



# DISPLACED YOUTH PROGRAM



WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION

# DISPLACED YOUTH

## AT A GLANCE



### ||| The Issue

- At least 8 million young people (15 to 24 years old) are currently displaced by armed conflict and war.
- Many have never been to school and have few opportunities to learn skills that will allow them to make a living.
- Young people are crucial actors in the rebuilding of peaceful, more tolerant communities when conflict ends.

### ||| Our Response

- Researched, in partnership with young people in Kosovo, northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, the unique challenges facing young people during conflict and offered youth-driven solutions.
- Increased international attention and support for quality education during an emergency, spurred by our landmark study, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*.
- Launched the Displaced Youth Initiative, a global research and advocacy project, which aims to increase the scope, scale and effectiveness of non-formal education, including skills building and job training—preparing young people for life during and after displacement.

### ||| Next Steps

- Study the issue of displaced young people through field assessments in five countries.
- Test promising practices in pilot projects to determine models for meeting the educational needs of young people that can be replicated and taken to scale.
- Develop and promote a resource kit for humanitarian workers, policy makers and donors to address displaced young people's educational and job training needs.

# Tapping the potential of displaced youth

## Background

Nearly 45 million people are currently displaced by armed conflict and human rights abuses. At least 8 million are young people between the ages of 15 and 24. They are either refugees who have fled to another country or internally displaced people, displaced within their own countries. Most of these young people are not in school; many have never been to school. The majority are unemployed. Sadly, their displacement is not for a semester or year; since the majority of refugees are in long-term situations that last an average of 17 years, many displaced children and young people spend their entire childhood and youth in these settings.

During this time, the majority will have very few opportunities to learn any productive skills that will allow them to make a living. These skills are critical for their protection and development—and essential for the future of their communities and countries.

Without opportunities to study and work, young people are left idle and frustrated. They may be involved in dangerous activities that put them and their communities at risk. Displaced young people, both boys and girls, are vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups. They may resort to dangerous jobs,



criminal activity and drug and alcohol abuse. Girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.

However, despite all the challenges, young people show tremendous resilience and ability to survive. They can be crucial actors in the rebuilding of peaceful, more tolerant communities when conflict ends. If they and their families resettle in a third country, young people are often the link between their families and the new host community. More attention must be paid to their unique needs.

## Recognizing the Potential of Young People

Between 1999 and 2005, the Women's Refugee Commission undertook research with displaced adolescents in Kosovo, northern Uganda and Sierra Leone. Our research findings demonstrated that young people have few opportunities for secondary and non-formal schooling or for developing skills that will enable them to get jobs. Funding for programs explicitly targeting this group, especially those who are not in school or have never been to school, remains scarce and too often focuses on addressing young people as problems, not as essential resources with energy and creative solutions. These findings led us to begin our current Displaced Youth





Initiative, a multi-year global research and advocacy project that seeks to increase the scope, scale and effectiveness of educational services and programs targeting displaced young people. The initiative focuses on programs that include practical education, employment readiness and life skills components. Unlike most current programming for young people that addresses immediate needs, our project also focuses on the future of young people and the skills they need for a successful adulthood.

The initiative works to ensure that programs are developed that build young people's social, cognitive and economic capacities by equipping them with the tools and skills they need to rebuild their lives, whether they return to their country of origin, settle in the community where they are living as refugees or resettle in a third country.

### Next Steps

Little information on the needs of displaced young people or attempts to address these

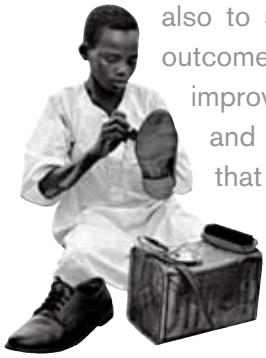
needs has been systematically collected, documented or shared. To address this we will conduct research, develop tools and undertake advocacy.

**Research:** By conducting field assessments in five countries (Jordan, Liberia, Sudan, northern Uganda and on the Thai/Burma border), we will document the needs of young people as they themselves define them, analyze existing formal and non-formal education programs and identify promising program models that can be replicated in other settings.

We will support pilot projects to test innovative approaches and to determine how promising practices may work in different contexts before we recommend large-scale replication. We will partner with international and local organizations to test approaches in urban, camp and rural settings in different phases of a conflict (emergency, long-term and following return to country of origin). The focus will be on preparing young people for life while they are displaced, as well as looking ahead at “durable solutions”—that is, return local integration or resettlement.

**Tools:** Informed by feedback from the pilot projects, research and assessments, we will develop a resource kit for humanitarian workers, policy makers and donors. The resource kit will include information on the extent of need; innovative interventions; guidelines and tools for program design and implementation; and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It will give people who work directly with refugees an easy-to-use “how-to” guide for program design and provide donors with funding guidance. Our intention is not only to improve practice in the immediate term, but





also to suggest standards for evaluating outcomes going forward. This will both improve programming for young people and yield far more rigorous data, so that we can more accurately measure progress. The *Market Assessment Toolkit for Vocational Training Providers and Youth*, developed with Columbia University in 2008 in northern Uganda, is an example of tools that will be included in such a resource kit.

**Advocacy:** Based on our research and findings from the assessments and pilot projects, we will recommend ways to strengthen programs and advocate with donors, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations to use existing funds more effectively and to expand effective programs so they reach all the displaced young people who need them. As a result, young people will learn to read and write and acquire the skills they need to earn a safe, dignified living and contribute to the peaceful reconstruction of their communities.

Learn more about displaced young people and download reports, toolkits and country assessments at: [www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/protection/youth](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/protection/youth)



“ I care for my sister and brother. I find food for them; I find money for school fees; I find clothing; I cultivate the land. I do all this by myself. I feel that there are certain things that an adult knows that are above my thinking.”

Pepertue, 18, Rwanda



**OUR MISSION:** Since 1989, the Women's Refugee Commission has advocated vigorously for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and displaced women, children and young people—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

**OUR VISION:** We envision a world in which refugee, internally displaced, returnee and asylum-seeking women, children and young people are safe, healthy and self-reliant, participating in the decisions that affect their lives.

**HOW WE WORK:** Through research and fact-finding field missions, we assess and identify best practices and find solutions on critical issues that include lifesaving reproductive health care, dignified livelihoods for refugees and, in the U.S., fair treatment of women, children and families seeking asylum. On Capitol Hill, at the United Nations and with humanitarian organizations and governments, we push for improvements in refugee policy and practice until measurable, long-term change is realized.

**GET INVOLVED:** Learn about the ways you can help ensure that our far-reaching, life-saving advocacy for women, children and young people continues. To sign up for our action alerts and to make a tax-deductible donation, please go to:

[womensrefugeecommission.org](http://womensrefugeecommission.org)  
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**“We need to teach young people to become providers, not just receivers”**

Nongovernmental organization staff, Thai-Burma border

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