

# **WE BELIEVE IN YOUTH! DO YOU?**

**Together we can achieve the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees. A Call to Action by young people affected by forced displacement.**

**December 2021**

# ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The Global Refugee Youth Network, the Tertiary Refugee Education Network, ActionAid Global Platforms, and UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council together with the Danish Refugee Council, UNHCR, the Compact for Youth in Humanitarian Action and UNICEF hosted and facilitated ten online youth dialogues on which this call to action is based on. The call to action presents the main challenges shared by the participants across the regions followed by their recommendations on how to overcome some of them. The focus of all dialogues was on collecting recommendations for improving meaningful participation. Therefore, more recommendations are presented in that section. Issues are reflected according to the frequency of how they were mentioned during the online dialogues.

The document reflects what 130 youth participants (42 young women, 82 young men, 6 others) based in over 40 countries shared in ten online youth dialogues. It reflects their experiences, perceptions, aspirations and sentiments. The document summarises the youth dialogue discussions and aims to reflect the voice of the participants. The participants were young people aged 18 to 35, who have been affected by forced displacement and include asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons and host community youth. For many participants, it was the first time to express their experiences and ideas as part of a facilitated process.

This document addresses all stakeholders (e.g., host governments, host communities, refugee communities, donor governments, UN organisations, international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), higher education institutions, labour unions).

The title *"We Believe in Youth! Do you?"* was chosen consciously to reference the Global Refugee Youth Consultations organised by the Women's Refugee Committee and UNHCR between October 2015 and June 2016.<sup>1</sup> The youth dialogues build on and continue efforts that have been made since 2015 to strengthen meaningful participation of young people affected by forced displacement.

The text is not an analysis, research or technical guidance. It is not comprehensive regarding the challenges youth affected by forced displacement face and the information shared was not been validated. In some instances, challenges are generalised if the issues were brought up in most of the dialogues.

The document does not reflect the views of the organisations hosting the regional dialogues.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Refugee Commission, UNHCR, GRYC. September 2016. ["We Believe in Youth" - Global Refugee Youth Consultations Final Report.](#)

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# KEY MESSAGES AT A GLANCE

**We, young people, are bridge builders and effective communicators. We have insights to offer, experiences to share and huge potential to help shape better solutions that work for us and our communities. Our competencies, capacities, and knowledge are valid and useful in helping communities affected by forced displacement. Your support will strengthen our collective ambitions and actions for social change. In the interest of an inclusive, peaceful and diverse society, independent of our background we need to get together to discuss, share and plan how to create the societies we want to live in.**

## 1. Invest in youth leadership and youth-led initiatives

We live in the communities affected by forced displacement and know their challenges. We are communicators within and across our communities. We need **reliable, flexible funding, trust, skills training, guidance and partners** to work more effectively. Our engagement in the community-level COVID-19 response showed that we can deliver.

## 2. Make meaningful youth participation part of the way you work

Our voices need safe spaces, platforms, and representation where we live. Where we live is where we achieve global goals. We need representation in our refugee community leadership. We need to be invited to local consultations, including with local authorities, private sector partners, and education institutions. We ask national authorities to open national youth platforms to refugee youth. **We ask stakeholders to include us regularly and systematically in needs assessments, project design, implementation, and monitoring.** There is a gap between global policy commitments and implementation at the local level. We want to help to address it by engaging with local stakeholders, including local authorities, employers, higher education institutions, who are the ones implementing policies that affect us.

## 3. Open and create more education and employment opportunities for us

Access to quality education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities are our primary concerns. We all know the evidence: education and self-reliance empower people affected by forced displacement immensely. Yet, we still experience **considerable barriers to access quality education and joining the labour market**, including access to the internet and reliable information, e.g., on scholarship opportunities. We call on the host governments, donor countries and all stakeholders to eliminate these barriers based on existing evidence, global policies and commitments. We want opportunities, not help. Instead of freeing our potential, we feel trapped.

## 4. Join our fight against discrimination

We all have experienced discrimination, including regarding documentation, restricted access to the labour market, unequal wages, restricted freedom of movement and access to health and housing. We experience discrimination in social media and through the circulation of fake news. Often we experience that national and local authorities lack knowledge and policy direction to support us adequately and according to our rights. **Refugee inclusion will not work if we do not join forces to fight refugee stigmatisation.** Therefore, we call for more robust refugee rights, protection and support systems and effective social cohesion efforts.

# INTRODUCTION

**“Empowerment of refugee and host community youth, building on their talent, potential and energy, supports resilience and eventual solutions. The active participation and engagement of refugee and host community youth will be supported by States and relevant stakeholders, including through projects that recognize, utilize and develop their capacities and skills, and foster their physical and emotional well-being.”<sup>2</sup>**

## Global Compact on Refugees, 2018

On 17 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR), after two years of extensive consultations led by UNHCR with Member States, international organisations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts. The GCR offers a framework for host governments and humanitarian and development partners to share responsibility for refugee situations more predictably and equitably. It prioritises sustainable solutions, opportunities and pathways for refugees, inclusion in national systems and the peaceful, sustainable development for refugee and host communities. Crucially, [the GCR includes 18 specific references to youth](#).

## Global Refugee Forum, 2019

To translate the GCR into action, the first [Global Refugee Forum](#) (GRF) took place in December 2019. It was the largest convening on refugee matters, bringing together over 3,000 participants from diverse segments of society, including refugees, States, the private sector, civil society, humanitarian organisations, development actors and academia. The GRF generated some 1,400 pledges, across areas such as protection, education, livelihoods and employment policies. [93 pledges have focused specifically on youth, underlining the urgency of working with and for youth in creating pathways for sustainable futures](#). The next GRF will take place in 2023.

## High-Level Officials Meeting, 2021

At the [High-Level Officials Meeting](#) (HLOM), taking place in December 2021, the international community will take stock of the progress made since the first GRF. Participants will identify progress, challenges and where further engagement is needed to increase support, self-reliance and access to solutions for refugees and host communities. As the COVID-19 crisis impeded the implementation of the GRF pledges, created new challenges and amplified existing ones for youth affected by forced displacement, these challenges will also be taken into consideration. The HLOM is part of a process to strengthen the framework for the engagement of States and other actors in refugee situations. [It is imperative that the youth affected by forced displacement are included and heard, both in the lead up to, during and after the HLOM](#).

## Youth Consultations Initiative, 2021

Systemic, meaningful and regular participation of youth affected by forced displacement in consultations, planning and decision-making related to the GRF process has not yet been realised at community, national, regional or global levels. In light of this, youth-led organisations and networks, such as the Global Refugee Youth Network, the Tertiary Refugee Student Network, ActionAid Global Platforms, and UNHCR’s Global Youth Advisory Council, together with the Danish Refugee Council, UNHCR, the Compact for Youth in Humanitarian Action and UNICEF facilitated a stock-taking event with youth in August 2021 and ten youth online dialogues in November 2021. The dialogues enabled 130 young women and men from about 40 countries to discuss the challenges they face, and put forth recommendations to improve their situations and make their participation in consultations, programming, implementation and decision-making more effective.

