

“ CORE ACTIONS for Refugee youth ”



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Raising their voices, refugee youth came together and shared their priorities and possible solutions. This reference lays out the most common challenges refugee youth identified and the framework they developed to address those challenges. The Core Actions for Refugee Youth are an integrated framework that highlight how by working with them—as partners and as leaders—solutions can be advanced.

“CORE
ACTIONS for
Refugee
youth”



UNHCR and the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) undertook the Global Refugee Youth Consultations (GRYC) to amplify youth “voices” in decisions that affect them and their communities. The GRYC included 1,482 young people who participated in 65 national or local consultations held in 23 countries between October 2015 and June 2016. The GRYC were the beginning of a process—a process that must continue to develop the leadership, capacity, and futures of refugee youth everywhere.

Adoption and use of the seven Core Actions for Refugee Youth is the first step towards achieving this.

“CORE
ACTIONS for
Refugee
youth”

1 Empower refugee youth through meaningful engagement

2 Recognize, utilize, and develop refugee youth capacities and skills

3 Ensure refugee youth-focused protection

4 Support the physical and emotional well-being of refugee youth



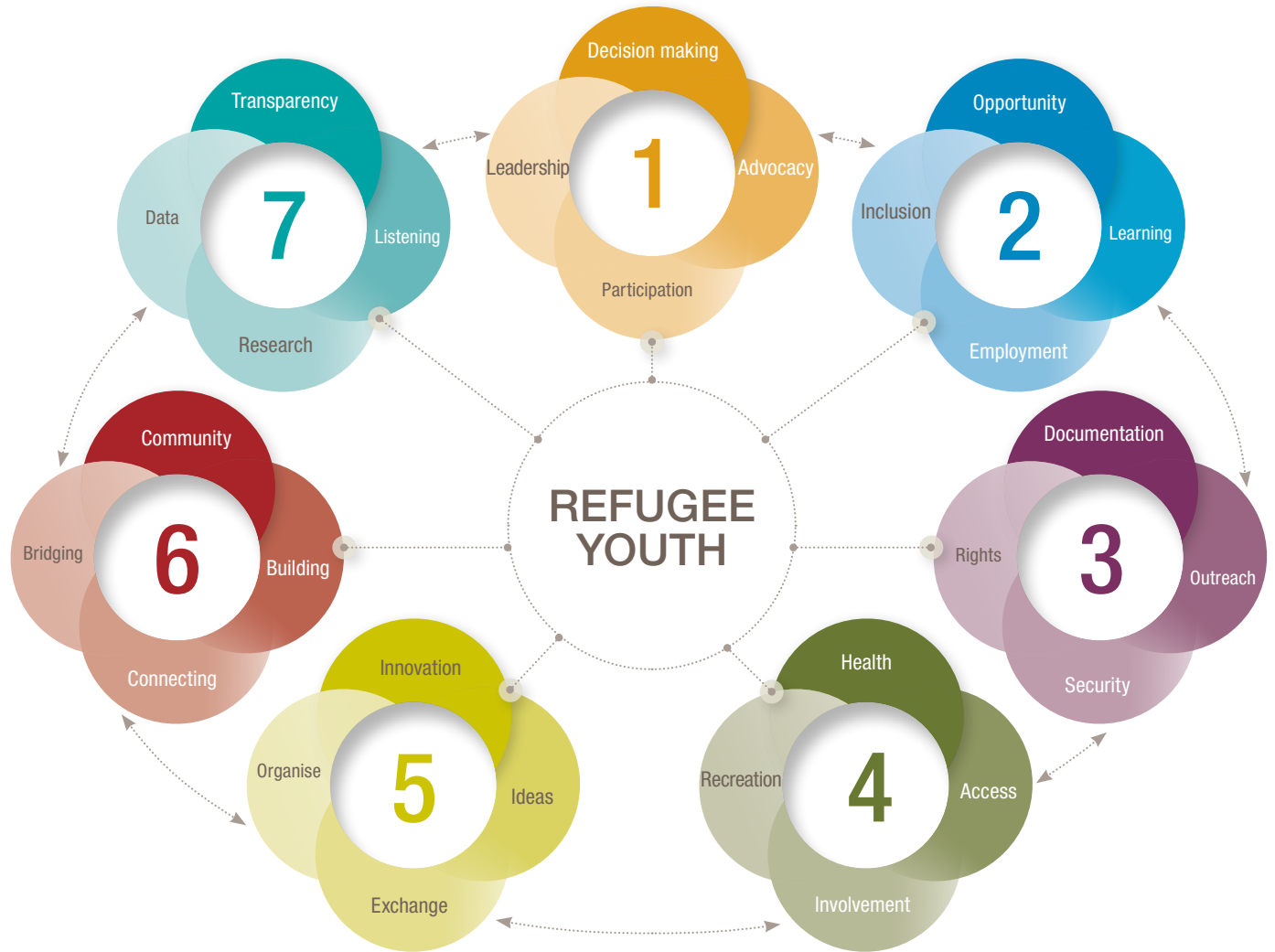
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Reinforce refugee youth in their role as connectors and peace builders

