Erasmus Mundus MA Advanced Development in Social Work

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Determinants of the Integration of Teenage Refugees into Non-Formal Education: Perceptions of Estonian Youth Workers

Research Project in International Social Work

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Table of contents

Abstract and keywords

This study aims to examine the perceptions of Estonian youth workers about the determinants of the integration of teenage refugees into local non-formal education programs in their new country of residence. The context of the study is an unprecedented situation in Estonia - the arrival of around 130 000 Ukrainian war refugees during 16 months from February 2022 to June 2023. 22 % of refugees are minors. Teenage war refugees are the new target group for Estonian youth work, although the issues of minority integration have been relevant in the country for decades.

Within the framework of this research project, two methods of information collection from the youth workers were used: firstly, the secondary analysis of an online questionnaire with open-ended questions conducted by the Estonian Association of Youth Workers (14 respondents), and secondly, the analysis of the interviews conducted by the author of this research project (7 interviews).

As a result, five determinants were described, namely the competence of the youth workers; previous experience with diversity in a specific non-formal education environment; the ability of refugees, locals, and youth workers to overlook the unpredictability of the refugee situation; community and political support for the mutual integration of refugees and locals; policy and practice in language issues in society, in community, and in specific non-formal education environment.

Regarding the results, it should be considered that most of the youth workers who answered the questionnaire and all who agreed to the interview were highly qualified and had an average of 13 years of work experience, i.e., are top specialists in their field. Thus, their ability to cope with critical situations in practice and their reflection skills is at great probability higher than that of beginners or employees without professional training.

The research project results will be presented to authorities in several conferences and articles to develop and implement efficient support measures for youth work institutions and youth workers to integrate teenage refugees better into local non-formal education initiatives.

Keywords: integration, refugees, non-formal education, youth workers

Key definitions

Integration is used in a current research project as an individual's seamless transition into the environment and becoming a natural part of the whole. In a broader sense, integration is a "process of mutual engagement that facilitates effective participation by all members of a diverse society in economic, political, social and cultural life, and fosters a shared sense of belonging at national and local levels" (OECD, 2023). "The integration of refugees is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population" (UNCHR, 2014).

Refugees are people who have crossed an international border to escape war, violence, conflict, or persecution and find safety in another country (UNCHR, 2023). Differently from voluntary immigrants, refugees are in a forced situation; crossing a border is not a well-prepared and voluntary mobility. (However, the experience of minors with immigration is different from that of adults (even if they are not in a refugee situation) because they are always more or less in a forced situation due to their dependence on their parents. Parents decide on the mobility of their (underage) children.) The expression *teenage refugees* mean refugees aged between 13 and 19 in this research project. The expression derives from the English numbers that end with the abbreviation "teen", i.e., thirteen to nineteen. However, the exact age limits are not particularly important in the current research project – teenager or adolescence is understood as a transition period between childhood and adulthood.

Non-formal education is any educational activity that takes place outside of the formal education system. It is a purposive "voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional facilitators or by volunteers" (Glossary, 2023). Non-formal

learning/education in youth work is often structured, based on learning objectives, learning time, and specific learning support and it is intentional (Glossary, 2023).

Youth workers directly contact young people and carry out activities to support their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning. Youth workers can be professionals or volunteers and can be civil servants or work for NGOs (European, 2015). In Estonia, a youth worker is understood as a specialist who helps young people aged 7-26 achieve their goals by clarifying their needs and goals together with the young person. A youth worker creates a trusting relationship with young people and cooperates with parents and other workers around young people, e.g., teachers, youth police officers, etc. A youth worker organises and develops youth work; for example, he organises youth work activities, mediates youth information, manages youth work organisations, and develops youth policy and youth work. The youth worker supports the development of entrepreneurship, self-initiative, and responsibility among young people. It is assumed that a person completes the corresponding curriculum or applies for a professional certificate through the Estonian Youth Worker Association to be a youth worker. There are around 7500 youth workers in Estonia. (Haridusportaal, 2023)

Introduction

Youth work operates at the intersection of social work and education, integrating the opportunities and challenges of the two fields. Non-formal education has often been presented as an efficient tool for integrating people from different backgrounds (Henriques & Bajja, 2018; Berry, 2011; Lipnickienė et al., 2018, etc.). Relying on this reputation, high expectations are set for youth workers in today's world in the integration field.

This topic became particularly focused in Estonia due to the unprecedented situation - the arrival of many Ukrainian war refugees in 2022-2023. As of June 15, 2023, 134 472 Ukrainian refugees have entered Estonia, and 55 % (n=73 654) have remained there. 22 % of refugees (n=29 541) are minors. 29 % of refugee minors (n=8498) are Estonian formal education system registered students. (Kriis, 2023) Since many refugees are teenagers who are the target group for youth work and may not be registered in the Estonian formal education system, there is an urgent need to develop, implement and analyse the integration practices in non-formal education.

What makes Estonia's situation special is that the issues of minority integration have been relevant in the country for a long time, although not in the context of war refugees. As of 2023, 68 % (n=925 892) of Estonian inhabitants are Estonians, 22 % (n=306 801) are Russians, and 10 % (n=133 191) are representatives of other nations (Statistikaamet, 2023). This research project does not delve into the reasons for this situation but examines, among other things, how this long-term experience of integrating different nationalities can affect the integration of teenage war refugees. Based on practical experience, the author can assume that young people and youth workers have had time to reflect and act on integration issues far before the arrival of refugees from Ukraine - for example, in 2016-2020 the national youth initiative support program "Nopi üles!" (Pick Up!) took place intending to support youth-initiated Estonian and Estonian-Russian youth integration projects (Linno, 2018). In the years 2015–2021, the state-funded youth integration program "Noortekohtumised" (Youth Meetings) took

place, which supported the establishment of contacts between foreign-speaking youth living in Estonia and Estonian-speaking youth. During this time, a total of nearly 12,000 young people participated in the program, which created a safe environment for young people where everyone supports each other, and every young person understands that making mistakes and learning from them is an important part of any learning process. (Nurgamaa & Tetsmann, 2022) There are also several good examples of studies on the integration potential of youth work. For example, Petuhhova (2019) analysed the impact of collaborative gamification on integrating the Estonian and Estonian-Russian youth into each other. In this action research, Petuhhova tested gamification effects on groups of 20 young people, 80 participants in total, half of them Estonians and half Estonian Russians. By the end of the project, different aspects of attitudes toward each other became more positive, especially the wish to communicate with each other. "Through such projects, it is possible to create positive memories and feelings of solidarity, which is very important for the integration process," concludes the researcher (Petuhhova, 2019, p. 87).

There seems to be a consensus in Estonia that youth work has great potential to rise tolerance not only among young people themselves but in the whole society because, as a rule, youth work activities take place in close cooperation with the local community (Linno, 2018).

The integration of immigrants, including war refugees, is a topical issue throughout Europe. More than one in ten 15-year-olds in European schools are first and second-generation migrants; more than 30% of all asylum requests concerned children (Lipnickienė et al., 2018, p. 3). On the one hand, more and more experiences are added, but on the other hand, social problems can also multiply if these experiences are not wisely converted into knowledge.

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers disagree about the extent to which immigrants, especially war refugees, should be treated similarly to locals and the extent to which different approaches are needed. In a comparison of 17 European countries,

including Estonia, it has been found that when implementing non-formal education programs, governments usually target all children without an explicit aim at migrant integration (Lipnickienė et al., 2018, 4). Also, most observed countries have no systematic training for educational professionals on how to engage with non-formal education in EU countries. There are also limited training opportunities for non-formal education providers across Europe, and even though there are more and more various non-formal education opportunities available in many countries, there is very limited research and evaluation data on their quality, key success factors for migrant inclusion and impact (Lipnickienė et al., 2018; 5). Official statistics and monitoring data on the quality, accessibility, and affordability of non-formal education activities are rarely collected. Most of the existing data relies on the perceptions of stakeholders and program organisers. (ibid)

Researchers have pointed out that "while many structural barriers determine an ethnic group's place of residence, school choices, and job selection, and it takes time and a great deal of effort to make changes in them, many leisure time activities have a much lower threshold for participation. Leisure time, therefore, also has a strong potential to bring together different ethnic groups." (Kukk 2019)

Globally, migration in general and the integration of war refugees more narrowly is an extremely important topic. Better means of transportation and connections make it easier for people to move around today than ever before. Unfortunately, the reasons for becoming a refugee have not decreased. On the contrary, an ever-increasing need for human relocation is predicted in the future due to climate change. Thus, social work with refugees is a topic of great international interest. The present research work is one small piece in expanding related knowledge.

A kind of confirmation that social work with refugees has an important place in today's world is the fact that works on this topic have already been completed within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus MA Advanced Development in Social Work. Different aspects of this field of work have been observed in different countries

(Ethiopia, France) and from the perspective of different interventions (using games to support child refugees, family hosting, and preventing gender violence) (Thesis, 2023). This work is partly inspired by Panagiota Kortomaniti's research project "The voices of social workers in the integration of refugee children and families. A comparative perspective, Greece and Portugal", which was one of the few that was publicly available. The author of this master's thesis states that practitioners' perspectives are rarely heard by researchers, and not much research is available on the experiences of professionals who work with refugees (Kortomaniti, 2016).

