



Amir's Volunteering

A study on Volunteering as Pathway to Social Inclusion for Young Asylum Seekers and Refugees - Opportunities and Barriers in a European Context

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Photo: Mikkel Østergaard



AMIR'S **VOLUNTEERING**

A study on volunteering as pathway to social inclusion
for young asylum seekers and refugees

Opportunities and barriers in a European context

2013



Photo: Peter Sørensen

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE **RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT** MOVEMENT

The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement works according to seven fundamental principles

Humanity

Impartiality

Neutrality

Independence

Voluntary Service

Unity

Universality

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1. INTRODUCTION: **social inclusion through voluntary service**

“I am interested in volunteering because I want to learn about the culture of this country, and this city: how people are, what they do, how they act – to find out what people are really like, and get to know them”

– young male asylum seeker, Scotland –

Could more be done to strengthen young asylum seekers' and refugees' inclusion into European society?
Could participation in voluntary service provide a tool to achieve this, and what would be required to make this a reality, both practically and structurally?

These questions form the core of the project entitled Volunteering for Social Inclusion (VSI) - a social experimental, comparative study of voluntary service as a possible way towards young asylum seekers' and refugees' social inclusion, financed by the EU and implemented in a bilateral cooperation between the Danish Red Cross and the British Red Cross during the period from September 2011 - September 2013.

This report presents the results of the VSI study of the experiences of young asylum seekers and refugees as volunteers in a Danish and Scottish context. To a large extent, the topic is seen from the young people's own perspective, based on their own considerations, thoughts and experiences.

The overall opportunities and barriers faced by young asylum seekers and refugees during social inclusion through voluntary service, identified in the report, will relate to a broader European context. The report will conclude with a number of recommendations for both EU institutions and individual EU Member States.

1.1. **Project background, aims and objective**

The project's target group consists of young people between the ages of 17 and 25 in Denmark and Scotland, as well as young refugees of the same age group who have recently received residence permits.

When the Danish Red Cross took the initiative to develop and apply for support for the VSI project in 2010, it was partly in response to the fact that in the recent years, Europe had witnessed an increase in the number of young, single asylum seekers under the age of 25, and particularly in the number of 'unaccompanied minors', i.e. asylum seekers under the age of 18 who arrive alone to the new country without parents or other legal guardians such as another authoritative family member, and who can therefore be considered to be in a particularly vulnerable position.

When young asylum seekers gain residence permits as refugees, (whether unaccompanied minors or young people, singles over 18 years of age), they all face a life on their own and having to find their feet in what is for them an unfamiliar, new society. They have to do this without their family, and possibly without no longer being bolstered by the same institutional structure (such as e.g. asylum centres) as before and which the relevant country probably provided during the actual asylum phase. Without a social network, during their transition to refugee status young people are often forced to draw on the various institutional systems and services that exist around them. However, a major key to young people starting a new life in a new country is social inclusion in their specific surroundings and local community. It is this very type of inclusion that institutional systems are less likely to provide, compared with e.g. activities and local networks of civic society, i.e. where the young people's everyday lives need to start to take shape.

Based on experience from a broad European context we know that volunteering can lend a certain structure in terms of forming social relations and creating local networks. In the relevant European countries, voluntary service plays a role in a range of areas including education, culture, sport, social care, humanitarian work, etc.

With regard to asylum seekers, a large comparative European report has highlighted that voluntary service also for this particular group often will yield many benefits when it comes to their overall feeling of 'empowerment' and social inclusion with respect to the surrounding community¹. However, whereas many young Europeans are actively involved in voluntary service, the majority of asylum seekers come from countries where this form of civic society activity is not widespread, so they often show a lack of knowledge about this type of work when they arrive.

Equally, local communities are often unaware of the potential resources that asylum seekers and refugees possess, including their ability to do voluntary service, i.e. as opposed solely to be the ones on the receiving

¹ *Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate [EASI]*, Development Partnership (2007): Asylum Seekers and Volunteering in Europe: transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England.

end of voluntary services from others (typically voluntary legal aid, homework help, or similar).

With the above in mind, partly with a focus on young asylum seekers and refugees as representing a number of resources (instead of just being a vulnerable part of society), and partly with a focus on the transition from '*passive recipient*' of voluntary service to '*active provider*', the VSI project's overall objective has been to study the extent to which voluntary service can be a useful tool in a European context towards strengthening the inclusion of young asylum seekers and refugees in civic society.

The VSI project also focuses on young people's transition from asylum status to refugee status. The latter should be seen in the light of the extent to which participation in voluntary service helps create a balance between new refugees' institutional and social affiliation in civic society.

In the discussion and analysis of this topic, the report operates on two parallel levels:

- From an *individual's perspective*, the report sheds light on young asylum seekers' and refugees' resources and motivation in relation to voluntary service, as well as the different types of obstacles experienced by the young people, such as language or lack of self-esteem, shyness and insecurity about their surroundings.
- On a *broader social level*, the report focuses sharply on the more structural opportunities and barriers that exist in Europe for asylum seekers' and refugees' active participation in voluntary service. The identification of the overall structural barriers and opportunities will conclude in a number of specific recommendations for EU institutions and individual EU countries.

Photo: Mikkel Østergaard



Based on both parties' extensive experience of working with young asylum seekers and volunteers, the VSI project has opted for a bilateral cooperation between the Danish Red Cross (DRC) and the British Red Cross (BRC). The Danish Red Cross has 29 years experience working with asylum seekers at asylum centres, and the British Red Cross has a decade of expertise in a more non-institutionalised context. From a European perspective, we have found this comparison of different experience interesting and enlightening when studying the VSI project's overall problem: *young asylum seekers' and refugees' obstacles and opportunities for social inclusion through voluntary service.*

1.2. Project method and participants

Running concurrently in Denmark and Scotland, the two-year VSI project was divided into three main phases, in addition to an initial phase as follows:

1. An initial phase focusing on the research of existing knowledge on the area (studies and reports), as well as interviews with voluntary service organisations and young asylum seekers and refugees about their knowledge of and obstacles to voluntary service.
The initial research provided a background for developing further project activities and is therefore included in the final assessment of the project's experiences.
2. The development and execution of interactive workshops for young asylum seekers and refugees with a view to highlighting the opportunities for voluntary service.
3. Cooperation with local associations/institutions for monitoring workshop participants' specific participation in voluntary service activities, followed by an assessment in the form of a qualitative interview with the participants.
4. Analysis of the data and experiences gathered in close dialogue with central external players in both Denmark and Scotland with special knowledge and experience of young asylum seekers/ refugees and/or voluntary work. In addition, an internal survey was conducted on experiences with young asylum seekers and refugees working as volunteers, which was sent out to a total of 125 voluntary organisations in both Scotland and Denmark. The results of the study has contributed to both the final analysis and to the preparation of the recommendations on this area.

Methodically, the project has been based on a specific socio-educational approach, developed by the Danish Red Cross in recent years, based on the organisation's extensive work with psychological education. In terms of asylum seekers' and refugees' social inclusion and 'empowerment', the socio-educational approach provides new knowledge and experience that is closely related to specific action. With regard to the VSI project this means that if the young asylum seeker or refugee is to acquire an awareness of the various ways in which he or she can become socially included in the local community, this awareness must be developed in close combination with practice and the reverse. In other words; in terms of social inclusion and 'empowerment', practical involvement will lead to new knowledge and reflection, which again leads to further action and so on.

In the VSI project the above socio-educational approach is shown through introductory workshops on social inclusion and voluntary service conducted with young asylum seekers and refugees in both Scotland and Denmark. The project involved the young people as much as possible when creating these workshops. As such, the workshop content was based on the young people's reflections on their own and each other's resources, and their initial opinions on social inclusion, including, and in particular, volunteering.

With regard to the workshop participants who subsequently went on to work as volunteers, the socio-educational approach exactly was put into practice through such combination of knowledge, reflection and action. Last but not least, this approach also played a role in terms of the shared evaluation, which together with the individual young people was conducted following their service as volunteers. This evaluation was in some cases also achieved through in-depth qualitative interviews, in which each participant had the opportunity to prioritise aspects of their own experience as a volunteer and express what in their opinion was relevant and meaningful (not only in relation to voluntary service, but also social inclusion in general).

The young participants

In Scotland a total of 57 young people took part in the VSI project workshops, of which 29 were asylum seekers and 28 were refugees - distributed across 10 workshops held in the period from April 2012 to April 2013. The participants in each of these workshops consisted of a mix of asylum seekers and refugees.

In Denmark, a total of 78 young people took part in the project's workshops, of which 28 were asylum seekers and 40 were refugees, distributed across 5 workshops, which were held in the period from April 2012 to May 2013. The participants in these workshops were split between asylum seekers and refugees.

For the two countries, the total number of workshop participants totalled 135 young asylum seekers/refugees. In Denmark's case, the biggest group came from Afghanistan and Iran. This was the same in Scotland, besides a number of African countries (primarily former British colonies).

Photo: Mikkel Østergaard



Of the total 135 participants in both Scotland and Denmark, 84 showed interest in volunteering following the workshops: In Scotland 36 (out of 57 participants) and in Denmark 48 (out of a total of 84 participants).

In Scotland's case, this led to 36 workshop participants (out of 36 interested) becoming involved in short-term (1 day) voluntary service. These young people did their voluntary service in groups. Of these 36 participants, 31 expressed interest in further voluntary service activities over a longer period of time. The VSI project in Scotland gave them personal support for this, which resulted in 5 (out of the 31 interested) participating in long-term voluntary service.

