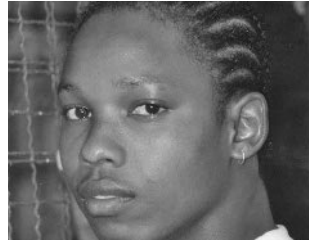


Section 1: Introduction





UNHCR and Refugee Youth

World Refugee Day 2003 is dedicated to refugee youth. Its purpose is to bring to the forefront of everyone's consciousness the existence of young refugees, their needs, and above all, their strengths and capacities to help themselves and their communities. **UNHCR and its partners aim to provide refugee youth with a sense of their value and self-worth, and to enable young refugees to express their resilience, creativity, entrepreneurship and courage.**



© Refugee Education Trust

Sources:

- Save the Children Federation USA (1996) Promoting Psychosocial Well-being among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches, Working Paper No 1. ISCA, Geneva
- UNHCR (1997) Evaluation of UNHCR's Efforts on behalf of Children and Adolescents. UNHCR Inspection and Evaluation Service, Geneva
- J. Lowicki (2000) Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict. Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York
- M. Sommers (2001) Youth: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies: A Field Guide. Save the Children, Washington DC
- UNHCR Mid-Year Progress Report 2002. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Summary Note on UNHCR's Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children. UNHCR, Geneva
- Valid International (2002) Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children: An Independent Evaluation of the Impact of UNHCR's Activities. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, Geneva

Who are refugee youth?

Definitions of the concept of 'youth' vary according to culture. Despite those cultural differences, the term refers broadly to a stage of psychological and social development between childhood and adulthood, a time of life stretching from puberty to the acceptance of family responsibilities. For the purposes of this World Refugee Day Information Kit, it is suggested that 'youth' is described as all people between the ages of 13 and 25. This definition, which is in line with the approach of some of UNHCR's major partners, including Save the Children, is recommended as a starting point. Each country programme celebrating World Refugee Day should define youth according to the cultural context in which it operates. The age range may be revised upwards, downwards, or both, according to how the community and young people themselves perceive the concept.

How many are there?

There are just under 20 million people worldwide who are of concern to UNHCR. Out of this total, UNHCR and its partners assist an estimated 7.7 million children and adolescents under the age of 18. Refugee children and adolescents under the age of 18 make up 45% of the world's refugee population. Young people between the ages of 12 and 24 represent approximately 35% of the world's population of refugees.

The needs and strengths of refugee youth

Complex emergencies involving massive human rights violations, ethnic and religious conflicts, civil wars and failed states too often mean that children and adolescents are targeted in armed conflict, as well as involved as fighters. The human costs are often high. Adolescence is a formative period that shapes adulthood. Unmet nutritional and health needs can permanently affect the cognitive and physical development of children and adolescents. If young people are not adequately protected and offered ample opportunities to learn skills required to live productive, independent lives, they are likely to contribute to the next round of conflict.

In many instances, while refugee children benefit from special programming initiatives by UNHCR and its partners, the particular needs of youth may be overlooked. Their needs overlap with those of adults, but they also encounter distinct protection and assistance problems that are often ignored. When they do receive adequate assistance, it can help prevent protection problems such as recruitment by armed groups, sexual exploitation and abuse, forced labour and

family separation. While all refugees may be susceptible to such ill-treatment, young people experience these abuses more frequently and more intensely.

Although young people suffer greatly, they also show great resilience as they actively cope with their circumstances. They are creative, energetic and important agents for constructive change among their peers and within their communities. Young people have a right and need to participate in decisions that affect them, and their involvement increases the likelihood that interventions planned for them will be accepted and effective. Adults must often be encouraged to support young people's leadership. Men and boys in particular may also need to be sensitised to the issues facing women and girls, to promote gender equality and the full involvement of women and girls in community action.



UNHCR / B.O. Belgrade



UNHCR / R. Chalasani



UNHCR / N. Behring-Chisholm



UNHCR / P. Smith

How are refugee youth legally protected? Youth is not a concept that fits neatly into the categories established in international humanitarian and refugee law. UNHCR explicitly recognises the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and its 2000 Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and 2000 Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. These legal instruments together constitute an important framework for UNHCR's actions relating to the protection of, assistance to, and the search for durable solutions for refugee youth. National governments have the primary responsibility for protecting and ensuring the rights of all children without discrimination, including refugee children. Young people aged less than 18 are considered as children in law (unless majority is attained earlier under national law) and are thus covered by the provisions of the CRC, which does not apply to youth aged 18 and over.

