

# SUMMARY

## OF INTEGRATING REFUGEES THROUGH YOUTH WORK ACTIVITIES RESEARCH



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## Summary of the research

In recent years, migration has put a huge pressure in many European countries. There is an emerging reflection on how to ensure a faster and more efficient integration of the immigrants. Youth sector has the challenging task to develop mid to long-term responses to help the big proportion of migrants, who are young people themselves, integrate in their new communities and participate actively in public life. Some activities under Erasmus+ Programme are already focusing on integration of young refugees. One of the projects, financed by this Programme, **“Together: refugees & youth” (TRY)** aims to create a special programme in which youth workers would include refugees in their work. Special attention is given to situation of Lithuania and Latvia. Project has two-way orientations. The way the youth would get a chance to develop in a multicultural environment – thus building up their tolerance and increasing multilingualism. Another, the refugees would integrate into the society, since the youth would help them with the local language, culture, traditions, etc. In order to implement **TRY** project successfully, research is made, to provide related evidence for enhancing youth work practice, to understand better the current reality, the potential of youth work in coordinated intervention of social integration of refugees in new communities. The aim of research is to examine the possibilities of integrating refugees through youth work activities in Lithuania and Latvia (research countries).



Erasmus+



## Refugee Statistical Data Overview

Over one million refugees and migrants (1 015 078) have made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean into Europe in 2015. The majority (850,000) has crossed from Turkey to Greece through the Aegean and Dodecanese seas<sup>1</sup>. Situation in 2016 is staying similar - 289 374 arrivals by the sea, 3 173 dead/missing<sup>2</sup>. This movement constitutes one of the largest movements of displaced people through European borders since World War Two. In 2015, 59.5 million people are displaced around the world, an increase of 8.3 million since 2014. Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. Since early 2011, the primary reason for this acceleration has been the war in Syria, now the world's single largest driver of displacement. On average, every day last year, 42,500 people became refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced, a four-fold increase in just four years. Meanwhile, decades-old instability and conflict around the world, for example in Afghanistan and Somalia, means that millions of people remain on the move or – as is increasingly common – stranded for years on the edge of society as long-term internally displaced people or refugees. There are thousands of forced migrants arriving every day on Europe's shores and most of them are young. In the first seven months of this year, 67 percent of them were

1 Figures valid as of 31 December 2015, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

2 Figures valid of August 2016, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

between the ages of 14 and 34.<sup>3</sup>

## Existing research on refugees in Europe

Studies that are conducted in Europe are usually focused on the attitudes towards the migrants and refugees (recently reporting that 54 percent of Lithuanians are keen to accept refugees<sup>4</sup>), the conditions of living and integration, the factors that are standing in the way or helping it. The policies are overviewed and evaluated and, often, criticized. Yet, there are also studies that make recommendations directed towards the issues of young refugees. One of those is the study on integration of young immigrants that was conducted by FutureLab Europe (2015)<sup>5</sup>. We found the following recommendations the most relevant to the youth field:

- » Work with mixed groups (migrants and non migrants) should be implemented.
- » NGOs should encourage civic and democratic participation of migrants. Trainings on civic participation, meetings with local deputies, excursions to city halls etc. should be further developed.
- » NGOs can involve migrants as project leaders. More projects dealing with the integration of third country nationals should prepare and encourage migrants to become project leaders, as they are often the most appropriate persons who can help other migrants to understand both the culture of the country of origin and of the host country.

## Legal Basis

Numerous legal documents are introduced on the European level as well as on national levels that differ in the terms of content and form. Yet, all the documents comply with the main principles of Human Rights and are guaranteeing the access to the territory as an important part of the right to asylum that is in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Latvian Asylum Law, adopted in 2009 and last amended in 2013, establishes the asylum procedure and reception conditions for asylum-seekers, as well as some of the content of the protection granted. It guarantees equal rights for refugees and persons with alternative status to information (Art. 34), while the rights granted to the respective groups differ in regard to residence status (Art. 36), social benefits (Art. 37(1)(2), and family unity (Art. 38(1)(3).

The Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners No IX-2206 ("Foreigners Law") has only a few articles of relevance to the integration of refugees. First, it stipulates that the state of Lithuania shall provide conditions for foreigners holding a residence permit to integrate into the political, economic and socio-cultural life of the state in accordance with the procedure established by laws. Second, it provides for the allocation of state funds for the implementation of a national policy in the area of refugee integration alongside the resources provided by international organizations, EU structural funds, humanitarian aid foundations and NGO's.

3 This percentage refers to the number of the people from ages 14-34 who applied for asylum in the EU28 in the first 7 months of 2015. European Union's Eurostat database, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

4 Survey „Kiek Lietuva yra nusiteikusi padėti pabėgėliams?“ [http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Kiek.Lt\\_nusiteike.padeti-pabegeliams\\_santrauka.pdf](http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Kiek.Lt_nusiteike.padeti-pabegeliams_santrauka.pdf)

5 FutureLab Europe, April 2015, available at [http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub\\_5495\\_fle\\_publication.pdf](http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_5495_fle_publication.pdf)



## Youth work and refugees

According to the reports from 27 European Union countries, “Youth work is also defined by its broader more societal aims which are participation in democratic societies, prevention and **social inclusion and cohesion**”<sup>6</sup>. One of the core and thematic priority areas identified across government youth policies and funding programmes is targeting disadvantaged young people.<sup>7</sup> As young refugees are falling into the category of being disadvantaged and are qualifying as young people, they are becoming a concern of youth policy that is targeting different areas of social life. Young people with migrant backgrounds are one of the target groups that are not sufficiently reached by youth work. According to the report on youth work by the European Commission, “Participation in the activities of organisations that work with young people is linked to the (peer-) culture and the image of the organisations working with youth. Certain forms of activities tend to be associated with youth from certain socio-economic and cultural background. Some country reports note that the more ‘traditional’ and long established forms of youth work struggle to reach out to the target groups that do not share the same cultural references as the majority population. This is in particular highlighted when it comes to young people with migrant backgrounds or different ethnic origins (noted in country reports of French Speaking Community of Belgium as well as the Flemish speaking community, Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Poland, Spain, and UK-Scotland)”<sup>8</sup>. This is the reason why youth organizations and youth centres should look into the activities that they are proposing and critically evaluate the suitability of the activities to vulnerable groups (as refugees) as well as the accessibility of it to more various groups.

6 Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council on youth work, Brussels, 18 and 19 November 2010.

7 Dunne, A., Ulicna, D., Murphy, I., Golubeva, M. (2014). Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/study/youth-work-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf)

8 Dunne et al (2014).

## Examples of Best Practices

Refugees and family members, arriving to European countries, are usually entitled to participate in the integration or introduction programmes that include: basic welfare, language training (in order for the refugees to communicate with locals more freely); social studies or civic orientation, focusing on the values of the country of arrival, for example in French Republic the classes consist of the topics on secularism, gender equality, fundamental freedoms, and education system and the organization and functioning of the French State and institutions. In some countries the introduction to the local culture is made, measures to attain skills for labour market participation/continue education are introduced. The psychological support, medical care and legal assistance is provided. In most countries NGOs as well as national institutions are organizing the support measures; in some cases NGOs are overtaking some of the responsibilities in others are contributing to them. For example Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) is implementing project "Legal Assistance and Representation of UNHCR's Persons of Concern". Activities of the project are designed to strengthen and improve the quality of the legal representation in the national asylum practice, enhance fundamental human rights and strengthen the principle of rule of law in the country.

Some of the more exclusive programmes are implemented in the following countries:

**CZECH REPUBLIC.** The campaign „Express your solidarity with refugees!“ is promoting tolerant debate around refugees. It calls on citizens not to be silent and publicly denounce racism and xenophobia.

**AUSTRIA.** "Refugee Buddies" programme - locals engage voluntarily at a variety of organizations, and meet regularly with one refugee, in order to establish personal relations. The programme "Mentoring for migrants", has been extended to highly-qualified refugees. the Austrian Federal Train Service (ÖBB) started the "Diversity as Chance" ("Diversität als Chance") project and offered 50 unaccompanied refugees between 15 and 17 year old apprenticeships. Open youth centres in Austria are actively working with young refugees by involving them into daily activities.

**HUNGARY.** The „Welcome Migrants“ project is producing short documentary clips featuring four well-known public figures welcoming a migrant in their home for a week.

