Meaningfully Engaging Youth in the Governance of the Global Refugee System

Bushra Ebadi

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About the Series

World Refugee Council research papers are policy documents commissioned by the Council from world-renowned experts to help inform the World Refugee Council and its final recommendations. The measures and concepts in these documents do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Refugee Council.

About the Author

Bushra Ebadi is a social innovator focused on designing sustainable, innovative solutions to complex global challenges using her multidisciplinary background and skills in design and systems thinking, policy analysis and mixed methods research. She has co-created refugee housing and integration strategies for arrival cities around the world, including Toronto and Paris. Bushra has conducted research and developed strategies on meaningful youth engagement and intergenerational dialogue and partnerships; women in leadership in the United Nations; advancing women's interests in Afghanistan's peace negotiations; assessing the effectiveness of UN Women's Safe Cities for Women and Girls program; and gender mainstreaming within refugee policy making and governance, multilateral decision-making and governance bodies, and in peace, security, and development policies.

Bushra is a youth ambassador for North America and Europe for the Global Alliance on Partnerships for Media and Information Literacy. She currently serves as an executive member and youth adviser for the Canadian Commission for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. She recently supported the World Refugee Council in developing recommendations to transform the global refugee and internal displacement systems as a Global Security & Politics Program research associate with the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

Bushra holds a master's degree in global affairs from the University of Toronto, Munk School of Global Affairs, and a joint honours B.A. in political science and philosophy, with a double minor in French and management, from McGill University.

Executive Summary

The meaningful engagement in global governance of youth — in particular displaced youth, including both refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) — is crucial to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of political, economic and social systems, as well as to realizing durable peace and security. Young people aged 15 to 35 comprise one-third of the world's population yet are largely absent from decision-making fora and as such are unaccounted for in policy making, programming and laws. The disenfranchisement of displaced youth is a particular problem, because it further marginalizes young people who have already experienced persecution and been forcibly displaced. While their individual realities vary depending on geographic location, gender and sexual identity, economic status and individual situation, youth share the experience of being marginalized within existing legal, political, economic and social systems globally.

Beyond consultations and youth fora on migration and refugees, the United Nations' Global Compact processes have not successfully mainstreamed the interests of youth or developed mechanisms for effectively engaging this population. Instead, despite their unique needs and capacities, displaced youth and refugees have largely been tokenized: invited to participate, yet prevented from influencing decisions or the design of structures and institutions, policy and reforms.

The meaningful and continuous engagement of youth (displaced and otherwise) in the governance of the global refugee system is critical for the system's functionality and to ensure that their needs are being met and to address the barriers that impede them from exercising their agency. While programming for and research on refugee youth are sparse, this paper aims to demonstrate the importance of including displaced youth in governance and decision making; to identify key barriers to engagement that displaced youth face; and to highlight effective strategies for engaging youth. Comprehensive financial, legal, social and governance reforms are needed in order to facilitate and support the meaningful engagement of youth in the refugee and IDP systems. Without these reforms and partnerships between youth and other diverse stakeholders, it will be difficult to achieve sustainable solutions for forcibly displaced populations and the communities that host them.

Introduction

Images of displaced and marginalized youth appear in humanitarian and development campaigns, in "feel-good" advertisements and sensationalized news, evoking either pity or fear — pity, for a demographic seen as innocent victims of conflict, corruption, violence and natural disasters; fear, for a demographic often associated with terrorism, gang violence and precariousness. These seemingly conflicting sentiments toward youth exist simultaneously and contribute to the further marginalization of a population already excluded from legal, political, economic and social systems around the world. Refugees and refugee-led or focused organizations are not being systematically and meaningfully engaged as partners in decision making, knowledge creation, program development and policy making, despite efforts by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during the Global Compact for Refugees consultations (Jones 2019).

Refugee and displaced youth face even greater levels of invisibility and marginalization. While data is collected on displaced populations (including refugees and IDPs), very little information is available on the numbers of displaced youth around the world. Existing refugee and displacement research also largely focuses on the mental, psychological, health and educational outcomes of displaced youth. This paper aims to demonstrate gaps in the current literature, while identifying key insights into the experiences of refugee and other displaced youth relating to their engagement in the governance of the system. For the purposes of this paper, Lawrence S. Finkelstein's conceptualization of global governance is used, namely, "overlapping functions performed internationally: information creation and exchange; formulation and promulgation of principles and promotion of consensual knowledge affecting the general international order, regional orders, particular issues on the international agenda, and efforts to influence the domestic rules and behaviour of states; good offices, conciliation, mediation, and compulsory resolution of disputes; regime formation, tending and execution;

adoption of rules, codes, and regulations; allocation of material and program resources; provision of technical assistance and development programs; relief, humanitarian, emergency, and disaster activities; and maintenance of peace and order" (Finkelstein 1995, 170-71).

Meaningful engagement is not a new concept. While it has not been systematically translated into the operations of organizations and broader policy and decision making, Sherry R. Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" (1969) alludes to the idea of meaningful engagement. According to Arnstein, meaningful participation that moves beyond non-participation and tokenism involves a redistribution of power negotiated between citizens and powerholders; shared planning and decision-making responsibilities; having the power to assure accountability of programs; and direct involvement in planning, policy making and program management (ibid.).

Based on a review of literature on meaningful engagement in governance and policy making, the following have been identified as conditions for meaningful youth engagement:

→ being aware of opportunities to participate in consultations or other activities of engagement;

→ providing a safe and inclusive space where diverse individuals' views, insights and contributions are sought;

→ making connections and then developing long-term working relationships among youth, institutions and political systems to work together on issues to achieve shared, mutually agreed objectives;

→ having a sense of agency such that youth feel empowered and effective, with real opportunities to contribute through sharing insights and developing processes, programs and initiatives;

→ deliberating collaboratively, with youth, policy makers, decision makers and other stakeholders, and collectively discussing challenges and potential interventions and solutions;

→ exercising agency, through opportunities to make a difference and realize change;

→ converting inputs and contributions into tangible or measurable impacts on issues or decisions; and

→ communicating how inputs and contributions resulted in impacts. (McCoy and Scully 2002, 118, 127; Lundy 2007, 933, 935; Wilton 2019)

This paper suggests there are six key barriers to the meaningful engagement of displaced (and other) youth in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems:

→ the experience of displacement in and of itself;

→ broken family ties;

→ perceptions of youth as either victims or criminals;

→ the exclusion of young people from aid and funding priorities and decisions;

→ exclusionary government policies and laws; and

→ the difficulty faced by individuals and organizations to adopt new ways of working that meaningfully engage youth as partners.

The sections below will put forward potential interventions or strategies to mitigate these barriers to effectively engaging displaced youth, proposals that emerge from a review of the existing literature, and insights derived from interviews and consultations:

→ prioritization of youth agency[1] in all policies, programming and initiatives (including education);

→ co-creation and development of spaces conducive to youth engagement at all levels of governance; and

→ investment in intergenerational dialogue and partnerships as a sustainable solution.

No one intervention can address the complex challenges and barriers impeding refugee and other displaced youth from meaningfully engaging in the governance of the system. Improving our understanding of these structural barriers and breaking down stereotypes of displaced youth as

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1 Agency refers to "young people's evolving capacity to act and influence their own life [community and world] and be active and participate" (Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto and Tuominen 2019, 554).

victims or criminals are important first steps to meaningfully engaging youth in decision making; policy and program design; development and implementation; knowledge creation; and the other activities encapsulated in Finkelstein's (1995) definition of global governance. This paper also puts forward actions that are needed in order to bolster research and intersectional understandings of the experiences, capacities and needs of displaced youth. Without this information, the development of policies, programs and so-called solutions will continue to be ill-informed and will continue to fail in centralizing the agency and protection of marginalized displaced populations.

Methodology

This study deployed participatory research methods. An initial desk review of the status and landscape of research relating to refugee youth engagement in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems (including but not limited to the design, development and implementation of laws, institutions, programs and processes) pointed to the scarcity of peer-reviewed research in these areas, as will be discussed in more detail later. Much of the literature focused on psychosocial supports, education as a service provision and the resettlement experiences of young refugees in developed contexts (largely concentrated on experiences in Australia, Canada and the United States). While the past decade has seen an emergence of literature on war-affected and displaced youth, most studies have been informed by psychological and psychiatric perspectives (Chatty 2009, 321-22). Sources relating to psychosocial support, health care, educational enrolment or access, and identity development were excluded, unless they explicitly related to the ability of displaced youth to engage in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems. Primary data sources, including the UNHCR's population data set, the Refugee Convention and organizational youth policies for participating institutions in the refugee system (including the UNHCR) were also consulted in order to better understand existing opportunities for engagement and protections for refugee and other displaced youth, if applicable.

