

**Comparative Social Work Practices with Young Refugees and Asylum
Seeker Families: Experiences from Finland, the United Kingdom,
Malta, Italy, and Serbia**

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Despite the increasing interest in improving the well-being of youth refugees and asylum-seekers, studies examining the links between social work practices in the recipient countries, the migration context, and the diverse needs of youth refugees, are limited. This paper builds a comparative perspective of youth social work policy, practices, and engagement related to young refugees in Finland, the United Kingdom, Malta, Italy, and Serbia. We solicited 48 good practices of youth social work practices, identified the central theme and linked them to each country's migration context and social work policy. We found that the majority of youth programs were carried out by NGOs at national level, except in Finland, where support from public institutions is dominant. Social work practices in the arrival and first transit-point countries such as Malta, Italy, and Serbia, emphasize support on socioeconomic empowerment, focusing on labour market-ready skills. In the main destination countries like Finland and the UK, the artistic and social initiatives to cope with mental health issues and person-centred support services such as mentoring and advocacy, are more dominant, indicating the attempt to improve the psychological and social well-being of the young refugees to resume a normal life, which aims at successful integration.

Introduction

Forced migration has been a pressing issue in many industrialized nations, with unaccompanied children and young people seeking sanctuary as refugees and asylum seekers constituting one third of these populations in Europe¹. Providing social support for their psychological, physical, and emotional well-being is integral in supporting their integration process into the recipient countries ([Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2010](#)). Previous research on unaccompanied minors has primarily highlighted their psychosocial health ([Groark, Sclare, & Raval, 2011](#)), human rights and children's rights ([Lundberg, 2011](#)) and the reception system ([Wernesjö, 2014](#)). However, the large and diverse bodies of literature on social work for this group have focused on the individual case studies, which centered on the young refugees and asylum seekers' collective experiences. There is still little understanding to what extent the physical and psychosocial needs of young refugees are appropriately addressed by the current policies and systems of the host countries ([Evans, Forte, & Fraser, 2013](#)). In the EU case, each host country has differing policies that translate into different levels of support. At the same time, the citizenships of refugees and their profiles differ substantially according to the countries they first apply for asylum in ([Hebebrand et al., 2016](#)). Better understanding on the recipient country's context is essential to understand the policy responses targeting the young refugees and asylum seekers, which would later manifest in improved social work practices.

This paper attempts to inform the practices of social work carried out with young refugees and asylum seekers and the receptiveness of selected recipient countries during the timeframe of the European refugee crisis in 2015. Our contributions to the current debates

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/refugee-and-migrant-crisis> accessed 05/11/2018

regarding the level of support to young refugees and asylum seekers are threefold: first, to improve our understanding regarding the situation in the field, we solicited 48 ‘good practices’ of social work in five recipient countries, namely Malta and Italy as the arrival country, Serbia as the transit country, and Finland and UK as the main destination countries of the migrants, that were carried out in 2016–2017. Secondly, we provide a cross-country comparison of social work policy and practices, the migration context of each country; and conclude with discussions on the limitation of the current support and recommendation on overcoming the problem with the lack of professionals and the increasingly interdisciplinary nature in the field.

Social Work Settings and the Migration Context

Turkey, Greece, Malta and Italy have been witnessing the influx or transit of refugees for the past few years. In the EU-28, 26% of all asylum applicants in 2014 were minors ([Eurostat, 2017](#)). Approximately 52% and 75% of the younger and older age groups were males. The vast majority (86%) of migrant/refugee children travelled with their parents ([Hebebrand et al., 2016](#)). The percentage of males was slightly over 50 for the accompanied, versus over 85% for the unaccompanied. Despite (mandatory) medical examinations, verification of the age of a young refugee is challenging; depending on the perceived benefits in the respective country of arrival, age may be falsely self-reported either as younger or older. This section will review the migration context and social work settings in the five countries studied, namely the UK, Serbia, Italy, Malta, and Finland.

(Figure 1 here)

Migration Context

The UK ranked among the top five states receiving asylum claims (UNHCR, 2014)². In 2015, the UK is home to more than 123,000 child refugees, comprising 6.8% of total child refugees in Europe³. Due to the recent European refugee crisis in 2011, mainstream media often launch negative stance toward refugees, which is fueled by the lack of information to the general population regarding refugees, allowing them and the political elites to portray their images in unfavorable ways ([Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013](#)). The case of Aylan Kurdi was able to shift the media and public perception of refugees to a more positive one ([Gladwell et al., 2018](#)).

