977) demonstrates how a social and political context affects language, and how language, in turn, shapes and constructs realities. The government of the time (supported by the main opposition) responded with hard-line political discourse that revolved around national security concerns and policies designed and implemented as “common sense” solutions to this perceived “invasion”. The human rights of refugees were generally subordinated to the “national good” (see for example the report published by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights 2006).

The historical fortresses surrounding the Maltese islands were reinforced – metaphorically and physically. The new arrivals were largely met with structural violence aimed at stripping the “illegalised” body of agency and a life of dignity. At a political level, the border serves as a state instrument of control, and also as the ideological marker for the construction of national and political identity – delineating who belongs, and who does not; who has rights, and the right to rights (Pisani 2016). Such politics of control geared towards exclusion and precariousness, however, are not complete, but rather are contested, negotiated, transgressed and resisted in diverse ways (see also Naples 2009; Squire 2011). For example, Pisani and Vaughan-Williams (2018) contest the binary distinction between “border control” and “migrant agency”, demonstrating how individuals encounter and negotiate – sometimes successfully, sometimes not so – bordering practices throughout the migratory journey, beyond and within the EU borders, including Malta.

## Crossing borders: the borderlands ...

Integra Foundation was established towards the end of 2004 in direct response to the multifaceted challenges asylum seekers were facing in Malta. Over the years, the NGO has developed and evolved, and today, the work of the organisation rests on three pillars, namely, advocacy, research and an active presence in the community. The first is advocacy. Working in partnership with other human rights organisations, our work focuses on protecting human rights and calling for corrective action. Together we monitor national and EU policies, and when necessary, pressure policy makers to act according to their international human rights obligations. The work also depends on grass-roots engagement and, when possible, the backing of public support and that of the media. Much of our advocacy also depends on a strong evidence base. The

second pillar is research. Integra has indeed conducted substantial research using and emphasising the need to adopt participatory methodologies. Over the years, such work has helped, not only in establishing Integra as a key stakeholder in the field of asylum, refugees and inclusion, but also in developing relationships with government, NGOs and INGOs, agencies and services. The third pillar is Konnect Kulturi, involving a team of volunteers providing a number of services for asylum seekers and refugees living in the community; these include, English and Maltese lessons, the Integra higher education programme and Dinja Waħda (One World), a drop-in centre.

In the early days, we opted to work on a voluntary basis. We took this decision in order to strengthen our advocacy role, fearing that any dependency on funds might compromise our values or practice. Of course, such a decision comes with consequences, and indeed services have remained small, limited by lack of financial resources. However, it also has its strengths, since Integra maintains an active presence thanks to a team of volunteers who are committed to the core values and aims of the NGO and those we work with. Stripped of bureaucratic restraints, the services remain open and flexible, able to respond to emerging needs with relative ease. The following section describes how Konnect Kulturi has developed over the years. The text focuses on three interlinked elements that characterise the youth work practice, namely:

1. Relationships: the importance of a safe space (but not a comfort zone), voluntary engagement, building relationships and trust.
2. New opportunities: developing trust, bonding and bridging social capital.
3. Learning: responding to diverse learning needs towards personal and socio-political transformation.

## **Dinja Waħda: building relationships**

Many years ago, I recall meeting a young woman, Mariam, for a coffee. Mariam, a refugee, had been in Malta for almost a year. She told me I was the first Maltese person to meet with her outside the borders of the centre. She felt lonely, and she felt alone. Ironically perhaps, Mariam was not “alone” in expressing such sentiments – it is a feeling, and a condition, that we have met all too many times. Within the refugee camp settings, young refugees are often living in overcrowded contexts, they forge many relationships, and most certainly, they are not “alone”. For Mariam, her loneliness was experienced as a lack of friendships, the possibility to relax, have fun, and just “be”, beyond the day-to-day functional interactions in the camp. Friendships are more personal, they serve no “function”, but rather, any purpose that arises from the “care and delight in each other” (Fielding 2007: 185). The sense of feeling “alone” is often mentioned in relation to a sense of personhood, of not being “seen” as a unique individual, and with it, the need for the kind of support that is associated with being treated with dignity (JRS, aditus foundation and Integra 2018). It was clear to us that something needed to be done, for Mariam, and many like her.

Nestled in the backstreets of the capital city of Valletta, the drop-in centre was set up to provide a safe space for young asylum seekers and refugees to meet, forge new relationships, and establish a sense of belonging. Given the broader political and societal climate, the need for such a space was critical. The centre is physically small; the front room has comfortable chairs for relaxing and a library. The back room

has a table and chairs and a whiteboard for meetings and educational activities. Importantly, the space also provides access to free Wi-Fi.

The team of volunteers is generally made up of young people; some are Maltese, others are migrants from the EU and beyond, albeit in a very different situation to refugees. What goes on in the centre varies from week to week – depending on the season (where weather may dictate), the scholastic year (where homework and studies may dictate), and also on who happens to be there (in which case those present organise the activities, which can be anything from watching a film together, to singing karaoke, or just hanging out and chatting). The informality allows for this flexibility; organised activities are planned together, and everyone is free to engage, or not.

The space is transitory; different people come and go, with some attending consistently for weeks, months or even years. Others drop by occasionally, often when something specific has come up. In many ways, Dinja Waħda has emerged as a hybrid, yet liminal space wherein “the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa 1999: 25). Whether physical, social, cultural or symbolic, borders are established “to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (Anzaldúa 1999: 25). Borders represent separation and divide, establishing a hierarchy, and enforcing binary identities; at the same time, they are ambiguous, fluid and in flux. The space between borders, where difference meets, this is the borderlands, “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 1999: 25). Life in this liminal space can be tough, a place of contradictions, violence, anger and pain. And it cannot be entirely “safe”; stepping out of one’s comfort zone requires radical openness. This is life at the edges, and perhaps also on the edge (see also hooks 1989). But for those who transgress the border, this liminal space also offers the possibility for reprieve, consciousness, and the possibility to embrace and struggle with our multiple identities, the different facets of the self, the positions we occupy, and the communities we belong to – and possibilities for fusion. Be they volunteers, interns or refugees, the people frequenting the drop-in occupy a liminal space between borders: as young people, often (even if for different reasons) transiting between school and employment, and positioned between multiple spaces of belonging: nation, “race”/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, legal status. Within these borderlands, albeit still bounded by time and space, through dialogue and building relationships and a sense of community, young people create opportunities to construct a sense of self, and create their own possibilities, confronting and transgressing borders. The youth leaders do not presume to educate, since such a top-down, prescriptive approach flies in the face of democratic learning. While the space has purposely been created in such a way that provides for informal learning (Stanton 2015), no goals have been set, beyond creating the possibility to get to know the “other”, to make friends, develop relationships and co-create a sense of belonging. That said, no longer subject to control and regulation, the space embraces an anti-oppressive, critical educational approach, providing the opportunity to question multiple scripts, inscribed by patriarchal, (post)colonial, statist, ageist, heterosexist and capitalist histories, if and when they emerge, and to explore and embrace new opportunities, to take on new and multiple subjectivities and untamed possibilities.

And so, for a short time at least, Dinja Waħda provides the opportunity to laugh together, to play, to discuss, to disagree, to struggle and to create – to be seen. Through dialogue, they learn about different and often unimagined realities; in creating their

own pedagogical conditions, they are able to disrupt and contest divisive geopolitical borders and the binaries established in policy and populist discourse. In doing so, young people defy the dominant discourses of who can and who cannot belong, of who is human, and indeed what it means to be human. Within the borderlands, a messy space that transgresses imposed borders, young people are resisting false binaries, both physical and metaphorical. For a moment they are liberated, they reclaim their voices, they cling to new opportunities for political and creative expression, and they expose each other to new ways of knowing, of understanding, of collective consciousness and resistance. Escape is temporary – the borders still exist, physically and metaphorically – but the borderland provides the possibility to learn, and the potential to use this knowledge to resist and to transform the borders.

### **New opportunities: developing trust, bonding and bridging social capital**

The borders that demarcate Dinja Waħda must not be fixed; they too must be fluid. By shifting the theoretical lens, we can also explore how the relationships – or bonds – forged in the drop-in, not only provide an important resource in coping with everyday life, but also serve as a valuable source of social capital, bridging and making new friends and, importantly, new networks. Poverty, racism and policies that have been conducive to (or even geared towards) marginalisation and exclusion have lent themselves to ghettoisation, metaphorically and physically. Bonding capital (Putnam 2000) may provide important support and a sense of identity, be it within the confines of the open centre, within an ethnic grouping, or even in Dinja Waħda. It does not, however, provide new sources of information, new forms of knowledge or relationships beyond the group. Contrarily, it risks reproducing the social structures, and class relations massaged by racism and Islamophobia (Bourdieu 1986).

We provide an ongoing referral service, reaching out to different agencies and service providers to address individual cases (these are varied, including social work intervention, medical cases, employment concerns and legal advice among others). More than this, over the years we have made efforts to step outside the borders of the drop-in. In the beginning, events tended to be more structured, such as bowling activities with other Maltese youth organisations. In truth, they achieved very little, providing little time to really develop friendships, and if anything, reinforcing a sense of the “other”, satisfying a sense of curiosity, but from a safe distance. With time, these trips became much more informal and impromptu: a trip to the beach, grabbing a pizza, visiting a local gallery, or simply enjoying a coffee in the sun – spaces where the young refugees were less likely to visit alone. While in the beginning they were accompanied by the volunteers, who were familiar with, and confident in, the context over time, the refugee youth started to frequent these same places alone and outside of the drop-in hours. Many of the young refugees posted photos of such outings on social media, encouraging others to attend, and also generating online conversations on what happened, and where to go next. One of our volunteers is a running enthusiast, and over the years has involved a number of young people in the Malta half marathon and other such events – developing not only new friendships, but also cultural capital within the sporting subculture. Using our own networks we reach out to football clubs, artists, theatre clubs, and they in turn reach out to us in order

to reach out to young refugees. In a sense, Integra serves as the conduit, providing the bridges and links to new relationships, accessing sociocultural needs, practical/functional needs and also learning and transformative needs (see below). This may be through referral, providing opportunities for young refugees to develop their own social capital, an important resource in their own political and social development, and also in creating spaces and platforms where (when possible) young refugees speak on their own terms.

## Responding to learning needs

Over the years, Integra has developed a number of learning opportunities in response to the young people's expressed needs. In Dinja Waħda, conversations are generally held in English, sometimes in Maltese (semitic in origin, the Maltese language sounds like an Arabic language mixed with English and Italian, making it easier for Arabic speakers to learn Maltese), and sometimes both. Many of the young people who attend the drop-in are eager to learn English, and we have responded in a number of ways, often blurring the lines between non-formal and informal learning. These terms are not being used arbitrarily. The glossary of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy refers to non-formal learning as:

a purposive, but voluntary, learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. (Council of Europe and European Commission Youth Partnership 2018)

**Figure 11.1 – Young people relaxing and having fun**



(Dinja Waħda, Integra drop-in)

In the same evening, it is quite normal to have a small group learning basic syntax, while others will be playing a game that encourages use of the English language, or watch a film with English subtitles. Homework support for those attending formal education is also provided, including, for example, trial “class presentations” in preparation for actual school assessments. Many refugees also request assistance in formulating a CV in order to enhance their employment possibilities. For a number of years Konnect Kulturi has also provided more structured language classes (the Ministry for Education has provided us with the space to do so). In the early days, the majority of refugees wanted to learn English, their intention being to leave Malta and settle elsewhere. Later, we introduced Maltese lessons, as more refugees wanted to remain in Malta. Such learning opportunities would appear to be in line with the “specific contribution of youth work and non-formal and informal learning to address challenges young people are facing, in particular the transition from education to employment” (European Commission 2015: 12). We also responded to requests by the participants to provide certificates, which have been instrumental in finding work. Providing young refugees with the skills to access employment or with the practical information to integrate into Maltese society has value, and serves a functional or instrumental purpose, useful – or necessary – in navigating a new life in a new country. Likewise, learning either English or Maltese will most certainly facilitate communication, perhaps rule out the need for an interpreter, and provide new opportunities to develop relationships in employment and beyond.

