



UNHCR GYAC Profiles

The High Commissioner appointed the first Global Youth Advisory Council in December 2017 to further advance UNHCR's work with and for youth. The GYAC enables young people to share their perspectives and to bring input from their communities into the work of UNHCR at all levels.

The GYAC 2018 is comprised of 15 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who come from diverse backgrounds and who currently live in Australia, Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Kenya, Morocco, Pakistan, Switzerland, Uganda, the United States of America and Zimbabwe. Each has travelled their own path and lived their own unique story.

BACKGROUND

During 2015-2016, UNHCR and Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) led the Global Refugee Youth Consultations (GRYC), which involved over 1450 youth from 34 countries. The GRYC was a participatory process that engaged young people to share their perspectives on the challenges that young refugees face and empowered them to propose solutions. Participating youth crafted a framework for action, the Core Actions for Refugee Youth, and recommendations for different actors on how to implement that framework.

The overwhelmingly positive engagement of these young people in the youth-themed UNHCR-NGO Consultations, as well as the High Commissioner's 2016 Protection Dialogue on Children on the Move, prompted the High Commissioner to commit to the creation of a more sustainable mechanism to facilitate the engagement of young people of concern at the global level.



What the GYAC Delegates have in common is engagement in their communities, enthusiasm to bring a youth perspective to global-level discussion on refugee policy and commitment to use their voices to represent and amplify the concerns and suggestions of young people and other members of their communities who might otherwise not be heard.



ABDUL KARIM ALBRM is 22 years old and is originally from Aleppo, Syria. Karim travelled with and supported a group of unaccompanied children through Lebanon, Turkey, Greece and the Balkans, assisting them to locate their families in Austria, Sweden and Germany. Karim finally sought asylum in Germany and now lives in Hamburg.

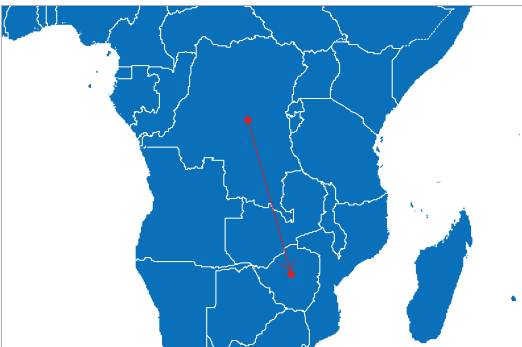


Karim is active as a practitioner and trainer for community based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). As a member of GYAC he is keen to support other youth to have opportunities to engage with decision-makers in their locations and help them to affect positive change in their communities.

“ Collaboration between youth and decision-makers has huge potential for transformative change. ”

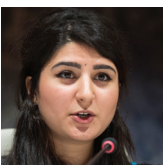


BARTHELEMY NGANE MWANZA is 24 years old and comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He lives in Tongogara refugee camp in Zimbabwe. Barth lost contact with his family during his flight to Zimbabwe in 2012. Upon arriving in Tongogara refugee camp, Barth was reunited with his sister and her family, but has not heard from his parents.



As a GYAC delegate, **Barth** advocates for youth development, engagement and recreation to support youth to better navigate life’s challenges and to ensure that the potential of youth and their dreams are not abandoned. Barth is a youth leader in Tongogara Refugee Camp and is part of the steering committee of the Adolescent Girls and Young Women Empowerment Program (AGAYWEP) sponsored by the Youth Initiative Fund.

“ Regional institutions should support states and other actors in achieving a whole-of-society approach, which is essential for an effective refugee response. ”



AYA MOHAMMED ABDULLAH, 22, fled Iraq to Syria with her family at the age of 14 and then again in 2011 to Turkey due to the war in Syria. Aya and her family eventually resettled to Switzerland in 2017 where they joined her father, who crossed the Mediterranean by boat.



Aya believes that the GYAC is an important conduit for the fresh ideas and perspectives of youth. Through young people, the work of international organisations and others working on humanitarian issues can be made much easier.

“ Young people are often bridges between communities. We are open minded. We want to make positive changes. We are keen to share our experiences. We want to give support to the communities in which we live. We can and we want to be meaningfully engaged in the development of solutions. ”



SAFIA IBRAHIMKHEL is 25 years old. She was born and grew up in an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan where she lives with her family. Her family briefly returned to Afghanistan but fled again to Pakistan due to war and violence.

