Young People on the Move and their engagement in Peace & Security: Case Study from the North of Central America and South Sudan

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September 2017

Executive Summary

UNHCR's contribution to the UN Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security focuses on young people on the move, in particular those who have crossed international borders to escape conflict and violence in their countries of origin. While recognising the great diversity of 'youth' - for the purposes of this research, ages 15 to 29 – UNHCR has identified key cross-cutting themes in the five key areas identified by Security Council Resolution 2250 (SCR 2250): participation, prevention, protection, partnership and demobilisation/reintegration.

UNHCR has selected two situations that are in many ways at opposite ends of the spectrum of displacement. In the first, young South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda in many ways face a 'traditional' refugee situation, in which families and communities have been forced by fighting to flee across international borders. Once in the country of asylum, many live within allocated camps or settlements, with varying degrees of contact with the host community. The second situation is the displacement from the North of Central America countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, where the reason for young people's movement is not armed conflict, but increased violence by organized armed criminal actors. People are targeted individually or as families, and flee alone or in small groups. In Mexico, some seek refugee status, but many remain undocumented, isolated and largely unprotected as they navigate their way along the route north. Despite the obvious differences between the two settings, there are historical, political and social similarities that have an impact on youth.

The research identifies youth 'dividers' (sources of tension for youth) and 'connectors' (potential mechanisms for peace for youth). Common dividers include, for example, pressures on youth to take part in violence and the impact of negative societal reactions to young people. Common connectors include activism in solidarity among young people, the pull of media and new technologies and cultural expressions such as music, dance, theatre, storytelling and poetry, among others. Relationships between connectors and dividers were examined through the optic of youth resilience, focusing on youth as individuals, in families, in communities, as citizens of countries of origin, in countries of asylum and regionally. Where possible, the section on connectors highlights factors contributing to or inhibiting young people's ability to engage proactively on peace and security.

In both locations, following peace processes in which many youth feel that they were not adequately engaged, violence has also returned. Communities in both settings have been negatively affected by conflict and displacement that predates the current violence. As a result, today's young people have grown up with little sense of community cohesion or protection and remain under tremendous pressure to take the path of violence. Many reject this path however.

Individual young people display real solidarity with each other. Youth led, community and faith-based initiatives are bringing young people together to give them the means to contribute positively to their surroundings. Socially-oriented education and human rights or peace-oriented frameworks have helped to contextualise the violence and boosted the resilience of individuals, including those from at-risk groups like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) and indigenous youth. For young people on the move however, it is clear that the receipt of asylum is not the end of the story. Receiving international protection does not address deeper psycho-social needs stemming from their experiences of displacement. Holistic, multi-sector responses are required to support young people to eventually take an active place alongside their peers working in wider initiatives around peace and security.

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Introduction

Youth on the Move from South Sudan and the North of Central America and Mexico

UNHCR's study of young people on the move – youth (15 to 29 years of age) moving between countries for a variety of reasons, including those displaced by conflict and natural disasters, with their parents or alone - highlights two situations that are in many ways at opposite ends of the spectrum. The first situation – that of young South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda –in many ways represents a 'traditional' refugee context, in which whole communities are forced to cross national borders to escape fighting and seek international protection in countries of asylum. In the second situation – that of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras (also known as North of Central America countries or NCA) - young people are more likely to flee individually or in small groups, primarily forced out by extreme violence of organized criminal gangs which have taken over their neighbourhoods and villages, often in the absence of effective state protection. There are no camps for them; some apply for refugee status in neighbouring countries or in Mexico,[1] but many still engage in dangerous journeys on the route northwards.

There are also highly relevant similarities between the two settings. Both are the **products of earlier, decades-long internal armed conflicts** that ended in negotiated peace settlements,[2] reached with varying degrees of participation from women and other key constituencies.[3] In both cases, the limited inclusion of youth voices in peace processes, since recommended by Security Council Resolution 2250 (SCR 2250), coupled with omissions or failures in the implementation of peace accords sowed the seeds of future youth disenfranchisement.[4] The accords reached were limited by political and other

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[1] Mexico is increasingly becoming a country of asylum as opposed to simply a country of transit for those moving north through the North of Central America countries (NCA)

[2] El Salvador (1992), Guatemala (1996) and Southern Sudan (2005). Honduras, though it avoided civil war, saw political unrest and repression in the 1980s, and also became embroiled in regional conflicts.

[3] On women's involvement: the Salvadoran and Guatemalan accords predated SCR 1325 of October 2000 on women's role in peace and security. In El Salvador, two of the ten negotiators and signatories to the peace accord on the FMLN side were women, and the Guatemalan accords held specific provisions on women's rights and women's role in reconstruction. However, even several years after SCR 1325, women did not have a notable role in the negotiations of the different components of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the Sudan/southern Sudan conflict, nor was a gender perspective apparent in its content.

[4] For peace processes in the NCA countries, please see: Kurtenbach, Sabine; "Postwar Violence in Guatemala: A Mirror of the Relationship between Youth and Adult Society", International Journal of Conflict and Violence, vol. 8(1), 2014; Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas"(IDHUCA) Dónde y cómo vive la juventud salvadoreña: Un país de crisis en crisis. Juventud Salvadoreña y ¿desarrollo? De la crisis actual a una nueva locura, 2009; Bruneau, Thomas; "Pandillas and Security in Central America", Latin American Research Review, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2014; Interpeace, Políticas Públicas para Prevenir la Violencia Juvenil (POLJUVE), Violencia Juvenil, Maras y Pandillas en Guatemala: informe para la discusión, 2009; and Instituto Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Picar Piedra: Iniciativas ciudadanas frente a la violencia, 2013. For the South Sudan peace process, please see: African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (AUCISS), Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 2014; and Reeve, Richard (2012) Peace and Conflict Assessment of South Sudan 2012, International Alert, London, 2012.

North of Central America countries – Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras

The route used by refugees and migrants through Mexico to North America is one of the world's busiest, accounting for an estimated six per cent of global population movement. It has long been viewed as a way out of poverty, extreme inequality and, at times, violence. Migration and population movement has had unintended consequences, including the emergence among urban Central American immigrant communities in the US of the *Mara Salvatrucha* (now MS-13) and *Barrio 18* gangs, in response to the threat posed by US-based gangs. By the mid-1990s, gang culture was exported back to Central American countries emerging from conflict.

In El Salvador and Guatemala, today's youth are among the first in decades, following the peace accords, to have grown up in peace, but they face a host of challenges. The national economies do not generate jobs, parents must migrate to find work, leaving children in at times inadequate or even abusive 'kinship care'. Mass displacement, intense and fluid human mobility and the loss of a generation of leaders have damaged the fabric of civil society, diminishing the level of community support available to young people. Compounding this, States face considerable challenges to fulfil their full responsibilities to young people in terms of the provision of services, protection and opportunities. A shift in trafficking routes for north-bound drugs has led to unprecedented growth in transnational crime. In many cases, corruption has contributed to the undermining of the rule of law and public institutions. 'Firm hand' responses to gang violence have in many cases further alienated young people.

To marginalised youth with few opportunities to make their living through legitimate means, the gangs and other criminal groups offer a way of getting ahead in a system stacked against them, of transforming stigma into a sense of identity. To neglected communities, gangs can offer a degree of protection - at a price. Gangs mainly fund themselves by extorting the people around them, using threats, beatings, torture, murder and disappearance as means of control and forcibly recruiting neighbourhood boys and girls. Within societies that stereotype what it means to be a man or a woman, gender inequality often manifests itself in high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and limits not only the capacities of individuals, but also the benefits they derive from economic growth and development. LGBTI people are particularly targeted.

Some young people under threat drop out of school and isolate themselves at home, in effect stifling their own development and life prospects in a bid to stay safe. Others, seeing no reliably safe internal flight alternative, flee north. If intercepted by Mexican authorities, they may face detention. If intercepted by criminals, they may face extortion, exploitation and violence. The effort to evade both isolates them, driving them underground and into more dangerous and isolated routes.

Some young people who attempt this journey are never heard from again. Some are eventually rescued from traffickers. Many more are intercepted by Mexican or US authorities and deported back home, poorer, indebted, and frequently bearing physical and emotional scars. Some of them are killed upon arrival by their persecutors in the gangs; others, facing the same threats that forced them out in the first place, see no option but to make another attempt to seek safety by traveling northwards.

Source: See, *inter alia, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Honduras and El Salvador* (2016); *Call to Action: Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America: Discussion Paper (Draft)* (2016); *Women on the Run* (2015); *Children on the Run* (2014).

constraints, and in all three cases, key socio-economic inequalities and grievances at the root of the fighting were omitted,[5] with grave and far-reaching consequences for the life opportunities available to young people. As one Guatemalan NGO staffer commented, '*this is the first generation*

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[5] In El Salvador, socio-economic issues were – with the exception of some agriculture and land topics -- left off the negotiating table, while in Guatemala the Accord on Socio-Economic and Agrarian Issues – despite specific provisions on women -- was considered among the weaker the negotiated accords. In the case of the CPA, the Agreement on Wealth Sharing focused primarily on north-south distribution of oil revenue.

to grow up in peace. They've had no war, but they've had no opportunities either'.[6] Moreover, some key elements of the negotiated accords have been not been implemented,[7] or as with Salvadoran and Guatemalan efforts to separate military and civilian policing functions, have been substantially undermined in the course of 'firm hand' responses to crime.

South Sudan

Since independence in 1956, southern Sudan has seen three wars. The 2005 North/South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) granted autonomy to the 60+ ethnic groups in the predominately Christian and Animist southern third of the country and laid the groundwork for a 2011 referendum in which the South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for independence from the Arab-speaking, primarily Muslim north.

Weak rule of law, coupled with poverty and food insecurity, has led communities – obliged to compete for scarce resources like water and pasture – to mobilise and arm their young men, developing traditions of revenge and retaliation. The struggle against the North gave these disparate armed groups a common cause, but also saw the growth of mistrust and division between them – spurred at times by attacks on each other's civilian populations. The CPA did not create a platform for holding those responsible for abuses to account, nor did it provide for reconciliation or give a substantial voice to youth and other key constituencies. It also failed to address the need for building state institutions to channel and respond to grievances.

In these circumstances, the 'peace dividend' that South Sudanese youth – many returning to an unfamiliar country after a childhood spent in exile - had hoped for did not materialise. Instead, in December 2013, a political dispute between President Salva Kiir Mayardit, from the largest ethnic group, the Dinka, and his vice president, Riek Machar, from the second largest ethnic group, the Nuer, descended quickly into violence. Inter-community wounds between Dinka and Nuer were reopened by inflammatory speech and exploited.

An African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan found evidence of violations of humanitarian and human rights law on all sides, with widespread underage recruitment, targeted killings of civilians in homes, churches and hospitals and widespread sexual and gender-based violence, often carried out on the basis of ethnicity. An August 2015 peace agreement mediated by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) did not hold. By mid-2016, an estimated 4.8 million South Sudanese faced food insecurity. In November 2016, when the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide visited South Sudan, he warned of the potential for genocide. In February 2017, the UN reported that, due to war and a collapsed economy, an estimated 100,000 people faced starvation and a further one million were on the brink of famine. As of April 2017, there were 1.9 million IDPs in South Sudan and 1.7 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

Source: See, *inter alia*, UNHCR, *South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2017*; *Updated Regional Framework for the Protection of South Sudanese and Sudanese Refugee Children* (2015); UNMISS Reports (various) and *Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan* (2014).

The research was grounded in recognition of **youth diversity** across both situations. 'Youth' as a broad category here encompasses boys and girls, young men and women, but also lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. It includes people who identify strongly with their particular

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[6] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

[7] In one example, Guatemala's Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognised the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of the country, specific collective rights of its indigenous peoples and customary indigenous law. Despite this, a constitutional amendment on indigenous justice only made it before the legislature in November 2016, when it was narrowly voted down; as of this writing it has yet to be reconsidered.

ethnic, racial or linguistic groups – whether majority or minority – as well as those from a mixed cultural background or for whom these factors have no personal significance. Youth adhere to a range of religions, or none. Some live in extremely remote and undeveloped rural regions, while many, reflecting the global trend towards urbanisation, come from cities. Some are from deep-rooted families and communities while most have grown up amidst mobility and flux, on the sharp end of violence and conflict. Youth vary enormously in the affluence of their families, their access to basic services, education and livelihood opportunities, and their degree of civic or political participation.