In Denmark's case, 18 workshop participants (out of a total of 48 interested) took part in voluntary service activities, some in groups and some individually, and in both cases supported by the VSI project's team. The activities lasted from one day to longer periods of time.

The specific voluntary service activities attended by the young asylum seekers and refugees in the two countries were as follows:

- Trainee assistants in sports associations
- Cooking and sale of food/drinks at music festivals
- Social visitors in care homes for the elderly
- Catering work at volunteer cafés
- Practical helpers at a gymnastics association's Christmas party
- Sewing clothes for children of poor families in Greenland
- Community gardening
- Bake sales
- Working in recycling stores

Of the total 54 participants who tried voluntary service through the VSI project in the two countries (whether on an introductory level or over a longer period of time) qualitative interviews were conducted with a total of 21 participants following their volunteer work: 12 in Scotland and 9 in Denmark (while in Denmark a further 2 people were interviewed whose long-term experience of voluntary work was unrelated to the VSI project). As part of the VSI project, then, a deeper qualitative evaluation interview was conducted with 23 asylum seekers and refugees in the two countries. For an overall view of those interviewed, see the table below.

	Country of residence	Age	Age upon arrival	Gender	Nationality	Immigration status at interview	Social status	Social status upon arrival
1.	SCO	20 years	18 years	M	Ivory Coast	Asylum seeker	Family	Family
2.	SCO	22 years	22 years	M	Syria	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
3.	SCO	20 years	19 years	M	Haiti	Refugee	Single	Single
4.	SCO	16 years	14 years	M	Afghanistan	Refugee	Unaccompanied	Unaccompanied
5.	SCO	18 years	16 years	M	Sudan	Asylum seeker	Single	Unaccompanied
6.	SCO	24 years	23 years	M	Guinea Bissau	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
7.	SCO	24 years	24 years	M	Iran	Refugee	Single	Single
8.	SCO	20 years	18 years	M	Ivory Coast	Asylum seeker	Family	Family
9.	SCO	23 years	21 years	M	Iran	Refugee	Single	Single
10.	SCO	24 years	24 years	M	Iran	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
11.	SCO	19 years	17 years	F	Somalia	Refugee	Single	Unaccompanied
12.	SCO	25 years	24 years	F	Eritrea	Refugee	Single	Single
13.	UK	27 years	26 years	M	Iran	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
14.	UK	24 years	23 years	M	Iran	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
15.	UK	19 years	17 years	M	Serbia	Refugee	Family	Family
16.	UK	18 years	16 years	M	Afghanistan	Refugee	Family	Family
17.	UK	19 years	16 years	M	Afghanistan	Refugee	Single	Unaccompanied
18.	UK	19 years	17 years	M	Afghanistan	Asylum seeker	Family	Family
19.	UK	18 years	16 years	M	Afghanistan	Asylum seeker	Family	Family
20.	UK	22 years	21 years	M	Afghanistan	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
21.	UK	20 years	19 years	M	Afghanistan	Asylum seeker	Single	Single
22.	DK (not VSI)	17 years	15 years	M	Afghanistan	Refugee	Unaccompanied	Unaccompanied
23.	DK (not VSI)	37 years	35 years	M	Guinea	Asylum seeker	Single	Single

As previously mentioned, the project's target group was young asylum seekers and refugees between the ages of 17 and 25, and either unaccompanied minors, or young singles over 18 years of age. At the VSI project's workshops, which were sometimes attended by up to 25 young people, it was not always possible to check these narrow participant criteria in advance. This means that both the project's workshops and the subsequent voluntary service were attended by young asylum seekers and refugees, who in various ways did not meet the project's fixed target group, either because of their age (overall the average age of workshop participants fell between 16 and 29 years of age) or because they were neither unaccompanied or single and were instead living in the country with close family (either one or both parents and any siblings).

With regard to this last category of workshop participant (young people over/under 18 years of age with family), occasionally some contrasts were noted in both countries in comparison with the target group with regard to motivation, obstacles and opportunities for voluntary service. As is shown in the overview table, it was therefore decided in both countries to include a number of the project participants from the group of young people with families in the final round of interviewees. The inclusion of this group added an enlightening perspective to the project, in relation to the unaccompanied minors and singles, as their respective life circumstances and day to day situations could be compared to one another.

As is also shown in the overview table, in Denmark, the decision was made to interview two VSI participants of 16 and 27 years respectively, who by their age fell outside the target group. We also decided to include two additional people in the final interviews who both had long-term experience of volunteering in their new country (one of whom falls outside the target group in terms of age), even though their volunteer work was independent of the VSI project.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the discussions and findings highlighted by this report in relation to the barriers and opportunities in voluntary service among young asylum seekers and refugees, are not based solely on the selected interviewees' experiences, but on the VSI project's overall experience from all the young people who attended the workshops and subsequent volunteer activities.

1.3. Report structure

"Today's societies place challenging demands on individuals, who are confronted with complexity in many parts of their lives. Globalization and modernization are creating an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. To make sense of and function well in this world, the competencies that individuals need to meet their goals have become more complex, requiring more than the mastery of certain narrowly defined skills".

This is what OECD (*Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*) writes in a report concerning the core competencies currently considered essential for individuals to function in today's global society - and in the increasingly complex situations and challenges that these societies entail².

A young person fleeing their homeland and arriving alone in a new and unfamiliar society on the other side of the world, is not only an apt metaphor for the globalised world referred to above by the OECD, but also a particularly good example of the complex and challenging life situations that this globalisation brings along.

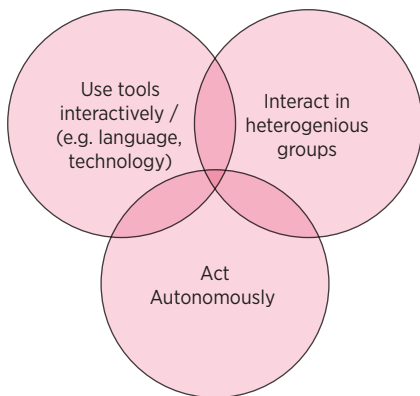
With this in mind, the VSI project found it useful in its study of young asylum seekers' and refugees' social inclusion through voluntary service, to look at the OECD report, and the overall core competencies highlighted as being essential for individuals to cope in today's complex world. In other words, we were interested in how the OECD's indicated core competencies had a resonance for newly arrived young asylum seekers' and refugees' life situation - and the relevance the same core competencies would have in relation to opportunities and obstacles to engaging in voluntary work.

The overall type of competence referred to by the OECD should be understood in a broad context, referring both to 'knowledge', 'skills', 'attitudes' and 'values'. These broadly defined competencies have been further split into three overall objective categories by the OECD³:

1. Firstly, the individual has to be able to master a number of 'tools' in order to interact effectively with the surroundings (both physically in the form of e.g. information technology and socially, for example in the form of language. A person must be able to use these tools sufficiently to achieve their own objective. i.e. *'use the tools interactively'*
2. In an increasingly interdependent and complex world, where people live among people from a number of different backgrounds, the individual must be able to *'interact within heterogeneous groups'*
3. And lastly, the individual must be able to take responsibility for managing his or her own life and situate it within its broader social context, *'act autonomously'*

² Report entitled *The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies: Executive Summary* (2005), is a summary of a major OECD project 'DeSeCo' (The Definition and Selection of key Competencies), which across the OECD countries has studied the overall competencies that young people require today to succeed in a globalised world. <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>

³ *The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies: Executive Summary* (2005), OECD, s. 5.



These last three overall categories or spheres comprise, according to the OECD, the overall platform that contains the most essential core competencies required by an individual to function successfully in today's globalised societies

As the model also shows, the OECD report focuses on the actual individual, in the form of their various personal competencies (referring to 'knowledge', 'skills', 'attitudes' and 'values'). With regards to the VSI project's inspiration from the OECD model, we found it necessary, however, to also focus on the surrounding social framework and the different structural barriers and opportunities for the individual's 'empowerment', activity and social inclusion this framework can lead to. The following two examples from the VSI material serve to illustrate this point.

EXAMPLE from Denmark.

In a study of the young asylum seekers' and refugees' social inclusion through voluntary service, it is not sufficient to look only at the individuals' own motivation and positive attitude in relation to e.g. meeting Danes and making Danish friends through volunteer work (whereby the person proves desire to interact in heterogeneous groups'). If a given person is not able in fact to get to the actual volunteering activity because - as with of Danish integration practice - they have been sent to live in a rural village with only limited access to public transport, then the situation needs to be viewed from a more structural perspective as well.

EXAMPLE from Scotland.

In a study of young asylum seekers' and refugees' social inclusion through voluntary service, it is not sufficient to focus only on the individual's strong motivation and desire in relation to e.g. learning English quickly to be able to offer his or her voluntary resources at a hospital in Glasgow, with a view to perhaps increasing their chances of a career in nursing (whereby the individual shows the ability and desire to 'take responsibility for their own life' and 'act autonomously'). If the individual reports that for a second year running there is a waiting list for a place on an English course and he or she therefore only has limited command of English, this too forces the perspective on the structural framework as well.