Over the past centuries, Malta has experienced a shift from the source of migration flows as the gate through Europe to become a destination. The arrival of the first boat on Maltese shores in 2002 has marked a significant point in Malta's migration history, with the number constantly increasing between 2002 and 2018 ([Falzon, 2012](#)). Maltese demographics has experienced a change since the beginning of the 21st century, with the locals undertaking emigration for economic reasons ([Cassar, 2013](#)) with help from the government that provided technical courses to ease the integration in the main destination ([Mayo, 2007](#)).

Finland is considered a newly-exposed country to refugees and asylum-seekers, though previously it has taken Vietnamese and Somalian immigrants ([Heikkilä & Peltonen, 2002](#)). Unlike the other Nordic countries with more open labor policies, Finland opts to meet labor demand domestically, or through 'return' migration of former nationals ([Valtonen, 2001](#)). This makes labor migration did not occur at a level comparable with

² UNHCR Asylum Trends 2014 <https://www.unhcr.org/551128679.pdf> accessed 06/11/2018

³ Source: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/> accessed 06/11/2018

many other immigrant-receiving countries, nor has it been perceived as an instrument of economic or demographic structuring ([Valtonen, 2001](#)). Finnish population is undergoing gradual change with the growth of ethnically diverse communities, the largest of which are from Somalia, Vietnam, Iraq and Iran ([Finland, 1999](#)). In 2015, the wave of asylum seekers comprised around 13,000 child refugees and 24,000 child asylum seekers entering Finland, has changed the landscape of social work practices in the country, with more public institutions nowadays offering support ([Björklund, 2015](#)).

Migrations are a significant socio-demographic phenomenon in Serbia ([Serbia, 2011](#)). In the 90s, Serbia became a major destination for refugees from the ex-Yugoslavian republic (Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). During the Kosovo war in 1999, more than 200,000 people fled to Central Serbia and stayed until today, bearing a status of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Since 2015 and the emergence of the Balkans' migration route, Serbia has been the transit country for refugees and economic migrants from the Middle East and Africa that are crossing the country for Western Europe.

Italy is a country with a long history of emigration and a very short experience of immigration ([Del Boca & Venturini, 2005](#)). Geographically situated close to the North African coast, Italy has historically been a popular arrival country for undocumented migrants using the Mediterranean routes. The EU Dublin Convention requires migrants to apply for asylum permits or protection in the first EU country of arrival, effectively barring them from crossing internal EU borders to the north. As a majority of this population aims to continue to the northern or western European countries, there is a tendency to avoid filling permits in Italy ([Fullerton, 2016](#)). In 2016, more than 25,800 unaccompanied minors arrived in Italy by sea⁴. Around 10% of the applicants with a

⁴ https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94399.html accessed 06/11/2018

protection status in Italy in 2016 were minors, and over half of them (54%) were unaccompanied minors⁵. These children predominantly came from African countries, Syria, and Bangladesh⁶.

Youth Refugee Situation

In Malta, the controversial systematic detention for anyone arriving on the island without the necessary visa or by boat has been reformed in 2015 ([Cassar, 2013](#)). Detention centers have been replaced by an initial reception center, where people undergo medical screening before being welcomed in open centers. This practice is just linked to a strategy document released by the current Government, whilst no change has been made to the relevant legislation⁷. Asylum requests are processed by the office of the Refugee Commissioner, who has decisional power on the kind of protection status to be recognized according to the particular situation of each individual.

Serbia, along with Italy, is popular as a first transiting country for refugees. Upon arriving, the refugees are physically exhausted, hence the provision of somatic health care represents a major concern ([Hebebrand et al., 2016](#)). Serbia undertook several important steps to provide reception and minimal protection to the increased number of unaccompanied and separated children. Apart from providing them with accommodation, Serbia managed to initiate a program of encouraging specialized foster care, to provide

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8016696/3-11052017-AP-EN.pdf> accessed 06/11/2018

⁶ UNICEF (2017) *A Deadly Journey for Children: The Central Mediterranean Migration Route* http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_94905.html accessed 06/11/2018

⁷ https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MHAS/Pages/Consultations/2015StrategyReceptionAsylumSeekersIrregularImmigrants.aspx accessed 06/11/2018

access to health care, and it even made first steps towards resolving the issue of access to education and effective use of leisure time of refugee children ([Rights, 2017](#)).

In March 2017, Italy took an innovative step related to young migrants, with the parliament passing a new (Zampa) law on “Provision of Protection measures”, outlining comprehensive standards of care for unaccompanied migrant children arriving in the country⁸. The law includes a strict prohibition of refusing them access at the border, decreasing the time they can spend in preliminary welcome centers and setting minimum standards for these facilities, setting a 10-day maximum to identity confirmation and ensuring their access to health care ([Lelliott, 2018](#)). With this legislation, which was also hailed by the UN, Italy became the first country in Europe to ensure comprehensive standards of care for unaccompanied migrant minors.