Past conflict has had other impacts on today's youth as well. In both the North of Central America and Mexico region and in South Sudan, war led to mass displacement. Peace, when it came, could not wholly repair the **damage to families and communities**. A Mexican source, describing youth on the move from the North of Central America countries said, '*they come from communities that have been battered for decades'.[8]* Not surprisingly, both settings, in keeping with global trends, have seen massive rural – urban migration. As a result, many young people on the move today are products, not of stable communities, but of fluid, peripheral settlements on the outskirts of cities and large towns with few, if any, protective mechanisms. These are prime settings for crime and urban violence and, in the North of Central America countries, for gang infiltration and control. In Guatemala, an NGO source commented, '[*in urban parts of Guatemala] the concept of community doesn't exist anymore. The feeling of community solidarity has been defeated'.[9]*

In both settings, the armed conflict and subsequent damage to the social fabric, exacerbated in the North of Central America countries by the spread of gang control, means that people have become accustomed to **high levels of violence, including SGBV**. Young people and those working with them articulated this in different ways: '*there are so many good people who die, innocently … you don't know when it's going to be your turn',[10]* and '*we left South Sudan, and we came here for safety. We choose this work to try to protect the life of our people, and to maintain peace with us'.[11]*

Finally, in both settings, youth were very clear about the fact that they were victims of **forced displacement**. They had not wanted to leave their homes, but had been obliged under duress to flee life-threatening circumstances. Many if not all want nothing more than to return, if they can do that in safety. The view expressed by one young Honduran man interviewed in Mexico, who had been working to support his single mother and younger siblings until gang members tried to extort his earnings and then to kill him when he resisted, is fairly typical: '*I'm not looking for the US or for dollars. I just want safety, to be free*'.[12]

Methodology

The aim of the study was to better understand specific peace and security challenges that youth on the move face, shedding light on some of the many ways that they and others are working to address them – using the South Sudan and North of Central America and Mexico situations as case studies. A number of research questions were agreed in advance with the SCR 2250 Study Secretariat.[13] With

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[8] UNHCR civil society interview, Tenosique, 13 February 2017.
[9] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.
[10] UNHCR interview, church worker, Guatemala, February 2017.
[11] UNHCR interview, young male member of the *shurta* in Jewi camp, Gambella, Ethiopia, April 2017.
[12] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Mexico City, 16 February 2017. This young man, whose asylum application in Mexico had just been turned down on the basis that there were safe internal flight options available to him, commented with a degree of bitterness that a month or two in any of the North of Central America countries would teach immigration officials differently.
[13] The following research questions were agreed with the Study Secretariat prior to the research commencing: (1) What are the key peace and security issues that young people on the move face? (2) What are the priorities of young people on the

these questions in mind, the research was conducted in three phases. Phase one involved a desk review on peace and security, from the perspective of youth on the move, focussing on the South Sudan and North of Central America and Mexico situations. Phase two involved conducting key informant interviews with UNHCR and partner staff, civil society actors, academics, religious organisations, youth and others persons of interest identified through the desk study. Phase three saw missions conducted to Ethiopia (Gambella), Uganda (Kampala and Bidibidi refugee settlement), Mexico (Tapachula, Tenosique and Villahermosa) and Ecuador (Guatemala City and Flores, El Peten) to collect further information through focus group discussions and interviews with young people, and conduct further interviews with a range of sources including UN, international and national civil society organisations, religious and educational groups and local authorities.

The analysis of research findings reflects the 'Local Capacities for Peace' framework used in both settings. This framework, and the 'Do No Harm' methodology that evolved from it, were developed jointly by nongovernmental organisations, UN agencies and donors. They focus on how aid and conflict interact, seeking to understand conflict dynamics and to assess the impact of aid on conflict. The approach identifies two key driving forces of social dynamics in any given conflict setting - those that are sources of tension (dividers) and those which are potential mechanisms for peace (connectors). By making development and humanitarian actors conscious of dividers, connectors and of the relationships between them, it aims to avoid as much as possible, the unintended negative consequences of programming and protection choices.

I.   Sources of Tension: Youth Dividers

Globally, conflict can arise from factors such as failures in democratic governance and the rule of law, structural inequalities, competition for access to scarce resources and various forms of intolerance. In any given setting, the 'Do No Harm' approach seeks to identify what divides local people and causes tensions between them. Dividers can be internal or external, and can include factors such as the influence and role of those who benefit from conflict.[14] This section highlights some of the dividers described by young men and women in both regions.

A. The impact of violence

Young people in both settings covered by this review are deeply affected by violence over which they have no control. The experience of violence is in itself divisive, as is what happens in its aftermath. In **South Sudan**, the targeted killings of Nuer civilians by primarily Dinka security forces in the capital

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move in terms of peace and security? (3) How are young people on the move engaged or propose to engage in addressing peace and security issues/challenges, e.g. in terms of peace building, prevention of conflict and promotion of social cohesion etc. (4) What factors contribute towards creating an enabling environment for youth to reach their potential in terms of addressing peace and security issues within their communities? (5) How are young people on the move perceived by humanitarian and development organizations in relation to peace and security issues (as a threat? as victims? are they ever engaged as key stakeholders and actors who have visions, dreams, and experiences that can be built on)? (6) What difference does time spent away make?

[14] Beginning in the early 1990s, a number of international and local NGOs collaborated through the *Local Capacities for Peace Project*, also known as the *"Do no Harm" Project* (DNH) to learn more about how assistance that is given in conflict settings interacts with the conflicts. Knowing that assistance can be used and misused by people in conflicts to pursue political and military advantage the group wanted to understand how this occurs in order to be able to prevent it. The DNH Framework is descriptive rather than prescriptive and as in this case can also be used in other ways, for example for Peace and Conflict Impact Analysis (PCIA). For further information on the DNH Framework and the *Seven Steps*, please see: Do No Harm Project (Local Capacities for Peace Project) (2004), *The Do No Harm Handbook* (The Framework for Analysing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict), Collaborative for Development Action, Inc. and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Cambridge USA.

Juba in mid-December 2013 had an immediate reaction.[15] It was a catalyst, triggering a chain reaction of retaliatory inter-communal violence, primarily carried out by young men, including in areas where they had previously lived peacefully alongside other ethnic groups and even inter-married. This violence triggered displacement. In **El Salvador and Honduras,**[16] the violence that serves as the 'last straw', ultimately forcing young people to flee their countries, is frequently gang-related. Some girls and women interviewed also reported escaping domestic violence. Sometimes the two overlap, with devastating effect. A 15-year-old Salvadoran girl who reported having repeatedly self-harmed even after having been given refugee status in Guatemala recounted a history of abuse then said simply, '*so many people have hurt me, I feel like I don't even have a heart anymore*'.[17]

Indeed, in both settings covered by this review, young people have seen so much violence that it has, in some sense, become 'normal'. This is particularly the case with SGBV, which is perceived as commonplace in marginalised, gang-dominated neighbourhoods in North of Central America countries and in South Sudan's conflict zones.[18] Illustrating this, a young South Sudanese activist in **Uganda** reported that SGBV prevention work in his settlement, to be effective, must begin with sensitisation in the community to make people realise that it is a crime.[19]

The normalisation of violence has a profound impact on young people, not just psychologically but also socially and developmentally. Interviewees in Guatemala, for instance, described the experience of constant fear as draining and disempowering, preventing people from thinking ahead or planning for the future. One said, '*people who try to stand up – human rights people, university people – they end up keeping quiet, out of fear*'.[20] Another source commented, '*the violence makes people close themselves off*'.[21] In response to a question about what young people can do together to be safer, a teenaged girl answered, '*keep quiet – that's the only thing that we can do*'.[22] This raises obvious questions about young people's ability to engage openly in peace and security concerns.

Violence has other divisive impacts on youth. As mentioned above, most young people described being forced to flee against their will. In **Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico**, many of those interviewed reported first having tried to bring official complaints against those who were threatening them, and in each case this information reportedly got back to the gangs and increased the person's vulnerability: '*going to the police is like going straight to the gang*',[23] said one. In several cases, perpetrators who

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[15] In December 2013, strained relations within the dominant SPLM culminated in a falling out between President Kiir, a Dinka, and vice president Machar, a Nuer. After an emotive speech by Kiir on 14 December harking back to episodes of conflict between the two groups during the war for independence, fighting broke out between Nuer and Dinka members of the Presidential Guard. It quickly spread, within other troops and then to residential neighbourhoods of Juba. By midday on 16 December, Machar-supporting, primarily Nuer soldiers had been pushed out and Nuer civilians were being targeted by Kiir's troops: in one incident, several hundred Nuer men from the Gudele neighbourhood were rounded up and massacred.

[16] In Guatemala, displacement is multi-causal, linked not only to gang or domestic abuse but also to the impact on communities of state-authorised, aggressively expanding hydro-electric, mining or agri-business megaprojects; drug cartels taking over local areas; and climate change (primarily affecting the southeast). It is important to note that Guatemala is an asylum as well as a transit country.

[17] UNHCR interview, civil society run migrant shelter, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

[18] Camps in Ethiopia and settlements in Uganda have dedicated services for identifying and responding to domestic violence, rape and other forms of SGBV. Rape cases in the camps and settlements, like other serious crimes, are referred to local police and judicial authorities rather than community-based customary courts. Reproductive health services, including HIV response, are also in place. In the North of Central America countries, girls and young women face high levels of SGBV from a range of actors. The literature review revealed estimates that 6 in 10 or even as many as 8 in 10 experience some kind of SGBV during their journey north.

[19] UNHCR key informant interview, May 2017.

[20] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017.

[21] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

[22] UNHCR focus group discussion, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.

[23] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

were arrested had managed to threaten the victim from their cell.[24] Some young people expressed anger and disillusionment with the authorities: *'insecurity starts with the police. They don't protect us. They don't react until something's already happened, when it's already too late'.[25]* Another young refugee commented, *'they* [the gangs] *are the ones who rule in the country now',[26]* while according to a third, *'they* [the gangs] *are killers and they are at their ease in the country – we're good people and we live in terror'*.[27] Long-term exposure to violence appears to be teaching young people in marginalised neighbourhoods of the North of Central America countries that, far from participation and partnership, the only way to survive is isolation and silence, or flight.

When on the move, violence is even more pervasive. Young men and women interviewed for this study highlighted a host of abuses – from both the authorities and from criminal organisations, but also at the hands of bus, taxi or lorry drivers, passers-by, migrants and others who have been forcibly displaced. One young Honduran man noted, *'you meet these people but you never know if you can trust them'.[28]* Most young men and women were unwilling to identify the perpetrators of the abuses they suffered in transit. In many cases, they seemed not to know who was responsible, nor to find it particularly significant. Violence was accepted as an almost inevitable part of the ordeal, and their response was, if anything, to isolate themselves even further. For young people fleeing through Mexican, their absolute vulnerability – and the pressure to become 'invisible' in order to evade interception – mitigates against any collective response to the threats they face.[29]

Violence in South Sudan has also had some effect on **South Sudanese refugees** now living in Uganda. In Northern Uganda, Dinka refugees are concentrated for their safety in Dinka-majority settlements, or in Dinka villages within mixed, multi-ethnic settlements. While ethnic tensions have resulted in some security incidents in Northern Uganda, the two populations live relatively peacefully. However one youth worker in Kampala noted that in refugee settlements in the region, young South Sudanese live largely segregated lives: *'they move alone. They are divided, even among Nuer, by sub-clan'.[30]* In western **Ethiopia** with the overwhelmingly Nuer refugee population, many have chosen to form clan-based villages rather than live amongst those of other clans.[31]

B. Pressure on young people to engage in violence

In both settings covered by this review, young people face family, community or peer pressure to take the path of violence.