7

Generate data and evidence on refugee youth to promote accountability to youth

5 Facilitate refugee youth networking and information sharing



TEN CHALLENGES for Refugee Youth

While refugee youth face many challenges, consulted youth consistently highlighted these ten challenges as the most pressing for refugee youth across all geographic regions. The Core Actions are formulated to address these and the many other challenges identified.



Difficulties with legal recognition and obtaining personal documents

Youth stressed the challenges, complexities, and delays in the processes to obtain asylum and related legal documents from UNHCR and/or local authorities, and the serious implications of not having them.



Difficulty in accessing quality learning, education, and skill-building opportunities

Young refugees consistently identified the difficulty of obtaining recognition for their existing qualifications and accessing quality learning, formal education, and skill-building opportunities as a serious challenge.



Discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and “culture clash”

Young refugees noted discrimination, racism, and xenophobia across all regions and emphasized how it can leave them feeling isolated and marginalized.



Few youth employment and livelihood opportunities

Refugee youth emphasized they would rather work than depend on humanitarian aid and expressed frustration at the limited employment and livelihood opportunities available to them.



Gender inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and violence—including for LGBTI youth

Young refugees highlighted concerns about gender inequality and discrimination as challenges in and of themselves, but also as underlying causes of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence (SGBV), including domestic violence, child and forced marriage, sexual assault, and rape.



Poor access to youth sensitive health care—including psychosocial support

Refugee youth highlighted a lack of access to quality health care as a major concern and particularly noted the need for youth-sensitive sexual and reproductive health care and psychosocial support.



Lack of safety, security, and freedom of movement

Refugee youth expressed concerns about safety, security, and freedom of movement linked to xenophobia and difficulty with documents. In some locations, they also highlighted police harassment as well as arrest and detention.



Challenges for unaccompanied youth

Refugees stressed the specific protection and practical challenges for unaccompanied youth, including the difficult transition and a lack of preparation for those who turn 18, “age out”, and are no longer afforded additional protection and support, but often still need guidance and assistance as well as access to rights and protection.



Lack of opportunities to participate, be engaged, or access decision makers

Youth identified a lack of empowerment and engagement opportunities as factors that limit youth involvement in decision making. They have few opportunities to analyze issues, devise solutions, share their ideas with decision makers, and be heard.



Lack of information about asylum, refugee rights, and available services

In all the consultations, young refugees highlighted challenges related to the lack of relevant, honest, and transparent information about the asylum process, refugee rights, available services, and the society and culture of their country of asylum.

Core Action

1

Empower refugee youth through meaningful engagement

Humanitarian actors must work to empower young refugees by facilitating opportunities for youth to voice their ideas, engage in decision making processes, and develop their leadership potential.



In **Ecuador**, refugee and host community youth have initiated a campaign “Lo que nos une” (What unites us) focused on combating racism, xenophobia, and discrimination and promoting integration. The group uses radio and fun public events to reach out to the community and also makes direct proposals to political leaders.

In **New Zealand**, refugee youth run the New Zealand National Refugee Youth Council. NZNRYC’s aim is to address issues faced by refugee youth by helping newly arrived refugee youth realize their full potential and successfully integrate into NZ culture. They do this by engaging all refugee youth with key national networks and advocating on refugee youth issues.