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<sup>2</sup> Global Compact on Refugees, para. 77, p. 15

# WE OFFER OUR PARTNERSHIP

**This Call to Action is a declaration by young people who are willing to act and be part of the sustainable solutions needed for asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons of all ages around the world. It implores national and international stakeholders at all levels to open space and mobilise resources for youth affected by forced displacement to effectively step into the role of agents and partners of change to achieve the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees.**

**We, young people affected by forced displacement,** acknowledge and represent the diversity of the needs and challenges youth face across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In this document, we share our challenges, ideas for sustainable solutions and meaningful participation. We greatly appreciate the opportunity that we had to meet fellow youth in the regional dialogues.

**2021 has seen considerable momentum for meaningful youth participation and leadership.** Young people around the world demonstrate increasing awareness, solidarity and action to protect human rights, our planet and to engage in peaceful, sustainable development. We hope that the visibility that youth have achieved in global, regional and national events translates into action in the communities, and more precisely into partnerships with us on a regular and systematic basis.

**The HLOM is an important milestone to further commit and realise concrete actions for youth.** We can come together and share our perspectives from very different corners of the world. But we want to do more than share our perspectives; we want to be part of the concrete implementation and follow-up. Young refugees and asylum seekers have fought for opportunities in their past and present lives, and are fighting for future opportunities. Instead of letting young generations struggle, we ask to be part of the solution. We have potential and can develop our skills, but we need your partnership. For real change to happen, you need our partnership as well.

**The circumstances we live in often deny us the opportunity to enjoy our youth.** We are often forced to compromise on our ambitions, our education and our employment. We often live in limbo not knowing of opportunities to prepare ourselves for an uncertain future and not knowing when we can return to our home countries. We lose months and sometimes years of education, vocational training or professional development due to long bureaucratic processes, lack of clear policies and access to information. Instead of developing our talents, skills and potential, we are often forced to search for ways to survive on a day-to-day basis, which slowly kills the youth in us.

**We are intelligent, skilled and motivated young people who have experienced forced displacement.** We want to break free of being stigmatised as refugees. If given a chance, we will not be your "refugee problem" but citizens who will co-create solutions in and with the community. For example, during the lockdown measures due to COVID-19, the majority of us took the initiative to provide services in our communities at a time when there were no services available. We continue to show that we can take action and respond to the challenges around us.

**Many of the issues that we highlight in this document are not new.** Though the views expressed here have been shared before, there have been limited tangible responses to our concerns. There is often a mismatch between the challenges of youth affected by forced displacement and our vision of change, and the agendas and solutions proposed by other stakeholders. Rather than discussing only our challenges, we want to discuss solutions and options for implementation that close the gap between global policy commitments and actions in the communities.

**Finally, we express our solidarity with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants** trapped in situations that violate their human and refugee rights and their right to protection. We call upon all governments to respect and protect human and refugee rights everywhere.

# LISTEN TO THE CHALLENGES WE FACE & THE RECOMMENDATIONS WE OFFER

**“I wish people knew that refugees need support. We need solidarity. When I arrived in Mexico, I felt a lack of empathy very strongly. I do not want people to ask me every day how I am. A simple gesture that shows us people try to understand our situation is enough. It has not been our decision to come here. We simply had no choice.”**<sup>3</sup>

## #1: Education

**Education is a make or break issue for us.** Education must not be considered a privilege but rather guaranteed as a right. In forced displacement situations, education plants important seeds for future solutions for individuals and communities. However, the access to recognised, quality education from early childhood development to tertiary education remains a challenge for young people affected by forced displacement everywhere. Access to and quality of education at all levels suffer, for example, because of overcrowded classrooms, inefficient school management, limited or lack of recognition of the education taught in camps and settlements, bureaucratic barriers related to the documentation of refugees and school-related costs. Consequently, enrolment remains low, children and youth drop out of school, fail their final exams or achieve only poor results. Unable to qualify for jobs or vocational training, they are stuck in the community.<sup>4</sup>

**Refugee inclusive education is not a reality yet.** While recognising the open-door policies of some host countries, quality, inclusive education is not within reach for the majority of refugee children and youth. There is a perceived and actual difference between the educational opportunities of nationals and that of refugees. We fear that educational disadvantage will hold us back from being able to compete for job opportunities. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted our need for devices and an internet connection to join remote classes and the vast learning opportunities that exist online.

**Education gaps are a risk and COVID-19 has increased it.** We fear that our generation and the younger generations will lose years of education as a result of limited quality opportunities where we live.<sup>5</sup> Although we are qualified and speak the language of instruction, we are often required to wait for admission due to our migration status.<sup>6</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic kept us at home and some of us have not yet returned to our studies. We have also not been able to go to work. The negative impact of the pandemic paired with the disadvantages that we face as refugees is not a short-term issue. Without an academic degree and work experience, we cannot achieve the self-reliance and resilience that we desire and deserve.

**Refugee teachers receive lower payments.** In Kenya and Jordan, for example, we observe that teachers with refugee status receive lower payments than non-refugee teachers, even if they have the same qualifications. Young refugees are eager to give back to their communities. However, unequal payment and unfair treatment within schools and education systems discourage youth from choosing the teaching profession, although our communities need qualified teachers who have experienced forced displacement.

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3 Youth Refugee in Mexico

4 Specific concerns regarding the quality of and access to education, including TVET, were voiced by young refugees living in settlements in Uganda, Kenya and Bangladesh.

5 Specific concern voiced by young refugees in Uganda, Bangladesh and India

6 Specific concern of Afghan refugees in India

**Adolescent girls need additional support to complete their education.** We see adolescent girls struggle to go to and stay in school. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the frequency and risk of early marriage and pregnancy. Too many girls have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school with minimal education levels. We want to emphasise that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the importance of education for adolescent girls, including their parents and the entire community. We are ready to engage in such programmes, provide peer support, visit schools and be role models for younger refugees.<sup>7</sup>

**Recognition of prior learning is important.** This is a concern for all of us who have been forced to flee while in secondary school, high school, college, vocational training or higher education. We experience problems continuing our education where there are no procedures for the recognition, accreditation or equivalency of prior learning or to assess our knowledge and competencies. It is, for example, difficult and complex for refugee students to validate educational qualifications earned in the country of origin and this severely limits our ability to access educational and employment opportunities. In some cases, we are forced to join education below the level we have already achieved because, without the education certificates of the host countries, we are, for example, not allowed to sit the university entrance exams.<sup>8</sup> We are concerned after hearing of cases in which Afghan refugees were forced to return to Afghanistan to get certificates or other documents to apply for university in Pakistan. We recognise that it is difficult for all of us, refugee and national youth, to be admitted to study programmes at public higher education institutions because of a lack of places. For many, private higher education institutions are not an option because of the high costs. Even if we submit complete application documents, which can be a challenge, refugee applicants are not guaranteed a seat.<sup>9</sup>

