

# Investing in Girls: Building Agency and Social Capital in Displaced Adolescent Girls

## Project Overview

### Background

Today there are more adolescents and young adults than at any time in history, and the total global population of girls ages 10 to 16—the largest ever—is expected to peak in the next decade. Hundreds of millions of these girls are living in crisis-affected contexts. Yet, adolescent girls have been largely absent from international humanitarian agendas. They are often mistakenly classified with young children or adults, even though their needs are very different.

Girls are less likely to be in school than boys and are often married by the time they are 16. Of the world's 130 million out-of-school youth, 70 percent are girls. As a result, girls' employment pros-

pects grow dimmer even as their burdens multiply; girls and women are increasingly responsible for providing for their families in the face of economic crises and humanitarian emergencies.

Whether in their homes or in displaced communities, inequitable social norms make it particularly difficult for adolescent girls to realize their rights to education and decent work and to protect themselves from psychological and bodily harm. Many girls lack opportunities to build the self-confidence and negotiation skills necessary to assert themselves and make decisions critical for their futures. They need social support, knowledge and resources to reduce their vulnerability to early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, exploitative work and physical and sexual assault.

In crisis and post-crisis settings, the risks to girls' well-being, safety and personal development are even greater as their family and peer networks often become severely fragmented. Working with displaced adolescent girls to build their knowledge, resources, decision-making power and social connectedness can help them develop and protect themselves, setting a more positive course for their adult lives.

### About the Project

The Women's Refugee Commission's project "Building Agency and Social Capital in Adolescent Girls" is looking at new ways of building the life skills and social support networks of adolescent girls in crisis and post-crisis settings so they can take more control over their own well-being and safety. "Social capital" refers to the relationships that girls have in their communities; the more they are invested in positive relationships, the better off they will be physically, psychologically, socially and economically.



The project focuses on conflict-affected, displaced girls ages 10–16, a particularly vulnerable and underserved group. The project aims to build the self-confidence of displaced adolescent girls and to enable them to develop better skills in negotiating with boys and men (and older women) on decisions that affect their lives.

Building on our years of experience in promoting economic opportunities for women and youth to lessen their risk of sexual and gender-based violence, the Women's Refugee Commission is applying existing knowledge and developing new and innovative strategies to enable adolescent girls to protect themselves.

The Women's Refugee Commission will analyze and compare innovative programs that work with adolescent girls on building their agency and social capital, and will conduct new field research in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and the United States. We aim to identify the most effective ways for displaced girls to empower themselves to become economically viable and socially secure adults in the years ahead.

## Goal

Improve the lives of displaced adolescent girls by increasing their agency and social capital.

## Objective

Improve practice and policy, and strengthen funding for humanitarian programs reaching adolescent girls (ages 10-16) to prepare them for developing safe, dignified livelihoods.



## Expected Outputs

- Capacity development of community-based organizations and grassroots groups to develop contextually appropriate models and strategies
- Global guidance document on toolkit of strategies and approaches from four country contexts
- Workshops for practitioners, donors and policymakers facilitated on “how to” build displaced girls’ agency and social capital
- Guidance on further research needed.

## Project Duration

July 2011 – June 2014

---

The Women's Refugee Commission advocates for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people, including those seeking asylum—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