In **South Sudan**, young men are often expected to play a role in the defence of their community within ethnicity-based militias.[32] In addition, some adult leaders have deliberately used inflammatory, hate-based language and stereotyping to radicalise youth and incite ethnic violence, while others have promoted the use of 'victim narratives' to promote cohesion within the group and to boost aggression

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[24] *Inter alia*, UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Tapachula, 15 February 2017; UNHCR key informant interview (Honduras), March 2017.

[25] UNHCR focus group discussion, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.

[26] Male Salvadoran asylum seeker in Mexico, age 22.

[27] UNHCR individual interview, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017.

[28] Male refugee from Honduras, age 20. He then described risking his life to hop his first train in Mexico, only to realise hours after succeeding that it was carrying him west towards the coast instead of north.

[29] Some small youth initiatives can happen within the (fluid and temporary) context of a stay in a particular migrant shelter, which are recognised 'safe spaces' under Mexican law.

[30] Key informant interview, Kampala, April 2017.

[31] Some humanitarian staff struggle with the ethical implications of such choices, which may seem to ultimately risk reinforcing ethnic or clan divisions in the interest of immediate-term avoidance of conflict.

[32] In the context of the current conflict, such groups include the Nuer 'White Army' or, in Western Equatoria state, the 'Arrow Boys', among others.

against those outside it.[33] It is telling that the bulk of refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda are women and children; many of the men have been killed, or have remained behind to fight. Young men among the refugee population can find it hard to escape the pattern: in Uganda and Ethiopia, there are allegations of cross-border recruitment or reports of young refugee men expressing the temptation to return as combatants.[34]

In **Guatemala, Honduras El Salvador and Mexico,** young people are the main targets for forcible recruitment by gangs. Most gang members are youth, although leaders are often older. A Salvadoran civil society interlocutor told UNHCR, '*the gangs feed off vulnerable young people and keep growing*'.[35] A young Guatemalan noted, '*it's easy to be corrupted when you don't know what you want*'.[36] To young men and women living on the margins of deeply unequal societies in Central America, it can also seem tempting to give in to pressures to join gangs. An NGO staffer explained, '*the gang fills their need to identify with a family, the gang manages to give them the feeling of belonging to a family*'.[37] In this way, for both girls and boys, gangs can offer group support and identity as well as a means to money and power. Given the focus of gangs on exercising territorial control enforced by violence and fear, protection is also a powerful incentive. During the conflicts of the 1980s for example, 'choosing your side' between rival gangs MS-13 and B-18 could seem to offer the best chance of survival, since lack of affiliation meant being viewed as a potential threat by both.[38] LGBTI people - especially transgender women, as they are particularly visible – are, in the words of one key informant, '*an easy target for the gangs*'.[39] They come under particular pressure to engage in criminal behaviour for gangs, for instance by smuggling drugs to gang leaders in prison. Numerous sources reported that as a result of this practice, transgender people are routinely subjected to additional and invasive searches by prison staff.[40]

C. Negative societal perceptions of youth

In both contexts covered by this review, youth are perceived by many in society as a source of insecurity. According to one Guatemalan NGO interlocutor, the societal view is that '*young people only wreck things*'.[41] A government official said that young people were seen by service providers as difficult to manage, '*because of the way they are – the view is that they cause a lot of problems*'.[42] In Ethiopia, an older South Sudanese man volunteering as a community safety initiative worker commented, '*for peace, you need to train youth to stop their negative activity, their criminal activity*'.[43]

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[33] See *inter alia* Chatham House, *Peace building, reconciliation and community cohesion in South Sudan: the role of youth* (2016), p. 10; World Peace Foundation, *Politics of Fear in South Sudan* (2016), p. 2; South Sudan Protection Cluster, *Macro Analysis of Conflict in South Sudan* (2014), pp. 10-11.

[34] UNHCR interviews, Ethiopia and Uganda, April 2017.

[35] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

[36] UNHCR individual interviews, migrant shelters, Guatemala City, 6 February and Peten, 10 February 2017.

[37] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

[38] Several young people interviewed for this study revealed that they or their siblings had joined gangs. They only fled when the demands of belonging became intolerable. For boys, the turning point was when the tasks assigned them by the gang escalated from minor crimes to murder. For girls, it involved a change or escalation in the sexual activity demanded of them by gang members.

[39] UNHCR key informant interview, NGO, El Salvador, March 2017.

[40] LGBTI youth are also at particular risk of abuses as they move. They have reported difficulties being accepted at some migrant shelters (though others – including church-supported ones – have taken specific protection steps on their behalf) and in feeling safe in Mexican migrant detention centres.

[41] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala, 6 February 2017.

[42] UNHCR official meeting, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.

[43] Focus group discussion, IMC SGBV project, Kule camp, Gambella, Ethiopia.

Negative stereotypes and the mistrust of youth that underpin them have concrete manifestations. Despite some attempts to include them in refugee structures,[44] young South Sudanese refugees in **Ethiopia and Uganda** reported that the exclusion they felt they had suffered in South Sudan had carried over into the camps and settlements, where many do not feel they have an adequate voice in decision making. Young refugees in Uganda commented, for instance,

> *youth are represented in the RWC* [Refugee Welfare Council]*, but if any news comes, it doesn't reach the youth – the information doesn't reach us, and our voices don't reach those in high office … there is a gap between upper offices and us. They don't talk to us – and we don't listen. It's a big gap'.[45]*

These blockages frustrate young people, hampering, and in some cases, discouraging their participation in community life and initiatives, including around peace and security. This in turn weakens camp and/or settlement structures and programmes, depriving them of the energy and engagement of youth.

A similar dynamic is found in the **North of Central America countries.** Young Honduran and Salvadoran refugees recounted feeling stigmatised as potential gang members despite having had their status recognised by the Guatemalan authorities.[46] In response, they limited their movements and interactions with the host community. A young Guatemalan national said that she felt that '*young people don't count – not in families, and not in society*',[47] while young men from El Salvador and Honduras expressed real bitterness when telling how they were beaten by police on suspicion – because of their age – of being gang members. One 17-year-old Salvadoran boy, who said of the abuse, '*I just had to take it*',[48] explained that it was particularly difficult to bear as at the time he was coping with real pressure from the gangs themselves to join and had gone to the police for support. His experience left him feeling even more vulnerable, angry and disempowered than before.

In both settings covered by this review, the perceptions of the young people of others of their age cohort was more nuanced. In the North of Central America countries, for instance, young people are keenly aware of having an upbringing in unstable or abusive homes in common with their persecutors in the gangs. One young Honduran man said of gang members, '*they have a heart – they just don't use it*'.[49] Similarly, South Sudanese young people referred to the emotional impact of conflict-related trauma, not just on civilians, but also on young fighters.

D. Traditional gender roles constricting girls' and women's participation

Another divider identified by young people was the impact of traditional gender roles and stereotyping. Young **South Sudanese** organisers recounted having to take particular measures – reduced hours to allow time for domestic chores, additional transport to ensure safe travel – in a bid to persuade parents to allow girls to take part in sport, leisure, training or other activities. A refugee working at a women's centre in Bidibidi in Uganda explained that many girls drop out of school after primary level due to cultural views about their home-based role: '*some girls feel inferior – they don't*

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[44] In Uganda, in each refugee village there is the Refugee Welfare Council (16 members). Under its umbrella there is also a youth executive committee (8 members). The RWC has a Secretary for Youth and Sport – he is a youth, so a youth representative on the RWC. The Vice chairman of the RWC oversees the YEC. In Ethiopia, the managing body in camps is the Refugee Central Committee. Each camp is divided into zones. The RCC and zones have youth representatives.
[45] UNHCR focus group discussion, youth leaders, Bidibidi settlement, Uganda, 11 April.
[46] UNHCR interviews, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017.
[47] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Petén, 10 February 2017.
[48] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.
[49] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Mexico City, 16 February 2017.

join in activities, or they withdraw – low self-esteem prevents them from participating'.[50] Child marriage, according to many sources used as a survival mechanism, also inhibits education: *'they [girls] get married – because of the war. Things are not stable – they have no time to enter into class'.*[51]

In **North of Central America countries**, women generally seem to have a more proactive and public role in society today, despite patriarchal traditions. As a result, some girls, though facing disempowering attitudes, respond with more resilience: a 16-year-old girl from an indigenous Guatemalan family, for instance, describing her great grandfather's vocal opposition to her being allowed to attend secondary school, said, *'so I said to him, "when I finish my studies, well, I am going to come bring you a photocopy of my diploma – even if I have to leave it on your grave'".*[52] Despite positive developments, a continued lack of protection from domestic violence restricts women's ability to leave abusive relationships, while the weak normative frameworks on sexual and reproductive health continue to limit girls' and women's bodily autonomy.

II. Youth Connectors

Connectors are potential mechanisms for peace. They are frequently harder to identify than dividers, in part because in violent situations, people's attention tends to focus first and foremost on the threats. Secondly, people involved in connecting activities in the midst of violence often do so unobtrusively so as not to become targets themselves. Finally, connectors can be hard to identify because they and their activities frequently seem for all intents and purposes like normal life. In the South Sudan situation and in the North of Central America and Mexico situation, young people on the move have a number of connectors in common.

A. Youth activism in solidarity with each other

In many ways, youth are their own best advocates. In both settings covered by this review, they have taken an active role in prevention and protection roles on behalf of themselves and others. In the **North of Central America countries and Mexico**, youth make up a significant proportion of ICRC volunteers offering family contact services and international phone calls along transit routes, and of workers at church-sponsored migrant shelters.[53] One young shelter worker explained that he joined because, among other things, *'people are really stigmatised for being migrants'.*[54] Another said, *'I'm here to help, because of what I've seen. It changes you – you can't be indifferent in these situations'.*[55] In **Uganda and Ethiopia**, young people form the bulk of workers in Child Friendly Spaces, where they implement peace education, sports and leisure activities and child, parent and community awareness-raising on key protection issues such as SGBV. In Uganda, they make up a significant proportion of the staff of Village Protection Desks, where they help to identify and support people with special needs including the disabled, elderly, child-headed households and those with mental health needs. In Ethiopia, they contribute members to the *shurta*, the refugee watch committee. One young member and youth leader, alluding to security concerns within the camp, explained, *'we chose to be a* shurta *for security and to serve the community'.*[56]

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[50] UNHCR focus group discussion, Bidibidi, Uganda, 12 April 2017.
[51] UNHCR NGO interview, Uganda, 12 April 2017.
[52] UNHCR focus group discussion, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.
[53] UNHCR interview, Guatemala City, 8 February 2017.
[54] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Petén, 10 February 2017.
[55] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Petén, 10 February 2017.
[56] UNHCR focus group discussion with *shurta*, Kule camp, Gambella, Ethiopia, 6 April 2017.

In Gambella, Ethiopia, young people are working preventively around difficult cultural issues affecting each other's safety and wellbeing.[57] One young man participating in an IMC-organised 'coffee corner' group in Jewi camp said, for instance, *'we hear a lot about child marriage and forced marriage… it's too young. If someone forces you to marry without your consent, there will be problems. We try to prevent that.'* When asked why it was important for young people to address this issue, he explained, *'we like this programme – it belongs to us. The old men and women, they were married early – for them it's done already. But this affects us'.* A young woman added succinctly, '*we are against forced marriage – it has consequences*'.[58]

Young South Sudanese refugees in Kampala formed the African Youth Action Network (AYAN) in 2015: its aim is *'to build a nation for all South Sudanese, that will value human life, human relations'.*[59] Many of their peers, refugees during the independence struggle, returned to South Sudan only to be manipulated into joining ethnically based fighting groups. These youth, of different ethnicities, reject this choice, instead forming a group that provides the space for other young people to empower themselves and avoid the trap of ethnic violence. They work to build tolerance and forgiveness between refugee communities, and offer cultural and awareness raising activities around peace and alternatives to violence.

