

# Reach out and engage adolescents

**A key part of your intervention is deciding which adolescents to include, and then taking steps to reach out to them. This involves organising your intervention in a way that makes them feel comfortable and safe, and reduces barriers to their participation, as well as finding ways to keep adolescent girls and boys involved.**

If you are starting a new programme, taking the steps outlined in this guidance from the beginning can help you to build a programme that effectively reaches the adolescents you aim to support, and keeps them involved. If you are already implementing a programme, consider using this guidance to assess whether you are reaching the adolescents you aim to support, and to introduce new strategies to expand and strengthen participation if you are not reaching your goals in this regard.

## 1. Decide which adolescents to include

As a first step, you need to decide which adolescents you want to include in your intervention with the Adolescent Kit. This decision should be based on your investigation of adolescents' situations in your community, along with an assessment of gaps in programming for adolescent girls and boys, and feedback from community members.

Consider:

- ▶ Which adolescents could be included in your intervention?
- ▶ Which adolescents are already being reached by other programmes?
- ▶ Are there adolescents who aren't being reached and who could benefit from the activities and approaches in the Adolescent Kit?

There are a lot of different options. You might decide to open up your intervention to all adolescents ages 10-17 who are interested in participating. Or, you may decide to target a specific group of adolescents who you have identified as particularly vulnerable or underserved. For example, you may notice that adolescent boys have more opportunities than adolescent girls to participate in activities outside their homes, and decide to focus your intervention specifically on girls.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, if certain groups of adolescents are being pulled into exploitative labour, armed conflict, child marriage or other worrying activities, you may try to target them.

<sup>1</sup> The needs of adolescent girls are often overlooked in humanitarian and development programmes. In particular, adolescent mothers or wives, who are often seen as adults, may miss out on helpful interventions.

## Involve the community

Consult with community members to discuss which adolescents should participate in activities with the Adolescent Kit, and work with those community members to reach out to the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys.

Consider what other programmes for adolescents exist in your community so that you don't overlap or duplicate activities for a particular group (e.g. younger boys), and try to fill in any gaps in support. Remember that the adolescents that need your help the most are the often ones who are the least visible.

Whatever you choose to do, try to involve the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys in your community, but be careful not to stigmatise or reinforce divisions between adolescents. Be aware that targeting one specific group with services and resources can cause tensions. Try to avoid this by selecting participants in an open, transparent way that involves the community.



## 2. Set enrolment targets

It's important to set (and track) enrolment targets. That means considering how many adolescents you want to include in your intervention, both overall and from different groups in the community. Think about:

- ▶ Including adolescents from different groups: Ideally, you should aim to include groups of adolescents in the same proportions that they are represented in the community. For example if 15% of adolescents in the area are from a particular ethnicity, you should try to enrol at least 15% of participants with that ethnicity.
- ▶ Prioritizing the most vulnerable adolescents: Set higher enrolment targets for them.
- ▶ Aligning enrolment targets with the resources available: Consider how much space, time and funding is available for activities, and how many facilitators can work with adolescents. (The recommended ratio is one facilitator to

every 25 adolescents.) Be realistic about how many adolescents you can support without compromising the quality or safety of your intervention with the Adolescent Kit.

Refer to Setting enrolment targets for vulnerable adolescents tool.

### 3. Reach out to adolescents

It's not enough to just set enrolment targets for adolescents. You need to actually go out and connect with them and convince them (and their families) to attend activities. You also need to find ways to overcome barriers that stop them from attending. This is particularly the case for the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys, who may never even hear about your intervention unless you actively seek them out. This means:

- ▶ Looking for adolescents in the places where they live, gather, learn, eat, work, pray and play, and encouraging them to get involved;
- ▶ Raising awareness about your intervention with adolescents' families and communities, and enlisting the support of leaders, teachers, parents, adolescents, and others to bring vulnerable adolescent girls and boys on board ;
- ▶ Reducing barriers to adolescents' attendance – for example, by organizing activities at times and places that they can access easily and safely. Refer to the Select a place and time section of the guidance.

Too often humanitarian programmes take 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 support the most. Try to avoid this and take active steps to involve the most marginalized adolescent girls and boys in your intervention!

### 4. Organise Adolescent Circles and activities carefully

Once you get adolescents to turn up to activities, you need to find ways to keep them involved. That means organising your intervention in a way that makes adolescent girls and boys feel comfortable and safe, and doesn't inadvertently create barriers to their

## Reaching out to the most vulnerable

The most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys can be the hardest to reach in humanitarian situations – and are often overlooked.

They may include:

- ▶ Girls, particularly wives and mothers
- ▶ Adolescents with disabilities
- ▶ Adolescents from ethnic and religious minorities
- ▶ Adolescents separated from their families or without appropriate care
- ▶ Adolescents affected by HIV/AIDS
- ▶ Adolescents in exploitative labour
- ▶ Adolescents associated with armed forces or armed groups

participation.<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Keep your groups between 7-25 adolescents, and make sure that there is at least one facilitator per group (ideally two).
- ▶ Consider creating separate groups for girls and boys (particularly in cultural contexts where they are commonly segregated), where they may feel more comfortable interacting and discussing sensitive issues.
- ▶ Group adolescents by age or developmental level so that it's easier to find activities that interest and challenge them, and for everyone to participate equally.
- ▶ Consider creating separate groups or activity times for girls or boys from specific circumstances, if this reduces social or other barriers to their participation. **However, take care not to reinforce social norms that stigmatize any group by creating segregated circles.**
- ▶ Conversely, consider grouping adolescents from different backgrounds, circumstances and experience together in a circle so that they can build connections and learn from each other.
- ▶ Support adolescents to form group agreements and rules for how they will work together. These can guide adolescents to share feedback and ideas in positive ways, to treat each other with



<sup>2</sup> See the Facilitator's Guidance for more details on how to organise adolescents into groups (or circles) so that they feel safe and supported.

respect and to listen and learn from each other.