After the initial literature review, the author conducted interviews and/or consultations with nine individuals who either had direct personal experiences of displacement as refugees or were working directly with refugee and other youth to develop solutions for the challenges facing the system. These interviews served as an opportunity to demonstrate the potential contributions young people (in particular, displaced youth) could have in developing and implementing sustainable solutions to the complex challenges facing the system. With their permission, the insights shared by three of the interviewees during these consultations appear in the paper as vignettes.

The author also leveraged personal insights into the engagement of youth in global governance systems, including the development of policies, programs and structures, to inform the design of this research project. These include the author's engagement in events including the 2017 Hult Prize Regional Finals (developing interventions through social enterprises to restore the dignity of refugee populations); the 2017 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Youth Forum (focused on youth engagement in UNESCO's priority areas); the lead-up to the 2018 Global Migration Youth Forum; the 2018 Global Youth Forum at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (identifying/co-creating community- and city-based solutions for refugees and other displaced persons); the 2019 Baku Forum on Intercultural Dialogue; and the 2019 Lisboa+21 World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (during which youth delegates and ministers for youth committed to a renewed declaration on youth policies and programs).[2]

Defining Youth, Refugees and IDPs

The United Nations, "without prejudice to any other definitions made by Member States...defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years."[3] However, when working at a national or

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2   See www.lisboa21.gov.pt/up/ficheiros-bin2_ficheiro_
     en_0320254001567615761-429.pdf.

3   See www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/.

local level, UNESCO adopts the definition of youth used by a member state or regional organization. For example, the African Youth Charter defines youth as "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years" (African Union Commission 2006, 11). The UNHCR utilizes the United Nations' definition of youth (15 to 24 years of age).[4] For the purposes of this paper, youth are defined as persons between the ages of 15 and 35, the most inclusive definition. This definition is especially relevant for refugee youth populations since it aligns with how youth are conceptualized in the countries and regions from which the majority of refugees originate.

According to the UN Refugee Convention and its Protocols, a refugee is any person who has a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR 1967, 14).

According to the "Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement," IDPs "are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border" (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] 1998, Introduction, para. 2).

Since the needs and experiences of refugees and IDPs differ, we can extrapolate that the experiences of refugee and IDP youth also differ. However, while there is little research on the engagement of refugee youth in the governance of the system, research on IDP youth is even more sparse.

A Relevant (and Neglected) Demographic

The UNHCR's population statistics[5] aggregate data on displaced populations in a way that makes it unclear exactly how many displaced persons are youth. In fact, individuals aged 18 to 59 years old are subsumed into one category, making it difficult to tailor policies and funding priorities based on the variance of age within this category. The needs of an 18-year-old displaced person differ from that of a 59-year-old, so the absence of disaggregated data makes effective policy making difficult. The most recent figures on displaced youth available estimate that there were eight million displaced youth[6] between the ages of 15 and 24 in 2010 (Women's Refugee Commission 2010). According to the UNHCR (2011), the total population of displaced persons at the time was 25.2 million people.[7] This means, using the more restrictive definition of youth, that approximately 32 percent of the total displaced population was comprised of youth 15 to 24 years of age. Yet, despite comprising a significant portion of the population of displaced persons around the world, youth remain an invisible population in service/program design, policy making and governance. Commissioning both quantitative and qualitative research on the displaced (refugee, internally displaced, stateless and so forth) youth could contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and interventions to ensure the meaningful engagement of these populations in the governance of the systems within which they are currently seen as passive participants or beneficiaries.

The few studies on displaced youth that do exist show that they have differing needs and capacities compared to displaced children and adults. Both historical and contemporary examples of the unique needs and capacities of displaced youth exist. For instance, Jewish refugee youth settling in Great Britain between 1938 and 1945 were found to have needs that differed from child refugees'; these youth faced bureaucratic hurdles and discrimination in vocational training and found it more difficult to integrate and develop relationships with their counterparts in Great Britain, compared to children (Baumel-Schwartz 2012, 125, 127). Furthermore, young people seeking asylum were found to be particularly vulnerable to the long-term impacts of human rights violations, discrimination, and trauma they experienced in their home country, during transition and in the resettlement country (Earnest et al. 2015, 2).

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4   See www.unhcr.org/youth.html.

5   See http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/demographics.

6   Figure includes refugees and IDPs.

7   Figure includes 10.55 million refugees and 14.7 million IDPs.

In a study conducted with refugee adolescents in the United States, 98 percent were found to have survived direct violence, with 44 percent experiencing different kinds of violence (Berthold 2000). Refugee youth also face specific challenges relating to educational attainment, which in turn impacts their ability to socially, civically and politically engage. These challenges included interrupted schooling; difficulties obtaining and translating educational documentation (certifications, degrees, diplomas and so forth); balancing the need to work with attending school; and working against age limitations in many education systems (Bonet 2018, 65).

A study involving marginalized youth with diverse and intersecting identities, including "refugee and vulnerable migrants" and "gender and sexuality-diverse" youth, found that youth participation enabled young people to design relevant and engaging health services (Robards et al. 2018, 377). Meaningfully engaging displaced youth in developing policies, programs and other mechanisms for effective governance can ensure the system functions in a manner that prioritizes the protection and agency of all stakeholders. Research on socio-cultural factors that mediate, facilitate and constrain the health and "empowerment" of refugee youth identifies "supportive environments and relationships that facilitate agency, self-determination and empowerment" as being especially salient to refugee youth themselves (Edge, Newbold and McKeary 2014, 37). Displaced youth, in both developed and developing contexts, are aware of their exclusion from decision making. For example, displaced youth along the Myanmar-Thailand border expressed concerns about being left out of decision making, especially when it personally affected them (Ball and Moselle 2016, 119).

Despite these findings, the unique needs and experiences of displaced youth remain absent from research, data collection and policy making. Instead, interventions within the global refugee system rely on data from displaced children and adults. This reliance can be, in part, attributed to the lack of accessible data from the UNHCR on displaced youth. Relying solely on adult logic, priorities and data to understand the behaviours and motivations of displaced youth overlooks the ways in which their differing ages, levels of maturity and educational attainment, and access to resources uniquely shape their

experiences (Schmidt 2017, 60). For example, a study of displaced youth from Central America and Mexico found that youth were motivated to migrate because of what they perceived to be "no-win" situations, in which they lacked security, educational and employment opportunities, and political environments conducive to ensuring their well-being (ibid., 74). Without a nuanced understanding of displaced youth's motivations, perceptions and experiences, it is unclear how effective interventions and programs can be developed to meet their needs.

Recommendation 1

→ The UNHCR and other institutions collecting and disseminating data on displaced persons should ensure that age-disaggregated data reflecting the age range of youth (15 to 24 or 15 to 35) be made available and accessible.

Not only do displaced youth remain invisible as regards research and data collection, but they are also rendered invisible by the very institutions responsible for finding durable solutions[8] for them. A systematic review by the UNHCR of its youth engagement activities revealed that youth remain invisible within the organization's structures despite its efforts to highlight their needs (Evans, Lo Forte and Fraser 2013, 57). The study concluded that displaced youth were invisible within the UNHCR as a result of a lack of clarity on the conceptualization of youth, limited policy focus, a lack of dedicated funding and limited comprehensive youth programming (ibid., 58). These issues continue to persist as evidenced by the results of a series of refugee youth consultations conducted by the UNHCR and the Women's Refugee Commission (Mahoney 2016). When youth fail to be meaningfully integrated into policies and programs that have

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8   The term "durable solutions" is defined in a multitude of ways in the literature. While the term does not appear in the Refugee Convention, the UNHCR states that the concept "has traditionally been associated with permanent settlement" while recognizing the nuance needed in the context of "an increasing interrelationship between refugee protection and international migration" (UNHCR 2017). In its framework on durable solutions for IDPs, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) says that durable solutions are achieved when IDPs "no longer have any specific assistance and protections needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement" (IASC 2010). Megan Bradley argues for the extension of this definition for refugee populations (Bradley 2019, 4). For the purposes of this paper, *durable solutions for displaced youth* means solutions that address displaced youths' specific assistance and protection needs related to their displacement so that they are able to fully enjoy their human rights.

an impact on them, their needs and capacities often go unacknowledged and unaccounted for.

While on the one hand young people are rhetorically being presented as so-called change makers by various institutions and politicians, on the other hand they are being conceptualized by policy and practice as a vulnerable group, lacking agency. Officially, the important role of young people in building peace and challenging violent extremism is gaining recognition. The UN Security Council passed resolutions 2250 on "Youth, Peace, and Security" (December 2015) and 2419 on the "Role of Youth in Negotiating, Implementing Peace Agreements" (June 2018),[9] acknowledging the important role young people play in global peace and security and calling on all relevant stakeholders to ensure their meaningful participation and engagement in peace processes. A study of refugee youth in the Middle East found that they "exhibited remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, poverty and political morasses" (Chatty 2007, 276). Nonetheless, political and legal systems continue to infantilize and criminalize displaced youth.