Hence, the VSI project therefore found it necessary to combine the focus on the individual asylum seeker or refugee (their resources, competencies and motivation) with a focus on the surrounding social structure, which can in different ways create obstacles and barriers to young people's access and opportunity to actively use their competencies and act on their motivation.

The report's analytical part (chapters 2 and 3) is thus built around the dynamic between 'individual' on the one side and 'structure' on the other, as it has become clearly apparent in the project's data material. This means that a combined view of the 'individual'/'structure' and 'motivation'/'barriers' will run side by side throughout the report (rather than be separated and discussed in individual sections).

EXAMPLE

The structural lack of access to e.g. language courses (and thus the ability to master the local language) can be experienced by the individual as both a motivation and a barrier in relation to doing volunteer work. In both cases, the lack of language courses will impact how the young person experience his or her own motivation and ability to act when it comes to social inclusion through voluntary service.

The constantly combined view of individual motivation and structural barriers further relate to the prevalent main axes the report is structured upon, i.e. *the comparison Denmark/Scotland and the comparison asylum seeker/refugee* (hereunder the transition between these two statuses).

- *Chapter 2* accounts for key aspects of the Danish and Scottish recipient society and their relevance to the report's topic, including not least the two countries' varying practices in the asylum and refugee area, and the impact these practices have on young asylum seekers' and refugees' participation in voluntary work.
- *Chapter 3* examines the young asylum seekers' and refugees' different types of individual motivation when volunteering, as well as the individual obstacles and barriers experienced to volunteering.

- *Chapter 4* comprises a conclusion which discusses the VSI project's overall findings and results from young asylum seekers and refugees as volunteers, while also discussing the target group's social inclusion and 'empowerment' in a broader and more general context. Overall the conclusion leads to a number of specific recommendations, which are accounted for point by point in the following chapter.
- *Chapter 5* covers a number of specific recommendations from the study, aimed at both EU institutions, governments and individual EU countries.



Photo: Layton Thomson

2. THE DANISH AND SCOTTISH RECEIVING SOCIETIES – **similarities and differences for young asylum seekers and refugees**

“My life has become much better now than before I received a positive (refugee status). I have many more options now. Not only because I no longer have to constantly think about refusal. But also because I can now go to school and get an education. And my own flat - and no longer live at the asylum centre where I had to share a room with others! That’s also something that is very different now!”

— male, 18 years old, refugee status in Denmark —

“I have to go to the housing services every Monday to see whether they are going to take me to a hotel or whether they are going to give me a place to live. I don’t know what is going to happen. If this housing matter settles somehow, and I get settled, I will be able to relax and to concentrate on other things, such as applying for college perhaps”

— 24 year old male, refugee status in Scotland —

Where the young VSI participants in Danish society tend to experience the transition from asylum seeker status to refugee status as relatively significant, it appears to be less so for those in Scotland, particularly when it comes to the existing support measures available to recognised refugees (financial, social and housing). Whereas the Danish welfare state has a relatively developed and institutionalised asylum and subsequent integration system, the British system, and therefore also the Scottish, reveals differences in several areas. These differences not only relate to the two countries' actual politics and legislation in this area, but must also be understood in a broader historical context, which we will touch on briefly now.

In present day Europe, diverging historical circumstances (political, financial, demographical, social etc.) have led to the development of different states relying on different welfare models. Such historical circumstances have naturally not created these welfare models by themselves, but have over time, led to different political arguments and decisions contributing to the shape of a given state apparatus. Each given state apparatus and its different institutions have affected the individual European societies, in terms of economy, labour, and in terms of which requirements and expectations each society places on its citizens. This is also relevant to how a state receives asylum seekers and refugees, and which welfare provisions it makes available to them.

In today's western society, hereunder Europe, there are three different ideal types of welfare states⁴:

- The so-called 'liberal' and only to a limited extent developed welfare model, of which the US and UK are an example. This focuses mainly on the incitement to work and function independently (and with regard to different types of social problems such as poverty, provides only limited aid).
- The so-called 'conservative' and cooperative welfare model, such as the one in Germany and Austria, is an example of focusing mainly on the family's responsibility, and on private insurances for different social groups, often job related.
- The so-called 'universalist' model, seen in the Scandinavian countries, which prioritises a solid and developed public sector in which all residents (not only citizens) are entitled to a number of benefits, such as child and family benefits, support for education, social security and pension (the latter sometimes in relation to the number of years the recipient has been resident in the country).

⁴ Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1990): *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

The latter universalist welfare model is based on the idea that it is in the interest of all of society for the public sector to supplement market forces, as it secures the entire population's basic living needs. Nowhere in the world has this political and ideological thinking in favour of a strong welfare system been more prevalent than in the Scandinavian countries, including Denmark. A Danish anthropologist writes:

"Even though homogenizing forces such as European Union integration and global competition tend to propel countries towards greater similarity in terms of economic structure and policy, the Scandinavian model of welfare still stands out as the most extensive in terms of policies that regard the national population as "a whole" towards which the state has obligations".⁵

Where Danish society traditionally builds on a comprehensive welfare sector (based on one of the world's highest tax rates), the public welfare system is far less developed in the British, and thus also Scottish, system. The social structure and social value base in Denmark and Scotland are thus quite different. This has also had an impact on the extent of the institutional structures and resources available to asylum seekers and refugees in these countries. Where these are quite considerable in Denmark, the situation is somewhat different in Scotland..

➤ **COMPARISON DENMARK/SCOTLAND WITH REGARD TO ASYLUM:**

In Denmark, all asylum seekers are secured housing at asylum centers during the asylum phase (and after rejection until deportation), as well as modest financial support for basic living expenses. In the UK, asylum seekers are supported to make an application to the Home Office for living expenses and housing. Private service companies are contracted by the Home Office to provide dispersal accommodation within communities. In Denmark, all services are provided from the asylum centers in a rather institutionalized setup, whereas asylum seekers in Scotland, as in many other European countries, are typically more dependent on having their own social network (often in the form of their respective ethnic communities) than those in Denmark and other Scandinavian receiving countries. The group of unaccompanied minors is however automatically guaranteed a number of provisions through the Scottish asylum system, in particular housing, financial and social support. In Denmark, asylum seekers are as well offered language courses during the asylum phase, unlike in Scotland where they have to apply for it themselves.

⁵ Steffen Jöhncke (2011): "Integrating Denmark: the Welfare State as a National(ist) Accomplishment". I: *The Question of Integration: Immigration, Exclusion, and the Danish Welfare State*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars side 30-53.

➤ **COMPARISON DENMARK/SCOTLAND WITH REGARD TO**

REFUGEES: Equally, when asylum seekers transition to refugee status, there is a relatively developed and institutionalised integration system for them in Denmark. It ensures that every newly recognised refugee receives housing and a minimum amount of money to live on, as well as mandatory lessons in Danish and Danish society basically from day one, free of charge⁶.

In Scotland, refugees are allowed to work but are entitled to apply for state benefits and housing. There can be delays and other difficulties in this application process, causing periods of destitution, which are not seen in Denmark. Moreover, in Scotland there is often a long waiting list for refugees to get a place on a language course (although here too separate rules and offers apply to unaccompanied minors).

ILLUSTRATION

Out of the total 57 workshop participants in Scotland, 13 young people were homeless (10 refugees and 3 asylum seekers), while in Denmark this figure was 0 (out of a total of 78 workshop participants). In terms of access to language tuition in English/Danish, 40 of the young workshop participants in Scotland (out of a total of 57) did not have any access, while all 78 workshop participants in Denmark were receiving Danish lessons.

The different practices in the asylum and integration area mean that the young participants in Denmark tended to experience the transition from asylum seeker to refugee as relatively significant, whereas this transition was of less relevance to participants in Scotland in terms of its impact on their daily lives. In other words, for young participants in Denmark, the moment they are recognized as refugees, there is an institutionalized integration system awaiting them, which provides for their basic needs in terms of finance, education and housing. By contrast, for the young participants in Scotland, these everyday conditions are not automatically provided. Applying for housing, benefits and education can, in itself, prove difficult for young people who do not have access to appropriate social support during this transition (which is the case for most young people who arrive when they are over 18).

The key point in relation to this report is that these either automatically guaranteed - or not automatically guaranteed - day to day basic conditions (finance and access to tuition, housing and social support etc.) to a large extent appear to affect the motivation and barriers experienced by the young VSI participants in Scotland and Denmark, partly in relation to social inclusion in a broad context and partly in relation to voluntary service more specifically. This observation and its implementations is the focus of the next chapter.

⁶ According to Danish integration law, since 1999, a recognised refugee is to be housed in a Danish local community for the first three years, and the refugee has no decision on the location. For refugees who have recently received a residence permit in Denmark this housing, as well as language tuition, is a mandatory procedure as long as you are unemployed and are supported by public means in the form of the so-called 'introduction benefits', which in Denmark are specifically intended for refugees (and individuals family reunited with refugees). This benefit is more or less the same amount as unemployment benefit for Danish citizens.

