



GEMEINSAM

GESTALTEN

MITTENDRIN

**Geflüchtete
Jugendliche
stärken.**

[Topic sheet 3 / 2018](#)

Cultural diversity

Over the past few years, Germany has taken in many young people with experience as refugees. Various facilities and opportunities have been created for the purpose of receiving these young people and fostering their participation in society.

Numerous employees in government, private agencies and civil society organizations have dedicated themselves to the goal of improving the situation of young immigrants particularly with regards to education, leisure activities and their integration into the work world. At the same time, young people with a history as refugees are still confronted with rejection, prejudice and barriers to entry in many places.

Institutions that offer opportunities to young people and young adults do not succeed in reaching all young people to the desired extent. What is the reason for this?

Germany is characterised by different religions, traditions and cultures. In 2017, 23.6 percent of all residents in Germany had a migrant background, a proportion that is rising. Linguistic and cultural diversity presents

a social and political challenge and at the same time an opportunity for our society.

A culturally open society contributes to a sense of understanding and openness among people from different cultural backgrounds. To achieve this, it is necessary to create a basic awareness amongst public sector agencies and authorities, non-government institutions and ultimately in society as a whole.

Youth work with refugees strives to produce a more open culture, with the aim of giving all young people living in Germany access to opportunities and services offered by public agencies and authorities and other institutions. In addition, the aim is for all young people, with their particular interests, ideas and abilities, to have the same opportunities to make a contribution.

The team of ***Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten – Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken*** has talked to experts in cultural diversity in order to present a multifaceted picture drawn from practice and to find out which factors have to be taken into account when working with young refugees.



Raising cultural awareness in youth work

The awareness of how to deal with different cultural backgrounds in a sensitive manner is of elementary importance in working with adolescents. At the same time, one thing has become very clear in both research and practice: young refugees are first of all young people with fears and insecurities that are typical for their age. However in addition to these, there are difficulties related to their experiences of flight and their residence status. It is important to see the individual young people as individuals and to take their concerns seriously. Cultural sensitivity and the capacity for professional empathy are important pillars in youth work that must be further strengthened.

Accordingly, youth work with refugees does not focus on their experience of flight, but on the young person himself or herself, who must be treated with understanding, empathy and respect.

Basic building blocks for culturally sensitive cooperation

1. **Tolerance and acceptance** are basic prerequisites for respectful interaction and the basis for an open and honest exchange with each other.
2. **Open-mindedness** helps to break down stigmas and stereotypes and to prevent negative prejudices affecting how one forms his or her opinions.
3. **Empathy and openness** towards all fellow human beings promotes mutual trust and understanding.
4. **Interest and curiosity** in another person's culture are expressions of appreciation of the other. In this way, initial points of contact can be found in dealing with each other.



Rani Kumar*,
18 year old from India
Training to be a cook



*Name changed

"I like to live in different cultures, so I don't have any problems here. I also like German culture. I particularly treasure the equality and freedom of opinion that applies to everybody here. Our teachers are interested in our culture and think seriously about how we're going to become familiar with German culture while at the same time having access to our own culture. For example, one time my supervisor took me to a Buddhist temple. I was very happy about that."

Challenges in youth work



1. A lack of trust in one other is one of the greatest hurdles to be overcome.
2. Professionals working in education and social work have decision-making power in many areas of young people's lives, which is why young people are heavily dependent on the decisions and goodwill of the adults responsible.
3. Young refugees come into contact with various public authorities, government agencies and other institutions. In most cases expert testimony about the youths is lacking, i.e. there is no indication of their medical history, educational or familial background. This makes the job of youth-work professionals more difficult.
4. Ignorance and prejudices on the part of the adult professionals and the young people make it difficult for both parties to approach each other in an unbiased manner. For example, young people fear consequences for their residence status and therefore handle their personal information very carefully. This problem needs to be tackled.

In Germany, young people with experience as refugees encounter a society with clear hierarchies that are difficult to overcome. In the framework of the program **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten**, Lawrence Odro-Sarpong conducted cultural awareness workshops for employees in both the private and the public sector. He describes the obstacles he has identified through his work.