Upon arrival in the UK, the unaccompanied minor will be taken care of under a Local Authority. The Children Act 1989 stated that if a young person has been in the care of a Local Authority for 13 weeks before they reach the age of 18, it is the Local Authority’s duty to ensure that the young persons continue in the same facilities to prepare themselves for leaving the care and transitioning into independence ([Education, 2010](#)). These duties continue until the young person reaches the age of 21, or 24 if they remain in full-time education, and include the provision of accommodation, advice and financial support ([Gladwell et al., 2018](#)). Refugees in the UK face one of the longest barriers to access the labor market when compared to their counterparts in other EU countries (European Parliament, 2016), with 22% of new refugees having waited for 5 years or more before receiving a decision on their application for asylum ([Cebulla, Daniel, & Zurawan, 2010](#); [Gladwell et al., 2018](#)).

⁸ https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95485.html accessed 06/11/2018

The Child Welfare Act in Finland (417/2007) holds a legal basis for immigrant children and youth, which is particularly relevant with unaccompanied children coming to Finland. The new Youth law (1285/2016) considered ‘youth’ to be under the age of 29, and acts as a basis of equal rights to participate and promote inclusion in society. Starting from the 1990s, refugees in Finland undertake ‘pre-employment’ which offers a wide range of labor-market orientation and training programs, including Finnish language instruction. An active labor-market policy has been directed to immigrants in the form of participation in education and training and subsidized on-the-job placements ([Valtonen, 2001](#)).

Youth Social Work Landscape

Legislation on youth work in Serbia was regulated in the Law on Youth (2011), National Youth Strategy (2015–2025), and Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Youth Strategy (2015–2017). The Ministry of Youth and Sports is responsible for creating a framework for youth policy ([O’Donovan, Cairns, Sousa, & Valcheva, 2018](#)).

The situation of the formal education of youth workers has regressed when a primary and master’s degree course in community youth work operated for only one year, as the profession is considered as “complementary to the formal education system, guided by the professional youth workers and conduct activities which uses methods of non-formal education and providing information” ([Bohn & Stallmann, 2007](#)). While it has still not been embedded in the Serbian Occupations Framework, youth work has been recognized as a contemporary profession by the governmental working group on updating the National Occupations Framework. Recently in 2017, a certification program in youth work was reopened in partnership with a foreign university ([O’Donovan et al., 2018](#)).

Youth work in Italy is mostly non-formal, non-professional, and controlled by the Local Departments for Youth Policies in the municipalities that organize the activities based on the regional needs. Youth workers work in different organizations of the third sector,

instead of the public one, but in the recent years the cooperation with formal educational institutions has been promoted. Youth workers are sometimes assigned the duty of the legal guardian of minors seeking asylum in Italy by their municipalities. Italian youth work does not have a big tradition, as it was introduced in Italy in the 90s with the help of relative European Programs ([O'Donovan et al., 2018](#)). The first youth workers in Italy worked mostly for church and scout organizations and in most cases on a local and territorial level. The Department of Youth and National Civil Service and the President of the Council of Ministers regulated the Italian youth social work policies and implementation.

The Maltese context has been characterized by a long tradition of volunteering, linked to the Catholic Church and related organizations. In this context, youth work was seen as the structures which provided adults with the chance to reach young people and promote moral behavior and catholic formation ([Teuma, 2009](#)). Youth work is carried out within the framework of the school system as a support for episodes of difficult behaviors; and outside schools, seeking to increase the participation of students in informal organizations. Starting from the 1990s, youth work has acquired more professional recognition at the university level when a formal training course in youth and community work was established in 1998 by the Malta Association of Youth Workers (MAY) ([O'Donovan et al., 2018](#)). Chapter 533 of the Laws of Malta⁹ provides formal recognition to youth work as a profession, establishing a National Agency (Aġenzija Żgħażaġh) which regulates the profession and provides support to youth workers and organizations. The Parliamentary Secretariat for Youth, Sports and Voluntary Organizations, Ministry

⁹ Laws of Malta, Chapter 533, Youth Work Profession Act (2014, rev. 2016) (source: <http://bit.ly/2qleAih>, accessed 06/11/2018)

for Education and Employment, and an Aġenzija Żgħażaġh are responsible for youth work policy and implementation in Malta.