In 2016 we established the Integra higher education programme in response to concerns put to us by Spark 15, a refugee youth-led organisation (see below). The members of the youth group faced multiple barriers (structural, economic and language) in accessing university. Integra responded by establishing a team of English teachers specifically focused on preparing potential students for the English admission exams. In parallel, we established communication channels with the University of Malta, the Ministry of Education and the Students Council. This has evolved into an ongoing collaboration between all partners, including Spark 15 and Integra. The process is slow, manoeuvring within a bureaucratic system that is resistant to change, but there is commitment from all sides to remove the intersecting structural barriers. In 2017, five young refugees registered for a course at university, a fruit of this collaboration and dialogue.

“Empowerment” will always be curtailed if the structural barriers, including (but not limited to) racism, Islamophobia, nationalism and a “statist” mindset that excludes the rights of the non-citizen or “illegal body” (see Pisani 2016) are not addressed and transformed. The methods and tools youth workers adopt are underpinned by the theoretical and ideological lens they use to understand the way society is structured and ordered. Youth workers’ *raison d’être* are varied, from creating a space for recreation and fun, to a focus on skills for employment, to one-on-one support (see also Cooper and White 1994). While each of these examples respond to a need, or multiple needs, very little is achieved in disrupting the status quo – the onus is on giving young people the skills and knowledge to navigate and fit into a system. Much of the work carried out by Integra would fall within such paradigms. However, in order for real transformation to take place, youth work must challenge the hegemonic structures that maintain and reproduce inequality and divide within and across our

communities, and broader society. This requires a focus on consciousness raising, with a focus on rights and social justice.

As such, any educational initiative framed as “empowering”, but which in practice simply serves to maintain the status quo, will be limited, indeed, perhaps even doomed to fail. All too often, the burden of such failure is placed on the young refugee. In a sense then, we provide these educational opportunities with our eyes wide open. Learning English or Maltese, or attending a university course, does not necessarily translate into the right to speak, nor indeed, provide any assurances that such voices will be heard. Time is critical here. Over the years, we have come to understand that on arrival, “functioning” is the priority for refugees, and youth work can be instrumental in this regard. The need to secure basic sustenance and shelter are crucial to survival. With time, and indeed a certain sense of security, submission in the face of injustice can no longer remain a sustainable option. Time has taught us that if and when young refugees make the association between addressing practical or functional learning needs and critical, political and transformative learning needs, they will turn to those they can trust. At Integra, our advocacy work is an ongoing dialogue geared towards structural change; over the years more and more refugees have recognised the need to speak on their own behalf and have asked us to support them in addressing their own learning needs in this regard, so that they may reposition themselves as actors in the Maltese context, and critically engage divisive and unequal power relationships.

## **Spark 15 – A refugee youth-led organisation**

In 2015 the Global Refugee Youth Consultations were launched at the UNHCR-NGO consultations in Geneva. Integra and another Maltese NGO, Organisation for Friendship in Diversity (OFD) were contacted by UNHCR Malta and asked to support in the development and piloting of a toolkit to be used for the consultations. The pilot activity brought together for the first time 15 young refugees living in Malta, and a number of them went on to participate in activities in Geneva and beyond. Spark 15, a refugee youth-led organisation, was set up as a result of this initiative. Once a week, the youth group meets at the Integra drop-in. We have tried to respond to their learning needs by providing sessions explaining policy and refugee and human rights laws (or pulling in other professionals to provide such education). We have put them in contact with the National Youth Agency, other youth work providers and also artists and cultural entities. We include them in meetings related to advocacy (nowadays we rarely “invite” or “include” them, they are included in their own right, and sometimes they include us). Beyond providing the space, Integra has tried to respond to the groups’ needs as they have evolved. Our approach embraces the difficult questions and, necessarily, critically explores geopolitics, neoliberalism, the nation state, borders, liberal democracy, citizenship and human rights. We engage the different voices and social divisions, represented in symbols, texts and images, and how they are experienced in real life. We discover the complexities of each individual, how age intersects with, *inter alia*, “race”, gender, sexual orientation, disability and, importantly, legal status, and how such social divisions shape the lives of young people, their opportunities, hopes, choices, and indeed, their ability to speak unto power (see Pisani 2017).



**Figure 11.2 – Members of Spark 15 talking at the Integra drop-in**



We have tapped into our own contacts as an important resource, putting the group in contact with journalists and media stations, among others. Over the past two years, Spark 15 has become an important voice within the Maltese context. It is speaking out on its own terms, engaging, challenging and influencing popular discourse and politics.

We also recognise the limitations of youth work practice and the possibilities for transformative action in advocating for a democratic process, paradoxically, within a “national” democratic space from which refugees, and in particular those not granted any form of protection, are excluded. It is for this reason that advocacy remains a critical component of our practice. The challenge remains in representing the young refugee and giving true voice, rather than recolonising their voices and perpetuating subjugation. This can only be achieved through listening, building trust, and creating the conditions to engage in critical authentic dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

Borders can be deadly and divisive; the cost of state security is borne by the politically insecure. In the case of young refugees, particularly those with no legal status, the transition from minor to voting adult cannot be assumed, and the rights associated with citizenship cannot be taken for granted. Youth work with young refugees requires a particular knowledge base grounded in an understanding of how state machinery excludes the racialised, illegalised young body, as well as a commitment to human rights, and a readiness to hold the state and other duty bearers to account. In this regard, I believe youth work has a critical and unique role.

This chapter describes how youth work practice with young refugees in Malta within an NGO has developed over the years. Rather than adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach, it explores how an NGO has engaged youth work principles and



practices grounded in social justice, in an attempt to meet the specific, and yet varied, multifaceted and evolving needs of young refugees in Malta. The text explores the borderlands as a site of youth work practice, different pedagogical methodologies grounded in a grass-roots approach to praxis, and the importance of transcending the institutional borders and providing young refugees with opportunities to develop their own social capital and speak out on their own terms.

In essence, the youth work conducted by Integra is multifaceted and flexible, responding to needs as they evolve. Grounded in praxis, with a commitment to social justice, it is hoped that the following points may provide points for reflection, and new possibilities for youth work practice with young refugees, and indeed, all young people positioned at the margins by multiple, intersecting systems of power:

- ▶ Positioned between adulthood and child, young people occupy a liminal space. Youth work can embrace the borderlands and provide a space that transgresses inscribed borders (be they legal, social or cultural), allowing young people to come and go, to make friends, to have fun and engage in dialogue with the “other”. The borderland offers a radical position of marginality and possibilities for new experiences, new subjectivities and new knowledge – it offers safety, but cannot be completely safe; this radical openness is situated on the “edge” – there is risk and discomfort in transgressing our comfort zones and exploring the unknown.
- ▶ Youth work can provide learner-centred opportunities that respond to immediate, practical or “functional” needs, such as learning the language and how to write a CV. But youth work that is committed to social justice must also be concerned with shifting the power imbalance, and providing opportunities for transformative learning. This necessarily requires critically engaging with the lived realities and concerns of young refugees, and developing the knowledge and skills necessary to challenge those structures that maintain and reproduce the status quo and inequalities.
- ▶ Being an important source of social capital – bonding within the group, but also reaching out and linking up. This may be through referral, by providing opportunities for young refugees to develop their own social capital, an important resource in their own political and social development, and also in creating spaces and platforms where young refugees speak out on their own terms.
- ▶ Silence is consent. Youth work practice that is committed to human rights and equity necessarily demands a commitment to advocacy and holding duty bearers to account.

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## Chapter 12

# Essaim d'Accueil: an example of youth work with young adult refugees in Geneva

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Analytical accuracy has not really undermined the consensus among political leaders and bureaucracies. It is not directly by arguing for migrants and against securitization that critical discourses can change the situation ... They [immigrants] will still be framed in relation to statist practices of rejection or integration. Effective challenges can only be indirect, by analyzing the conditions under which the authority of truth is given to a discourse that creates the immigrant as an "outsider, inside the State".

(Bigo 2002: 66)

### 1. Setting the scene: (young) refugees as embodying unease

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to a better understanding of the situation of young refugees in Europe<sup>46</sup> and to reflect on the role of youth work values in their integration through the example of the organisation Essaim d'Accueil, based in Geneva, Switzerland. As a co-founder of this organisation and an anthropologist, I have had both the opportunity and the tools to conduct participant observation throughout interactions occurring at various organisational levels of Essaim d'Accueil. Additionally, as one of the main actors within the organisation, I was able to conduct formal and informal interviews with subsets of the involved actors, such as members of the organisation, participants in the activities<sup>47</sup> and external collaborators, including those from government institutions. Unless otherwise stated, reflections and observations shared in this chapter stem from my personal experience over the course of the construction of this non-profit organisation. However, I also draw on relevant results from research I conducted for my master's thesis at the Graduate Institute Geneva in various locations in Switzerland in 2017. That research explores how values held by long-term Swiss residents lead to individual contributions to the collective discourse on (im-)migration as an unsettling and worrying phenomenon, and empirically demonstrates what Didier

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46. In this chapter the term "refugee" refers to individuals residing in housing facilities for asylum seekers.

47. The distinction between members and other participants refers only to the level of involvement in the organisation's activities. Members are signed up, whereas participants join activities spontaneously.

Bigo refers to as the “general unease, in which many different actors exchange their fears and beliefs in the process of making a risky and dangerous society” as well as in the process of managing it (2002: 63).

The focus of my exploration in this chapter is specifically on the role of the horizontal approach that Essaim d’Accueil adopts, as I believe it is key to fighting the societal unease vis-à-vis immigration, which can also be understood as the

feeling of being “under siege” [that] has become increasingly pervasive in the contemporary Western world ... [and] become integral to a dominant mode of governmentality. This feeling emerges amid ... a colonial crisis, generated by the rise of asylum seekers in Europe, the resurgence of Western militarist interventionism in the Middle East, and the various forms of Muslim self-affirmation that have accompanied it. (Hage 2016: 38)

In other words, it has become state-centric common sense in Europe to beware of human markers of what Ghassan Hage calls the colonial crisis, as there is a shared public and private feeling of being besieged by such “others” (ibid.: 39). This “other” is commonly found in the guise of “Muslim” and/or “asylum seeker” in Europe (cf. Hage 2016), and I believe this is part of the reason why young refugees are experiencing difficulties getting to know people: many “locals” actively avoid contact with the “other”. Indeed, Essaim d’Accueil’s efforts to desegregate Geneva have been morally judged as wrong and they have been accused of blindly benefiting asylum seekers, thereby driving resources away from and threatening the well-being of those who have a legitimate claim over them, namely local citizens.<sup>48</sup>

Instead of working with the opposition of “local” and “other”, or “us” and “them,” Essaim d’Accueil suggests regarding all as equally strongly, yet qualitatively differently, belonging to the same community. Every resident of the area is viewed as having different strengths and weaknesses and as able to contribute to society in a corresponding way. A horizontal approach represents a mode of communication that is based on this understanding, which promotes dialogue as from coequal to coequal. Both the form and the content of what is done or said need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine how to adopt a horizontal approach, how to achieve what Essaim d’Accueil calls horizontality. This approach acknowledges the particularities of each individual and works against the essentialisation of cultural traits, for example those attributed to “asylum seekers”, which can constitute a serious obstacle for social inclusion.

