

Integrating Youth Leadership in MHPSS Responses in Humanitarian Emergencies

A Research Project by
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in Partnership with the MHPSS Collaborative

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**THE MHPSS
COLLABORATIVE**

Integrating Youth Leadership in Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) Responses in Humanitarian Emergencies

Applied Research Project

Final Report

submitted by

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Executive Summary

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) responses in humanitarian emergencies can significantly improve by unlocking the potential of youth leadership. Reflecting the growing recognition of, and guidance for, incorporating young people's valuable contributions to humanitarian action as well as forging community-based MHPSS response, this report builds a bridge between youth leadership, MHPSS responses, and humanitarian action.

Through an applied research project, the MHPSS Collaborative and students from the Geneva Graduate Institute have joined forces to develop a practical guidance document for practitioners, policy-makers, and funders in the humanitarian and MHPSS sectors to work with and support young people in MHPSS response in emergencies. The document is based on extensive desk research, interviews, and focus group discussions as well as a co-creation workshop with young leaders, MHPSS practitioners, experts, funders, and policy-makers. Before introducing the final output of this collaborative research, this report defines the key components of the research, briefly presents findings from the literature review, clarifies the research methodology, analyzes the collected data, and summarizes our findings.

The guidance document starts by outlining the importance of youth leadership in MHPSS response; From improving its quality and relevance to increasing capacity and creating synergies, the integration of youth leadership promises to be a game-changer for MHPSS response. It also presents possible barriers and challenges of integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response, which were identified as a lack of trust in and from youth, a lack of knowledge, experience, or capacity to work with youth, their exclusion from decision-making and tokenistic approaches to participation, limited resources of and for youth, the risk of doing harm to youth, and the ignorance of young people's diversity.

At its core, the guidance recommends principles for meaningful cooperation with young people, emphasizing the importance of intentionality, adaptability, equality, inclusivity, agency, and sustainability. It then proposes nine strategies for promoting and integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response. They span from policy commitment to compensation and are designed to strengthen the capacity of young people, prioritize their safety and well-being, and ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. To assist organizations in evaluating and improving their current level of youth leadership integration in their work, the guidance comprises a self-assessment scale as well as further resources.

The guidance is an important contribution to further institutional efforts on the local, national, and international level of advancing young people's role in humanitarian response and MHPSS in particular.

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Second, we sincerely thank our academic supervisors, Dr. Claudia Seymour and Mohammadreza Eghbalizarch of the Geneva Graduate Institute for their guidance, expertise, and support. Their insights and thoughtful feedback greatly enriched the research process, ensuring its rigor and quality.

Furthermore, we acknowledge the substantial contributions of Dr. Victor Ugo of Save the Children Denmark and the MHPSS Collaborative throughout this research project. Their extensive network of experts, practitioners, and organizations working in the field of MHPSS provided us with invaluable resources and collaborative opportunities which greatly enriched the content of this study.

Lastly, we express our heartfelt thanks to all those who have provided support, encouragement, and understanding in diverse ways throughout this research journey.

A. Introduction to the Research Project

Young people are leaders in and positively impact humanitarian responses (Hoban et al. 2019; Apollo & Mbah 2022). The trend of recognizing their contributions to the humanitarian sector coincides with an increase of attention towards mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) responses and the active involvement of community therein (IASC 2018; Larrieta et al. 2022). Despite the importance of both developments, the integration of youth leadership in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) responses remains an uncharted territory. Generally seen on the receiving end of MHPSS, young people's agency in MHPSS responses is not yet adequately supported and promoted. Stakeholders engaged in humanitarian and MHPSS sectors seeking sustainable, local, and effective solutions to MHPSS responses in emergencies can unlock the potential of youth - but often lack both the understanding of its importance and practical guidance of *how to*.

This report is the result of an applied research project of the MHPSS Collaborative in partnership with students from the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. The objective of the research project was to develop a practical guidance document for practitioners, policy-makers and funders in the humanitarian and MHPSS sectors to work with and support young people as leaders in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies. The question guiding this project was: **how can youth leadership be meaningfully integrated into MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies?**

To respond to this question, the research has explored the chances and potentials of, the barriers and challenges of, relevant principles for, and strategies for integrating youth leadership in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies. The research was conducted through an extensive literature review, collection of data through interviews and focus group discussions, analysis of the data, and its utilization for the creation of the guidance document through a co-creation workshop with youth. The outcome of this project is the first-ever guidance document to encourage and assist humanitarian organizations in effectively incorporating youth leadership into MHPSS responses. It is based on extensive desk research, interviews and focus group discussions and a co-creation workshop with young leaders, MHPSS practitioners, experts, funders and policy-makers.

This report first briefly defines the key components of the research, summarizes an in-depth literature review, and briefly describes the research methodology. In the following analysis, we discuss the collected data from interviews and focus group discussions in light of the desk research. It is structured to first discuss opportunities, barriers, then principles for meaningful partnership with youth, strategies for promoting youth leadership and ultimately ensuring organizational commitment. After briefly introducing the workshop outcomes and a dissemination strategy, a conclusion of this report leads to the final guidance document. The report includes a number of annexes providing more detailed accounts of the different steps of this research project.

B. Definitions

A detailed definition of each component is provided in Section B of the literature review in Annex I.

This section briefly defines youth, youth leadership, MHPSS response and humanitarian emergency for use throughout the research project.

I. Youth

The age range for defining young people, youth, and adolescents differs across contexts. For the purpose of this research and to recognize young people in their diversity (Simpson 2018, p. 12), youth is understood broadly as a transitional phase of life from childhood over adolescence to adulthood that does not exceed 35 years.

II. Youth Leadership

Youth leadership refers to the ownership young people exercise over self-initiated actions and programmes throughout all project phases of MHPSS response, possibly involving shared decision-making with adults who see youth as equal and autonomous partners. It thereby represents the highest level of youth engagement and participation (IASC 2020, p. 44; UNICEF 1992; UNESCO 2019, p. 12) but does not refer to youth as a target group. Youth leadership can be exercised by young individuals in a community, youth groups and initiatives, and youth-led organizations. With regard to the research question, integrating youth leadership in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies can refer to (i) supporting independent youth-led action and (ii) integrating youth in existing institutions and MHPSS mechanisms (e.g. assessment, coordination, decision-making, resource allocation, monitoring).