These seemingly disparate discourses can be confusing for young people, whose understanding of the world and expectations are being transformed by global communications technology (White 2011, 17). These technologies can facilitate greater access to information and allow young people to share their experiences and opinions with other people, particularly important for displaced youth, whose information needs and information literacy practices arise from their desire to connect with and become established in their new community, learn new social rules, deal with challenges that arise from cultural expectations and support the information needs of other family members (Lloyd and Wilkinson 2016, 300). In fact, in some cases, refugee youth are providing for their parents (Hampshire et al. 2011, 88).

Despite the barriers that youth face in engaging in the governance of the refugee system, they are already championing solutions at the local, regional and global levels, with limited resources. Engaging youth through tangible investments and opportunities to engage and influence decision making can provide an opportunity for solutions to be scaled up. Meaningfully engaging

youth thus becomes a necessity not only for their own well-being but for the well-being of their families, communities and society as a whole. Mortaza Behboudi's story (Vignette 1) provides one illustration of the power of information and of how refugees can enrich their new communities through meaningful engagement.

Youth Engagement: A Durable Solution and Necessity

The UNHCR's preferred "durable solution" of voluntary return often does not account for the agency and interests of displaced youth who have very little connection to their place of return, having spent their formative years in another country and considering the persecution they may face upon return. In fact, so-called durable solutions for displaced youth largely do not exist. For example, in Europe, as asylum-seeking youth transition to "adulthood" (age 18), they frequently see an "evaporation of rights previously accorded to them as children" (Allsopp and Chase 2019, 294; Hammarberg 2010). While policies state that they are acting in the best interests of displaced youth, they are based on a flawed conceptualization of "best interests" that is co-opted by immigration and border officials and their "bias towards enforced return as a durable solution" (Allsopp and Chase 2019, 307). These policies fail to recognize the inherent agency of young people and exclude them from co-design, development, implementation and review processes. By doing so, policy makers render the policies ineffectual at best and harmful at worst. However, the existing faults in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems will not be resolved by merely inviting displaced youth into institutions and fora as tokens.

Meaningfully engaging youth differs from inviting youth to participate in processes, fora and activities that have been designed by adults. Participation and engagement are often conflated in discourse on the inclusion of marginalized groups within organizations and institutions. Participation is often considered as a consultation whereby government and non-government agencies gain

9   See https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419(2018) and https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015), respectively.

insight into the views and opinions of the whole or specific segments of the community (Couch 2007, 38). However, this conceptualization is problematic because it subverts the interests of the group that is being consulted — in this case, youth — to the interests of other actors, such as governments, non-governmental organizations, corporations and so on, and fails to acknowledge that youth also exist within these organizations. The goal behind these types of consultations is to "take" young people's ideas and opinions and use them to advance the interests of the individual or organization holding the consultation, instead of using the consultation as an opportunity to *mainstream* the interests of youth into the work and priorities of the organization. While on the surface these consultations may provide youth

with an opportunity to participate and "influence" decision making and future planning, it does not afford them with formal decision-making roles (ibid.). The ability for them to influence policy, programs and laws is dependent on the willingness of the organization holding consultations to incorporate their insights into its work.

In order to overcome the tokenization that can stem from "participation," the language of empowerment is often used as a substitute or complement. Mark W. Fraser and Maeda J. Galinksky (1997, 272) conceptualize empowerment as a sense of control combined with the ability to affect the behaviour of others: "a focus on enhancing strengths in individuals or communities, a goal of establishing equity in the distribution of

resources, an ecological (rather than individual) form of analysis for understanding individual and community phenomena and a belief that power is not a scarce commodity but rather one that can be generated." However, this conceptualization does not seem to coincide with current understandings of empowerment, which entail questionable power dynamics where one "gives" power to another, instead of acknowledging the real barriers that prevent one from exercising their power and agency.[10] In some cases, those who are able to freely exercise their power and authority *hinder* the ability of others to do the same — a dynamic especially evident in conflict-affected communities and states. Examples include militias and authoritarian leaders restricting marginalized populations' access to education and employment opportunities, such as women, girls, gender and sexually diverse persons, differently abled individuals and ethnic minorities; politicians restricting activists' and journalists' freedom of expression; and armed groups forcing civilians from their homes. The language of empowering youth by "giving voice" to them needs to shift to one in which youth voices are highlighted, amplified and supported instead, in order to acknowledge that they already have a voice (Iwasaki 2015, 41). It is therefore incumbent on organizations and individuals to be mindful of the language they are using in their attempts to foster greater inclusion, to ensure they are not further marginalizing people and reinforcing inequitable power relations.

The important role that displaced youth can play and the impacts they can make — whether through informal grassroots channels or outside of powerful decision-making bodies within either the global refugee system or global systems more broadly — provide a compelling argument for concerted efforts to be made by multilateral organizations, governments, civil society and the private sector to meaningfully and systematically engage and mainstream displaced youth in the governance of the system.

Gaps in the Literature

Research on displaced (refugee and IDP) youth in the context of governance and engagement is sparse and, where it does exist, it centres on the psychological and psychosocial aspects of displacement among youth. In her study on displaced youth in the Middle East, Dawn Chatty (2007, 266) found that there was very little literature about youth refugees and forced migrants in spite of the fact that refugees under 25 sometimes represent more than 50 percent of the total population. Furthermore, comparative research on displaced youth was found to be almost non-existent (ibid.). Not much has changed since then.

To illustrate, a quick search of the keyword "refugee" in ProQuest's and EBSCO's political science databases listed 41,986 peer-reviewed resources and 25,053 peer-reviewed resources, respectively. A search[11] of the keywords "refugee" *and* "youth" in these same databases listed 828 peer-reviewed resources and 982 peer-reviewed resources, respectively.

Honing in further, a search of the following strings of key words produced these results:

→ **"youth"** *and* **"engagement"** *and* **"refugee"**: 41 peer-reviewed resources (ProQuest political science database) and 40 peer-reviewed resources (EBSCO political science database);

→ **"youth"** *and* **"refugee"** *and* **"governance"**: six peer-reviewed resources each in ProQuest's and EBSCO's political science databases; and

→ **"youth engagement"** *and* **"refugee"**: three peer-reviewed resources.

Of the combined 50 initial results, only six of the resources pertained in some way to the engagement

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10 Heidbrink (2014, 16) defines social agency as actions and choices that individuals make of their own will, which are shaped by one's upbringing, cultural beliefs and norms, and social status.

11 Search results as of July 10, 2019.

of displaced youth in governance,[12] and only three were directly relevant to the subject of this paper.

The absence of research on displaced youth is a problem because it prevents the development of evidence-based policies and programs. Without a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and motivations of displaced youth, targeted services and programs will fall short. In particular, knowledge of the perceptions and experiences of refugee youth is lacking and notable, given the unique stressors they experience relating to migration, settlement and integration (Edge, Newbold and McKeary 2014, 34). As a result, the needs and capacities of displaced youth are often subsumed under those of children and adults, where youth are increasingly held accountable as adults for their actions, yet deemed to be as dependent as infants or children.

The few studies that have been conducted on displaced youth focus on their psychological and physical well-being, emphasizing their vulnerabilities and the need to build resilience in the population. To address the one-dimensional understanding of youth as victims and inherently dependent persons and to uncover the shortcomings and dangers of current (mis) conceptualizations of youth migration, an analysis of displaced youth's social agency is recommended (Heidbrink 2014, 16). In the absence of reliable data and comprehensive research, policies for displaced youth are being developed based on perceptions and generalizations of youth as a social group.

The literature review also revealed an absence of peer-reviewed research by young scholars with lived or professional experiences of displacement. Commissioning research by young scholars with these experiences could address some of the challenges of access and trust that may result from outsiders coming into camps and other settings to conduct research with displaced populations. These scholars' perspectives can also inform the

design of research and ensure that it better reflects the nuanced needs, capacities and desires of displaced populations, including refugees and IDPs.

Recommendation 2

→ The UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and other relevant agencies, think tanks and educational institutions should invest in developing a research agenda on displaced youth, youth engagement and agency in order to provide an evidence base for progressive policy making and program development and to develop a nuanced understanding of the experiences of displaced youth. Particular attention should be given to displaced youth as creators of knowledge, with substantial investments made in their capacity to conduct and disseminate research.