## 2. Essaim d’Accueil: horizontal organisation for social inclusion

The idea for the organisation Essaim d’Accueil was born in a conversation in 2016 between a group of students, who founded the Migration Initiative at the Graduate Institute Geneva, and the representative of the integration unit of the local government body, Hospice Général. These students were looking to improve the situation of refugees in the city in which they themselves lived, and the representative from Hospice Général was happy to share some observed needs of asylum seekers. A large lacuna that the representative expressed desire to see addressed turned out to

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48. For example, see comments on: [www.tdg.ch/geneve/Des-etudiants-veulent-accueillir-chaque-migrant/story/12972737](http://www.tdg.ch/geneve/Des-etudiants-veulent-accueillir-chaque-migrant/story/12972737), accessed 5 October 2018.

be the disengagement of civil society and the corresponding missing link between individuals arriving in Geneva as asylum seekers and other residents. In response to this need, in February 2017 the organisation *Essaim d'Accueil* was created by eight young adults, including myself, aiming to put local residents of various legal status in touch with each other, while specifically including refugees. *Essaim d'Accueil* was to furnish an environment for informal interpersonal and intercultural exchange, as opposed to formal service provision. This objective places our activities among urban mobilisations that informally extend the right to and through the city (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012: 81) to marginalised groups within a segregated community (cf. Fassin 1996: 49). The urban policy arena plays a uniquely important role in how a basic set of rights, which refugees are granted by international and constitutional norms, are substantively distributed (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012: 83). In this arena, *Essaim d'Accueil* addresses issues of social exclusion by means of indirect advocacy for comprehensive social inclusion, while specifically aiming to challenge and work against the normalisation of hierarchies based on othering (cf. Labonte 2004: 117). *Essaim d'Accueil's* approach aims to create personal ties across socioculturally distinct heritages and across people holding diverse legal status by providing the necessary spaces for the otherwise segregated to interact and thereby foster interpersonal links.

In August 2017, *Essaim d'Accueil* had over 50 members<sup>49</sup> who are not all equally active in the informal activities at the core of the organisation. Since February 2018, approximately three informal gatherings per week have been held. Additionally, people who have met through the organisation have been undertaking further activities privately. In addition, there have been larger or more formal activities such as picnics open to the general public or general assemblies. The procedure of the informal activities is that members suggest a time slot during which they visit housing facilities for asylum seekers to suggest to those present the option of "hanging out". Because of this flexible procedure, it is difficult to keep track of the number of spontaneous participants in these main activities of the organisation. The total number of participants per activity has varied from 4 to 15. What exactly is done during the time spent together entirely depends on the wishes of the participants. There is no need to undertake anything exceptional. Participants are encouraged to do simple things like going to the lake, chatting, having a coffee or doing whatever else they like doing – as long as they do it together.

The personal connections that *Essaim d'Accueil* facilitates allow a move away from general discourse and beliefs<sup>50</sup> towards alternative modes of sense-making based on attempted comprehension of the interlocutor's situation<sup>51</sup> (cf. Termeer 2009: 301). General discourse depicts refugees largely along racial lines and as not possessing desirable markers of integration such as speaking the local language or having a job. However, the discourse does not include the reasons why this may be "their" situation (cf. Hage 2016). In order to successfully learn a language one must practise, preferably with someone who speaks it well. In order to work one needs a work permit, to which asylum seekers are not entitled. After successfully obtaining international refugee status, there are further administrative

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49. Membership is open to individuals of any legal status and formalised by signing a code of conduct.

50. See Austin 1962: 143 for a discussion of how people are prone to speak in generalisations that do not correspond to their full state of knowledge.

51. This is something I empirically demonstrate in my MA thesis.

obstacles that go hand in hand with the myth of the free capitalist job market, which synergistically impede refugees finding a job. An example of such an obstacle is that the majority of non-Western diplomas are not recognised by Western employers. A co-founder of Essaim d'Accueil who herself came to Switzerland three years ago as a young refugee (she was 20 years old at the time) got a job offer in the canton of Vaud. However, because she was issued the F residence permit, which entitles her to temporarily stay in the canton that issued the permit, she was later declined for the job for administrative reasons.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it is not enough to superficially speak of integration, which in fact further reproduces structures of oppression (Freire and Bergman 2009 [1968]: 165), but rather we must consider why some markers of the inclusion/exclusion continuum (cf. Labonte 2004: 117) are or are not exhibited by refugees. Sharing personal stories with other people met through Essaim d'Accueil permits every participant to add nuance and depth to the possible meanings of social inclusion, thereby countering the state-centric discourse on integration.

Although initially Essaim d'Accueil did not aim to specifically focus on young refugees, the organisation decided to start its activities around those housing facilities for asylum seekers which were most socially isolated and excluded – the fallout shelters. These shelters, designated as temporary housing only, are inhabited by young men who are at least 18 years old, the legal adult age in Switzerland. As all of the members of the executive committee were also young (either students or recent graduates), we were looking forward to meeting our peers, establishing regular informal activities and then opening them up to the broader public to create horizontal networks (cf. Burlone et al. 2008: 134) and promote alternative ways of sense-making through these networks. From the start, it was important to view participating refugees as peers so as to contribute to the creation of a counter discourse about migration and refugee movements, thereby epistemologically destabilising and theoretically questioning some key concepts and categories such as “asylum seeker”<sup>53</sup> and “refugee”, but also “local” and “integration” (cf. de Genova et al. 2016: 5). Changing the meanings of words is a slow yet powerful motor of social change (Termeer 2009), which can eventually allow users to distance themselves from a mode of governance and governmentality that is enacted in urgent response to crises. Viewing the current situation in Europe with regard to people on the move as a crisis, a common stance in the media and more generally in public discourse, masks the genealogy of the phenomenon to which it refers and legitimises undemocratic actions of the state of exception (Bigo 2002: 73; de Genova 2016 et al.: 10ff; Hage 2016: 43). A crisis implies a sudden development that is out of control and that requires immediate intervention, a response that the temporalities of democratic systems cannot provide. Further, the focus on crisis diverts the gaze away from the gradual developments which led to the current situation with regard to global south–north movements, namely the perpetuation of colonial dynamics (Hage 2016) and anti-democratic decision-making processes (de Genova et al. 2016: 10).

The sentiment that it is important to treat co-residents of the city as peers strongly resonates with young adult refugees who participate in our activities. Some of the regular

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52. After some back and forth, her employer found a way of making an exception.

53. Legal status of residents of the housing facilities for asylum seekers varies from asylum seekers, to “accepted as a refugee”, “granted temporary stay” and “declined”.



refugee participants, most of whom are in their early twenties, openly state that they much appreciate our inclusive approach which, in their view, creates a feeling of belonging. Some of the regular non-refugee participants are grateful for having joined Essaim d'Accueil for the friendships made, for the emotionally rich experience of being part of refugees' lives in difficult moments, and for actually getting to know some refugees instead of thinking of them as an abstract academic or legal category, or news. Even those that are theoretically very knowledgeable about migration admit to having been confronted with the great gap between theory and practice. For example, another co-founder of Essaim d'Accueil admitted that she used to live a two-minute walk away from one of the shelters with which we are in touch but did not know about its existence, despite its capacity to house up to 100 people and her strong theoretical interests in migration and human rights. She lived right next to the shelter, so we can barely speak of physical segregation. However, there is a strong social segregation between the residents of the shelter and other residents of the neighbourhood. In part, this is caused by the virtual invisibility of shelter residents – who are living underground – but it is also due in part to the inability of others to see them, as their presence does not constitute locally available knowledge (cf. Keane 2015). The opposite knowledge that “there is nothing below that parking lot” is the locally available collective belief (cf. Clément 2010). In simpler words, as an average Geneva resident, one does not know about the existence and current use of these shelters. One does not even ask the question because everybody thinks they know that there is nothing there.

Although the first contact with residents of the shelter is sometimes marked by uncertainty on both sides, generally the young people in housing facilities are glad to meet other young people and participate in social life. As far as social inclusion is concerned, in its broadest terms, the young shelter inhabitants generally look forward to no longer being stuck in a situation in which they depend on bureaucracies. They look forward to having a job (cf. Valtonen 2001: 958), finding other housing and, of course, getting a (positive) answer to the asylum request. In a way, they are the most vulnerable of asylum seekers because they no longer qualify for the additional care provided to minors (such as better housing conditions) and because they have reached a point in life at which they are striving to become independent, but systematically cannot because of their legal status. They regularly encounter formal refusal of their efforts to relocate or look for a job, and are required to literally sit and wait. It is common for such waiting to take up to three years,<sup>54</sup> which is a long period of time, especially for young people eager to begin a new (if not first) chapter of their adult lives. Those that were declined asylum or those that gave up their efforts towards social inclusion are very difficult to reach. While the case of declined refugees may be more ambiguous, it is clearly necessary to find structures that would permit motivated young people to live a meaningful life on their own terms. Informal activities can help to get rid of mutual prejudice and mistrust, which are crucial aspects of the obstacles to an inclusive society.

Besides the challenges of bringing on board some young refugees, who may be anxious, shy or too distrustful to join Essaim d'Accueil, as well as the challenges of bringing on board non-refugees, who may be ideologically opposed to or careless about its

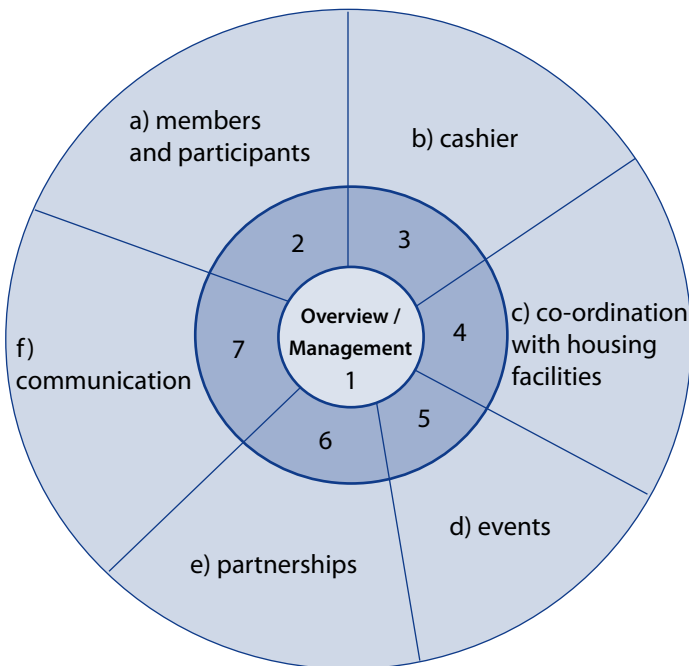
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54. Although Hospice Général relocates people from the shelters to better housing conditions whenever a bed elsewhere becomes free.

endeavour, there are other barriers to the organisation's smooth horizontal functioning. For instance, there is the legal requirement to nominate a president of the organisation. Schematically, it is the responsibility of one of the current seven members of the executive committee to keep an overview of the organisation's activities and timeline. Each of the six other members holds the responsibility to execute all tasks that fall into the domains of a) contact with members and participants, b) budgetary issues, c) co-ordination with the housing facilities of co-operation, d) events, e) seeking and maintaining partnerships with other organisations or projects and f) impersonal communication on social media and through the website. Anybody can convoke working groups for specific causes (such as organising a larger picnic with all current and potential participants or administrative help if committee members lack needed skills) on a rolling basis, of which everybody can be part. Through such working groups, the management of the organisation is kept transparent and inclusive so that anyone can contribute their skills and ideas. However, members of the executive committee possess a veto allowing them to decline an idea if it is incompatible with a horizontal approach. Sometimes maintaining a horizontal approach is difficult when negotiating the terms of collaboration with partners, because they usually function according to hierarchic principles (cf. Termeer 2009: 300).