Youth who participated in the GRYC national consultation in **Uganda** wrote and shared a report on the consultation findings with Office of the Prime Minister and as a result, the settlement where they live has agreed to involve youth in local decision making.

Consulted youth consistently emphasised that the opportunity for them to speak on behalf of young refugees in their communities, to share their concerns, and to be listened to and taken seriously by representatives of governments, UNHCR and other UN agencies and INGOs is transformative. They also commented on their need to further develop their understanding of different stakeholders' respective roles so that they can be more effective in their advocacy efforts. They talked about how meaningful youth engagement, such as participation in community programmes and decision-making processes, political activism, mentorship, and advocacy, could counter the isolation

refugee youth experience, foster mutual support among refugees, and empower young refugees by tapping into their knowledge, skills, passion, and leadership abilities.

Refugee youth engagement and empowerment must include:

- Engaging actively with youth in an ongoing and meaningful basis to seek their ideas and input on issues that are important to them and their communities;
- Supporting youth to analyse, understand, and advocate on issues of importance to them and their communities;
- Helping youth to establish and sustain their own youth organizations and representative bodies, such as youth

councils or advisory boards, in order to enable them to express themselves and take action;

- Supporting collaborative approaches that bring together refugee youth with other actors to develop, review, and implement policies and practices on issues of importance to youth; and
- Establishing programmes that support the engagement of adults to share their technical expertise through mentoring.¹



Through youth empowerment and engagement, we are able to deliver results to benefit ourselves and other young refugees globally...

We can **engage** by mobilizing action.”

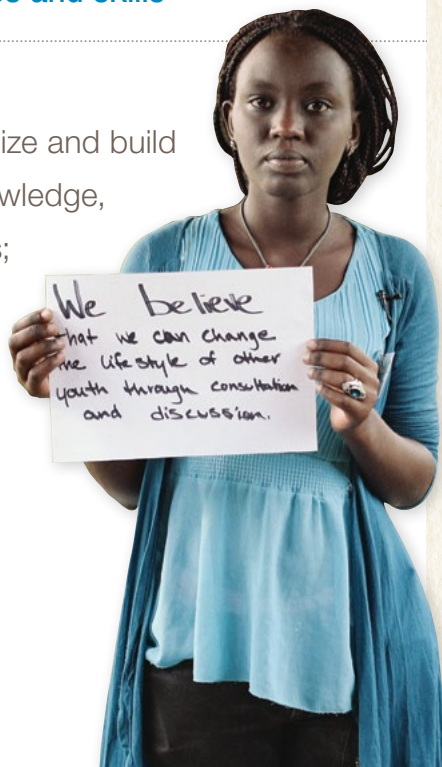
¹ More information on “Lo que nos une” is available at [<https://loquenosune.org/tag/ret-international/>]. More information on New Zealand National Refugee Youth Council is available at [<http://www.nznryc.org.nz>] and [<https://www.facebook.com/nz.refugeeyouth/>].

Core Action

2

Recognize, utilize, and develop refugee youth capacities and skills

Humanitarian actors must recognize and build upon young refugees' existing knowledge, skills, capacities, and qualifications; support access to quality and inclusive learning opportunities, including formal and non-formal education, skills building, and jobs training; and facilitate employment and livelihood opportunities.



Young refugees in **Australia**, frustrated by their own experiences trying to access education in Indonesia, formed and funded the Cisaura Refugee Learning Centre, which now supports 100 young refugees to study in Jakarta.

In **Uganda**, a young refugee from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) started COBURWAS together with his friends when he was 14 in order to educate refugees. It has grown into COBURWAS, International Youth Organisation to Transform Africa (CIYOTA), a volunteer based non-profit organisation focused on education, leadership, and non-violence that has provided functional education and entrepreneurial leadership to over 5,000 refugee and national youth.

Consulted youth consistently emphasized formal and informal education and other learning opportunities as a means to empower youth as socially responsible leaders. They highlighted the value of recognising young refugees' existing skills, capacities, and qualifications. They underlined the importance of access to a range of certified quality learning and skills-building opportunities that develop young refugees' literacy, numeracy, vocational, entrepreneurial, and life skills. They also emphasised that youth can take an active role in supporting accessible and inclusive learning opportunities within their communities.