The author of a current research project set a clear and narrow focus for the work. The purpose of the research project is to find out which factors, according to youth workers, have the greatest weight in the integration of teenage refugees into non-formal education. Therefore, the work no longer investigates whether non-formal education is an effective measure of integration (because it has been proven to date) but rather maps the determinants of a specific adolescent's integration. Practitioners-youth workers share their views based on their experiences, and the task of the author of the work is to look for commonalities and differences in them to offer recommendations for the future.

The current written part of the research project consists of four main chapters. The first main chapter is a literature review, which provides a theoretical overview of three thematic blocks related to the research project: integration in society in general; integration in education, youth work, and leisure activities; and impact assessment of youth work and integration. It is necessary to understand the background, meaning, and role of integration today and the factors influencing it to find out what are the determinants of the integration of teenage refugees into non-formal education. On the other hand, the title and problem statement of the current work contains the understanding that there are successful and unsuccessful interventions, and if we study the determinants of successful integration, we also need to understand how the understanding of success has arisen in the first place and how success is measured.

The second chapter covers methodology and ethics. Although the chapter is short compared to other main chapters, its importance cannot be underestimated. Any research that strives for high quality must be sensitive to issues of ethics and bias. Although the current student work does not claim great generalizability or representativeness due to the chosen methodology and the author's limited research experience, the author aspires to be ethically impeccable and aware of possible biases. As part of the research project is a secondary analysis, the author cannot change the conditions of the survey, but be aware of them and do their best to mitigate risks (first, the possibility of identifying the respondent is kept in mind). Several respondents were very forthright in referring to the location of their activities - in this writing, such concrete facts are left aside in the presentation of the results, and the focus is on principled positions or specific examples without highlighting names and geographical locations. The chapter describes the principles of sampling and warns the reader against possible distortions of reality resulting from the sampling and methodology.

Findings are presented in the third main chapter. This chapter synthesises the input from the two methods of data collection (survey and interviews) into five main results. Numerous quotes from participants are provided to illustrate these results. The results are linked to the outcomes of the literature review, and by discussing them, important steps are taken to prepare the fourth and last main chapter, "Conclusions and recommendations". The fourth chapter summarises the journey of this research project and hopefully inspires the next researchers or research projects to delve into the surprising or currently unclear aspects revealed in this research project.

Due to such a structure, the work will hopefully be a logical and fluent read for anyone interested. The author thanks the supervisor Dr Hélène Join-Lambert for their irreplaceable advice in the process of planning and completing the work - most importantly, in setting the initial over-ambitious research plan in a reasonable and executable framework within the author's abilities and the time frame of the research project. The supervisor's encouragement helped the author to complete the research on time and as per the requirements.

Literature review

This chapter is designed to give the necessary background to the author's research on the determinants of the integration of teenage refugees into non-formal education. The authors' scope of research in this project is a tiny slice of a broad and significant area of social policy and welfare. However, one part of the picture cannot be truly understood without grasping the whole. On the contrary, it is precisely seeing the whole picture that allows one to delve deeper into some detail in such a way that the observed detail does not separate from the whole but emerges as a part of it.

The background of the field is given an overview through two sub-chapters: the first sub-chapter talks about integration more broadly, and after that, the theme of integration in education, youth work, and leisure is examined, not forgetting the aspect of impact assessment in social processes and activities.
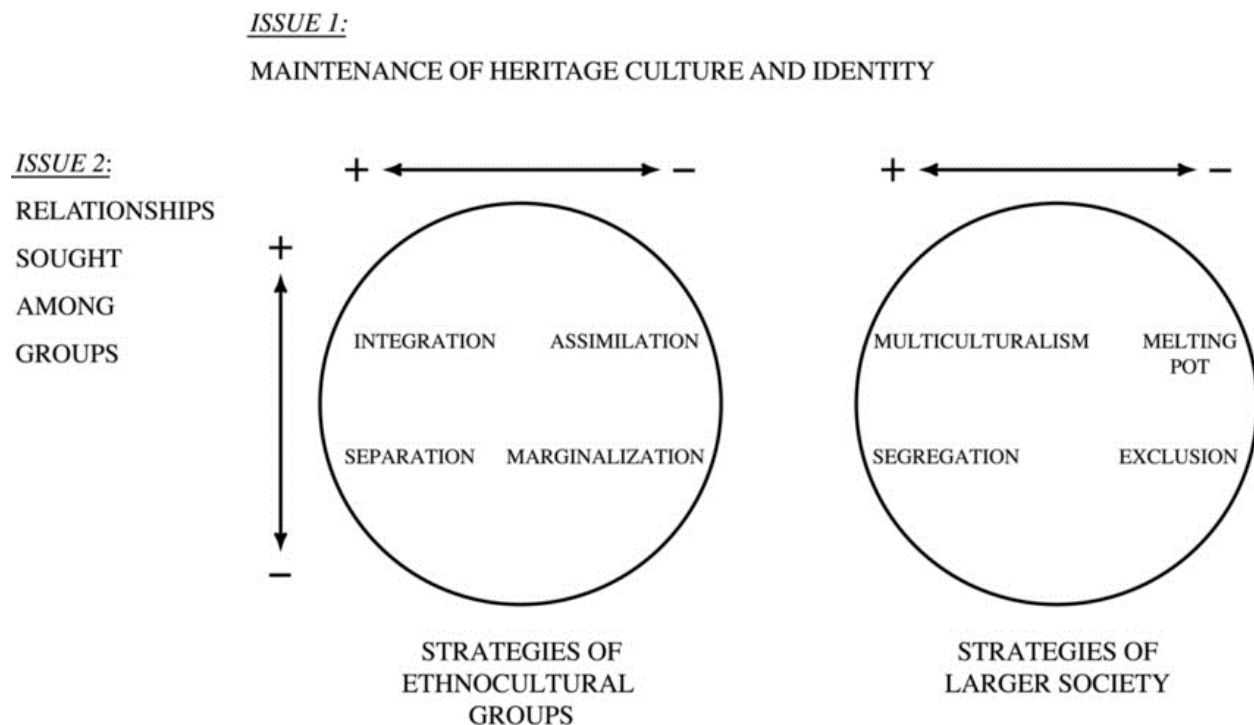
Integration in society

Integration is mostly discussed in terms of the mutual influence of groups, not from an individual point of view, as is the focus of this work. However, these general principles can also be taken to the individual level.

Berry (2011) explains integration from the perspective of identity and relationships, seeing four different solutions in the process (Figure 1). Based on his theory, Petuhhova (2019) opens these solutions in a simplified manner as follows:

1. If the minority nation and the main nation communicate with each other, but the minority nation's culture and identity are not preserved, the result is *inclusion/melting pot* (from the society's point of view) or *assimilation* (from the minority's point of view).
2. If the minority nation and the main nation do not communicate with each other and the minority nation's culture and identity are preserved, the result is

segregation (from the society's point of view) or *separation* (from the minority's point of view).

3. If the minority nation and the main nation interact with each other and at the same time, the culture and identity of the minority nation survive, it is *multiculturalism* (from the society's point of view) or *integration* (from the minority's point of view).

4. If the minority nation and the main nation do not communicate with each other and at the same time, the culture and identity of the minority nation do not survive, it is *exclusion* (from the society's point of view) or *marginalisation* (from the minority's point of view). (Petuhhova 2019)

Figure 1. Intercultural Strategies of Ethnocultural Groups and the Larger Society. (Berry 2011)

It has been found that cultural similarity is a determinant of the smooth integration of immigrants. Analysis of WVS data made by political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel demonstrates that there are two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation in the world:

1. Traditional values versus Secular-rational values and
2. Survival values versus Self-expression values (Figure 2; Inglehart & Welzel, 2023).

Traditional values emphasise the importance of traditional family values, authority, religion, and parent-child ties. These societies have a nationalistic outlook and high levels of national pride.

Secular-rational values have the opposite preferences: less emphasis on religion, traditional family values, and authority.

Survival values emphasise economic and physical security. It is linked with a relatively ethnocentric outlook and low levels of trust and tolerance.

Self-expression values give high priority to environmental protection, growing tolerance of foreigners, gays and lesbians, and rising demands for gender equality and participation in decision-making. (Inglehart & Welzel, 2023)