This form of management was inspired by some self-organisational anarchist ideas (cf. Graeber 2004: 24) and then further refined by holacracy, a concept of organisational self-management. What is innovative about Essaim d'Accueil's approach though is that it does not use horizontal management as a form of government, nor a form of collaboration between organisations (cf. Burlone et al. 2008: 133), nor for the purpose of an organisation with well-defined limits (what holacracy is designed to do). As opposed to these three other cases, Essaim d'Accueil purposely keeps participation as open as possible instead of limiting it to a well-defined circle of people.

**Figure 12.1 – Hurdles to social inclusion through horizontality**



In practice, implementing a horizontal approach is a trial-and-error process. The first time that I went to one of the fallout shelters as a member of Essaim d'Accueil we were four people who wanted to do something together: my friend and co-founder and two young refugees around 21 years old. The first minor barrier to our attempt at a horizontal approach was the complete willingness of those we had just met to adapt to our wishes – they were up for doing whatever we wanted to do. Thus, we were put in a situation in which we were expected to make the decisions. In order not to simply make a decision for everybody, my friend and I started explaining to the others that it was important for us to do something that everybody wanted to do. After some discussion we agreed on having a tea by the lake. A major conceptual component of the hangouts organised by Essaim d'Accueil is its educational nature. While Geneva may serve as the starting point, ultimately the world, including multiple world views, is discovered through interaction and dialogue, and through having teacher-students and student-teachers rather than teachers and students (cf. Freire and Bergman 2009 [1986]: 169). My friend and I opted for being open with the people we met about how we see our relations. However, not all members handle similar situations in similar ways. I have heard a couple of members worrying about others not coming to meet people with a horizontal attitude. As a result, some hangouts turn into top-down French classes in the fallout shelters, and once a member was given the nickname “colonel” by refugees for her authoritative way of interacting.

Power relations are discernible in all human interactions and are inherent to all human relationships; they cannot be fully eliminated (Turner 2008). However, an effort can be made towards viewing oneself and one's interlocutor as peers, while respectfully recognising individual differences. There is nothing incompatible about adopting a horizontal attitude and loving to teach or having a tendency to express one's opinions in a blunt manner, as long as it is done with peer-to-peer respect. The willingness to listen and to react in a way that tries to understand the meanings conveyed by one's interlocutor is central to a horizontal attitude (cf. Termeer 2009: 301). This requires a certain openness to step away from fixed meanings (ibid.: 302), which is especially important when dealing with young people with potential trauma and refugees, whose personalities are not limited to the fact that they are refugees (contrary to many depictions in the humanitarian discourse).

Young adults often occupy a liminal space, in which they are treated at the same time as competent, responsible and liable, and as incompetent, irresponsible and unreliable (Skelton 2010: 145). This is representative of the “global inconsistencies between young people's political rights and legally assumed responsibilities” (ibid.), which particularly come to the fore in the context of doubly liminal young adult refugees. On one hand, they are considered capable of filing their asylum application and of carrying out the duties that go along with it, such as providing all necessary information. On the other hand, in bureaucratic encounters they are doubly treated as irresponsible and unknowledgeable about local customs and rules – once for their young age and once for being regarded as outsiders (cf. Aretxaga 2003: 405; Freire 2009 [1989]: 165). This liminality and outsidership can easily be abused by social workers (or others) working for refugees (cf. Labonte 2004: 118). For example, social workers can show a false commitment and deny providing a service to a refugee,

although the person is legally entitled to it, such as failing to put him or her on the waiting list for better housing.

There are many organisations in Geneva that provide specific services to asylum-seeking beneficiaries, thereby departing from the idea of an unequal distribution of power, knowledge and/or skills. Such services include housing, legal advice and free French classes. Until recently, social workers in charge of housing facilities for adult asylum seekers were solely in charge of transferring questions related to housing, nutrition, health or other matters to the responsible bureaucratic entity. In 2016 a major restructuring of Hospice Général began, and social workers' responsibilities were extended to animating the housing facilities, namely trying to brighten up the atmosphere. However, in practice this goal is usually not achieved and the task is particularly difficult in the fallout shelters where living conditions are harshest and some individuals know that their asylum request will be denied. Social workers occasionally organise day trips, which represent an escape from daily waiting, but their busy schedules do not allow them to offer the more individualised attention that young people may need. The absence of individual attention to asylum seekers in social workers' job descriptions does not mean that none of them goes beyond their strict responsibilities, but this is not the norm. The majority of the existing organisations are in short supply of financial and human resources for the amount of cases and requests they receive. This commonly leads to the human component of interactions between a beneficiary and an institution getting lost in translation. There is little room for young refugees to openly ask a question or share something just for the sake of asking or sharing it. The way integration is demanded from young refugees leaves little space for the values of *Essaim d'Accueil* and youth work more broadly, such as participation and self-empowerment. Young refugees rarely have the option of taking part in constructing a community, their views are commonly neglected, they often lack respect, and the focus is on their "problem behaviour" instead of on developing their skills (cf. NYA 2017).

It is not new that people are treated as cases, nor is it unique to marginalised categories of people. However, spaces in which people are understood as individuals can be created through "hopeful inquiry" (Freire 2009 [1986]: 164) and time (cf. Termeer 2009). There is a major difference between doing something "for" refugees and doing something "with" refugees. Just like any truly democratic process, it requires more time, which may not be available in a highly institutionalised setting with limited resources. Because members of *Essaim d'Accueil* also have mostly been socialised in a context in which time and resources are considered finite and precious, it is the organisation's task to sensitise its members to what horizontality is and what it may look like in practice. In a context where refugees are commonly represented as victims, some members demonstrate their wish to do something "for" refugees, thereby excluding the possibility to, in their own return, learn "from" refugees or learn something together "with" refugees.

There are yet further hurdles to social inclusion through horizontality that come from outside the organisation and which point to the need to change policy, if we want to talk seriously about social inclusion of refugees. Social inclusion is sometimes abruptly cut by symptoms of the feeling of being under siege introduced above. For example, in mid-June 2017 a young asylum seeker, whom I will call Michael here,

disappeared. His former flatmate, also a refugee, says that the police came to deport Michael at 6 a.m. At the same time, Michael was as integrated as formal structures of inclusion and exclusion allowed: he spoke French, he worked the legal maximum for Hospice Général (the compensation for that day of work amounted to 40 Swiss francs (CHF), the equivalent of two hours of similar work on the regular job market in Geneva), and he volunteered for the same job the other four days of the business week. On 22 June 2017, we were invited to the birthday of a mutual friend, but he was no longer in town.

Essaim d'Accueil is currently working on assuring a horizontal attitude among participants in its activities and to attract more mid- to long-term residents to whom the idea of meeting refugees may not speak. To achieve the first goal, Essaim d'Accueil has set up regular training sessions and workshops which members, participants and anybody interested in the topic is encouraged to attend. The workshops deal with the importance of the choice of words and the general importance of approaching every interlocutor individually, as opposed to yet another representative of a category of people. The training sessions focus on social and legal realities of asylum seekers in Switzerland and are held with the generous support of an external legal expert. To achieve the latter goal we will soon be setting up a profile on an online platform for corporate volunteering. Individuals who sign up through the corporate volunteering platform will be provided with the same type of training. These training sessions will also address the question of whether a truly horizontal approach is possible. Power relations present in interpersonal relations do not automatically render the interactions incompatible with a horizontal approach. However, they can distort the horizontality if they are not properly addressed. It is important to keep a reasonable balance in leading and following, in teaching and learning, and where the limits are can only be defined within the particular relationship. Acknowledging that “[k]nowledge emerges only through inventions and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry, human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire 2009 [1968]: 164) allows for stepping away from the teacher–student contradiction and from performing work for refugees to living moments with refugees, and learning from these moments together.

Although different strategies can be adopted to counter present-day dominant dehumanising discourse in Geneva, Essaim d'Accueil's navigation of ideology, policy and practice demonstrates that broader societal and political structures must be changed if young refugees are to be effectively included. For instance, structures have to be designed to allow refugees into the local job market, or at least a job market with comparable employment opportunities. Otherwise, avoiding the othering and exploitation of certain categories of people, symptoms of the feeling of being besieged in the West, seems an impossible task. Although it is not Essaim d'Accueil's objective to take on an advocacy role and publicly push for more inclusive societal structures, some of its effects may be similar. The organisation decided to place its focus differently, namely on creating private networks that allow every resident of the area to decide individually to what extent she or he wants to participate. Through these networks people are occasionally confronted with difficult situations that may go against some of their moral values and they may therefore want to take action to abolish the structural obstacles of inclusion that refugees meet.

Essaim d'Accueil was founded on conviction, principles and the desire to change the present in order to shape the future – elements typical of youth work. In what follows I will discuss how the work of Essaim d'Accueil constitutes an (atypical) example of youth work. First of all, the practices of setting up leisure activities in which participation is voluntary and avoiding top-down processes are common to both Essaim d'Accueil and other forms of youth work (Davies 2010: 1-2; EU–Council of Europe 2015). Further, the focus on understanding the potential and aspirations of the participants of activities is central to both the example of Essaim d'Accueil and other various approaches to youth work (Davies 2010: 2). The collective sense-making during activities influence everyone present – whether they are members wishing to meet refugees (who can also be refugees) or spontaneous participants residing as asylum seekers. While in most variations of youth work it is usually clear who has the role of the youth worker, in Essaim d'Accueil this role does not exist, as all participants are considered peers. Of course, those who are more sensitive about wishing to equally include everyone in an activity may make an effort of inclusion, which is more typical of youth workers than someone who participates in an activity for the first time and has not yet built the necessary basis of trust to let oneself go and be the private person one is. Because most of our members are young, some of the typical barriers between youth worker and young people usually fall away, thereby facilitating the alleviation of authorities (cf. *ibid.*: 3). This gives Essaim d'Accueil the advantage of being able to build mutual trust and respect relatively quickly. While the motivation to be part of Essaim d'Accueil is different for every participant, Essaim d'Accueil does not differentiate between voluntary collective action and professional collective action (cf. Minkoff and Powell 2006). Everybody participates equally, whether spontaneously as a resident of housing facilities for asylum seekers or as a member, thereby avoiding some flaws of an empowerment paradigm (cf. Elyachar 2002; Labonte 2004: 117). Everybody is free to contribute as much and to embrace as much responsibility within Essaim d'Accueil as he or she wishes.

The organisation's activities need to be seen as complementary to formal social services for refugees and the commitment of social workers and other involved actors, otherwise there could be no attempt to informally spend exploratory time together in a relaxed atmosphere without the formal effort for specific requests made elsewhere. Yet, no formalised service can replace a holistic take on individuals' social inclusion (cf. Valtonen 2001: 959).

The organisation provides spaces in which one can empower oneself. These spaces are not only voluntary but also educational and intercultural, as by choosing to take part one also chooses to learn about the sociocultural backgrounds of other participants and to share bits of one's own identity considered relevant. In sharing the moment and whatever aspects of one's background relevant for it, the incentive to othering – present in the dominant discourse on integration – is avoided. Seemingly trivial activities such as going to cafés teach participants about gender relations, politeness and how to deal with money in different cultural contexts. The knowledge of such daily substantial cultural specificities is crucial for social inclusion, and no formal pedagogy could be as effective as the informal undertakings.