3. VOLUNTARY SERVICE AMONG YOUNG ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

“When you volunteer you feel useful because you are helping other people”

— young male refugee in Scotland —

A large, comparative European report from 2007 on the involvement of asylum seekers in voluntary work in Hungary, France and England, points out how through different volunteering roles, participants generally experienced an increased feeling of 'empowerment' on to the surrounding community⁷. More specifically, it highlights that asylum seekers' involvement in volunteer work often affected their social inclusion in their respective European societies in the following positive ways:

- Building trust in the local community
- Access to general information and social networks
- Acquiring new skills - and strengthening existing ones
- Strengthening language and communicative skills
- Gaining insight into the new society and its culture
- Experience in relation to the society's organisational and working culture
- Acquiring organisational knowledge to help create own associations
- Access to practical solutions in relation to various problems
- Structure and purpose to daily life
- Reduced isolation
- Opportunity to meet and work with people in the local community and learning from one another on an equal footing

These benefits were also experienced across Denmark and Scotland, and pointed out by the VSI project's young asylum seekers and refugees themselves (either based on their perception of the benefits of voluntary work or based on their actual experiences of such).

⁷ Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate [EASI], Development Partnership (2007): *Asylum Seekers and Volunteering in Europe: transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England*.

However, some differences also exist between the two countries when it comes to the benefits experienced, especially when you examine the motivation factor for voluntary work from participants in Denmark and Scotland. These differences are in many ways an extension of the more general differences in the refugee and asylum area, which were discussed in the previous chapter. As described, whereas the institutionalised structure and support system in the refugee and integration area is relatively developed in Denmark, asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland have to rely more on their own personal and social networks. As we will also see in this chapter, in some cases these differences also affect the individual motivations and obstacles to volunteering, which participants in both countries have highlighted.

Photo: Mikkel Østergaard



Another relevant social condition, which has proven to affect how the participants in the two countries sometimes perceive their motivation for voluntary work, is the way in which voluntary service in Danish and Scottish societies was traditionally associated with two different primary sectors - the civic society sphere and the public/private business sector. In Danish society, civic associations have always played a very strong role, with a long tradition of voluntary work within the civic society sphere (culture, sports and other leisure time activities). In Scottish society, voluntary organizations are seen as the third sector alongside public and private bodies. The voluntary sector is often seen as meeting the needs of vulnerable people and filling gaps between the public and private sectors. This can lead to voluntary opportunities in more formalized voluntary roles targeting professional competencies, skills and experiences. This was experienced by VSI participants in Scotland in contrast to Denmark where voluntary work is mainly associated with leisure activities and thereby the civic society sector (as opposed to the employment sector).⁸

This chapter examines the main motivation and obstacles with regard to participation in voluntary work which the young participants in the VSI project have generally stressed. In addition, the chapter also summarises the ways motivation and obstacles can differ depending on which country the participants are living in, or according to status, i.e. asylum seekers or refugees.

3.1. Motivation for volunteering

The most important reasons for volunteering given by participants from both countries can be summarised in a series of specific headings, respectively: *language, social life, cultural competencies, personal competencies and personal quality of life*. This section examines the different reasons given by the young people for participating in voluntary work.

MOTIVATION

LANGUAGE Improve my Danish/English

“In college you are studying English, but when volunteering you can practice what you are learning in college because you meet people”

– 20 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“If I spoke English I would be more part of society. I cannot get a college place despite lots of support from the British Red Cross. I am on a waiting list and I think that volunteering could help me improve my English a little”

– 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“It is really important for me to learn Danish. It is important if I’m going to establish good relations with Danish people. Even though everyone here also speaks English it’s important to be able to speak with people in their own language and voluntary work is good for learning this.”

–27 year-old male asylum seeker, Denmark –

“One of the reasons I am looking for a volunteer job is English. There you can meet the people and you have to speak with them – that is how you improve your English”

– 23 year-old male refugee, Scotland –

“If I find a place to volunteer, maybe I will get Scottish friends and it will help me to understand more when the Scottish people speak with their accent. I don't communicate with Scottish people now, because... maybe because I don't have contact with them. That is why I want to find some volunteer job. It is important to have Scottish friends because I live here, so it would be good to speak with Scottish people. But at the moment, no – because I don't have the opportunity. That is why I need to find an opportunity. I think that if I work as a volunteer in a shop, I will meet them – and it will be good”

– 20 year-old male refugee, Scotland) –

MOTIVATION

SOCIAL LIFE Meeting other people/get a social network
Get to know Danes/Scots better
Feel welcome
Help others

“To help others is to show love. That is important to be part of society”

— 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Denmark —

“For instance by volunteering, through knowing more people here opportunities will come forward”

— 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

“For me to help people at my own age, for instance - I really like it. If I can help people to do basketball, because I know about it, I can teach them - and when I do it, I feel something very good in my heart”

— 20 year-old male refugee, Scotland —

“I think maybe that if more refugees did voluntary work it might stop the separation between Danes and foreigners, because then they would meet each other and do things together, instead of just talking about each other without really knowing anything about each other. For example, I once worked in a supermarket and there was a customer who had forgotten her debit card, so I ran out of the shop after her with it and she was so happy and looked at me in surprise, as if to say - why would a refugee give me my card back? If we met more, through voluntary work for example, perhaps it wouldn't be like this any more.”

— 18 year-old male refugee, Denmark —

“Normally, I feel welcome in Denmark, but I felt extra welcome when I was a volunteer [as assistant trainer for children in a sport club], because I was invited to be there. I didn’t need to be there, like being at work, for example, but I was still invited. And the trainer didn’t get paid for inviting me. Normally, people aren’t prepared to do anything good for you unless they get paid, but the trainer was the opposite. So I definitely felt extra welcome because it was voluntary work.”

— 18 year-old male refugee, Denmark —

MOTIVATION

CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

Understanding Danes / Scots
Understanding Danish / Scottish culture

“If I’m going to do voluntary work, the most important thing for me for example, is not to get something on my CV for a job later, but to learn the language and have fun while I’m doing it and also to learn about Danish culture and how Danes live”

— 19 year-old male refugee, Denmark —

“When you don’t know the country and you go to volunteer, you meet people from the country and you discover how people are – what kind of people are in the country”

— 20 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

“Denmark is a very democratic country. First words I learned here was ‘you decide’. I was confused, how can I decide anything for myself? And when you participate in volunteering work it is very democratic, you discuss things together in a democratic way – there is no boss alone deciding. Here you are free to talk and think – It’s very peaceful. And volunteering is a good way to learn about this way of democratic, peaceful thinking. This is also what I tell to the new asylum seekers coming to the asylum centre”

— 37 year-old male asylum seeker, Denmark —

“When I want to be with Scottish people through volunteering, it’s because they are people from here – they know things better about here, and then you discover things about the country. Because when you know the traditions and culture, you feel a bit more part of the country – you feel more inside the country. You don’t feel too much an outsider like before. I don’t want to live like a hermit. Everywhere you are with other people – volunteering jobs, college, sports clubs – you can make a lot of friends, meet a lot of people. Maybe sometimes you can even discover that you are practically the same as a Scottish person. And you didn’t know that, because you are from a different country, different culture, different religion – but you are totally similar, you have similar thinking”

– 20 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

MOTIVATION

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES

Experience for getting a job in the future
Experience on my CV
Learn new things / get new skills

“I have never had access to education in my life. So I love working because you learn new things, and because I don't have right to work right now, I want to volunteer. I want to volunteer in a kitchen, I want to learn more about that kind of work – and maybe have the opportunity to get a certificate. I don't want to work 'here and there', but to do something purposeful for my future”

– 24 year-old male refugee, Scotland –

“I want to be a priest, so I'm thinking that it will be good experience if I could continue as a volunteer in the church where I am now on work experience””

– 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Denmark –

“Before I didn't have any experience of work, and I think volunteering will help me understand about working and to discover new personal skills and qualities”

– 20 male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“Through volunteering you can get more skills, and also it’s good for your CV. Here in Scotland, the UK, you have to show a CV and show that you have done a lot of things, as well as education, to get a good job – a lot of the other boys say so”

– 16 year old male refugee, Scotland –

“If I get a residence permit and can stay in Denmark, I want to become a farmer. So some time ago, I cycled out to a nearby farm and asked if I could help, so I became a volunteer with the farmer and have since also had work experience with him”

– 37 year-old male asylum seeker, Denmark –

“I want to volunteer because I want to know something. Any volunteering is okay, but I would like to volunteer in a nursery looking after children, for experience – because in the future I want to work in child care. So I really want to gain experience of work to help me get a job, as I am on Jobseekers Allowance now, which is not really enough for me to live”

– 19 year old female refugee, Scotland –

“I will be starting the social worker course after the summer holiday and I hope that a good reference from the after-school club where I’ve been a volunteer for a year will perhaps mean that I’ll get good work experience placement during the course and maybe a good job afterwards”

– 17 year-old male refugee, Denmark –

“I would like to be mechanic or a joiner. Perhaps volunteering in a sports club won't give me the exact skills I need for it but it can perhaps show my willingness to work on my CV. Maybe, if you've done volunteer work, it will show that you're active and willing to help and it will look good in terms of getting me work experience later”

— 19 year-old male refugee, Denmark —

“Where I am going to do volunteer work now [in a media organization] I will have to do leaflets and posters.