From Figure 2, we can see that Estonia and Ukraine are quite close in terms of their values, being located quite close in the middle of the figure. This means that there is no major cultural conflict between these countries compared to some other possible pairs (for example, Estonia and Ghana, Ukraine and Sweden).
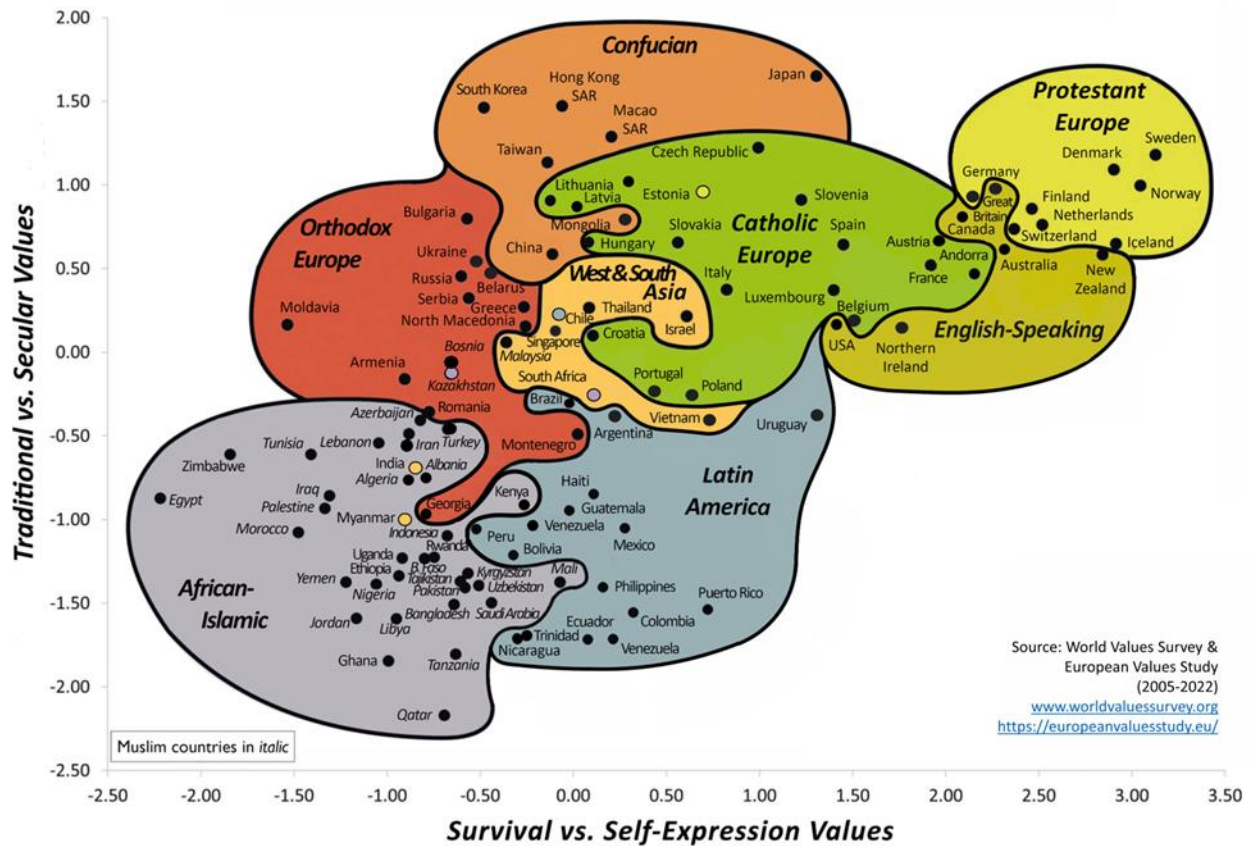
The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023

Figure 2. The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023. Inglehart & Welzel 2023

Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) generalise that by exploring social integration in the context of social inclusion of immigrants, you can distinguish between three dimensions: legal/political, socio-economic, and cultural/religious.

1. *The legal/political dimension*: laws, policies, and political structures that govern the inclusion and participation of individuals or groups within a society. It involves creating a legal framework that ensures equal rights and opportunities for all members, regardless of their background or origin. This dimension includes aspects such as citizenship, immigration policies, non-discrimination laws, and political representation. In the legal/political dimension, integration is achieved through the establishment of inclusive and fair legal systems that protect the rights of all individuals and promote equal treatment. This may involve granting

15

citizenship or legal status to newcomers, providing avenues for political participation and representation, and ensuring access to justice and protection against discrimination.

2. *The socio-economic dimension* of integration focuses on the economic and social aspects of the integration process. It involves providing opportunities for individuals or groups to participate fully in the economic life of a society, access education, healthcare, and social services, and improve their overall well-being. Socio-economic integration aims to address disparities in income, employment, education, and living standards among different groups. In this dimension, integration is achieved by creating inclusive economic policies and social programs that promote equal opportunities and social mobility. This may include measures such as job training and employment support, educational programs that cater to diverse needs, affordable housing initiatives, and social welfare systems designed to assist vulnerable populations.

3. *The cultural/religious dimension* of integration refers to the blending of diverse cultural and religious practices, values, and beliefs within a society. It involves fostering an environment where individuals or groups can maintain their cultural and religious identities while also actively engaging with the broader society. Cultural integration acknowledges and appreciates the diversity of traditions, languages, and customs. In this dimension, integration is achieved by promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding, and respect. It involves initiatives that encourage interaction, exchange, and mutual learning between different cultural and religious communities. This can include programs that celebrate diversity, support multicultural events and festivals, and create spaces for dialogue and collaboration. (Heckmann & Bosswick, 2006; Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, etg)

Heckmann & Bostwick (2006) cite Esser (2000), who proposes four basic forms of individual social integration:

1. *Acculturation* (also termed socialisation) is the process by which an individual acquires the knowledge, cultural standards, and competencies needed to interact successfully in society.
2. *Placement* means an individual gaining a position in society – in the educational or economic systems, in the professions, or as a citizen. Placement also implies the acquisition of rights associated with positions and the opportunity to establish social relations and to win cultural, social, and economic capital. Acculturation is a precondition for placement.
3. *Interaction* is the formation of relationships and networks by individuals who share a mutual orientation. These include friendships, romantic relationships or marriages, or more general membership of social groups.
4. *Identification* refers to an individual's identification with a social system: the person sees him or herself as part of a collective body. Identification has both cognitive and emotional aspects.

Integration in education, youth work, and leisure activities

Integration of immigrants, incl refugees into formal education systems has been the focus of education research for a while. Integrating the results of a long list of research, it has been concluded by Lucie Cerna in 2019 that factors in achieving the learning, social and emotional needs of refugee children include a series of individual, interpersonal, and school-level characteristics, including:
1. *Individual factors*: language proficiency, mother tongue proficiency, and physical and mental health.
2. *Interpersonal factors*: connections with peers as well as family and social support of refugee children.
3. *School-level factors*: learning environment, teacher-student interactions, school engagement, assessment at the school level, extra-curricular activities, and parental involvement in the school community. (Cerna, 2019, 27-33)

The interview questions for the present research project were developed based on this list to check whether Estonian youth workers face similar challenges. School-level factors were modified to youth centre/organisation-level factors.

Research literature and policy documents focus primarily on formal compulsory education when talking about immigrant education. This topic is traditionally also given a lot of attention in research projects and cooperation networks. However, the potential of non-formal education is more and more acknowledged. For example, the "SIRIUS – Policy Network on Migrant Education" which brings together key stakeholders in migration and education from around Europe since 2017, has produced a special report on the role of non-formal education in migrant children inclusion and its' links with schools across 17 EU Member States. (Lipnickienė et al., 2018) In the SIRIUS network, researchers and practitioners agree that cooperation between schools and non-formal education (NFE) actors bring to school flexible approaches that can address the specific needs of vulnerable children as well as enrich learning for all students. (ibid)

Even though understanding of the importance of links between formal and non-formal learning to holistic children's development is growing in research and policy discourse, such collaboration is still limited and unsystematic in practice across many EU Member States (Lipnickienė et al., 2018). The following tendencies can be observed:
1. In many countries, collaboration is partly facilitated through national or regional government policies and programmes.
2. Most of the projects and initiatives, particularly those targeting migrant and refugee children, documented in national reviews were established by NGOs and community organisations.
3. Individual schools are well placed to collaborate with non-formal education actors, provided they have the necessary resources and capacity (Lipnickienė et al., 2018).

There seems to be no complete agreement among educators and policymakers on the importance of non-formal education programs per se. The challenges illustrating the

insufficient recognition of the importance of non-formal education and partnerships involve a lack of validation and assessment of competencies acquired through out-of-school activities and their inclusion into children's learning portfolios, absence of a definition of roles that education authorities, formal and non-formal educators should play in the provision and integration of non-formal education; inconsistent quality of non-formal education activities, etc. (Lipnickienė et al., 2018)

Henriques & Lyamouri–Bajja (2018) have listed challenges in the youth work with refugees as follows:

1. *Unpredictability.* It is not clear how long youth workers will be working with some young people and how the transition to adulthood or the change in legal status will affect their engagement. Furthermore, for some young people, it is not clear if they will stay in that host community or will move to another place.
2. *Competences of youth workers.* While this is not specific to working with young refugees, it is very important to raise the question of whether those working with young refugees are trained on issues such as intercultural dialogue and learning, working on first aid in mental health, working with young people in vulnerable situations, etc.
3. *Intercultural skills.* To speak a common language is a basic step in creating relationships of trust. Sometimes youth workers lack the language skills and the intercultural awareness to interact with some young refugees.
4. *New fields and situations.* Many youth work providers are not used to dealing with mental health and trauma situations. In addition, the stronger focus on safety and legal help is also something new for the sector. This can create stress and pressure on youth workers and lead to burnout.
5. *Funding and partnerships.* Solutions at the local level are essential in contributing to inclusion and participation, but there is a lack of funding available for such programs, and in more isolated areas, there are few possibilities to engage in partnerships with organisations that have the background experience and know-how on migration and asylum.

6. *Lack of political and public support.* Some sectors of society, including authorities and public opinion, are sometimes not that supportive of initiatives for the inclusion and participation of young refugees.

7. *Difficulties in reaching out*, especially to young women and girls and to young refugees in more rural and isolated areas.

8. *Policy dilemmas.* The policy discussion on supporting young refugees is an ongoing one, especially in the youth field. While in some countries, there is a division of responsibilities, and work with young refugees is included in the "integration" policy field, in other countries, youth policy is also concerned. Youth workers must be aware of the existing policy frameworks related to their work. (Henriques & Lyamouri–Bajja; 2018, 20)

The relevance of these challenges to Estonian youth workers was discussed both in the questionnaire and in the interviews.

