

Why a kit for adolescents' expression and innovation?¹

The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation (Adolescent Kit) was created in recognition of the particular challenges that adolescents face in humanitarian situations, and the gap in programming to support them. It aims to support adolescent girls and boys in difficult circumstances, and to bring about positive change in their lives.

Adolescents are a key age group affected by conflict and other humanitarian situations. Their rights are often violated during times of crisis, and they may face risks to their lives, health, development and wellbeing.

Despite these challenges, many adolescents demonstrate significant resilience in humanitarian

situations, finding constructive ways to adapt to their situations and cope with difficulties. Drawing on their resourcefulness and skills, they can, and do, contribute great energy, creativity and enthusiasm to improving their own lives, as well as their communities – and can be resources for peace and stability.

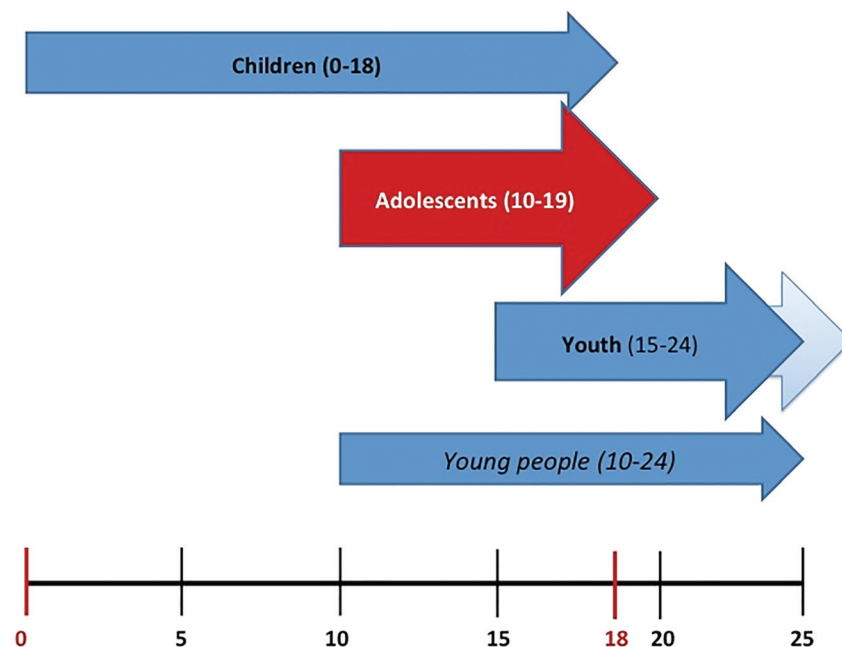
Gaps in support for adolescents

Aid actors have established a number of helpful initiatives to support the development and protection of adolescents in humanitarian situations. These include youth, child protection, education, psychosocial, life skills, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and other programmes. Many of these interventions provide children with opportunities to recover, learn and engage

Who are adolescents?

The United Nations defines adolescents as human beings in the second decade of life, ages 10-19. Adolescents ages 10-17 (to the moment they turn 18) are children, and as such are within UNICEF's mandate as custodians of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (People ages 18-19 are both adolescents and adults).

The following definitions of different age groups may be useful:



- ▶ Children are “human beings up to age 18” as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the child.
- ▶ United Nations agencies, including UNICEF and UNFPA, use a working definition of youth as human beings ages 15-24, but individual states utilize their own official definitions of ‘youth,’ which sometimes extend to higher age ranges.
- ▶ ‘Young people’ are defined by the United Nations as people ages 10-24.
- ▶ UNICEF defines adolescents as human beings ages 10-19.

The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation is designed to support programmes and interventions for adolescents ages 10-17 – the subgroup of adolescents that are also children within UNICEF's mandate. Depending on their context and goals, programme coordinators, facilitators, and anyone else using the kit may also choose to reach out to and include younger children and older adolescents or youth, adapting the approaches as they see fit for those populations.

¹Source for text box, Who are adolescents?: United Nations Children's Fund, Adolescence: An age of opportunity, The State of the World's Children, UNICEF, New York, 2011.

Overlooking certain adolescents

Even when adolescents are included in programmes, certain groups are often overlooked:

Older adolescents: Most programmes address the developmental levels of younger adolescents, and are less relevant to the interests and capacities of adolescent girls and boys ages 14 and above. Games and recreation activities that are enjoyable for younger adolescents may not hold the attention of older adolescents who have adult roles and responsibilities, and are capable of more complex tasks and projects.