III. MHPSS Response

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007, p. 16) defines MHPSS response as “any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psycho-social well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder”, which is extended for the purpose of this report to any mental health condition. The IASC’s Intervention pyramid categorizes MHPSS response into basic services and security, community and family supports, focused non-specialized supports and specialized services (IASC 2007 p. 13). According to the IASC’s Minimum Service Package (2022, p. 4), MHPSS “provides critical services and supports across the life course to reduce suffering“, improving people’s abilities to meet their basic needs to survive, recover and rebuild their lives.

IV. Humanitarian Emergencies

The IASC (2007, p. 17) defines an emergency as a situation arising from armed conflicts and natural disasters (including food crises) where large segments of the population are at acute risk of dying, immense suffering and/or losing their dignity. While various organizations have differing definitions on what they think is an emergency depending on their own mandates, in this project, no distinction is made between emergencies emerging from armed conflict, natural hazards, man-made crises nor public health emergencies as all are considered to provoke MHPSS needs.

C. Literature Review: Synthesis

A detailed literature review is provided in Annex I.

The research project is situated at the intersection of the three main components of this research, namely youth leadership, MHPSS response, and humanitarian emergency (see graphic). To understand the broader academic and policy environment, this research commenced with a literature review of 88 academic and non-academic sources. The following presents a brief synthesis of the review.



While some general guidelines for youth participation in humanitarian response and for youth engagement in MHPSS as well as guidelines on community-based (CB) MHPSS exist, there are currently no existing guidance documents that provide specific recommendations on integrating youth leadership in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies.

In situating the resources, we have first identified increasing recognition of, a number of guidelines for, and success stories of youth-led humanitarian response. Youth leadership in humanitarian action is thus demanded and supported. Second, this recognition does not yet extend to young people’s agency in MHPSS responses. We found a predominant perception of youth as “beneficiaries” *for* whom MHPSS response is provided instead of agents leading such response. Third, while young people’s contributions to general MHPSS outside emergencies are increasingly recognized, youth leadership is hardly mentioned in guidelines on MHPSS in emergencies. Fourth, with an increasing trend towards community-based (CB) MHPSS responses, youth can be perceived as a sub-actor in CB MHPSS.

The state of knowledge about integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response in humanitarian emergencies was divided into four areas. *First*, chances and opportunities, which foremost lie in the unexplored potential of youth for improving MHPSS response through increased relevance, reach, and capacity as well as benefits for young people engaged in MHPSS response themselves. *Second*, barriers and challenges pertain to a lack of trust in young people’s capacities, a lack of funding and resources, lack of time and evidence as well as multiple risks. *Third* possible steps and possible areas for integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response cover all stages of MHPSS response, ranging from needs assessment to strategic planning and decision-making, to resource allocation, to implementation and monitoring to review and evaluation. *Fourth*, partnerships with and support for young people should be based on a set of principles to ensure the meaningful nature of the cooperation.

Overall, the lack of comprehensive guidance highlights the need for development of a practical resource to improve the meaningful integration of youth leadership in MHPSS response in humanitarian emergencies. Based on the review, this research project aims to contribute to the literature by exploring a yet missing perspective: young people’s views and experiences on youth leadership in MHPSS response. It is also apparent that many insights have been drawn from various sources not dealing with the triple nexus of youth leadership, MHPSS response, and humanitarian emergency. This research aims at collecting and analyzing data from this specific intersecting field, allowing to best understand the importance, possible barriers, strategies, and principles for integrating youth leadership. The literature review has informed the questions for data collection and the final structure of the guidance document.

D. Research Methodology

A detailed description of the methodology of this research is provided in Annex II.

In a qualitative approach, this research conducted two focus group discussions and ten semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample to explore the integration of youth leadership into MHPSS response in humanitarian emergencies. Focus group discussions (FGD) gathered insights from youth activists from different countries (see Annex IV for the FGD guide), while interviews involved experts, practitioners, funders, and policymakers (see Annex V for the interview guide). The collected data underwent deductive and inductive thematic analysis, leading to the development of a guidance document through an iterative process. An initial draft based on the key findings of the data analysis underwent a written feedback loop with all research participants and a co-creation workshop with seven previous research participants, including young people, and expert reviews and revisions. The questions guiding the review of the draft guidance are provided in Annex VI. From the onset to the conclusion of the research project, highest ethical research standards were upheld.¹

E. Analysis and Research Findings

This section discusses the six overall themes identified through this research. The first theme examines the prospects and opportunities of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS initiatives. The second theme discusses the barriers, challenges, and risks associated with the integration of youth leadership. The third theme focuses on strategies for successful integration of youth leadership before the fourth theme presents factors for meaningful cooperation with young people. The fifth theme delves into the concept of an accountability framework to assess the integration of youth leadership and lastly, the discussion concludes with an exploration of the need for a comprehensive guidance document that outlines the process of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS response.

I. Opportunities and Benefits

When asked about the benefits of integrating youth into MHPSS, we identified advantages both for MHPSS implementing organizations and youth themselves. Research participants left no doubt that young people “*should be present in defining and implementing such a response*”, which is generally supported by a ‘call’ for youth leadership in humanitarian action (Compact on Young People in Humanitarian Action, 2016; UNSC 2020).

The focus group discussions highlighted that young people **best understand their needs**, “*are more open to speaking about the challenges they face with their mental health*”, and are hence **best placed for peer-to-peer support**, e.g. by “*finding ways to remotely check on, and support, others’ mental health*” (Compact 2020, p. 10; also see Metzler et al., 2021); this confirms an important finding of the literature review, inter alia young people’s function as community gatekeepers (IOM 2019, 31). Furthermore, FGDs confirmed that youth are **easy to mobilize** in

¹ Participants to the interviews and focus group discussions were requested to sign a consent form for participation in the research and permission that the conversations will be recorded and their content used for academic purposes. The consent forms are available in the Annex III. Participants were informed about the possibility to withdraw their consent and participation at any time and had the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had concerning the study. Participants' identities were and are kept anonymous to protect their privacy, and all data has been stored solely for the purposes of this study. The research team strictly adhered to the [Geneva Graduate Institute’s Research Guidelines](#).

local settings: “*In an emergency, you can heavily depend on youth and they also can mobilize other youth and resources*”.

The **motivation of young people** and their **innovative ideas and solutions** were particularly highlighted: “*Whether it’s designing a chat bot for their peers or it’s leveraging best practices for even older people*”, young people can **provide low-intensity solutions** when “*professionals who are therapists and psychologists are unavailable just because of the huge demand that there is*”. Accordingly, youth organizations and groups can be understood as a “social resource” for promoting mental health (IASC 2018, p. 8f.; UNICEF 2016, 56).

