



GEMEINSAM

GESTALTEN

MITTENDRIN

**Geflüchtete  
Jugendliche  
stärken.**

[Topic sheet 5 / 2018](#)

## Empowerment

**For young people, a stable sense of self-confidence is a basic prerequisite for finding their way in society. In many respects, this poses a particularly major challenge for refugees. They face additional obstacles such as lack of language skills, exclusion and discrimination. This is why they need special support. Projects that promote opportunities for young people and foster their self-responsibility make it easier for them to move in the right direction.**

The term 'empowerment' designates a process in which people discover their own strengths and abilities. Ideally, they use these strengths and abilities to improve their own living conditions. Empowerment projects should motivate and encourage young people to shape their lives independently and in a self-determined manner. Empowerment focuses on the strengths and abilities of young people, not on their weaknesses. It is important to create a safe space in which young people can open up, receive feedback and recognise their potential and interests.

At the same time, empowerment also means becoming able to participate in social and political life. To achieve this, young people need to be familiar with basic social and political parameters. It is therefore important to teach young people about laws and rights, such as the constitution (in Germany: the Basic Law) or children's rights, and to provide them with opportunities for participation. These are basic prerequisites for genuine participation in society.

The programme **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten** has selected the Trier youth centre "Jugendzentrum Auf der Höhe" as a location for a project aimed both at illuminating empowerment from all sides and practising it. In addition, various youth welfare programmes have emphasized what empowerment means for them and which challenges and insights can be derived from their experiences.

# The “Auf der Höhe” Youth Centre in Trier



The Treffpunkt am Weidengraben e. V. was founded 30 years ago as a citizens' initiative and has been operating the youth centre “Auf der Höhe” for almost ten years, not only for, but above all with young people between the ages of 6 and 27. With the help of a good network, the team organizes a variety of regular activities and events in the field of open youth work, youth cultural work, detached youth work and help for young refugees. With graffiti workshops, guitar lessons and many other activities, the youth club offers a wide range of leisure activities.

The youth centre's project Start up - Ankommen, Weiterkommen (Start up - Arrive, Make progress), gives young people the chance to initiate their own creative projects. Together they discuss which projects they would like to take on and then carry them out independently. To this end, they are given rooms, materials and the support they need to be able to take the initiative themselves. Through this empowerment project, the youth centre succeeds in motivating young people to participate rather than merely be in attendance.

As a part of the **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten** programme in cooperation with the youth centre “Auf der Höhe”, Mohammed Jouni and Çingiz Sülejmanov lead an empowerment workshop with young refugees in Trier.

In the following interview, Zuhra Hassanzada, a 17-year-old student who took part in the workshop, talks about what she learned:



## Interview with Zuhra Hassanzada

### Who took part in the workshop?

*Young people living in and around Trier took part in the workshop with a lot of interest and energy.*

### What was the workshop about?

*Many young people who live here do not know what their rights are or what they have to do to integrate themselves. At the same time, many are unaware how they can oppose racism or discrimination. The workshop was a good opportunity to find out about these issues.*

### How did this workshop help you?

*This workshop gave me the opportunity to become more active. I came up with a lot of ideas about how to make the Jugendliche ohne Grenzen project (Youth Without Borders, German initialism: JOG) in Rhineland-Palatinate known*

### What does an empowerment workshop for young refugees include?

In a safe space, various methods are used to help the participants talk about experiences of racism and discrimination. They exchange ideas and reflect on their own everyday experiences. At the same time, they develop strategies for dealing with difficult situations. It is crucial to inform young people about the legal situation: What rights do they have? How can they make use of them? Because only those who know their rights can exercise them.



*throughout Germany. I learned many important things at the workshop: my motivation has become stronger and my goals more ambitious. I learned that as a girl who came to a foreign country with a foreign language and culture, I have to fight for my rights and those of future generations. I want to prove to the world that despite being in a difficult situation with many hurdles, a girl without her parents can still achieve her goal..*

### How are you involved now?

*After the workshop I became even more active. I wanted to extend the Youth Without Borders group from Trier to the whole of Rhineland-Palatinate. There was a big demo in Trier at the beginning of August concerning the creation of safe harbours for refugees travelling by sea. We organized the demo as a JOG-group. On the day, I gave a speech in front of 500 people. Other people's suggestions have helped me to develop further and now I am able to support others as well.*

# Challenges in implementing empowerment



1. Pedagogical institutions often lack basic knowledge about issues such as children's rights. The pedagogical staff needs the necessary expertise in the first place in order to pass it on to young participants.
2. Implementing empowerment in a permanent and sustainable way is a difficult task. Here it is important to consistently pursue a policy that includes approaches to self-empowerment and genuine opportunities for participation. Right from the start, those involved must ensure that young people are included.
3. Empowerment only succeeds if the target group itself wants to be empowered.
4. Various circumstances such as uncertain residence status, experiences of racism and exclusion often mean that young refugees are isolated. They lack safe spaces in which they can confide in others and open themselves up to the empowerment process. It is therefore important to create such safe spaces.