Support for refugees in the UK was of high variety and implemented mainly by NGOs. Many NGO-run projects offered financial, emotional and practical advice, language courses, integration schemes and workshops which provide creative and practical opportunities. While UK has a formal channel of youth work education at the University and Postgraduate level ([O'Donovan et al., 2018](#)), the sector relies largely on volunteers. This may affect the service that the refugees receive, as they may be acquiring help from a person who is not a 'professional' in the field. In a 2015 survey, 90% of English councils cut the funding for youth programs ([Unison, 2016](#)). These have had a negative impact on charities who rely on government handouts to provide support for refugees. In a report commissioned by the [Council \(2010\)](#), they detailed the damage that has been inflicted on the NGOs, stating that the cuts may decimate the sector. Youth work policy and implementation in the UK is regulated by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport; the Department for Education, Work and Pension; and the Department for Health ([O'Donovan et al., 2018](#)).

Social work education in Finland is incorporated at the university level, concentrating on Social Services (based on social work) or Community Pedagogue (based on youth work). People working in an institution which takes care of refugees and asylum seekers, need a Bachelor's degree in education. Apart from the formal path, volunteerism is also common and not limited to any study background, which is supported by NGOs; for instance, the Finnish Red Cross. Volunteers have an important role in Finland in terms of supporting refugees. Youth workers in Finland work in refugee centers (asylum seekers), family group homes (unaccompanied children), non-governmental organizations (NGO) and communities. Social workers in Finland use many different kinds of methods in working

with immigrant youth. The policy and implementation is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture ([O'Donovan et al., 2018](#)).

Mapping the Social Work Practices

In the following, we outline the immediate responses from the social work practices upon the EU migrant crisis that peaked in 2015. Data collection was carried out between 2015–2017, meaning that the listed practices could serve as proxies of the practices able to respond immediately to the needs.

Methodology

The work is based upon the PAPHYRUS (Professional Action and Practice for Youth Refugees and Asylum Seekers) project funded by the European Union. We analyzed projects and programs addressing the well-being of refugees and asylum seekers with a focus on youths, and identified the good practices from the respective countries. Criteria of good practices are:

- (1) Showing understanding and awareness of the cultural identity and diverse experiences of migration
- (2) Promoting social inclusion and community cohesion
- (3) Requiring partnership working across different sectors on the national and international level
- (4) Refugees and asylum seekers should be involved in the process of creating of such services; their needs should be identified by the service providers and responded to, seeing them as a person first and taking their feelings into consideration

Information about the projects identified as good practices used mixed methods of desk research and interviews and a combination of these two.

Result

We identified 48 programs during 2016–2017 and found that these do not only focus on the needs of refugees, but also carry significant advantage to the host communities and volunteers. Most programs focusing on social activities incorporate strong initiatives to build engagement and social cohesion with the local community in the form of cultural exchange or creative workshops. This helps create empathy with the refugee situation in the locality, which would consequently change the perspectives on refugees. Socioeconomic empowerment programs which help refugees obtain access to vocational training and education, are also found. Some empowerment programs also specifically trained volunteers, social workers, and carers with a refugee background to deal with cultural issues that may hamper the service delivery, indicating two ways of empowerment, for the refugees and the social workers. Some programs also address the more specific needs of young refugees individually, for instance, the support for refugees with a LGBTQ background, sexual violence survivors, and minors who were forced to be caretakers of younger kids.

Classification of activities

(Table 1 here)

Table 1 shows the lists of the social work programs dedicated to young refugees, which we further classify into four categories, namely artistic and social activities and initiatives, individual and person-centered support, practical help with the everyday situation in life,

and socio-economic empowerment¹⁰. Certain themes of support are important for young refugees, namely cultural belonging, psychological well-being, family unit functioning and relationships, as well as friendships and interpersonal processes ([McGregor, Melvin, & Newman, 2015](#)). These forms of support were incorporated in the individual and person-centered support as well as artistic and social activities and initiatives. Meanwhile socio-economic empowerment helps to increase access to decent work and economic opportunities for young refugees in host communities, and to enhance the role and participation of refugees in political processes and decision-making processes.

Characteristics of Social Work

Category of support and sectors

NGOs dominate as the primary institutions carrying out good practice programs for refugee youths, comprising 39 programs of the 48 examined (81%). Only in Finland however, 4/10 programs (40%) are administered by public institutions such as municipalities. One program in Malta and Italy each are ran by religious organizations, followed by two programs by private institutions in Italy, indicating a relatively diverse refugee support initiatives in the country. The UK, as one of the top asylum-seeking destinations, has the most programs, followed by Finland, even though the migration phenomenon was considered very recent in the country.

