



Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action

Recommendations on young people in the Global Compact on Refugees

Of the world's 22.5 million refugees, more than one third are young people.^{1,2} Their needs are fundamentally different from those of younger children and of older adults. Refugee youth are facing the challenges of displacement at a time of

intense cognitive, physical and social development. If given the right platforms, including for civic engagement, these young people have unique capacities to contribute positively not just to their individual development, but also to that of their families and communities. They demonstrate immense potential to contribute to host states, improve humanitarian responses and help build durable solutions. Too frequently, however, young refugees are left out of decision-making and their specific needs are insufficiently taken into account when policies and programs are designed.

“It is the young people who have the most to lose from an unsupported exile.”

Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is a critical opportunity to recognize and respond to the rights of young refugees in commitments on refugee protection and humanitarian response – to ensure that refugee youth, as a group with distinct rights, needs, and capacities, are adequately protected and empowered. By addressing their specific rights, needs, and capacities, as well as ensuring their meaningful participation in its implementation, the GCR will make a significant contribution to realizing the potential of a generation of young people.

In May 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit, a new Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action was launched.³ More than 50 humanitarian partners including governments, UN System entities, private sector organizations, INGOs, and major youth organizations and networks have endorsed this innovative compact. The members of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action view the GCR as a historic opportunity to advance the commitments made for and with young people at the World Humanitarian Summit.

We base the following recommendations for the GCR on the five commitments made in the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action.⁴ The members of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action stand ready to work with refugee youth, States, UNHCR, and other stakeholders to ensure that the GCR succeeds in protecting and strengthening the rights of, and supporting greater opportunities for, forcibly displaced young people and the host community youth they live alongside. In addition to the Compact members, the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC)⁵ also endorses the following recommendations.

¹ UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, A Global Review: UNHCR's Engagement with Displaced Youth (March 2013), 20. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/513f37bb9.pdf>. This quotes the Women's Refugee Commission's estimate of the percentage of refugees aged 10 – 24. UNHCR does not currently hold data on refugee youth numbers, and no data is available for this age group.

² For the purposes of this document, the terms “youth” and “young people” are interchangeable and both can refer to children, adolescents, and young adults.

³ Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, May 2016, available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/CompactforYoungPeopleinHumanitarianAction-FINAL_EDITED_VERSION.pdf.

⁴ Recommendations are made in light of the GCR Draft 1 and the consultation process for finalizing the GCR in September 2018.

⁵ Comprised of young people, the GYAC is a consultative group on issues relating to the protection and development of young people who are refugees, internally displaced and/or stateless, and their communities.

1) Young people's access to services

We welcome that the GCR recognizes young refugees as a distinct population group needing a targeted response in services and systems. Given this, the GCR should:

- Ensure that refugee youth are recognized as a distinct population group in all stages of a comprehensive response.
- Respond accordingly by ensuring youth-specific policy and programming in all stages of a comprehensive response.
- Recognize age, gender, and diversity within the category of youth when addressing specific needs.
- Strengthen national services⁶ to facilitate access by refugee youth. This includes building the capacity for improved responses to unaccompanied and separated adolescents in national child protection systems (e.g. introducing best interest determination frameworks).
- Specifically reference the protection needs of young people in the “Reception and Admission” section, including that young people would benefit from community-based protection networks and “youth-specific” safe spaces in refugee reception. Also, youth should not be detained based on their immigration status.
- Recognize the need for, and commit resources to, developing youth-specific procedures for reaching durable solutions – particularly given the absence of any such procedures, processes, or frameworks to identify and facilitate appropriate youth-specific assessments for determining durable solutions.

