

Shadows to Spotlight: Making Adolescents Visible in Already-Collected Data

The purpose of this brief is to facilitate dialogue and catalyze action that can help to ensure the humanitarian community is leveraging existing sex- and age-disaggregated data (SADD) to benefit adolescents, especially girls. Specifically, this paper identifies opportunities to (a) leverage and utilize existing SADD for improved analysis, visualization, and dissemination, and (b) go one step further, reviewing and tweaking assessment and registration forms to promote the inclusion of, accountability to and services for the full diversity of adolescent girls and boys.

The brief is informed by interviews with humanitarian practitioners, by a scan of existing UNHCR data, and by field work in more than ten crisis-affected countries. The recommendations are shaped by the Women's Refugee Commission's ongoing collaborations with several humanitarian actors, including members of the Girls in Emergencies Collaborative,¹ the Inter-Agency Working Group for Reproductive Health in Crises, UN agencies, cluster working groups, and the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

What is the current situation?

The humanitarian community has affirmed the importance of SADD. The collection and use of disaggregated data are essential to the effective design, implementation, and monitoring of humanitarian response. The push for SADD in donor reporting requirements reflects the consensus that SADD is an essential first-step in determining whether humanitarian response is inclusive, equitable and accountable.

Despite some progress, however, humanitarian assessments find that SADD are not adequately, if at all, collected, shared, and used to inform humanitarian response.^{2,3,4} Research has noted that quality data collection and use varies widely across contexts, and even across sectors.⁵ Humanitarian action is reportedly driven more by anecdote and assumptions than by context-specific SADD.⁶ Additionally, in locations where SADD are collected, its use in decision-making during a response is limited. SADD collection often sits within the purview of monitoring and evaluation. As a result, such data are most frequently linked to post-implementation tasks such as donor reporting, rather than incorporated into program decision-making.

1 Girls in Emergencies Collaborative members include: Equality Now, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Near East Foundation, Population Council, Plan International and the Women's Refugee Commission. The Girls in Emergencies Collaborative Statement and Action Agenda is available at: <https://www.annalsofglobalhealth.org/article/S2214-9996%2815%2901220-5/abstract/>

2 DARA. (2011). The Humanitarian Response Index 2011: Addressing the Gender Challenge. Madrid: DARA International.

3 Mazurana, D., Benelli, P., Walker, P. (2013). How sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender and generational analyses can improve humanitarian response. *Disasters*. Jul;37 Suppl 1:S68-82.

4 Mazurana, D., Benelli, P., Gupta, H. & Walker, P. (2011). *Sex and Age Matter: Improving Humanitarian Response in Emergencies*. Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.

5 Eklund, L., Tellier S. (2012). Gender and international crisis response: do we have the data, and does it matter? *Disasters*. Oct 36(4):589-608

6 Secondary SADD or primary SADD collection (and use).

Limited use of sex and age disaggregated data in decision-making has significant consequences. The number of adolescents in any specific response is not always known, or the estimate rarely informs decisions made by implementing agencies. Yet, based on a WRC scan of select UNHCR data included in the last two Global Trends Reports, age specific data were collected across 240 locations in seven crisis-affected countries. In 2016 alone, the scan identified more than two million adolescents in urban, camp and informal settings. On average approximately one in six individuals was an adolescent between the age of 12 and 17 years.⁷ And there is wide variation across contexts. In some settings, adolescents made up more than 25% of the displaced population—a substantial variation. When data are lacking on the sex and age of these adolescents, resources are not allocated at appropriate levels to their needs. As a result, humanitarian response is unlikely to prioritize the actions that can reduce and respond equitably to adolescents' specific health and protection needs, nor leverage their strengths, voice and resilience.^{8,9}

Why make SADD information on adolescents more accessible?

Without a baseline estimate of the total number of adolescent girls and boys within a crisis-affected area, it is difficult to assess how effectively humanitarian programs are reaching them. Reporting on the "numbers of girls and boys reached" or documenting the "percent of program participants who are girls" are common practice, but alone are insufficient. Denominators are essential to the interpretation of data. For example: is a response that reaches 1000 girls in a community where 5000 girls live, versus a community where 2000 girls live, equally effective? Additionally, what if a humanitarian intervention reaches 200 adolescent girls in a camp where baseline estimates suggest 250 girls live? A smaller number of girls reached may not necessarily reflect response effectiveness.

To make more informed determinations about whether humanitarian responses are equitably supporting adolescents, a baseline snapshot of the total number of adolescents ("the denominator") is needed (See Visual 1 below). This baseline information shapes the design of context-specific humanitarian action that advances adolescent inclusion, engagement and participation.

Visual 1 | Which response is more effective?¹⁰ Difficult to answer this question without the denominator.