And I know that in Glasgow, people need leaflets and posters. Afterwards, organizations will say to me 'We need leaflets. We will pay'. So me, if I know how to make leaflets, I will make the leaflets – together with someone who can print them. We can make money with that... in my future. Because to me, the first thing is work and earn money. If I have a job, then I can start thinking about other parts of my future, making a family and so on. So that's why I want to start now in a volunteer role doing leaflets”

— 20 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

MOTIVATION

PERSONAL QUALITY OF LIFE

Passing the time / keeping busy
Using the time meaningfully
Forgetting my problems
Increasing my self confidence

“Volunteering – yes, I want to do anything I can do to keep myself busy and get my mind off of my situation [homeless, with no financial support]”

– 22 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“When I am doing something to help others, I feel better myself. You know, when you help, you feel that they need you – you feel a bit important, you feel better, and it gives you a bit of confidence”

– 20 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“The good thing about doing voluntary work is that you have fun yourself while you’re doing it and can forget everything a little. I was happy while I tried it and it was fun. And when you laugh and have fun, you’re free from your worries”

– 18 year-old refugee, Denmark –

“When I volunteered [making raised beds in a community garden] it gave me the opportunity to use skills that I have, but which I don’t have the chance to use here in Scotland, as right now I don’t have right to work. For me, the job was very easy, and it was enjoyable because I used to do this job, use drills and things. It was very nice – it was a long time since I used a drill. I wanted to do more of it, but there was no more work to do! I really enjoyed doing this work”

– 22 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“When I came to Denmark, before I started volunteering, I just spent all my time at the computer reading about my home country – or I just completely wasted my time being lazy. Now I keep busy with meaningful things. When you volunteer, you spend your time in a good way”

– 37 year-old asylum seeker, Denmark –

“For me, it would be great to go to college or to do voluntary work, because the more I stay at home, the more I worry about being sent back to my country and losing my life. I start to feel unwell, when I am doing nothing”

– 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –



Photo: Hannah Maule-Ffinch

Differences in motivation between the participants

Differences in the young asylum seekers' and refugees' motivation for taking part in voluntary work are associated with all the above-mentioned reasons in both countries. In other words, improving *language, social life, cultural competencies, personal competencies and personal quality of life*. However, the extent to which these apply can vary between Denmark and Scotland. Variations between the different forms of motivation among participants in the two countries are particularly in relation to 'personal competencies' and 'personal quality of life'. The following summary describes the reasons for this.

SUMMARY

MOTIVATION

1. Developing personal competencies with regard to future work opportunities was significantly more important in Scotland than in Denmark. Here, meeting Danes and making Danish friends was more often cited as a main motivator compared with Scotland (a situation that is probably connected with the various sectors of society with which voluntary work in the two countries is mainly associated; respectively, the civic sector in Denmark and to a greater extent in Scotland the private/public business sectors, see also Chapter 2).
2. With regard to passing the time/keeping busy under the 'personal quality of life' heading, this was mentioned more frequently by participants who did not have access to language tuition/language learning (and possibly also to work). This situation was most common among participants in Scotland (both asylum seekers and refugees), many of whom did not have access to language tuition (see also Chapter 2). Comparatively, the same situation was less common in Denmark, where participants had access to both language tuition and language teaching. However, there are two exceptions to this pattern:
 - a. Participants in Scotland who had neither access to language tuition nor a place to live, most often found it so time-consuming and stressful trying to find a solution to their daily problems that in general, they did not have the energy for voluntary work.
 - b. In Denmark, compared with participants who were refugees and often had spare-time jobs in addition to their time on courses to keep them occupied, the motivation to pass the time/keep busy was more prevalent among those who were asylum seekers and who did not have permission to work alongside their language courses, and who felt that life at the asylum centre was boring.

3.2. **Barriers to volunteering**

As demonstrated in the previous section, the young asylum seekers and refugees had various reasons for their interest in undertaking voluntary work. As mentioned previously, the motivation for project participants who demonstrated a desire to undertake voluntary activities was associated with the following headings: *language, social life, cultural competencies, personal competencies, and personal quality of life*.

If one looks at the figures for both countries, however, it was not all the young VSI participants who wished to participate in some form of voluntary activity following their introductory workshops. Of the 135 workshop participants in both Denmark and Scotland, 84 wished to undertake some voluntary work. Of this group, only 54 young people actually participated in one or more voluntary service activities (cf. Chapter 1).

What were the reasons for this drop-out rate? What types of obstacles and barriers have we been able to identify during the course of the project that could account for this? This section answers this question and also examines how a number of these barriers were expressed and experienced, seen through the daily experience of the young asylum seekers and refugees themselves.

Some of these barriers, found in relation to the target group's active involvement in voluntary work, have already been indirectly mentioned earlier in the report. With regard to the reasons for taking part in voluntary work as noted in the previous section (3.1.), many of the barriers were actually just "the other side of the coin". In other words; a given daily situation can be simultaneously both the *motivation as well as the obstacle*.

This applies particularly to the heading 'language'. As shown in the previous section, learning the local language is often a central motivation for the young people in relation to participating in voluntary work. However, as we will see, the young asylum seekers and refugees just as often experience language as a main barrier - not only in relation to participating in voluntary work, but also in regard to their general participation and social inclusion in a broader sense. This is *illustrated* by the following examples:

“Language is a big problem when being with Scottish people. I have been speaking English since I was 6 years old, but it is kind of difficult with this Scottish accent. People understand me because I speak English, but I don’t understand them due to the Scottish accent. I try, but I don’t understand them – but they understand me. It makes me feel that I am never going to learn this language”

– 18 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland –

“I believe volunteering is a good way to develop your Danish, but I think it is better first to learn the language a bit more – and then go to do volunteering. I can serve the cola and do the popcorn, but not speak with them! That’s not enough. Because then it doesn’t give you anything back”

– 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Denmark –

Photo: Layton Thomson



“When I went to an organization to find out about volunteering, the lady was talking very fast, and I was shy to ask ‘can you speak slowly, please’ – because there was a lot of people and maybe they would look at me and think ‘why does she ask her to speak slowly?’. I will not go back to this organization, because I know that I don’t understand this lady, and it makes me feel like my English is bad”

– 19 year-old female refugee, Scotland –

“When I couldn’t speak English, I was really shy to ask anybody a question because I thought that if I asked that question, they would laugh at me – but now I talk to everyone. Before that, I never spoke to anybody – and I think it wouldn’t have been possible for me to volunteer back then. Because if I couldn’t speak English, how could I be a volunteer? If they tell me ‘close the window’, I might have gone to close the door instead because of my English! So, if somebody cannot speak English, it is maybe hard to work as a volunteer, I think”

– 23 year-old male refugee, Scotland –

Let us look briefly at the idea of 'time' as another example of something that can constitute both motivation and obstacle for young people and their desire to take part in voluntary work. As previously mentioned, it was usually those participants who had no access to language tuition/ language teaching that placed the greatest emphasis on 'passing the time' as a main motivation for becoming involved in voluntary work. This is illustrated by the example below:

“I am not engaged in college. It's boring you know, just sitting at home. I want to do something, help some people. My life is just sleeping at home and watching television, it's not cool. I would like to make myself busy through volunteering”

— 18 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

Among those participants who did have access to language tuition/ language teaching on the other hand (many of whom prioritised their courses of language tuition or training highly due to a strong desire for social inclusion), 'passing the time' was of less importance. Some even said that they did not have time for voluntary work. The example below illustrates this situation:

“I find volunteering interesting, but I have to concentrate on my English lessons right now - and prioritise all my spare time to get extra English tutoring. Because I would like this year to move on into a mainstream subject, but my English is not yet good enough for this. So, I have to prioritize studying right now”

— 16 year-old male refugee, Scotland —



Photo: Mikkel Østergaard

In those cases where the young participants said they were too busy to take part in voluntary work because they were too involved in their courses of study, this is luckily also evidence that they are already engaged in building up a good basis for social inclusion and 'empowerment' in relation to their new country and life. In other words: Where 'lack of time' has, in some cases, been an obstacle to participation in voluntary work (due to involvement in courses of language tuition or training), this is not necessarily always to be taken as a barrier to social inclusion in a more general sense. However, unfortunately, this is not always the case.

Most of the participants who said they could not find the time for voluntary work often had very different reasons for this than being busily involved in a course of language tuition. For these participants, it was, on the other hand, often more a case of having to use all their time and energy finding a place to live, or getting access to some kind of basic economic and social support. This situation almost exclusively applied to the young participants in Scotland. That is, with regard to the participants here who could not find the time to take part in voluntary work (in spite of their interest in it), the problem often was unfortunately that instead of being engaged in a time-consuming course of language tuition, they were obliged to use large parts of their day trying to find a solution to structural basic life circumstances, i.e. lack of access to economic, social or housing support.

The obstacles of language and time are clearly not the only ones preventing participation in voluntary work that we encountered among the participants in the the VSI project. Unfamiliarity with the local community and its cultural norms and social conventions can often lead to shyness and insecurity, which proved an obstacle for many in participating in voluntary work. However, as we saw in section 3.2., this situation was also a motivating factor among the young participants. In other words: using voluntary work to get to know young Danes and Scots and through them gain familiarity with the countries' traditions and social and cultural communication forms. Yet, even in this connection, another obstacle for the young participants often was that they didn't actually know where to go to enquire about voluntary work or indeed, who to ask. Similarly - especially with the Scottish cohort - the young people were often required to fill out a written application form to become a volunteer and without the necessary acces to social support, this could in itself be an arduous process. The example below illustrates this:

“When I tried to volunteer in a charity soup kitchen, they asked me to fill out forms and to show documents that I don't have. I struggle to understand things like 'police checks' that are necessary for volunteering with vulnerable people. And my English or writing is not good enough to manage such recruitment process on my own”

— 24 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

The following is a summary of the main individual obstacles and barriers for young asylum seekers' and refugees' participation in voluntary work which the VSI project has identified, listed in unprioritised order under a number of thematic headings.