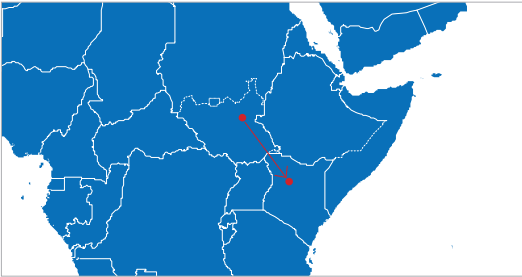


As a GYAC Youth Delegate **Safia** wants to take advantage of the opportunity for direct dialogue with key stakeholders in the international community on key refugee issues like education, and opportunities for adolescent girls and young women.

“ When refugees study with students from the host community, they are able to communicate with each other, and this leads to interaction and the sharing of ideas. Through communication, they can understand each other and defeat the negative media perception of refugees. ”



FONI JOYCE VUNI is 25 years old and hails from South Sudan (Sudan at the time). Her parents fled the southern part of Sudan in 1991 because of the civil war – her father was a journalist fleeing the state - and sought asylum in Kenya where she was born.

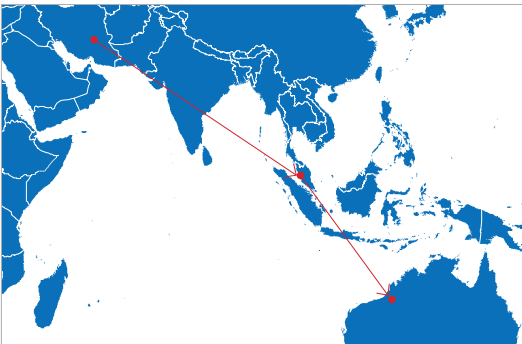


🎯 Foni has established an organization that links unemployed youth to mentors and other opportunities. She thinks the GYAC should support and inspire youth to play a large role in solutions for their communities, especially as peace builders.

“ *Peace is not lack of arguments or disagreement, but it is rather, accepting to coexist with everyone regardless of their difference... As a good friend of mine once said, most of us are not just victims or survivors. We are warriors walking in masquerade. The hurt, the struggle, the pain, the challenges, the success is what motivates us to choose to either become a peace builder or a peace breaker.* ”



ARASH BORDBAR, 24, is originally from Shiraz in Iran. He fled his home with his mum and brother and travelled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where he lived for 5 years before being resettled to Australia in May 2015.

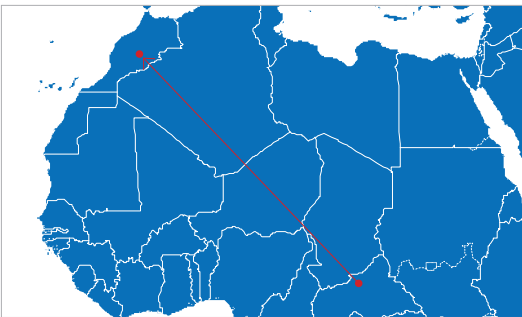


🎯 Arash is keen that other refugees should not have to make the same mistakes he did and can benefit from his learning. With that goal in mind, Arash is involved in running events for new arrivals to Australia. For Arash, the GYAC can bring new attitudes, perspectives and creative ways of approaching and addressing problems in UNHCR's work.

“ *When it comes to refugee leadership, putting people first means refugees taking responsibility. It means giving us, as refugees, the opportunity to raise our voice, but also working with us, training us and empowering us to be your partners.* ”



IBRAHIM SALLET MAHAMAT, 23, is from the Central African Republic (CAR). Ibrahim was studying in Morocco when war broke out in CAR in 2013. Due to the war, Ibrahim has been unable to return to CAR and sought asylum in Rabat, Morocco, where he lives now.

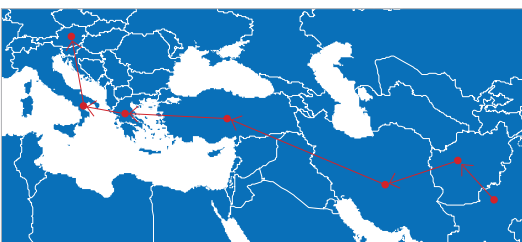


🎯 In Morocco, Ibrahim is the President of Living Together, a local NGO that supports refugees to integrate into Moroccan society. Being a member of the GYAC allows him to engage and help refugees locally and globally. He believes that every refugee has the right to live a normal life. He fights for this right and is committed to understanding the daily challenges that refugees face during their journeys in order to bring about lasting solutions.

“ *Having a place to live in is crucial for refugees. Without these basic things, we cannot even think about studying, contributing, participating and integrating into society.* ”



ASIF SAFDARY, 24, fled the conflict in Afghanistan at the age of 14 to seek protection and safety and travelled on his own as a separated child through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. He currently lives in Austria.