Overall, youth engagement in MHPSS interventions enhances mental health outcomes as Dunne et al. (2017) demonstrate. For youth themselves, it was recognized that being involved in MHPSS is a “**learning process**” for them, which “*helps them to build a more conscious self so that when they are older, hopefully they can think about these mental (health) issues in a more mature way*”. Enhancing resilience and improving well-being are positive effects on youth also highlighted by Bennouna et al. 2019, p. 10; Hamber et al. 2022, p. 12) and is a key principle in IASC’s guidelines on working with youth (2020a). Interview participants also mentioned young people’s integration as a career entry point and further benefits such as building confidence.

Overall, the FGDs and interviews confirmed that “young people can lead and drive solutions in humanitarian action” (ActionAid/Restless Development 2019) and allowed us to conclude for the guidance document that organizations should integrate youth leadership in MHPSS response because it **improves quality, reach, and awareness of MHPSS response, the capacity for the latter and benefits for young people** themselves. Taking Apollo & Mbah’s (2022) argument that youth leadership in humanitarian action is “not a matter of if but how” forward, this research project focuses on the *how* of integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response.

II. Barriers and Challenges

Notwithstanding the benefits, all research participants were conscious of numerous challenges of integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response. As comprehensively discussed in the UNSC commissioned study “The Missing Peace” (2018, p. 42), the **lack of trust in young people** was emphasized throughout the data collection. On the one hand, a lack of trust of youth in policy makers due to their lack of representativeness was mentioned. More prominently highlighted, on the other hand, was the lack of trust of policy makers and organizations in young people due to negative stereotypes, a lack of knowledge on *how* to integrate young people and the perceived lack of skills. The FGDs highlighted that “*youth have huge capacities*” and expressed the need for spaces to demonstrate their successful contributions to build trust little by little.

Beyond trust, the **lack of knowledge, experience and capacity** on both sides was identified as a key challenge. Such a presumed inexperience by organizations also pointed out by REPSSI (2009, p. 6), also linked to resistance in participation. Organizations are missing suitable approaches to engaging youth, partly due to internal shortcomings such as bureaucratic barriers and partly due to a lack of guidance, which further underlines the relevance of this project. Young people require special training and the technical skills about the humanitarian sector and

psychological first aid, because otherwise “*it can be quite difficult*” as a young MHPSS respondent shared in a FGD.

The **issue of funding** was identified as a challenge through the desk research, showing up as inadequacies at the grassroots level (Larriette 2022), youth organizational budgets being below 5,000 USD per year (The Missing Peace 2018, p. 42), and the similar concerns were mirrored while collecting the empirical evidence. Young research participants mentioned the great barriers to submitting funding proposals and accessing grants. One participant stated that young people and youth-led organizations struggle with obtaining funding since they often have to compete with professionals who are years ahead in experience. This is combined with a lack of recognition of young people’s capacity to make successful contributions if only they get an opportunity to “*start somewhere*”.

Young people’s **exclusion from decision-making** and difficulty of accessing relevant platforms for coordination of MHPSS response was an often-evoked challenge pertaining to a **tokenistic instead of meaningful participation**. If young people are included, it is often only “*to give our thoughts on something that has been designed by elders*”. Research participants voiced administrative and legal limitations of large organizations and a resistance to power-sharing, ultimately resulting in a situation where “*[young people] are not there to design the MHPSS that [they] were talking about. So it’s all gone for nothing*”. The FGDs with young people reflected a frustration over the limited possibilities for meaningfully engaging in decision-making. Furthermore, exclusive structures often lead to a marginalization of certain young people, thereby misrepresenting the diversity of youth which the literature review underscored through the possible reinforcement of pre-existing hierarchies.

Lastly, the review of literature found risks such as reinforcing pre-existing power imbalances and exacerbating stigmatization (IASC 2018, p. 4), whereas the data gathering draws particular attention to the **risks of harming young people** by engaging them in MHPSS response due to a tendency to overwork and the exposure to mentally demanding tasks (compare REPSSI 2009, p. 6). One research participant and young MHPSS responder in a protracted crisis highlighted the importance of a good system of care, of sufficient time for breaks and of possibilities for supervision for the “*times when everyone is burned out*”. Adapting IFRC’s Integrated Model of Supervision (2021) to be a youth-specific safeguarding mechanism could be considered for supervision.

Overall, the challenges identified in the literature review were largely confirmed and complemented with further insights, leading us to conclude for the guidance document a lack of trust in and from youth, a lack of knowledge, experience and capacity to work with youth, exclusion from decision-making and tokenistic approaches, limited resources of and for youth, and the risk of doing harm.

III. Meaningful Partnerships

The collected data underlined the centrality of meaningful collaboration with young people, i.e. a form of partnership that allows young people to effectively influence outcomes. Most of the often referred to basic requirements defined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, adolescent-friendly, inclusive,

supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk, accountable; UN 2020, para 34) are broadly covered but were specified to youth leadership in MHPSS response by research participants.

As a prerequisite, they mentioned that *“having that **intentionality** from the very beginning of how exactly you want to engage young people in a longer term project“* is important. **Adapting to young people’s realities** is something organizations need to learn, particularly with respect to the time availability of young people, identification of existing networks of youth, e.g. by joining their existing platforms, and provision of spaces where youth feel at ease.

Young people should then be perceived as **equal partners**, for which a FGD participant identified a simple rule: *“Just think about it as how you would engage any other stakeholder group? You would never, if it was a panel of experts on the intersections of conflict and health in global disasters, you would never bring that stakeholder group and give them a consultation session where they don’t know the agenda until the last minute”*. Partnerships with youth-led organizations and outsourcing certain activities to them can be considered an important step to allow ownership and agency over the processes. One research participant described a vision: *“One thing that I think is super great for engaging young people is getting youth to lead ongoing projects or lengthier projects and that again helps build that sense of autonomy and agency and I guess an ownership of a longer-term initiative”*. The sustainability of youth leadership should be safeguarded through long-term planning.

To give young people the floor to talk about what most affects them but also “which solutions they propose”, **creating spaces to actively listen** to young people should go beyond “one-off consultations” and require an organization *“to put in the work to actually learn. I’m not going to put in the work to teach them if they are not willing”*, as a young research participant said. Another means to this end is **including young people permanently in organizational and decision-making structures**, for example in steering committees, community advisory boards or even *“youth-lived experience committees”*, as one interviewee suggested.