When talking about the competencies of youth workers, the trauma awareness of youth workers often comes up in the case of refugees as one of the target groups of youth work. Many young refugees arriving in Europe have had to face an important number of traumatic events (separation from family; transit between departure from home and final settlement; experience of war, prosecution, violence etc). The arrival in Europe does not always end the traumatising journey. Rather, additional difficulties or potential repeated trauma often take place: institutional violence of the asylum conditions and procedures; regular relocation from one shelter/city to another; long and difficult access to family reunification; cultural pressure to integrate; etc. (Lyamouri-Bajja 2017: 46-47)

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, the most important conditions for this being social support, the feeling of being useful and busy, not talking about trauma and being secure and having access to basic needs. (Lyamouri-Bajja 2017: 48)

The core principles of trauma-informed youth work include the six guiding principles of trauma-informed approach:

1. *Safety*: Ensuring physical and emotional safety; checking in with young people to see if they feel safe in your program setting.
2. *Trustworthiness*: Being clear and transparent about the program and your position, how things are done in the agency. Being clear about expectations and program structure.
3. *Choice*: Allowing individuals to take part in decision-making regarding their level of participation; giving them choices in programming.
4. *Empowerment*: Ensuring that individuals have a voice during programming; building on their strengths.
5. *Collaboration*: Communicating respect for young people's life experience; communicating that they are the experts on their own lives; working together.
6. *Cultural, historical, and gender issues*: Acknowledging the role culture, history, and gender can play in trauma; actively moving past cultural stereotypes and biases; understanding the healing value of traditional cultural connections. (Dotterwiech 2021)

By adopting a trauma-informed approach, youth workers can create an environment that promotes positive development for young people who have experienced trauma. This approach emphasises compassion, empathy, and understanding, allowing youth workers to better meet the needs of the young individuals they serve.

In the comprehensive research on the cultural integration of Estonians and Estonian Russians, Kukk (2019) has found that two main mechanisms lead to ethnic segmentation and segregation: marginalisation and preferences. Marginalisation entails two aspects, these being a lower socio-economic status which does not permit minorities to be able to afford more costly activities, and discrimination. Prejudice and discrimination, either actual or perceived, limit the options of minorities during their leisure time. The strongest predictor of participation in leisure time activities is age. Younger people participate more in different activities than older people. Each step

during one's life makes people more passive when it comes to participating in out-of-home leisure activities. "For integration to be able to take place, members of both the ethnic minority and the majority population first need to undertake the same activities. Then they need to meet each other during those activities, which means taking part in the same leisure activities (to overcome leisure segmentation) in the same place and at the same time (to overcome leisure segregation)." (Kukk 2019)

Kukk (2019) has suggested: "For Russians to be welcomed into the social networks of Estonians, minorities must be fluent in Estonian and even must distance themselves from other minorities who are not as integrated as they are themselves. Language barriers are therefore still important in facilitating these divisions and ensuring social closure between ethnic groups because it is more convenient to communicate in one's language as it gives one more freedom of expression."

If Kukk (2019) first of all draws attention to obstacles and shortcomings (although admitting that marginalisation is not so common among young people), Jegorova (2022) is certain: "Based on history, it can be said that Estonian youth work has always been multicultural. /---/ Regardless of what nationality the young person is and what language he speaks, as youth workers, we must be able to find a common language and approach for everyone and treat everyone equally." As a practitioner of youth work, Jegorova admits that communication and playful activities are important for younger children, older children want to make friends and practice hobbies, and teenagers look for opportunities for self-realisation, finish their studies and find a job. "Despite their different ages, they all have one thing in common - they all need reassurance that they don't have to run anywhere, leave their things, toys, and pyjamas, and flee away in an unknown direction." (Jegorova, 2022)

Jegorova explains that when it comes to a normal day at the youth centre, young people come to the youth centre just to spend their free time outside of school and at home. Their main concerns are school, homework, and exams. However, when it comes to young Ukrainian refugees, these aspects are not important to them; they want to return

to a safe life as soon as possible. They look for a safe adult or friend who talks, shares experiences, and helps if needed; a person with whom it is pleasant to spend time and at one point forget what is happening in your country. Young people need to see that they are not a burden and that they are welcome here, that they will not be insulted or forced to leave the country again." (Jegorova, 2022)

In Jegorova's experience, most young people in Ukraine speak Russian and, to a lesser extent English, so communicating in the same language makes it possible to quickly establish contact and convey the necessary information. However, the language barrier can become a serious obstacle to the integration of young people - among other things, because parallel to real-life war, there is an information war taking place in the media space and social networks. Speaking of young people, they consume most of their information on the n social media platform TikTok, where everyone has their truth, which in their differences can become and is already becoming a problem and a source of intolerance towards the Ukrainian or Russian people. Photos and videos spread quickly, and the resources are not checked before spreading the info. Unfortunately, there are failures in the development of critical thinking not only among young people but bu also among adults, therefore it is very important that youth workers themselves take courses or training on this topic, as well as train young people to recognise fake news and seek confirmation from sources to stop this information war and wave of aggression. (Jegorova, 2022)

Jegorova sees potential in the fact that Estonian youth work has been multicultural and multilingual for decades. "When it comes to the region of Ida-Virumaa, most of the youth centres and youth organisations do youth work in Russian, as there is a higher proportion of Russian-speaking residents and young people there. This experience has made it possible to use already proven informal methods in youth work today, in the current crisis, to provide help and protection, awareness and social inclusion to people and young people who need it." (Jegorova, 2022)

When discussing the impact of youth work and integration, it is important to also touch on the issues of quality assessment. The author of this work has found in their previous writings about the quality assessment projects in youth work that quality must be viewed on three levels: quality of input, quality of process, and quality of result (Talur, 2009; Talur, 2013; Talur, 2014; Talur, 2019). In this approach, impact evaluation is linked to the third stage, i.e., outcome.

It is always possible to point out some such concrete result, which for the participants very clearly shows the impact of the youth work experience. For example, Nurgamaa & Tetsmann (2022) consider, reflecting on the integration program "Noortekohtumised" (Youth Meetings): "An objective sign of successful integration would certainly be the acquisition of the Estonian language as the national language, but subjective and certainly no less important is the creation of a sense of togetherness and a sense of a common homeland." (Nurgamaa & Tetsmann, 2022) Hands-on practitioners understand this approach.

However, researchers (e.g., Gliske et al., 2020, Hytti et al., 2020) believe that any impact assessment, including in the fields of youth work and integration, is a complex topic. Quantitative and qualitative, short-term, and long-term aspects are intertwined in it, and the prevailing values in society and the different perspectives of individuals and communities on these processes have an important, although sometimes unconscious, influence. In the youth work context, two approaches for impact assessment have been described: a variable-centred approach, assuming the relationships between predictors and outcomes are homogenous across a population, and a person-centred approach which categorises individuals into groups based on a set of pre-identified attributes under the assumption that the population is heterogeneous concerning the relationships between predictors and outcomes (Gliske et al., 2021). Following this logic, adolescent refugees are one subgroup of adolescents with several common features that may lead to different outcomes of youth work interventions compared to local adolescents. The developmental ecological model by Durlak et al. (2010) brings together several aspects that must be noticed when evaluating the impact of youth work – these are the

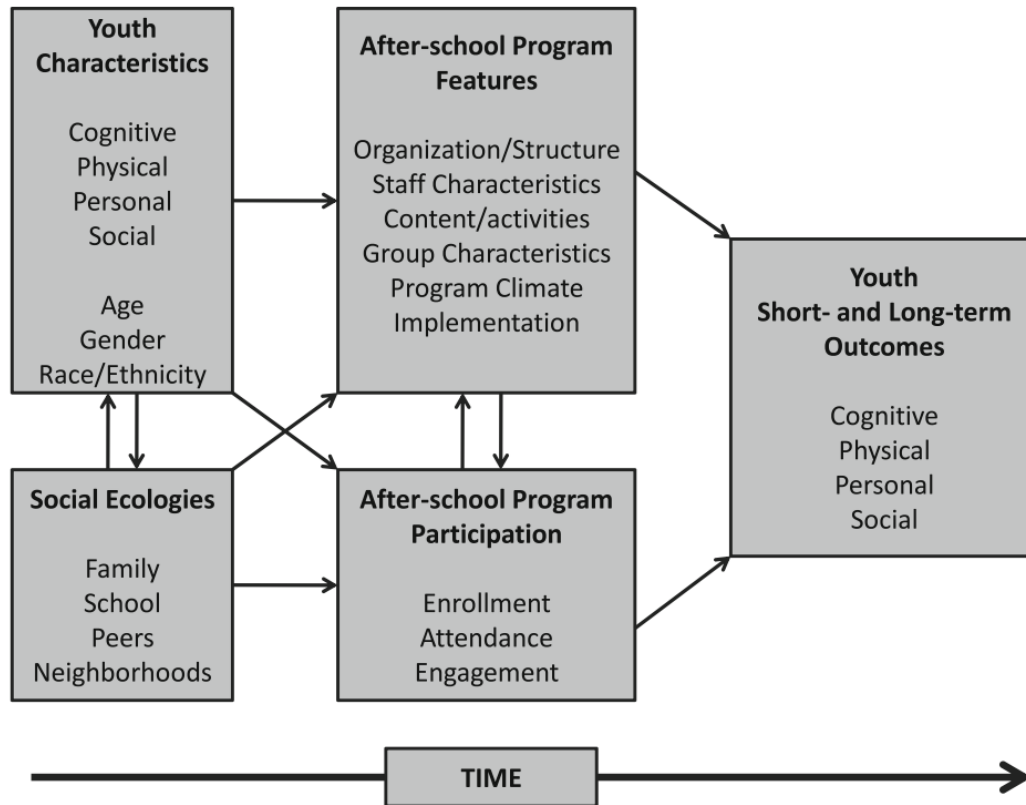potentially important factors affecting how after-school programs influence youth outcomes (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Developmental ecological model (Durlak et al.,2010)

