

## Policy Briefing

October 2017

### Key Policy Recommendations

- Improve policy and programming design to better align with the lived experience of being a refugee. This has implications for co-ordinated cross-sector planning and service delivery.
- Refine legal instrumentation around refugee status to ensure service access and system capacity to avoid stunting youth transitions.
- Provide choice in long term livelihood pathways by providing skills linked to labour market demand in the host country or educational catch up opportunities outside of age-based schooling.
- Remove barriers to integration by creating enabling conditions which facilitate the transition into adulthood, such as increased provision of language training.
- Young people are experts on their own lives, regardless of the circumstances they find themselves in. Youth should be supported to voice their opinions and perspectives on their future adult lives.

### Introduction

Forced displacement is a critical global issue. In 2017 UNHCR identified some 64 million people across the globe as displaced, of these over 16 million were classified as refugees.<sup>1</sup> Continuing instability in the Middle East, central Asia and Africa is causing prolonged periods of displacement for those affected by crises, with most refugees hosted by countries with high levels of poverty. Rising refugee populations are of significant concern in regions where mounting tensions have led to outbreaks of insurgency due to political, economic, religious, ethnic and social pressures. Further, protracted displacement has become the norm in areas suffering sustained conflict with some states existing in a cycle of perpetual crises. UNHCR highlights that the average period of displacement has risen to more than 20 years,<sup>2</sup> the distinction between humanitarian and development action has blurred. This has important implications for the design of policy and the efficacy of donor programming.

Of particular concern is the situation for children and youth, with around 600 million young people living in fragile or conflict areas across the globe and over half of refugee populations under the age of 18 (Figure 1). DFID is responding

to this difficult and changing context by examining the effects of protracted displacement on youth transitions. The focus on youth reflects growing policy interest in addressing the challenges created by forced displacement on trajectories into adulthood and the need to equip young people with the skills and capabilities required to create positive adult lives. This research contributes to addressing a knowledge gap in understanding how displacement affects youth transitions to inform better policy and programme design.

### Research Methodology and Key Findings

The research adopted a participatory and youth-led approach undertaken in Uganda and Jordan with refugees aged 10-24 years old. In Uganda, the research worked with participants originating from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Jordan, young refugees were Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinians from Gaza. In both countries, participants were drawn from camp and urban settings, with 505 young people involved in surveys, 80 in focus groups, 92 giving narrative interviews and 25 producing story maps that give deep insight into youth experiences. More information on the research can be found in the detailed [Synthesis Report](#), [Methodology Report](#) and in the online [story map](#).

The youth-led research has provided a number of new insights into the challenges of transition to adulthood for young refugees. Centrally, the experience of being a refugee is one of frustrated ambitions and expectations for adult life that are evident in the progress through transition pathways of education, work / livelihoods and family life.

**Education:** The research participants recognised the vital importance of education both as a marker of transition to adulthood and as a prerequisite for obtaining quality employment. However, youth reported a range of practical



Figure 1: Young refugees re-entering Za'atari refugee camp.

barriers and lack of system capacity that limited their ability to realise the benefits of education. These included the loss of certificates, making it difficult to recommence education as a refugee; the hidden costs within a 'free' education system (and costs of higher education in Jordan); language barriers; discrimination and harassment; conflicting home responsibilities; and a lack of school places, particularly in the rural camp settlement in Uganda. In Jordan the two-shift system resulted in variable quality with Syrian refugees generally participating in afternoon classes. Failure to complete education has a number of implications in negatively impacting on young peoples' aspirations and behaviours, restricting their ability to access the labour market.

"I do not have money for school fees and my academic documents to not qualify me to get any job here" (*Renan, 15 year-old Congolese male, Kampala*).

"I lost all hope without my education. It felt like having a bleak and unknown future" (*Nasim, 20 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa*).

**Work / livelihoods:** The transition into work is a key life stage for young people and a marker of adulthood. Participants reported frustration in their ability to obtain 'good work', due to weak labour market conditions in the host country, a lack of skills (including language in Uganda) and, in Jordan, legal restrictions on the types of work open to refugees. These difficulties have a range of implications that include high unemployment and engagement in exploitative forms of work, all of which build frustration and resentment. It also means that youth are unable to obtain stable incomes that allow them to build assets or afford marriage until later in life.

"I am a living person and my brains and heart are still working and I don't want to sit around and be like a tree; I want to be a person with goals and moving ahead" (*Filsan, 18 year-old Somali male, Nakivale*).

"I am not allowed to work in anything ... or as a cleaner or something like that" (*Adnan, 17 year-old Syrian male, E. Amman*).