(Table 2 here)

As shown in Table 2, 50% of the identified programs fall under socioeconomic empowerment. They are largely carried out in Malta, Italy, and Serbia as the arrival and first transit country of migrants. The Maltese government plays a role to provide hands-

¹⁰ Information on the identified programs is attached as supplementary material.

on technical courses to support the Maltese's labor market competitiveness in their main destination countries which are mainly English-speaking ([Mayo, 2007](#)). Three projects in Malta involve the youth refugee beneficiaries to explore their needs and help communicate them to Maltese authorities. One project, for instance, is a program established by the first young refugee-led organization in Malta. The project provides support to young migrants in access to education, as well as various advocacy related to employment, legal, integration, financial assistance and health care. Three other programs carried out by the church provide support for the Maltese and English language.

Italy indicates socio-economic empowerment as the dominant type of support. Three projects provide career guidance and technical and language courses, including English, computer sciences, French, Geography and European culture. Project 'Integration for Agriculture' uniquely provides technical training in agriculture for young refugees. While immigrants and refugees in Italy are entitled to access mental health services, they have encountered barriers of individual health beliefs and discrimination from health workers ([Griffiths & Tarricone, 2017](#)). In this case, initiatives from the FARI (Forming-Assist-Rehabilitate-Insert) project aim to educate local entities and youth workers to deal with minors and young refugees with mental health issues. Two programs were carried out by the private sector, in the form of internship with local enterprises (From Expats to Experts) and entrepreneurial and marketing training on handicraft work (Talenti Integrati).

Both artistic and social activities and initiatives and socio-economic empowerment are the dominant type of support in Serbia as the middle corridor of the Balkan migration route from Greece towards Austria and Germany. Some artistic initiatives are designated for young journalists to report the migrant crisis and to raise awareness of the general public regarding the migrants' human rights; followed by a program that captures

migrants in media in the form of pictures, video and documentary. Others administer cultural exchange with the locals, for instance, sharing the table project, which promotes the exchange of local Serbian cuisine with the Afghan and Syrian ones and a series of creative workshops and socio-cultural events with the locals. The socioeconomic empowerment activities carry out educational workshops, social arts and language courses with the locals and a tutoring program for the local community stakeholders (i.e. Psychosocial Innovation Network project) for better common understanding on the migrant crisis and migrants' needs.

As they are the final destination of migrants, Finland and the UK slightly differ from the Balkans. Dominant types of support vary because the governments prepare to facilitate migrants for resettlement. In Finland, the programs' priority is to help migrants integrate – to pick up the language, and change the negative attitudes of the locals towards the refugees. This explains why 40% of the programs in Finland were organized by public institutions, such as municipalities and national institutes. While the most popular type of support in Finland is the artistic and social activities and initiatives, this approach mostly leads to mental health adjustment and support using arts in the form of group social activities. One project seeks young asylum seekers who belong to sexual and/or gender minorities to express themselves through the medium of art, strengthens their networks amongst themselves and with the local youth, and builds awareness of their rights. Individual and person-centered type of support seeks to help migrants adjust themselves to their life in the resettlement. Three projects under this category help deal with Finnish bureaucracy and create a model of operations to support 18–25-year-old immigrants navigate the educational and working life path. The prevalent type of support is practical help with everyday situations, with services which range from interpreter services and reading clubs to counselling for vocational and continuing education. Two projects under

this theme focus on linking the young refugees in the transitional stage to the next path of education and build youth peer support with the local youth of similar age.

The UK listed the most support as practical help with everyday situations, followed by individual and person-centered support. Practical support to access essential health, welfare, education, legal, and other youth services, and volunteer-based interpreter provision and job-seeking support are predominant. The project 'Age Dispute' provides access to legal provision for young people who have been age-disputed by the authorities, while the project 'Include' helps young carers originating from refugee and migrant communities with their mental health and well-being, as it is uncommon for youngsters to take care of smaller minors. In individual and person-centered support, case work, counselling, and advocacy activities help individual youths navigate the complex legal system to access their rights ('Stand by me' program), and to educate them on healthy relationships, the risks and safety to avoid being re-trafficked (i.e. project 'Rise'). Programs especially targeted at women are recognized, (i.e. the project 'Eponine', which cared for asylum-seeking women who had experienced sexual violence, provided gender-sensitive early intervention treatment, and the project 'Health access for refugees' primarily helped women with younger children to accompany them getting access to healthcare). In terms of socioeconomic empowerment, some universities mobilize their TESOL final year students to teach language for free to refugees in the surrounding areas. The 'Bike' project collected second-hand bikes and refurbished them to be given to the refugees with a cyclist buddy to mentor them, and lastly, the 'Chrysalis' project gave intensive life skills workshops on education, health, legal issues as well as well-being for refugee children.