### 3. Concluding remarks

Thanks to the process of mutual sense-making that peer-oriented youth work suggests, the depiction of refugees as the “other” can be countered. Such an approach is called horizontal, as it includes participants on a voluntary basis and there is no hierarchy within the inclusive community, the organisation of which is transparent. Such horizontality breaks with categorising people based on their citizenship or other legal status in casual conversations, constituting a necessary step in what Engin Isin calls “decolonizing citizenship”, which forms the continuation of imperialist expansion (Isin 2012: 567, 569). Eventually, through horizontal collective sense-making processes nationalist, racist, xenophobic and other violent attitudes can be reduced, as a horizontal perspective removes the necessity to differentiate between “us” and “them”. Instead of viewing refugees as “besieging Europe”, residents of the same area can develop alternative ways of seeing each other through personal acquaintance.

I would like to call for close attention to practices that could encompass condescending components and thereby hinder horizontal exchanges. Such practices can unintentionally further marginalise already disadvantaged groups of people. Because of the nature of youth work, often there is a certain authority attached to the youth worker. In the case of young adults, however, this authority can work against the social inclusion of the person putatively benefiting from an interaction more than others. When the benefit is regarded as unidirectional, it is accompanied by an assumption of some level of inferiority of the person, seen as standing at the end of the chain. The case of Essaim d’Accueil constitutes an example of youth work by youth and demonstrates the inclusionary effects of horizontal practices for all individuals involved. For initiatives developing and promoting horizontal exchanges and deconstructing prejudice across sociocultural backgrounds, to be able to focus on their mission a favourable legal framework is required. Such a legal framework must, for example, guarantee initiatives’ independence from government institutions and make parallel efforts of undoing the sociocultural segregation of urban and/or public spaces.

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**Figure 12.2 – Essaim d’Accueil**



**Figure 12.3 – Essaim d’Accueil**



Figure 12.4 – Essaim d'Accueil



## Chapter 13

# Youth work and refugees: empowering young refugees through participation and involvement

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*Wilke Ziemann*

### Germany says (said) welcome

**G**ermany is purportedly not a country of immigration. In spite of this belief, which is still being expressed by many political parties, the influx of people into the centre of Europe is a decades-old phenomenon, so the supposedly high numbers of refugees currently entering the country can quickly be put into perspective and the situation described in a more pragmatic way. There were 12.5 million displaced persons living in Germany after the end of the war. This was followed from 1951 onwards by around 4.5 million so-called “(late) repatriates” with German roots from Eastern Europe, from 1961 onwards by around 11 million guest workers, 3 million of whom (predominantly Turks, Italians and Yugoslavs) stayed in the country, and between 1989 and 1992 by 1.5 million war refugees from the Balkans. That presumably provides enough background to take the experience of what many believed was a new and unique wave of immigrants, consisting of some 1.2 million asylum seekers in 2015-2016 alone from civil war countries like Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and other regions and adopt a “seen it all before” attitude to Chancellor Merkel’s powerful statement “We can do it!”. The fact is that immigration is a necessity: Germany, with its booming economy, full employment in some regions and a resulting shortage of skilled workers in many places, needs an estimated 2 million immigrants a year to be able to compensate for the consequences of declining demographic trends.

However, many new immigrants experience a Germany that has not yet developed a self-image as a society of immigration. There is a lack of fair and unambiguous conditions of entry and residence that will stand the test of time and will not be increasingly made more stringent. In particular, the political debates on so-called upper limits for refugees conducted in the run-up to federal and regional elections, the *de facto* freeze on family reunion and limited-duration residence permits granted in each case are leading to uncertainty among new immigrants concerning their own future in Germany.

In order to be able to establish a “welcome culture”, institutions need to introduce into their organisational structure a policy of openness towards new members and make proactive efforts to reach out to immigrants. At an individual level, it is necessary to develop an open and, as far as possible, unbiased attitude and behaviour towards immigrants. At a local level, prejudices and discrimination must therefore be combated, and tolerance and the appreciation of diversity fostered.<sup>55</sup>

With the focus on young refugees, youth work has a particular responsibility to bear here since its aim is to address the individual interests of young people and to empower them towards self-determination and social participation.

## Participation of young refugees

The right to participation is guaranteed at the highest level. With reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Germany “Children and young people ... shall, according to their level of development, be involved in taking all public youth welfare decisions affecting them.” This is laid down in many federal and regional laws and explicitly includes all children and young people living in Germany.<sup>56</sup> Refugees (too) should accordingly be able to become involved and participate at an early stage, express their views and be heard in matters that affect their interests.

If this is to happen, they must be empowered by adopting a bottom-up approach. With the aim of fostering a political awareness through educational work and encouraging self-organisation and networking with collaborators, professional fields have become established in social and youth work in Germany that explicitly focus on the potential of each individual rather than on his/her shortcomings. For youth work, this educational dimension means giving young people professional help to develop skills to enable them to stand up for their own interests and become involved in shaping their living environment.

In the case of involvement in ordinary institutions, namely top-down, participation is to be understood as an ongoing development process for a (youth) facility, which in principle therefore rules out one-off youth projects. Undesirable forms that involve decisions being taken by others or sham participation – such as doing no more than asking people for their opinions – should be avoided and participation made possible in all its different stages (participation/commitment, information, involvement, co-determination) up to and including self-determination and autonomy.<sup>57</sup>

It is worthwhile for local authorities to involve both young refugees and young people who have grown up in their area. In this way, democratic skills are strengthened, cohesion and identification are fostered, especially in rural areas, the cohesion of different social groups is reinforced, innovative ideas to resolve local challenges

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55. Schader Stiftung (2014), “Integrationspotenziale ländlicher Regionen im Strukturwandel”, available at <http://bit.ly/2JoVVBN>.

56. Social Code (Sozialgesetzbuch – SGB) VIII, Articles 8 and 36; Federal Child Protection Act (Bundeskinderschutzgesetz), regional by-laws/regional acts on the implementation of the Child and Youth Welfare Act (Ausführungsgesetze Kinder- und Jugendhilfe Gesetz KJHG), Building Code (Baugesetzbuch), etc.

57. According to Prof Dr Waldemar Stange, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg.

are made possible and, last but not least, planning can be tailored more to specific needs, for example the planning of youth welfare programmes, mobility schemes or construction projects.

## Involvement in local authority activities

Smaller towns away from the big cities have successfully tested how to do this at local authority level,<sup>58</sup> by taking part in a structured process assisted by external moderators. Initially, an analytical phase is carried out to determine how to achieve the objective of the participation and empowerment of (new) young immigrants and which local players are to be involved, for example integration centres, youth facilities, housing facilities, the youth welfare office, youth cafés and advice centres, such as the Youth Migration Service. In the following phase, workshops are a tried-and-tested format enabling refugees who are being assisted by mentors and youth workers to voice their concerns and wishes in direct contact with administrative staff and integration commissioners. Specialist youth workers can speak about obstacles and difficulties in their work and put forward ideas on how to improve procedures. The networking of various youth welfare facilities initiated in this way provides a good basis for planning practical follow-up steps together.

The direction in which a local authority should develop depends not only on the aims defined by politicians and the administration but also on the wishes and ideas of those living there. Involving them and, in particular, young new immigrants is both an opportunity and at the same time a huge challenge for youth work. Plans and specific project ideas can be developed in moderated community dialogue events involving adults and young people, both individuals who have grown up in Germany and young immigrants. In order to enable young immigrants to engage in active participation, they must first be prepared for this in workshops on teamwork and participation, for which educationally experienced mentors are required. In the dialogue engaged with everyone, the aim should initially be to identify what good practices already exist and then determine changes that need to be made and any areas for development. With the challenge of being able to achieve aims shared by all and implement ideas, the focus must be on practicable projects. Youth workers have a special role to play here because they can work on this together with newly arrived immigrants, for example when it comes to producing the contents of a guide describing the services provided by authorities from the refugees' point of view.

## Digital participation

Digital media are increasingly being used in the case of participation processes. On their way to Europe, many refugees discovered that their mobile telephone and digital information channels were vitally important and they are basically familiar with

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58. An exemplary process has been launched in the town of Olpe: [www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de/themenportal/artikel/sommerwerkstatt-in-olpe-damit-morgen-besser-wird-als-heute/?cHash=5dda50abd88c1c93306158f8c56606628L=0](http://www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de/themenportal/artikel/sommerwerkstatt-in-olpe-damit-morgen-besser-wird-als-heute/?cHash=5dda50abd88c1c93306158f8c56606628L=0). The municipality of Norderstedt gained positive experience at a so-called "refugee summit": [www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de/programm/servicebueros/servicebuero-hamburg/dialog-in-norderstedt/](http://www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de/programm/servicebueros/servicebuero-hamburg/dialog-in-norderstedt/).

the technology. Although up to now digital media has been linked to experiences often felt to be traumatic, it does provide a readily available means of participation when new issues associated with the world of young people are discussed. Films often constitute a bridge between the different cultural groups and can therefore be used as a good basis in media work, for example in youth media centres, short films made or film festivals (co-)initiated by young refugees are a way of enabling them to produce creative work based on their own ideas and help them not only to engage in the artistic treatment of their subject matter but also to attract broader social attention. Youth work in this area can have a broad impact and therefore provide valuable experience of self-efficacy for those involved. E-participation continues to be an objective expressed by more and more local authorities to involve young people locally in participatory processes. A wide range of tools based on various forms of participation is now available in this connection.<sup>59</sup> However, when digital tools are used it is important not to neglect the basic skills that young people need to use them properly. The same standards that apply to the critical use of media by a self-determined, mature and responsible user should apply here as in other youth media work.

## **Involvement in (sports) clubs**

When they arrive and are integrated into German civil society, many refugees experience a hitherto unknown phenomenon: clubs and societies. Whether they are interested in football or other sports, sport is so well organised down to the last detail that barriers and rules and regulations make it difficult to participate. In Germany, sport is to a large extent dependent on the commitment of volunteers, who in addition to the organisation of the club, mainly work as coaches. Educational expertise is not very common, with the result that non-sport related issues and problems, such as legal questions concerning an individual's residence status, language courses, housing, and vocational and training opportunities, quickly lead to situations beyond their capabilities. In many places, it is a huge challenge here to foster links with what youth work and youth social work offer because the various institutions, such as hostels, youth clubs, schools and sports clubs, often do not collaborate with one another.<sup>60</sup> And yet this is particularly important because sport provides an opportunity for many refugees to become integrated into society, for example when they change from being players to coaches and consequently become volunteers themselves.

## **What youth work needs**

Youth work aimed at bringing about participation should therefore not be understood as an isolated service for a target group facing great difficulties and in particular need of support but, rather, as an integral component of a local network. With its knowledge of the young target group and owing to its closeness to it, youth work must

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59. See [www.jugend.beteiligen.jetzt](http://www.jugend.beteiligen.jetzt).

60. The "Willkommen im Fußball" (Welcome to Football) programme initiates and supports alliances between local football clubs: [www.dfl-stiftung.de/willkommen-im-fussball/](http://www.dfl-stiftung.de/willkommen-im-fussball/).

therefore be recognised as an equal partner in local networks and given support. If this is to succeed, the following requirements must be met:

- ▶ Youth work must be given the necessary freedom by politicians and administrative bodies to enable it to give its clients, namely young immigrants, even more dedicated support.
- ▶ An infrastructure must be available for youth work that, for example in youth centres, enables services tailored more to visitors' needs and interests to be provided. With the changing composition of the youth group, this must be renewed and adapted.
- ▶ Educators involved in the field of youth work must have the opportunity to attend regular further education and training courses in order to prepare for new challenges in their work with new arrivals, for example on legal questions relating to all aspects of their residence status, intercultural skills, media work, gender-sensitive activities, etc.
- ▶ Changes in the living environment of young people resulting from increasing digitisation must be reflected in new participatory forms of youth work in order to foster social participation.
- ▶ At local level, people in positions of responsibility should initiate the networking of all relevant players and, where appropriate, ensure it is supported by external professional moderators so that youth work can successfully bring about the social integration and participation of new arrivals.