Recognizing, utilizing, and developing refugee youth skills and capacities includes:

- Enabling recognition of existing education or vocational qualifications;
- Expanding access and quality across the full range of formal and non-formal learning opportunities;
- Ensuring equal legal access to formal education for all young refugees;
- Enhancing financing to enable more youth to access secondary and tertiary education, vocational training, skills building, and other learning opportunities;
- Putting systems in place to identify, support, and develop young refugees' talents and capacities and build their literacy, numeracy, vocational, and life skills;

- Supporting peer-to-peer transfer of knowledge and skills;
- Providing young refugees with access to formal employment and training through recognition of qualifications, provision of work permits, and through linking them with entrepreneurs and businesses to provide skills training and employment opportunities; and
- Supporting learning opportunities that facilitate protection, integration and peacebuilding.²



Many of these Afghan boys have been working for years in Afghanistan... They have many skills and recognizing and using their skills could **improve** their self-confidence and self-esteem.”

² More information on the Cisura Refugee Learning Center is available at [<http://cisarualearning.com/#intro>].
More information on COBURWAS International Organisation to Transform Africa is available at [<http://www.coburwas.org>].

Core Action

3

Ensure refugee youth-focused protection

Humanitarian actors must engage young refugees in protecting themselves and their peers and ensure that young refugees have access to personal documentation, freedom of movement, and protective services that are attuned to their needs and ensure their safety.



In **Zambia**, youth suggested tackling early and forced marriage through peer education.

In **Chad**, youth suggested practical efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV, including running self-defence classes for women, providing support for SGBV survivors, and organising couples counselling to help young couples resolve their issues before they escalate.

In **Pakistan**, youth proposed forming youth committees and using social media, community meetings, and art to convey messages on gender equality, prevention of SGBV, and respect for LGBTI individuals.

Consulted youth stressed the importance of recognising and addressing protection challenges that are specific or are amplified for youth due to their age and stage of development. This includes preventing and responding to SGBV, addressing LGBTI protection concerns, addressing discrimination and isolation related to having a disability or being an ethnic or religious minority, and facilitating youth to obtain documentation. They also emphasised the importance of addressing issues for unaccompanied youth, such as when they turn 18 and “age out” and family separation, and reunification. They suggested ways that youth could support peer protection through outreach, advocacy, and peer education.

Ensuring protection involving, focused on, or led by refugee youth includes:

- Enabling peer-to-peer SGBV education and outreach to survivors of SGBV to help them seek support and services;
- Acquainting LGBTI refugee youth with their rights and educating others about their rights through raising awareness;
- Acknowledging the specific protection concerns of refugee youth with disabilities and supporting them to access the services that they need;
- Acknowledging and addressing the specific protection concerns of refugee youth from social, ethnic, and religious minorities;
- Involving host-country youth in campaigns aimed at ending racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against refugees;

- Facilitating the complex process of family reunification;
- Ensuring that young people are able to secure personal documentation that enables them to access services, move freely, and have personal security;
- Supporting young refugees as active protection actors, including involving them in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the promotion of protection for refugee youth; and
- Addressing the needs of unaccompanied youth, including those who have turned 18, by establishing transition programmes.



The real way of fighting against SGBV is to work with and empower youth. The solution is to enable refugee youth to *educate* others and follow up on their gender-based violence cases.”

Core Action

4

Support the physical and emotional well-being of refugee youth

Humanitarian actors must support young refugees to access opportunities, services and activities that support their mental, emotional, and physical health and happiness and enhance their ability to engage and develop socially, physically, spiritually, and emotionally with their peers, family, and community.

In **Jordan**, youth decided to raise awareness about the importance of psychosocial support by spreading the message among youth that it is natural to feel traumatized by the effect of war, providing peer-to-peer support through home visits, and engaging those who have been affected by war in youth activities.

In **Uganda**, youth suggest supporting local and refugee youth to raise awareness and educate people on how to develop youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.



Consulted youth stressed the importance of general physical health but also emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing. They talked about how stress and social isolation linked to past experiences, uncertainty, being unaccompanied, difficult living arrangements, xenophobia, racism, and limited opportunities to make friends can lead to negative coping strategies. They stressed the importance of accessible, youth-friendly, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and psychosocial services including youth outreach, networks and peer support. They also emphasised the importance of sports and recreation as a physical and emotional outlet to socialize, build confidence, and focus on something positive.