A mixed-methods approach is recommended to gain a comprehensive understanding of impact. This approach combines quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, with qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups. By utilizing both numerical data and in-depth insights, a more nuanced picture of the impact can be obtained. Taking a longitudinal perspective is valuable for assessing the long-term effects of youth work. Tracking outcomes over time through longitudinal studies and follow-up assessments provides insights into sustained impact and young people's developmental trajectories. Contextual factors should be considered to understand the impact of youth work. These factors include social, cultural, economic, and political

contexts that may influence the outcomes and effectiveness of interventions. (Hytti et al., 2020)

European Council has adopted key competencies for lifelong learning. This reference framework lists eight key competencies, the progress of which can be considered the positive result of every educational process. They are as follows:

1. "Literacy competence. Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, express, create, and interpret concepts, feelings, facts, and opinions in both oral and written forms, using visual, sound/audio, and digital materials across disciplines and contexts. It implies the ability to communicate and connect effectively with others, appropriately and creatively. /---/ This competence involves the knowledge of reading and writing and a sound understanding of written information and thus requires an individual to know the vocabulary, functional grammar, and the functions of language. It includes an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary texts, and the main features of different styles and registers of language. Individuals should have the skills to communicate both orally and in writing in a variety of situations and to monitor and adapt their communication to the requirements of the situation. This competence also includes the ability to distinguish and use different types of sources, to search for, collect and process information, to use aids, and to formulate and express one's oral and written arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context. It encompasses critical thinking and the ability to assess and work with information. /---/

2. Multilingual competence. This competence defines the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication. It broadly shares the main skill dimensions of literacy: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts, and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts according to one's wants or needs. Language competencies integrate a historical dimension and intercultural competencies. /---/ This competence requires knowledge of vocabulary and functional grammar of

different languages and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of languages. Knowledge of societal conventions and the cultural aspect and variability of languages is important.

3. Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, and engineering. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking and insight to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Building on a sound mastery of numeracy, the emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge. Mathematical competence involves, to different degrees, the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs, charts). Competence in science refers to the ability and willingness to explain the natural world by making use of the body of knowledge and methodology employed, including observation and experimentation, to identify questions and draw evidence-based conclusions. Competences in technology and engineering are applications of that knowledge and methodology in response to perceived human wants or needs. Competence in science, technology, and engineering involves an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and responsibility as an individual citizen. /---/

4. Digital competence involves the confident, critical, and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society. It includes information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), safety (including digital well-being and competencies related to cybersecurity), intellectual property-related questions, problem-solving, and critical thinking. /---/ Engagement with digital technologies and content requires a reflective and critical, yet curious, open-minded, and forward-looking attitude to their evolution. It also requires an ethical, safe, and responsible approach to the use of these tools.

5. Personal, social, and learning to learn competence is the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, constructively work with others, remain resilient, and manage one's learning and career. It includes the ability to

cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one's physical and emotional well-being, maintain physical and mental health, and to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, empathise and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context. /---/

6. Citizenship competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life based on an understanding of social, economic, legal, and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability. Citizenship competence is based on knowledge of basic concepts and phenomena relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, society, economy, and culture. /---/ It includes knowledge of contemporary events, as well as a critical understanding of the main developments in national, European, and world history. In addition, it includes an awareness of the aims, values, and policies of social and political movements, as well as of sustainable systems, in particular climate and demographic change at the global level and their underlying causes. /---/

7. Entrepreneurship competence refers to the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas and to transform them into values for others. It is founded upon creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, taking initiative and perseverance, and the ability to work collaboratively to plan and manage projects that are of cultural, social, or financial value. Entrepreneurship competence requires knowing that there are different contexts and opportunities for turning ideas into action in personal, social, and professional activities and an understanding of how these arise. Individuals should know and understand approaches to planning and management of projects, which include both processes and resources. They should understand economics and the social and economic opportunities and challenges facing an employer, organisation, or society. They should also be aware of ethical principles and challenges of sustainable development and have self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. /---/

8. Cultural awareness and expression competence. Competence in cultural awareness and expression involves understanding and respect for how ideas

and meaning are creatively expressed and communicated in different cultures and through a range of arts and other cultural forms. It involves being engaged in understanding, developing, and expressing one's ideas and sense of place or role in society in a variety of ways and contexts. This competence requires knowledge of local, national, regional, European, and global cultures and expressions, including their languages, heritage and traditions, and cultural products, and an understanding of how these expressions can influence each other as well as the ideas of the individual. It includes understanding the different ways of communicating ideas between creator, participant, and audience within written, printed, and digital texts, theatre, film, dance, games, art and design, music, rituals, and architecture, as well as hybrid forms. It requires an understanding of one's own developing identity and cultural heritage within a world of cultural diversity and how arts and other cultural forms can be a way to both view and shape the world. /---/" (European, 2018)

This very comprehensive perspective on the competencies acquired during lifelong learning is the basis for several individual development evaluation tools, such as Youthpass (Youthpass, 2023).

Methodology and ethics

The epistemological approach of the research project is phenomenology – i.e. the research is dependent on the researcher's perspective and the contexts of meaning in which the researcher enters. The phenomenological approach seeks knowledge of the world as it is experienced from a first-person perspective. Focus is on the essence of an experience, on trying to understand the basic structure of that experience and interpreting the meaning it has for a person or group (SAGE, 2016, 367).

The qualitative researcher can often be the instrument based on their skills to receive information in 'natural' contexts where they can uncover the meanings through descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory methods-procedures (SAGE, 2016, 345).

Within the framework of this research project, two methods of information collection were used: firstly, the secondary analysis of an online questionnaire with open-ended questions conducted by the Estonian Association of Youth Workers (14 respondents), and secondly, interviews conducted by the author of this research project (7 interviews). Both methods of information collection are described in more detail below. The author's views on ethical considerations and bias in research are added to the descriptions.

Internet survey with open-ended questions

One of the inputs for this research project was the secondary research based on an internet survey of 12 questions conducted among the members of the Estonian Association of Youth Workers in the summer of 2022. The questionnaire was non-anonymous and non-compulsory for members. Its main goal was to get input from the organisation members about what resources and conditions youth workers need to create to better support and integrate Ukrainian youth into the local community. However, the participation was low (14 respondents in total from the 300+ members of the organisation), and for this reason, the answers were not analysed and publicly presented this time. The author of the current research project was not involved in the

process. The answers to 5 questions connected to the topic of the current research project are used in the analysis. Respondents are marked R1, R2, etc., in the quotes. All respondents were women. No questions were asked about the respondent's age, length of work experience, or educational background.

For the sample of this survey, it should be considered that the most active members answered who, despite the summer vacation period, followed the organisation's information channels and who were personally involved in the integration of Ukrainian war refugees into youth work activities. Thus, the results are strongly biased in a positive direction - as a rule, those who wish to express views that they do not consider widely acceptable do not respond to a personalised survey. It can also be assumed that only those who are very interested in the topic will respond when information is collected in such a period and in such a personalised way. So, the input is probably somewhat one-sided and can have so-called "response bias": the desire of the participants to please the researcher and to provide socially desirable responses.

It can be said about this input material that ethical issues were not thought through very carefully. At the same time, the material was not misused, and the secondary analysis of the data in this work is also based on the principle of confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews

Seven individual online interviews were conducted to get knowledge about individuals' perspectives on the research topic. Purposive sampling was used – first, the internet search was done using the simultaneous keywords "noorsootöö Eesti põgenik Ukraina" (in English: youth work Estonia refugee Ukraine). Based on the search results, the list of 14 youth workers who were publicly involved in the integration of refugees in one way or another was created, and then all of them were contacted with the proposal for interview. All seven people who responded positively to the researchers' e-mails were interviewed. Six interviewees were Estonians; one was Estonian Russian. All interviews took place in Estonian. Six of the seven interviewees were well-educated for youth

work: they had bachelor's and/or master-level qualifications in youth work, school youth work, or community work. One interviewee had higher education in economics and excessive additional training in youth work. Five interviewees were employed full-time in the field of youth work at the time of the interview; two were volunteers working daily in another field and engaging in youth work on a project basis in their spare time. The shortest work experience in the youth field was five years, the longest was 22 years, and both the median mean and arithmetical mean were 13 years. Interviewees are marked IN1, IN2, etc., in the quotes.

Based on the way how the sample was made and on the educational background and length of work experience of the respondents, the author considers the results strongly biased in a positive direction: all the respondents are experienced, motivated, and dedicated youth workers.

All the respondents signed the informed consent about participation, as shown in Infoblox 1.