Numerator	1000 Number of Adolescent Girls Reached in Area #1	1000 Number of Adolescent Girls Reached in Area #2	200 Number of Adolescent Girls Reached in Area #3
	5000 Total Number of Adolescent Girls living in Area #1	2000 Total Number of Adolescent Girls living in Area #2	250 Total Number of Adolescent Girls living in Area #2
Denominator			

⁷ This age range is how UNHCR data are currently collected/presented. WRC recognizes that how to classify and report age ranges is an ongoing conversation with the humanitarian community, but this report – in its content and recommendations – is not focused on this wider discussion.

⁸ Eklund, L., Tellier S. (2012). Gender and international crisis response: do we have the data, and does it matter? Disasters. Oct 36(4):589-608

⁹ Robles, O., Rastogi, S., Katz, R. (2014). I'm Here : Adolescent Girls in Emergencies. New York: Women's Refugee Commission.

¹⁰ Visual modified from training materials used during WRC's I'm Here Implementation training; training materials and session available in I'm Here Implementation Playbook (Spring 2018).

Opportunities to better visualize and act upon existing SADD

It is possible to generate a more accurate snapshot of the total number of adolescents. Several coordinating agencies have been championing the collection and use of SADD. Existing information systems can therefore be utilized and/or adjusted to better incorporate already-available or collected information for meaningful presentation and use.

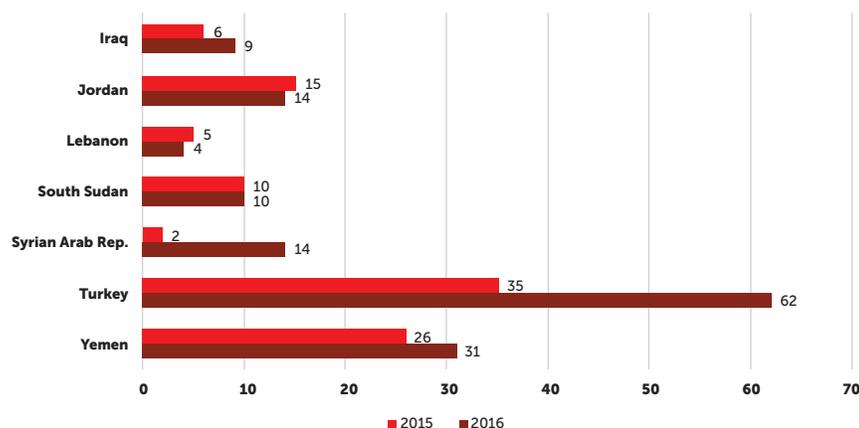
WRC has identified opportunities to modify how already-collected information is framed, visualized, and disseminated with a particular focus on promoting equitable programming for adolescent girls and boys. For example, the UNHCR Global Trends Report—a valuable resource for policy dialogue and humanitarian action—currently collapses adolescent girls and boys into categories that mask them. The 2017 report correctly notes that “nearly half of all refugees were women or girls and about half were children.” The statement—while sufficient in scale and scope to compel greater humanitarian investment and action—does not shine the necessary spotlight on adolescent girls and boys. It dispatches adolescents to the shadows, where they remain invisible in humanitarian policy frameworks and not adequately prioritized in humanitarian programming.^{11,12}

Within UNHCR’s existing data, however, is a wealth of actionable information, including figures that could help humanitarians to estimate the number of adolescents, by sex, registered at specific locations. Shining a spotlight on adolescents does not require wholesale shifts to existing SADD; it’s about modifying how we utilize and present what is already collected and expanding where and how such information can be accessed. Several agencies that collect SADD can also tweak how they report SADD information.

Two key actions include: (a) refraining from collapsing adolescents into categories that mask them i.e., 5-18 years of age, or under 18, and (b) presenting SADD information on adolescents at a smaller geographic scale, where possible. Given that adolescent girls’ movement is often restricted to small geographic areas, it would be beneficial to avoid collapsing data into large geographic units. These two modifications to existing data can help inform efforts to mainstreaming adolescents into humanitarian operations and to design targeted and inclusive adolescent programming.

Settings Scanned, per county & year (n=243)

Source: UNHCR Global Trends Reports, Annexed Raw Data Files



¹¹ Approximately 80% of the key-informants consulted by the WRC referenced that limited information on the numbers of adolescent girls and boys in humanitarian settings was a barrier for advocacy and programming. To date, WRC interviewed 27 humanitarian practitioners.

¹² The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) does not systematically capture SADD information because (a) in many contexts such information is not collected and (b) when it is collected, the information is not standardized.

Opportunities for agencies that coordinate data collection and dissemination in humanitarian settings—e.g., UNHCR, WHO, IOM, UNOCHA—include:

- Ensuring that subsequent global reports shine a light on adolescent girls and boys, reporting on their numbers where such information can be safely disseminated.
- Visualizing and disseminating existing SADD for adolescents, shifting away from collapsing adolescents into larger default categories e.g., 'under 18 years' or 5-18 years.¹³
- Ensuring that "Humanitarian Dashboards" and other centralized repositories of information reflect these changes.