BARRIERS

MAIN THEMES

Language issues

Experience of inability to communicate with the local population - to understand and also to be understood.

Time issues

For example, lack of time due to participation in a course of language tuition or training, but also more often due to challenging everyday problems that can be very time-consuming for the young person to solve, such as finding a place to live or access to economic or social support.

Social issues

Shyness, insecurity and lack of self-confidence in relation to social interaction in the local community due to lack of understanding of the new country's social norms and cultural traditions, including not knowing where to go to become a volunteer or how one actually applies.

Personal/psychological issues

Worries in relation to one's own personal problems including, for example, one's asylum case, or stress in connection with homelessness or economic problems. These are problems that in themselves require considerable personal resources.

Practical and structural issues

Economy: For some, just having money for transport to and from a given voluntary activity represents a considerable expense.

Housing: For young homeless people, this is often such a great personal strain on their daily lives that it can be difficult to summon up the energy for new forms of social interaction and engagement such as voluntary work.

Social support: If a young person does not have access to social support (e.g. information on the various rules and procedures in society, or actual support in relation to case procedures), he or she can find it difficult to get a perspective on daily life in the new country. This can lead to the person not having the energy to try something new such as voluntary work, which can (for example, in Scotland) in itself include a number of unfamiliar application procedures and rules.

4. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND 'EMPOWERMENT'

“Because of volunteering, now I know so many people. When I walk outside the asylum centre or in the city, many greet me and say 'hi Sara'”

— young female asylum seeker, Denmark —

The VSI project builds on a general basic believe that participation in voluntary work increases the possibility for social interaction with society and the build-up of a social network, thus increasing social inclusion. The project has been interested in investigating the ways in which this process could benefit young asylum seekers and refugees to a greater extent. In its hypothesis that voluntary service can contribute to increasing social interaction and inclusion in society among this target group, the project has also taken inspiration from the results of an extensive comparative European study from 2007 which investigated voluntary service among asylum seekers in respectively Hungary, France and England. As noted previously, this concludes that for asylum seekers, involvement in voluntary work can often contribute to a general feeling of 'empowerment' and social inclusion in the local community and surrounding society.



In other words: The aim of the VSI project has not been to assess or undertake a further evaluation of whether or indeed the extent to which voluntary work can lead to social inclusion in the local community and thus to social inclusion in a broader sense. Rather, the question has been how this can happen and thus the project's objectives have been the following:

1. to understand the ways in which the above movement (voluntary work > social engagement > social inclusion) can be disseminated in practice among young asylum seekers and refugees.
2. to show the existing opportunities and barriers for voluntary participation as they are seen from the point of view of the target group by looking at the young participants' own considerations and experiences.

In other words: While the basic premise of the VSI project is that voluntary service leads to *participation*, which in turn leads to *inclusion*, the project has been interested in examining the opportunities and obstacles associated with this movement, seen from the viewpoint of the target group; the young asylum seekers and refugees, with whom the whole movement begins.

If one considers the individual opportunities to participation in voluntary work expressed by the young asylum seekers and refugees in the report, it becomes clear however, that in a study of this type it is important to not just investigate the young peoples' individual motivation, resources and competencies with regard to social inclusion (whether through voluntary work or another form of social interaction such as work or language tuition), because there are also often various individual obstacles and barriers to participation in. As we have seen in the report, these barriers are found across the target group irrespective of the country of residence and are more to do with the language obstacle as well as lack of self-confidence, shyness or insecurity in relation to meeting and coming into contact with the local population. However, whenever the young people succeed in overcoming these problems and begin participating, they often subsequently describe an increased experience of self-confidence and social inclusion. The following are examples of this tendency:

“When I went to a community garden in Glasgow to volunteer, it was a very nice experience. It is nice to mix with Scottish people. I really enjoyed it. We all enjoyed it”

— 22 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

“I have to convince myself to do new volunteer things and I have to build up the confidence before I go – because I am afraid to do new things in this place. But there is a curiosity in my mind, so even though I am afraid, I try it, because I don't want to miss out on something. And afterwards, I feel more self-confidence”

— 20 year-old male asylum seeker, Scotland —

As recommended above, even if one is aware of the young person's individual motivation and obstacles, this may still not provide enough focus, because for many young asylum seekers and refugees, their daily lives are also deeply bound up with the structural level of society.

Language is one example. If a young asylum seeker or refugee does not have access to language tuition (perhaps because the person is not eligible for this because of the recipient country's rules in this area), this structural issue can easily come to play an important part in the motivation or obstacles to the young person's participation in the local community, e.g. via voluntary work. Perhaps the young person views voluntary work as an alternative way of learning the language, or perhaps the young person views his or her lack of linguistic ability as a barrier to participation.

Another example could be housing. If, as a young asylum seeker or refugee, you have no place to live (perhaps because there is no automatic eligibility for housing because of the recipient country's rules in this area), social interaction via the build-up of a social network can be seen as a way of finding accommodation. However, being homeless can also mean that the young person can be so challenged in his or her daily life (psychologically, economically, practically and logistically etc.), that the various forms of social interaction available in the local area, e.g. voluntary work, would be low down on the priority list of basic life support needs searched for access to on daily basis - that is, before just the *fundamental* conditions of social inclusion and empowerment can be said to be in place.

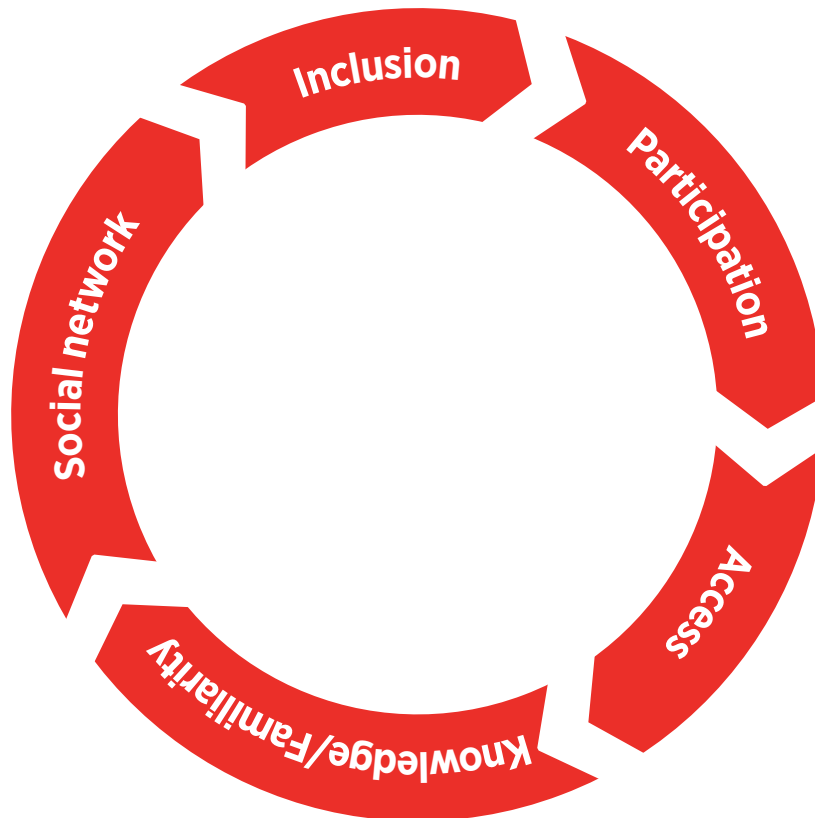
“I have to go to the housing services every Monday to see whether they are going to take me to a hotel or whether they are going to give me a place to live. I don't know what is going to happen. If this housing matter settles somehow, and I get settled, I will be able to relax and to concentrate on other things, such as applying for college perhaps”

— young male refugee, Scotland —

“Even though I now have refugee status, and am no longer an asylum seeker - we people can't tell exactly what is going to happen in the future. We can't make a decision for our lives. I want to build something good for myself for the future, but right now I just want a normal day to day life like everyone else. I want a job - and I want to have a place to live. Only then I can start working out my future and how to socially become a part of this society”

— young male refugee, Scotland —

In other words: For young asylum seekers and refugees there is often a kind of circular movement between their basic daily needs, where it is often difficult (both for themselves and for others) to determine which comes first while at the same time acknowledging that they are all interdependent. In other words: To become empowered and in order to create a social network, it is important to be included. Inclusion requires participation. Participation requires access. To get access, you need to know which doors to open. To know this, you need a social network. And so on (cf. the model below)



At the structural level, closing the circle can for the individual asylum seeker or refugee naturally mean different things, but where the characteristic is that *participation* and *access* all the time go hand in hand. In other words, without *structural* access to the basic necessities that constitute a new life in a new country (a place to live, food, language teaching, etc.), there is no individual basis for *social participation and inclusion*.



Photo: Hannah Maule-Ffinch

With regard to further work - at different levels - to create increased 'empowerment and social inclusion for young asylum seekers and refugees in a European context, it is recommended that, in combination with the OECD focus discussed in this report on the individual's personal motivation and competencies, also to increase the focus on the young asylum seekers' and refugees' structural day to day framework. This framework leads to a series of individual opportunities and barriers with regard to the individual young asylum seeker or refugee's overall social inclusion and 'empowerment'.