Infobox 1. English translation of the informed consent

Consent to participate in the interview within the
Piret Talur's research project
Determinants of the Integration of Teenage Refugees into Non-Formal Education:
Perceptions of Estonian Youth Workers

I have been informed about the above-mentioned research, and I am aware of the

purpose of the research being conducted and the methodology of the research.

I know that the research is conducted confidentially; that is, Piret Talur tries to remove any elements that could indicate the identity of the participants when presenting the results of the research.

I know that the written summary of the research project resulting from the study is public, and conference presentations and articles may be published based on it. They may quote me anonymously.

I know that Piret Talur, pirettalur@gmail.com, will provide me with additional information regarding questions arising during the study.

I know that my interview as part of the study will be recorded and transcribed. The recording and transcription are stored on the computer's hard drive and cannot be used by anyone other than Piret Talur, who is conducting the research. The recording and transcription will be deleted after the evaluation of Piret Talur's subject, "Research Project in International Social Work", which is part of their master's program MA in Advanced Development in Social Work (ADVANCES).

I confirm my informed consent to participate in the interview with a digital signature.

Interviews were semi-structured, i.e., the most important discussion points were in place in advance, but the course of the interview was partially determined based on the interviewee and his experiences, which means that the most important aspects for the interviewee were discussed in more detail and these topics which were not important for the interviewee and were only briefly touched upon.

All interviews were transcribed and analysed by using thematic analysis. The codes provided some perspective on the most important topics expressed in interviews. To illustrate these topics and attitudes, several quotes were selected and translated into English.

Findings

First determinant: the competence of the youth workers

Both the available literature and the opinions of Estonian youth workers place the responsibility for the integration of the refugee on the competence of the youth worker to work with any minorities in youth work. As a special or additional skill, the ability to work with a young person with a trauma experience is highlighted.

Competences refer to the specific knowledge, capabilities, and behaviours that individuals possess and demonstrate to perform tasks or accomplish goals effectively. Competences can be acquired through education, training, and experience. In the European Union, competencies are defined as "a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, where knowledge is composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject; skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results; attitudes describe the disposition and mindsets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations." (European, 2018)

One of the competencies of a youth worker is to launch age-appropriate educational activities in cooperation with young people. An often-cited example of practical activity was summer work camps. Joint parties and summer camps were seen as a good solution for teenagers to get to know each other.

> R5: "Culture evening. /---/ During this event, young people got along better with each other /---/. After the event, Ukrainians started visiting the youth centre more."
>
> R7: "This camp was successful because it was possible to see how Estonian youth embraced Ukrainian youth and vice versa."
>
> R9: "[in the joint event] many found friends among Estonian youth."

IN5: "Estonians and Ukrainians both stayed in a youth centre locked for a night; it was a completely new environment and experience for both; they were in similar situations."

IN2: "It sounded very exciting - no one of us spends the night at home, but we all spend the night in the youth centre. No one is at home; everyone is out of home. It was a conscious decision to bring them together, to put them in such a different environment; at school, they are kept in different classrooms, but there they have to come up with activities together, maybe cook together."

As a sign of flexibility, exceptions to the usual work arrangements were made.

R6: "The youth centre is also open to Ukrainian youth. This summer, in an exceptional case, it was also open in July."

IN6: "We do things mainly for the members of our organisation, within the organisation. In other words, the fact that you involve someone from outside is an exception. In the context of this war in Ukraine, an exception was made; it was said to do it together with the youth of Ukraine; it is a supported activity. But it was like a real exception in principle; I don't know if it would have been done for other nationalities who just happened to live here."

IN5: "We discussed several times that if the Estonian youth enjoys the fact that the music is very loud, then for the Ukrainian youth, it can be very traumatic because for them it is related to, for example, air raid danger signal. We turned it down."

Participants showed their preparedness for critical reflection on analysing the efficiency of interventions. Scepticism was expressed several times that there was too much pressure on teenage refugees in the beginning, and different expectations of different age groups were not considered.

R1: "[It's not a good idea to] organise events for Ukrainian youth if there is no direct contact with them before. They don't trust that something is happening for them and could be free."

R6: "Unfortunately, young people aged 15-17 participate less in camps; it is more difficult to involve them in activities".

R8: "[it was not efficient] at first, going to hotels, because it was difficult to get newly arrived war refugees out of the hotel room."

IN1: "[teenage refugees] were under pressure that they have to integrate and be there with our youngsters, in some cases, you could see that he is not there so willingly… that it is /---/ the pressure of the parents. But if they were already there, then, in fact, they were very active."

Reflecting on acquired skills and competencies (basic and advanced training of youth workers) that have helped them to cope well with the situation of Ukrainian youth, the participants suggested that the general level of youth work competence is very high in Estonia, but there is room for improvement on specific skills for trauma-informed and culturally sensitive youth work. To the question, what has personally helped you successfully cope with work with refugee youth? The answer was always that the entire previous study and work journey had created preparation for this new situation.

R1: "Experience of working with young people and experience of youth work in general."

R2: "Acquired skills of the social pedagogue, youth worker, trainer."

R4: "The whole "compote" of my skills and knowledge is a supporting factor. However, the willingness /--/ to involve others around you is important."

R8: "Anything that has involved young people with trauma. /---/ Above all, humanity and open communication."

IN6: "In my opinion, these principles of our [youth work] ethics are universal, always valid, so here, the nationality or refugee status is not important."

IN7: "First of all, nice youth work personality: good communicators, empathetic, courageous, open, tolerant."

Some respondents mentioned specific influential training.

R5: "Language camp organisation training."

R9: "[Sensoa] flag system training." (Sensoa Flag System supports professionals to correctly assess acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour in children and young people (0-18 years) (Flagsystem, 2023).)

R10: "Training "First aid for mental health"." ("First aid for mental health" is a training course given by the NGOs Peaasjad and Estonian Psychosocial Rehabilitation Association to practice 5-step support in case of mental health problems (Esmaabi, 2023).)

IN1: "I feel that I received a very good preparation and with this topic, a subject called "Inclusive youth work" goes very well. I feel that today I would not be the youth worker that I am, I wouldn't think the way I do if I didn't have this one subject in uni."

As an exception, one interviewee was very critical about how well Estonian youth workers are generally prepared to work with teenage war refugees.

IN4: "Not enough preparation at all! I see that this preparation is like sticking a cat's nose into the milk [believing that the cat will instinctively drink] so that you can smell it a little bit. It's the same with preparation to work with a young person who has some kind of special need. Either there is a physical or mental special need, or someone who comes to the centre with a kind of trauma, well, lots of young people have this backpack [of bad experience], so a good solution for this would be if an additional speciality was created next to the youth work speciality, not just one module, but a whole year to gain special competences. /---/ what youth workers are working with now is advice from life experience that they get from older and more experienced colleagues, not from what they themselves have learnt that some things work and others not."

Youth workers also showed professional awareness in the discussion, which would help youth workers in effective work with teenage refugees in the future. Super- and provision, mentoring, and exchange of experiences among youth workers were mentioned. Development of basic language skills in Russian or Ukrainian was

considered useful. Some respondents expressed their opinion that some aspects necessary for working with refugees have been missing from their training until now.

> R10: *"All kinds of training (like what to notice, how to support children who have experienced the horrors of war)."*

There were different opinions on how important financial opportunities are to the success of integration. More often, it was said that money is not enough, and the competence of the youth worker is the key determinant of mutual integration of refugee and local youth.

> IN1: *"If you don't have the readiness, the ability, the will, then money alone won't save you because there must be a certain impact, results."*

Second determinant: previous experience with diversity in a specific non-formal education environment

It was found that even if alienation and xenophobia occur in the community and/or society, youth work institutions are tolerant and open.

> IN3: *"In general, youth workers have encountered different young people, with different behaviour, and for example, we have also had international volunteers here, so we have had different experiences; everyone has seen, knows, they are still such tolerant and open people."*

Youth workers are aware of cultural bias in integration processes and are optimistic that youth work and youth workers are more ready than other areas of livelihood to accept diversity as something positive. To test the reactions to the controversial issues, the researcher brought up the subject of gender equality in youth work activities. The problem that has reached several European countries today, where, unlike Estonia, more war refugees have been accepted from countries culturally distant from European Union member states, such as Syria, etc., is the practice of some cultures and religions to treat boys and girls very differently. So, the interviewees were asked what do you think about gender-separated activities and what they would do in a situation where a

teenage refugee visited the youth centre; he said that he also has two sisters of about the same age at home, but they are not allowed to come with him, because such a centre is not appropriate for girls to spend time in. For example, the local girls at the youth centre may be wearing make-up and skimpy clothing. The youth workers' answers were conciliatory to varying degrees; no one considered openly expressing displeasure.

> IN1: "You must approach that topic delicately, respecting his beliefs. [Have] to say I understand where you are coming from. I understand. why you are like that. However, you are currently in this cultural space, and we would be very happy to accept, for example, that if you don't want to come with them now, maybe you can give them our flyer, maybe you agree to tell them about us, maybe you can still come together later. I would not dare to say to him that you are doing wrong, but the fact that this girl also has the right to be here, and she is also very welcome."

> IN3: "We cannot break and change their belief like this here on the spot; it has to reach them over time if they continue [to live] in our society. If parents, see that things are different in this environment… You can invite parents to visit the centre, to talk about this topic. But yes, you can't say that you must do it that way."