No one can seriously doubt that a large number of refugees will continue to come to Germany and other European countries. They are therefore *de facto* countries of immigration and consequently duty-bound to address these challenges and provide their best possible support for youth work in this important area.

**Figure 13.1 – Photo from a project activity**







## Chapter 14

# “Altochtonen van de Toekomst”

*Maura Ryckebusch and Loes Steegmans*

**T**he project Altochtonen van de Toekomst first started as a project for accompanied minors, between the ages of 15 and 18 years old, who had arrived in Belgium to apply for asylum. Given that they were travelling with parents and guardians, these young people did not have the possibility to partake in an asylum interview, rather, others spoke on their behalf. As such, they had no opportunity to tell their story. The project was first developed to address this particular group of young people in an effort to give voice and to provide an opportunity for them to tell their own story. Initial engagement was organised by project staff, together with participants from Altochtonen, who organised “play” encounters in asylum centres in an effort to reach out, and also to provide information on asylum procedures and educational opportunities. Some young people also heard about the initiative through the support of active social assistants, some through their legal guardians and others through friends, simply tagging along.

Over time other young refugees, unaccompanied and over the age of 18, expressed an interest in joining the initiative, and so Altochtonen responded and evolved in order to include them.

The project seeks to empower young refugees and asylum seekers so that their voices will be heard by policy makers. In order to do so the project provides youngsters with workshops (for example photography and social media, sexuality and relationships, politics). Young people who fled to Belgium identify problems in the asylum procedure, the reception policy and integration. The project helps them to communicate these problems to policy makers. The project also raises public awareness through giving young refugees a face that people can relate to on social media or through awareness campaigns. The project meets the needs of a vulnerable group for meaningful leisure activities and brings more diversity to the Flemish youth sector.

Altochtonen van de Toekomst has steadily grown since 2014. In 2016, the group had 99 young refugee participants, 10 volunteers, one project manager and up to two interns during the year. The project was originally organised by a Flemish NGO, Refugee Action, who supported it for four years. Since January 2018 the project has stood on its own feet.

Figure 14.1 – Altochtonen book cover



Drawing by Nelson Rosales Baez, a member of Altochtonen. The image was used for a book cover published by Altochtonen.

## Chapter 15

# Spark 15 – a refugee youth-led organisation

*Paul Galea and Bakary B. Kanteh*

### **Paul Galea, mentor, Spark 15**

**S**park 15 is a refugee-led youth NGO that aims to promote integration of the refugee communities with the Maltese local community. A further aim is combating the challenges youth refugees face in Malta.

The group was initially formed as part of an outreach exercise of the Global Refugee Youth Consultations of the UNHCR. For this programme, the UNHCR (Malta) joined forces with two other NGOs, namely Integra Foundation and the Organisation for Friendship in Diversity, and together they involved a number of refugee youths, holding a weekend of activities in Gozo, Malta's neighbouring island.

While this event proved a success, they also realised that within this young group there was energy to be found that could be harnessed towards working for the greater good. The youths themselves recognised this and expressed their hope to continue working towards this aim. There being 15 of them at the time, along with the year being 2015, the group decided to call themselves Spark 15. With the help of the three NGOs, meetings started to be held on a regular weekly basis. Initially, Spark 15 just met and chatted as a group of mainly young adults. They had much in common: all were either asylum seekers or had a form of protection (full, subsidiary or temporary humanitarian protection). A number of them were without family or friends, and most of the typical challenges faced by refugees were also part of their usual daily challenges. Furthermore, they were all Muslim, faced discrimination and, importantly, were all in their late teens to early twenties.

The fact that the group interacted had a number of positive effects. First, there was the empowerment of individual members as they benefited from forming part of the group. This empowerment came through the social capital that was gained through being a group. Bonding social capital came through the effects of a greater circle of friends, which translated into empathy from issues shared with others who faced similar challenges. Indeed, as a group, they acquired a far better tool to face aspects of the double liminality that existed within their age groups: the fact that not only were they grappling with typical teenage growing-up issues but they were also Muslim, often black, and refugees in a country that had a tendency towards racism. Another ripple effect was that of safety in numbers, which meant that they were slightly buffered from the feeling of being "othered" when they were together as a group. In this way, weekly meetings were dominated by talks of experiences of discrimination, what happened during the week and also, yet another burden on their minds, their documentation as refugees/asylum seekers. The pecking order within the group itself was also being sorted out as the "leaders" started emerging from within the group.

There was also a certain amount of bridging social capital as the founding NGOs helped out in different ways. Talks were often held with the group to help them understand different themes such as human rights within a local context. They encouraged them and helped them attend conferences, held both locally and abroad. Consequently, this broadened their outlook, maturing them, so that their outlook on their issues and those of others became more holistic and simultaneously empathetic. In this way, the group members became more open to understanding their situation within the local context, with the result that rather than feeling down due to the negativity and discrimination constantly around them, they started facing their challenges with a positive outlook. Slowly the weekly mention of discrimination and racism that pervaded their lives turned to discussing how to deal with it and, moreover, overcome it. Today, though the situation has hardly changed, the negativity is only mentioned in a positive way on how to handle the way forward rather than just accepting the situation.

The first year passed in this way, with the group learning to cope with the situation around it. As the leaders in the group started to become more obvious, they held the group together while simultaneously starting to reach out and organise themselves. Besides just attending the conferences, they started to give talks and sit on panels on these same conferences. They started to look into ways of reaching out and helping, not only themselves but also others in the refugee community. They also registered as a fully fledged NGO.

Currently, the NGO works with a two-pronged approach, that of advocacy and that of organising events. From the aspect of advocacy, they actively attend conferences to promote their cause. To this effect, they have participated yearly in the UNHCR Global Refugee Youth Consultations held in Geneva, a number of conferences in different European countries and many also held here in Malta. They have discussed their challenges with members of the Maltese Parliament and also ministers from the European Union. Additionally, rather than solely focusing on just rhetoric, Spark uses more concrete approaches to further their cause. Subsequently, they have also organised a number of football events, the first one taking place at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) which was attended by the President of Malta. Spark 15 also teamed up with MOVE, another youth NGO, to organise a number of football events in Marsa and Valletta. In the latter event, Spark 15 put on a musical festival at St. George's Square, Valletta, that promoted African music. Football has been perceived as an effective method of encouraging encounters between the refugee community and the local community, both of whom share a love for this sport, in an attempt to encourage social inclusion.

Promising results have been seen. One example is an interview held by the *Times of Malta* with Spark 15 that highlighted the difficulties regarding access to higher education. The interview was read by Dr Giuliana Fenech, who teamed up with Integra Foundation to start their Programme for Higher Education. Currently a number of Spark members participate in this programme of facilitating access to university, indeed not only do some attend the English courses held to prepare them for the IELTS exam but five members have been accepted into university as a result of this programme. Spark 15 also works towards promoting the scheme to others within the refugee community. Another outcome of this interview occurred when

an American university professor read the article and came here to meet Spark to discuss these and other issues for his research. Today, one of our founder members has been invited to his university to complete her PhD.

## **Bakary B. Kanteh, member, Spark 15**

### **How I came to know about Spark 15**

I first came across a video on Facebook by young refugees speaking about the daily challenges they face regarding the perception of people towards them. In the video, these young refugees spoke about their individual challenges ranging from being denied a job because of having an Arab surname, the fear of being considered a terrorist because of wearing a head scarf (hijab) and the feeling of rejection by some locals who are opposed to embracing refugees. The feeling of rejection mentioned by these refugees is the same situation I am in as a migrant living in Malta. This particular video served as source of motivation and inspiration to join Spark 15, the first ever migrant-led NGO advocating for equality and raising awareness.

Joining Spark 15 has given me the opportunity to make new friends from the different nationalities and cultures with whom I have common challenges and meeting regularly to discuss ways to tackle and improve on our challenges. This has helped me in getting to know members and developing a strong bond, and being inspired to take on advocating for equality.

Talks given to us by a sister NGO's legal experts on migration have raised my awareness about rights and obligations of refugees and the legal challenges we face and how to deal with them. This gave me the chance of becoming more aware of rights and obligations which I was oblivious of prior to joining Spark 15.

Being part of Spark also gave me the chance of attending conferences and workshops on issues surrounding migrants and migration. I had the opportunity of interacting and engaging with other NGOs that operate on issues surrounding migrants, examples of which are the Jesuit Refugee Service and Integra Foundation, and learning from them.

As a member, I also had the opportunity of representing Spark 15 on conferences where we were invited to share our thoughts surrounding migrants and to map out ways and means of addressing the challenges we face. This has helped me in speaking out from personal experience and voicing the need to address the challenges we face.

Spark 15, built on the grounds of equality, has opened my mind and inspired me to embrace people from other ethnicity, race, religion or nationality and condemn all forms of discrimination, segregation and bias against all, irrespective of one's status in society.

### **My thoughts on Spark 15**

As a migrant-led NGO, Spark 15 is having a positive touch on the lives of young refugees, inspiring and motivating them and serving as a mouthpiece, speaking on platforms about the challenges faced by its members and the entire migrant community in general. I am a living example of the positive impact it has on my life, the aforementioned lessons and the opportunities I have gained from being a member of Spark 15 are examples.

Figure 15.1 – Football match organised by Spark 15 at MCAST



Figure 15.2 – Spark 15 members attending a “No Hate” march





**Figure 15.3 – Spark 15 inauguration**



Selfie with Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, during the official ceremony when Spark 15 became an NGO.

**Figure 15.4 – Member of Spark 15 being interviewed by a German TV station**







## Conclusions

# Youth work and young refugees – Critical reflections on the evolving social order and bridges to inclusion

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*Maria Pisani and Tanya Basarab*

### Introduction

**T**he current human rights crisis affecting refugees in Europe served as the impetus for a number of EU–Council of Europe youth partnership actions geared towards exploring the situation of young refugees in Europe, and in particular the role of youth work and youth policy in their integration and inclusion. This issue of Youth Knowledge Books responded to a recognised need for more critical engagement, an opportunity to explore what is being done in the youth field, the challenges, the strengths, and ways of moving forward, while advancing a dialogue between policy, research and practice, both in the youth field and in co-operation with other fields.

Our call was ambitious, setting out a broad array of areas for development, and the contributors did not disappoint. The pages in this book highlight the diversity of practices across a range of settings, with different youth actors developing a contextualised knowledge base, and drawing on a range of methodologies, skills and tools to respond to the needs and aspirations of young refugees. The reader will also recognise key youth work characteristics (see Council of Europe 2015) informing analysis and practice throughout the book: the emphasis on value-driven youth work that is self-reflective and critical, the focus on young people's expressed needs and aspirations, voluntary participation, a focus on the personal, social and ethical development of young people, and the focus on relational practice, emphasising dialogue with young people and the broader communities.

But how do such characteristics play out within what is clearly a very particular, and yet evolving and uncertain context? What is particular about youth work with young refugees and migrants? What knowledge base, sources and skills are youth workers drawing on and developing in order to address new learning needs? This concluding chapter reflects on the common threads, presents some of the emerging themes and locates youth work within, and the possibilities it may offer to, the lives of young refugees and migrants. It also presents some avenues and perspectives to consider in youth policy making.

We hope that the examples that contributors brought, together with these concluding remarks, will also support those involved in the European youth field to continue working on the issues young refugees and migrants face. In an increasingly hostile context across Europe, maintaining the inclusion and human rights of young refugees and migrants on the European youth agenda and communicating the needs of these groups to other policy fields is an important responsibility.

