

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
17 – 19 JUNE 2014 - International Conference Center Geneva

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Protection of adolescents and youth

Tuesday 17 June 2014, 16h45 – 18h30 - Room 4

Promoting leadership, engagement and participation of displaced adolescents and youth in humanitarian situations

The unique capacities and needs of displaced adolescents and youth are often overlooked in humanitarian situations. Few humanitarian organizations have programmes specifically targeted at young people and there is often limited funding.

These young people are at a critical juncture in their lives as they transition from childhood into adulthood. Whilst internationally adolescence and youth are often categorised through assigned age ranges, in many contexts movement from one stage to the next is facilitated by a change in circumstance, such as marriage or leaving the parental home. This means that for some young people this transition is delayed or completely halted by the experience of displacement.

Although young people can be perceived as a threat to stability and security (especially males) or as vulnerable victims (females), displacement often forces them to take on new roles and responsibilities that ensure their own, and their families' basic needs are met. These new roles may put them at risk, for example girls and young women are often at an increased risk of harmful coping strategies such as survival sex and early marriage, while boys and young men may face an increased risk of forced military recruitment and exploitation in the labour market. The reality of course is that these risks are not mutually exclusive, as girls and young women are all too often often caught up with armed groups and equally exploited in the labour market. Despite this adversity, and often against the odds, young people consistently demonstrate great resilience in challenging situations, finding the ability to adapt and exercise agency.

Individually and as part of groups young people display unique talents, utilising skills and resources which – if effectively nurtured and channelled – can assist them not only in their own transition to adulthood, but also to make considerable contributions to their communities, and to challenging situations such as a humanitarian response. Without specialised programmes and the kind of targeted support that younger children receive, the investment that is made in yesterday's children, today's young people and tomorrow's

adults is at risk of stalling, with talents and skills wasted and a generation of young people lost.

This session “Promoting leadership, engagement and participation of displaced adolescents and youth in humanitarian situations” will hear from three young refugee leaders who will demonstrate that young people can achieve exceptional things despite the adversity of forced displacement.

The session will provide a platform for the young speakers to relate their personal stories and to discuss their thoughts on how humanitarian organisations can better promote leadership, the engagement and participation of young displaced people in their work. The session will also give participants the opportunity to discuss in greater detail the following questions:

- How can humanitarian organizations better engage with youth and adolescents in humanitarian situations?
How do young people think that humanitarian organizations can better engage with them?
- How can humanitarian organizations provide meaningful opportunities for the participation of youth and adolescents in the planning, design, running and evaluation of humanitarian programmes?
How do young people think that humanitarian organizations can provide meaningful opportunities for youth and adolescent participation?
- How can humanitarian organizations better promote leadership opportunities for youth and adolescents in the design, planning, running and evaluation of humanitarian programmes?