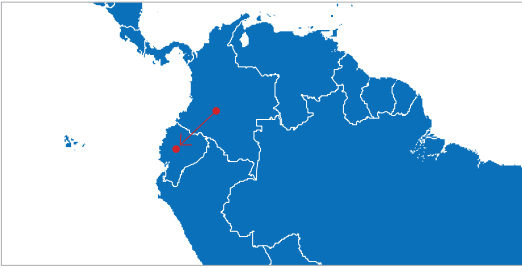


🎯 Asif believes that the GYAC will provide a platform for the Youth Delegates and other young people to speak about their experiences as refugees, to assist policy makers in better understanding the situation of refugees and to give refugees, especially youth, a voice in global fora and State-led mechanisms and conferences. .

“ *Refugees should have equal access to quality education and all education actors should work together to expand scholarship opportunities for refugees. Host countries should work actively to prevent xenophobia and discrimination in all education settings.* ”



LAURA ELIZABETH VALENCIA RESTREPO, 21, was born in Colombia and fled to Ecuador with her family in 2007.

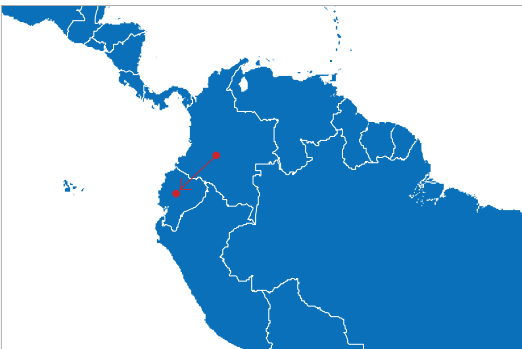


🎯 Laura passionately believes that refugees should have a voice in all matters that affect them. She feels that the Youth Delegates on the GYAC should be a source of information and inspiration for UNHCR on identifying sustainable solutions to the challenges that refugees face.

“ People think that refugees do nothing else but cry, but the future can be seen clearly through eyes that have cried. Those words are so true, and make us realise that working hand in hand, using the abilities and capacities of refugee youth, is our best option. **”**

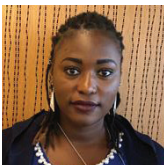


DANIELA MARÍA PÉREZ OBANDO is 19 years old and was born in Colombia. She fled with her family to escape the conflict. Since 2010 she has lived as a refugee in Quito, Ecuador.

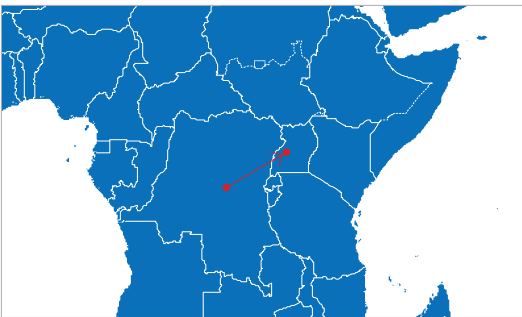


🎯 As a Youth Delegate in the GYAC, Daniela believes that she has the responsibility to expose flaws in international and national refugee systems, and to have continued and constant interaction with national authorities and international actors to improve the system.

“ We are the same as everyone else where we live. And we contribute! That is why it is essential that our identity and our documents are recognised. Only this way can we truly show you how good we are! **”**



MUGISHA WILLENT is 25 years old. She was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, with her family, fled the conflict in 2000. Since then, she has lived in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

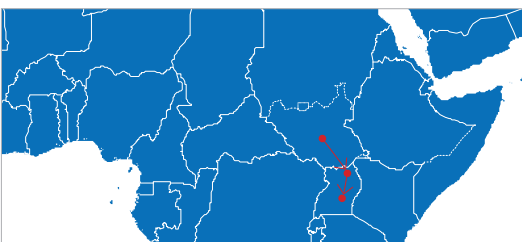


🎯 Mugisha launched and leads an initiative called the Girls Out of School (GOSCH) Association, which provides vocational training for adolescent girls and young women who have left school early due to child marriage and pregnancy. She is passionate about promoting livelihoods support for girls and young women to enable them to become independent and self-reliant. Mugisha believes that as a GYAC Youth Delegate she should work as an ambassador for her community.

“ It is important to support projects that help women to be financially independent and stable, because it will enable them to cater for their needs and their families' needs. **”**



SIMON MAROT TOULOUNG, 25, fled from his home in South Sudan (Sudan at the time) as a separated child in 2000, and sought asylum in the Keri transit camp in Northern Uganda. He currently lives in Kampala, Uganda.