Apart from primary types of support, which focus on the refugees, some programs incorporate empowerment initiatives for the volunteers and social workers in the form of

training and workshops related to multiculturalism and working with refugees. The ‘Silta’ project in Finland seeks for expert or counsellor networks in the Finnish capital area to support newly arrived immigrant youths. A program in Serbia specifically trained journalists on heightened awareness of the migrants’ situation (‘Promotion of responsible and professional reporting on issues related to migrants and refugees’ program) and another trained local community stakeholders to provide support for migrants (Tutoring Program). In Italy, the BeTheOne program also trained volunteers, while in Malta, the Youth UpBeat! and #rightfactor programs trained volunteers on human rights dynamics and the migration crisis. Training and advice are also offered to professionals to raise awareness regarding the rights and entitlements of the migrants in the UK (project ‘Destitute Youth’).

Engagement with youth workers

(Table 3 here)

In Table 3, while many projects hired professionals such as youth workers (18.9%) and expert counsellors (21.6%), these were relatively low in number because the NGOs generally relied on volunteers (24.3%). A proportion of the volunteers were undergraduates in ‘caring’ professions, such as social work and nursing. While the engagement of youth workers, especially those coming from refugee background, is still rare, their involvement appears important in bringing ‘role model’ effects amongst peer refugees. The largest proportion of the program involves people with unspecified backgrounds (35%), which indicates that the youth work lacks resources with a professional background and is highly dependent on volunteers and people from non-related backgrounds. This is especially the case in Malta and the UK, which are highly characterized by volunteerism in social work. In practice, language and cultural problems often arise frequently during interaction between refugees and their caregivers. One

important aspect is to involve interpreters to bridge the communication and understanding between the refugees and caregivers. In this case, further employment and training of interpreters with multicultural background and local cultural groups play a paramount role; but they are not necessarily equipped with formal social work backgrounds. Interpreters or social workers may need to compile culture profiles, which introduce the social structure, language, geography, and history of various cultural groups, apart from speaking the refugees' language. This probably explains why the majority of actors that are identified in the programs (35%) did not specify their professional background: they tend to be trained to work even without a suitable background.

Program scale and outreach

The majority of the programs (58.3%) dedicated their services to large groups of more than 30 people, while the rest (41.7%) catered to small groups or individual-based cases. Finland, especially, tends to focus on delivering services to the individual and small groups, as opposed to the rest of the countries which mostly target larger groups. Socioeconomic empowerment programs in the form of educational, technical-skills, and access support, mostly targeted the large group, while practical help with day-to-day activities and individual person-centered support mainly work in a more intimate group. Almost half of the programs (47%) ran with a medium timeline of one to three years, followed by a slightly longer of more than 3 years (29%). Programs in Finland and the UK are more mature and run relatively longer (more than 1 year) than those in the Balkan and Mediterranean. This may indicate the sustainability risks and lack of support in the arrival and transit country of the migrants as opposed to a more stable support in the main destination countries.

Discussion

We have provided a comparative approach on social work practices targeting young refugees and asylum-seekers in Malta, Finland, Italy, Serbia, and the UK, between 2016 to 2017. We found that country contexts matter in determining the dominating types of support to these refugee groups across countries. In general, Italy, Malta, and Serbia as the arrival and first transit country of migrants provides the targeted groups with socioeconomic empowerment support, while Finland and the UK as the main destination of migrants focus on providing artistic, social activities and initiatives (means to cope with mental health issues) and person-centered support services (mentoring and advocacy). A strong tradition of faith-based volunteerism and social work characterized the support in Italy, Malta, and Serbia, while the UK relied heavily on NGOs, and Finland provided the integrated support via public institutions.

We also found the youth social work profession to be incorporated in formal education at university level in Malta, Finland, and the UK, in which supports were provided by the Ministry of Education, indicating the strong acknowledgement by the government in their policy and practices. However, these trends were regressed in Serbia when a formal program in the field stopped operating recently, which is alarming as children comprised 34% of the total number of refugees and migrants in the country in 2017¹¹. Italy, on the other hand, highly relied on non-formal certifications in the youth social work fields due to the absence of such formal education. While the Italian parliament recently passed a new law outlining comprehensive standards of care for unaccompanied migrant children arriving in the country, the efforts may be hampered by the lack of certified professionals in the field to implement such practices.