**Family life:** Marriage and family formation was also viewed by young refugees as a key transition pathway and a primary means to attain social status. Marriage was frequently delayed due to the costs, the lack of a suitable match or a sense of instability where marriage may worsen conditions for the individual or their partner or constrain future opportunities for resettlement. These challenges have implications for social cohesion and the ability of youth to feel a respected member of the community. It also restricts traditional means of building household assets (Figure 2).

"When you're married and when you're single it's not the same. Like when you are a married, people will respect you and you see you as a respected person and an adult" (*Uba, 20 year-old Somali female, Nakivale*).

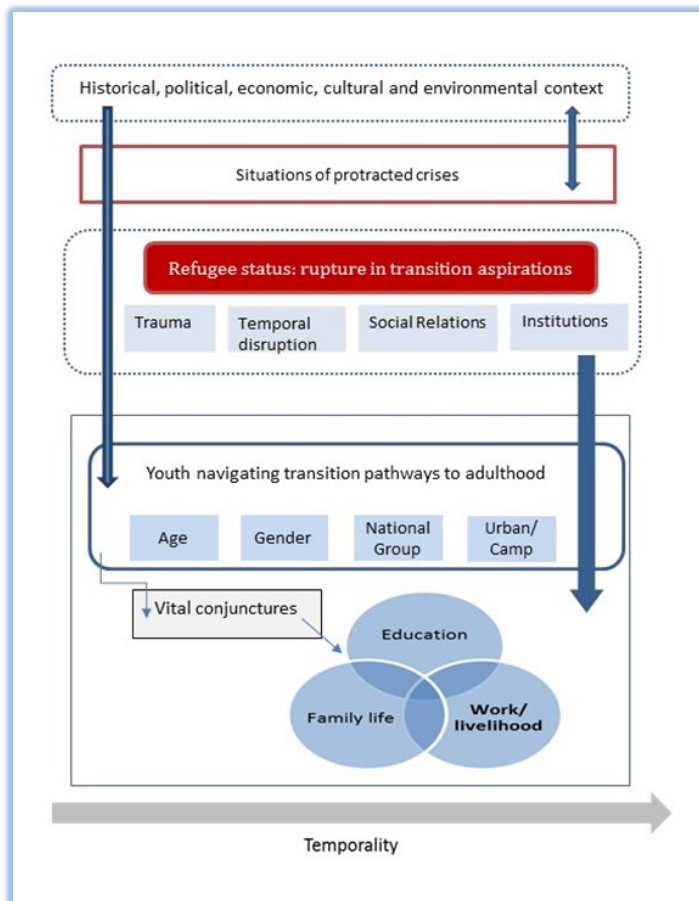
"It's a big step. If one doesn't have a job it is not possible to get married and establish a family" (*Zain, 20 year-old Syrian male, Za'atari*).



**Figure 2:** Research participant Khadra shows an example of a Somali wedding dress, in Kisenyi, Kampala. Photograph taken for her story map.

## Conceptual Insight on Factors Affecting Transition

The research has also provided new conceptual insights into the processes of transition and the specific challenges created by protracted displacement. The research indicates that becoming a refugee is a rupture in the transition to adulthood (Figure 3), which has multiple consequences for young people trying to establish adult lives in host countries. Beyond a single disruptive event that may affect a particular aspect or pathway of a young person's transition to adulthood at any given moment, such as death of a parent, or pregnancy (a vital juncture), young refugees' entire journey towards adulthood has been significantly affected through a simultaneous shift across all potential transition pathways.



**Figure 3:** Refugee status as a rupture in transitions.

The experience of becoming a refugee is shown to transform aspirations and shape the direction of young people's potential pathways. Being a refugee had a stronger impact on young people's transitions to adulthood than individual factors such as location (urban or camp settlement), ethnicity, or gender. However, there were nuances in experience due to markers of difference such as age, gender, national group and location. For example, those in the 10-14 years age range had more aspirational dreams for future adulthood; while those who were older tended to remain single for longer than cultural norms dictate due to the inability to achieve educational and livelihood goals. Similarly, while few differences emerged between national groups in terms of transition experience, there were some nuances in gendered experiences around caring, gender discrimination and restrictions on access to work. For example, Somali women in Uganda whose religion and dress code made them more obviously stand out as refugees, noted discrimination.

"Being a refugee has affected my plans, I have been taken backwards [...] I returned to zero. I am like a young child starting afresh with life." (Arthur, Congolese male, Uganda).

"Here in Jordan and although the people have been great ... it's not like the help you get from your family. I mean you can say that future plans have failed already, that means there is no future!" (Samer, 20 year-old Iraqi male, Zarqa).

Minor differences in experience can also be identified based on whether youth live in a camp or an urban setting for example in education, with cities offering better access than was available in camps.