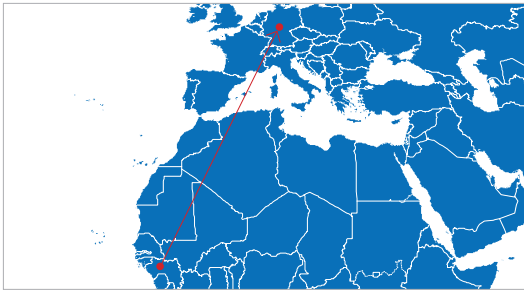


🎯 Simon is active in promoting education and peace building and believes that the GYAC Youth Delegates have the responsibility to advise UNHCR on how they can best work with and support young refugees to be part of solutions around the globe.

“ We were born in war, raised and suffered in war. We want this to stop. Regional bodies and governments should support us in addressing the root causes of these forgotten conflicts, through our peace-building programmes. **”**

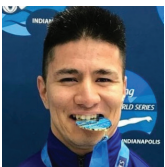


MARIAMA SARAN SOW is 25 years old and is from Guinea. Faced with the risk of Female Genital Mutilation in her home country and the prospects of a forced marriage to a man much older than her, Mariama fled in 2010 as an unaccompanied child, and sought asylum in Germany, where she currently resides.



🎯 **Mariama** believes that the GYAC empowers delegates to speak out on important and often taboo protection issues like sexual and gender based violence. As a GYAC delegate, she works to improve protection for vulnerable children and to fight against sexual violence against women, particularly in conflict situations.

“ When we discuss issues of global protection, I would urge us to think about protection both broadly and deeply... We all know that documentation and legal protection are essential to guarantee asylum and to avoid refoulement. But, protection is also about refugees’ access to immediate and continuous services, including psychosocial support, which enables them to preserve their dignity. ”



ABBAS KARIMI, 20, was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. He fled Afghanistan, leaving his family behind, and travelled through Iran to Turkey where he sought asylum. In 2016 he was resettled to the United States.



🎯 Abbas is a world class swimmer and the GYAC focal point for sports. In 2017, he took a silver medal at the Para Swimming World Championships in Mexico City and he is training hard with the goal of going to the Olympics. He sees his athletic accomplishments as being a win for all refugees. As a GYAC delegate, Abbas advocates for refugee athletes and the importance of sports for young people.

“ It is important to recognize the talent of youth refugees in sports and give them the opportunity to compete internationally. Sports bring peace! ”



CARLOS ALBERTO MELARA GARCÍA, 19, fled from his home in El Salvador with his family in 2014 because of persecution and threats to his family from the maras, or gangs. They travelled to Costa Rica where they were recognised as refugees.



🎯 **Carlos** is a passionate advocate for refugee and migrant rights and is active in reaching out to vulnerable youth. He thinks that GYAC delegates should work on peace and security issues.

“ A refugee suffers along the journey, but he decides to change his life. Now put yourself in his shoes. ”



What Global Youth Advisory Council Delegates do

- **Consult with** their communities to get broader input on the key challenges for refugees and recommendations for how to address them;
- **Review and provide** feedback on policies, strategies, guidance documents and training products for UNHCR and partners;
- **Share** a youth perspective on specific topics or themes through interviews, social media, videos, blogs and videos;
- **Serve on** reference groups for research or policy initiatives;
- **Collaborate with** local level practitioners to improve the services for refugee youth;
- **Support** the development and selection of youth-led projects;
- **Speak on** panels at international conferences and meetings, including the High Commissioner's Dialogue, UNHCR's Annual NGO Consultation, the Formal Consultations on the Global Compact on Refugees, the UN General Assembly, and other events and forums;
- **Organize and facilitate** sessions that highlight youth perspectives for events such as the UNHCR High Commissioner's Dialogue, the NGO Consultations or other forums.

How you can engage with the GYAC:

- ✓ Meet with GYAC delegates who are based in your country and/or your thematic or geographic interests.
- ✓ Call on GYAC delegates to serve on a reference group or to review a document.
- ✓ Invite GYAC delegates to speak on regional or thematic panel sessions or to give interviews at local, national, regional or global events.
- ✓ Highlight and support the work that GYAC delegates and other youth leaders are doing at the community level.
- ✓ Facilitate the GYAC's interaction with member states, UNHCR staff and civil society to advance joint solutions to meet the needs of young refugees around the world.

Engage with the GYAC now to ensure refugee, stateless and displaced youth voices are heard and that young refugees are engaged in all aspects of your programming. For more information, contact us at: unhcr.gyac@gmail.com, cc'ing hqchipro@unhcr.org.

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