The group finds that this is harder in the settlements than in Kampala, as refugees are divided by clan (for Nuer) and by ethnicity. There are clear protection concerns between youth of different ethnic groups, and for youth workers themselves. By the end of 2016, the group had trained fifty 'peace ambassadors' from different areas and settlements around Uganda in peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills. Operating with the approval of Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), responsible for refugee affairs, they are expanding their work, carrying out consciousness-raising, training and mentorship events for other young people.

In Rhino Camp settlement in Arua District, Uganda, young South Sudanese and host community activists formed the Youth Social Advocacy Team in June 2015 to respond to the high incidence of conflict-related trauma and SGBV they saw around them. The multi-ethnic team carries out community sensitisation and advocacy around SGBV. It also engages young people in school or vocational training, and those not in any form of education or learning, in peace education, youth and women's empowerment and cross-ethnicity sport. These activities are supported by the OPM and other stakeholders. The group has built houses, latrines and rubbish pits for refugees with special needs, to contribute to the community and to set a concrete example of the capability of youth to have a positive impact. The group also participated in the UNHCR and civil society led Global Refugee Youth Consultations in Uganda. One of the organisers explained, *'it's a long history of conflict in South Sudan – it needs all of our efforts to change it. Otherwise you are born in conflict and you die in conflict'.*[60]

LGBTI and indigenous activists in the North of Central America countries

Significantly, in the North of Central America countries it is particularly vulnerable groups that have empowered themselves to display the most solidarity. For example, LGBTI young people – despite, or even perhaps because of facing heightened risks of discrimination and violence in their communities – are highly organised. LGBTI groups in the region – such as *Asociación Entre Amigos* and *COMCAVIS-TRANS* in El Salvador and *Lambda Association* in Guatemala - provide services that include support to

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[57] As of 31 March 2017, 12.1 per cent of refugees in Gambella camps were aged between 15 and 24 (UNHCR).
[58] UNHCR focus group discussion, IMC coffee corner participants, Jewi camp, Gambella, Ethiopia, 7 April 2017.
[59] UNHCR key informant interview, Kampala, April 2017.
[60] UNHCR key informant interview, May 2017.

human rights defenders, advocacy, human rights education and community outreach training to their members as well as capacity building to government authorities and civil society on international protection of LGTBI individuals. This enables them to carry out awareness-raising work around sexual and reproductive health and to provide crucial support in the community around HIV testing and access to anti-retroviral drugs. These groups demonstrate a firm commitment to and grounding in human rights principles, an area that has been fundamental to the growth and protection of the region's vibrant civil society over past decades.

Young LGBTI activists are extremely articulate about both their protection needs and the prevention aspect of their work. According to one, '*we want help to make ourselves visible – we don't want to just end up as death statistics*'.[61] Their work is particularly commendable given the threatening atmosphere in which they operate.[62] Similar examples can be found among young people in indigenous communities, for example in areas of southern Mexico,[63] and in the west of Guatemala.[64]

Young activists with Pop No'j Association, an NGO active in Huehuetenango, Petén and Chimaltenango in Guatemala, use creative forms of local advocacy to support indigenous youth. Among other initiatives, they have developed a project to train trainers of community youth groups on prevention of violence and citizens' security.[65] The organisation is also involved with efforts to protect young people apprehended by Mexican or US immigration authorities and deported back to Guatemala. These 'returnees' are often vulnerable, having suffered multiple forms of violence on the move before being intercepted, detained and ultimately sent back to the places they risked their lives to leave in the first place. The US-based NGO Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) works with Pop No'j Association and other local civil society organisations in Guatemala, as well as in Honduras and El Salvador, to help ensure that young (under 18) returnees are not returned to situations where they would be in danger, to link them to services where they exist and to provide follow-up and individual protection case management.[66]

Young LGBTI and indigenous people, and in particular young activists, remain at risk for a variety of factors. These include, but are not limited to, the repressive attitude of many indigenous communities to LGBTI people, challenges in addressing domestic violence in same-sex couples, and the particularly virulent machismo directed against trans women for choosing to identify with the 'weaker sex' after having been born male.[67] At the same time, the prevention and protection work of these groups is an important reminder that collective action is – though under threat – alive and well amongst some communities in the North of Central America countries.

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[61] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala City, 8 February 2017.

[62] Key informant interviews, Salvadoran NGOs, March 2017. In the space of two weeks in February 2017, for instance, five LGBTI people, including three transgender women in one Salvadoran municipality alone -- San Luis Talpa, La Paz department – were killed by as-yet unidentified assailants, reportedly after gang members in the area made online threats against the community. See *inter alia* IACHR Condemns Alarming Numbers of LGBT Killings in the Region so Far this Year, 23 Mar 2017 at http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2017/037.asp.

[63] UNHCR interview, Tenosique, 13 February 2017. for instance, some organised communities permit neither gang nor border patrol presence on their land, providing a respite for migrants

[64] There are 24 indigenous groups in the country, nearly all of them Mayan. These communities, originating primarily in the west of the country have survived centuries of racism, structural discrimination and social exclusion. Today, they remain among the country's poorest and most excluded citizens. Some have developed a tradition of seasonal migration to southern Mexico, potentially exposing young people to labour and/or sexual exploitation. ECOSOC Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Report on the living conditions of indigenous children and adolescents in Mesoamerica and compliance with their rights (E/C.19/2014/5), 27 Feb 2014, para. 25.

[65] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017.

[66] Key informant interview, KIND, March 2017.

[67] UNHCR NGO interviews, Guatemala City, 8 February 2017.

B. Youth involvement in community-based initiatives for change

In both regions covered by this review, communities have been weakened by decades of violence and displacement. Nonetheless, community engagement around common concerns remains a powerful tool for change. Community initiatives offer a means of harnessing the energy of youth and openness to change. They also foster communications between young people and other age groups, create spaces for working together, and give young people a platform for altering negative perceptions about them.

In **Ethiopia**, refugee communities play preventive and protection roles in working to combat SGBV. UNHCR and partners such as IMC, Plan International and MSF are working to respond to and to prevent SGBV and to educate people on reproductive health. Youth centres hold dialogues on domestic violence, HIV prevention and family planning, they also offer drop-in sessions for information and support on SGBV. IMC supports community-based outreach work as well as 'community safety initiative workers' including elders, Refugee Central Committee (RCC) members, *shurtas*, and other respected people, who spread information on SGBV prevention to other refugees at water points, food distributions, grinding mills and nutrition centres and encourage women and girls to avail themselves of women's centres and safe spaces.

Men spoke in particular about the prevention aspect of the work. An older male participant explained, *'we founded this collective to make sure our children are protected – to do collective prevention. For fathers to talk to baby boys, mothers to baby girls, to end this problem'.* Another elder, when asked what message he passes on to the young men in his community, said, *'I tell them, no rapes in the camp, no early marriage – and to resolve marital disputes. Marriage should not be violence'.* A third, young man raised the topic of the impact of the community-based initiative on gender relations: '*IMC gives an opportunity for young men and women to come together on these issues. It enhances capacity, empowers women to speak in the presence of men. They would not have done this before - but now they do speak, we have an exchange of views'.* Young women, for their part, referred to the '*hardship conditions*' youth endured in South Sudan and expressed a clear view of the protection aspects of the work: '*we are refugees. People come with stigma, past problems – they need a friendly space… it is good to bring the young people together to get peace training, to forget what they saw in South Sudan*'.[68]

Plan International's youth centres in Kule and Jewi camps offer spaces for dialogue and awareness-raising on SGBV prevention and response, reproductive health and peace education. Youth members are encouraged to carry what they have learned back to their communities through peer-to-peer sensitisation. In addition, the centres provide an important outlet for young people: '*the youth centre is a place for youth from different places – you come here to talk to your peers, forget your bad memories,*' commented a young focus group participant. These centres are well used and seem a popular resource, particularly among older school-going children. In many places, there are additional efforts to reach out-of-school youth. There were issues around girls' attendance, with one young woman commenting, '*some girls are not allowed to come here. The parents think they will have improper contact with boys here'.* Staff are working with youth to raise community awareness of the value of the centre for young people, and to explain that young women's activities end well in time for them to be home before dark.[69]

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[68] UNHCR focus group discussion, IMC SGBV project participants, Kule camp, Ethiopia, April 2017.
[69] UNHCR focus group discussion, Kule camp, April 2017.

In the **North of Central America countries** peripheral urban communities – already highly transient, marginalised and fragmented – have been further weakened by the encroachment of gangs. Despite this, some local community-based initiatives persist with tangible benefits, particularly in Guatemala. One of these, Proyecto Educativo Laboral Puente Belice,[70] established in 2003, grew out of Jesuit outreach work among the inhabitants of four marginalised neighbourhoods in Guatemala City. It provides opportunities for at-risk youth through partnerships with local businesses, which employ the young people and make a contribution towards their education. The youth work for half the day and study for the second half, following an alternative education programme developed by the *Instituto Guatemalteco de Educación Radiofónica.* The work reinforces the resilience and self-esteem of young people who often, due to their backgrounds, have little self-confidence and, as a result, can be prone to aggression and meeting violence with violence. Community work furthers this personal development. The work has clear prevention, protection, partnership and participation elements. The organisers describe the methodology as an 'opportunities yes, assistance no' way to break the cycle of marginalisation. Graduates go on to work or further study, some re-joining the project as outreach workers. The centre also offers weekend popular education courses for adolescents and adults.

Another organisation**, Asociación Grupo Ceiba,** began in the El Limón area of Guatemala City in 1989,[71] offering alternative education to at-risk adolescents and young adults excluded from or not reached by the formal primary and secondary education system. The programme continues, including flexible, part-time and weekend courses. The project now also includes a central vocational training institute with courses in graphic design, web design and computing, among others. As with the Ethiopian project mentioned above, older people are involved; they receive training alongside youth, helping to bridge the generation gap.[72] The organisation uses a peace-centred, micro-level approach to local community building in at-risk urban areas.[73]

C. Youth, media and technology

Powerful mechanisms for unifying young people are new technologies and media. In both settings radio is the most common and widely-accessible media, used not just for news or music but also for distance learning and preventive awareness-raising on social topics. Arua-based Radio Pacis is the only FM radio station in northwest **Uganda**'s West Nile region, where the South Sudanese settlements are located. It broadcasts over three frequencies, each of which has two of the local languages shared between the host community and refugees as anchor languages, and reaches as far as parts of South Sudan and the DRC. Broadcasts include news, interactive debates on rural issues, cultural programmes and music. Some programmes provide a platform for local leaders to be invited to account to their constituents.

Radio Pacis runs a 'Rural Voices' slot featuring debates on local issues recorded in communities, including Rhino Camp settlement. The aim is to '*to give a voice to the refugees and the host community, to talk about local challenges and conflicts refugees are facing*'. Issues important to young people in past debates have included access to productive ventures, skills training and secondary

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[70] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017. See also "*Memoria Historica: Proyecto Educativo Laboral Puente Belice*" (2010) and "*Sistematización Crítica: Proyecto Educativo Laboral Puente Belice*" (2010) at http://puentebelice.org/publicaciones.h ml.

[71] This is one of the most dangerous areas of Guatemala City, located in zone18 and mainly governed by MS-18.

[72] UNHCR NGO interview, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.

[73] Asociación Grupo Ceiba, *Resumen Ejecutivo 2016*, p. 5; American Friends Service Committee, *Implementación de Plataformas Locales de Paz Urbana: Lecciones Aprendidas sobre la construcción de paz en contextos urbanos violentos*, 2012, pp. 7, 10, 17; and *El Manual de las Plataformas de Paz Urbana. Guía de Reflexión y acción para la reducción de la violencia urbana*, 2013, pp. 11-12, 19.

education. In early May, a dialogue with mainly 18- to 22-year-olds in Rhino Camp settlement gave people a chance to share their experiences of coping with conflict-related trauma. The radio's programme manager explained the pastoral care side of the work: *'as a radio we try to talk to these people and counsel them, guide them in life so that they can forget the past'.*[74] The radio station has in the past provided a platform for refugee youth-led peace initiatives, for instance by airing interviews with groups such as AYAN.