We commend the GCR's reference to:

- Promoting education for young refugees, including flexible learning programs. The GCR should ensure that young people have access to quality education opportunities as soon as possible after arrival. Further, the GCR should strengthen access to secondary and tertiary education, as well as vocational and non-formal education opportunities and include reference to time spent out of school, provide for a broad range of opportunities that include both formal and non-formal learning opportunities. These should provide opportunities for both refugee and host community youth and should engage both humanitarian and development actors.
- Minimizing time spent out of school.
- Strengthening access to secondary and tertiary education, as well as to vocational opportunities, which should be a top priority for action in the coming years.⁷ We note that young refugees need access to quality non-formal education and to training that includes transferable and life skills.
- Exploring labour mobility opportunities for refugees. However, the GCR should go beyond this and create and implement international rights-based labour mobility mechanisms for refugees that incorporate skill development, identify needs of communities, enact cross-border harmonization, and recognize skills and qualifications.
- Promoting economic opportunities for young people. However, the GCR should further include a specific reference to promoting young people's access to productive, safe and equitable work and volunteering opportunities.
- The need to address psycho-social issues faced by young people within educational settings. However, States and their development and humanitarian partners should be encouraged to promote well-being and resilience

⁶ In accordance with international human rights law.

⁷ We note that just 23% of refugees adolescents are enrolled in secondary education, compared to 84 % globally and that for tertiary education the gap is even bigger with only 1% of refugee youth attending higher education compared to 36 percent globally.

through targeted/youth-specific psycho-social support – integrated into activities for young people across all sectors (not only educational), recognizing the particular needs of adolescent girls and young women.

- Facilitating access to health systems for young people including access to sexual and reproductive health and information. However, we call for specific reference to access to adolescent and youth-specific health services and programs.

2) Youth participation

We note that the GCR does not sufficiently recognize and engage with young people as key actors, with specific capabilities, in comprehensive solutions. The GCR should:

- Explicitly commit States, UNHCR, and relevant stakeholders to support systematic engagement and partnership with youth in all phases of humanitarian action starting from reception and admission stage through durable solutions.
- Specifically commit to ensuring that young refugees and youth-led organizations can meaningfully participate in mechanisms for responsibility-sharing. This includes reference to them as partners in the global, regional, and national mechanisms supporting a comprehensive refugee response.
- Ensure that young people are identified as active participants in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating any refugee response, with adolescent girls and young women specifically engaged.
- Ensure young people’s active participation and meaningful engagement through putting them “at the center” of identification of, and taking action towards, comprehensive solutions. This includes through consultative youth bodies and/or volunteer groups (made up of both refugee and local youth) that are involved in planning and programming for an emergency response.
- Recognize the technical expertise in facilitating youth participation and youth-specific policy and programming.
- Ensure that gender-, age- and diversity-related barriers to participation are identified and addressed, particularly those faced by refugee girls and young women, including those with differing levels of ability.⁸

We strongly endorse reference in the GCR to:

- Increasing commitments of States in reaching solutions through investment in host countries, and where relevant, in countries of origin.
- The commitment to increasing resettlement places and complementary forms of admission.
- Calls for the participation of young people in processes and decision-making relevant to voluntary repatriation, including peace-building activities.

3) Strengthening young people’s capacities to be effective humanitarian actors

In order to facilitate the recommendations in section 2 above, the GCR should invest in:

- Building the leadership skills of young people in humanitarian action, particularly girls and young women, and creating opportunities for them to be effective actors in decision-making that affects their lives.
- Youth-led initiatives and organizations. It should address the specific barriers that young women face in accessing participation processes and mechanisms.

⁸ Evidenced barriers that girls and young women face in participating in decision-making processes include a wide range of protection concerns, discriminatory gender norms that affect women’s and girls’ participation in public life more broadly, unpaid domestic and care work, educational achievement, and resource issues that impact their mobility.

In identifying local solutions, the GCR should:

- Include reference to building young people’s capacity to be meaningfully included in all stages when identifying and implementing solutions (whichever solution is more relevant and is in the best interest of young people and adolescents).
- Recognize that solutions need to be designed by or co-designed with young people, and meaningfully include, wherever possible, engagement with host state youth to promote positive relations between host and refugee youth.
- Recognize the capacity of young people to reach out more easily to their peers across cultures.
- Invest in building the capacity of young people and youth-led organizations in host communities to deliver essential peer-to-peer services such as non-formal education and psycho-social support through leisure activities.
- Recommend that States invest in solutions that promote positive relationships between refugees and hosts, create safe spaces where youth can convene to identify common priorities, and develop a shared voice across ethnic groups or host-refugee community divides.