Leading agencies could align these shifts with a complementary effort to facilitate much-needed dialogue about how to proactively respond to adolescent girls' restricted mobility, gender-specific risks and unique capacities. At a policy level, this greater coordination related to SADD dissemination and use is essential. Location-specific information can help promote the meaningful inclusion of adolescents in operational decision-making, as well as drive adequate resources towards their protection, health and wellbeing, including funds for life-saving, age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence prevention and response services.

Opportunities to tweak data collection forms—informing equity, inclusion & accountability

Adolescence is a time of immense physical, emotional and cognitive growth, and programs should also consider the immense variation that exists within a population termed "adolescents." The WRC has worked with partners to examine what can feasibly be collected during assessments and program designs so that humanitarian action is more inclusive and accountable to adolescents, given the diversity of gender-based experiences, risks, and capacities among them..

In addition to making adolescents more visible in already-collection information, WRC believes key actors can, deliberately and over time, go one step further. For example, the WRC advocates for the collection of "SADD-Plus" information to ensure the implementation of more nuanced programming, as soon as implementing partners begin to design tailored programs for adolescent girls and boys. In addition to capturing sex and age, SADD-Plus refers to top-line information about adolescent subpopulations that enable humanitarians to reach, engage and be inclusive of the most isolated and vulnerable adolescents—information such as adolescent girls' and boys' school status, marital status, parental status, accompaniment status, labor practices and disability status.

Based on its technical assistance work in ten crisis-affected countries, WRC believes coordinating bodies could leverage field learning to facilitate the design of more inclusive, gender-responsive programming for adolescents. In partnership with several members of the Girls in Emergencies Collaborative—namely Mercy Corps, Population Council, GirlSPARKS and the Danish Refugee Council—WRC has refined an adaptable set of steps and tools that help humanitarian agencies to utilize SADD-Plus information.¹⁴

¹³ Coordinating with other donors and partners to build consensus around the age-reporting categories is also important. For the purposes of these recommendations, the brief only focuses on identifying the "easy wins" related to how existing secondary SADD are routinely presented.

¹⁴ Steps and tools refer to *I'm Here* Approach. The *I'm Here* Approach, inclusive the *Girl Roster*™ developed by the Population Council and modified by WRC and its partners for use in humanitarian settings, is designed to help humanitarian organizations generate these snapshots of actionable information for timely program decision-making. To date, *I'm Here* implementation has been carried out in more than 30 crisis-affected areas in ten countries. The steps and tool are not necessarily feasible for use in every humanitarian context and require adaptations for safe, meaningful and ethical use across contexts. The *I'm Here* Approach, inclusive the *Girl Roster*™ developed by the Population Council and modified by WRC and its partners for use in humanitarian settings, is designed to help humanitarian organizations generate these snapshots of actionable information for timely program decision-making.

To be inclusive of adolescents' diverse, gender-specific needs, risks, and capacities, humanitarian actors must consciously prioritize intentional inclusion. Proactive measures make it possible to reach not only the 11-year-old girl who attends school, but also the 15-year-old girl who is married and a mother, the 16-year-old girl who is out-of-school and caring for her siblings, and the disabled 17 year-old-girl. These girls have different capacities and risks. The brothers of adolescent girls are also not a uniformly privileged group. As a result, WRC promotes a gender-synchronized approach to generating actionable information and advocates for equity in resource allocation and in program decision-making.

Opportunities for agencies that coordinate data collection and dissemination in humanitarian settings—e.g., UNHCR, WHO, IOM, UNOCHA—to leverage field learning include:

- Cross-referencing their data collection forms with existing field-tested, adolescent-focused information systems that collect the SADD-Plus information, including SADD-Plus information collected via WRC's *I'm Here Approach: Steps and Tools to Reach Adolescent Girls*.¹⁵
- Making modifications to data collection and registration forms — estimate the numbers of young and older adolescent girls and boys, generating actionable information.

The WRC acknowledges that dialogue around humanitarian data collection, analysis, and use is a testy subject. While critical and relevant, considerations around data quality, data management, and access to data can derail focused debate about how to change current practice in ways that promote quality, security and decision-making. For several years, key stakeholders have acknowledged the need to do better and made incremental progress.

With respect adolescents—who are now displaced in greater numbers than ever before—the WRC believes focused dialogue is possible. Collaborating with several partners—current and new—there is a timely opportunity to incubate dialogue and learning that result in concrete, feasible changes that shine a brighter light on adolescents.



¹⁵ The *I'm Here Approach*, inclusive the Girl Roster™ developed by the Population Council and modified by WRC and partners for use in humanitarian settings, has been implemented with specific humanitarian organizations. To date, the steps and tools have been carried out in more than 30 crisis-affected areas in 10 countries.