The *Cine en la Calle* (Street Cinema) project in **Guatemala** offers another example of the power of media and technology to capture the attention of young people and channel their energy and creativity for the benefit of their community. For the last six years, the project has been working with young people in marginalised urban areas of Guatemala City, as well as with indigenous youth in the remote highland region of Nebaj. It works by bringing young people together in a public space, showing documentaries on themes of interest – migration, gender, youth work – and providing a format for dialogue. As a next step, young people are trained in multimedia and video skills, empowering them to express themselves creatively through video and using it as a technique for proactive engagement with community issues. Over the years, youth have made (and in some cases, posted on YouTube[75]), short films on community life and origins and the stories of some community members, as well as on lighter themes such as community members' relationships with their dogs and their accounts of their favourite movies. The films are made in a highly participatory manner, activity involving community members and offering them a platform for sharing a bit of themselves. In the process, they spontaneously express their views on a range of topics, including – of particular relevance - the opportunities and risks associated with migration.

According to one project organiser, this work has in some instances resulted in young people being given a standing in the community and a voice in communal fora that they did not have before[76].

D. Cultural expressions: music, dance, poetry, storytelling and theatre

Interlocutors in both settings referred to the power of music and arts in capturing young people's interest and attention, allowing them to release their feelings and cope with difficult episodes from the past and helping them to communicate within the community. One youth worker explained '*music is so powerful, it speaks to the soul – it is one way of bringing youth together*'.[77] In this way, the arts can provide a conduit for participatory prevention and protection work.

One strong example is the 'Theatre of Joy, Theatre of Change' project active in Bidibidi in **Uganda**. It is partly based on applied theatre techniques from the African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme Trust,[78] in which young people first act a play about issues that matter to them, in their real-life context and own language. They are then encouraged to engage in an age-appropriate problem-solving discussion with the audience, around questions like 'what is the problem?', 'who caused it?', 'who is affected?' and finally, 'what can we do about it?' Some of the refugee organisers and participants were already involved in this work in South Sudan. They brought the technique and skills with them to Uganda when they were forced to flee.[79]

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[74] UNHCR interview, May 2017. Radio Pacis is an initiative of the Catholic diocese of Arua in northern Uganda. See http://www.radiopacis.org/.
[75] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCieq8m2JD546doMfIXrnSaw; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIvS54kuIbY; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IHqkJ02d50.
[76] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.
[77] Originally formed in South Africa in 1987. UNHCR interview, Kampala, April 2017.
[78] See for instance http://www.arepp.org.za/aboutus.
[79] UNHCR interview, Bidibidi settlement, Uganda, April 2017.

These activities are enormously popular with young people in the settlement, drawing them even from neighbouring villages. Organisers use the activities as a way of bringing together young refugees from all ethnic groups as well as host community youth - they are encouraged to perform together. At the primary school, participants staged a play on the importance of girls' education. Older youth have developed and performed short choral pieces on themes of concern to them, for instance the need to change traditional attitudes against women working outside of the home. They have also staged dramas addressing SGBV, gang violence, how to manage the monthly food ration, and the need to avoid damaging the environment by chopping down too many trees for charcoal. Refugee leaders attend, presenting the theme and engaging in the community dialogue about possible solutions afterwards. They are then invited to follow up and report back on the community's recommendations, reinforcing their responsiveness and accountability.

The work clearly has a strong prevention component. At the same time, in engaging youth and giving them an outlet for their energies and anxieties, it addresses protection needs. As an adult project organiser explained, *'it is very therapeutic. They can bring out their selves. They have to overcome their shyness, to let the drama out. [Participants in] the drama groups are different from the other youth – this helps them come out of that thing they have gone through in South Sudan'.* In a relatively short time, the training has had a marked impact. One young woman, a secondary school student, volunteered, '*the fact that I am speaking here in front of you is because of that training. It helps us build relations and encourages people who have dropped out [of school] to come back, to not give up their hopes*'. A young man added, *'it gives us motivation – we get education about life, how to conduct ourselves'.* A third commented, *'people have different skills. I am not academic but I love this. [The drama club] has come to nurture our talents. I want this to be my career'.*[80]

The project, supported by UNHCR and Windle Trust, also encourages dance initiatives amongst young refugees. Dance is important to the culture of many of the small ethnic groups from Equatoria Province, the area of origin of most of the refugees in the settlement. The organisers have found numerous pre-formed groups of children and youth engaged in traditional and contemporary dance, and have supported them to organise competitions and performances. This gives young people the chance to get to know and to appreciate each other's culture, with significant impact. For example, at the local primary school, children of all ethnicities participate in Acholi dance, simply for the joy of taking part.

At Plan International-sponsored youth centres in **Ethiopia**, drama and music activities are also popular parts of the programme. One young participant explained the significance of taking part in familiar cultural activities: *'we left all our traditional things behind [in South Sudan]. Here [at the centre] we can come, to do those things again'*. Others spoke about the unifying power of these activities: *'as Nuer we are different sub-clans – so here we are respecting each other, bringing unity between us',* and *'people are respecting their culture. Nuer clans have different cultures and we can show that in the youth centre, respect it and strengthen it'.*[81]

Guatemala also offers examples, with the International Poetry Festival (*Festival Internacional de Poesía)*, an initiative of young local poets*.* It is held annually in Quetzaltenango, a majority indigenous city, with additional venues throughout indigenous areas of the country and in the capital. Now in its thirteenth year, the Festival offers people a chance to '*understand their problems through poetry*',[82] In a week long programme, the festival – featuring poets from around the world – brings poetry to the

[80] All quotes from UNHCR interview, zone 1, village 1, Bidibidi settlement, Uganda, April 2017.
[81] UNHCR focus group discussion, youth centre, Jewi camp, Ethiopia, April 2017.
[82] UNHCR interview, March 2017.

street and to bars, schools, prisons, universities and other venues. It is open to all ages but is organised with youth in mind; many of the 40 organisers from different supporting groups are young. Some participants who began as children now take part as artists in their own right. The festival focuses on poetry as a means of social transformation.[83] In 2016, under the theme 'Memory', the event was dedicated to the 40,000 Guatemalans 'disappeared' during the armed conflict. From 31 July to 5 August 2017, the focus will be on the 5,000 of those 'disappeared' who were children. Potential topics for 2018 include migration and migrants.

E.   The work of faith-based organisations

In both regions, faith-based organisations display enormous commitment to youth on the move and play a significant unifying role amongst them, irrespective of young people's own religious beliefs. In **Northern Uganda**, where the host community is a mixture of Muslim and Christian while the refugees are nearly all Christian,[84] there is a high degree of solidarity. As a local official explained, *'we have a brotherhood relationship because when the Europeans partitioned Africa, they didn't partition by tribe. The borders they made split tribes into two or even three. In our case, there are many groups that are present in both South Sudan and northern Uganda'.*[85]

Caritas has established a joint residential vocational training programme for young South Sudanese and host community men and women. The project does not distinguish by religion. As a Caritas staff member explained, *'once you separate by religion, you can't achieve what you came here to achieve'.*[86] The project evidences a high degree of attention to protection, through the optic of pastoral care. The head teacher of one institution, for instance, explained the situation of some of the young refugees: *'some were with the rebels. They have told us because they feel we accept them… now they are feeling more relaxed here, they can tell us.'* He added,

> *'people are coming from war. What they are feeling is not so stable. But we work with them. They are doing better, and feel good that they will go back with skills… these boys are very hardworking. Their problem is that war. It came and interrupted their development … now we are having to start again'.*[87]

The project is evolving to incorporate a psycho-social support component in response to this need.

Similarly, Jesuit Refugee Services supports psycho-social, peace-building and secondary education work with refugees and host communities in Uganda. It has cultural and information-sharing projects for young refugees, including South Sudanese, of different faiths, ethnicities and nationalities in Kampala. Its programme in Adjumani is preparing to pilot a multi-ethnic peace and reconciliation project that builds on the initiative of young South Sudanese refugees themselves.[88]

In the **North of Central America countries, Mexico and the United States**, the Catholic Church has dedicated structures for pastoral work with young people on the move. Over decades, it has developed a network of shelters where people in transit can come for a meal, a change of clothes and a safe place to sleep, with no questions asked; these have historically been responsible for most of

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[83] See www.fipg.org.
[84] By many accounts churches are among of South Sudan's strongest institutions.
[85] UNHCR official interview, Uganda, April 2017.
[86] UNHCR NGO interview, Uganda, April 2017.
[87] UNHCR interview, Uganda, April 2017.
[88] Key informant interview, May 2017. See also http://en.jrs.net/Regions_Detail?Region=ear.

the concrete, day-to-day protection work with youth on the move.[89] In addition, many shelters have over time developed holistic programmes to respond to their psycho-social, medical and legal needs. In some shelters, the services offered to young LGBTI people have evolved over time to show more flexibility and responsiveness to both their identity and their protection needs, for instance by organising separate, more private accommodation in addition to unisex male and female dormitories so that they can be offered choices.

In recognition of this reality, in recent years, UNHCR has strengthened its partnerships with North of Central America and Mexican church structures for people on the move. This trend is reflected around the world. In 2012, the UNHCR High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges focused on "Faith and Protection", and in 2013 UNHCR supported a coalition of leading faith-based humanitarian organizations and academic institutions in developing a set of inter-faith principles in support of refugees and IDPs called *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders*. The Principles state,

> 'a core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same... I will remember and remind others in my community that no one leaves his or her homeland without a reason: some flee because of persecution, violence or exploitation; others due to natural disaster; yet others out of love to provide better lives for their families.... I recognize that all persons are entitled to dignity and respect as human beings'.[90]

In **El Salvador**, the Anglican/Episcopal church-backed organisation Cristosal provides another concrete example of solidarity with young people of concern to UNHCR. Cristosal has played a pivotal role in faith-based protection in the country by using a religious freedom framework to invite all faith groups to reflect on their attitudes and behaviours towards LGBTI people so as to put an end to practices that discriminate against and stigmatise them.[91] Cristosal also carries out grassroots community development work in several highly marginalised municipalities in and around the capital San Salvador. This work aims to foster inclusive youth leadership in the communities, in part through training in conflict transformation and a culture of peace and in part through concrete projects developed by the young people themselves. To date, these have included mural-painting in a local creche and parks and publishing a people's history of the community in booklet form.

Cristosal's community development work is evolving in the direction of community solidarity, in part as a response to its engagement around forced displacement. It provides emergency protection and support to internally displaced people, including those fleeing gang violence, and is working with partners in the Civil Society Roundtable against Forced Displacement by Violence and Organised Crime

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[89] Although the shelters are church-run, there is no proselytizing, and they are open to all. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some migrants from evangelical churches may prefer to stay elsewhere but for most this does not seem an issue. There are also shelters run by non-religious civil society organisations.

[90] "Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders" at: http://www.unhcr.org/51b6de419.html, p. 8.

[91] See for instance Cristosal, "La libertad religiosa y las personas LGBTI: cuaderno para el dialogo sobre los derechos humanos en El Salvador" (2016) at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5784803ebe6594ad5e34ea63/t/57ce05052994ca4d3c1f2bff/1473119508238/cuaderno-para-el-dialogo_cristosal-final.pdf and "Puntos de Encuentro: Reconciliando la diversidad sexual y la libertad religiosa en El Salvador" (2016) at http://www.academia.edu/25088398/Puntos_de_encuentro_Reconciliando_a_diversidad_sexual_y_la_libertad_religiosa_en_El_Salvador.

in El Salvador (*Mesa de sociedad civil contra el desplazamiento forzado por violencia y crimen organizado en El Salvador*) and communities to look at local protection alternatives.[92]

III. Factors that contribute to youth resilience and the engagement of youth with peace and security

The previous sections identified dividers evident amongst young people on the move in the two settings and gave concrete examples of connectors at work between them. This segment explores how these elements interact and highlights some key factors affecting youth resilience at individual, family, community, national, regional and international levels. Finally, it aims to highlight factors that enable young people to engage proactively with peace and security.