*"For us, empowerment represents a central motivation for taking action, because anyone who is born into a social fabric is required to and wants to acquire a cultural repertoire — language, writing, rules and much more — in order to be able to shape their everyday life in a self-determined way.*

*Concretely, this means having the ability to move safely and autonomously in a new cultural environment, which is the basis for successful inclusion."*

Tom Cartus

Head of "Auf der Höhe" Youth Centre in Trier



## Findings from the field



1. Empowerment workshops, especially peer-to-peer workshops, help young refugees at different levels:
  - They give young people the opportunity to share their own experiences with people who have gone through similar experiences. Young people recognise that they are not alone and feel strengthened by these alliances.
  - By educating them about the current legal situation, the refugees get an idea of what their rights are and the fact that they can claim them.
2. Empowerment projects enable young people to recognise their own interests and abilities, thereby strengthening their self-confidence. Through their own action, they become visible as social actors and receive acknowledgment.
3. From a situation of hopelessness and isolation, empowerment projects give new impetus and encouragement. They enable young people to make their own path.

4. Young refugees can only succeed in empowering themselves if actors in their environment – reception centres, youth welfare offices, municipal representatives, schools, youth centres, etc. – support the process of self-empowerment by creating protective spaces.

*"I see empowerment as a collective means of enforcing certain rights of marginalised and discriminated groups. Collective action can facilitate a fruitful dialogue that is immensely important. Safe spaces must be created in which young people's experiences and values can be shared and appreciated without external evaluation or judgment. Only in this way can self-empowerment and participation succeed."*

Mohammed Jouni

Empowerment trainer

Jugendliche ohne Grenzen

# Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten –

## Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken

(creating conjointly right in the middle –  
empowering young refugees)

While young refugees have a right to participate in decision-making, they are rarely able to exercise it. In response, the German Children and Youth Foundation and the Bertelsmann Stiftung have jointly set up the program **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten – Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken**. The aim is to empower young people between the ages of 14 and 27 to develop their potential and exercise their rights. Together with their municipal partners, youth workers at three locations will test methods for promoting participation and develop them further.

This information 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](http://www.dkjs.de/themen/alle-programme/gemeinsam-mittendrin-gestalten).



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### Find out more:

The organisation **Jugendliche ohne Grenzen (JOG)** (Youth without Borders) is a nationwide association of young refugees founded in 2005, whose work follows the principle that affected people have their own voice and do not need a policy that “represents” them by speaking for them. They decide themselves which forms of action are suitable for them as well as how to carry them out. JOG is against any kind of discrimination, especially racism, fascism and anti-Muslim racism.

[www.jogspace.net](http://www.jogspace.net)

Since 1994, the **Informations- und Dokumentationszentrum für Antirassismusbearbeitung in Nordrhein-Westfalen (IDA-NRW)** (Information and Documentation Centre for Anti-Racism Work in North Rhine-Westphalia) has been dealing with right-wing extremism, racism, migration, diversity and empowerment. Based on their own self-understanding, the participants aim to help reduce racism and right-wing extremism and to advise youth welfare institutions and schools on how to develop a pedagogy appropriate to a multicultural society.

[www.ida-nrw.de](http://www.ida-nrw.de)

Sport can bring joy back into the life of refugees, contribute to a sense of identification with their new hometown, and help them establish contact with new people. Due to its enormous popularity all over the world, football has a phenomenal social significance. Becoming involved in sports helps build self-confidence and empowerment. The programme **Willkommen im Fußball** (Welcome to Football) enables young refugees up to the age of 27 to access sport in the form of low-threshold activities and thus supports inclusion and social interaction beyond organised football. [www.dkjs.de/themen/alle-programme/willkommen-im-fussball](http://www.dkjs.de/themen/alle-programme/willkommen-im-fussball)

**Jung, geflüchtet, selbstbestimmt** (Young, self-determined refugees) is a support project of the Landesjugendring Berlin, which supports services for young refugees provided by Berlin youth associations, youth educational institutions and self-organized migrants' groups.

[www.jung-gefluechtet-selbstbestimmt.de](http://www.jung-gefluechtet-selbstbestimmt.de)

In cooperation with:

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Building our future with children  
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