In other words: There is a general need to combine the focus on the individual young asylum seeker or refugee (in terms of his or her resources, competencies and motivation) with a focus on the surrounding societal structures which can create obstacles with regard to the young person's opportunities and access to use these competencies actively and act on their motivation to participate. 'Empowerment' and inclusion are mutually dependent and in the following chapter we will consider a number of recommendations for how this relationship can be further cemented.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

– access and participation

Based on the experiences and results of the project reviewed and expanded upon in the previous chapters, further work is recommended on the following:

Governments and EU institutions

Ensuring basic needs and requirements is necessary for social interaction, inclusion and 'empowerment'.

- *Young asylum seekers and refugees must be ensured access to suitable housing.*

If the individual asylum seeker or refugee does not have a place to live, this may cause such practical and psychological strain that the energy and ability to establish a life in other areas will also be minimal. Usually in this situation, various forms of social interaction in the local community (such as development of a social network) will be prioritised last, which can have a long-term effect on social inclusion.

- *Young asylum seekers and refugees should be assured access to language tuition and other courses of training.*

If the individual asylum seeker or refugee is denied access to courses of language tuition or training, he or she is also denied access to the basic acquisition of language with which to communicate and become a part of society and the local community. Participation of this type can in itself be important for learning the local language, but for many asylum seekers and refugees it is also a source of insecurity and low self-esteem not to be able to meet the local population with at least a basic knowledge of the local language in order later to be able to develop this via social interaction.

- *Young asylum seekers and refugees should be provided with information on voluntary work.*

It would be easy to ensure that newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees are provided with information on the civic society and opportunities for volunteer service. This can be as part of an introduction programme for asylum seekers or provided by the local authority case officer. It could also be included as a supplement with a work-related focus in the language tuition curriculum for young refugees⁹

⁹ As an example and inspiration, Glasgow College has developed teaching material on volunteering in collaboration with the VSI project which is a part of language teaching for young asylum seekers and refugees. The material can be ordered from Glasgow College: Anniesland Campus Hatfield Drive, Glasgow G12 0YE T: 0141 272 9000; Lyn Ma LMa@glasgowclyde.ac.uk.

- *Young asylum seekers and refugees should be ensured access to social and economic support*

If the individual asylum seeker or refugee is not ensured access to various forms of support, including vital social and economic support, it may be difficult for the individual to understand not only his or her own situation, but also planning for the future with the aim of social inclusion. In a situation where most of his or her energy (due to lack of access to social support) is used up simply attempting to make head or tail of everything in the new country or (due to lack of access to economic support) merely trying to ensure the basic necessities of life, typically the asylum seeker or refugee will not have much energy left for building up a new social life or in relation to more long-term initiatives for social inclusion and 'empowerment'.

Moreover, in many situations, access to social support and other forms of support will often be directly dependent on one another: in many European countries, access to housing support, economic support and education are not things to which asylum seekers and refugees are automatically entitled but must apply for. If one is unfamiliar with the language or rules, and does not have access to social support, these application procedures can in themselves be difficult for the asylum seeker or refugee to process.

Similarly, social interaction and access to economic support are also directly related, for instance in the sense that the asylum seeker or refugee must be able to afford the transport to a given social event, which can be a considerable expense. This is not least important when one considers that in many European countries asylum centres are often located a long way from urban centres and many countries as well operate a policy of geographical dispersal with regard to refugees who have gained residence permits.

- *Finance for research into social inclusion should be ensured.*

Asylum seekers' and refugees' participation in volunteer work is a relatively under-researched field. Opportunities for the individual Member State to undertake further research in their respective national and regional contexts as well as at European level should be supported through funds and pools.

Voluntary organisations should be given resources to provide the necessary support for the recruitment and introduction of asylum seekers and refugees to voluntary work through, among other things, further project development.

Organisations

- Increased collaboration between voluntary organisations with regard to sharing knowledge and experience of young asylum seekers' and refugee's participation in voluntary work should be encouraged. The following types of knowledge can thus be shared and supported: the target group's awareness of these types of activity and the opportunities for actively using these activities in inclusion work with young asylum seekers and refugees.
- Voluntary organisations can employ contact persons who can act as bridge-builders between the organisations and the young asylum seekers and refugees and who can help with recruitment to the organisations and their activities.
- Voluntary organisations can target their information and recruitment strategies for the specific group, including providing a simple and transparent application procedure where required.
- For practical recommendations, see the VSI project's practitioner's guide for the involvement of young asylum seekers and refugees (published concurrently with this report): *Amir's Volunteering - Guide on involving young asylum seekers and refugees as volunteers: Experiences ideas and recommendations.*

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7. POSTSCRIPT BY EXTERNAL EVALUATOR HUMAN HOUSE

This report is an overall assessment of the social experimental project Volunteering for Social Inclusion (VSI). A research-based comparative study of the effect of voluntary work in relation to the social inclusion of young asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark and Scotland.

Because of the social experimental nature of the VSI project, assessment has been undertaken as a collaboration between the two internal assessors; the project owner, the Danish Red Cross; the project partner, the British Red Cross and Human House A/S as sparring partner and external guarantor for the internal assessment.

The following section is Human House's report on the design of the VSI assessment as well as a general assessment of the applicability of the report.

Particular characteristics of the VSI project

The VSI project is a research-based, hypothesis-testing and experimental project to create knowledge and qualified hypotheses on connections between voluntary service and social inclusion.

The project investigates partly what individual competencies, motivation and obstacles young asylum seekers and refugees have in relation to social inclusion and partly what social obstacles there may be. The project also investigates how voluntary work can contribute to developing young asylum seekers' and refugees' competencies and overcome obstacles to social inclusion.

The project assessment focuses on assimilating experiences and creating knowledge that can form the basis for recommendations and further action. These recommendations are directed both at policy actions and 'next practice' and also for distribution to relevant practitioners via the practitioner's guide, which has been prepared for organisations and is to be published concurrently with the report.

A fundamental challenge with assessing social experimental projects such as the VSI project is that it is not possible to carry out a traditional result assessment via the operationalisation of previously defined success criteria. There are number of reasons for this:

1. Firstly, the final objective with regard to social inclusion has been delayed with regard to the VSI project.
2. Secondly, the main aim of the project was not in itself to create social inclusion, but to investigate factors that either are obstacles to, or create movement towards increased participation and inclusion.

3. Thirdly, the VSI project is affected by great internal heterogeneity, with a relatively small group of participants involved in various social and cultural contexts in the two countries with very different socio-economic conditions. There are therefore a considerable number of contextual factors to be taken into consideration.
4. Finally, the VSI project has been under constant development, because knowledge and experience from the project's subsidiary elements has been integrated on an ongoing basis and has contributed to the development of the subsequent phases and activities. This is thus not a final and conclusive project with clear and defined objectives which are then assessed in retrospect. It is, however, an experimental project with an ongoing learning and developmental base.

Thus the project can be successful in relation to creating knowledge and in achieving a number of subsidiary targets without this directly showing that the project as such leads to increased social inclusion.

From an assessment point of view, the project can be said to be a type of participatory action research¹⁰, in other words, one in which professionals and young asylum seekers and refugees are involved in the ongoing development and knowledge generation. This is particularly evident due to the project having had a number of periods of voluntary activities during which knowledge and experience was assimilated. The conclusions to this report have been based on the overall experiences although the primary interview material comes from participants in the project's final and most developmental phase.

Requirements for consistency and relevance in experimental development projects

As previously noted, a socio-experimental project such as *Volunteering for Social Inclusion* cannot be assessed using standard methods. As it is can fundamentally be regarded as action research, quality criteria used in this field have been used in its assessment. This is to ensure the quality and value of the report's conclusions. In this form of research, a general analytical requirement is that a project must be both *internally consistent and externally relevant*¹¹.

The requirement for relevance is a pragmatic quality criterion. The relevance criteria require that the project's actions and conclusions are relevant in relation to the problem the project is attempting to create knowledge on. From the report's conclusions (especially chapters 3 and 4) it can be said that the relevance criteria have been convincingly satisfied. The report has contributed new knowledge relevant to the usefulness of voluntary service as a means towards social inclusion.

The requirement for consistency is a more 'scientific' quality requirement. Here, the requirement is that there is an internal theoretical and pragmatic connection between the project's various elements, including the assessment. With regard to the VSI project, the consistency requirement can be ensured by analysing whether there is a connection between the prior theoretical assumptions and the applied interview questions as well what has been used for data collection. For this analysis, Action Theory was used.

