

Investigate adolescents' situations

An important step in planning your work with the Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation (Adolescent Kit) is to identify the adolescents in your programme context, especially those most in need of support, and to understand key issues that affect their lives.

Adolescents are an extremely diverse group with different needs, interests and challenges. As you get started with using the Adolescent Kit, find out as much as you can about adolescents in your area. Think about which adolescents might benefit from the approaches and activities within the Adolescent Kit, and how you can design your intervention so that it meets their needs. Once your intervention is underway, continue to update information about adolescents' situations regularly and adapt activities to meet changes in their circumstances, needs and interests.

Make sure that you **involve adolescents!** Adolescent girls and boys know more about their situations than anyone else, and may have creative ways of collecting information about their peers.

Refer to the **Collecting information about adolescents** tool for guidance on collecting data and consulting adolescents.

Use the questions below to guide your investigation of adolescents' situations. Add any others that make sense in your particular context.

Refer to the **Questions for investigating adolescents** tool

1. Who are the adolescents?

As a first step, try to find out who the adolescents are in your area and where they can be found. This may include adolescents of different ages, ethnicity, clan, language, sexual orientation and religion, and those with disabilities. In particular, try to identify the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys, who are typically overlooked in programmes and need support the most.¹



2. How many adolescents are there?

Try to obtain the strongest demographic profile possible

¹ This can be difficult – vulnerable adolescents often disappear in humanitarian situations, and you may need to enlist the support of community members and other adolescents to actively seek them out.

Investigating adolescents

There are a lot of ways to gather information about adolescents in humanitarian situations:

- ▶ Review child protection, education, reproductive health and other programmes that target older children – situation analyses, surveys and humanitarian assessments can also provide useful information about adolescents
- ▶ Collect additional information through focus groups, surveys and rapid assessments
- ▶ Talk to community members – teachers, parents, religious leaders, community workers and others can provide useful information about adolescents' circumstances
- ▶ Consult adolescents!

Look for adolescents in the places where they live, gather, learn, eat, work, pray and play, and ask them about their lives



of adolescents in your community, calculating the overall number of adolescents, as well as the number of adolescent girls and boys from different ethnic, language, religious and other backgrounds. This will help you to set enrolment targets for your intervention with the Adolescent Kit, and to reach those most in need of support.

3. What kinds of humanitarian circumstances are adolescents dealing with?

Consider whether adolescents are in the first few weeks of a crisis, undergoing a longer-term humanitarian emergency situation (such as ongoing displacement within a refugee or IDP camp), experiencing a conflict, or living in a fairly permanent and stable development context.

The type of humanitarian context, anticipated duration of adolescents' displacement, and the prospects for recovery can affect how you design and run your

Ethical considerations for undertaking an assessment of adolescents' situations

The following excerpt from the Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit developed by the Child Protection Working Group of the Global Protection Cluster provides an overview of ethical approaches and key considerations that should be taken when conducting an assessment of children's situations. Programme coordinators using the Adolescent Kit are strongly encouraged to review and follow the guidance provided in that resource for additional considerations and steps to take when assessing adolescents' situations, and to review and uphold the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (See the Child Protection section of the Resources in the Foundation Guidance.)

An ethical approach to rapid assessments requires:

- ▶ A commitment to follow-up action, as necessary;
- ▶ Identifying and finding ways to support community-coping mechanisms that do not violate basic rights of or harm children;
- ▶ Considering potential negative effects of the assessment exercise (such as stigmatizing a person or group by attracting unnecessary attention to them or creating fear);
- ▶ Not raising false expectations by being honest with communities about the objectives of the assessment before and during the assessment;
- ▶ An analysed desk review.

Assessments are interventions in themselves. They can be meaningful and positive experiences or intrusive and disruptive, and can cause additional stress for the population. This is especially the case during the immediate aftermath of an emergency. 'Do no harm' and 'the best interests of the child' should therefore be primary considerations in any assessment.

Sensitive information: It is your responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of the information you have been entrusted with. Confidentially means 'the restrictive management of sensitive information (e.g. names, incidents, locations, details, etc.) that has been collected before, during and after child protection assessments.'

Sensitive information must be protected and shared only with those people (service providers, family, etc.) who need the information for the best interest of the child. Shared information should be stripped of any details of the source, unless required to ensure appropriate action (with written consent from the source). For more on data confidentiality, please see Standard 5 of 'Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Response'

Informed consent is an integral part of any assessment activity that involves direct acquisition of information from people regardless of their age. Informed consent is 'the voluntary agreement of an individual who has the capacity to give consent, and who exercises free power of choice.'

Excerpt from: Global Protection Cluster Child Protection Working Group, Child Protection Rapid

intervention with the Adolescent Kit. It's also important to bear in mind that adolescents' circumstances can change rapidly in humanitarian settings – and that it is likely that you will have to adapt your intervention in response to those changes.

Refer to the **Adapting to the humanitarian context** tool to understand how different humanitarian circumstances may affect activities and approaches with adolescents.

4. What kinds of challenges do adolescents face?

Find out what is happening in adolescent girls' and boys' lives and use this information to design an intervention that helps them to cope with their challenges and build on opportunities in their environments.

