



Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to

YOUTH

Syrian refugee Abeer Jajouk laughs as she takes pictures at a New Roots visual arts experimental workshop, taught by Bulgarian ethnographer Kiril Kirkov in Vienna.

This tipsheet is one of a series of six aimed at applying the specificities of the AGD approach. It highlights the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as age, gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, physical appearance, etc.) combine, overlap, or intersect. It draws our attention to the impact of various overlapping social identities or intersectionality¹ on our work with groups of concern to UNHCR, more specifically persons with disabilities, youth, children and adolescents, minorities and indigenous peoples, older persons and LGBTIQ+ persons.

Who are we talking about?

In line with the United Nations definitions, UNHCR considers “youth” to be aged between 15 and 24, “adolescents” to be aged between 10 and 19 and “young people” to include every person aged 10 and 24, while recognizing and respecting the various regional, intergovernmental and national interpretations and understandings of all of these terms.²

¹ **Intersectionality** is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g. gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies advantages and disadvantages that are felt by people due to a combination of factors (Oxford English Dictionary).

² The UN recognizes that “the meaning of the term ‘youth’ varies in different societies around the world”. Adolescents are considered to be those aged 10 to 19 years. “Young people” is a catch-all term that includes adolescents and youth. Please refer to the tip sheet on children for additional considerations that also apply to adolescents.

Why does it matter?

Youth constitutes a large proportion of persons under the UNHCR mandate. It is a distinct group whose concerns, needs and energy are often disregarded in humanitarian settings. Nevertheless, youth are a vital positive force in humanitarian settings because young people are agents of change and have wide-ranging capacities and unique needs; however, they often fall through the cracks between programming for children and programming for adults.

Even where young people are included, youth is rarely the primary focus of interventions, thus the effect on them may be diluted. Among them, girls face disproportionate risks of gender-based violence (GBV), have fewer educational opportunities, including skills building, and bear an enormous domestic care burden in comparison with boys. Access to reproductive health services and sanitary materials is also a challenge.

It is important to single out youth and focus on them from the onset to build self-esteem and leadership skills that will enable young people to be more resilient. Youth engagement must be strengthened in both forcibly displaced and host communities by building on the talent, potential and energy of young people to achieve resilience and find solutions.

What can UNHCR do?

Youth have the right to participate, to have their well-being assessed and considered, and to have the opportunity to be agents of change in their communities. Such well-being depends on individual circumstances such as gender, age, level of maturity and experience, as well as factors such as the presence of parents or caregivers and their relationship with them.

Below is a list of actions required if youth are to be fully included in UNHCR interventions. Actions are organized around the three key areas of engagement of the 2018 AGD Policy.

AGD inclusive programming

- Collect data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability on youth refugees, IDPs and stateless, as well as data relating to the specific risks and barriers youth may face.³
- Gather data on the needs, priorities, skills and contributions of youth for inclusive youth-focused programmes; data should be gathered and analysed based on the distinctive gender needs.
- Train staff and partners, including youth themselves, on ethically and technically sound data collection methods, data protection protocols, management of sensitive information and youth-friendly techniques.
- Support data gathering exercises led by youth refugees, IDPs and stateless.

³ This could be achieved through the application of the IASC Gender with Age Marker during project design and implementation. <https://www.iascgenderwithagemarker.com/>

- Identify a UNHCR youth focal point in the operation, who will have direct contact with youth networks and organizations, including girls-led networks and organisations and ensure institutional accountability.