> IN4: "I would start with the position that it's perfectly okay [to have girls and boys in same activities] and that it's acceptable, everything is safe. Everything is all right. You can't just go and say, we don't do things like that here; you cannot tear down someone else's home [rules] like that. Unless the child is abused at home, yes. It's /---/ such a very delicate topic; it's more like just show the possibilities of our culture much as possible and try to influence and involve them."

Reflecting on this example, one respondent admitted that she remembers a case where the response to a Syrian war refugee was different on the social media of youth centres than the response to Ukrainian refugees.

> IN3: "We have more of this hostility towards refugees from some countries and, well... when a Syrian refugee visited our youth centre, they prepared some food

and did some interesting things there, and when these pictures were posted that
everything was so great, there were still people who commented something else
under the picture. Currently, the thing about Ukrainians is that they are quite like
Estonians, so to speak; it is a bit easier, yes."

Participants emphasised that teenage refugees are first just teenagers with the specific
needs and problems typical to this period of life.

> *IN1: "I see that it is very important to understand that these are just young people*
> *who are coming here. We must create a place for them, but not make them look*
> *like clowns or zoo animals: "See, now we have war refugees". No, we have a*
> *group of young people, and daily, they deserve and need that they are just a part*
> *of the regular group."*
> *IN3: "A young person is young, so, well, I somehow feel that we already have*
> *young people with special needs, and in fact, trauma is one such special need,*
> *and [youth workers] are ready and then, based on this [refugee] situation, they try*
> *to cope. /---/They certainly lack such [specific] skill. However, they still take*
> *[refugee] youth as [regular] youth."*
> *INT7: "Youth workers are open and ready for different young people. Are they*
> *refugees, or don't know these young people or anyone else? They are young*
> *people; they are partners; they are equal, no matter, refugee or not."*

It was highlighted that the topic of tolerance and human rights is constantly dealt with in
youth centres.

> *IN3: "We have a youth worker who really tries to educate young people. Well, the*
> *topic of human rights and all these distinctions and those... so that they would*
> *understand and well, so that such difficult situations would not arise /---/ well,*
> *these topics have all been around for a long time, now it is just war refugee topic*
> *in focus."*
> *IN1: "Young person goes to the youth centre every day and sees how*
> *internationally we often have a lot of communication with people; it's normal. And*
> *we always notice and observe that there would be no bullying. We intervene and*

show our position if one does something good or, conversely, bad to another
person. We point out that this is not a normal thing to say about someone. It's not
okay, and it's against human rights and so on and so forth.”

The youth workers also realised that the geographic location of the centre affects the
diverse experiences they have from the past.

IN4: “We got along well at the youth centre, /---/ we got those young people who
didn't fight with each other; there were Estonian youths, Estonian Russian
youths, Ukrainian youths, and all of them seemed to have a very good synergy
with each other. I think it also depends a bit on the region. Our city centre is as
central and neutral as Switzerland is [laughs] and maybe somewhere else in the
Estonian region; it would be like when we visited the youth centre in Narva, and
there was a very clear line between Estonian Russian youth and then Estonian
youth. [It seemed] they don't communicate with each other at all because nobody
speaks the language. And the youth workers don't speak the language either,
well, it makes this [situation] even more difficult.”

(Town of Narva, mentioned in the previous excerpt from the interview, is in Ida-Viru
County, which has 81 % of the non-Estonian population. (Statistikaamet, 2023)

Third determinant: the ability of refugees, locals, and youth workers to overlook the unpredictability of the refugee situation

Unpredictability, or the so-called "waiting hood", is a source of tension felt by all parties.
“Waitinghood” is described as “the unstable situation of not knowing whether the legal
status of refugee will be granted, or whether the young person will need to be sent back
to their country of origin, but also not knowing what will happen after the status is
granted.” (Henriques & Lyamouri–Bajja, 2018, 20) Ukrainian war refugees in Estonia
are not worried about their official status, but the proximity of their homeland and mixed
information about the course of the war keeps them in an uncertain situation as to how

soon they could return home. Some respondents felt this very keenly when the first war refugees arrive in the first half of 2022.

> IN3: *"It was quite a difficult situation in that regard. That sense of temporariness by all parties. It seemed to cast a shadow over everything."*

By the spring of 2023, the feeling has changed.

> IN3: *"Now they may know that they are not going back. In the meantime, it was that "we want to return", so they rather didn't take our language and being... Well, I don't know; they kind of took it easy. Then somehow, it seemed that they didn't want to be here and take it all in, going back right tomorrow anyway. And now that the parents have said yes, we will stay, then this interest in the things of our youth work and this behaviour is a bit different on their part as well as on our part."*

The argument that youth workers always meet very different young people was also used to confirm that working with refugees has not been too overwhelming.

> IN3: *"We already have young people with special needs, and trauma is one such special need. /---/ For example, in addition to refugees and our regular youth, we also had a young person with special needs in the [summer] camp. And this girl and then the Ukrainian boy somehow found a common language, because this boy very much seemed to sympathise with or was interested in her illness, and after they met outside the camp so that some kind of social thing [of people being different from others] can also bond."*

Some youth workers suggested that perhaps coping with unpredictability is different in urban and rural communities.

> IN1: *"For me, it is very common for young people to come and go. And /---/ my greatest joy is when they come back, but the reality is that they often won't, as it is so simple to come and go. Our task was to make the best possible impression on them so that they would, I don't know, look for us on the Internet. I don't see that it would be an obstacle if they came for a short time. We a place that says*

you know, you're welcome; it's a safe place to be anytime. /---/ But I can imagine that, for example, somewhere in a small rural community where this youth centre may be the only meeting point for young people, and there may be more regular clientele there - there maybe they think that they came only for a month, so why bother? There are two workers here, and they are overworked anyway. Then it can prove to be a hindrance to some extent."

In general, in this aspect, however, an optimistic attitude was heard, that it is as it is and you have to put your hands to work.

IN6: "Well, in general, the time around us has somehow become so fast that if you think "I will do it when there is time or money or more skills," then all the things are left undone. In the case of young people, it is somehow important to invest as soon as you notice a young person, of whatever nationality or situation, whom you can like, involved in youth work, you must do it and not wait. /---/ To leave the person alone, because maybe I'm doing wrong, then it's like, well, that's worse in my opinion anyway. As if you don't dare to touch it, that it might break, right? In any case, this person needs a little human contact more than staying there alone in his trauma."

Fourth determinant: community and political support for the mutual integration of refugees and locals

Youth workers consider the integration of teenage war refugees from Ukraine into non-formal education natural in Estonia because it is in line with the general social attitude.

IN6: "Relating to a foreign group is still socially complex, it is a bit challenging, but here the feeling of discomfort in dealing with a stranger fell short in comparison with the desire that we can include them and encourage them. Everyone wanted to help or contribute to the crisis in Ukraine. Then the girls found that this was their way of helping, that they could be like others [in the community]. /---/ It's like our chance to alleviate some of the sufferings of some young people."

The expectation expressed in the state funding program that 50% of the youth refugees and 50% of the local youth would participate in the activities was considered an important direction indicator and was also felt as a relief.

> IN3: "If we are told 50/50, then it's fine, isn't it? But if we must take in all these war refugees 100%, the balance will surely go the other way, that it must be too hard, right, certain fears and all of them are behind."

It was pointed out that the funding principle, that 50/50 activities are supported, also prevented possible protests as to why the activities of local youth are not funded, but refugees are prioritised.

> IN3: "At some point, it seemed that only refugees are like those who need help and not local youth, but it was these donors who were constantly repeating that we should not forget our young people. At some point [before the new funding program], it seemed that the refugees were more important. Some [community members] were disturbed by this."

One sign of community approval for integration was that it was easy to find participants in 50/50 groups and events.

> IN2: "There has been no negative feedback, and when we have different activities for Estonian and Ukraine youth, then there is no problem finding the Estonian youth who want to participate. I think the community is ready. They have accepted that we have them. And I don't see any opposition, or at least it hasn't reached me."

The interviewees noticed that if there is a shared hobby or passion (football, art, playing the piano…), then it is easier for young people to find something in common right away. If a young person cannot say exactly what interests him, it is also more difficult to build friendships in a new community.

Some respondents provided their explanation as to why there is so much talk in Estonia that young refugees should attend the same schools and youth institutions as Estonians. (The only exception is the Ukrainian-refugee-oriented unit of Tallinn Tõnismäe State High School, with 570 Ukrainian students in a separate building in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia (Vabaduse, 2023.) The hope was expressed that the work with Ukrainian refugees would bring the integration of the local Russian-speaking minority into focus again.

> IN3: *"It is thought that they should not start to form their [closed] communities, so to speak. Just like there are Estonian and Russian schools, that's why now it is more emphasised that, well, let's disperse the refugees and do things together and so on; otherwise, a city of our own will emerge later."*
>
> IN4: *"But in Tallinn, we can say that there is a "land behind the mountain", Maardu, which would need the same integration money, all that, somehow. Or I don't know. It seems to me that the needs that our people have not been noticed lately. But there are all these other Estonian cultures and people. /---/ And well, policy supports the integration of war refugees, but our own [Russian] minority still stays isolated like in [some refugee] tent camps there, so to speak."*

The background of these observations is that the Russian-speaking minority of Estonia has mostly gathered in the capital or in certain areas in North Estonia where a smaller amount of Estonian-speaking people lives. A significant part of Russian-speaking people has been under the influence of the Russian Federation media, have studied in schools of Russian as an everyday language and have chosen Russian citizenship. 22 % of Estonian residents are Russians, and 6 % of Estonian residents hold Russian Federation passports. (Lass et al., 2023)

The interviewees pointed out that the integration of young people into common non-formal education activities does not mean that actual integration in the community takes place.