## **Between violence and hope – Youth work navigating insecurity and uncertainty**

The ethnographic data presented by Briggs and Cordero Verdugo sets the terrain; the disturbing contexts they describe as they trace a trail across Europe are repeated throughout these pages. Smugglers, deportation, refugee camps, legal status – these are not familiar terms to youth workers, or indeed the majority of us who can make a claim to citizenship and the rights we take for granted. Such terms belong to the subjective life-world of the refugee, the “illegalised” migrant, the lived environment that surrounds them, which provides the backdrop against which they try to make sense of their world, their journeys and their future. A number of contributors emphasised the need for youth workers to understand the legal terrain and the administrative barriers many young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants confront on a daily basis.

Young refugees and migrants are exposed to violence and multiple insecurities, fleeing war, persecution, experiencing the loss of family and home, sexual and gender-based violence, and institutional violence, racism and hate crime. While recognising the role and limitations of youth work, Lyamouri-Bajja reminds us that youth workers working with young refugees will invariably be working with young people who have endured or continue to endure a traumatic event. This reality also highlights the need for more research into trauma-informed youth work practice. The author emphasises that in such situations youth work can explore the resources and resilience of the person and focus on supporting their own life projects as a way forward.

“Waitinghood”, a drawn-out process marked by insecurity and precarity, surfaced time and time again, often as a source of ongoing trauma. Citing unaccompanied minors, Honkasalo described it as the most “unbearable” aspect of life in a new country – not knowing if they will be able to remain, or the conditions framing their right to remain. For the young asylum seeker and undocumented migrants, the transition to adulthood then is not associated with gaining new rights, but potentially losing rights, and new risks, such as deportation, are added to the mix. For youth workers and policy makers, knowledge development is critical in developing the services, tools and good practices necessary to accompany young asylum seekers and refugees as they navigate the complex legal terrain, but also in understanding how such transitions affect the lives of young asylum seekers and migrants. The period of waitinghood (that is particular to young asylum seekers and undocumented migrants) also provides some important insights into how we theorise adolescence and emerging adulthood, vulnerability, agency and resilience. Certainly, in making the transition to adulthood, the possibilities for exploration and opportunities are not equally accessible nor obtainable to all young people, and choices will of course vary according to different individuals and cultural influences (see Arnett 2000: 477).

However, for those young people facing the possibility of deportation, in particular those who will remain with an irregular legal status, postponing the transition to “adulthood” is not an option. Adulthood does not “emerge”, but rather, is delivered through legal notice at the age of 18 – with a significant reduction in rights and in fulfilling their potential through further education, professional development, and indeed political development.

## Youth work, cross-sectoral partnerships and relationships

Young asylum seekers and refugees do not live in a vacuum. Given the complex and multifaceted realities mentioned above and many others documented throughout this publication, a number of contributors highlight the need for cross-sectoral collaboration across the services young refugees and migrants come in contact with. Henn and Gregull argue that youth work with young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants requires new alliances, cross-sectoral co-operation and working relationships with other service providers and professionals, in order to tap into diverse perspectives, resources and expertise, and also to develop service provision, practice and youth policies. Özerim and Kalem, for example, provide a number of examples of how youth organisations have responded to the refugee crisis in Turkey, and engaged in different partnerships, including collaboration with humanitarian organisations, to address the needs of young refugees. The authors also look at how youth work has moved from emergency support to more structured, continual engagement with young refugees in Turkey. Youth work in humanitarian and emergency contexts has emerged as an important arena for action in several contributions in this book. This topic requires further knowledge gathering, analysis and understanding to facilitate adequate support to those paid or volunteer youth workers acting in such contexts.

Social capital is an established theoretical lens for looking at how youth workers, as resource-bearers, can further the development of capital. When it comes to youth work, relationships matter, going to the very heart of practice. Whether it be youth workers developing their capital by reaching out to other service providers and facilitating cross-sectoral practice, or youth workers sharing their capital with young people in the form of information, support, and bridging communities, it is clear that, in the case of young refugees and migrants, the importance of this resource takes on a new meaning and significance. By its very nature, forced migration entails disruption, separation, and life in a new and strange context.

While highlighting the administrative and legal obstacles upon which so much hinges, Le Guern describes the educational role in providing transcultural and transitional support to young refugees. Described as learning the “cultural keys” to their new environment, young people are guided through this process as they take ownership of their own journey towards belonging and inclusion. In this case, youth workers co-operate closely with other professionals (psychologists, social workers, lawyers, administrators), in order to offer the young people a coherent service. Such multi-disciplinary teams provide the opportunity for each specialised role to develop in a focused way, while avoiding role confusion, burnout and, indeed, unethical practice.

Formal and informal social networks are critical in affecting how the migratory journey will pan out. This is particularly the case where young asylum seekers and refugees

have little say on where they will be moved to. As Williams so aptly captures it, social capital is “shattered” by the policy of dispersal, moving young asylum seekers from one place to the next through the course of the asylum process. Eicken describes her own sense of helplessness and the effect it has on the young refugees she works with, in particular how ongoing displacement disrupts relationships of trust and forces young refugees to face such challenges over and over again. In the words of Abbas, a 17-year-old Afghan, on learning that he will be moved to a new home in a different part of the country:

My home will close. They will transfer me and my friends to different homes. I will lose my friends, my home and since I will be moved very far, also my job. (see Chapter 3)

Gately and Refugee Youth also describe how friendships and relationships suffer as a result of ongoing displacement and relocation, contributing to a sense of isolation and loneliness that is common among young asylum seekers. At greater risk of social exclusion, young refugees and migrants experience higher rates of material poverty and face obstacles (social and legal) to social welfare and health services. Networks and relationships, then, become crucial in providing support, finding a place to live, a place to study, a place to work, a place to worship, and a place to hang out and feel safe. The absence of such relationships forms one of the biggest barriers to young refugees and migrants engaging within and across communities. Several contributions have highlighted the importance of relationship-building and ensuring some level of stability by building a trustful relationship with the youth worker, investing in new friendships and support networks with peers and with the host community. Reflections from youth work practice in such contexts also refer to the need for support and guidance for the youth workers themselves.

Different facets of social capital were discussed by many of the contributors. In her chapter on the work being done in Italy, Scardigno discusses the importance of recognising the cultural capital and resources young refugees and migrants already possess, and also how specially designed programmes within the formal education system can provide opportunities for young refugees and migrants to further develop and accumulate different forms of capital, including cultural knowledge, and social capital in accessing new and different communities, spaces and places. Scardigno reflects on the need young refugees might have to reconstruct their story and, in the process, identify bridging elements to the context, in this case building an academic achievements portfolio that the university can use as a basis to open its doors for furthering education. Pisani discusses the importance of providing a space to bond; she describes a liminal space that transcends arbitrary borders, providing a space for young people, including young asylum seekers and refugees, to no longer feel lonely, nor alone. This is a recurrent theme throughout the book. The opportunity to feel safe and make friends, leisure activities and having fun is emphasised as fundamental to the well-being of young refugees and migrants – and as one might expect, youth workers have responded across diverse contexts in familiar and innovative ways. For example, young refugees and migrants recognise language barriers as one of the biggest obstacles to making new friends, to understanding the legal context, their rights and how to access them, to reaching out to service providers, policy makers and new communities. Youth workers are tapping into their strengths and responding in

innovative ways through informal education – learning languages through play, and engaging in activities that are less dependent on spoken language, such as sports or the arts, and which support young refugees not only in keeping them active but also providing the much needed emotional support and space to express.

Nothing new here, it's what youth workers "do". And yet not. Such practices must be couched within the broader context. Racism, xenophobia, far-right, invasion, besieged, nationalism, fear, hate and violence: these terms are repeated and echoed throughout this publication, as different authors have commented and reflected on the discourse and environment that receives young asylum seekers and refugees to Europe. Polishchuk argues that the "other" guised as the Muslim/illegal immigrant/refugee generates a "shared public and private feeling of being besieged". She argues that such a reality influences why young refugees and migrants experience difficulties in making new friends: the "local" actively avoids contact with the "other" (see Chapter 12). Honkasalo describes how negative and stereotypical media coverage has influenced the ideas of young people in youth clubs; she provided examples of critical media analysis and research, and calls for more training for youth workers in this regard. Galea and Kanteh provide an example of how such exclusion can be addressed. They describe how empowerment came through the social capital that was gained through forming part of a refugee-led group. Bonding social capital came through the effects of a greater circle of friends, which translated into empathy of issues shared with others who faced similar challenges. As a group, the members "acquired a far better tool to face aspects of the double liminality that existed within their age groups: the fact that not only were they grappling with typical teenage growing-up issues but they were also Muslim, often black, and refugees in a country that had a tendency towards racism" (see Chapter 15).

Framed within different paradigms, from horizontal methodologies to participatory and bottom-up approaches, and with an emphasis on dialogue, the transformative and political element of youth work is not only embraced, but theorised as central to youth work practice. Briggs and Cordero Verdugo call out for a renewed political energy in youth work. Critical political engagement requires youth workers and young refugees to be attentive to power relations and social inequalities (see Gately and Refugee Youth and their work on Participatory Action Research and critical youth work), to understand the local within the global, and to develop a deeper understanding of refugee and migrant movements within a globalised and interdependent world. Together, youth workers and refugees interrogate and ask questions as to how and why policy is developed and, ultimately, how it is experienced in real life.

Williams positions youth work as a place of hope, arguing that in order to keep hope alive, youth workers must work with young refugees and migrants to politically engage, and to embrace a transformative youth work agenda. A number of contributors provide examples of how youth work with young refugees has embraced these possibilities. Located in the borderlands, Pisani describes youth work as a site for radical openness, where young people can feel safe, and engage in the uncomfortable conversations that must be had, to learn, to challenge, to transgress borders and create opportunities to embrace and enable political agency and voice. Borderlands is a space of action allowing young refugees and youth workers to speak

out about their doubts and vulnerabilities while at the same time engaging with the social order and its challenges.

Polishchuk introduces “horizontality”, embracing democratic processes “with” young refugees, paradoxically within a national context that is embracing undemocratic processes justified within a constructed national “crisis”. Bringing a policy-making perspective, Ziemann makes the point that youth work has a particular role and responsibility to bear in ensuring young refugees have real opportunities to engage. Situating participation as a human right, he argues that young refugees should be supported to participate, not only to speak, but also to be heard (Spivak 1988). Ziemann provides examples of how youth workers in Germany have engaged young refugees and local youth in a series of structured workshops with local authorities. The workshops identified youth needs, while the process as a whole strengthened democratic skills and social cohesion.

Social capital in the form of bridging, providing links to other spaces, including institutions and structures of power and influence such as the media and policy makers, also comes to the fore. Ryckebusch and Steegmans explain how a project in Belgium works with young asylum seekers to identify problems in the asylum procedure, the reception policy and integration. The project also embraces a pedagogy that seeks to work with young people to communicate these problems to policy makers, and to raise public awareness. Social media has provided a space for young refugees to challenge such negative, homogenising and often violent casting, and an opportunity to speak out on their own terms.

## **Confirmed and emerging themes – Considerations for youth policy**

Migration is a transversal phenomenon not limited to procedures or to specific authorities. The contributions in this book have highlighted the strength and potential of youth work in supporting young refugees once they arrive in Europe and in their host communities. Some of the contributions in this book have highlighted how youth work has responded through its flexible and adaptable nature, while others have also touched upon how services for young refugees and migrants are organised and implemented on the basis of co-operation. There are certain considerations for policy makers in the youth field to reflect on or to advocate towards other policy areas, based on the analysis in this Youth Knowledge book.