Accountability to affected people

- Create and develop youth-friendly environments and approaches that will allow young people to express themselves and feel comfortable. This includes trusted and preferred communication channels.
- Include adolescents and youth in participatory methodologies with no discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, nationality or other diversity characteristics.
- Design and employ inclusive and accessible tools and strategies to ensure the meaningful participation of youth, including the most vulnerable and the least represented, taking into account gender, age, communication method, level of maturity, safety and so on.
- Identify and mitigate the protection risks, including the risk of exposure to GBV, that adolescents and youth face, as well as the factors underlying these protection risks, such as community attitudes and barriers to accessing services.
- Organize campaigns to reach out to refugee youth, create spaces for youth and humanitarian actors to meet; engage youth, both as users and content producers, in awareness-raising, information sessions, advocacy and communication on protection, including youth-friendly, contextualized messages on relevant protection risks, including the risk of GBV, and services in formats accessible to them.
- Integrate youth opinions and experiences, ensuring that an equitable and balanced representation of youth voices in their diversity with consideration to gender and other aspects are included, in all stages of the operation management cycle and design programmes accordingly.
- Build the capacity of UNHCR personnel and partners to communicate about youth protection issues, including the heightened risk of GBV.
- Include youth among UNHCR staff (e.g. as community outreach volunteers).
- Advocate for the inclusion of adolescents and youth in government and partners' plans.
- Set up confidential, youth-friendly, AGD-appropriate and accessible mechanisms to gather and process feedback and reports from youth and adolescents.
- Immediately address any safeguarding issues and make other timely adjustments as per the feedback received.

Gender equality⁴

- Promote the meaningful participation and inclusion of adolescents and youth, including with diverse SOGIESC, in decision-making processes and leadership structures, while addressing possible barriers to participation.
- Consult youth, male and female, including the most vulnerable, taking into account gender, age, communication method, level of maturity, safety and so on. on their concerns and views on safety and ensure youth-friendly survivor-centred services are available.

⁴ In line with what is stated in the Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, although the Commitments focus on women and girls; attention is also paid to gender inequalities that affect men and boys as well as other genders

- Ensure that young people, in particular young female people, have personal documentation enabling them to access services, move freely and have personal safety.
- Support the legal access of youth to formal secondary and tertiary education, vocational training, and other learning opportunities and ensure that youth skills training and opportunities are not stereotypical.
- Engage young persons in raising awareness about health, including sexual and reproductive health and ensure that healthcare is AGD-appropriate and accessible.
- Allow youth to also design and implement their own youth-led initiatives to increase the participation of both male and female young people.
- Provide youth with access to formal employment and training through recognition of qualifications, provision of work permits, skills training and employment opportunities.
- Create youth groups, including female youth groups, for peer-to-peer support, transfer of knowledge and skills and to boost integration.
- Strengthen formal and informal service providers' capacity to provide youth-friendly services to all young people, with special attention to diverse sexual and gender identities, age and disability.
- Establish appropriate youth-specific referral mechanisms to address the emotional difficulties associated with forced displacement, discrimination, and isolation.
- Use accessible information and methods to raise awareness, among staff, communities and female and male youth on gender-based violence (GBV); provide information on how to mitigate risk factors, including on how and where to access safe services.
- Strengthen communities' ability to monitor and address the GBV risks faced by youth and provide young people with information on where and how they can seek support in an ethical, safe and confidential manner.⁵
- Ensure that response and referral mechanisms are made accessible, confidential and safe for youth who are at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence.
- Address the distinct health and educational needs of pregnant, lactating and married adolescent girls, and the barriers they face, through targeted actions.

Key resources

International legal and policy framework

- [Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action](#), 2016
- [Data collection & age disaggregation for young people in humanitarian action](#), 2019

International guidance

- [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#), 2021

UNHCR policy

- [Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy](#), 2018

⁵ In line with what is stated in the UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence (2020).

- [UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence](#), 2020

UNHCR guidance

- [Resettlement of Children and Adolescents at Risk](#), 2016
- [Core Actions for Refugee Youth](#), 2016

*This resource is a living document that will be updated to reflect ongoing UNHCR work on the inclusion of older persons and application of the resource in the field. UNHCR works to include persons with disabilities and as the resource is applied in the field. UNHCR colleagues and partners can send questions and feedback to **UNHCR HQ Community-Based Protection Unit**, at hqts00@unhcr.org.*

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