**GERMANY<sup>9</sup>.** Local sport clubs are responsible for organizing activities for immigrants since 1989. The aim of the programme "Integration through sport" is to allow immigrants to participate in the life of various different associations and in training and competitions over the long term.

**SWEDEN<sup>10</sup>.** The Wallenberg Foundation is implementing support education and training activities for young people and refugees from disadvantaged areas. The initiative includes summer schools in scientific subjects, intensive courses in Swedish, and tutoring for students who have recently arrived.

**WE WELCOME  
REFUGEES**

9 More information available at [http://www.integration-durch-sport.de/fileadmin/fm-dosb/arbeitsfelder/ids/images/2014/Flyer\\_Programm\\_ENGLISCH.pdf](http://www.integration-durch-sport.de/fileadmin/fm-dosb/arbeitsfelder/ids/images/2014/Flyer_Programm_ENGLISCH.pdf)

10 More information available at <http://www.efc.be/news/wallenberg-foundations-launch-initiatives-support-integration-young-refugees-education-training/>

## Empirical Research

**Implementation of research** was done by 2 researchers, who at the same time were over-viewing existing research and data as well as organized and performed in-depth interviews and focus groups. In – depth interviews were conducted with the following groups:

- » **Representatives of the organizations** that are working with refugees on daily basis. Two types of organizations were chosen: state institutions and NGO's. The aim of these interviews was to examine what kind of strategies, programmes and long – term projects are implemented, what elements are successful, which are not, what challenges are faced, how they are dealing with them, etc. 8 interviews were conducted: 2 representatives from state institution in Lithuania; 2 representatives from state institution in Latvia; 2 representatives from NGO in Lithuania; 2 representatives from NGO in Latvia.
- » **Youth workers**, working in youth centers in different regions of Lithuania and Latvia. Youth workers were selected according to their working experience (not less than 3 years of direct work experience with young people). The aim of these interviews is to collect opinions and proposals on if and how young refugees could be involved into youth work activities, types of activities that would be feasible and the readiness of the youth workers to take over new activities or to adjust old ones. 6 interviews were conducted: 3 with youth workers from Lithuania and 3 with youth workers from Latvia.
- » **Young refugees**. Aim – to investigate the opinions and points of view regarding involvement into/ through youth work and youth activities. Young refugees were asked for their opinions about the proposed activities. Questionnaire for young refugees was made based on the proposals of youth workers; youth centre users and youth NGO representatives. It gives a little bit more focus on proposed activities and helped finding out which activities might be interesting for young refugees. 6 interviews were conducted: 3 with young refugees in Lithuania and 3 with young refugees in Latvia.
- » **Focus groups** were organized with 2 different groups: youth centre users (14 - 21 years old) and young people from youth NGOs (17 - 29 years old). 4 focus groups were organized in total (2 in Lithuania and 2 in Latvia). The aim of the focus groups was to learn how the young people approach the integration of young refugees into the activities of youth centres and NGOs. Young people were asked to describe their usual activities, to brainstorm for the ideas how the young refugees could be integrated into societies and if/how they could be included into common actions.

## Key results

**Representatives from public institutions and NGOs**, who are working or used to be working (more than 10 years of experience) in one of the few institutions or organizations dealing with refugees were interviewed regarding the work that is done. The interviewees presented their experience in working with refugees and overviewed what is being done by their organizations. The common themes that were appearing the most were the integration problems of refugees because of the stereotypes and prejudice that are vivid in Lithuania and Latvia, the language barrier, lack of financing, time and human resources.

Both the public institutions and NGOs have a lot to do with the documentation, formalities and basic integration of refugees: providing legal advice, social assistance, ensuring health care, the possibility for the children to attend kindergartens or schools, solving issues or conflicts appearing in schools, are monitoring if the children are attending school, dealing with their integration into labour market etc. Basic criteria for successful social integration of refugees were named their motivation to stay, which is influenced by several factors. When asked if there are some extra activities or programmes for young people, the interviewees

acknowledged that there are no such programmes and the refugees are less divided by the age groups, but more according to the gender: special activities are organized for moms with kids, some arts and crafts, cooking activities. Sports activities were mainly organized for male part of the refugees who are the majority (in Latvia) of the refugees in general. By the interviewees it was mentioned that the success of integration and creating social ties are a lot more frequent among young people.