The Case for Engaging Displaced Youth

Youth, in particular displaced youth, are being marginalized and prevented from fully participating in the decisions that directly impact them, because of their age. The age-based development theories that have served to justify this type of discrimination and exclusion have been challenged by research (Burfoot 2003, 47). And while engaging youth may entail a cost for organizations as they transform their systems to mainstream youth into their work and structures, the benefits will far outweigh the costs.

As it stands, young people are disproportionately affected by poor governance, since existing systems are set up in such a way as to make them reliant on institutions for protection, access to social services and economic opportunities. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children found that youth are especially negatively impacted by conflict and instability, yet their specific needs and experiences are generally unaccounted for (Lowicki and Pillsbury 2000, 4). Much of the focus in existing literature and policy has been on the impacts of conflict on children.

Meaningfully engaging displaced youth is beneficial for displaced youth, their families and

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12 To illustrate, the titles of these six sources are: "How Marginalized Young People Access, Engage With, and Navigate Health-Care Systems in the Digital Age: Systematic Review" (Robards et al. 2018), "Syrian Refugee Youth Use Social Media: Building Transcultural Spaces and Connections for Resettlement in Ottawa, Canada" (Veronis, Tabler and Ahmed 2018), "Refugee youth in settlement, schooling, and social action: reviewing current research through a transnational lens" (Van der Dussen Toukan 2019), "Transformative Learning of Refugee Girls Within a Community Youth Organization Serving Southeast Asians in North Carolina" (Kolano and Davila 2019), "Immigrant Youth and Voluntary Service: Who Serves?" (Lee and Pritzker 2013) and "Creative Activism: Youth Media in Palestine" (Norman 2009).

communities, the impact of projects and programs, and the global community as a whole. The inability of displaced youth to self-advocate in occupational, educational or other social settings hinders their sense of belonging and can serve as a barrier to their integration into host communities (Edge, Newbold and McKeary 2014, 37). Effective youth engagement is a key factor for positive youth outcomes at personal, social and community levels, and for the development of their communities (Iwasaki 2015, 26; Makhoul, Alameddine and Afifi 2011, 914). Settlement outcomes for youth are also dependent on their ability to become valued citizens within their new country (Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett 2010, 1406). On the one hand, a lack of coordinated focus specific to youth in early resettlement programs results in the inability of educational and employment policies to adequately meet the needs of refugee youth (ibid., 1399). On the other hand, engaging displaced youth has been found to improve their academic performance, enhance their pro-social attitude, develop their self-image, and allow them to acquire new skills and explore viable career opportunities (Makhoul, Alameddine and Afifi 2011, 915). Providing space and opportunities for youth engagement can help youth prepare for their own decision making and build connections they need for their healthy development (Burfoot 2003, 45). For example, 23 Palestinian youth aged 17 to 25 living in or around the Borj El Barajneh refugee camp were trained as youth mentors as part of the Qaderoon[13] youth mental health intervention project for Palestinian refugee children 10 to 15 years of age (Makhoul, Alameddine and Afifi 2011, 915-16). The youth mentors cited four benefits they gained by participating in the project: personal development; self-confidence and courage; ability to better articulate and voice their opinions; and learning skills such as patience, conflict management, problem solving, negotiation and anger management (ibid., 920).

Besides benefiting displaced youth themselves, their meaningful engagement and opportunities to exercise their agency benefit their families and communities. The refugee children participating in the Qaderoon project benefited from youth mentorship through improved social skills (ibid., 923). Removing barriers to and creating accessible opportunities for displaced youth's involvement in economic activities would also allow them to better

support their families. For example, in a study of refugee youth in the Middle East, youth expressed a desire to emigrate to find work and send remittances back to their families (Chatty 2007, 277). If youth assume responsibilities to contribute to the economic and practical needs of their families, they should be involved in programs designed to benefit them (Couch 2007, 39). Failing to involve them could render these programs ineffective.

In fact, while programs for conflict-affected children and youth are often dictated by adults' perceptions of the impact of war on young people (Boyden and de Berry 2004, xix), studies have shown that providing opportunities for youth to inform or co-create these programs makes the programs more effective (Lansdown 2001, 4, 23). The engagement and presence of young people have been shown to enhance the performance of boards and committees (Office for Youth 2004). Conversely, organizations that treat refugee youth as dependent, irresponsible and incompetent will find this approach becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Couch 2007, 39).

Investing in opportunities for youth to engage in decision making and governance is also beneficial to the global community. Where societies fail to integrate youth in meaningful ways, young people are more likely to engage in political violence (Proctor 2015, 43). A failure to engage youth and prevent feelings of powerlessness and isolation could increase the likelihood of their recruitment by extremist groups (Burfoot 2003, 49), thereby contributing to global insecurity. Meaningful youth engagement is key to addressing this challenge. "Where existing political institutions lack the capacity — or the will — to incorporate new voices, youth empowerment may result in expectations outpacing changes in the status quo [and] dissatisfied youth may seek alternative methods to express their frustration" (Proctor 2015, 38). Thus far, discussions on youth, recruitment and violent extremism have featured prominently in global discourse and have largely focused on preventing the recruitment of youth by extremist groups, thereby reinforcing paradoxical depictions of youth as victims and perpetrators, without recognizing their important role in peacebuilding, state building, development and innovation. Young people's participation has the potential to improve stability, enhance democracy and support peaceful social change (Burfoot 2003, 48). It is argued that when people feel like they belong to a community they helped create, they

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13   Qaderoon translates to "We are capable" in English from Arabic.

are more likely to safeguard it (Stevenson and Sutton 2011, 139). Fostering this type of inclusion is important because the engagement of youth (whether displaced or not) can ensure that any policies or solutions developed for the effective governance of the refugee system are sustainable and have the buy-in of a key stakeholder group.

Recommendation 3

→ Multilateral organizations (such as the UNHCR, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and regional organizations (such as the African Union, the Organization of American States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and so forth) governments, civil society and the private sector should commit to mainstreaming youth within their operations and ensure that youth are being meaningfully engaged in a way that avoids tokenizing them or undermining their contributions.

Barriers to Youth Engagement

Despite the myriad of benefits of meaningfully engaging youth in the governance of the global refugee and IDP systems, a number of barriers prevent them from effectively doing so. The social exclusion of displaced youth, as well as youth more broadly, is not only economic, but cultural and spatial (White 2007, 244). Displaced youth are excluded from decision and policy making, program design and evaluation, and research. As such, this paper looks at the structural barriers experienced by youth, acknowledging that different cultural, social, political and economic contexts will influence their individual experiences.

The Experience of Being Forcibly Displaced

Experiences of displacement are inherently marginalizing. The experience of being forcibly disconnected from one's home, community, friends and family often forces displaced youth to re-establish themselves in unpredictable, uncertain and, in many cases, highly volatile circumstances. Refugee youth exhibit high levels of trauma exposure, post-traumatic stress disorder and

other mental health challenges, which require targeted interventions (Dryden-Petersen and Reddick 2017, 255). Even when refugee youth are resettled, they risk living in poverty in the places they resettled to (Bajaj and Bartlett 2017, 26). Therefore, displaced youth experience risk and precariousness at each stage of their journey.

For IDP youth, residency-based registration and other identification requirements can exclude individuals from basic social protection assistance (Hopkins, Bastagli and Hagen-Zanker 2016). Only one-third of displaced Afghan youth reported owning an Afghan identity document (Schmeidl and Bose 2016, 75). The experiences of internally displaced Afghan youth are not unlike the experiences of other internally displaced youth around the world. Without official identification and documentation, displaced youth are often prevented from accessing services and programs. It is also often difficult to access IDP youth, because they have not crossed an international border.

"Refugee youth…who have been forced to resettle frequently have experienced disrupted education backgrounds that may create disadvantages and have implications for their educational and employment prospects" (Lloyd and Wilkinson 2016, 300). Refugee and asylum-seeking youth often lack citizenship and therefore the pathway to rights that enable post-education work and civil and political participation (Dryden-Petersen 2016, 480). The disruption of youth's education can be especially problematic for youth engagement, as it can prevent them from acquiring the skills and connections to meaningfully engage. Education and schools often serve as vehicles and space for youth to exercise their agency in a relatively safe environment, surrounded by other youth.

The design and deployment of education models need to be intentional if they are to address the specific needs of displaced youth and to avoid replicating models of oppression, (neo-) colonialism and persecution. Furthermore, the lack of global standardization of education can result in youth being unprepared for the curriculum in refugee camps or the country to which they are transiting or being resettled.

Recommendation 4

→ To address and, where possible, prevent disruptions in education as a result of forced displacement, governments should invest

in accessible and affordable education and the leadership development of displaced youth in partnership with educational institutions and civil society organizations.