**Scholarship opportunities for higher education are a common concern.** Scholarship and education grant or loan opportunities are scarce compared to the actual needs of youth affected by forced displacement, including host community youth. If there are no scholarships or grants to support our participation in education, we have to work. There is no other fall back option. A special concern for refugee students is the very limited availability of scholarships for Master's studies. In particular, we are concerned that information about available scholarships for refugees is not shared transparently and widely enough and that there are no orientation sessions available for refugees who are considering higher education.<sup>10</sup> It should not be by coincidence that we receive information about education opportunities. Finally, bureaucratic requirements to access higher education are very high – including navigating application procedures, providing required documentation, obtaining education finance - often too high to overcome.

**While education is a primary concern for all of us, the situation of the Rohingya refugee children and youth has been urgently raised.** We are concerned that there is no formal education system accessible to Rohingya refugees<sup>11</sup> in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and that the education available is often rudimentary. Youth from Cox's Bazar reported in the regional dialogues that fear of missing out and falling behind because of their limited access to quality education and qualifications, is widely shared among refugee children and youth. The current learning system does not provide certificates of completion and refugee youth are not allowed to access national higher education institutions in Bangladesh. The COVID-19 pandemic further contributed to an increased sense of hopelessness and disconnectedness. The lack of education opportunities has negative impacts on gender-based violence, drug addiction and trafficking, child marriage, human trafficking, and social media addiction.<sup>12</sup>

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7 Specific concern voiced by young refugees in Uganda

8 Specific concern voiced by young refugees in Ethiopia

9 Specific concern shared by participants from Pakistan

10 Access to scholarships is a main concern for youth across all countries. The participants from Pakistan were particularly vocal about the information sharing regarding scholarship opportunities.

11 Rohingya are officially recognised as Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh.

12 Statements from the refugee youth group that joined Cox's Bazar facilitated by DRC Bangladesh

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

### To host governments

- 1. Increase your commitment to education - it is a lifeline for us:** We acknowledge that including forcibly displaced children and youth in the national education system may be a long-term process. However, our education cannot wait. We recommend that host governments work with international stakeholders, donors and programmes to improve access to and quality of education for all. The need for and importance of refugee inclusive education needs to be solidified at the community level. We can be part of this effort. Without promoting refugee inclusive education, we are afraid that the social problems and exclusion we face will continue. Much stronger joint national and international financial commitments for our education are needed across countries.
- 2. Accelerate your collaboration with national and international partners:** Lead and coordinate the planning, and implementation of country- and context-specific refugee education inclusion strategies under the umbrella of the SDG4 agenda. Give quality refugee inclusive education at all levels, including vocational training, the political attention urgently needed, especially to mitigate the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3. Put in place a national framework to recognise our prior learning:** We acknowledge the differences in national education systems and standards and ask for mechanisms to ensure our existing qualifications are recognised. To help us continue our schooling, studying or professional training we need recognition of our existing qualifications. Assessments are a great way to find out the level of our education and placement on a certain learning path. Communication about the available assessment and certificate recognition services should be immediately available and transparently communicated to young refugees when they arrive in a host country.

### To UN agencies, international NGOs and other stakeholders

- 4. Support refugee children and youth to get back to school immediately after arrival:** Lengthy periods out-of-school and challenges adapting to a new education system have negative effects on children and youth. All refugee children and youth must be able to continue their education as soon as possible, and girls need additional support to stay in school through transition periods as they may be at risk of getting pregnant or dropping out permanently. Following up closely with children and youth, their parents and the respective schools to ensure that students are thriving, especially if the language of instruction is new, is important.<sup>13</sup>

### To donor countries

- 5. Continue and extend the availability of scholarships:** We recommend continued and increased investment in scholarships for upper secondary and tertiary education. Youth affected by forced displacement do not have financial resources for higher education. For many, even secondary education is unaffordable. It is through scholarship programmes that we experience mentorship, support, skills training, and participation opportunities. UNHCR's tertiary scholarship programme (DAFI), for example, offers scholars a platform to exchange and speak to UNHCR, partner organisations, and on some occasions the German Embassy. Third-country scholarships have become an important opportunity for some of us and we recommend the expansion of such opportunities. Additionally, we ask donors to offer scholarships for study programmes in the arts and humanities as these are relevant subjects for peaceful, sustainable human development as well.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Recommendation from West Africa dialogue

14 Recommendation formulated by youth participants from Kenya and Uganda in the global online dialogue.

## #2: Employment

**Employment opportunities are limited across countries.** As young people, we are concerned that our efforts and ambitions to complete education and engage in our communities often do not result in decent job opportunities. Access to the labour market is still restricted in many ways, e.g., national policies that deny us the right to work or restrict the sectors we are allowed to work in, challenges to obtain work permits, and unclear regulations regarding entrepreneurship. Employers often do not know the conditions and regulations under which they can employ us, so they often prefer not to. We experience discrimination in job offers and payment levels because of our refugee status (e.g., in Jordan, Liberia, Kenya, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe). Even if we complete our studies or were sponsored by the DAFI programme, which includes career preparation activities, many of us do not find a job. We acknowledge that the youth unemployment rate is high in many host countries and that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the situation even more. However, we, displaced youth, are additionally disadvantaged by our status. Our frustration and hopelessness are increasing.

**We witness the negative, maybe irreversible effects on young people in our communities.** The lack of entry-level and decent or even permanent work opportunities has negative consequences for youth in refugee communities. The COVID-19 pandemic further deteriorated the situation and contributed to increased drug abuse, inaction, passivity and idleness, but also the creation of gangs and increased fighting among various groups.<sup>15</sup> Because of the lack of opportunities for decent work, young people are forced to accept jobs that are exploitative in terms of payment, excessive working hours, weak protections and poor conditions.<sup>16</sup> The fact that so many youths with higher education and other qualifications are unable to find a job negatively impacts younger people with fewer qualifications. South Sudanese refugee youth in Uganda reported, for example, that some youth went back to South Sudan to find work although the conditions for return are not in place.