¹¹ <https://www.unicef.org/eca/emergencies/latest-statistics-and-graphics-refugee-and-migrant-children> accessed 06/11/2018

In addition, it is important to note that the duration of support programs is longer in the main destination countries. This may be explained by the fact that the programs are focused on the efforts to resettle the migrant in the longer term, while those of the arrival and transit countries centered on the practical empowerment that could help the migrants retain their independence. Technical and vocational training and language lessons are short in nature, and can attract large number of participants; indicating the cost-effective nature of these supports, which are favored by the latter countries.

Nevertheless, we found several policy recommendations that may help to improve the program implementation for the young refugees and asylum seekers in the European context.

1. Between policy versus practices, and needs versus available support

Programs targeted to young refugees and asylum seekers rely heavily on grassroots movements and volunteerism, especially in the countries where the proportion of young migrants is large. This limitation is probably caused by the lack of available funding, and may threaten the sustainability of such programs. In this case, international cooperation across countries with more expertise and resources must be promoted. For instance, programs involving many stakeholders across countries, between corporate operators and the grassroots movement, or academics and civic organizations, should be encouraged. It is also worth noting that in the first arrival countries of migrants, physical healthcare support may be crucial for the young refugees and asylum seekers after they have undertaken the difficult journey. However, most programs focused on the theme of practical socio-economic empowerment, while not so much on physical well-being. More support from inter-sectoral stakeholders may be able to provide such support for the young refugees via better coordination amongst grassroots organizations, municipalities, and international aid agencies focusing on healthcare issues.

2. The profession is getting more sophisticated and interdisciplinary

We found that only in Malta, the UK and Finland the youth work profession is incorporated in the formal education, while not so much in Serbia and Italy, which relied on non-formal training and certifications. Social work with refugees and asylum-seekers needs multicultural understanding and skills to understand the challenges and problems. Support is needed not only on recuperation of the psychosocial and physical situation, but also in dealing with post-flight resettlement. One of the ways to overcome the lack of professionals in the field is through the introduction of inter-disciplinary programs that incorporate the provision of youth work training, for instance, in nursing programs. Partnership with neighboring universities in the regions which provide such degree programs is also advisable, in the form of teacher training or short exchange programs. The profession of a youth social worker is becoming more interdisciplinary as social workers must adapt to a changing field, and should be able to engage different professions to support the means of providing support to refugees. This is indicated by such programs that we found were delivered by experts from different fields i.e. agricultural experts, business and entrepreneur experts, public relations and project managers, apart from trained social workers.

3. The role of PAPHYRUS

In these solicited projects, the majority of youth work was carried out by volunteers who may lack the means of formal social work education. The next step of our PAPHYRUS project is to introduce resources and methodologies to engage with young refugees and migrants. We developed an accessible training kit for the volunteers, experts, and social workers, with the central theme of multiculturalism aspects, social inclusion, socioeconomic empowerment, psychosocial support, as well as abuse prevention and

safeguarding of youth refugees. The materials are accessible here and free to use:

<https://papyrus-project.org/>.

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Table 1: Category of social work support

Artistic and social activities and initiatives	Individual, person-centered support	Practical help with everyday situations in life	Socio-economic empowerment
Dance classes and workshops	1-2-1 case work	Housing support	Job-seeking support
Music classes	Advice	Help, with official documents and benefits	Computer classes
Cookery classes	Advocacy	Help with homework	Access to the internet and computers
Drama classes and workshops	Mentoring	Signposting to services	Educational support
Sport activities	Mental-health and well-being support	Orientation in the city/place of living	Vocational support
Music production	Counselling	Humanitarian packages distribution	Access to library resources
Poetry classes		Interpreter services	
Movie club			
Arts and craft classes			
Photography workshops and exhibition			
Excursions			
Social and cultural events			
Film production workshops			

Source: Authors' data (2018)

Table 2: Category of social work practices by sectors

Country	Category of support					Dominant category of support	Sector				
	Artistic & social activities and initiatives	Socioeconomic empowerment	Practical help with everyday situations in life	Individual, person-centered support	Total		NGO	Public	Private	Faith	Total no of identified projects
Serbia	4	4	0	0	8 (16.7%)	Socioeconomic empowerment, Artistic & social activities and initiatives	8	0	0	0	8 (16.7%)
Italy	0	8	0	0	8 (16.7%)	Socioeconomic empowerment	6	0	2	1	9 (18.8%)
Malta	1	8	0	0	9 (18.7%)	Socioeconomic empowerment	8	0	0	1	9 (18.8%)
Finland	4	1	2	3	10 (20.8%)	Artistic & social activities and initiatives	5	4	1	0	10 (20.8%)
United Kingdom	1	3	5	4	13 (27.1%)	Practical help with everyday life situations	13	0	0	0	13 (27.8%)
Total	12 (25%)	24 (50%)	7 (14.6%)	5 (10%)	48 (100%)		39 (81%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	48 (100%)