Broken Family Ties

Refugee or migrant youth are sometimes forced to break off ties with their families in the process of seeking asylum. The full impact of the United States' policy of separating families (Jordan and Dickerson 2019) seeking asylum from violence and persecutions in Latin America will likely remain unknown for years. What *is* known is that the loss of family ties can lead to poor long-term outcomes, since networks are a vital factor in the successful integration of individuals.

In some cases, youth are seen to be more mobile than other family members and are the first ones to seek safety abroad, with the hopes that they will be able to quickly establish themselves and support the resettlement of other family members in the future. A study conducted with Afghan refugee youth in Perth, Australia, revealed the high value placed on families by displaced youth in their resettlement and resilience, with youth expressing a desire to sponsor their family members to resettle in Australia (Earnest et al. 2015, 7).

Family reunions are not always possible; family members may be killed during conflict or resettled in a different place from their children, while unaccompanied children may be forced to formally break ties with their parents in order to apply for asylum. For example, in the United States, unaccompanied minors are often forced to make claims that their parents abandoned, abused or neglected them, in order to be eligible to apply for asylum (Heidbrink 2014).

Intergenerational trauma also presents a challenge to displaced youth, even when they are accompanied by their parents or caregivers. Few systematic studies exist evaluating services for parents exposed to conflict, "unauthorized migration" or displacement (Yoshikawa, Wuermli and Aber 2018, 197).

Recommendation 5

→ Family reunification programs should be prioritized by governments, and concerted efforts should be made to ensure that families are able to resettle together, where possible.

→ Family separation should never be used as a means to dissuade individuals from seeking or claiming asylum.

Perceptions of Displaced Youth

People tend to focus on youth's vulnerabilities, disregarding young people's strengths and potential, especially when they hear the word "refugee" (Edge, Newbold and McKeary 2014, 37). The representation of displaced youth as a vulnerable group lacking agency and skills can be traced back to the Spanish War, where the Basque label was used to elicit sympathy and support for refugee children and to emphasize "the assumed vulnerability and innocence of the refugees as children" (Myers 2009, 33). While this type of representation had short-term benefits, such as creating support for fundraising activities, it eventually created long-term problems, where the "assumed innocence and passivity" of youth did not account for their positive and political roles (ibid., 43). Conceptualizations of youth as inherent victims are often used to justify their protection, care and legal advocacy, diverting advocates away from inquiring what youth view to be in their own best interests (Goździak and Ensor 2010, 275). For example, in the context of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA), accounts of young people's lives are, for the most part, narrowly restricted to their function as passive beneficiaries of its assistance (Hart 2004, 171). This type of depiction of displaced youth, and youth in general, is problematic because it not only risks further marginalizing them, but it also reinforces unequal/hegemonic power structures (Vignette 2). In fact, Kevin Myers argues that these types of perceptions and depictions of youth reproduce cultural chauvinism where those who are able to "help" displaced youth adopt an "us versus them" mentality, which is central to imperialism (Myers 2009, 43). Displaced youth are then considered outsiders in their new societies/communities, which further exacerbates their exclusion (Couch 2007, 39).

There is a general failure to recognize young people's agency and the invaluable contributions they can and do make to society. Perceptions of inferiority and dependence contrast with young people's roles in familiar decision-making processes and their decisions as individual social actors (Heidbrink 2014, 15). For example, unaccompanied youth in the United States were found to negotiate

complex networks of actors and institutions in order to evade deportation, earn an income and contribute to household economies in the United States and their countries of origin (ibid., 19).

While it is vital that young people's capacities be acknowledged and supported, there is a risk that increasing recognition of youth agency may provide justification for their criminalization and prosecution as adults within the justice system. For example, in France the empowerment of children and recognition of their active agency have resulted in calls for more punishment, lowering the minimum age for criminal responsibility and for retribution for offenders, and more compensation for victims and/or society (Terrio 2007, 166). These developments mark a shift away from welfare approaches to ones that emphasize children's accountability and responsibility for their actions.

The representation of youth as a vulnerable population in need of care and support conflicts with simultaneous depictions of them as criminals and social deviants. People's views of youth are influenced by sensationalized media coverage of their involvement in crime, leading to exaggerated threat perceptions of youth by older generations within the population (Burfoot 2003, 46). Higher education is seen as a crucial "tool to...reverse [the]

narrative" that refugees are passive victims and instead make them agents who are empowered from within instead of through traditional models of emergency aid (Zeus 2011, 272). However, the media and education systems are not solely to blame for these perceptions. Displaced youth are increasingly criminalized in judicial systems around the world. For example, in the United States, the number of migrant children in detention, many of whom are seeking asylum, reportedly increased fivefold in September 2018 from the previous year, reaching a total of 12,800 detained in "shelters" (Dickerson 2018). In this context, "engagement" with young people is heavily focused on their proximity to gang violence, drug dealing and possible incarceration, instead of seeing youth as agents of change in their communities and societies (Couch 2007, 40).

Recommendation 6

→ Youth must be conceptualized as complex, multi-faceted individuals. Language that oversimplifies their characteristics or assigns them rigid attributes should be avoided by governments, civil society, researchers and multilateral organizations.

→ Efforts should be made by all stakeholders, including governments, multilateral and regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, to base their conceptions of leadership on the qualities individuals possess and the influence and agency they are able to exercise rather than their age, gender, sexuality, income, status and abilities, among other characteristics.

Recommendation 7

→ Governments, multilateral and regional organizations, and civil society should examine opportunities to ensure youth are able to fully engage in governance (including the development of programs, policies, frameworks and so forth) and are able to fully exercise their agency, regardless of their citizenship status.

Exclusion from Aid and Funding Priorities

Engaging youth in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems can lengthen the time horizon in which actors operate and ensure that long-term outcomes and concerns are also prioritized.

Currently, most humanitarian operations have a strong focus on immediate needs. For example, the vast majority of the UNWRA's and international non-government organizations' internationally funded efforts focused on providing humanitarian relief instead of sustainable development or peacebuilding processes (Natil 2016, 81). Instead of solely focusing and prioritizing immediate needs, the inclusion of youth considerations can shift the focus of governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to long-term objectives, such as sustainable development, education and economic opportunities, and peace.

Furthermore, without youth present at the decision-making table, they are unable to influence budgeting to reflect their needs and priorities. Youth face funding issues around the world as a result of negative perceptions conflating youth movements with alter-globalization movements in countries such as Japan (Chan 2008, 315).

Despite skepticism on funding for youth-led organizations and young people in general, investments in youth provide a far greater return than their upfront cost. By investing in the ideas and work of (formerly) displaced youth (such as Manyang Reath Kher in Vignette 3), institutions and donors would essentially be investing in solutions championed by individuals with lived experiences of displacement and the creativity and ingenuity to present innovative solutions to the challenges plaguing the system.

A global refugee/displaced youth fund could be developed to invest in initiatives, projects or ideas led by displaced youth. The fund could be managed by an investment firm or independent global body. In order to develop the structure of the fund, it is recommended that additional research be conducted to identify the various models one could employ in the context of displacement and youth.

Recommendation 8

→ Multilateral organizations, governments and civil society should engage youth in developing spending plans.

→ Donors should earmark funds for displaced and host community youth in governance, development, peacebuilding and human rights activities.

→ Governments should ensure their laws and regulations allow refugee youth to be gainfully employed or to start their own enterprises.

→ Multi-stakeholder financial investments should be made in support of youth leadership and development, education and economic opportunities, including entrepreneurship. This could take the form of a global refugee/displaced youth fund.

Vignette 3: 734 Coffee

Manyang Reath Kher, a former refugee from South Sudan who was resettled in the United States, started 734 Coffee, a social enterprise selling coffee, in order to help send refugee children and youth to school and provide an opportunity for people to learn about refugees and their stories when they drink coffee. His personal experience of living in a refugee camp gave him first-hand insights into the cycles of poverty that ensue there. He identified education as key to ending the cycle.

Reath Kher, in an interview with the author conducted as part of this paper's research, says that "we need to allow refugees to work. There's currently no guarantee that you have the right to start a business, even if you have the money. Some people have resources and they've been displaced by war but have the means to start a business. We need to give them opportunities to do so. You rebuild countries through action. If you allow a refugee to contribute to the system and allow them to create a business, they can be successful. I wanted to show this by starting my own business."

Exclusionary Government Policies and Legal Frameworks

Current policies and laws around the world either fail to account for the experiences of displaced youth or discriminate against them. The exclusion of displaced youth as members in any political community renders them non-persons with respect to justice and results in their political alienation, inefficacy and disengagement (Fraser 2005, 77; Banks 2019, 245). For example, US immigration law does not recognize child- or age-specific persecution, such as experienced by

child soldiers, youth resisting gang members and youth as political activists in adjudicating asylum claims (Heidbrink 2014, 80). This lack creates a severe impediment for young people who have legitimate claims of persecution that are deemed to be irrelevant by restrictive laws and frameworks. In fact, the use of the law as a vehicle to deal with youth integration has been a long-standing challenge in advanced industrialized economies (Venkatesh and Kassimir 2007, 6). Legal discourses governing youth, whether linked to social justice and universal rights or associated with criminalization and law enforcement, may originate in nation-states, but increasingly they circulate globally and are tied to neo-liberalism (Terrio 2007, 165). Young people's place is inherently tied to their relationship with the state and its borders — when young people are displaced, they "lose" their place. This loss is especially important for young people who are reliant on their relationship with the state, a relationship that is in and of itself fraught because of the power dynamics involved and the lack of mechanisms with which youth can hold their governments to account. At the global level, international law makes no distinction between children and youth (Boyle, Smith and Guenther 2006, 256). The UN Security Council's resolutions relating to youth, peace and security do not directly address the policies of governments in regions that have sustained conflict, oppressive and unrepresentative governance structures, corruption and marginalization (Williams 2016, 108).

When youth are invited or "given" an opportunity to participate, they face obstacles as a result of exclusionary government policies or legal frameworks. Restrictive legal and cultural definitions of childhood and adulthood isolate youth who cannot be classified or labelled either as children in the Western sense or as adults (Swaine 2004, 64). These restrictive definitions permeate government and institutional policies. While youth may increasingly be invited to participate through youth councils, youth policies and initiatives, and government youth participation strategies, they are simultaneously patronized and told to wait until they are adults to fully engage, as a result of regulatory and law enforcement activity (White 2007, 223). For example, in attempting to challenge the US government's deportation of Cambodian refugees, members of the group AYPAL — Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership — found the system to be inefficient and bureaucratic and disenfranchising, giving

its non-voting constituents (youth under the age of 18) little real political power (Kwon 2012, 739, 744). Governments simply fail to prioritize youth engagement and priorities. The absence of much-needed collaboration on youth policy programming in the Northern Triangle of Central America can be attributed to a lack of coordination by governments (Schmidt 2017, 75). The combination of restrictive laws and legal policies and the lack of prioritization of youth engagement by governments and other organizations serves to disenfranchise youth, especially displaced youth who lack protections that citizens may be afforded.

Recommendation 9

→ Youth should be acknowledged and accounted for in national and international laws and treaties.

→ Law makers should consider extending voting rights to youth 16 years of age.

→ Governments should adopt a "whole of government" approach to youth engagement, ensuring youth are mainstreamed into all policy and program development and evaluations.

→ Governments should make meaningful financial and social investments in youth, including in official budgets.

Difficulty Adopting New Ways of Working

Even the most seemingly well-intentioned organizations, which may be responsible for improving outcomes for youth, have largely failed to successfully engage youth. This failure can be attributed to the combined difficulty of adopting new models of working at an organizational level and fears of the change youth will bring to organizations when they are able to meaningfully engage and exercise influence. Working in participatory ways is difficult and requires a reformulation of adults' roles in relation to youth (Couch 2007, 42). For actors in the humanitarian and development spaces, treating youth as individuals with a right to their own personal views and aspirations and as active participants in their families and communities can challenge traditional divisions between humanitarian assistance and political solidarity (Hart 2004, 184). It is for this very

reason that displaced youth should be engaged and mainstreamed across the work of multilateral organizations, civil society, governments and the private sector. Youth can bring new perspectives and challenge the dysfunctional status quo and do not have a vested interest in maintaining existing power structures and bureaucracies.

Recommendation 10

→ Organizations should make an effort to promote the benefits of engaging youth in their work and dispel myths, concerns or fears that existing members may have about adopting new ways of working.

→ Organizations should develop youth engagement plans and strategies in collaboration with youth, and develop monitoring and evaluation programs to ensure that the strategies are effectively implemented.

A Model for Effective Youth Engagement

In order to facilitate meaningful youth engagement in the global refugee and IDP systems, it will be necessary to not only address the barriers that prevent displaced youth from engaging but to also invest in and implement approaches to youth engagement that champion their agency and development. Effective approaches to youth engagement will avoid tokenization and ensure the experiences and insights of young people translate to real outcomes and change. Motivations for youth engagement are cross-cultural (Makhoul, Alameddine and Afifi 2011, 925). Refugee youth, in particular, identified the following factors as being important for their well-being and empowerment: a sense of belonging; a positive self-identity; emotional well-being; and supportive environments and relationships to facilitate agency and self-determination (Edge, Newbold and McKeary 2014, 34, 37). Furthermore, youth are motivated to engage as a result of their personal experiences with social injustice, enhanced feelings of belonging to a community, feeling psychologically stimulated, improved efficacy as a result of learning new skills, and integrity for themselves and their communities (Makhoul, Alameddine and Afifi

2011, 915, 924). The following approaches to youth engagement are seen to be the most effective in facilitating young people's well-being, sense of belonging, leadership and communication skills, and opportunities to enact meaningful change.

Potential Approaches

There are a variety of approaches to "youth engagement," some more effective than others at advancing the agency of youth. For example, an equality approach expects young people to fit into existing structures that may be inherently exclusive (Couch 2007, 42). In contrast, equity approaches are seen to be preferable since they involve an analysis and identification of different levels of exclusion, acknowledge issues of difference and formulate ways existing structures can accommodate those who are excluded from decision making, design, evaluation and other processes (Couch 2007, 42). At the national and local levels, governments need to deploy a "whole of government approach" to allow youth to move beyond "observer status" in policy cycles and actually shape and influence political outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016, 30). At the international level, the focus is often on children's, and sometimes explicitly youth, rights. While a rights-based approach can help provide legal protections for youth, it is insufficient in achieving sustainable public support for young people's participation (Burfoot 2003, 48). It is insufficient to simply provide protections to youth without addressing the challenges they face and acknowledging and supporting their capacities. Analysis of agency and rights becomes central in migrant youth narratives, accounting for the ways they cross physical, social and metaphoric borders and reside in overlapping spaces of impossibility: social invisibility, illegality or independence (Heidbrink 2014, 20).

Approaches to youth engagement are most effective when they address structural barriers to engagement, prioritize youth rights, and acknowledge and develop young people's capacities to meaningfully engage and lead. Young people should be perceived and treated as "directors" and "partners," rather than simply as subjects, and have accessible opportunities to impact processes, influence decisions or produce outcomes (Couch 2007, 39). In order to develop the leadership capacity of youth, we need grassroots programs that implement principles of positive youth development and of youth community organization or mobilization

that sustainably harness young people's ideas around the issues that are important to them (Schmidt 2017, 75). Intersectional approaches to youth engagement are therefore crucial in mainstreaming youth into governance systems.

Intersectionality not only entails a plurality of disciplines being represented — such as human rights, behavioural science, development, economics and security — but also requires the inclusion of diverse lived experiences and identities in order to be truly effective. The experience of youth as a stage of one's life can differ based on one's gender. In some contexts, youth can signify "a time when the 'world expands' for boys and 'contracts' for girls" in the sense that restricting social norms may prevent females from socializing outside of their homes and participating in various activities (Schmeidl and Bose 2016, 70, 76). For example, a study of Somali refugee youth resettled to the United States found that gender plays a significant role in the way youth adapted to a host culture (Shepard 2008, 236). Girls were more likely to have more parental restrictions and household responsibilities than boys; these restrictions afforded girls less time to socialize outside of school and the family environment, while boys were given more autonomy (ibid.). Sports teams were also found to be more accessible to boys than to girls (Lloyd and Wilkinson 2016, 305). While male refugee youth expressed anxiety about being seen as idle in public spaces in Kakuma refugee camp, females expressed anxiety about being forced to stay indoors and as such being further isolated from the community (Bellino 2018, 550). On the one hand, female Palestinian refugee youth articulated a lack of social freedom regarding marriage and education, fewer opportunities relative to their male counterparts, and constraints within the family household and community (Chatty 2009, 329-30, 335). On the other, male Palestinian refugee youth were found to have greater liberty and were more directly involved in political activities, including "membership in groups, taking part in confrontations and being imprisoned" (Chatty 2009, 335). In a survey of internally displaced Afghan youth, a majority of female respondents and almost half of displaced male respondents reported never going to school (Schmeidl and Bose 2016, 73). As investments are made in youth engagement, it is crucial that a gender-based analysis be conducted to ensure that inequalities are not reinforced and that certain groups of individuals, in particular young women and gender and sexually diverse

youth, are not further marginalized. Some of these issues can be mitigated by actively and meaningfully engaging marginalized youth in designing programs and systems, rather than merely viewing them as passive beneficiaries.

Recommendation 11

→ The United Nations and other multilateral agencies, governments and civil society organizations should adopt intersectional approaches to youth engagement.

→ Multilateral agencies, governments, civil society organizations and other relevant actors should mainstream youth and gender across their work and adopt gender- and diversity-based analysis to their programming and strategies.

→ Organizations should ensure that the diversity of youth needs are accounted for, in particular the needs of those who are traditionally marginalized from governance.

Recognizing the Agency of Displaced Youth

The capacity for youth, displaced youth in particular, to impact, influence and contribute to policies and programming within the global refugee system often goes unrecognized. Refugee youth are rarely constructed as actors in the public sphere and are instead seen as a disengaged group at risk of becoming a problem for society (Couch 2007, 40). Adolescents are portrayed as passive recipients of adult agency, emphasizing their vulnerability, helplessness and reliance on adults, when in reality they define their own allegiances during conflicts, as well as their own strategies for coping and survival (Boyden and de Berry 2004, xv). Rigid conceptualizations of youth as victims and criminals undermine their agency and influence the design of policies and programs that are meant to benefit them. As a result, existing policies fail to recognize the resources displaced youth bring to a new country and miss the opportunity to develop their leadership (Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett 2010, 1399).

The global refugee and IDP systems are currently structured in such a way to undermine young people's agency. For example, within multilateral organizations, donor funding requires reporting on youth's needs and vulnerabilities, as opposed to their capacities. Organizing displaced youth

exclusively according to their needs, deficiencies and vulnerabilities sets them up as victims rather than as citizens with a stake in their community (Stevenson and Sutton 2011, 144). Structure is also a challenge at the regional level. In the Middle East and North Africa, youth have limited opportunities to influence policy making, and generally lack adequate access to decent employment, quality education and affordable health care (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016, 3). A lack of empowerment and engagement opportunities as factors limit young people's involvement in decision making (Mahoney 2016, 6).

Alternatively, by creating space for displaced youth to meaningfully engage in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems, these young people may be able to leverage their influence and ability to exercise agency in other areas of their lives (Gaventa 2006, 27). For example, in the United States, the DREAMers — primarily undocumented students and youth who support the proposed Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act — are utilizing political participation as the vehicle for social change through rallies, marches, petitions, sit-ins, teach-ins and acts of civil disobedience, while publicly (sometimes through media) demanding resolution to their tentative legal status in the United States (Heidbrink 2014, 60, 160). Providing opportunities for young people to self-advocate and influence policy not only benefits them but also builds their capacities to advocate on behalf of other marginalized groups. For example, a study of Palestinian youth's use of participatory media demonstrates that participatory media can more actively engage youth in their local and global communities, enable youth to amplify their voices, raise awareness of conflict, and challenge dominant discourses about youth (Norman 2009, 272-73). By exercising their agency, refugee youth contribute to social change for individual refugees and for the refugee community as a whole (Dryden-Petersen 2006, 390; Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010). Championing and prioritizing the agency of displaced youth can ensure that sustainable and inclusive solutions and change is enacted for the entire community of displaced persons.

Supporting the collective agency of displaced youth can contribute to greater individual agency as well. By supporting the agency of the group and creating opportunities to mobilize together, displaced youth can benefit from a peer network

of support (Yoshikawa, Wuermli and Aber 2018, 192). The presence of supportive and socially accepting environments and peers are crucial for the well-being and self-determination of unaccompanied minors (Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto and Tuominen 2019, 564).

Recommendation 12

→ Prioritize the individual and collective agency of displaced youth, ensuring that their capacities for enacting change, for contributing to knowledge creation, and for informing and designing policies, programs and other interventions are acknowledged and supported.

Investing in and Building Spaces Conducive to Youth Engagement

In order to realize meaningful youth engagement within the global refugee and IDP systems, structural reforms are needed. One way to enact structural change is through the environment in which governance takes place. Having agencies or programs with leaders and staff from diverse refugee backgrounds who can relate to refugee experiences can help create supportive environments and relationships to facilitate the agency and empowerment of refugee youth (Edge, Newbold and McKeary 2014, 39). It is important for young people to have space to speak about their experiences and to choose how they represent themselves to their community, friends and host country (Gifford and Wilding 2013, 561). Displaced youth themselves explicitly communicate the importance of, and demand, inclusive and engaging spaces. In a study of Palestinian refugee youth, respondents understood their social exclusion and experience of discrimination through the presence of a "poor physical environment and housing conditions…the overcrowding, the lack of privacy, the non-existence of any 'green space' or playing fields, the lack of public services, libraries, clubs, and poor sanitation" (Chatty 2009, 333). Physical space and the way it is designed is clearly important for displaced youth who, as a result of their displacement, have lost or been forced from their space or place.

Displaced youth need, therefore, to be partners in designing and developing these spaces. Active involvement in place shaping is a proven empowerment mechanism and a strong means of building citizenship (Stevenson and Sutton 2011, 137). Spaces are often reflective of power; those

who help create the space are able to demonstrate and exercise their power in the created space. For example, in Tunisia, Houssem Aoudi founded Cogite, a creative co-working space in Tunis that provides a platform for young entrepreneurs to collaborate, in order to build civic entrepreneurship throughout the country (Williams 2016, 106). Aoudi was motivated to become an entrepreneur in order to mount a resistance against an "unfriendly banking system and old-fashioned government" (Williams 2016, 106). Similarly, allowing youth to co-create spaces of governance can help facilitate a shift away from traditional, patronizing hierarchies that disenfranchise young people and other marginalized groups.

Providing space for opportunity, dignity and decent jobs is not just beneficial to displaced youth themselves but also central to stability and social cohesion (ibid., 105). Prioritizing policies and services that ensure open and socially inclusive structures in the host community can promote the well-being and effective settlement of displaced youth (Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett 2010, 1406). Building these types of spaces should not be restricted to the resettlement stage of the displaced youth's experience. The ability for refugees to make rights claims and service demands and to negotiate their relationships with aid agencies and governments in camp settings may also reshape their expectations of governance in the societies they may eventually (re)settle in (Stevenson and Sutton 2011, 138).

Educational spaces, when designed with agency and inclusion as priorities, can enable displaced youth to better engage in the governance of the system as a whole. Schools can serve as spaces where marginalization and oppression are challenged through the promotion of "democratic environments in which power is shared" (Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto and Tuominen 2019, 11). As these spaces are developed, it will be important to account for the varied experiences of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, whose differing statuses and unique challenges will impact the feasibility and effectiveness of institutional and program design.

In an increasingly connected world, online and technologically facilitated spaces serve as an important vehicle through which displaced youth are able to exercise their agency, especially when they have been displaced from physical spaces. Availability and access to information communication technologies (ICTs) play an important role in the settlement process for youth (Gifford and Wilding 2013, 560-61). For example, ICTs enabled Karen refugee youth in Australia to resist expectations of assimilation in favour of more positive forms of resettlement (ibid., 572). Everyday socio-technical and institutional spaces allow refugee youth to improve their information literacy, create conducive learning environments, maintain familial networks and keep up to date on global events affecting their homeland (Lloyd and Wilkinson 2016, 305–9). Global virtual spaces also provide youth with an opportunity to develop their identities alongside other young people, allowing them to reimagine their sense of being an outsider in the real world by becoming an insider in the virtual world (Gifford and Wilding 2013, 569). A study of Syrian refugee youth in Canada revealed that social media played a role in helping them learn "about Canada, its culture, languages, and everyday life" (Veronis, Tabler and Ahmed 2018, 86). However, the risks of being further persecuted as a result of government surveillance and privacy breaches can prevent displaced and other marginalized youth from fully engaging. Displaced youth may self-censor in order to mitigate some of these risks in light of poor internet governance and insufficient or non-existent legal protections.

While digital spaces are important for displaced youth, efforts should also be made to invest in physical, everyday spaces, such as libraries, community and faith-based groups, and extracurricular activities (sports, artistic endeavours and so forth). These spaces provide valuable opportunities for young people to build social and cultural capital and information and other literacies (Lloyd and Wilkinson 2016, 300). These spaces can also provide displaced youth with information, skills-building opportunities, mental health services and counselling, and health workshops (ibid., 308), which can remove the barriers from successful integration and meaningful engagement in decision making and governance.

Recommendation 13

→ Work with displaced and other youth to develop inclusive governance spaces and processes for the global refugee and IDP systems.

→ Create accessible opportunities for youth to participate and engage in program design and implementation, policy making, monitoring and evaluation, and negotiations.

→ Ensure the accessibility and security of digital spaces for youth, while addressing the particular needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of displaced youth.

→ Multilateral and regional organizations, governments, civil society and the private sector should invest in physical spaces and institutions, such as libraries, community and faith-based groups, and extracurricular activities in order to support displaced youth's well-being and build their capacities to engage in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems.

Prioritizing Intergenerational Dialogue and Partnerships

In addition to investing in spaces conducive to youth engagement in the governance of the refugee and IDP systems, it is also crucial to invest in building and fostering healthy relationships. According to Mercy Corps, youth civic engagement programs that are not coupled with meaningful governance reforms may frustrate youth as a result of exclusive, elder-dominated formal institutions that fail to address their concerns and create space for them to meaningfully engage (Proctor 2015, 2). The development of interpersonal, leadership and citizenship skills, as well as relationships between adolescent refugees and adults, can foster a sense of social inclusion among displaced youth through improved access and participation in civil society (Wilkinson, Santoro and Major 2017, 215, 217). Positive outcomes for youth depend on listening to their views and developing their leadership and sharing power with them in authentic ways through intergenerational collaboration (Schmidt 2017, 75). In order to overcome problematic and hierarchical power relations and ensure youth are not tokenized, adults should proactively seek opportunities for youth to contribute their views and suggestions to both support their capacities and better understand their perspectives (ibid., 76).

Recognizing the agency of youth and building their capacities may cause tension to develop between young people and their families and communities. The terms *autonomy*, *independence* and *resilience* may carry the threat of further fragmentation for displaced populations who may fear losing their youth to a new culture after having already lost their homes (Couch 2007, 41). These fears can be especially magnified when displaced youth are isolated from their families, and isolation alone is problematic, because of the crucial role families

often play in the lives of youth, displaced youth in particular. For example, for displaced Palestinian youth, family is the centre of the individual's life and the "locus of transmission of identity" (Chatty 2009, 336). Effective engagement strategies for displaced youth are those that connect with families, including parents, grandparents and siblings, and provide them with information. Working in isolation from families risks loosening family ties that may be a young person's first line of protection (Couch 2007, 41). Young people's empowerment may also represent a major shift in social functioning and may be seen as loss of power and control by adults or parents, especially when they have experienced dramatic changes or are unable to fully assert their own rights (ibid.).

Intergenerational role reversals that challenge social norms around authority and respect may seem threatening to older people (Hampshire et al. 2011, 83). However, when done successfully, youth engagement should not entail the relinquishing of adults' power and responsibility to youth. Rather, meaningful youth engagement requires intergenerational dialogue and partnerships to ensure that all stakeholders are effectively contributing to the governance of the refugee and IDP systems.

Recommendation 14

→ Organizations, governments and civil society should invest and commit to implementing and realizing mechanisms and opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and partnerships for governing the refugee and IDP systems.

Conclusion and Next Steps

While the benefits of engaging youth, in particular displaced youth, in the governance of the global refugee and IDP systems are evident, thus far most organizations and governments have failed to do so effectively and meaningfully. Displaced youth are further rendered invisible because so few studies have been done by, with or about them, especially regarding their agency, engagement and ability to influence and participate as partners in decision-making processes and fora. Displaced youth face

a myriad of barriers, including the experience of displacement in and of itself; broken family ties and relationships; questionable and one-dimensional understandings of youth; a failure to recognize young people's agency; a lack of earmarked and targeted funding; inherently exclusionary policies and laws; entrenched bureaucracies; and the unwillingness or inability of organizations to restructure themselves to include youth. In order to overcome these barriers, UN agencies, multilateral organizations, governments, civil society, the private sector and academia should adopt intersectional approaches to youth engagement drawing from existing best practices in other fields. All stakeholders must commit to intergenerational dialogue and partnerships to ensure that youth are not tokenized and that the potential for hostility between youth and adults or children is abated. A failure to meaningfully and effectively engage youth will ensure that the dysfunctional status quo within the global refugee and IDP systems remains as such. Sustainable and inclusive solutions and meaningful change cannot be achieved when a significant group of displaced persons are excluded from governance and decision making.

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About CIGI

We are the Centre for International Governance Innovation: an independent, non-partisan think tank with an objective and uniquely global perspective. Our research, opinions and public voice make a difference in today's world by bringing clarity and innovative thinking to global policy making. By working across disciplines and in partnership with the best peers and experts, we are the benchmark for influential research and trusted analysis.

Our research programs focus on governance of the global economy, global security and politics, and international law in collaboration with a range of strategic partners and have received support from the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, as well as founder Jim Balsillie.

À propos du CIGI

Au Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance internationale (CIGI), nous formons un groupe de réflexion indépendant et non partisan doté d'un point de vue objectif et unique de portée mondiale. Nos recherches, nos avis et nos interventions publiques ont des effets réels sur le monde d'aujourd'hui car ils apportent de la clarté et une réflexion novatrice pour l'élaboration des politiques à l'échelle internationale. En raison des travaux accomplis en collaboration et en partenariat avec des pairs et des spécialistes interdisciplinaires des plus compétents, nous sommes devenus une référence grâce à l'influence de nos recherches et à la fiabilité de nos analyses.

Nos programmes de recherche ont trait à la gouvernance dans les domaines suivants : l'économie mondiale, la sécurité et les politiques internationales, et le droit international. Nous comptons sur la collaboration de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et avons reçu le soutien des gouvernements du Canada et de l'Ontario ainsi que du fondateur du CIGI, Jim Balsillie.

About the World Refugee Council

There are more than 21 million refugees worldwide. Over half are under the age of 18. As a growing number of these individuals are forced to flee their homelands in search of safety, they are faced with severe limitations on the availability and quality of asylum, leading them to spend longer in exile today than ever before.

The current refugee system is not equipped to respond to the refugee crisis in a predictable or comprehensive manner. When a crisis erupts, home countries, countries of first asylum, transit countries and destination countries unexpectedly find themselves coping with large numbers of refugees flowing within or over their borders. Support from the international community is typically ad hoc, sporadic and woefully inadequate.

Bold Thinking for a New Refugee System

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) led a consensus-driven effort to produce a new Global Compact on Refugees in 2018. The World Refugee Council (WRC), established in May 2017 by the Centre for International Governance Innovation, is intended to complement its efforts.

The WRC seeks to offer bold strategic thinking about how the international community can comprehensively respond to refugees based on the principles of international cooperation and responsibility sharing. The Council is comprised of thought leaders, practitioners and innovators drawn from regions around the world and is supported by a research advisory network.

The WRC explores advances in technology, innovative financing opportunities and prospects for strengthening existing international law to craft and advance a strategic vision for refugees and the associated countries.

The Council will produce a final report grounded by empirical research and informed by an extensive program of outreach to governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society.

À propos du Conseil mondial pour les réfugiés

Il y a en ce moment dans le monde plus de 21 millions de réfugiés, et plus de la moitié d'entre eux ont moins de 18 ans. En outre, de plus en plus de personnes sont forcées de quitter leur pays natal et partent à la recherche d'une sécurité, et elles sont alors confrontées aux limites importantes qui existent quant aux possibilités d'accueil et à la qualité de ce dernier. À cause de cette situation, les réfugiés passent maintenant plus de temps que jamais auparavant en exil.

En ce moment, le système de protection des réfugiés ne permet pas de réagir adéquatement à la crise des réfugiés d'une façon planifiée et globale. Quand une crise éclate, les pays de premier asile, les pays de transit et les pays de destination finale se retrouvent sans l'avoir prévu à devoir composer avec un grand nombre de réfugiés qui arrivent sur leur territoire, le traversent ou en partent. Et le soutien fourni dans ce contexte par la communauté internationale est en règle générale ponctuel, irrégulier et nettement inadéquat.

Des idées audacieuses pour un nouveau système de protection des réfugiés

Le Haut-Commissariat pour les réfugiés (HCR) des Nations Unies a dirigé des efforts découlant d'un consensus et visant à instaurer un nouveau « pacte mondial pour les réfugiés » en 2018. Mis sur pied en mai 2017 par le Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance international (CIGI), le Conseil mondial pour les réfugiés (CMR) veut compléter ces efforts.

Le CMR vise à proposer une réflexion stratégique audacieuse sur la manière dont la communauté internationale peut réagir de façon globale aux déplacements de réfugiés, et ce, en se fondant sur les principes de la coopération international et du partage des responsabilités. Formé de leaders, de praticiens et d'innovateurs éclairés provenant de toutes les régions du globe, le CMR bénéficie du soutien d'un réseau consultatif de recherche.

Le CMR examine les progrès techniques, les occasions de financement novatrices ainsi que les possibilités pour ce qui est de renforcer le droit international et d'y intégrer une vision stratégique pour les réfugiées et les pays concernés.

Par ailleurs, le CMR produira un rapport final fondé sur des recherches empiriques et sur les résultats d'un vaste programme de sensibilisation ciblant les gouvernements, les organisations intergouvernementales et la société civile.