**The vocational training we receive is not up to par with the current labour market.** Refugee youth across countries are often offered skills training in hairdressing, soap making, tailoring or carpentry. We do not want to be trained in these areas only. Although they have helped many to create a livelihood, we desire training aligned with modern skills such as IT, graphic design, coding, programming or engineering. Therefore, local implementing partners should redesign and update their vocational and livelihood training programmes. We fear that we are already falling behind and will not be relevant in the modern labour market. This is particularly urgent in remote and rural areas. In urban areas, we experience problems where competition for jobs is especially high. For example in Kampala, Uganda, we may be able to access computer training but the level is so basic that it does not qualify us for decent jobs.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

### To host governments

- 1. Create policies that allow us to work and earn wages according to our qualifications:** We urge host governments to recognise refugees as assets and resources for their economies and societies. Inclusive labour and wage policies will allow us to earn a living, pay our bills, pay taxes, be self-reliant and contribute to the countries where we live. We also urge you to ensure refugees in rural areas have access to land to earn a living.

### To UN agencies, international NGOs and other stakeholders

- 2. Expand relevant, market-oriented entrepreneurship and vocational training:** Increase and expand your efforts to work with local governments, private sector and training institutions to offer relevant, market-oriented, certified vocational and entrepreneurship training. Include refugee entrepreneurs and youth from the refugee and host community in the design of such programmes. Specific attention should be given to opportunities in refugee settlements and neighbouring host communities and remote areas where access to quality technical and

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15 Specific concern voiced by participants from Kenya and Bangladesh.

16 Specific concern shared during the Latin America regional youth dialogue.

vocational education and training (TVET) is limited. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for TVET and entrepreneurship opportunities because many secondary school students have not or will not return to school after the lockdown and need adequate alternatives. Therefore, prioritise support for the admission of those youth to TVET programmes.<sup>17</sup>

- 3. Recruit persons who experienced forced displacement:** Employment opportunities for young refugees across all countries are limited even if we are qualified. We suggest that organisations that work for people forcibly displaced adopt a quota for how many staff should have a refugee background. Youth with forced migration experience can be an important link to the community your organisations aim to support and can bring vital expertise.

### To donor countries

- 4. Provide increased funding for entrepreneurship, short-term skills training and the expansion of TVET programmes specifically in refugee settlements and rural areas:** Increase the funding for the development and expansion of national, refugee inclusive TVET systems. Invest simultaneously in projects responding to the immediate vocational training needs. Support vocational training programmes that are context-specific, relevant, high quality, certified by local authorities and support transition to employment. Such training programmes should include entrepreneurship training, start-up kits and initial funding to support young entrepreneurs to set up a small business.

## #3: Documentation and Freedom of Movement

### **Documentation remains a central challenge in the daily lives of asylum seekers and refugees.**

While we share many challenges with host community youth, recognised documents are a specific challenge for forcibly displaced youth. Valid, recognised identification documents are required for everything: education, employment, travel, housing, health, marriage, birth and banking. An identity card or passport is often required to access even the most basic services in most countries. Many asylum seekers and refugees do not have and cannot access a passport. Across countries and regions, we share the experience that authorities and institutions often are unaware of the differences between migrants, asylum seekers and recognised refugees and thus may not accept documents although they are valid. Lack of recognition of education documents from the home country makes it difficult to enrol in private or public education at any level in the host country. The same is true for applying for jobs or opening a business – the bureaucratic hurdles and long processing times often leave refugees in limbo for months. During this time, we cannot work, find decent accommodation, study or move freely in the country. We are especially concerned that young people affected by forced displacement have no other choice but to live on the streets in Mexico.

**Restricted movement undermines our engagement and participation.** Restrictions in moving freely in the host country are another challenge not experienced by host community youth. Across all countries, we frequently face requirements for travel documents, for example, to leave a camp or settlement let alone travel internationally. Applying for travel documents is an additional hurdle in already challenging circumstances, takes time and constantly reminds us that we are refugees with limited rights and agency. If asked what would enhance refugee youth participation, we would say: improve travel policies! In Bangladesh, for example, refugee youth cannot participate in national youth fora, in-person programmes or consultations because it is too difficult to acquire movement permission. This creates a sense of frustration and futility. Notably, refugee youth who wish to engage in community or volunteer work are often prevented from doing so because they lack the authorization to move freely or to take advantage of opportunities that arise on short notice and require several layers of permission.<sup>18</sup> We have also heard that youth often face more restrictive movement policies in large refugee camps like Kakuma and Dadaab.

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17 Recommendation from dialogues in Uganda and Kenya

18 Specific concern shared by refugee youth from Morocco

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

### To host governments

1. **Ensure the 1951 Geneva convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees guide asylum procedures and refugee protection at all levels:** We ask governments who signed the Convention and the Protocol to live up to the principles of refugee rights and protection.<sup>19</sup> This requires that the implementation of these principles through policy is reinforced at all levels. We believe asylum procedures should be faster to allow refugees to start building their lives in new countries with better support, protection and recognition. Governments need to ensure that the policy implementation gaps at the community level are closed.

### To UN agencies, international NGOs and other stakeholders

2. **Help improve the knowledge on refugee rights and issues:** Further investment in political discussions and sensitisation regarding international refugee protection, rights and issues is needed at the country and community levels. Remind and advise host governments on their obligations to protect and support forcibly displaced persons within a national legal framework.<sup>20</sup> The lack of knowledge and guidance among authorities creates difficulties for us, for example, in terms of the recognition of documents, and rights to education, employment, movement and services. Continued engagement by UNHCR, DRC and other organisations with national authorities can reduce institutional barriers and clarify the specific rights to protection and access to services for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.<sup>21</sup>

## #4: Discrimination

**We have heard fellow refugee youth ask, 'Are we not human beings, too?' For us, a red line is crossed when circumstances and dynamics slowly make us believe that we are not 'full human beings'.**

**Discrimination and racism are a reality for refugee youth every day.** We experience structural and systemic discrimination, and open discrimination in the streets across all regions. There is discrimination based on refugees' sexuality, religion, language or culture. Social media has increasingly become a space where we experience hate speech, fake news and homophobic attacks. The different shades of racism and discrimination have an impact on our lives, including our mental health. Many of us are well educated, we have experienced forced displacement, loss and difficulties but we have always been and remain ready to claim our space and opportunities. Many displaced youths arrive in foreign countries where they are expected to assimilate to the local culture. Even if we speak the language of our host country well, we are confronted with strong negative stereotypes, and experience rejection or bullying.

**Stigmatisation follows us everywhere.** The negative connotation of the word 'refugee' is too heavy for some of us. Instead of receiving empathy for our fate and the protection we deserve, we feel inferior. We are not "just refugees," we are human beings who experience forced displacement. We have seen qualified doctors, lawyers and teachers earn much less than nationals because of their refugee status. Despite our contributions to society, neighbourhoods and the economy, many host communities consider us a problem.

**In some places being a refugee means being exposed and vulnerable.** We are saddened to admit that we have heard and experienced situations where police mistreat or harass refugees. This occurs when we are unable to show travel or work permits or when we pass checkpoints. Despite presenting the permits, once we are identified as refugees we may face police harassment or even be thrown off buses.<sup>22</sup> The many processes of securing permits and documents make us easy targets for corruption.