Furthermore, young people can take leadership in **all stages of the programme cycle** (IASC 2020, pp. 70-85; Pau Pérez-Sales et al. 2011, p. 354; Compact 2020, p. 21). However, research participants emphasized the importance of gradually increasing the amount of responsibility and required expertise to provide easy entry-points. Likewise, in respect of their diversity, young people should freely choose and might have preferences of where to engage in. One example of engaging youth meaningfully in funding is to allow young people to decide about funding allocation: *“If young people are responsible in part for determining who gets the money, they are then also responsible for overseeing its implementation. And I think that’s a really important safeguard, really empowering young people to determine the course of how financial resources are distributed”*. Another given example was monitoring, in which young people should not only collect data but be involved in *“the whole data gathering process from design to analysis and publication”*.

Working with young people cannot be meaningful if a **diversity of youth** is not involved. *“You have to dig deep and go local, more local to reach.”* because. It requires an extra effort and organizations’ initiatives to invite, mobilize and support marginalized youth, i.e. young people who are in a disadvantaged position to access platforms of engagement and decision-making due to socio-economic limits, structural inequalities and discrimination. While addressing structural imbalances will often go beyond the possibilities of a humanitarian organization, a

maximum should be undertaken to reduce multiple accessibility barriers, including by providing travel funding and investing in reaching marginalized youth.

Lastly, young MHPPS leaders should be **informed about the impact** of their contributions, by “going back to the young people with and telling them how their feedback and their advice was used in a very practical sense.” To avoid tokenism or at least a subjectively *perceived* tokenism, the importance of youth contributions should be made sufficiently clear. Another research participant shared an account of a belated feedback to a meaningful contribution: “When I heard back, I think after two years, that what I did resulted in this and that, I finally felt like, okay, so I'm not doing this for nothing. I'm actually doing something that matters”. Ultimately, a good feedback system towards young leaders also comes with a benefit for organizations. Namely by “creating credibility for the organization amongst other young people”, a crucial step for overcoming the trust issues vis-à-vis youth.

IV. Strategies for Promoting Youth Leadership

The core of the FGDs and interviews focused on strategies for integrating and working with young people in MHPSS response, for which a number of aspects were identified as important.

A first relevant aspect, which is not sufficiently covered by the reviewed literature, is the need for **training and support** of young people. While it was acknowledged that young people already have capacity, a clear need for strengthening them in specific areas such as psychological first aid and humanitarian action was identified alongside mentorship and guidance „to actually apply the knowledge“ during MHPSS response and in decision-making. Some content suggested by young research participants was, „for example, what to say when someone is in a very bad mood, wants to harm themselves, wants to commit suicide, or what are the basics needs, how to approach a depressed person, how to approach a person who is in the mania phase“. Further training components could be monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and research skills and fundraising. The importance was highlighted by an interview partner saying that “After training camps are held, youth feel more responsible to their communities and are able to notice problems“. It was also mentioned that training can and should already happen in absence of emergencies to improve preparedness (also see IASC 2020, p. 90).

Secondly, both younger and older research participants raised the need for organizations to provide guidance and support to **ensure young people's own well-being** when engaging in MHPSS response in response to the previously identified risk of doing harm (REPSSI 2009, p. 6). A participant narrated that a group of young volunteers supporting Ukrainian refugee children could overcome their exhaustion thanks to supervision: “After a while they realized that it was quite exhausting for them. So thankfully we could find someone who provides supervision for them, I think every other week, and they said that it's such a great help and they see that it's a crucial part of their engagement.” To prevent harm to young volunteers, “giving good breaks and for example, working in teams, working the ship, that would be a very good thing”, added another. The positive effects of providing care and supervision through organizations should not be underestimated: “I felt like that was one of the first moments where I actually felt like I was not only taking care of others, but I was also being taken care of.”

A third aspect relates to **accessibility of funding**. Identified as a problem already above, research participants proposed various solutions. Amongst them, special open funding calls

should exclusively target youth-led initiatives and organizations as likewise recommended by the Compact (2020, p. 21) and the Global Youth Mobilization (2023, p. 86). Furthermore, support should be provided for writing funding applications: *„If we could have some question and answer forum or some application support services which really help youth-led organizations, I think that would be great also so that these organizations are not left behind.”* In a similar vein, reporting requirements should be reduced for young people and youth-led organizations. Introducing funding requirements for humanitarian organizations to include partnerships and integration of young people and their organization was another proposal to effectively increase availability of funding for youth-led action.

As a fourth aspect, **compensating and recognizing** young people for their work was particularly important to young research participants who asked „what do you offer in return”? That this is a youth-specific priority is reflected in the lack of mention thereof in reviewed literature and guidance documents. Importantly, a distinction was made *„between incentivizing and recognizing because actually most young people will be incentivized just to know that they're shaping the outcome (...). But making sure then that actually those actions go recognized is an important component (...) for making sure that they're fairly noted for what they have done.”* Only because young people are easily mobilized and motivated, organizations should not neglect their actual and often unpaid contributions. In other words, most important is *“the fact that [young people] feel heard, feel seen, feel recognized.”*

Different forms to credit and compensate their contributions are possible. First, financial compensation was generally preferred by research participants because *“quite often we find that young people are the ones that bear the cost where the contributions of adults are often remunerated”*, because *“paying for their expertise can influence on how they are they being fully engaged”*, and because it increases the diversity of young volunteers who could otherwise not commit time. The demand for compensation was, however, also linked to a fear of exclusion of youth *“because someone doesn't feel like they have the budget”*. Secondly, educational opportunities can compensate young volunteers, for example by giving them *“tools they need to be able to give support to their local communities”*, run an organization effectively and develop *“administrative and other kinds of skills to access funding by international humanitarian funds”*. Thirdly, networking opportunities can support the feeling of belonging – or in the words of a research participant *“be able to be connected and feel empowered”* – allow access to other opportunities, and improve the standing in the local community. Fourthly, idealistic compensation can take the form of *“showing them that they are part of something big, of a team and an organization”*. From thank you letters to more public recognition, including by *“taking a picture of them and posting them on social media, that can really help.”*

Lastly, building the **internal capacity of organizations** was identified during interviews as key to enhancing the cooperation with young people, for example through youth focal points and clear policies to engage youth. What is formulated as the ideal for youth-specific success factors in humanitarian response (IASC 2020, pp. 87-91), this research showed that this is often not yet reflected in organizations' realities.

Overall, the data collection has proven effective to complement limited findings of the desk research process, including more practical and hands-on aspects such as compensating young people, caring for their well-being and providing training and supervision.