First, some topics well known to youth policy have come up in the publication related to the importance of supporting access to rights, participation, relationship- and trust-building, and cross-sectoral co-operation. These have been generally seen in youth policy as fundamental aspects of young people’s transition to autonomy and socialisation. What is important is to assess whether all youth work with young migrants and refugees, wherever it happens, is well supported by the general youth policy set-up.

Second, a range of themes that were considered no longer relevant have emerged to the foreground again, not exclusively due to the political and media discourse around large recent arrivals of migrants and refugees to Europe. These themes

include discrimination, xenophobia, hate speech and lack of access to rights. Policy makers need to ensure the states fully respect their commitments to guaranteeing the rights young refugees have and actively combat these negative phenomena. Young people growing up in a country that tolerates public discrimination will assume that it is acceptable to perpetrate such acts. Equipping youth workers with information on the human rights system, on the rights of young refugees and the various categories therein is the right approach in such contexts. Support to active young people engaged in awareness raising, open debates and mobilisation against these actions ensure an investment in a peaceful, cohesive society.

Third, new themes have also emerged that may require new policy frameworks. One such point has been the need to support further knowledge development and put in place support systems for youth work in humanitarian or emergency contexts. Youth work in such contexts bring an important contribution rooted in informal and non-formal pedagogies in providing information, offering a break to young people caught in such contexts, safe and recreational spaces to breathe, connect and learn. Co-operation with the development and emergency aid sectors is required to understand the strengths and the limitations of youth work in these new contexts. Youth workers feel the need to understand well the asylum legislation, the migration laws, the rights and responsibilities of the young refugees, the rights of migrants in the labour market or to education or healthcare. These are not questions that can be learned through practice, they imply understanding of facts and legislation. In this sense, authorities can develop user-friendly referral systems for youth work practitioners to help them navigate migration and integration procedures, while at the same time bringing their added value of safe learning and recreational spaces.

Supervision and guidance systems are needed for youth workers in these and other contexts through targeted policy measures. For example, trauma-informed youth work may be equally straining for the youth workers and for the young refugees. Disruptions have a stronger impact in the transitions of young refugees that might travel alone. Long waitinghood and procedures take a strain on the young people and affect them in multiple ways. Youth work that reaches out to these young people needs resources and an enabling environment. It needs to be made visible and recognised by youth policy makers through a combination of broad and targeted measures.

While the contributions in this publication have reflected on youth workers' perspectives, youth policy should consider also what specific measures might be needed to address the youth population in the host communities at large with the objective of strengthening community-building and preventing divisions. For example, at the local level, policies on community cohesion and intercultural dialogue are needed, so as to foster a rich intercultural exchange between the young migrants and refugees and the young people from the hosting communities which might become the new homes for some of them. Youth policy can initiate cross-sectoral partnerships for this purpose.

Several authors have reflected on the hostile environment, negative imagery and media portrayal of the refugees which lead to a rise in xenophobia and even violence. The concept of borderlands as a space where young refugees have a chance to define their own agency, to build their own social and cultural capital and engage with the host communities could be a useful basis to reflect on policy barriers or limitations.

There are countries that have extended certain rights and protection beyond 18 years as a way to reduce the sudden interruption of life projects.

Youth policy should support further understanding of how transition, participation, autonomy and resilience are seen by young refugees and migrants and by young people in host communities and how youth work could facilitate a constructive dialogue between these perspectives.

Policy improvement also requires active contribution from practice, therefore ongoing dialogue and spaces for advocacy need to be supported. Targeted funding to refugee-led initiatives can inform not only youth policy, it can also enrich youth work traditions and approaches that have developed in Europe. Support to experiential youth work practice, to inclusion initiatives but also to basic language courses led by thousands of volunteer youth workers means support for inclusion as a whole.

Creating space and support for refugee-led initiatives can also lead to a stronger advocacy movement and ensure that any discussion on refugee issues involves those concerned. Across Europe, young migrants and refugees are not yet fully part of the discussions that concern them; political bias often gets in the mainstream of public discourse and human rights questions are side-lined. Through supporting the agency and space for refugee initiatives, these harmful tendencies can be reversed and a more balanced and fairer democratic space could emerge on migration topics to be discussed.

Finally, support to research is important in identifying the most effective policy responses to the various contexts and moments young refugees and migrants may experience, from arrival to full integration or return to their homeland.

## **Conclusion – Political contributions of youth work and policy: embracing and shaping a more dynamic and diffuse new world order**

The challenges that young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants face are well documented throughout this book. Positioning these young people as passive victims of their circumstances, to focus on obstacles alone, would fail to capture the complexity and multifaceted aspects of their lives, and how they deal with them at an individual level. Likewise, examples of their resilience, strength, determination and agency, while inspiring, must not be fixed in binary terms: vulnerability and resilience are dynamic in nature. To do so would simply be to flip the hierarchy in an attempt to maintain a neat but dysfunctional order, and negates how social categories (such as age, race, gender and legal status among others) are dynamic and intersect.

In many ways the arrival of the “other” is forcing us all to reflect on the complexities, risks, disruptions and possibilities of the “post” world we call home. The nation state, borders and the comfort of certainty and stability are being challenged by growing global, regional and local economic inequality, climate change, political unrest and transnational conflicts and disasters. With these changes come new opportunities and the excitement of unknown and yet unimagined possibilities. The chapters in this book testify to the way youth work has embraced the unknown, and this in itself points to one of the strengths of the field. Youth workers are reaching out, working where young refugees and migrants are at, wherever they may be, developing a myriad of relationships and working relationally to connect “us” to the “other” (Fusco 2012) – whoever the “us” and the “other” may be.



Finally, but perhaps most importantly, the arrival of young refugees and migrants has also held up a mirror to youth work, inviting us to ask ourselves who we are, how we define ourselves and our actions, and responding to the question: What do we stand for? The response from our contributors was explicit and unambiguous. Respect for each and every individual goes to the heart of youth work practice. Young refugees are young people first and foremost, and must not be defined by their legal status. Within a context that increasingly seeks to shackle the lives of young refugees, youth workers have an opportunity to embrace and encourage their political agency. Taking this notion further, a transformative practice moves beyond youth workers as providers of recreation and leisure – that may at times merely serve as a distraction – to engaging with the structural inequalities that shape young people’s lives, and collectively addressing these obstacles. Recognising the inalienable human rights of every young person, not only as an ethical stance, but also as a legal obligation of the state, and supporting inclusion and participation, requires critical engagement, dialogue and participation, knowledge and action. We are reminded of the political role of youth work, in advocating with, and sometimes, where they are excluded from such spaces and processes, on behalf of young refugees and migrants.

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## Contributors

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**Johanna Eicken** has her formative roots in the field of pedagogy and humanitarian action and she specialised in inclusive and intercultural Waldorf education. Between 2008 and 2015, she worked outside Germany (Brazil, Switzerland, South Africa and Malta) in pedagogical, psychosocial support and trauma-pedagogical settings for children, youth and young adults. Besides her professional work, Johanna has also engaged in voluntary work (both independently and with NGOs), predominantly in the field of psychosocial support of individuals and groups of refugee and asylum-seeking children, youth and adults. Since 2016 Johanna has been living in Germany, where she works as an emergency pedagogue with asylum-seeking adolescents and young adults.

**Paul Galea** graduated in earth systems and obtained an MSc in Environmental Management and Sustainability focusing on the human aspect of sustainability. His thesis was entitled “Insights into social empowerment through peer and mentoring support of young adult refugees in Malta” and it centred on the group Spark 15, which was in its infancy at that stage. It discussed the dynamics found within the group and the opportunities gained through being a member of such a group. Currently, Paul works in a primary school and he still forms part of Spark 15, acting as a mentor to the group.

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**Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja** is a systemic intercultural psychologist and international trainer/ consultant. She has worked with migrants and refugees for Doctors of the World, UNICEF and the Red Cross in various countries. From 2006 to 2011, she was an educational adviser for the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe. Currently, Nadine is a co-manager of the Intercultural Institute of Systemic Competences (IICoS). She specialises in solution-focused psychotraumatology and has been working as a psychotherapist for unaccompanied minors in France and Germany for many years. She also supervises and trains teams of social workers and educators in refugee shelters and teaches intercultural competences in various university courses in Germany and France.

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**Maria Pisani**, PhD, is a lecturer with the department of Youth and Community Studies, University of Malta and a youth worker by profession. Maria also lectures on the MA in Humanitarian Action, and is Deputy Director (Malta) on the Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA). She is the co-founder and director of Integra Foundation, an NGO that focuses on advocacy, and the provision of non-formal education in the community – with a special focus on asylum seekers and refugees. Maria has published in international journals and contributed to edited texts. Her research interests include forced migration with a special focus on gender, “race” and colonialism, youth, national identity, citizenship and intersectionality. She combines this work with her interest in critical pedagogy and engaging praxis as a project of social transformation towards social justice.

**Catherine Raya Polishchuk** completed her MA in Anthropology and Sociology of Development at the Graduate Institute Geneva (IHEID) in the summer of 2017. As a student, but also as a citizen of our planet, she has been involved in various initiatives, the most notable being the organisation Essaim d’Accueil, of which she is a co-founder. Currently working at B Lab (Switzerland), a not-for-profit organisation promoting a more inclusive and conscious economy, she looks forward to returning to academia by way of a PhD focusing on the (re-)production of symbolic violence by democratic nation states.

**Maura Ryckebusch** did an internship at Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, supporting the Altoctonen van de Toekomst youth project, in the autumn of 2017. She got inspired by the positive energy of the group and stayed involved as a volunteer. Since February 2018, she has worked as a project employee at the integration services of Sint-Pieters-Leeuw: supporting refugees in Sint-Pieters-Leeuw and co-ordinating projects.

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**Simon Williams** is a senior lecturer for Youth Work and Community Development at the University of Derby, involved in teaching and preparing placement opportunities for students on the course. Simon has a background in youth and community work with new arrivals, which includes asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants. Simon has recently been actively involved in working with European communities in Derby, and a part of this was developing Roma Community Care, the first Roma-led self-sustaining advocacy service. Simon was also involved in establishing open youth work spaces, forums and training in the city with a wide network of agencies working with new arrivals. Simon continues to research the areas of inequality and identity with new arrivals, as well as exploring the role of youth work and community development in interprofessional practice.

**Wilke Ziemann** graduated from Jena University of Applied Sciences (Diplom), as well as law and German studies at the University of Bochum. He is head of the programme department of the German Children and Youth Foundation and a member of the management with nationwide educational projects. His special focus is on the following topics: integration of refugees, youth commitment, entrepreneurial education, in-service training. In addition, he is involved in international networks and projects such as school companies and City-as-School.

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This *Youth Knowledge* book presents theoretical references and reflections on the experiences of young refugees and the way they reconcile personal hope with the tensions within their host societies. It also explores learning from practices and their theoretical underpinnings concerning the role of youth work in a cross-sectoral approach. This book aims to be a reference for policy makers, practitioners and researchers in the youth field and stakeholders from other sectors working on inclusion, access to rights and the participation of young refugees.

All the contributors propose a very critical engagement with the reality of young refugees in today's Europe, where tolerance levels for negative phenomena, such as human rights violations, hate speech and discrimination, are on the rise. However, there is also an underlying message of hope for those willing to engage in a human rights-based youth work practice that ensures safe spaces for being young, no matter who, no matter where. Practices and reflections deal with democracy, activism, participation, formal and non-formal education and learning, employment, trauma, "waitinghood" and negotiating identities.

We hope this book as a whole, and each individual contribution, will inspire youth policy makers and practitioners to take on board the complex realities of unfinished transitions and borderland experiences and create a positive environment for an enriched and transformed youth work for the inclusion of young refugees in their host communities.

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