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19 <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

20 Recommendation from Latin America dialogue

21 Recommendation from West Africa dialogue

22 Problem reported from participant based in Kenya.

## Voices from young members of the Hijra (transgender) community in Cox's Bazar<sup>23</sup>

Six youths (four from the refugee community and two from the host community) from the Hijra community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, participated in the Asia regional dialogue.

**We lack the right to free movement, expression and identity.** Our gender identity is not indicated on our identity cards. Therefore, we cannot access specialised services, including sexual and reproduction health services (i.e., HIV screening, information on safe sex). We cannot marry the partner of our choice. We are forced to marry women because at birth we were assigned to be male. Because of our identity and appearance, we have no access to jobs, income-generating and skill training opportunities, learning centres and communal spaces and we are not allowed in funeral ceremonies, mosques or temples.

**We experience constant policing and harassment by our families and community members.** We are prevented from dressing in feminine clothing or keeping our hair long because of social stigma. We have no access to youth spaces, networks or consultations, also because of the social stigma. All of it affects our mental health and we have no space to meet our Hijra community members safely and dance, sing and share our struggles, which would already help us a lot to cope.

**We have been excluded for years.** By giving us a voice on platforms and dialogues, we can share our struggles with other young people. Humanitarian partners should start to acknowledge and normalise our identity as *Hijra* to help us overcome social stigma and express our concerns and needs; one priority request is that UNHCR could support us to receive identity cards indicating our actual gender identity to allow us to access appropriate services.

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23 "In South Asia, the Hijra are a group of transgender women and non-binary and intersex people who were assigned male at birth. Some estimates suggest that more than 10 000 hijras live in Bangladesh, whereas others indicate there are more than 100 000. However, they are deprived of basic human rights in Bangladesh, such as access to primary health-care services, housing facilities, food, and employment opportunities. Hijras have long faced high levels of social stigma, discrimination, isolation, and separation." Source: Ridwan Islam Sifat. December 2020. The effect of COVID-19 on hijra (third gender) people in Bangladesh.

## #5: Inclusion and Social Cohesion

**“We desire to integrate but for us, inclusion turns out to be a frustrating concept. We will never be seen as equals, let alone nationals, even if we are born here, educated here. We are treated as ‘refugees’.”<sup>24</sup>**

**We seek togetherness with host community youth but mostly we do not interact.** In the youth dialogues, refugee and host community youth discussed together, although refugees were in the majority. We recognise that refugee and host community youth often share similar challenges when it comes to accessing quality education, scholarships, the internet or digital devices, job opportunities or empowerment programmes for youth. However, to build on shared challenges and aspirations we need to get together.<sup>25</sup>

**Inclusion is not possible if we cannot access basic services and are restricted in our freedom.** We experience, in each country, difficulties accessing services or benefits including opening a bank account, making financial transfers or going to public hospitals, because of our migration status.<sup>26</sup>

**Asylum seekers often wait for long periods in uncertainty.** We are concerned that young asylum seekers in many regions, including Europe, North and Latin America have to wait for long periods to receive legal documentation. During this time, it is very difficult to find decent housing or take action to obtain education or work because we lack identity documents or credit history. Young people find it hard to endure such a long time, waiting for interviews and hearings and then again for the final decision.<sup>27</sup> In Morocco, asylum seekers face long delays before accessing the asylum process and receiving support in terms of health care, food, housing and clothes.

**Resettled refugee youth lack inclusion support in Europe and North America.** We, the young men and women who resettled in Europe and North America, are tremendously grateful for this life-changing opportunity. We acknowledge the economic and political challenges governments face when receiving large numbers of refugees. As newcomers in communities in resettlement countries, we are ready to share our experiences and knowledge with communities, authorities and institutions to improve the services offered to refugees and to improve our ability to participate fully in society. This requires that you listen to us and that we work together to make it beneficial for all. We may have difficulties integrating for example, in terms of language, options to meet host community youth, and the need for mentors to guide closely our integration but also our psychological and emotional wellbeing.

**“We do not arrive and immediately enter a new life. We first are treated as refugees. We are accommodated in shared housing, sign papers, then we have a contract with someone we do not know, the accommodation is not good, and there is no one listening to us. We have no choice. We have no voice.”<sup>28</sup>**

**Language is often a challenge for young people arriving, resettling or integrating into new countries and communities.** Accessing crucial information and navigating new systems is impossible without knowing the language of the new community. However, language learning takes time. Refugees come from different countries and speak different languages and may not understand each other either. As a result, the social networks, information and ability to access services that they need to gain control of their new lives are accessible only later. Not knowing the language is a disabling and excluding factor.

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24 A young refugee based in Kenya expressed what many others shared in the regional dialogues.

25 Concern voiced by participants based in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh

26 Restricted access to public health services was a challenge expressed by participants based in Kenya and Jordan.

27 Specific concern from refugee youth based in Canada

28 Specific concern voiced by resettled refugee in Sweden

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

### To host governments

1. **Enable us to build on what we bring:** The psychological and emotional implications of forced displacement make it hard to start from nothing and we ask you to acknowledge this. We recommend creating education and employment opportunities and pathways that allow us to build on the education, experiences and skills that we have.
2. **Invest in refugee rights education:** Awareness-raising regarding the history and causes of migration and forced displacement as well as the legal instruments that underpin refugee protection are vital. Therefore, we suggest (a) fostering awareness and knowledge in host communities and institutions regarding the specific rights and needs of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants; (b) teaching children and youth about refugee rights, reasons why people are forced to flee and the far-reaching effects it has on their lives; and (c) encouraging them to reach out to us. We are ready to share our stories and expertise to help create awareness and empathy and fight discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

### To host communities

3. **Improve refugee inclusion efforts at the community level:** We recommend host communities, including local governments, schools and other stakeholders embrace refugee support and inclusion. Our daily lives are lived in communities where we go to school, to the hospital, to the shops, and where we ask for permits. Discuss directly with youth affected by forced displacement to better understand our situation. Authorities and politicians should evaluate with UNHCR and other protection organisations how responsibilities are shared to effectively reach and support forcibly displaced persons.<sup>30</sup> We ask local governments to ensure the implementation of refugee-inclusive policies and protection principles across sectors and institutions at the community level to ensure that we can participate, contribute to and thrive in the places we live.
4. **Reach out to young refugees in your community:** Help young refugees to find their place in your community. They may not have the information or contacts to understand how to integrate and how your community works. Personal contact is important for us to feel seen, respected and welcome.<sup>31</sup> We need a focal person who gives us orientation, helps us to make informed decisions and to discuss our progress regarding education, employment, official documents and our integration, especially if the language is new.<sup>32</sup>
5. **Start youth mentorship programmes:** Support the setup and coordination of peer-to-peer mentorship programmes for and with refugee and host community youth. Such programmes can support children and youth to stay informed about education, employment, training and participation opportunities and learn from the experiences of others. Mentorship can offer social-emotional stability and guidance.<sup>33</sup>

### To UN agencies, international NGOs and other stakeholders

6. **Remain available to us in resettlement countries:** In resettlement countries, UNHCR plays a different role than in the countries that host us initially. We recommend UNHCR play a more active role in supporting social inclusion and cohesion by bringing together refugee and host community youth in resettlement countries (e.g., meetings, games, cultural events) to support our integration.<sup>34</sup>
7. **Offer orientation to refugees in host countries:** Provide orientation programmes to forcibly displaced youth to give them the information needed to make decisions regarding their education and employment. They need to know about their rights and how to access services.