V. Ensuring Organizational Commitment and Implementation

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring organizational commitment for effective implementation and monitoring of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS responses. The IASC guidelines on working with and for young people in humanitarian and protracted crises (2020a, p. 58) do recommend steps to structure in youth participation, however, fail to account for youth leadership. While holding organizations accountable for integrating youth leadership lies beyond the possible, several suggestions were made on how the implementation of youth-led MHPSS response can be ensured and the accountability of organizations strengthened.

Firstly, participants emphasized the need for including reporting mechanisms for both organizations and youth involved in MHPSS responses. They stressed the importance of regular reporting to track progress, measure impact, and ensure transparency in the integration of youth leadership. Clear reporting guidelines would enable organizations to document their efforts in involving young individuals, showcasing the extent of their initiatives to engage youth. Reporting the number of people that have been involved in participating in community support, as suggested by the Sphere Handbook (2018, p. 340), could be expanded by counting youth-led and supported MHPSS services.

In addition, some participants highlighted possibilities of providing incentives to encourage organizations to actively engage with youth in MHPSS programs. They suggested various incentives, such as providing tax exemptions or other financial benefits for organizations that demonstrate meaningful youth participation. Such a financial remuneration was accentuated by Perez-Sales et al. (2011, p. 353) as well for ensuring sustainable results. This approach, according to one participant *“would not only recognize and reward organizations for their commitment to youth leadership but also serve as a motivator for increased involvement.”* Making the integration of youth leadership a requirement for donors could be an effective mechanism for promoting accountability. By including it as a condition for funding, donors would prioritize and allocate resources to projects that actively involve young individuals in decision-making processes and leadership roles. This requirement would encourage organizations to prioritize youth participation in their MHPSS initiatives to secure funding and support.

Thirdly, the need for the establishment of a platform aimed at sharing best practices to inspire and inform others was also highlighted. Such a platform could indeed serve various purposes such as consultative, participatory and advocacy (IASC 2020, p. 87) The participants suggested creating a dedicated space where organizations, practitioners, and youth leaders can showcase successful examples of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS. This platform would serve as a valuable resource, fostering knowledge exchange, collaboration, and the replication of effective strategies in different contexts. By sharing best practices, participants noted that it would inspire and motivate stakeholders to adopt similar approaches, ultimately leading to widespread integration of youth leadership in MHPSS initiatives.

Overall, the participants' feedback highlights the need for an accountability framework to effectively integrate youth leadership into MHPSS. By incorporating reporting mechanisms, providing incentives and sharing best practices, the framework would enhance transparency, encourage collaboration, and foster a culture of accountability among organizations and youth involved in MHPSS. These aspects were taken into consideration by integrating them throughout the guidance on the one hand and developing a self-assessment scale on the other hand.

VI. Guidance Document

Research participants confirmed the lack of existing and need for a comprehensive guideline for integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response. They emphasized that such a document could serve as a valuable resource for young people, practitioners, and organizations involved in MHPSS, providing practical guidance on fostering meaningful youth participation and amplifying their voices in decision-making processes.

When asked what the guidance document should contain, some participants emphasized that the document should be prescriptive, providing clear and practical roles and guidance to stakeholders, particularly youth and organizations involved in MHPSS responses. One participant stated, *"I would like to see something which is not just a generic guidance but something which is a little bit more prescriptive with examples of how you can actually put this into practice."* A prescriptive approach with a suggestive tone would therefore help bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that the recommendations are actionable and implementable.

Furthermore, the participants stressed the importance of creating a guidance document that is devoid of jargon and complex terminology. They emphasized the need for clear and concise language that is easily understandable to a wide range of audiences. By avoiding technical language, the document would become more accessible to the target audience, fostering better comprehension and facilitating effective implementation of the recommended strategies.

It also emerged that participants would like the guidance document to explicitly mention the benefits that organizations would derive from integrating youth leadership into MHPSS initiatives. They emphasized that organizations should be made aware of the positive impacts of involving young people as leaders. By highlighting these benefits, the document would help organizations recognize the value and importance of youth leadership in MHPSS, encouraging their active involvement and support. Other participants emphasized the significance of including success stories from different contexts in the guidance document. They noted that showcasing examples of youth-led initiatives that have achieved positive outcomes in various settings would serve as powerful motivators and inspirations for stakeholders. Furthermore, aspects specifically highlighted by participants were recognition of youth contributions, particularly through financial compensation, and the importance of training offers for youth leaders.

Lastly, participants expressed the need for the guidance document to be widely circulated and piloted before its full operationalization, including via social media channels. They emphasized the importance of ensuring broad dissemination of the document to reach a diverse range of stakeholders. Overall, the need for a comprehensive guidance document for integrating youth leadership into MHPSS response has been affirmed by both the insights shared by participants and the existing literature. The guidance document should be concise and comprehensible, and as specific as possible.

F. Workshop Outcomes & subsequent changes

A detailed description of the workshop outcomes is available in Annex VII.

The initial draft of the guidance document was revised based on feedback from the co-creation workshop. Changes included adding full introductory phrases to complement bullet points, specifying the target audience and purpose, and highlighting the relevance to emergency situations. Part I was recomposed to emphasize four main aspects, removing contentious topics without consensus. Part II was renamed to "Principles for Meaningful Partnerships" and merged into six categories. Part III included adjustments in language and inclusion of youth-friendly language. Part IV merged previous sections on promoting inclusion and organizational commitment, undergoing major revisions with new sections on providing information and feedback, funding, and prioritizing internal capacity and policy commitment.

G. Dissemination Strategy

For a detailed six-month dissemination plan, please refer to Annex VIII.

The MHPSS Collaborative team will manage the layout and design of the project materials, including the research report, guidance document, self-assessment scale, and social media toolkit as part of the pre-launch activities. It will furthermore reach out to partner organizations, coordinate media outreach, and develop and release short videos highlighting key messages and findings from the report. The official launch will be marked by a webinar, the release of the executive summary and full report, and dissemination of the developed key messages and findings on social media. The project will be featured on various platforms, including websites and newsletters of key stakeholders in the sector. Public presentations, participation in relevant events, and submissions to academic journals will further extend the reach of the project. To round up dissemination and exploitation of results, the research team will explore the possibility of developing a 2-hour MOOC on integrating youth leadership using the guidance document as the foundational material for building this course.

H. Conclusion

The humanitarian sector has witnessed an important turning point when it evolved its perception of young people from aid recipients to agents of change. This realization - that working with and supporting young people's efforts improves humanitarian response - is yet to reach the MHPSS sector. As the humanitarian sector advances from the mere realization to actually partnering with youth, young people's leadership provides a transformational potential for MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies that organizations should be eager to unlock. Embracing and implementing the lessons learned from this research can strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of MHPSS responses and create more inclusive and resilient communities to respond to crises.