UNHCR has translated those legal provisions into strong policies and guidelines on the protection and care of refugee children and young people under the age of 18. Its Policy on Refugee Children (1993) and Refugee Children: Guidelines on the Protection and Care (1994) provide the overall protection and assistance framework for meeting their needs.

In 1997, in collaboration with Save the Children Alliance, UNHCR initiated [Action for the Rights of Children \(ARC\)](#), a rights-based inter-agency training programme. This programme aims to increase the capacity of UNHCR, government and NGO staff to protect and assist children and adolescents of concern to UNHCR, beginning at the onset of emergencies and continuing right through until durable solutions are found. The programme is implemented in field operations through trainers' workshops, with the objective of establishing regional resource teams to address critical issues affecting children and adolescents. UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) joined the initiative in 1999. ARC co-ordination is handled by the Geneva office of Save the Children Alliance.

(Refer to the [Resource Sheet](#) on ARC for further information).

Contacts

UNHCR Focal Points

Ms. Christina Linner
Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Children
E-mail: Linner@unhcr.org

Ms. Pamela Baxter
Peace Education Co-ordinator
E-mail: Baxter@unhcr.org

Mr. Claude Marshall
Refugee Sport Programme Co-ordinator
E-mail: Marshalc@unhcr.org

Mr. Paul Spiegel
Senior Technical Officer (HIV/AIDS)
E-mail: Spiegel@unhcr.org

Ms. Ana Grace Cabrera
Team Leader SGBV Guidelines
E-mail: Cabrera@unhcr.org

Partners involved in youth programmes

Mr. David Nosworthy
ARC Project Coordinator
Save the Children Alliance
E-mail: david@savethechildren.ch

Mr. Jan Van Erps
Executive Director
Refugee Education Trust
E-mail: Vanerps@unhcr.org

Bibliography

- J. Lowicki (2000) Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict. Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York
- Mona Macksoud (2000) Helping Children Cope with the Stresses of War. UNICEF, New York
- Refugee Education Trust (2002) Post-Primary Education for Refugee and Displaced Children: Access, Quality, Equity: Activity Report May 2001-2002. RET, Geneva
- Save the Children Federation USA (1996) Promoting Psychosocial Well-being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches, Working Paper No 1. ISCA, Geneva
- M. Sommers (2001) Youth: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies: A Field Guide. Save the Children, Washington DC
- UNHCR (1994) Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (1996) Working with Unaccompanied Children: A Community-based Approach. UNHCR Community Services Unit, Geneva
- UNHCR/WHO (1996) Mental Health of Refugees. UNHCR/WHO, Geneva.
- UNHCR (1997) Evaluation of UNHCR's Efforts on behalf of Children and Adolescents. UNHCR Inspection and Evaluation Service, Geneva
- UNHCR (2001) HIV/AIDS Education for Refugee Youth: The Window of Hope. UNHCR Education Unit, Geneva
- UNHCR (2001) UNHCR Peace Education Programme. UNHCR, Nairobi
- UNHCR (2002) Mid-Year Progress Report 2002. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Peace Education Programme in Dadaab and Kakuma: Evaluation Summary. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Refugees By Number. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Statistical Yearbook 2001. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Summary Note on UNHCR's Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Work with Young Refugees to Address Their Reproductive Needs: It's Their Right and Our Duty. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2003) Agenda for Protection. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR/International Save the Children (2001) Action for the Rights of Children. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNICEF (2002) Birth Registration Right From the Start. UNICEF, Florence
- Valid International (2002) Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children: An Independent Evaluation of the Impact of UNHCR's Activities. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, Geneva
- Wendy Ayotte (2000) Statement of Good Practice, 2nd Edition October 2000. SCEP, Copenhagen

World Refugee Day 2003

Refugee Youth: Building the Future

Information Kit

Published by:
UNHCR
Public Affairs Unit

P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

HQPA00@UNHCR.ORG

Editor:
Elisabeth Nolet

Co-ordinator:
Annalisa Montecalvo

Written by:
Betty Talbot

Front cover:
Oil painting "Fraternité" 2002 by Kosal, Cambodian refugee

Graphic design studio:
Quim Martell
qmartell@hotmail.com