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29 Recommended by refugees in Europe

30 Recommendation from Latin America regional youth dialogue

31 Recommended by refugees in Europe

32 Recommended by refugees in Europe

33 Suggested by participants in Bangladesh and West Africa

34 Recommended by refugees in Europe

- 8. Foster social cohesion:** Invest in projects fostering social cohesion between refugee and host communities. Engage refugee youth and local stakeholders to design and implement relevant projects that appeal to youth in both communities. Refugee and host community youth face similar issues yet we do not work together to find common solutions. Create opportunities for refugee and host community youth to work together, plant trees, play sports, do creative work and other activities that bring youth together, foster social cohesion and build mutual understanding.

## #6: Access to Information and the Internet

**"I very much wanted to participate in this youth dialogue. I went two hours by bus to the next city to find an internet connection. There are many challenges we face in the refugee camp and I need to talk about them. In the camp, we have no support to join exchanges like this. I have a degree, but no work."**<sup>35</sup>

**Young people have great potential to create change, but we need better information about opportunities.** We cannot help our communities and ourselves in the ways that we know we can if we do not have the information we need, including information about skills training, funding and mentoring opportunities for our initiatives and projects, scholarships and participation opportunities. As refugee youth leaders, we need information to participate fully in the discussions and decisions that affect us. We need to be able to share accurate information and give advice to other refugee youth. Lack of access to information is frustrating for us, especially for those of us who are active at the community level and wish to have an understanding of and engagement in global online events and networks. We have realised that while social media offers great opportunities it is not the best way to reach refugee youth everywhere, simply because of a lack of internet connection, data-related costs or connectivity issues, lack of devices, unfamiliarity with apps or social media services and the fast flow of information from many sources. Additionally, it can invite misinformation or fake news, which can be harmful to us.<sup>36</sup> The digital world is hard to navigate sensibly if you have no experience. Particularly in remote refugee-hosting areas we feel disconnected from the rest of the world. In some locations, we are prohibited from using national sim cards because we are refugees.<sup>37</sup>

**Accessing correct information, including important legal information, is a challenge.** Information shared among refugees is based on experience but can be outdated and misleading. Because of language barriers and the challenges of accessing relevant, updated and correct information in host countries, procedures take longer than they should. Having the right information is important for us, for example, in terms of accessing support, family reunification, accommodation, education, work, opening bank accounts, applying for identity cards and passports. In reception centres in Europe, for instance, refugee youth expressed that legal information and counselling were not available in the necessary languages. Information is not always transparently accessible, is often too complicated and rarely youth-friendly. For example, young refugees need case-specific orientation and support in the new country, but without an accessible caseworker, we struggle with core life issues.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

### To UN agencies, international NGOs and other stakeholders

- 1. Ensure spaces with computer and internet access are available:** Make sure that refugee and host community youth especially in rural and remote areas are not left behind because

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35 Statement from a refugee youth participant from Ethiopia, Gambella region

36 Elizabeth Culliford. 8 Dec. 2021. [Rohingya refugees sue Facebook for \\$150 billion over Myanmar violence.](#)

37 Concern shared by participants based on Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

of a lack of connectivity. Connectivity is important in many aspects of our lives: education and lifelong learning, employment, participation and online activism. We recommend supporting strategies and programmes that scale up the availability of digital devices to support remote learning for all. Ensure that refugee children and youth, as well as the host community, have access to stable internet, including in schools.<sup>38</sup> Especially, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, more is needed to close the digital divide by supporting national inclusive digitization efforts to improve connectivity and fair access to digitally empowered education. Install computer rooms in community youth and learning centres to allow us safe spaces and access to the internet. Work with private sector partners to find viable, context-specific solutions based on existing evidence and best practices in the field.

- 2. Communicate all opportunities for youth transparently:** Communicate scholarship, training and participation opportunities for youth transparently through various communication channels. Complementary to emails or social media, use banners, booklets or flyers in the refugee communities to advertise education, training, employment or participation opportunities. Additionally, in person engagement is key in reaching those refugees who are most vulnerable and hardest to reach. Enable youth representatives or leaders to disseminate such information to refugee youth through school and community meetings.

## #7: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

**To participate, integrate, engage, study, and be resilient we need to be mentally fit and emotionally well.** As young people, we have ambitions and aspirations, we have energy and motivation, and our experiences are unique with some of us having faced loss and deep pain, while others have been lucky to live in supportive communities. Each of our lives is different and so are our tools to deal with challenges. Those of us who were forced to leave our home countries behind experienced uncertainty and fear in the search for protection, and found a window of opportunity to regain normalcy in life. Some of us have not experienced normalcy for a long time. The things our families or we have experienced leave a mark. While we can deal with some issues, others we cannot manage on our own.

**Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is not available in appropriate and sufficient ways.** MHPSS needs to be discreetly available and accessible so that young refugees do not fear stigmatisation. There are many reasons why a young person affected by forced displacement might need MHPSS, including as a result of experiences in the home country, during flight or arrival in a new country, experiences of structural racism, violent pushbacks or abusive treatment by smugglers.<sup>39</sup>

**Our emotional and mental resilience has been challenged by the lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic.** Due to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an increasing level of hopelessness, idleness and depression. We are saddened that some young people have attempted or committed suicide.<sup>40</sup> Young people and children in Uganda have experienced the longest lockdown, with schools closed for 80 weeks. Youth-sensitive health care and MHPSS access have become a major concern in the face of increasing mental health problems.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

#### To host governments

- 1. Make mental health and psychosocial support accessible:** Provide youth-friendly and easily accessible information on how to access mental health and psychosocial support services. Ensure that persons unfamiliar with such services have access to them if they are in need. Involve refugees in protection projects and involve youth in the creation of systems that will ensure their mental wellbeing.

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38 Recommendation from Ethiopia

39 Specific concern raised by participants in the Europe regional dialogue

40 Mentioned by participants in Uganda and Kenya

## #8: Meaningful Participation

**“No one has shown interest in working with youth here. Soccer matches took place, we came but afterwards, no one talked with us.”<sup>41</sup>**

**We, young people affected by forced displacement, stand a high chance that ‘others’ make decisions for us without us.** We do not feel that we are considered as ‘equals’, but we feel trapped in paternalistic structures, especially in camps and reception centres. A concern we all share is that although there are opportunities for us to share our issues (e.g., in focus group discussions or conferences) there is a general lack of effective follow-up. This illustrates a lack of accountability and systematic approaches to engage us meaningfully.