On the one hand, this study marks a shift of perceiving young people as a target group of MHPSS responses only but rather recognizes young people's agency in leading positive change. The study has shown that despite the capacities, skills and readiness of young people, they often lack an enabling environment and support systems to effectively convert their abilities into valuable contributions to MHPSS responses. Reducing the barriers to young people's full engagement, in particular the significant underestimation of their potential due to lack of trust, poor and inaccessible funding opportunities and exclusion from decision-making spaces, should be priorities for working with young people as valued partners.

On the other hand, this collaborative research effort has culminated in the first-ever guidance document to encourage and assist humanitarian organizations in effectively incorporating youth leadership into MHPSS responses. With strategies and principles for meaningful partnership with youth leaders, humanitarian organizations can now refer to a roadmap developed with young people to ultimately improve the overall effectiveness and impact of MHPSS interventions in emergency settings. Notwithstanding all excitement about unexplored opportunities, any attempt of tapping into young people's potential immediately loses value when their support is not truly intended, accompanied with substantial (financial) resources, and does not prioritize the safety and well-being of young people engaged in MHPSS responses.

Young people participating in this research were determined to advance their role in MHPSS responses, particularly to urge for more recognition and sustainable partnerships with adequate support. We encourage all possible stakeholders to do those young leaders and youth worldwide justice by taking them and their contributions seriously.

The guidance does not prescribe a one-size fits all solution to supporting youth leadership in MHPSS responses but should rather be read and used as an incentive, orientation, and helpful tool for developing context- and organization-specific approaches on how to best partner with young people. The most important advice we would like to conclude this research with is addressed to anyone seeking to advance their organization's work on youth leadership: Ask young people and youth-led organizations themselves what they recommend you to do.

Guidance Document, Youth Leadership Assessment Scale, and Resource Recommendations

This is a preliminary version of the guidance document designed by the researching students. A professional layout is currently being developed by the MHPSS collaborative. The Youth Leadership Assessment Scale (YLAS) is going to be developed in an accessible online interface which links directly to Recommended Resources depending on the assessment results.

The finalized versions including weblinks to the MHPSS Collaborative's website will be shared as soon as they are available.

INTEGRATING YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN MHPSS RESPONSES IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

THE GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This document provides practical guidance and sets a general frame for integrating youth leadership into mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) responses in humanitarian emergencies throughout all project cycles. It inspires, encourages, and recommends actions for organizations to develop comprehensive and context-specific solutions.

KEY AUDIENCE

This guidance is designed for organizations, practitioners, and policy-makers working in the field of MHPSS and humanitarian response. It is particularly beneficial for those who are actively seeking to enhance their engagement with youth. It is also a valuable resource for entities that have not yet prioritized youth involvement but recognize its importance and are considering ways to incorporate youth leadership into their work.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This guidance document is a result of a joint research effort of the MHPSS Collaborative and Master students of the Geneva Graduate Institute within the framework of an applied research project. From the onset of the project, young people were involved in shaping this document through their active contributions. Following extensive desk research, interviews, and focus group discussions with young leaders, MHPSS practitioners, experts, funders and policy-makers built the foundation for draft guidance which was refined in a co-creation workshop involving (young) research participants and multiple reviews by an external advisory committee and academic supervision.

SUMMARY

The guidance document starts by outlining the importance of youth leadership in MHPSS response, which lies in enhancing the relevance and expanding the reach of as well as increasing capacity for MHPSS response. It then presents possible barriers and challenges of integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response, which were identified as lack of trust in and from youth, a lack of knowledge, experience and capacity to work with youth, their exclusion from decision-making and tokenistic approaches to participation, limited resources of and for youth, risk of doing harm to youth, and the ignorance of young people's diversity. It then proposes nine strategies for promoting and integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response. They span from policy commitment to compensation and are designed to strengthen the capacity of young people, prioritize their safety and well-being, and ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the guidance recommends principles for meaningful cooperation with young people, emphasizing the importance of intentionality, adaptability, equality, inclusivity, agency, and sustainability. To assist organizations in evaluating and improving their current level of youth leadership integration in their work, the guidance comprises a self-assessment scale as well as further resources.

CONTENT

- Importance of Integrating Youth Leadership in MHPSS Responses (Part I)
- Possible Barriers and Challenges (Part II)
- Principles for Meaningful Partnership (Part III)
- Strategies for Promoting Youth Leadership (Part IV)
- Self-Assessment Scale (Annex A)
- Resource Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Leadership Integration (Annex B)

DEFINITIONS

Youth - For the purpose of this document, youth refers to individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 based on varying United Nations definitions. The definition of youth can vary depending on regional, cultural, societal, and organizational contexts, hence this document understands youth in broad terms.

Youth Leadership - Young people's ability to voluntarily initiate and implement MHPSS response with ownership over the process and outcome. Youth leadership can be exercised by young individuals in a community, youth groups and initiatives, and youth-led organizations. Integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response refers to both (i) externally supporting independent youth-led action, and (ii) engaging young people meaningfully in decision-making structures, existing institutions, and MHPSS mechanisms. It does not simply refer to young professionals.

MHPSS - Any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental health conditions.

Humanitarian Emergencies - Events or series of events that represent a critical threat to the health, safety, security, or well-being of a community or other large group of people.

PART I: IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN MHPSS RESPONSES

This section highlights the significant possible impact of youth leadership on MHPSS responses. From improving their quality and relevance to increasing capacity and creating synergies, the integration of youth leadership is a game-changer in the field of MHPSS.

ENHANCING RELEVANCE OF MHPSS RESPONSES

Youth leadership can improve MHPSS interventions because:

- Young people have an intimate understanding of their own and their communities needs and strengths, which can inform more relevant, suitable, and effective interventions
- Youth bring innovative ideas, solutions, and technological skills that can enhance and modernize MHPSS responses to adapt to ever-changing circumstances

EXPANDING THE REACH OF MHPSS RESPONSES

Youth leadership can significantly improve the scope of MHPSS responses because:

- Young people are best placed to reach and engage their peers, increasing the effectiveness of peer-to-peer support
- Young people are often more prone to speak about and prioritize mental health, which can help break down stigma and encourage more people to seek support

BOOSTING CAPACITY FOR MHPSS RESPONSES

Youth leadership is a great resource for providing MHPSS responses because:

- Young people's motivation, enthusiasm, bravery, and quick mobilization can significantly increase the capacity for MHPSS responses
- Supporting existing youth-led initiatives can maximize their potential and increase their impact

BENEFITTING YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED IN MHPSS SUPPORT

Partnering with young people in MHPSS response is a form of direct support because this:

- Promotes reflection about and care for their own mental health
- Improves self-confidence, soft skills, and response capacity
- Increases their recognition and value as partners
- Provides opportunities to gain professional experience and kickstart careers in the field of MHPSS

PART II: POSSIBLE BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

This section explores potential factors that could complicate the integration of youth leadership in MHPSS responses. An understanding of these factors is crucial for developing strategies to prevent and overcome them as well as to create an environment that fosters and supports youth leadership.