Adolescents may face unique challenges in humanitarian situations. These could include disruption to their communities, interruption to their education and separation from their families, exploitative labour, child marriage, violence and abuse, or recruitment into fighting forces. Adolescents may live in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, and lack basic food, health, security and other services. Adolescents may be bored and idle, lacking opportunities to go to school or support themselves and their families, or they may be overwhelmed and burdened with adult responsibilities such as work, child care and domestic chores that make it difficult for them to participate in programmes intended for them. They may feel frustrated, discouraged, frightened or anxious about the future. Like adolescents everywhere, they may also be concerned about their friendships, families, romantic relationships and futures.

Refer to the **Exploring challenges and opportunities** tool

5. What kind of family situations do adolescents have? What are their roles and responsibilities?

Try to get a sense of adolescents' family situations, and their roles and responsibilities at home. Many adolescents may take on new roles in humanitarian situations, such as heading households, minding siblings, working, and becoming parents themselves. These new roles have implications for the type of activities with the Adolescent Kit that may be relevant to

adolescents' needs and interests, as well as for the time they may have available to participate in interventions.

6. How do adolescents spend their time?

Investigate how adolescent girls and boys spend their days, where they go, and what they do. Adolescents' daily lives may leave them with long periods of the day when they are unoccupied and unsupervised, or their days may be very busy with household tasks or work. Adolescents may be confined to their homes due to



household responsibilities, social norms or disabilities, or they may spend long periods away from their homes earning income (or seeking to do so), often through unsafe and potentially harmful activities.

Understanding how adolescents spend their time can help you to identify windows of opportunity (both time and place) for reaching them through the Adolescent Circles approach.

7. What kind of environments do adolescents live in?

Learn as much as you can about adolescents' cultural, social and physical environments, as these can affect opportunities to play, learn and interact with others through interventions with the Adolescent Kit.

Cultural environment: Cultural, social, and religious norms may influence the types of activities that are considered acceptable for adolescents. In many contexts it is considered inappropriate or unsafe for adolescent boys and girls to interact, and/or for adolescent girls to move about or be seen unaccompanied in public. Marginalised adolescents may face discrimination or stigma, limiting their opportunities to participate in activities with other adolescent girls and boys. Religious practice, including daily prayer or annual holidays, can also affect the time adolescents have to participate in activities.

Social environment: Adolescents' ethnic, religious or clan identity, as well as their family connections, place of origin or association with a political or military group, can shape how they relate to others – particularly in conflict-affected situations.

Physical environment: Adolescents who live in remote

areas may not have the time or money to reach programmes that are located in community centres. Hazards such as traffic, road conditions, or the possibility of harassment, sexual assault, or robbery can also inhibit adolescents' movement around their communities (often disproportionately creating barriers for girls and those with disabilities) and their participation in Adolescent Circles.

8. What kind of activities are adolescents interested in?



Even in difficult circumstances adolescents may enjoy activities such as playing sports, meeting friends, cooking, or caring for younger siblings. Ask adolescents what they enjoy or would like to try, and use this information to plan and run activities with the Adolescent Kit.

9. What knowledge and skills do adolescents want to gain?

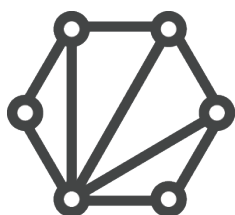


A top priority of adolescents in humanitarian circumstances is to gain knowledge and skills that will help them in their adult roles as heads of households, parents, students, earners and citizens. They may be curious about certain issues, or want to know how to manage

their current circumstances and contribute to their communities. Take time to discuss the type of skills and knowledge that adolescents want to gain through an intervention with the Adolescent Kit and select activities that meet their interests and needs.

10. What kind of relationships do adolescents have?

Adolescents may experience shifts in their relationships as they grow and develop and their circumstances change. In humanitarian settings, adolescents are



often isolated from their peers, and may experience tension with others in their households or community. Talk to adolescents about their relationships with peers, friends, family members and others. Use this information to plan and run activities with the Adolescent Kit that help them to strengthen positive relationships, and to address challenging ones.²

11. What are adolescents' hopes and goals?



Feeling hopeful with realistic goals for the future is a key element of psychosocial wellbeing. Talk to adolescents about their hopes and goals for their families and communities, and the changes they would like to see in their lives. As much as possible, plan and run activities that can help adolescents to develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their goals and improve their immediate circumstances.

Bringing it all together

The information that you collect regarding adolescents' circumstances and lives will help you to plan and run your intervention with the Adolescent Kit. The most important thing to remember is to take a flexible approach, and to design your activities and approaches in line with the particular needs of adolescent girls and boys in your community.

Monitor and adapt

Investigating adolescents' situations is not just a one-time exercise that you do before setting up your intervention with the Adolescent Kit. It is something that you will need to do continuously as you work with adolescent girls and boys. As their situations change – as the humanitarian context evolves, as they grow and develop, and life throws new challenges at them – you will need to keep adapting your approach.

As you move forward, make sure that you continue asking questions, observing adolescents closely and monitoring the overall situation in the community. Run activities that can help you to learn more about their lives and use this information to plan your work together. Refer to the **Activities for learning from and**

² Adolescent Circles can also help adolescents to form new relationships by providing opportunities to make friends (or to spend time with friends they don't see very often).