Experienced (at least 3 years of experience working directly with young people) **youth workers** from Latvia and Lithuania were interviewed regarding the possibilities to include refugees in the activities provided by youth centres. During the in-depth interviews the following themes were covered: the activities of the youth centres, the activities that the youth centres could offer the refugees, preparation that is needed for the youth workers in order to work with a different target group, opportunities and challenges that the youth workers see in the integration of young refugees.

The youth workers from Latvia and Lithuania were asked about the activities that are usually implemented in the youth centres that they are working in. A variety of **activities** were presented: hanging out and communicating; board games; foosball (table football); watching YouTube videos; watching movies; celebrating birthdays and holidays; cultural evenings (telling about the country, culture, customs, singing songs, dancing, cooking traditional dishes); cooking; quizzes; sleep-overs; crafts; robotics; programming; creating websites (learning how to do it); playing musical instruments; break dance lessons; sports (football, volleyball, basketball); trips; experiential hikes; camping; orientation games.

As the interviewees were asked which of the regular activities would be suitable for refugees, the most common answer was “all of them”. It was also stressed out that working with young refugees should be started with simple socialization activities like board games or sports, which should lead to learning more about the needs and interests of young people and address those needs in the future.

In general youth workers took the idea of working with refugees positively, some said that if not the youth workers, then who else could take over this mission to contribute to integration of refugees to the society, others mentioned the educational potential of people with different background joining the youth centre as “there would be new topics to discuss with young people: diversity, tolerance, stereotypes.” To sum up, youth workers are claiming that the best way of integration is to treat the refugees as any other young people who are coming to the youth centre. Youth workers are a little bit cautious that new attendants of youth centres would result in new challenges as well as the ability of each and every youth worker to take on working with a more diverse group and seek for more targeted training.

**Young people** were interviewed in focus groups: 2 groups were formed from young people aged from 14 to 21 years old who are attending youth centres; other 2 groups were formed from young people aged from 17 to 29 years old who are members of youth NGOs. Main themes that were addressed in these focus groups were the following: stereotypes and prejudice about the refugees, the role of media in forming the public opinion about refugees, activities of youth centres and youth organizations, possibilities to include refugees into the regular activities or organizing new ones, interests of young people, possibilities of cross-institutional cooperation.

The main issues raised by young people did not differ in regard with their age group or the organization (youth centre or youth NGO) they were identifying their selves with. The opinions and proposals of young people from Lithuania and Latvia also did not differ significantly. For these reasons we are presenting the findings from all 4 focus groups that included 35 young people aged from 14 to 29 years.

Young people were asked what could refugees do in their youth centre or their organizations and 3 *types of participation* were distinguished:

1. Young refugee as a **service user**. Representatives from youth NGOs were first proposing to attend events organized by their organizations or to come for consults regarding

adjusting to a new city, knowing the opportunities for studies or work. So to be a kind of customers. Representatives from student unions mentioned that “with refugees there probably would be as much work as with Erasmus students” and the refugees have the right to be represented as any other student. Since none of the youth NGOs (that were interviewed) are focusing their work on integration of refugees (yet), they did not propose any special activities that would be exclusively for young people of refugee background, but are considering the refugees as any other foreigner.

2. Young refugee as a **resource** because of the difference. Young people both from youth centres and youth NGOs were very fast to indicate that it would be very interesting to know more about the cultures of refugees and to involve them into the events as special guests or if the refugees would decide to join the NGO, to have him or her use their knowledge and experience to help other refugees or to organize special events for them.
3. Young refugee as a **member or co-worker** of an NGO or an **attendee** of a youth centre. Young people stressed that their organizations and youth centres are open and they would be glad if more various people would join them in the regular activities. As young people presume that the refugees speak English or will know some Lithuanian or Latvian, they can easily join the organizations and be accepted.

The same as youth workers, young people mainly mentioned that all the regular activities of the organizations or youth centres are suitable for all the people and refugees should join according to their interests: “when we’re talking about refugees, we’re talking about a group of people, but we are forgetting that they have different characters, likes and dislikes. These are the aspects that need to be taken into consideration before planning the activities.” Young people discarded the idea of organizing activities exclusively for refugees and pointed out that youth organizations or youth centres are a great platform to start integration in a new country by finding friends, learning about cultures, norms, daily life.