“The greatest difficulty or hurdle to inter-cultural openness lies in sharing existing resources and privileges, which are structurally useful for members of the white German majority society, with migrants and people with a so-called migrant background. It is true that, after much strenuous work, these obstacles have now begun to be appreciated by boards and committees. Nevertheless, centuries of exercising control over narratives have made it difficult for white Germans to attribute an appropriate value to the voices and positions of migrants. This leads to the fact that inter-cultural opening is often unsuccessful, even though the potential is there.”

Lawrence Oduro-Sarpong,
Trainer, Coach, Mediator
Living Diversity Consulting

Insights from the Field

1. Satisfactory and sustainable solutions to problems and conflicts can be achieved when young people and professionals working in agencies and government are willing to compromise.
2. The willingness to critically question one's previous knowledge and to value foreign cultural influences can be an important step in reconsidering our own actions.
3. It is important for educational professionals working for private agencies and municipal administrations to check that their own position of power is not being exploited.
4. The use of linguistic mediators and so-called “cultural mediators” helps to strengthen awareness of cultural differences. On the basis of their experience and knowledge, these mediators take on the important task of mediating conflicts between young people and staff in various fields.



“Dialogue between people is hardly conceivable without empathy and respect. Putting oneself in another person's shoes and empathizing with them should be a given for any communicative exchange, even though it doesn't always succeed. The result of cultural awareness can and should be a dialogue in which all those involved can express themselves openly, without having to fear being rejected or even discriminated against.”

Lubna Hayatleh,
Social worker with IBLM e. V.
Kinder- und Jugendhaus Weißenfels
(Weissenfels Children's and Youth Centre)

Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten –

Empowering Young Refugees

Young refugees have a right to participate. Yet, they can rarely exercise it. In response, the German Children and Youth Foundation and the Bertelsmann Foundation have jointly set up the program **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten – Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken** (creating con-jointly right in the middle – empowering young refugees). The aim is to strengthen young people between the ages of 14 and 27 in order to develop their potential and to exercise their rights. Together with their municipal partners, youth workers at three locations will test methods for the promotion of empowerment and develop them further.

This topic sheet is part of a series in which experiences and findings arrived at in the course of providing young refugees with practical support are taken up and presented in an accessible way. All publications can be downloaded at www.dkjs.de/themen/alle-programme/gemeinsam-mittendrin-gestalten



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More on the subject:

The publication *Vielfalt in Deutschland* (Diversity in Germany) from the Bertelsmann Stiftung is concerned with the creation of a diverse society and thus with the question of how equal participation and respectful coexistence can be achieved.

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Willkommen bei Freunden – Bündnisse für junge Flüchtlinge helps districts, towns, and communities to welcome and look after refugee children and young people. The aim is to enable young people with a history as refugees to exercise their basic right to education and participation, to receive the support and assistance to which they are entitled, and to have the opportunity to become actively involved in the community.

www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de

The project *neXTkultur – Migration | Partizipation | Integration | Kooperation* tries to contribute to the structural integration of young people and to qualify them inter-culturally. To this end, existing structures are analysed, groups of young people with a migration background are advised, supported and networked with other groups and recognised youth associations. Within the framework of this project a Juleica practice book on inter-cultural youth work has been published ('Juleica' is the name of an official ID card granted to volunteer youth workers in Germany). The book can be downloaded for free at www.nextkultur.de

The *Bundesvereinigung für Kulturelle Kinder und Jugendbildung e. V.* (German initialism 'BKJ') has an extensive dossier on cultural diversity and inclusion. The dossier contains recommendations for action, examples from practice and answers to research questions. The BKJ is a nationwide network of 56 schools and extra-curricular institutions, professional associations and umbrella organisations for cultural education.

www.bkj.de

In cooperation with:

Epim
European Programme
for Integration
and Migration

Never Alone
Building our future with children
and youth arriving in Europe