A. Youth as individuals

While generalizations about young people may not be particularly useful in light of their diversity, there are some general observations worth making about influences that can help strengthen a young person's ability to understand the context in which they live and to cope with its consequences.

On the basis of observations across the two situations covered in this review, it would appear that **education** increases young people's ability to participate in the political arena. For example, in Guatemala, university students were key to the '*Justicia Ya*' movement that forced the 2015 resignation of then-president Otto Pérez Molina on corruption charges. Even amongst younger students like the secondary school pupils who took part in a UNHCR focus group discussion in a Fe y Alegría[93] school in a marginal neighbourhood in Guatemala City, holistic, socially-oriented education had fostered a clear ability to reflect proactively, even around fairly sensitive peace and security issues. These young people, a large percentage of whom live without access to many services, in part because service providers are afraid to set foot in their neighbourhood, are frequently reliant on a local gang (not linked to MS-13 or B-18) for security and resolution of disputes due in part to lack of trust in police or justice officials. Despite this, they were extraordinarily articulate about issues including forced displacement and security. In Ugandan refugee settlements, educated young people are questioning and pushing back against the divisive messages that have driven their peers into ethnic militia. They provide the clearest examples available of youth-led initiatives around peace and security in either setting.

At the other end of the spectrum, young people with little education are still capable of reflecting critically and taking steps to engage with the protection mechanisms available to them. A 15-year-old Honduran girl in a civil society-run shelter in Guatemala recounted, for instance, how she had presented herself to judicial authorities in Guatemala City and asked to be taken into care after having run away from home due to domestic violence. She explained her reasoning: '*you know what happens in the street – poverty, drugs, gangs – you live in the street, you know what it's like ... I realised, thinking about it, that it was really dangerous... There's no justice on the street*'.[94]

In the North of Central America countries in particular, a **strong human rights framework** also helped some young people – particularly those in LGBTI or indigenous communities - to engage around peace

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[92] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.
[93] The **Fe y Alegria** (Faith and Joy) movement is also present in El Salvador and Honduras. It is active throughout Latin America as well as in Chad and Madagascar. See http://www.feyalegria.org/es.
[94] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

and security. Young people from these vulnerable minority groups were more likely to be aware of their rights and to be proactive in holding authorities to account. They also displayed a greater degree of activism and solidarity with other members of their embattled communities.[95] However, interlocutors noted that young people in the North of Central America countries have less of a human rights perspective than was perhaps the case during the conflict years and their immediate aftermath.[96] In Guatemala, some young people reported their parents' experiences of conflict and persecution had led them to discourage their children from becoming active around political or social issues: '*your parents don't tell you not to do it – but they pass on their fear*'.[97] A civil society organisation staffer in El Salvador noted that young people have become so desensitised by pervasive violence that '*they no longer even see themselves as subjects with rights*'; in schools infiltrated by gangs, teachers are afraid to raise the subject: '*to mention rights is to break the silence, and destabilise the situation even more … you become an enemy of these groups, [teachers] prefer to just keep quiet*'.[98]

Within the South Sudan context, the **peace and conflict resolution framework** played a similar role in helping young people engage around peace and security. Some young refugees reported having already been given peace education and conflict mediation, while in South Sudan, immediately following independence. They had since witnessed the degeneration of a political dispute into cyclical violence carried out along ethnic lines, at times at the instigation of those in positions of authority. In this context, it seems that education for peace had not been a barrier to the spread of conflict. It seemed however, to have retained some impact in terms of resilience, evidenced by some young refugees' ability to identify, resist and even organise activities against ethnicity-based fragmentation in countries of asylum (see, for example, projects described in the 'Connector' section above).

An area that merits attention at the individual level is the **psycho-social impact of violence and flight** on young people. Though living in a violent context in their country of origin, many youth from North of Central America countries reported that having to flee came as a shock for which they were wholly unprepared. In recognition of this, organisations such as IDHUCA (*Instituto de los Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeon Canas*), in addition to more traditional human rights and access to justice programming, include a psychological accompaniment element in their work, helping to prepare individuals to meet the dangers they will face en route.[99] Similarly, civil society and faith-based migrant shelters in the North of Central America countries and Mexico have added psycho-social support to the services they offer. In Uganda, interlocutors pointed to the healing influence of less overtly therapeutic interventions such as theatre, poetry and story-telling.

Interestingly, in both settings covered by this review, the official recognition of refugee status, and therefore the removal of the most immediate risk of a return to violence, seemed to have little or no effect in relieving young people's psycho-social distress. This may indicate that exposure to violence – whether as victims or perpetrators – may have left young people with significant psychological damage unrelated to the immediate threat levels they face.[100] For projects working with at-risk or returnee youth in country of origin in the North of Central America countries, an important lesson has been that mental health needs are crucial: '*you can work with youth on their literacy and numeracy*

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[95] Anecdotal reports indicate that young people who are members of both, however, face enormous obstacles in reconciling the two identities and in practice may find themselves having to choose between them.

[96] *Inter alia*, UNHCR NGO and official interviews, Guatemala City, 8 and 9 February 2017. Young people active in supporting their local migrant shelter through a local church group reported simply that some of their peers made fun of them for their work. UNHCR focus group discussion, Petén, 10 February 2017.

[97] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Petén, 10 February 2017.

[98] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

[99] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

[100] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

and teach them skills – but if you don't look at their mental health at the same time, the achievements will be limited'.[101] Some use the 'Most Significant Change' (*'cambio mas significativo'*) self – evaluation technique.

Interestingly, projects like those implemented by Caritas in Uganda have come to the same conclusion, and are taking steps to add psycho-social components to their programmes to meet the needs of young people. Many within the refugee community seemed aware of the harm young people had suffered and its impact on their mental and emotional state. A woman member of a Presbyterian church in Kule camp, Ethiopia, commented, '*the problem is the young boys come through hardship. Then at the camp there is no opportunity for them to transform their mind from the conflict they passed through'.* Another woman alluded to the damage left by the experience of combat, and the need for a form of DDR assistance and follow-up: '*many of the youth were fighters. To bring them back to civilian life, investment is needed…. even some women were involved in the fighting – they were involved, or they were the victims'*.[102] A refugee youth leader in Bidibidi in Uganda, describing the psycho-social harm many refugees are still suffering, explained, '*people carry stress from South Sudan. The other day they heard a gunshot here – they were all terrified. They still carry the weight of what they saw'.[103]*

B. Youth and the family

Strong family ties encourage resilience, but conflict profoundly affects these young people's experience of family, with negative consequences. As a starting point, in both situations covered by this review, young people are affected by their elders' experiences of past wars. Conflict-related trauma and other psychological impacts can damage parents' and caregivers' ability to develop relationships with children and can contribute to domestic violence, alcoholism and other harmful behaviours. Many South Sudanese youth in Ethiopia and Uganda are deeply scarred by the more recent loss of family members to violence, others are debilitated by concern for family left behind in South Sudan, who may be caught up in further fighting. As one youth leader in Bidibidi explained, '*many people are afraid for the family they left behind. If they hear of fighting or killings they are afraid until they hear their people are safe*'.[104]

The North of Central America countries are marked by a high level of family disintegration as many parents have migrated north for work, often leaving their children in the care of extended family. While the remittances parents send home have helped to support their families, for many children their absence has had a marked impact. The experience for some young people in kinship care can be one of heightened risks of neglect and abuse, coupled with the lack of a close bond with their parents. One 14-year-old Guatemalan girl put it most succinctly: '*I don't want a 'cashpoint dad'. I want someone who loves me*'.[105] Young people on the move in the region were extremely articulate about their precarious home life and its impact. One said simply, '*I'd like to have a family – a mum and a dad*'.[106] When asked 'what needs to change in order for young people to be safer?', the most common answer in the North of Central America countries was linked to family[107] - '*a more stable family environment*', in the words of an 18-year-old woman from El Salvador.[108] Several of those interviewed,

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[101] Ibid.
[102] UNHCR focus group discussion, Presbyterian church group, Kule Camp, Ethiopia, 6 April 2017.
[103] UNHCR focus group discussion, youth leader group, Bidibidi settlement, Uganda, 11 April 2017.
[104] Ibid.
[105] UNHCR focus group discussion, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.
[106] UNHCR individual interviews, migrant shelter, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.
[107] The second was 'an end to corruption' (see below). Others simply said that there was nothing to be done.
[108] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

recognising that gang members share their lack of family communication and affection, said that there will be no end to gang culture until there is more support for families.[109]

One project that demonstrates the benefit of strengthening family resilience is the Catholic Relief Services 'Young Builders' (*Jóvenes Constructores*) programme in at-risk communities in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. It trains youth and gives them a community service role. It also proactively involves parents in developing their child's 'life plan', using a Pan-American Health Organisation methodology to improve lines of communication within the family and to reduce violence in the home.[110]

Some youth on the move are parents themselves. Amongst South Sudanese refugees, most of these are young mothers. School programmes in Ugandan settlements have been designed to be flexible in order to encourage the participation of young mothers. Some young women even attend primary school alongside their older children, gaining confidence, skills and qualifications that enhance their resilience.[111] Some young parents in the North of Central America region reported leaving their children behind when they fled, while others had brought them along. Both scenarios entail additional pressures on the young parents as well as additional protection needs for their children. Along the route, small children can be seen as a form of 'insurance', in that the general public may be more willing to help a woman or a couple with a small baby or child, but the need to care for the child imposes other difficulties. A 20-year-old recognised refugee and mother described how her 3-year-old daughter, witnessing her parents' distress as they recounted their past ordeals to Guatemalan asylum officials during their status determination interview, became distraught herself, making the whole process even more painful and draining. [112] Women who have become pregnant or who have had children as a result of rape are even more in need of protection and support.

C. Youth in the community

The damage to the social fabric caused by conflict – through the deaths of some community members, the displacement of many more and the resulting loss of communal life and customs – was evident in the lives of young people in countries of origin in both settings. When asked what structures or people in their community they turned to when under threat in their country of origin, almost all young people from the North of Central America region replied that there were none.[113] Some adult interlocutors commented that the negative impact of the loss of community life is particularly apparent in settings like shelters. Many youth are unused to communal life and unskilled at compromise and negotiation, making them appear demanding and intolerant of others in group settings.[114] These factors – on top of the psycho-social impact of violence, family separation and displacement – must be incorporated into structural frameworks for working with young people within shelter settings.

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[109] *Inter alia*, UNHCR individual interviews, migrant shelter, Mexico City, 16 February 2017.
[110] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017. The PAHO model 'Familias Fuertes' ('Strong Families') aims to reduce domestic risk factors and identify protection strategies for young people and their families (see http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3189&Itemid=2420&lang=es).
[111] In an example of inter-agency cooperation, early childhood development centres run by other partner organisations provide care for these women's younger children during school hours.
[112] UNHCR individual interview, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017. She also described bursting into tears herself not long after arriving in Guatemala as she listened to the child sob, *'Mummy, my tummy is hungry'*.
[113] UNHCR individual interviews, Guatemala and Mexico, February 2017.
[114] UNHCR interviews, Mexico, February 2017.

At the same time, recent history offers some strong examples of resilience and collective engagement in peace and security among other communal concerns.[115] The projects described above illustrate that community-based work can still be a real connector for youth.

In Uganda and Ethiopia, though community structures may have been damaged in decades of fighting, most young people retain a sense of belonging to their particular ethnic group, which helps to provide a sense of identity and resilience. As described above, this can also be a divisive factor. As a result, many groups active amongst young people use peace education to enhance their sense of belonging in parallel with their tolerance and appreciation of other groups' cultures.

