

22.06.2009. An international seminar '**Space under the Sun: Empowering Young Refugees and IDPs in the Caucasus**' was successfully held in Baku Azerbaijan during 16 – 21 June 2009. It was supported by the European Youth Foundation, Ministry of Youth and Sport of Azerbaijan in held in partnership with the European Scouts Region.

In European domain, quite often, great numbers of young people were or are obliged to leave their homes, to abandon things which made their immediate universe, to experience personal and family trauma, to start their lives all over again in new circumstances and not always friendly ones). Ultimately, 'the challenges and difficulties posed in this new environment and life can be manifold: fighting for acceptance, finding ones place, creating new bonds and dealing with everyday hardships- all while holding on to hope and strength.' Unfortunately, it is not even hard to site few of many localities in Europe where 'IDP' and 'refugee' terms have become part of routine daily vocabulary; these are particularly relevant for the Caucasus with its dozens of frozen and flaming conflicts. Millions of internally displaced persons and refugees fled from violent conflicts between Azerbaijanis and Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazians and Georgians, Ossetians and Georgians, Chechens and Russians, and world-watched recent one between Russia and Georgia. Results are terrifying with thousands lives lost, economic crisis, long lasting hatred, clashes and blood. Young people often are victims of these severe bloodsheds and often are most vulnerable ones without a choice to participate in decision-making shaping their new realities and lives. Witnessing and experiencing all above through its own membership and understanding vital importance of addressing the challenges faced by young people in conflict areas, Association of Scouts of Azerbaijan in partnership with number of youth organizations and agencies successfully held 4 full day (excluding arrival and departure) international seminar coinciding with the World Refugee Day in order to explore, share, debate and learn from the challenges posed by contemporary realities in the Caucasus. This event was built on experience generated by the Scouting Movement and the Council of Europe youth directorate on the theme. Participatory methodology constituted the core framework of the seminar designed to stimulate critical thinking and reflections among participants. Working groups and plenary discussions, integrated case studies and participants own firsthand experience did provide opportunities for participants to exchange, explore, understand and contribute into the seminar. Participants took an active role by sharing their experience in addressing the challenges of IDP and refugees in the Caucasus, linking this to Human Rights concepts and the European values.

Team is pleased that the project was able to achieve its original objectives such as: - new status & procedures, relation with the host society and neighborhood, personal self-determination and future perspectives; - reviewing what is done by international organizations and networks such as UNCEF, UNHCR, CoE, EU, ICRC, Voices of Young Refugees in Europe, etc.; - facilitating dialogue and exchange between youth NGOs and governmental agencies working with young refugees and IDP; - empowering affected young people to become active citizens and actively participate in democratic institutions and processes in their new environments; - developing realistic and simple action plans for the follow up of the activity and motivate participants to become active in constructively addressing their challenges; The nature of issues addressed by the seminar and participants represented did certainly allow a sound platform to enhance the intercultural learning of participants, which was manifested by shared understanding and experience of cultural exchange itself, the notion or peace and international solidarity, thus international thematic evenings and cultural site visits. Participants did actively benefit from enriching opportunity to share and learn from each other on various aspects of their own cultures, including cultural and behavioral patterns, stereotypes, attitudes and reflected how all these translates into peace work dimension. It was a rewarding experience for the diverse team as well.

With support of:

