

Background

In May 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit will convene to consider the current state of affairs of global security and humanitarian response. This occurs against the backdrop of the greatest refugee crisis of our time, with the largest number of displaced people since World War II. This has placed a major strain on the global humanitarian system. Adolescent girls face unique challenges in this and any crisis setting, as they are marginalized both as females and as youth. Rates of child and forced marriage among Syrian refugees have nearly tripled¹ and accounts of sexual enslavement and forced marriage, particularly of Yazidi girls, by ISIL has horrified the world. As a recent Council on Foreign Relations paper points out, nine of the eleven least developed countries on UNDP's Human Development Index have child marriage rates above 40 percent, and most of the countries with high prevalence of the practice are correlated with high vulnerability to natural disasters.² An estimated 65 million adolescent girls are currently out-of-school and half of the world's out-of-school children live in conflict-affected settings. In some cases extremist groups are actively targeting schoolgirls for abduction and attacks, as in the cases of Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At the Summit, global leaders and key stakeholders will make commitments to support the implementation of the Secretary General's [Agenda for Humanity](#), a central theme of which is justifiably the empowerment and protection of women and girls (Core Responsibility 3.D; see also Core Responsibility 2. A, C & D). Political leaders, donors and all actors in the humanitarian system must use this opportunity to make commitments that specifically protect the rights of adolescent girls at risk in both conflict and natural disaster settings.

Recommendations

As governments, UN agencies, civil society representatives and other actors prepare Summit commitments articulating how they will work together to realize the Agenda for Humanity, we recommend³ a host of policy, program and research actions with an explicit focus on adolescent girls.

I. Policy

There are currently few policies that focus exclusively on the rights and needs of adolescent girls in both conflict and natural disaster settings, with the recent exception of the [US Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls](#). The Women, Peace and Security agenda (UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its ensuing, "sister" resolutions), for instance, addresses the vulnerabilities of women during war and their value to peacebuilding, but fails to consistently articulate the special needs of girls within that context. Child protection policies are often blind on gender or lack the empowerment focus that is so central to the women, peace and security agenda. In addition to auditing national policies on humanitarian assistance to ensure they adequately address gender, and within that the rights and needs of girls, the following, suggested policy commitments could be made at the Summit to address this gap.

¹ [http://www.unicef.org/mena/UNICEFJordan_EarlyMarriageStudy2014\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/mena/UNICEFJordan_EarlyMarriageStudy2014(1).pdf)

² Lemmon, Gayle Tzemach. "Fragile States, Fragile Lives: Child Marriage Amid Disaster and Conflict." Council on Foreign Relations, June 2014.

³ These recommendations were developed over the course of a year of consultations with numerous humanitarian and gender experts in government, academia and humanitarian response.

Leaders Should Make [Core Commitments](#) to Protect and Empower Adolescent Girls at the World Humanitarian Summit High-Level Leaders' Roundtable on Women and Girls. The High Level Leaders' Roundtable on Women and Girls: Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality will be a space for commitments to protect and empower women and girls as part of the global community's fulfillment of the Agenda for Humanity. We encourage leaders to attend this session, and to come prepared to make core commitments specifically to address the needs of adolescent girls in crisis settings. This is in line with Agenda for Humanity actions under Core Responsibilities Two and Three and also directly advances targets 5.2 and 5.3 under the gender equality goal (Goal 5) of the Sustainable Development Goals, in addition to supporting the achievement of other goals and targets across the framework.

- For commitment 1: Actors should commit to ensure all adolescent girls in crisis settings are linked to essential services and stand-alone programming that addresses their specific protection risks and empowers them to become involved in all community decision making that affects their lives.
- For commitment 2: Leaders should commit to providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including for adolescent girls, as soon as possible after an emergency, by 2017.
- For commitment 3: For actors who are already part of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, commit to ensuring GBV prevention and mitigation interventions—including for adolescent girls—throughout all stages of humanitarian action within and across 100% of their areas of operation by 2018.

II. Programs

Development and humanitarian donors and practitioners should prioritize conducting needs analyses and developing programs geared toward adolescent girls⁴ from the initial onset of a crisis, ensuring girls are part of the conversation and programming at every stage. Safe spaces for adolescent girls are important, but equally important are the activities within those safe spaces: Programming should not focus solely on the protection of girls as potential victims, but should also encourage a range of activities that will increase the agency of girls, allowing them to contribute to the very solutions that will meet their unique needs. All activities and programs should be monitored and evaluated (see below). The inclusion of the communities in which girls live is vital to ensuring that girls not only see themselves as valuable, but that those around them do as well.

III. Research

The existing research on adolescent girls has been focused mainly on both older adolescent girls (15-19 years-old) as beneficiaries and not participants and has been focused on those girls in development settings. Immediate investment in action-grounded research that catalyzes results for displaced adolescent girls is needed. This increase in real-time, results-based research grounded in age- and gender- disaggregated data must be conducted with adolescent girls to ensure programs are effective, inclusive and responsive to their needs. Ethical standards for human research, particularly with young adolescents (ages 10-14) need to be developed and implemented, and girls themselves need to be included at all stages of research. Finally, funding for research on girls in conflict and crisis settings should be increased.

⁴ For more on this, see the Women's Refugee Commission's analysis: <https://womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/1078-i-m-here-report-final-pdf>