**In crisis- and conflict-affected areas, youth are not considered sufficiently.** There are few if any mechanisms or platforms for young people to relay their concerns to humanitarian actors in conflict-affected areas. Participants based in North-East Nigeria, for example, shared that although young people are also severely affected by Boko Haram violence and the related crisis, humanitarian interventions largely neglected youth. They reported that there was a focus on women and children but no mechanisms and support for coping structures for young people.

**We lack the trust and recognition necessary to participate meaningfully.** Refugee-led initiatives are not systematically included in planning or coordination meetings of actors in the communities or regions where they engage. We believe the community perspective is important to response planning and design, and refugee youth-led initiatives and refugee youth leaders can provide that perspective and critical link. However, we often do not get the chance to speak to stakeholders. Host community youth in Bangladesh have created associations but have not received support from NGOs because they could not meet the bureaucratic requirements. In Ethiopia, it was reported that refugee-led organisations and initiatives depend on recommendation letters from UNHCR because otherwise “no donor will give you money because they don’t believe you”. We heard a similar experience from Pakistan, where refugee youth are not heard if they are not affiliated with a recognised organisation. Youth from Pakistan also noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic they were among the first to respond, but later were not recognised for it and did not receive opportunities to participate.

**Refugee community leadership does not necessarily represent the voices of young people.** Refugee youth from Uganda shared that refugees, including youth, had been invited to a forum to discuss the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), but refugee youth were not given sufficient space to voice their concerns and ideas. The presence of refugees does not necessarily mean young people’s voices are represented. The fact that refugee youth are perceived as immature, inferior or too young by adults and elders is often rooted in cultural principles. For example, South Sudanese refugee youth said that South Sudanese refugees systematically set up associations and initiatives based on cultural principles that do not give youth the voice they deserve and need.<sup>42</sup>

**Community leaders in refugee and host communities are young and have ideas but lack funding.** Meaningful participation starts when people engage, work with others and come up with concrete, situation-specific actions for positive change. Refugee youth from Chad said that community mobilisation is well received among young people and they engage voluntarily in planning activities for their communities each semester. However, the plans are often not implemented because there are no resources; this is fundamentally demotivating for young people trying to make a difference.

**“Sometimes when I am with adults, when I share my opinion, they act as if they were my parents. It is difficult to discuss and exchange ideas with them if they try to undermine your perspectives. Unfortunately, in most cases, adults are taken seriously but we are not. However, youth does not stand for immaturity. We experience this in consultations with the government and therefore ask international partners to solicit and elevate our voices.”<sup>43</sup>**

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41 Statement from a refugee youth participant from Uganda

42 Statement from a refugee youth participant from Uganda

43 Statement from a refugee youth participant from Latin America

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

### To UN agencies, international NGOs and other stakeholders

#### 1. Support community platforms and regular national youth consultations

- Support youth to build and strengthen **platforms** as safe spaces for youth-to-youth interaction.
- Engage at least two **youth leaders** (man/woman/other) in each community/settlement regularly in consultations with local and national authorities, including higher education institutions and labour unions to discuss challenges, needs and possible solutions.
- Empower youth representatives to **communicate effectively** (i.e., they receive updated, relevant information, use different communication channels) with the youth in their community.
- Organise with refugee and host community **youth fora** to which CBOs and CSOs, NGOs, politicians, researchers, private sector representatives and others are regularly invited.
- Facilitate **regular national youth consultations** on challenges, emerging needs and possible solutions, including on local and national decision-making processes that will affect our lives, and the progress of national GRF pledges and commitments.

#### 2. Create a refugee youth board at the national level

- Create a **board of refugee youth representatives** to discuss regularly with UNHCR, its implementing partners and other partners that have the mandate to support refugees.
- Establish **terms of references** for the youth board describing, for example, (a) diverse, inclusive representation of young persons<sup>44</sup>, (b) effective follow-up, and (c) participation considerations regarding travel permissions and safety concerns.

#### 3. Regularise regional youth dialogues

- Continue and **regularise online regional and global youth dialogues**.
- Host them in addition to face-to-face youth consultations at the national and community level.
- Ensure that youth receive **information about the outcomes**, follow-up and progress.
- Ensure youth have the **opportunity to join online events** by securing their access to places with an internet connection or providing data bundles.
- Reach out to youth to ensure **diverse, inclusive access** and address safety and protection issues ahead of any consultation. Take extra steps to reach the most vulnerable who would not otherwise have an opportunity.

#### 4. Integrate youth participation in your programming cycle

- Pay attention to the **needs of conflict and displacement affected youth** because often they cannot support themselves and have few training or participation opportunities.
- Streamline meaningful youth participation in your entire (humanitarian<sup>45</sup> and development) programming cycle. **UNHCR and UNICEF should lead by example**, including its implementing partners.
- Collect good practices from youth and partners who work towards improved youth participation to understand what does, and does not work to realise systematic, meaningful participation.

#### 5. Invest in youth skills training

- Offer critical skills training, e.g., in public speaking, campaigning, social media strategies, etc., that **empowers us to advocate** with parliamentarians, politicians, policy-makers, schools, higher education institutions and humanitarian and development partners.

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44 Concerning gender, disability, communities, urban and rural areas, age, country of origin, language, etc.

45 Recommendation from participant based in North East Nigeria. Guidance on how to do this offer the IASC Guidelines, *With us & for us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises* (2020).

- Offer workshops and webinars that **improve our knowledge in refugee rights and protection** systems, community-based programming, network development, etc.
  - Offer **project management training** to apply for and implement resources effectively.
  - Communicate clearly which organisations offer **technical guidance and funding** for our projects.
- 6. Community-based organisations (CBOs) should work closely with youth**
- CBOs need to **coordinate and communicate better with youth**, and relay their needs and ideas to funding partners.
  - CBOs should have the resources and the mandate to **strengthen the role and engagement of youth in community leadership structures** and their role in implementing activities.
- 7. Open coordination meetings to youth**
- Collaboration and coordination mechanisms of government, humanitarian and development partners, specifically at the sub-national level, should **allow for regular engagement of youth** from both the refugee and host community, particularly regarding issues pertaining to their needs.

