

# Protecting and Empowering Displaced Adolescent Girls

## Background

Twenty million girls in conflict zones are not in school; girls account for only 30 percent of refugees enrolled in secondary school. And 50 percent of victims of sexual violence worldwide are 15 years old or younger.

In communities around the world, it is often 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 negotiating skills they need to assert themselves and make decisions critical for their futures.

In crisis and postcrisis settings, the risks to girls' well-being, safety and personal development are even greater as their family and peer networks of-

ten become severely fragmented. In a humanitarian crisis, whether it's war, famine or a natural disaster, lives are turned upside down. Families are uprooted or torn apart. Access to education declines. Safety and security disappear. In the midst of this chaos, displaced adolescent girls are often overlooked, neglected and vulnerable.

Displaced girls ages 10-16 are more exposed to:

- exploitation and abuse
- sexual and gender-based violence
- early pregnancy
- early and/or forced marriage, often by age 16
- forced labor

For girls to be safe and to have a chance at the future they deserve, they need security and education, health care, social support and



adult mentors. And they need opportunities to develop the confidence, critical thinking and support networks needed to make good decisions for their lives. 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.



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## About the Project

The Women's Refugee Commission's Protecting and Empowering Displaced Girls project illuminates and addresses the critical needs of adolescent girls in crisis settings. Its aim is to ensure that they stay safe and make positive changes in their lives. We are working in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda with girls, and the groups that support them, to identify and promote ways that girls can protect themselves, access health care, complete school, build leadership skills and be seen as a valued part of their families and communities.

The project aims to help displaced girls develop the skills they need to protect themselves from exploitation and abuse, forced marriage, early pregnancy, physical and sexual assault, and other traumas widespread in crisis settings. We learn from the girls themselves what works and what doesn't and then we partner with local organi-

zations to design unique projects to meet these needs.

Local partners will provide safe spaces and help displaced adolescent girls build skills through workshops, peer support networks and mentorship. The project will also engage and educate families and community leaders about the importance of protecting and empowering adolescent girls.

As a result of our work, displaced girls will learn how to live safer lives and, with the support of adults, build brighter futures.

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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.