> IN1 *"When we had them there [in the youth centre], it seemed to be going well, but what was outside of that, whether they kept into their own community, we*

don't know exactly. Since I have my fourteen-year-old teenage girl, I know some of them became friends; there were games, they listened to music together and walked around together."

The media's role in covering general views was seen as controversial.

IN4: "If I rely purely on the news, it seems to me that it is as if two things are being discussed here alternately. Just yesterday, my colleagues and I also talked about the Ukrainian war refugees, that isolation versus integration, that this border is very thin, and it is easy to fluctuate to one side or the other. Leaning towards integration is not bad, but the other way is. /---/What words the media uses and how they talk about it has an impact, too. /---/ I don't think that the Estonian media should talk about the Ukrainian youth separately and what is being done to them, but that this is the fact that we have Estonian youth with whom we do youth work, and all youth is Estonian youth."

Fifth determinant: policy and practice in language issues in society, community, and specific non-formal education environment

Sharing information in different languages was considered an important step in integration by youth workers.

R1 "We share information with Ukrainian youth."

R3 "An interpreter was employed in the municipal government, who communicates, translates, and transmits information when necessary. It is mainly delivered by the municipality's social department, but we have increasingly involved youth work and education."

R4 "We have /---/ mediated information (including the Russian language) with the contact person/helpers of Ukrainian people so that information about youth work opportunities can reach them."

R12 "At the beginning of the crisis, we went to the refugee accommodation to present our youth centre and our possibilities. We also distributed written materials about our centre to them."

3 out of 14 respondents of the questionnaire and 2 of 7 interviewed youth workers mentioned, without a direct question about language, that knowledge of Russian or Ukrainian has been of great help. To a direct question about the importance of language skills, the answer was often that it was not a particular problem.

> IN3: "We had youth workers who did not know the Russian language. They spoke to them [Ukrainians] in Estonian, they had to understand, they had small misunderstandings with each other there. /---/ The language barrier is one thing that can scare [youth workers] that you want to speak in Estonian [to youngsters]."

While it was initially assumed that the teenagers could communicate with each other in English, it turned out that the Ukrainian refugees' English skills were poorer compared to their Estonian peers.

> IN1 "The language barrier is big, actually. Because the younger ones don't speak English very well."

However, it did not turn out to be a very big problem in the end; translation apps like Google Translate came to the rescue, interpreters were found, and the young people quickly learned the basic words of each other language. Activities with multiple working languages or no need for good language skills were used to overcome the language barrier.

> R3 "A cooking club is held in one community, where four languages - Estonian, Russian, English, and Ukrainian - were used to conduct the club to involve young people."
>
> R4 "We hired a group leader who also [in addition to Estonian] speaks fluent Russian."
>
> R9 "We bought board games that don't require a lot of language [skills]."
>
> IN1 "We went hiking. And to the adventure park. Then we did manual activities, handicrafts, games."

All in all, the language barrier does not turn out to be as big a problem for integration into joint activities as it was thought based on the first impressions.

> *IN5: "They finally got along. No one knew the language. They couldn't communicate in English, and they did not speak Russian, so I don't know; maybe it was body language. [smiles] I think this is a pretty good example of quick integration without much language knowledge."*

Conclusions and recommendations for practice

The current research project examined the perceptions of Estonian youth workers about the determinants of the integration of teenage refugees into local non-formal education programs in their new country of residence. Based on the literature review, two methods of information collection from the youth workers were used in the research project: firstly, the secondary analysis of an online questionnaire with open-ended questions conducted by the Estonian Association of Youth Workers, and secondly, the analysis of the interviews conducted by the author of this research project.

As a result, five determinants were described:
1. the competence of the youth workers;
2. previous experience with diversity in a specific non-formal education environment;
3. the ability of refugees, locals, and youth workers to overlook the unpredictability of the refugee situation;
4. community and political support for the mutual integration of refugees and locals;
5. policy and practice in language issues in society, community, and specific non-formal education environment.

The competence of youth workers is crucial in integrating refugees into non-formal education for several reasons. Youth workers with the appropriate skills and knowledge can facilitate cultural understanding and sensitivity, creating inclusive environments for refugees. They are equipped to recognise and respect refugees' diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs, which helps establish trust and rapport. Many refugees have experienced trauma and face psychological challenges. Competent youth workers can foster a sense of safety, trust, and belonging within the educational setting. Youth workers with strong networking and collaboration skills can establish connections with relevant stakeholders, such as refugee support organisations and educational institutions. These partnerships contribute to a coordinated and holistic

approach to supporting the integration of refugees into non-formal education. (Mölsä et al., 2017)

The participants in this study generally considered the preparation of Estonian youth workers to work with refugees sufficient, supporting the principle that all young people must be treated equally and that a teenage refugee needs as little or as much special treatment as many other young people that youth workers meet.

Previous experience with diversity in a specific non-formal education environment can significantly determine smooth integration. Such experience allows educators to understand and appreciate the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds, including refugees (Beach et al., 2017). Educators with experience working with diverse groups are more likely to possess effective communication and facilitation skills that can support mixing refugees and locals in non-formal education. Young people with diverse experiences are likelier to possess an open mindset and be receptive to different cultural practices and perspectives. This flexibility and openness create safe and welcoming spaces where refugees feel valued and respected (Gay, 2018).

The youth workers who participated in the research believed youth work is generally a very tolerant and open environment, and tolerance and openness had already been practised long before the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees.

The refugee situation is inherently complex and unpredictable, with various challenges and uncertainties. The ability to overlook this unpredictability allows refugees, locals, and youth workers to approach the situation with flexibility and adaptability. It enables them to navigate changes, setbacks, and unexpected circumstances that may arise during the integration process. The more smoothly everyone involved (refugees, local youth, youth workers) accepts the unpredictability (so-called "waitinghood"; Henriques & Lyamouri–Bajja, 2018, 20), the more smoothly the teenage refugees can be integrated into non-formal education programs and endeavours.

The participants in the current research project believed that although unpredictability can make a person uncertain at the beginning, youth work is aimed primarily at groups with a changing composition. In this sense, there is nothing unprecedented in the temporariness of the involvement of teenage refugees.

The fourth determinant puts the youth work interventions into the context of broader society. Community and political support for the mutual integration of refugees and locals give non-formal education institutions the necessary confidence and public respect to integrate refugees and local youth. For the research project participants, a particular political message was the state funding program, through which support was allocated for various initiatives in which teenage war refugees of Ukrainian origin and local youth participated equally. It was not just a method of integration that worked well in practice, but it carried an important political message about the equality of young people.

Finally: policy and practice in language issues in society, community, and specific non-formal education environment. Language proficiency plays a significant role in integrating refugees into formal education. Non-formal education, however, tries to be much more flexible in this matter. Using multilingual resources to share information and facilitate effective learning experiences is common in youth work. Adequate provision of interpretation services ensures effective communication but is not crucial to develop a sense of being of belonging and safety. Body language may speak louder than grammatically correct sentences. Realising this, the youth workers who took part in the survey paid particular attention to activities that were in multiple working languages (however limited the skills in their languages were) or no need for good language skills: four-working-language cooking club, board games that do not require much vocabulary, hiking, visit to an adventure park, handcrafting etc. These experiences gave young people the courage to communicate, which in turn fostered an interest in language learning more generally.

Based on the above, the author's recommendations for the development of youth work practice, training and financing are as follows:

1. Youth work training should concentrate on inclusive youth work as a whole, giving the youth workers the confidence to work with diverse youth groups. In this case, the necessary background info can be acquired quickly when new target groups emerge, but the readiness to work with diverse youngsters is already there permanently.

2. Different types of diversity should be encouraged in non-formal education environments, including mixing the different local youngsters: non-disabled and disabled, from majority and minority ethnic groups etc. It is often said that creating an environment that considers all young people is too costly - for example, if there is just one visually impaired teenager or young person in a wheelchair in our town, is it practical to adapt the youth centre for his needs? The author of the current research project is confident that different things are reasonable in the short and long term. In the long run, such adaptations are necessary not for this one young person but for all young people to develop empathy and be ready to live in a very diverse community in the future. Moreover, youth work can guide inclusive joint activities for all age groups.

3. It is essential to continue funding and implementing mental health first aid and other self-help training and advice to facilitate the adaptation to the uncertainty of young refugees, local youth, and youth workers and to increase their resilience.

4. The political principles should be continuously translated into funding rules and programs. It speaks to grassroots youth workers more than policy documents, strategies, and development plans. Namely, it should be considered that the national youth initiative programs "Nopi üles!" (Pick Up!) and "Noortekohtumised" (Youth Meetings) should be continued or replaced with equivalents, and the unique support program for the integration of Ukrainian refugees should be continued.

5. Language policy must remain flexible and step-by-step and not based on the understanding that language skills are needed first, and then all possibilities for action become available. Non-formal education is an excellent starting platform

to find the motivation to acquire the local language at such a level that integrating the refugee into society in all three dimensions (legal/political, socio-economic, and cultural/religious) is possible in the future.

The author's research project results and suggestions will be presented to authorities in several conferences and articles to develop and implement efficient support measures for youth work institutions and youth workers to integrate teenage refugees better into local non-formal education initiatives.

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