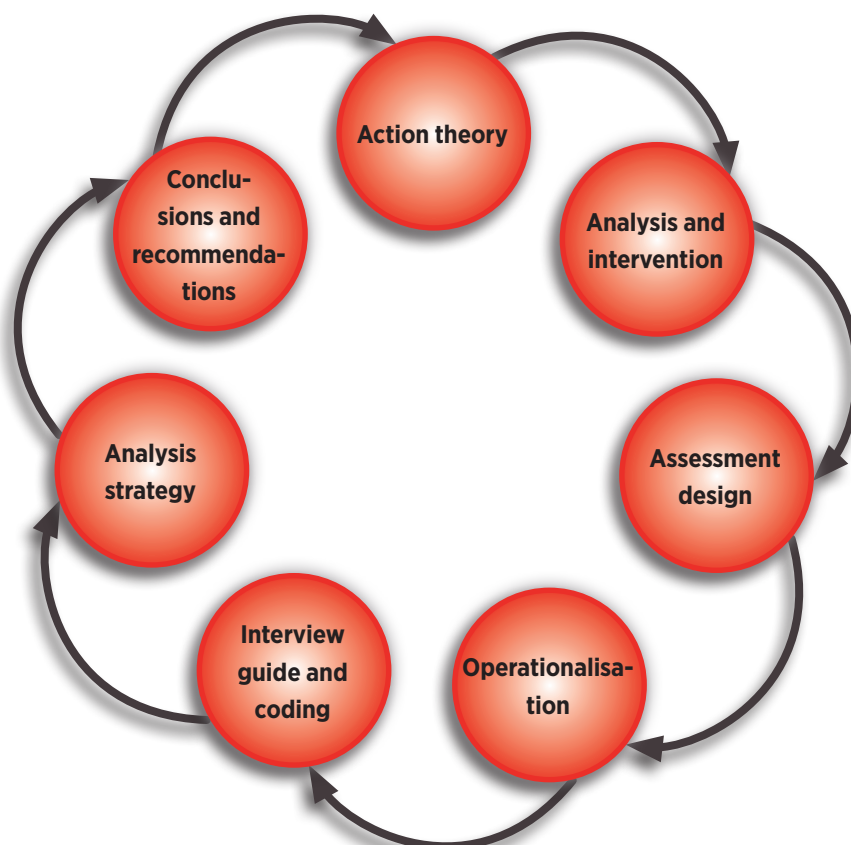
¹⁰ See fx (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Noffke & Somekh, 2005)

¹¹ A classic reference work in the field is (Argyris & Schön, 1974)

Action Theory- a method for ensuring quality in the assessment of social projects

The action theory of a project can be seen as a general model for how to interpret the connections one wishes to demonstrate. The VSI project operates with a so-called 'interactional action theory'. For example, this means that the VSI project views the movement towards social inclusion as a result of interactions between the individual and various social conditions. In the report, for example, there is not just focus on how the individual has particular competencies for social inclusion. Similarly, there is not just focus on structural obstacles. There is, on the other hand, a comparative study of how individual competencies and social obstacles work together in relation to social inclusion. The significant point in this context is that action theory is used as an analytical tool to ensure the report's quality by investigating whether there is consistency between the project's elements and the methods applied.

This is shown in a simpler form in the model below which illustrates how all the project elements are connected. The arrows show that there is theoretical consistency between the individual elements.



In order to document whether the VSI project and its internal assessment comply with the internal consistency requirement and thus also the stipulated quality requirements, it will now be shown how the action theory of 'interactionism' fits with the other project elements.

Analysis and intervention in the VSI project

The VSI project regards social inclusion as a result of interaction between the individual's competencies and the social conditions. This is demonstrated in the project's main theses of 'participation' and 'empowerment' which indicate that social inclusion is a result of interaction between individual competencies and social conditions.

For example, the conclusions show partly how the young asylum seekers and refugees have different obstacles and opportunities in Scotland and Denmark and partly how, in both countries, certain individual competencies such as language and self-confidence are necessary for social inclusion. The project therefore uses action theory to investigate consistency, how voluntary work can be a means to developing competencies and overcoming obstacles to social inclusion.

Assessment design of the VSI project

Assessment has been planned as an open research-based and hypothesis-testing process evaluation.

As mentioned previously, with regard to methodology as well as for practical reasons, social inclusion was not itself investigated, but rather the fundamental mechanisms and processes behind the movement towards social inclusion. As noted in Chapter 1, there is therefore an analytical operationalisational and methodological split where two parallel and interactional lines are investigated. This complies with the interactional action theory:

- One line provides insight into the connections between voluntary work and the development of competencies that can lead to social participation and inclusion.
- The other line shows the existing opportunities and obstacles to voluntary participation as these occur and are experienced from the point of view of the target group. This is done using the young participants' own thoughts and experiences.

Study of the effect of voluntary service: Interview and operationalisation

To be able to compare the development of competencies by participation in voluntary work, a structure has been prepared that will serve as a matrix for the research. This applies (as stated in Chapter 1) the OECD core competencies considered essential for human interaction in relation to the conditions consistent with action theory. The OECD competencies have a number of advantages:

- They are competencies that can be seen as general tools for action that can be analysed in a context of broader general usage (as opposed to specific skills or abilities)
- They are competencies that can be developed and thus, with regard to the project, it is possible to investigate how competencies develop through voluntary work, as well as being able to pinpoint competencies lacking in this specific target group that are likely to prevent participation in voluntary work and social inclusion.
- They are competencies that can be compared in all countries.
- They are competencies that can be considered as individually developing resources that make participation and 'empowerment' possible.

Working with competencies at a primary analytical level makes it possible to analyse a 'fit' - in other words, a comparison of the structural conditions, which can reveal a potential "gap" between the individual's competencies and the structural opportunities. This gap can thus explain lack of social inclusion and indicate solutions and recommendations, with regard to the development of individual competencies and in relation to the removal of social obstacles.

Interview guide and coding

The internal assessor and Human House have together operationalised the OECD competencies in a series of indicators that are especially relevant in relation to young asylum seekers' and refugees' opportunities for social inclusion. These are organised in a competency matrix which forms the basis for the semi-structured question guide. The question guide was prepared by the Red Cross with input from Human House.

From the question guide, the Red Cross carried out 23 in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews (see Chapter 1 of the report for further information).

The interviews were then edited and coded by the Red Cross in relation to the competency matrix. Human House had access to all the material and tested the coding via spot-checks, comparing these with the report conclusions. On this basis, Human House can conclude that there is internal consistency between the coding and the way the interview material was used in the report.

Project analysis strategy

The analysis strategy was 'interactional' This means that the indicators for structural and individual competencies in the project were analysed comparatively and 'interactionally' to determine connections and interactions across the material.

The 'heterogeneity' of the project, i.e. the differences between the young asylum seekers and refugees, is an analytical advantage. In part, the young people had to react under different conditions and in part, there were different experiences of voluntary service. These differences across the material meant that it was possible for the VSI project to be able to predictively analyse some general hypotheses for how individual competencies and structural conditions interact in different ways in relation to movement towards social inclusion.

Conclusions and recommendations

Consistent with the project methodology, the report creates knowledge and recommendations at a number of levels. At the individual level, it concludes that voluntary service develops competences with regard to movement towards social inclusion. It then concludes that action with regard to voluntary organisations can help overcome obstacles and finally, it specifies these structural obstacles as well as actions that can be put in place to overcome them.

These conclusions and recommendations in which social inclusion is seen as a balanced relationship between individual competencies and social conditions, is thus consistent with the project methodology and action theory.

Conclusion on the scientific status of the report.

As described, the VSI report complies overall with the stipulated methodological criteria for consistency and relevance.

The VSI project therefore demonstrates consistency between:

Project Action Theory

Social inclusion must be seen as a mutually interactive relationship between individuals and their competencies and the social condition.

Project Analysis and intervention

There can be both individual and structural limitations to social interaction. Voluntary service can be a means to develop competencies and overcome obstacles to social inclusion.

Project Assessment design

Young asylum seekers' and refugees' competencies and obstacles to social inclusion are studied by giving them experience with voluntary service. Competencies and obstacles are then identified via qualitative interviews.

Project analysis strategy

A comparative analytical study of how competencies and obstacles differ in Danish and Scottish contexts was carried out. The analysis is thus a nuanced and contextualised comment on the structural obstacles.

Project recommendations

The project contains new knowledge and recommendations in relation to the overall structural obstacles, the use of voluntary organisations as a means towards social inclusion and in terms of learning more about the young asylum seekers' and refugees' individual competencies and obstacles.

Summary

On the basis of the above review of the study methods, methodology, results and recommendations, Human House can conclude that there is internal consistency between the study's various elements and that it therefore complies with the stipulated criteria for internal consistency and external relevance.

Throughout the assessment process (re-analysis, design, data collection and analysis), the Red Cross has been in ongoing dialogue with Human House with regard to design, methodology and method Human House has had access to data material, which has been tested in accordance with the report conclusions. As external guarantor, Human House attests to the validity of the hypotheses, methods, methodology, conclusion and recommendations in the report, in relation to the data provided.

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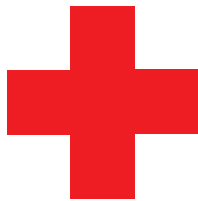
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Can more be done to improve the social inclusion of young asylum seekers and refugees into the European societies? Can participation in voluntary work be a tool to achieve this and what is required to make this a reality, both practically and structurally?

In this report, these questions are investigated and discussed with reference to the perspectives, thoughts and experiences of a group of young asylum seekers and refugees in respectively Denmark and Scotland.

The report is based on the project *Volunteering for Social Inclusion (VSI)*; a social experimental, comparative study of voluntary work as a possible way towards young asylum seekers' and refugees' social inclusion, financed by the EU and implemented in a bilateral cooperation between the Danish Red Cross and the British Red Cross during the period from September 2011 - September 2013.

The report presents the overall experiences and results of the project with regard to young asylum seekers and refugees as volunteers in a both Danish and Scottish context. The theme is broadly seen from the perspective of the young people.

The overall opportunities and barriers identified in the report with regard to the social inclusion and 'empowerment' of young asylum seekers and refugees through voluntary work, are related to a broader European context and the report concludes with recommendations for both EU institutions and individual Member States.