## Recommendations linked to GRF/GCR process

- 8. Build an alliance in support of youth-led initiatives and participation**
- Bring partners together that **champion the leadership, initiatives and participation of youth** affected by forced displacement to elevate our voices, increase our visibility, facilitate our initiatives and invite us to participate and help us claim new spaces.
  - Help us create a **better link between the local and global levels** to ensure global commitments and policies that concern us, are informed by us and translate into tangible results with us.
- 9. Engage us to achieve greater accountability**
- Open GRF/GCR stakeholder consultations to refugee youth at all levels and **reserve a seat for us**. Only through our regular, continuous and meaningful participation will we be able to **hold host and donor governments accountable** to the global commitments or policies they agree to.
  - There is a **gap between global policy commitments and local implementation**. Empower us to address these gaps by engaging with local stakeholders, including local authorities, employers, higher education institutions, who implement policies that affect us.
  - Work with all partners to **generate reliable, quality data on young people** to inform decision-making at all levels.

## To host governments

- 10. Ensure that youth affected by forced displacement is not afraid to speak up**
- Create **safe spaces for young people seeking asylum** to express their ideas and concerns where they will be heard. Everyone has a voice. Being heard and seen is important for forcibly displaced persons to feel recognised as full human beings.
- 11. Improve inclusion by enabling refugee youth participation**
- Invite and enable refugee youth to **access platforms, funds and support** available to national youth.
  - National, sub-national or district **youth councils should include refugee youth** to create awareness for their issues, for common challenges and ideas and to support social cohesion and inclusion efforts. In countries where these councils do not yet exist at all levels, expand and strengthen those structures.<sup>46</sup>

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46 Recommendation from Uganda Youth Dialogue

## To donor countries

### 12. Increase the funding available for youth-led initiatives

- Offer **technical and financial support** to community-based and refugee youth-led development projects rooted in the communities.
- Transparently communicate **funding opportunities** for refugee-led initiatives and organisations to ensure youth leaders and youth volunteers affected by forced displacement remain motivated to develop and implement community-specific actions plans.
- Link financial support with **mentorship and training** to strengthen the competencies of youth leaders and volunteers and consider paying staff positions and cover operational costs adequately.
- Support **refugee-led initiatives in camps**, such as the Rohingya Women Development Forum, Rohingya Youth Association in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where opportunities are particularly limited.<sup>47</sup>

### 13. Provide resources for sustainable youth programmes

- Provide significant resources to support **holistic and effective youth programmes** designed and implemented with and for forcibly displaced youth and host community youth. With holistic we mean that youth programmes respond to the challenges we face in terms of education, professional training, transition to the labour market, access to the internet and relevant information, recreational and creative activities as well as participatory and leadership opportunities.

## More insights from youth affected by forced displacement:

- Durable Solutions Platform, Danish Refugee Council and Jordan River Foundation. December 2021. [Young People's Voices on Education and Employment: Policy Brief](#). Key Findings from a National Survey of Youth in Jordan.
- Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, Global Refugee Youth Network, Refugee-Led Research Hub. 2021. [Refugee Self-Reliance and the Global Compact on Refugees](#): Unpacking Barriers and Opportunities for Success.
- Women's Refugee Commission, UNHCR, GRYC. September 2016. ["We Believe in Youth" - Global Refugee Youth Consultations Final Report](#).
- UNICEF & the Major Group for Children and Youth, July 2021. [Talent on the Move – Listening to children and young people on the move to unlock their potential](#).

## Technical guidance on meaningful youth participation:

- IASC. 2020. [With us & for us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#), UNICEF and NRC for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, 2020.
- Women's Refugee Commission, UNHCR, GRYC. [Toolkit for Consulting with Youth](#).

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47 Specific, related recommendation from participants from Bangladesh; @WomenRwdf and @RYA\_Rohingya

# CLAIM THE SPACE, FELLOW YOUTH!

## Recommendations to our fellow youth

- ✔ **Build a strong community and act together.** Reach out to fellow refugee youth and host community youth. Identify what binds you and how you can support each other. Discuss challenges, think about solutions and approach allies for support. Make sure you create an open and inclusive group to be able to represent diverse needs and ideas. Reach out to youth in other communities to exchange ideas.
- ✔ **Fight refugee discrimination.** Let us organise ourselves at the national, regional and global levels and change collectively, the narrative about refugees.
- ✔ **Educate yourself about your rights.** Each of us has a responsibility to know our rights and to support others in our communities to know their rights, too.
- ✔ **Approach the refugee leadership.** Our refugee leadership may not represent the voice of young women and men in a way that is needed to address their challenges and work with them. Respectfully bringing up the lack of youth representation in the refugee leadership and offering suggestions for change may be an option to change the status quo, where needed.
- ✔ **Advocate for your opportunities and rights.** If you want a seat at the decision-making, planning and consultation tables then let, those that are in the lead know about it. Reach out to and advocate, for example, with parliamentarians, politicians, policy-makers, refugee leadership, UNHCR, NGOs, implementing partners, schools, host community representatives, and labour unions.
- ✔ **Engage and help strengthen existing refugee youth networks.** We know how important it is to receive information about funding opportunities, scholarships, sponsoring for workshop or conference participation and we know how often the information is lost. That is why we need strong networks. In these networks, we need to share information and our initiatives and projects to inspire other youth to engage actively in the development of their communities. Help strengthen existing networks, create links where they are missing, improve our ways of communication (e.g., national, regional sub-groups, language groups, etc.) and make sure information arrives where it is needed. We need to seek support from allies to strengthen our networking and information-sharing activities.
- ✔ **Share what you know and train others.** Share the knowledge and skills you have. You can reinforce the skills of other young men and women in your community, such as in basic computer literacy, finance and accounting, and countless other areas.
- ✔ **Raise awareness in the host community.** As a young person, you may be more flexible, learn the language faster and be able to get in touch with the host community youth more easily. Visit schools, community and religious centres and spaces to discuss refugee issues and how refugees and the host community can work together and help each other. For instance, regarding agriculture or local climate adaptation activities.
- ✔ **Engage parents.** Parents are not always aware of the issues young people have to deal with. Engaging them in these discussions on rights, participation, leadership and representation is important.<sup>48</sup>
- ✔ **Reach out to refugees who have successfully integrated.** All persons who have experienced forced displacement should be asked to show solidarity and support young people to be engaged and represented.

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48 Recommendation from Bangladesh

# READY TO DISCUSS NEXT STEPS?

Are you interested in further building an alliance in support of meaningful youth participation in the GRF processes, specifically between now and the GRF in 2023? Then please write to the following three persons:

- **Foni Joyce Vuni**, GRYN Coordinator, [fonivuni35@gmail.com](mailto:fonivuni35@gmail.com)
- **Jakob Illemann Myschetzky**, Advisor on Youth in Displacement, Danish Refugee Council, [jakob.myschetzky@drc.ngo](mailto:jakob.myschetzky@drc.ngo)
- **Germán Robles Osuna**, Youth Advisor, UNHCR, [roblesos@unhcr.org](mailto:roblesos@unhcr.org)

## Co-Facilitating Youth Networks

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## Co-Convening Partners

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