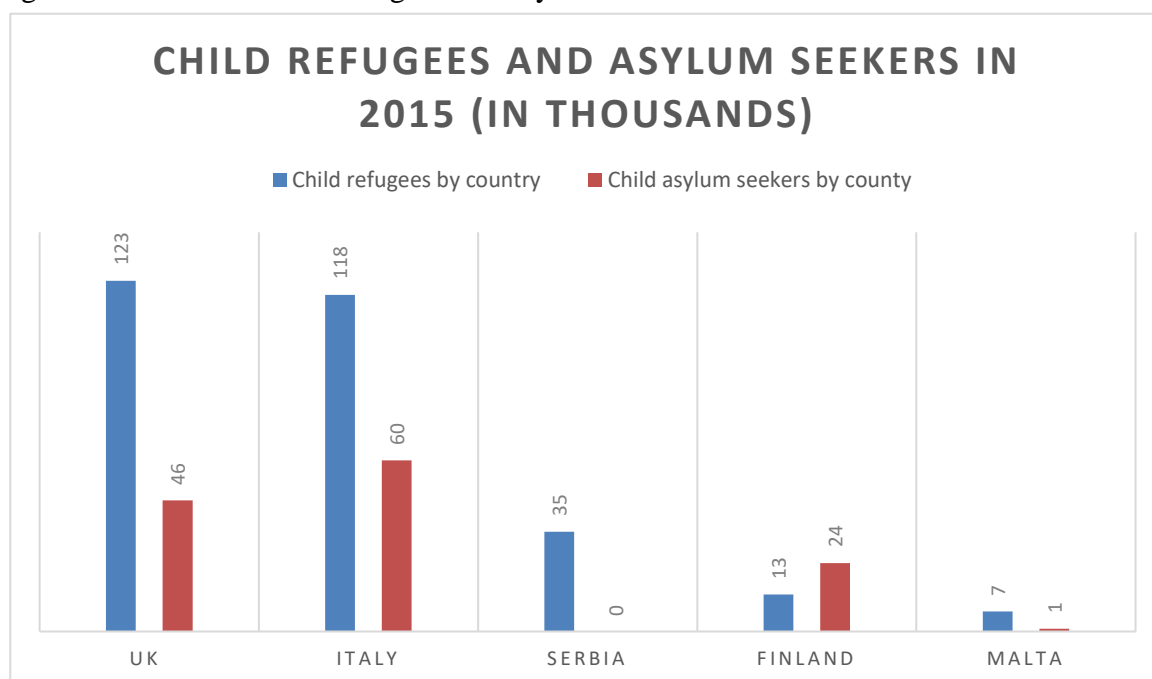
Source: Authors' data (2018)

Table 3: *Category of social work practices by coverage and involvement of social workers*

Country	Scope of participants			Duration				Involvement and engagement (programs may have overlapping personnel category)				
	1-on-1 or small group	Large to medium -sized group	Total	<1 year	1–3 years	>3 years	Total	Specific profession /experts related to project	Volunteer Involved (non- specified age)	Youth social workers	Other non- specified background	Total
Serbia	1	7	8 (16.7%)	4	4	0	8 (16.7%)	2	3	4	3	12 (16.2%)
Italy	3	5	8 (16.7%)	6	2	0	8 (16.7%)	5	1	5	4	15 (20.3%)
Malta	3	6	9 (18.7%)	1	6	2	9 (18.7%)	1	6	0	7	14 (18.9%)
Finland	7	3	10 (20.8%)	0	7	3	10 (20.8%)	3	2	3	7	15 (20.3%)
United Kingdom	6	7	13 (27.1%)	0	4	9	13 (27.1%)	5	6	2	5	18 (24.3%)
Total	20 (41.7%)	28 (58.3%)	48 (100%)	11 (22.9%)	23 (47.9%)	14 (29.1%)	48 (100%)	16 (21.6%)	18 (24.3%)	14 (18.9%)	26 (35.1%)	74 (100%)

Source: Authors' data (2018)

Figure 1: Number of child refugees and asylum seekers in 2015



Source: UNICEF (2016)¹²

¹² Source: https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Child-migrants-and-refugees_268.xlsx

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