LACK OF TRUST IN AND FROM YOUTH

Institutions often lack confidence in the abilities of young people to lead, while young people, in turn, harbor distrust towards these institutions. Some challenges are:

- Underestimation of young people's capacities and skills
- Undervaluation of young people's experiences and perspectives
- Harmful stereotypes surrounding youth
- Mistrust of youth in institutions due to lack of representation and hesitance to formally engage

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, AND CAPACITY TO WORK WITH YOUTH

Organizations do not know how to best collaborate with young people. Some challenges are:

- Lack of dedicated internal capacity to support youth engagement
- Limited knowledge and use of available guidance materials on youth engagement and leadership
- Limited understanding of young people's needs

EXCLUSION FROM DECISION-MAKING AND TOKENISTIC APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION

Young people are not meaningfully included in decision-making. Some challenges are:

- Limited opportunities for young people to influence decisions that affect them
- Superficial, non-sustainable engagement with youth, often characterized by a box-ticking approach
- Lack of diversity in youth representation, leading to the marginalization of certain groups
- Administrative and political barriers to improved youth leadership, including resistance to power-sharing

LIMITED RESOURCES OF AND FOR YOUTH

Young people are not in a position to meaningfully contribute to MHPSS. Some challenges are:

- Limited knowledge about the humanitarian sector and MHPSS
- Minimal financial resources and inaccessible funding for youth-led initiatives
- Lack of access to specialized training for young people on humanitarian action and MHPSS

RISK OF DOING HARM

Engaging young people in MHPSS response poses risks. Some challenges are:

- The tendency of young people to overwork in leadership positions
- Risk of young people developing mental health conditions as a result of providing MHPSS
- Potential to reinforce pre-existing community tensions and hierarchies by favouring certain youth

IGNORED DIVERSITY OF YOUTH

Young people's diversity is often overlooked, which can lead to exclusion and marginalization. Some challenges are:

- Perception of young people as a homogenous group, ignoring the diverse experiences, identities, perspectives, and needs within this demographic
- Marginalized youth do not have the same access to decision-making spaces and youth organizations
- Gender bias and cultural norms can lead to the exclusion of certain groups from youth leadership opportunities

PART III: PRINCIPLES FOR MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIP

This section outlines the principles that should guide organizations in their efforts to meaningfully partner with young people in MHPSS responses. These principles emphasize the importance of intentionality, adaptability, equality, inclusivity, agency, and sustainability.

INTENTIONALITY AND REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Organizations should approach youth partnerships with the right intentions and set realistic expectations. This includes:

- Assessing the level of power the organization is genuinely willing to share with youth
- Evaluating the organization's capacity to facilitate meaningful youth participation
- Identifying the resources that can be availed for youth-led initiatives

ADAPTABILITY TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S REALITIES

Organizations should understand and adapt to the needs and perspectives of young people. This includes:

- Identifying and working with existing youth networks
- Asking young people about their expectations and perspectives
- Starting with basic roles and gradually increasing responsibilities for youth
- Using youth-friendly language and communication channels
- Creating spaces where young people feel comfortable and respected

EQUALITY AND PARTNERSHIP

Organizations should treat young people as equal partners in their work. This includes:

- Enabling young people to take the lead beyond data collection
- Establishing partnerships with youth-led organizations
- Treating young people with the same respect as their adult counterparts

INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY

Organizations should strive to equitably engage youth and diverse organizations otherwise excluded from decision-making spaces. This includes:

- Recognizing and respecting the diversity and different forms of marginalization of (some) young people
- Initiating outreach to excluded youth, joining their existing spaces, and identifying innovative approaches to lower thresholds for participation
- Covering and reimbursing costs for meeting participation to ensure inclusivity

YOUTH INFLUENCE, OWNERSHIP, AND AGENCY

Organizations should ensure that young people can influence and own processes with full agency. This includes:

- Providing young people with opportunities to influence decisions in all stages of the program cycle.
- Creating spaces for young people to express their agency, not just their needs
- Transferring full responsibility for certain projects to youth organizations
- Engaging with youth for a sufficient period of time, such as the entire duration of a project

BEST PRACTICE	<u>YOUTH LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE: A MODEL FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION</u> , FROM SAVE THE CHILDREN, 2017.
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SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Organizations should plan for the durability of their commitment to youth leadership in the long term. This includes:

- Ensuring that resources and support for youth leadership are not dependent on short-term funding or individual champions
- Embedding youth leadership support within the organization's structures and processes

PART IV: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING AND INTEGRATING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

This section presents nine practical strategies for organizations to promote youth leadership in MHPSS responses. These strategies span from policy commitment to compensation and are designed to strengthen the capacity of young people, prioritize their safety and well-being, and ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The specific roles that young people assume in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies are not predefined, but rather, they should be tailored to the unique realities and specific needs of the context.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND INTERNAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Organizations should prioritize youth leadership in their policies and internal structures. Relevant steps include:

- Introducing focal points for youth within the organization
- Adopting policies that support youth leadership across all stages of program, advocacy, and research
- Establishing and maintaining partnerships with youth-led organizations
- Adapting the organizational culture to trust and engage youth
- Integrate training on collaborating with youth into emergency preparedness activities

BEST PRACTICE	<u>YOUTH POLICY</u> , IFRC, 2018 AND <u>EARLY RECOVERY CONFERENCE</u> , VIOLET, 2023.
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TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR YOUTH

Organizations should invest in capacity-building opportunities and support for youth. Relevant steps include:

- Offering training on relevant topics like psychological first aid, psychoeducation, etc., to enhance the competency of the young people they work with
- Strengthening the existing capacities of youth-led and youth-focused organizations
- Providing mentorship and facilitation support for youth leaders
- Improving youth capacity as part of emergency preparedness and anticipatory action initiative