Vulnerable adolescents: Interventions don't always begin by identifying and reaching out to the most marginalized adolescents. Instead there is often an 'if you build it they will come' approach, which disproportionately reaches adolescents who already have access to programmes and services, and fails to reach those who need the support the most – such as adolescent girls and boys who are confined to their homes, who carry a heavy burden of responsibilities, participate in harmful forms of labour, or have disabilities.

in positive activities within safe environments such as child friendly spaces, sports clubs, mentoring schemes, children's clubs, and youth centres.

Despite these initiatives, huge gaps exist and missed opportunities remain for supporting adolescents. Evidence suggests that the majority of interventions for children in humanitarian situations focus overwhelmingly on younger girls and boys under the age of 10, with very few targeting adolescents specifically.

Why are adolescents left behind?

There are a number of reasons why adolescents are often left behind:

It can be more challenging to work with adolescents than young children: Developing interventions that meet adolescents' developmental level and interests is challenging. It can be difficult to find activities, projects and issues that engage adolescents, particularly in contexts where resources and information are limited, space is difficult to secure and facilitators lack training and experience in working with young people.

Resources and tools for working with adolescents in humanitarian situations haven't been gathered systematically, despite many creative and effective initiatives for young people globally. As a result, humanitarian staff often lack clear guidelines and tools for setting up interventions with adolescents, and are unable to take into account lessons learned from working with young people around the world.

Opening space for adolescents to voice their opinions and take leadership roles can be controversial.

Adolescents may challenge traditions and conventions, test boundaries, and voice unpopular views. In some cultural contexts, providing adolescents with opportunities to speak out or participate in decision-making may challenge conventional norms around deference, authority and age. Humanitarian staff operating in difficult, unstable circumstances may want to protect their working relationship with the host community, and may be concerned that working with adolescents could put them at risk.

What does this mean?

The upshot is that there is often very little support for adolescents in humanitarian situations, and the programmes that are available often fail to reach the adolescent girls and boys who could benefit the most. This means that adolescents are often left to fend for themselves in extremely challenging circumstances and to navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood without support or protection. It means that their rights as children are neglected. And it means that we fail to capitalize on the important roles that adolescents can and do play as agents of social change, peacemakers and contributors to their communities in times of humanitarian crisis.

Filling the gap

The Adolescent Kit aims to address this gap in support, by providing humanitarian organisations with a practical package of **guidance, tools, activities and supplies** for supporting adolescent girls and boys. It is the result of a collaborative effort involving experts, communities and adolescents, and builds on best practices that have already been established by UNICEF and partners in humanitarian contexts in Kenya, Haiti, Indonesia, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Jordan, and Myanmar.

The Adolescent Kit brings together approaches for working with adolescents that have been tried and tested with adolescent girls and boys around the

world, and found to be effective for making positive change in their lives. It revolves around evidence that adolescents often demonstrate great resilience in challenging situations, and tries to nurture this through activities that build on their strengths. It provides them with opportunities to learn new skills, develop positive relationships and give back to their communities.

The activities, tools and guidance in the Adolescent Kit can be used through any kind of programme or intervention that brings groups of adolescents together to learn, play, practice new skills, or work on projects together. It can be used to catalyse or strengthen the kinds of child protection, education and/or youth development interventions that aid actors already implement in humanitarian response, such as child- and adolescent-friendly spaces, recreation programmes, learning initiatives, and clubs, making them more appropriate, relevant and effective for the adolescent age group.

Children's rights are the foundation for the Adolescent Kit.

This promotes an integrated and holistic approach to supporting adolescents in humanitarian situations, and emphasizes that all adolescent girls and boys, even the most vulnerable, should be included in interventions.

The Adolescent Kit:

- ▶ Supports programmes to bring a particular focus to **children ages 10-17**;
- ▶ **Builds on best practices and standards** in child protection, psychosocial support, education, life skills, peacebuilding and other sectors, to support adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing, learning, and engagement with their communities;
- ▶ Focuses on **reaching the adolescents who are most in need of support**;
- ▶ Uses **the arts** as a way for adolescents to express and explore the world around them, learn and use key skills, discover their own talents, and reconnect with their cultural heritage;
- ▶ Supports adolescents in becoming **innovators** by providing them with opportunities to think creatively, explore problems and opportunities, and experiment with solutions and possibilities; and
- ▶ **Addresses both younger and older adolescents**, and can be adapted to adolescents' developmental levels, needs, interests and abilities.