Supporting refugee youth physical and emotional wellbeing includes:

- Supporting and encouraging refugee youth to engage in peer-to-peer psychosocial first aid services in their communities;
- Ensuring access to youth-specific and appropriate quality services for mental health and psychosocial support to address the emotional difficulties associated with forced displacement, discrimination, and isolation;
- Involving local and refugee youth in raising awareness about sexual and reproductive health and ensuring care is age- and gender-accessible and appropriate;
- Creating dedicated safe, welcoming, and enabling spaces for youth to make friends and find peer support;
- Enabling refugee youth to participate in sports and other physical or recreational activities to promote inclusion and help them make friends and build peer networks;
- Engaging youth to develop awareness about stress in displacement situations and actively support the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of their peers and communities; and
- Working to develop community understanding of the challenges that young people face both physically and psychologically at their specific times of life.



To **play** football or basketball with everyone is nice...to be part of a team is better, you don't feel alone."

Core Action

5

Facilitate refugee youth networking and information sharing

Humanitarian actors must facilitate two-way sharing of accurate, honest, age-appropriate, and context-specific information with and among young refugees through channels and structures that are easily accessible.



In **Malta**, young refugees who met through the GRYC national consultations formed Spark15 to represent and support refugee youth in Malta. Currently they are working to develop a resource library in order to provide refugee youth with accurate information about their rights and how to access services. They hope to obtain legal recognition so that they can effectively act as a link between the government and young refugees.

In **Sweden**, young unaccompanied refugees formed an organization, Ensamkommandes Forbund (Association of Unaccompanied), so that those who have been there for longer can reach out to new arrivals and help them connect to the information they need.

In **Germany**, young refugees suggest bringing refugee and national youth together to create a multi-lingual refugee newspaper.

Consulted youth highlighted the importance of ensuring that young refugees have access to accurate and age-appropriate information about legal issues, asylum procedures, refugee rights, and protection risks so that they can make decisions about their lives. They emphasized the value of a two-way dialogue with humanitarian actors. They stressed that they are keen to use social media to reach out to young refugees and other youth, transmit information, build and sustain relationships, offer mutual support, multiply refugee youth voices, and advocate for refugee rights. They also cited the information sharing and networking that took place during the consultation process and noted how empowering it was to voice the concerns of other young refugees

Networking and information sharing includes:

- Engaging with youth as substantive actors in collecting and disseminating information related to refugee protection, durable solutions, the protection environment, and services relevant for youth and their communities;
- Actively seeking youth input and ideas on how to reach out to young people and other community members on important issues;
- Exploring with youth innovative ways of using technology including social media to disseminate and exchange information;
- Supporting refugee youth to expand their networks with other youth and youth-led organizations nationally, regionally, and globally as well as with business

and social entrepreneurs, and organizations; and

- Encouraging national, regional, and global youth organizations, networks, and forums to engage with and include refugee youth in their organizations and activities to ensure that refugee youth are represented and their voices are heard.



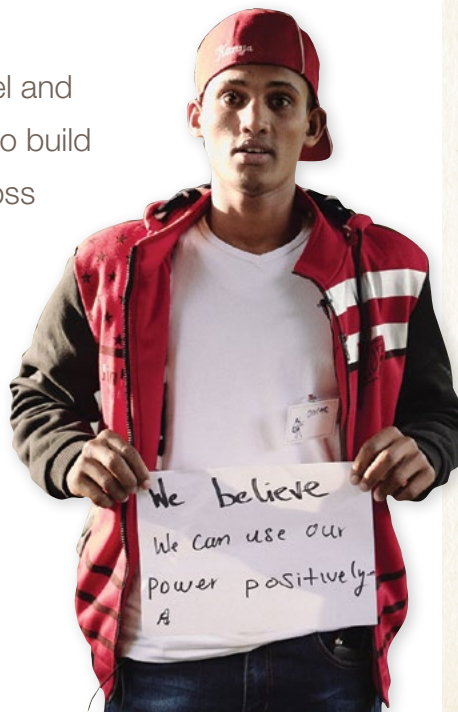
All refugees must be part of a team to **help** current and future refugees.”