4) Resources

We note that the GCR commits to ensuring adequate financing for the emergency response and protracted situations, including flexible, un-earmarked, and multi-year funding wherever possible.

Given this, the GCR should:

- Ensure such funding includes holistic, youth-specific programming. Without targeted resourcing and investment, the needs of young people risk being overlooked.
- Ensure that, where resources are targeted to refugee youth, UNHCR establishes mechanisms for tracking and reporting on youth-specific programming, with reporting in the GCR follow-up mechanisms.
- Ensure that donors require humanitarian actors to collect and report age-, sex-, and diversity-disaggregated data on programming with young people.
- Include reference to young people as resources – as important stakeholders in designing, developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating comprehensive solutions.

5) Data

We note that there are significant gaps in refugee youth-specific data.⁹ The absence of such data results in a lack of targeted age and developmental-stage appropriate protection, assistance and positive engagement programs. This includes initiatives to ensure young people’s engagement in secondary and tertiary education, along with vocational training and volunteering opportunities, on the pathway to the world of work.

We welcome that the GCR commits States and relevant stakeholders to collecting, analyzing, and disseminating age- and sex- disaggregated data. However, we note that UNHCR’s recently released *Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability 2018* does not recognize youth as a distinct population group or make specific reference to youth in its Core Actions.¹⁰

The GCR should:

⁹ See footnote 1; UNHCR does not currently hold data on refugee youth numbers, with data commonly quoted from 2013.

¹⁰ UNHCR, *Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability 2018* (2018), available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/5aa13c0c7/policy-age-gender-diversity-accountability-2018.html>

- Ensure that dedicated data is collected on 15 to 30 year olds¹¹ (including by UNHCR).
- Ensure that this data is utilized in reporting, monitoring and evaluation of the GCR.
- Ensure age and sex disaggregated data is collected for refugee youth.
- Ensure that this data is systematically used to tailor programming according to age, gender and diversity considerations, and to understand and track impact.

List of the members of the Compact

Act for Human Rights, ALEF Association, AJIL, Anti-Tribalism Movement, arche noVa, Benetton, Group Barranquilla +20, Committee for ASEAN Youth Cooperation, Crown Agents, Denmark, Danish Refugee Council, FinnChurchAid, Germany, Global Development Community/Boston University, Global Platform for Syrian Students, GP4SYS, Gooddler, DOZ e. V., IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project/GenCap, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent – IFRC, International Federation of Medical Students Association – IFMSA, International Movement of Catholic Students - Pax Romana, Istanbul Youth Assembly, Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) – MYAN, Mercy Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council – NRC, Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, Plan International, Reach out to Asia – ROTA, Relief & Resilience through Education in Transition - RET International, ReBootKamp – RBK, Republic of Madagascar, Restless Development, Right To Play, Save Youth Future Society, Terres des Hommes – TDH, The Humanitarian Forum, United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth – UNMGCY, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Youth – SDSN-Youth, United Nations Development Programme – UNDP, United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA, United Nations Human Settlements Programme - UN-Habitat, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – UNHCR, United Nations Children’s Fund – UNICEF, United Nations Industrial Development Organization – UNIDO, United Kingdom Department for International Development- UK-DFID, United Muslim Relief – UMR, United Network of Young Peace Builders – UNOY, United Nations Peace Building Support Office - UN PBSO, UN Volunteers - UNV, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women - UN WOMEN, WeYouth, Women's Refugee Commission – WRC, World Organization of the Scout Movement – WOSM.

Non Compact member endorsing the recommendations: UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC).

¹¹ Ensuring that coercion does not take place.