## 5. Monitor attendance

It is important to monitor adolescents' attendance at each session. This will tell you who is turning up for activities regularly, and whether you are meeting your enrolment targets for adolescents - both overall and from different groups. Use an enrolment log to work out:

- ▶ Which adolescents are attending activities, and how regularly;
- ▶ Whether there are too many or too few adolescents attending overall;
- ▶ Whether attendance is lower or higher among certain groups of adolescents (For example: girls, boys, adolescents from certain ethnic or religious backgrounds, or those with disabilities); and
- ▶ Whether attendance has increased or dropped off since the intervention began.

Patterns in adolescents' daily or weekly attendance can yield useful information about their lives and interests, and help you to find ways to make your intervention more accessible and engaging. Refer to How to make and use an enrolment log.

### Respond to changes in attendance

You may need to take action if adolescents' attendance is very irregular, or persistently too high or low. Try to find out what may be causing the situation, and consider ways to adapt your intervention in response.

### If adolescents, or specific groups of adolescents, are not participating in activities (or are not participating regularly or consistently):

- ▶ **Consult adolescents** to find out why they aren't attending activities and get their suggestions for improving the situation.
- ▶ Consider changing the time, location or nature of activities and rearranging the way you group girls and boys in their circles so that they are more accessible or attractive to adolescents.
- ▶ Raise more awareness about your intervention and enlist the support of community members (parents, teachers, leaders) to bring participants on board.



- ▶ Reach out to newly arrived adolescents, or children just entering adolescence who may not be aware about your intervention with the Adolescent Kit.

Refer to **Reducing barriers to participation** tool.

### If more adolescents are participating than originally expected or planned:

- ▶ Congratulate yourself, your colleagues and the participants in creating a programme or intervention that adolescents find interesting and engaging!
- ▶ Assess whether the programme resources are sufficient for adolescents to participate safely in activities that support their development and use of new competencies. Make sure that circles are an appropriate size (7-25 adolescents each), with 1-2 facilitators supporting each circle. Reorganize or create more groups (circles) of adolescents, find bigger activity spaces, and consider introducing morning and afternoon shifts to accommodate extra participants.
- ▶ Consider expanding your intervention by raising more funds, recruiting more facilitators, finding more activity spaces and gathering more supplies and equipment.
- ▶ Consider providing shorter sessions for more participants, rotating adolescents' activities (some work in the activity spaces while others do activities in the community), or recruiting community volunteers to run activities.
- ▶ Consider engaging older adolescents as volunteer facilitators or facilitator assistants if they are ready and interested to do so. (However, make sure that older adolescents also have time for activities that address their own interests and capabilities, and are not only given opportunities to look after younger adolescents and children.)
- ▶ Make sure that you still meet enrolment targets for specific groups of adolescents, and that the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys aren't overlooked.<sup>3</sup> It can be harder to be inclusive, or to notice when certain groups are not participating, when large numbers of adolescents are involved in activities.



<sup>3</sup> It is often the least marginalized adolescents – those who already have disproportionate access to programmes and services - who are the most likely to turn up to interventions.

- ▶ Try to be flexible, but be prepared to limit attendance in line with your resources (number of facilitators, activity spaces, supplies, time), so that you don't compromise the quality and safety of your intervention.

## Consider safety

Never organize activities for large numbers of adolescents if it puts their safety and wellbeing at risk.



- ▶ Crowded spaces can be stressful, and can contribute to arguments or fighting among participants.
- ▶ Physical and emotional safety can be difficult to protect if there is a low facilitator-to-adolescent ratio.
- ▶ The ability of facilitators to intervene in cases of bullying or exclusion and to support positive group dynamics diminishes as the number of adolescents goes up.

It is important to remember that adolescents' circumstances can fluctuate rapidly in humanitarian situations, and that it is normal for attendance to go up and down over the course of your intervention. Make sure that you continuously monitor attendance so that you can adjust your intervention as needed and support adolescents to participate safely.



link to the **Adapting to changes in adolescents' circumstances** tool

## Monitor and adapt

As you move forward, continue to monitor adolescents' attendance and participation carefully – and be ready to make changes in response. Take time to try and understand why adolescents may be dropping out of activities (or alternatively why there is high demand), and to figure out how you can encourage even the most

marginalized adolescent girls and boys to participate equally and safely in sessions.

Remember to **consult adolescents!** Adolescents can help you to understand why your intervention is not working for particular groups of girls or boys, and how you can reorganise your work to improve the situation. Make sure that you continuously check in with adolescents as you work together, and enlist their support in designing an intervention that meets their changing needs and circumstances.