

TOWARDS A GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES: YOUNG PEOPLE

Contribution by Mercy Corps to Thematic Discussions Two and Three OCTOBER 2017

Mercy Corps appreciates this opportunity to contribute to Thematic Discussions Two and Three on the Global Compact on Refugees. Mercy Corps is a global humanitarian organisation empowering people to recover from crisis, build better lives and transform their communities for good. In this written contribution, we discuss ways in which the international community can safeguard young refugees and partner more effectively with them to improve their lives.

Of the world's 22.5 million refugees, more than half are children under the age of 18.¹ Approximately one third of refugees are between 10 and 24 years old.² These young people are facing the challenges of displacement at a time of intense cognitive, physical and social development. On top of these challenges, young refugees are often dealing with significant psychological stress.

At the same time, young refugees demonstrate immense potential to contribute to host states, improve humanitarian responses and help build durable solutions for their host communities and, perhaps someday, home communities. A comprehensive refugee response must address the needs of young people and also empower them to make positive changes in their lives.

- I. **Measures to be taken at the onset of a large movement of refugees**
 - a. **How can we support States to receive large numbers of refugees in a safe and dignified manner?**

It is crucial that the needs of young people are addressed from the very start of a refugee response. At the onset of a large movement of refugees, receiving States, in cooperation with UNHCR, international organisations and other partners, should systematically collect and use age- and sex-disaggregated data to tailor programming according to age and sex considerations, and track impact accordingly.

- b. **How can we support receiving States to identify persons in need of international protection?**

A key part of ensuring safety for young arrivals is establishing community-based protection networks and safe spaces for young people. In order to identify young people in need of protection, local government should:

- Partner with an array of community actors and organisations—including school directors, local non-government organisations, religious groups and employers—to identify and engage young refugees at risk of isolation.
- Coordinate communication among stakeholders to improve access to resources and services that respond to abuse or harassment based on stigmatisation or prejudice.

- c. **How can we support receiving States to address specific needs within large-scale refugee situations?**

¹ UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance" (last updated 19 June 2017), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/gures-at-a-glance.html>.

² UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, *A Global Review: UNHCR's Engagement with Displaced Youth* (March 2013), 20, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/513f37bb9.pdf>.

With young people making up one third of all refugees, a comprehensive refugee response must take into account the needs and capabilities of this age group. It is essential, however, that a refugee response should be designed with young refugees—not for them. Young refugees are best placed to know what will work for them and what will not. Conversations with young people about their priorities, fears, daily commitments and safe and unsafe places in the community should shape the design of any service or activity. Humanitarian actors should account for sex- and age-specific vulnerabilities, needs, and capacities, co-designing programme activities with young refugees accordingly. Once these activities have been designed, young people should be provided with opportunities to actively lead and take ownership of programme activities, not just show up and participate in activities led by adults.

States, in cooperation with donors, should, in coordination with receiving States:

- Partner with young people by investing in mapping and analysis to better understand their needs and assets, in particular those of adolescent girls. This mapping should help identify services and get a sense of whether they are located in a place where young people, girls in particular, can access them and are user friendly for young people.
- Partner with young people in implementing and evaluating programmes, ensuring that girls and young women are explicitly engaged.
- Promote well-being and resilience through targeted psychosocial support for young people. Psychosocial support should be integrated into activities for young people across all sectors. To help ensure that young people receive appropriate psychosocial support, government and humanitarian actors should receive orientation and training focused on the psychosocial needs of young people.
- Increase and earmark funding and other resources for holistic programming for young people. Donors should fund programmes tailored to the needs of young people. They should also fund programmes that prioritise engaging young people in cross-sectoral work such as education, cash programming and urban response.
- Accurately track and report on how resources earmarked for young people are spent. Donors should require humanitarian actors to collect and report age- and sex-disaggregated data on programming with young people.

II. Meeting needs and supporting communities

a. How can we support the inclusion of refugees in national systems and services?

There is tremendous benefit and opportunity when young refugees engage with their communities and host communities. When young people are able to contribute to their communities and participate in decisions that affect their lives, they gain confidence and status, and they strengthen their relationships with peers and adults. Moreover, communities ultimately benefit from young people's bold ideas and openness to change. Mercy Corps' experience shows that by increasing young refugees' community engagement, humanitarian actors can improve ties between refugee and host communities. States, UNHCR, and relevant partners should:

- Facilitate the creation of networks and partnerships between young refugees, civil society and local government.
- Invite the opinions and voices of young refugees and their host community peers into local humanitarian response and development planning, and be open to being influenced by those opinions and voices.
- Support initiatives that build tolerance and trust between young refugees and their host communities, such as sports, recreation and civic activities.
- Invest in long-term integration programmes to promote positive relationships between refugees and hosts and to prevent conflict.

- Foster reconciliation and dialogue by creating safe spaces where youth can convene to identify common priorities and develop a shared voice across ethnic groups or host-refugee community divides.

b. How can we enhance economic inclusion and promote livelihood opportunities for all refugees in a way that benefits host countries and communities?

Employment, entrepreneurship and other income-generating opportunities provide more than economic benefits. They give young people a purpose and a sense of status and belonging. At the same time, many young refugees are forced to earn an income at an early age because of their families', or their own, dire economic reality. A comprehensive refugee response should ensure that young refugees have employment opportunities. It should also protect young refugees from child labour, exploitative conditions, and work that may cause harm, with a focus on gender-specific safety initiatives for girls. A comprehensive refugee response should create avenues for older adolescents to gain skills and transition safely to decent and equitable work opportunities. Adolescents should be provided with market-driven skills training and safe, non-exploitative apprenticeships, so that they are equipped with in-demand skills.

Host States, in cooperation with UNHCR and other UN entities, international organisations, and other partners, should:

- Increase access to quality formal and non- formal education for young people. Non-Formal Education (NFE) should be an increasing area of emphasis starting in adolescence, as many young people are unable or unwilling to enroll in formal education. Within this response, promote new technologies that provide relevant and certified education while addressing issues of displacement, dispersion, language and certification challenges. Young people should receive training that includes transferable and life skills.
- Improve young people's access to productive, safe and equitable work opportunities³ in order to foster self-reliance and enable young people to make the best use of their skills and capabilities and contribute to local economies.
- Leverage resources into targeted industries and businesses that can meet the growing demands for jobs. Donors, regional governments, and NGOs should conduct value-chain and market analyses to assess potential areas for business growth and develop well-matched workforce programmes. Refugee youth should then be linked to market-driven accredited training programmes and work opportunities.
- Consider developing a vocational certification for refugees that is not sector-specific but that measures a basic level of literacy, language, communications, teamwork and critical thinking skills.

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³ See Mercy Corps, *Guidance on Safe and Decent Work for Adolescents and Youth* (May 2016), available at <https://mcdl.mercy Corps.org/gsdll/docs/ GuidanceSafeDecentWork4AdolescentsYouth.pdf>.