Young people have mainly positive attitudes towards refugees, they do understand the difficulties that the refugees are facing and are keen on meeting them, learning about countries and cultures that are unknown to them. At the same time there is an open question about cultural differences that need to be addressed.

Lists of proposed activities were provided to the **refugees** (6 respondents) via the social workers that are working with them directly because of the current circumstances that were also described in the previous interviews or focus groups – refugees are presented negatively in the media and refugees do not trust people from outside as their words are majorly misinterpreted. List of activities was provided from proposals, gathered from interviews with youth workers and focus groups with young people. Respondents could show which activity they would like or dislike.

The following activities were chosen to be interesting to the refugees: hanging out and communicating; board games; foosball (table football); watching movies; cultural evenings (telling about the country, culture, customs, singing songs, dancing, cooking traditional dishes); cooking; crafts; creating websites (learning how to do it); playing musical instruments; sports (football, volleyball, basketball); trips; participating in events; getting consultations and relevant information on the topics that is interesting.

Lower threshold activities were chosen by the refugees that were aged 18 to 27 years old. It is presumable that some of the activities were not chosen as interesting, because of a too short description or a lack of clarity by what is included in a certain activity. Sports activities were popular as well as cooking or trips.

It is important to note that the refugees would like to be invited to join the organizations of

youth centres as they are aware of the public opinion and do not feel too confident to simply appear at a youth centre or youth organization.

Their willingness to join offered activities depends on their situation: if they are single, do not have psychological problems, already are studying or working, have no problem with housing, etc. “First they need to do everything to survive” – say the interviewees, who are working with integration of refugees. Participation in proposed activities has to have a clear added value for their integration in order to support their motivation to be active.



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## Recommendations

1. A *closer cooperation* between youth NGOs, youth centres and the organizations that are in charge of the socialization of refugees in the country *needs to be encouraged*. While the “organizations in charge” are swamped with documentation, legal aid, formal requirements and lack of human resources, youth centres and youth NGOs could involve people of migrant or refugee background into activities where they could meet and socialize with locals. Using already existing activities young people should contribute to building up the social ties between refugees and the local community.
2. Youth organizations and youth centres are welcome to approach organizations that are working directly with refugees and *discuss possible cooperation*. Youth centres and youth NGOs can bring added value to already existing integration measures.
3. *Two-way integration models have to be implemented*. There are two groups of beneficiaries: those who are refugees or asylum seekers and those who are members of the local community. NGO’s should be working towards local communities to be more tolerant. It is important to keep in mind that cultural differences, respect, intercultural learning and integration questions should be addressed in work with young people as the need for refugees “to live by the norms of the countries who are accepting them” was expressed intensively. The topic is sensitive, so it would be necessary to discuss integration, assimilation and do these words mean to young people.
4. Youth organizations should join other actors in the field and *provide services* for young refugees, such as psychological or academic consultations. It is important to involve tar-

get group of proposed services in constructing such services in order to meet their needs.

5. Open youth centres, focusing on the social work with young people, are contributing a great deal to the integration of socially vulnerable groups in different cities and towns; they can be one of the *key actors in socialization of young refugees*. Before starting work with them, each element must be well thought out. It should start with the simplest activities, giving them time to do nothing, not to put pressure and high expectations.
6. Youth centres and youth NGOs, before starting work with social integration of refugees have to assess their own capabilities, resources, etc. Organizations shouldn't depart extremely from *what they do the best*. "Hunting for finances", were additional funds are allocated can lead to distortion of institution.
7. *Youth workers need to receive training* on working with young people from refugee background and including them into activities with local youth. The training should include intercultural learning, human rights education, diversity, work with groups, conflict management, and interfaith.
8. The organizations that are already working with refugees should cooperate with youth organizations in *putting effort to influence the media* coverage of the refugee's topic.
9. Youth workers should take into consideration that even though they do not have to "put out the fires" and start working with young refugees now, they *should be dedicating the time and start preparing young people for interaction and living with others*.





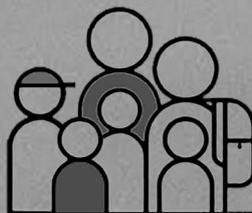
**together**  
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POLITIKOS TYRIMŲ IR ANALIZĖS  
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