Groups such as Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID) seek to build a sense of community amongst urban refugees of disparate nationalities and ethnicities. This group formed in 2008 to help respond to the common challenges – gaining access to jobs and education, avoiding criminality - faced by young refugees living, with little support, in Kampala. Its young organisers realised that refugees from the Great Lakes Region were struggling to overcome the impact of the multinational conflict that had forced them to flee their homes. One explained,

> *refugees from Congo [DRC] saw the Burundese, Rwandese and Ugandans as the cause of their displacement. This did not help them to come together. Congolese saw the others as enemies… We managed to bring them together. We realised how important it is to be a team – you fight the same cause, you consider yourselves as one and forget what divides you, you work together for the same aim.[116]*

The group initially used sport to bring young people of these different nationalities together so that they could overcome the resentment and fear that divided them and begin to discuss collective responses to common challenges. It has since expanded its programmes to include education, women's empowerment, training in computer skills and use of social media, job readiness and placement, and microfinance, and is widening its range from urban areas to refugee settlements. It continues to work with youth from a range of nationalities, including the host community, and is applying the lessons learned to its work with South Sudanese refugees so as to help bridge the gap between Nuer, Dinka and other groups.

D. Key interlocutors for youth

Civil society in the country of origin

Despite pressures, civil society in **North of Central America and Mexico** is strong, with robust academic and civil organisations working in the area of refugees and migration. Some interlocutors drew attention to a gap between youth and a number of civil society organisations. One, speaking of some indigenous community structures, explained, '*there is a generation gap, adults don't cede active spaces and decision making roles in the community to youth',[117]* a view echoed elsewhere. Others referred to the practice by some adults of co-opting 'youth' organisations as money-making ventures

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[115] Relevant examples include returnee villages in Guatemala and El Salvador, founded by communities which had been in exile together and which returned en masse after the peace. These returnee communities were highly cohesive and organised, for instance around communal agricultural projects like coffee cultivation and processing. Unfortunately, limited profitability compounded by the recent global recession have meant that there is little work generated for youth. Many young returnees, having grown up in Mexico, struggled to adapt to life in rural zones. In the face of economic stagnation in the villages, many have returned to Mexico to work, leaving communities populated mainly by older generations. Others want to stay, but must become highly adaptable in order to do so. Young people from such areas have seen collective action at work – but have also seen it fail, often through external factors.
[116] UNHCR key informant interview, May 2017.
[117] UNHCR key informant interview, March 2017.

without any pretence of real youth inclusion or participation in decision-making.[118] While these are valid concerns, it is also true that the strength and vibrancy of civil society in the North of Central America and, Mexico region boosts youth resilience. As demonstrated by the different examples cited throughout this review, civil society organisations play an important role in protecting youth by drawing attention to cases of abuse and pushing for justice, as well as by serving as a platform for youth voices, participation and engagement. Civil society organisations also help to bridge the gulf between young people and the authorities, helping them to articulate their concerns and to hold duty bearers to account. As such they are a significant enabling factor for youth engagement.

Authorities in country of origin

A common factor between the two situations covered in this review is the lack of investment in youth across all sectors.

Interviews conducted for this review in the North of Central America have demonstrated that young people appreciate the complex and multi-faceted nature of the problems facing their countries. Unfortunately, for many in positions of power, gang violence is not a symptom of what is wrong, but rather the problem itself. As a result, many responses have been security-based, with many now recognizing that these responses have exacerbated rather than mitigated the problem - not least by reinforcing gang members' sense of persecution and the strength of their identification with the gangs,. It remains to be seen what the impact of the new, less aggressive, 'community-based' security approaches will be on young people's ability to engage with peace and security issues. As one government interlocutor in Guatemala commented, '*this doesn't change from one day to the next*'.[119]

Governments in the North of Central America and Mexico have taken positive steps. They have demonstrated political will to protect against trafficking, for example by establishing alert mechanisms in cases of missing children and teenagers. Some efforts have been made to improve the situation of returnees deported to their countries of origin by Mexico or the United States, although much remains to be done to enable these young people to play a proactive peace and security role.

Similarly, young people interviewed during the course of this research repeatedly pointed to the lack of an internal flight alternative in their countries and the absence of measures to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs). Honduras has made advances in officially recognising and beginning to respond to internal displacement with its Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence and other measures.[120] Guatemala and El Salvador have been reluctant to follow suit, not least because this topic evokes still-fresh memories of conflict, but this is evolving. USAID and other donors are showing increased interest in community-based projects for returnees, IDPs and other at-risk youth; the impact of this shift on youth security and engagement remains to be seen.

E. Host country response to refugees

This study illustrates the primacy of host country response as an influence on youth resilience. **Uganda** represents one end of the spectrum of host government responses, and provides a good practice example in many refugee response sectors. Its borders are open, and not only does it welcome refugees and allocate them land to settle, but it gives them access to agricultural land and the right to work to help maintain their self-sufficiency. Refugees in Uganda benefit from freedom of movement

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[118] UNHCR interview, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.
[119] UNHCR official meetings, Guatemala City, 9 February 2017.
[120] Honduras' Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence (IICPPDV) published a diagnostic study on internal displacement in 2015.

and access to a wide range of services on par with nationals. As a local official in northern Uganda explained, this openness is rooted in Ugandans' own experience:

the host community here were refugees in South Sudan. Those born in the 1970s and above were refugees there between around 1979 and 2002, when Ugandan refugees started to return here. They [Ugandans] think back to what happened to them. They have to pay back the hospitality the South Sudanese gave to them. The relationship is very cordial.[121]

It is no great surprise that the strongest examples of independent youth-led initiatives cited here are based in Uganda. The environment created by the government is more enabling than any other host country included in this research, and some young refugees respond to it by engaging fully in peace and security issues in their communities. This does not mean that young refugees in Uganda have no problems, they do. They still face divisions within different refugee populations, and some tensions with the host community. Too many are left idle, lacking work, education and training opportunities. However, there are structures in place to facilitate dialogue and address these issues.

In **Ethiopia**, South Sudanese refugees have been granted *prima facie* refugee status and the border remains open to new arrivals. However the situation in its Gambella camps is complicated by severe (as of this writing, 75 per cent) under-funding and food shortages that raise health and other concerns.[122] In addition, the refugee influx has altered the ethnic balance in the region, contributing to insecurity with part of the host community.[123] A refugee leader in Jewi camp, which has experienced some ethnic tensions with the host community, described his view of the situation: '*we are guests here. As guests we cannot hate the owner of the house. We need peace and peaceful coexistence'.*[124] Ethiopian authorities are trying to manage the situation, including through peace education via local structures. Refugee youth report having little contact with the host community however. Some engage in peace and conflict resolution training and activities in the camps, but their engagement is primarily limited to the other Nuer clans present amongst the refugees.

The situation in the **North of Central America** is very different. Young people have the right to travel freely between the three countries and Nicaragua and, commendably, increasing numbers of Salvadorans and Hondurans are applying for and receiving asylum in Guatemala.[125] However, Central America is a very small place, and the ability to travel also extends to the perpetrators. There have been killings of refugees by unidentified assailants in Guatemala. Young refugees in Guatemala, while grateful for the openness shown to them, do not feel truly safe. They try to keep an extremely low

[121] UNHCR official meeting, Yumbe, Uganda, 13 April 2017.

[122] The monthly food ration has been cut from 16 to 13 kgs. Numerous sources raised this as a major issue. One church member explained, '*before, it just went the whole month – now, there is no way. It causes insecurity in the camp – young boys see that the food for the month is up, they go out and look what they can eat – or steal, whatever. It is a source of great insecurity*'. UNHCR interview, Presbyterian Church group, Kule camp, Ethiopia, 6 April 2017.

[123] In Gambella, the camps are located in a remote and fairly harsh physical environment with already tense ethnic relationships amongst the host population, made up primarily of people from the Nuer and Anuak ethnic groups. Traditionally transhumant pastoralist Nuer and sedentary farming/fishery-dependent Anuak -- divided by cultural identity and conflict over resources – have a history of violent conflict in the area. In January 2016, Gambella saw an outbreak of ethnic violence between the two groups, and this remains a concern and a security constraint for refugees. For their part, Anuak members of the host community fear what they see as Nuer expansionism.

[124] UNHCR focus group interview, Jewi camp shurta and RCC, 7 April 2017.

[125] Government figures indicate that the government of Guatemala gave asylum to 40 adults and 23 children in 2015; in 2016 the figures rose to 45 adults and 29 children. UNHCR, *Cantidad de Solicitudes de Asilo Otorgadas, por Nacionalidad y Mes*, 2015-2016 (source: Oficina de Relaciones Migratorias Internacionales (ORMI) of the Dirección General de Migración (DGM)).

profile to increase their chances of security; '*I try not to let my guard down,'* said a young Honduran man.[126] A young woman refugee from El Salvador said simply, '*we are afraid to go out'.*[127]

Once in **Mexico**, the situation for young people on the move changes yet again. Citizens from North of Central America countries cannot legally enter Mexico unless they have an approved visa, something which is generally beyond the means of many. Mexico's border with Guatemala is extremely porous, and there is no real barrier to entry, other than officials at designated border points and criminals stationed at key unofficial crossing points who extort passing migrants. Once in Mexican territory, young people are deeply aware that they are 'illegal' and face deportation if apprehended.

Mexico has a clear individual refugee status determination system supported by UNHCR,[128] however it is slow, with limited capacity, and faces increasing demand. Young people who have successfully claimed asylum in Mexico generally reported feeling safe, although several mentioned the presence of gangs. One young woman asylum seeker said she felt safe as compared to El Salvador, but added '*well, I feel safe – but I'm not going to trust anyone*'.[129]

Mexico is working hard to strengthen its attention to unaccompanied children among youth on the move, for instance with designated DIF (*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*, Holistic Family Development) units and a new shelter in Villahermosa that applies Casa Alianza methodology in its work with young asylum-seekers.[130] However the practice of detaining migrants, including asylum seekers waiting for their cases to be processed, seriously undermines the efforts undertaken for young people at federal, regional and local levels. Interlocutors argue that prolonged detention has an enormously dissuasive effect on young people who might well be eligible for asylum but who cannot face being deprived of their freedom for three months while the process takes its course. On the basis of discussions with key informants, there appears to be political will among important sectors of Mexican society to rectify this situation, as well as to make more efforts at local integration, but for most young people on the move in Mexico the aim, far from organising collectively or engaging in peace and security, is to remain invisible.

That said, there are five areas in which Mexico could serve as an example for other transit countries. First, migrant shelters are recognised as 'safe spaces' under Mexican law,[131] this allows churches and civil society to respond to the primary human needs of those on the move. Second, similar to some other countries, Mexico's 2011 immigration law includes a provision for humanitarian visas for those who have suffered serious crimes.[132] While more could be done to raise awareness of and access to this mechanism, it is an important step forward. Next, Mexico's National Institute for Migration has 'Grupo Beta' units designed to protect the human rights of 'migrants'. The Attorney General's Office has established an investigative unit for federal crimes committed by or against migrants, with some important cross-border mechanisms for migrant victims' families, as well as a Forensic Commission: these two measures are described in more detail below, as they are in effect regional measures.

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[126] UNHCR individual interview, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017.

[127] UNHCR individual interview, Guatemala City, 7 February 2017.

[128] In 2015, nearly 92 per cent of the asylum applications logged in Mexico were from the North of Central America countries. A total of 3,138 asylum claims were begun, of which 2,212 (70 per cent) completed the process. In 2015 878 North of Central America asylum requests were granted. *Estadísticas 2015* at http://www.comar.gob.mx/work/models/COMAR/Resource/267/6/images/ESTADISTICAS_2013_A_04-2016_act.pdf.

[129] UNHCR individual interview, migrant shelter, Tapachula, 15 February 2017.

[130] UNHCR interview, state UASC shelter, Villahermosa, Mexico, 14 February 2017.

[131] UNHCR interview, migrant shelter, Tenosique, 13 February 2017.

[132] González-Murphy and Koslowski, (2011), Understanding Mexico's Changing Immigration Laws, University at Albany State University of New York Albany, NY available at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/GONZALEZ%20%2526%20KOSLOWSKI.pdf, P35.