Overall, the research identifies four active components to rupture that shapes the transitions of youth into adulthood. First, that the traumatic experiences of becoming and being a refugee, often due to the experience of violence and loss, can have a deep effect on the psycho-social wellbeing of young people and their aspirations for adulthood.

Second, temporariness is implicit in humanitarian policy and central to the expectations of refugees that they will return home or be permanently resettled. However, the protracted nature of crises now means that this may take several years and even decades. Due to expectations of impending change, youth do not invest in the present or they take risks to realise distant imagined futures.

Third, displacement breaks relational networks which are important for the construction of identity and creation of assets. Many transition pathways rely on social relationships as a source of support or information and these are unavailable to refugee youth.

Fourth, institutional rules and conditions impact significantly on young refugees' ability to realise future plans. Navigating complex or inconsistently applied rules have an impact on freedom of movement, types of work available, education and the accumulation of assets to frustrate effective transitions.

## Conclusion

The research has demonstrated the complexity of growing up in protracted crises. Working across two very different contexts, youth face many common challenges in realising their goals for adult life. By deepening understanding of transition pathways and the conditional factors that affect opportunity and decision making, this project fills a vital gap in knowledge needed to target assistance to displaced youth and support their efforts to build productive adult lives. The condition of being a refugee has significant implications for young people and in particular where their displacement is protracted. Transitioning to adulthood is a time when aspirations are realised and long-term decisions made regarding education, work/livelihoods and family life. Displacement ruptures young people's plans and specific support is required to ensure that changes to transition pathways are positively impacted with as little disruption as possible. Based on the research and workshop discussions with practitioner organisations engaged with young refugees, a series of recommendations are offered (see over).

## References

- <sup>1</sup> UNHCR. (2017). Global Appeal 2017 Update. Geneva: United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
- <sup>2</sup> UNHCR. (2016). Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2015. Geneva: United Nations High Commission for Refugees.



# Policy Recommendations

The findings and conceptual insights from the research result in several implications and recommendations for policy and programming, particularly that the status of being a refugee has significant implications for transitions to adulthood at all levels and across pathways. In both Uganda and Jordan the institutional arrangements for service delivery are both complex and different. A key recommendation from the research is that beyond context, actions should be co-ordinated at national and local levels and involve state, donor, NGO, community based organisations and youth representatives in the design of new services.

The specific recommendations are as follows:

## Integrated nature of refugee experience

The design of policy and programming should be better aligned with the lived experience of being a refugee. This has implications for cross-sector and co-ordinated planning and delivery of services. Specifically, the research indicates:

- piloting and evaluation of person / family centred planning of multi-agency support for young refugees resident in camp and urban settings;
- expanded provision of trauma counselling, mentoring and self-esteem building, augmenting existing networked NGO services; and
- greater country support for decentralised programming at settlement level to more effectively connect providers and improve targeting of resources.

## System capacity

The implementation of laws and regulations that determine status and access to services need to be refined to avoid negative consequences on youth transitions. This includes:

- A partnership action plan at country level, with government and key stakeholder organisations, to identify where legal frameworks impede youth transitions, such as access to 'good work' or administrative barriers to marriage;
- ensuring sufficient capacity of education provision in camp and urban settlements for refugees at secondary level to reduce number of out of school children;
- removing institutional disadvantages in education including hidden costs, class overcrowding, and low quality teaching environments;
- expanding the availability of fully funded scholarships for refugee youth into higher education; and
- reducing discrimination through better public information and community action to build bridges between host and refugee populations.

## Skills and training

Planning must be for the long term; assuming that employment will be in the host country. Including:

- vocational training to have stronger links to labour market demand and to include options for progression to higher level qualifications;
- diversification of opportunities for youth to enable selection of livelihood pathways.
- creating opportunities for youth who have missed education due to language/traumatic experience to catch up outside of age-based schooling;
- the provision of career information as part of person / family centred service delivery; and
- increased capacity for enterprise skills, training and access to start-up capital.

## Enabling conditions

Increasing focus, and funding, on creating conditions that enable transition into adulthood. This should:

- streamline processes for young refugees to obtain replacement education certificates lost during displacement or translate documents;
- use NGOs / CBOs more effectively as conduits for information to and engagement of refugee youth; and
- in Uganda increase provision of language training to remove a key barrier to integration.

## Youth voice

Young people are experts on their own lives, regardless of the circumstances they find themselves in. Youth should be supported to voice their opinions and perspectives on their future adult lives. This could include:

- the creation and involvement of youth fora in service planning and delivery at settlement and national levels, where youth properly and appropriately facilitated to meaningfully participate; and
- facilitating youth as champions and advocates within and across refugee communities, supported through CBOs.

### Youth Transitions in Protracted Crises:

A collaboration between the University of Dundee, UK, Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL), King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF), Jordan.

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