Core Action

6

Reinforce refugee youth in their role as connectors and peace builders

Humanitarian actors must channel and reinforce young refugees' abilities to build connections and relationships across social, cultural, linguistic, political, and other differences and support them to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding processes.



In **Turkey**, refugee youth are acting as medical translators to help older refugees access healthcare.

In order to foster mutual understanding and dialogue, youth in **Chad** suggested organising activities with refugee youth and national youth to coincide with meetings between traditional leaders from refugee and host communities.

In **Greece**, young refugees suggested creating common clubs with Greek young people in order to learn from each other.

In **Germany**, youth plan to establish a peer support "homework club" involving older youth supporting younger children with their school work.

In **Cyprus**, refugee youth suggested that they organise structured dialogues with local youth to identify common issues.

Consulted youth repeatedly stressed the different ways young people can reach across the invisible boundaries of culture, ethnicity, religion, geography, language, sexual orientation, gender, ability, and age that separate people for much of their lives. This is a special capacity that youth often demonstrate, and which serves and supports them to help each other and to support their families and communities. They talked about how the consultation process served as an important opportunity for refugee and host-country youth to meet and gain a better understanding of the issues they face, as youth, and for refugee youth to work more closely with national youth organisations. They highlighted that

it is important to support young refugees to use their abilities as “connectors” and peace builders.

Reinforcing young refugees as “connectors” includes:

- Bridging inter-generational gaps through the promotion and development of relationships with children, adults, and older persons within their families and communities;
- Building inter-community and inter-cultural relationships through the use of social, artistic, and cultural skills that enable youth to reach across boundaries between refugees and other communities;
- Using youth as connectors between different ethnic, religious, and national

communities to promote peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence;

- Addressing negative norms related to gender and sexual identity by challenging social and cultural mores;
- Building relationships, friendships, and understanding between able-bodied persons and persons with disabilities; and
- Utilizing technology, social media, and other innovative approaches to build far-reaching networks that include people of all ages, ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures.



Youth **are connectors!** Youth take care of children, youth translate for older people, and [youth] have links with the host community.”

Core Action

7

Generate data and evidence on refugee youth to promote accountability to youth

Humanitarian actors must gather quality disaggregated data on youth as well as on their needs, priorities, skills, and contributions; this is essential for planning and designing youth programming and being accountable to youth.

In **Uganda**, refugee youth are involved in encouraging young refugees to register as refugees, providing youth-to-youth support on obtaining documentation, and in conducting needs assessments.

In **Ecuador**, refugee youth suggest that youth advocate to address the lack of government recognition for refugee identification documents, and use the media to sensitise the host population with regard to refugee identity documents.



Consulted youth emphasised the importance of collecting and sharing accurate demographic data about youth in order to make youth and their needs more visible, enable better budgeting and planning for inclusive youth-focused programmes, and foster accountability. They also emphasised that young refugees themselves can play a key role in gathering data and evidence on youth in refugee contexts when given the support, training, and opportunity.

Generating data on refugee youth and promoting accountability includes:

- Collecting accurate disaggregated sex and age data on refugee youth as a specific demographic category with distinct needs;
- Supporting refugee youth-led research, and youth-led evaluations of programmes aimed at and including youth;
- Supporting ongoing research and the pursuit of evidence relevant to developing effective youth-appropriate programmes and services for refugees;
- Assessing specific youth needs by consulting and mobilizing refugee youth wherever they are;
- Organizing comprehensive campaigns to reach out to unregistered refugee youth;
- Creating common open spaces for youth and humanitarian actors to meet and listening to their voices to make youth programming relevant;
- Planning and budgeting in consultation with youth to ensure transparency; and

- Encouraging donors to require disaggregated data on youth from humanitarian actors.



How can we work with youth if we do not **see** them?

How can we **plan** for youth if we do not know their needs?

How much should we **invest**, if we're not sure how many they are?

How can we **host** youth in our countries without providing specific humanitarian assistance focused on youth?

How can we **write** effective public policy for youth without consulting with the youth it is intended to benefit?

How can we **work** and progress together if we are invisible?"



For more information on the Global Refugee Youth Consultations
please consult the final report '*We Believe in Youth*' at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/protection/globalconsult/57e1126e7/final-report.html>