F. Regional mechanisms for youth

Both settings present regional problems which could greatly benefit from regional responses.

IGAD, the Inter-governmental Authority for Development, is a regional economic community that includes South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and other African states.[133] IGAD carries out a range of important activities relevant to youth, peace and security, including around food security and early warning of conflict. IGAD is also involved in mediating peace negotiations in South Sudan - this political role affects how it is perceived among South Sudanese communities.

In the North of Central America and Mexico region, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is very active on issues linked to youth on the move, for instance issuing precautionary measures on behalf of threatened staff of 'La 72' shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco.[134] It has held special hearings on the situation of LGBTI people and the committees of families of disappeared migrants,[135] leading the Mexican government to take some of the measures described below.

Since the early 2000s, families of the disappeared - many of them young people - have been working together to determine the fate of their loved ones and, where necessary, to obtain justice for them. They have been supported by the Regional Truth and Justice Network for Migrants ('*Red Regional Verdad y Justicia para las Personas Migrantes*') made up of family committees and civil society organisations from countries in the North of Central America, Mexico and the US. In 2013, after sustained media attention on reported massacres of Central American migrants by criminal groups in Mexico, Mexico established a Forensic Commission tasked with investigating three massacres of migrants in Mexico. On the basis of a pilot agreement, mass graves believed to contain the remains of migrants were exhumed,[136] and a DNA database set up to help try to identify remains – some of which have been returned to families in country of origin. In late 2015, the Mexican Attorney General's Office set up a unit to investigate crimes against migrants (the *'Unidad de Investigación de Delitos para Personas Migrantes'*).[137] It is also responsible for reparations to victims.

These measures, recommended by the IACHR, the UN Committee on Disappearances and others were intended to strengthen the communication between families and Mexican prosecutors, by enabling families to register the disappearance with Mexican authorities from their country of origin and to name legal representatives in Mexico to follow the case. Observers report that so far it works very slowly, but it is working. These measures offer a model for protecting young people and responding to families' needs for countries facing similar situations along other routes used by refugees and migrants.

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[133] Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan.

[134] See PM 273/11 - Fray Tomás González Castillo, Ruben Figueroa, staff Home- Shelter migrants 'La 72' and others, Mexico at http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/decisions/precautionary.asp.

[135] Enforced disappearance has been recognised as a significant, if under-reported, phenomenon of great concern in Mexico. As of end December 2016 there had been nearly 30,000 reported victims of enforced disappearance across the country. (Centro para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios, A.C.; Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho, A.C.; TRIAL International, *Executive Summary of the Follow-Up Report on the Implementation by Mexico of the Recommendations issued by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances in February 2015,* 2017, para. 5).

[136] The massacre of 72 migrants in Tamaulipas (2010); another 49 common graves in San Fernando, Tamaulipas (2011); and the remains of 49 people discovered in Cadereyta, Nuevo León (2012).

[137] Acuerdo A/117/15 of 18 December 2015 at http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5420681&fecha=18/12/2015.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

The situations in both the North of Central America countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, and South Sudan (and refugee hosting countries in the region) are products of incomplete or failed **peace processes** that – although some of the right language may have been used – often left young people without protection, services or mechanisms for improving their lives, either through omission of young people's voices and contributions or through failures in implementation.[138] In both situations, the result was that youth were subsequently neglected in the implementation of the peace accords and development plans, engaged in a limited manner or not at all in decision making processes or largely forgotten. In both situations, violence has also returned.

In Central America, long-term exposure to gang control and pervasive violence may lead young people to believe that they have no alternatives other than isolation and silence at home or flight along a sometimes violent route northwards where their safety lies in remaining as invisible as possible, effectively preventing them from organising any collective response to the threats they face. In South Sudan, incitement to ethnic conflict, and the experience of violence that it provokes, may pit young South Sudanese against their peers.

However the situation is more nuanced than it appears at first glance. In both situations, individual young people display real solidarity with other youth. Community- and faith-based initiatives are bringing young people together, in some cases by using music, dance, theatre, media and new technologies to capture their attention and give them the means to contribute positively to their surroundings. Holistic, socially-oriented education and a human rights or peace-oriented framework to help contextualise the violence around them have boosted the resilience of individuals, including those from at-risk groups like LGBTI and indigenous youth, laying the groundwork for engagement on peace and security.

Young people remain under tremendous pressure to take the path of violence, but many are rejecting this path. Perversely, in some settings, those rejecting violence are among those most likely to be forced from their homes and to require international protection. Young people on the move need help, both to address the structural roots of violence - of which gangs and ethnicity-based armed groups are symptoms - and to support their own peace initiatives. They also need protection from forces – including gangs, criminal organisations and armed groups, but also in some cases, state authorities - that feel threatened by their challenges to the status quo.

Youth in both situations referred repeatedly to family. This was most pronounced when speaking to the youth in Guatemala and Mexico. This points to the need for governments to support family structures through job creation, labour rights, access to agricultural land and credits and equality of pay and opportunity for women. In all of these areas, change is achievable, with clear benefits for family stability and for young people themselves. What is needed is vision and political will.

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[138] For peace processes in the NCA countries, please see: Kurtenbach, Sabine; "Postwar Violence in Guatemala: A Mirror of the Relationship between Youth and Adult Society", International Journal of Conflict and Violence, vol. 8(1), 2014; Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas"(IDHUCA) Dónde y cómo vive la juventud salvadoreña: Un país de crisis en crisis. Juventud Salvadoreña y ¿desarrollo? De la crisis actual a una nueva locura, 2009; Bruneau, Thomas; "Pandillas and Security in Central America", Latin American Research Review, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2014; Interpeace, Políticas Públicas para Prevenir la Violencia Juvenil (POLJUVE), Violencia Juvenil, Maras y Pandillas en Guatemala: informe para la discusión, 2009; and Instituto Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Picar Piedra: Iniciativas ciudadanas frente a la violencia, 2013. For the South Sudan peace process, please see: African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (AUCISS), Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 2014; and Reeve, Richard (2012) Peace and Conflict Assessment of South Sudan 2012, International Alert, London, 2012.

Communities in both settings have been damaged by conflict and displacement that predates the current violence. As a result, today's young people have grown up with little sense of community cohesion or protection. This report points to examples, particularly in Central America, in which community-based initiatives have made a change in young people's lives. There appears to be increasing donor interest for supporting community-based initiatives that could, crucially, benefit internally displaced and returnee youth.

In the country of asylum, the attitudes of the host government and community are crucial to youth resilience. Uganda offers the most supportive and conducive environment, and as a result has seen the emergence of far more youth-led initiatives than the other countries of asylum. Mexico, while needing urgently to end the practice of detaining asylum seekers and other young people on the move, has begun some exemplary steps on behalf of refugee and migrant victims of crime and their families that could serve as a useful model for other countries situated along routes used by refugees and migrants. Too many youth in both settings find themselves excluded from secondary school by their inability to produce certificates of past study. For these young people education is a way of taking control and getting some benefit from this enforced period of exile – obstacles need to be addressed in order to safeguard their mental and emotional well-being and to facilitate their engagement on peace and security.

Finally, in both regional situations covered by this review, the provision of asylum does not address the deeper psycho-social needs of young people on the need due to their experiences of forced displacement. Without appropriate psycho-social and mental health programmes can these young men and women eventually take an active place alongside their peers working in wider initiatives around peace and security.

Recommendations include:

In peace negotiations and processes

- In order to give youth a meaningful voice and impact in peace processes, build on the content of SCR 2250 as well as the example of SCR 1325 and accompanying resolutions that have strengthened the role of women in negotiations, peace settlements and peace-building.

In the country of origin

- States should review the impact of their peace and security policies and practices on young people in order to ensure that that youth, in line with SCR 2250 can meaningfully contribute. This could involve, as a first step, participatory national diagnostic assessments of the true situation of young people in all their diversity, followed by comprehensive audits of laws, regulations and policies from a youth and a family perspective, to inform targeted reforms.
- Youth voices should be meaningfully included in national dialogues around peace and security issues.
- States should actively pursue community policing approaches to criminal violence, but these should operate as part of an integral reform package designed to create a criminal justice system (including police, prosecutors and courts) that communities can trust.
- Authorities should prioritise DDR programmes adapted to the particularities of each context, for youth formerly involved in gangs or ethnicity-based armed groups.
- Programmes for at-risk youth should build on good practice models, projects like CRS's 'Young Builders' (*Jóvenes Constructores*), which include measures to strengthen family communication in order to boost youth receptiveness and resilience. Guidelines from the Pan-

American Health Organisation or other regional entities can provide context-appropriate guidance.

- Governments must systematically address the protection, prevention and participation needs of young returnees and IDPs, building on the strong work of the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence in Honduras and the Civil Society Roundtable against Forced Displacement by Violence and Organised Crime in El Salvador, among others.

In the country of origin and country of asylum

- To the extent that it is safe for them to do so, churches, civil society organisations, state authorities and international actors should foster holistic, socially-oriented education, with human rights and/or peace training, to increase young people's resilience to violence.
- Civil society organisations working with young people should be supported and protected in the face of threats and violence and in the context of national legislation.
- State and non-state actors should take particular steps to address the psycho-social needs of all young victims of violence, including youth on the move cross-border, IDPs and returnees. This will support them to be better able to benefit fully from educational, vocational and other programming and to eventually take their place in peace and security initiatives.
- State and non-state actors should build on existing efforts against all forms of SGBV and harmful societal gender norms. This should include dedicated Gender Equality programmes and efforts to shift social norms around gender roles in society.
- Programming for at-risk young people and youth on the move should, where possible, build on existing structures – government peace education systems, faith-based networks, youth frameworks – to strengthen these while increasing youth participation in peace and security.
- All actors should be alert to the presence of youth-led initiatives on the ground and should create mechanisms for providing these with the space and support they need. They should also highlight the achievements of youth-led initiatives, as a way of counterbalancing harmful negative societal and community views of young people.
- Youth voices and perspective must be reflected in every stage of project planning, assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Explicit spaces for youth voices and participation must be incorporated into project structures.
- UNHCR and other UN agencies should urge partners working with young people – particularly domestic groups – to review their own structures and membership, to ensure that there is space for youth to have a voice and participate fully.
- As youth-led initiatives in Uganda and elsewhere demonstrate, bridging gaps between young people from divided or antagonistic groups works best when youth are active together. Sport, cultural activities and new technologies all offer avenues for overcoming barriers between individuals and creating space for collectively addressing common concerns in ways that build trust. Peace education and cultural elements like music, dance and drama can help reinforce young people's sense of belonging to their ethnic group in parallel with their tolerance and appreciation of other groups' cultures.

In the country of asylum

- Uganda's approach to refugees should be used as an example of 'best practice', particularly around issues such as freedom of movement, access to services and land and other measures to promote self-sufficiency. This approach, coupled with a receptive attitude in the host

community, has created the most conducive environment for the emergence of youth-led initiatives among the two situations covered by this review.

- All actors should prioritise educational and vocational options for young refugees to help them take proactive ownership of the period of enforced displacement in their lives.
- Particular attention should be paid to the additional protection needs of young parents on the move and their children, as well as to examples of flexible programming to facilitate young parents' access to education.
- Support financially and with guidance and mentoring, youth led protection and development projects that work to address the peace and security issues in their communities
- Establish a small fund for youth led projects at the country level.
- Youth on the move should be linked into national youth structures that offer them support and opportunities to address the peace and security challenges that they face.

In transit countries

- Mexico's efforts for migrants at risk of violence; migrants who have been victims of crime, and families of 'disappeared' migrants, while still developing, are instructive for other transit countries.
- Border development programmes in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, where the focus has been on increasing public security generally through strengthened social, health and education services rather than on interdiction of migrants, could provide some lessons on alternative ways of making border areas safer.
- Migrant shelters, on the front line of protection efforts for youth on the move, require more support, including specific protection and accountability measures to prevent threats and attacks on their staff.