BEST PRACTICE	<u>FIRST AID TRAINING COURSE</u> , VIOLET AND <u>YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM</u> , VIOLET
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YOUNG PEOPLE'S SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

Organizations should care for the safety and well-being of young people leading in MHPSS responses. Relevant steps include:

- Providing supervision and guidance
- Developing safeguarding guidelines that staff members are also trained in
- Facilitating peer groups and/or support groups for the young people we work with
- Ensuring breaks and sufficient time in-between services and engagements with the same youth

BEST PRACTICE	<u>BLUE DOT SPACES</u> , UNICEF.
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YOUNG PEOPLE IN PERMANENT DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

Organizations should fully integrate young people into their decision-making processes. Relevant steps include:

- Acknowledging the valuable insights offered by young people
- Reserving seats in Steering Committees, Community Advisory Boards, Coordination groups, etc
- Avoiding one-off consultations and building long-term relationships with youth and youth-led organizations

BEST PRACTICE	<u>YOUTH COMMISSION</u> , IFRC.
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ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations should partner with youth-led organizations. Relevant steps include:

- Building relationships with youth organizations and inviting them to participate in your activities
- Establishing formal partnerships and offering substantial, ongoing assistance

BEST PRACTICE	<u>UACT: SCOUTS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE FOR UKRAINE</u> , SCOUT MOVEMENT AND UNICEF, 2022
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ACCESSIBLE LONG-TERM FUNDING FOR YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations should provide accessible long-term funding for youth-led initiatives and organizations. Relevant steps include:

- Offering special open funding calls for young people and youth organizations
- Providing supervision/support to youth organizations to accompany funding applications
- Involving young people in funding allocation decisions
- Reducing reporting requirements for young people and youth-led organizations
- Making youth engagement a requirement for funding eligibility

BEST
PRACTICE

GLOBAL YOUTH MOBILIZATION

COMPENSATION AND RECOGNITION

Organizations should value young people's contributions. Relevant steps include:

- Providing financial compensation beyond reimbursing incurred costs
- Offering educational opportunities such as training, skills development, and certification
- Providing ideational compensation such as thank you letters, public recognition, and visibility on social media
- Offering networking opportunities for young people themselves and with partners

FEEDBACK, EVALUATION, AND IMPROVEMENT

Organizations should be open to seeking young people's input and feedback and strive to improve their practices.

Relevant steps include:

- Establishing open channels for feedback for and from youth
- Providing information and reporting about how young people contribute to shaping eventual outcomes
- Evaluating the organization's work with young people and formulating steps for improvement

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND ADVOCACY

Organizations should be accountable and transparent about their commitment to youth leadership. Relevant steps include:

- Publicly reporting on their progress in integrating youth leadership into their work
- Being open to feedback and criticism, and taking corrective action when necessary
- Advocating for the importance of youth leadership in MHPSS responses within their own networks and in broader policy and funding contexts

DISSEMINATION STRATEGY

The MHPSS Collaborative team will manage the layout and design of the project's materials, including the research report, guidance document, self-assessment scale, and social media toolkit as part of the pre-launch activities as well as reach out to partner organizations, coordinate media outreach, and the development and release of short videos highlighting key messages and findings from the report. The official launch will be marked by a webinar, the release of the executive summary and full report, and dissemination of the developed key messages and findings on social media. The project will be featured on various platforms, including websites and newsletters of key stakeholders in the sector. Public presentations, participation in relevant events, and submissions to academic journals will further extend the reach of the project. To round up dissemination and exploitation of results, the research team will explore the possibility of developing a 2-hour MOOC on integrating youth leadership using the guidance document as the foundational material for building this course.

INTEGRATING YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN MHPSS RESPONSES IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

YLAS - YOUTH LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE

This Scale enables organizations to evaluate their current level of youth leadership integration in their work. It allows respondents to rate their agreement with various statements about youth leadership integration and includes items related to the strategies identified in Part IV above.

THE SCALE

Please rate your organization on the following aspects using the scale provided:

1 = Strongly Disagree: Fully not aligned without the current tendency for improvement

2 = Disagree: Generally not aligned, missing a solid foundation, or at least need for significant improvement of status quo

3 = Neutral: Not applicable/Aligned to some extent

4 = Agree: Generally aligned with possibilities for improvement

5 = Strongly Agree: Fully aligned with only marginal room for improvement

POLICY COMMITMENT & INTERNAL CAPACITY BUILDING

- Our organization has (a) youth focal point(s)
- Our organization has a policy/policies that explicitly support youth engagement
- We have established and maintained partnerships with youth-led organizations
- Our organizational culture trusts and engages youth

TRAINING & SUPPORT FOR YOUTH

- Our organization offers training on relevant topics to enhance the competency of the young people we work with
- We strengthen the existing capacities of youth-led and youth-focused organizations
- Our organization provides mentorship and support for youth leaders
- We integrate youth capacity strengthening as part of emergency preparedness initiatives

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

- Our organization provides supervision and guidance to young people
- We have developed safeguarding guidelines that staff members are also trained in
- Our organization facilitates peer groups and/or support groups for the young people we work with
- We ensure breaks and sufficient time in-between services and engagements with the same youth

YOUNG PEOPLE IN PERMANENT DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

- Our organization acknowledges the valuable insights offered by young people
- We reserve seats for young people in Steering Committees, Community Advisory Boards, Coordination groups, etc
- Our organization avoids one-off consultations and builds long-term relationships with youth and youth-led organizations

ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

- Our organization builds relationships with youth organizations and invites them to participate in our activities
- We establish formal partnerships with youth organizations and offer substantial, ongoing assistance

ACCESSIBLE FUNDING FOR YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES

- Our organization offers special open funding calls for young people and youth-led organizations
- We provide supervision/support to youth organizations to accompany funding applications
- Our organization involves young people in funding allocation decisions
- We reduce reporting requirements for young people and youth-led organizations
- Our organization makes youth engagement a requirement for funding eligibility

COMPENSATION AND RECOGNITION

- Our organization provides financial compensation beyond reimbursing incurred costs to young people
- We offer educational opportunities such as training, skills development, and certification to young people
- Our organization provides idealistic compensation such as thank you letters, public recognition, and visibility on social media to young people
- We offer networking opportunities for young people themselves and with partners

FEEDBACK, EVALUATION, AND IMPROVEMENT

- Our organization establishes open channels for feedback for and from youth
- We provide information and report about how young people contribute to shaping eventual outcomes
- Our organization evaluates our work with young people and formulates steps for improvement

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND ADVOCACY

- Our organization publicly reports on our progress in integrating youth leadership into our work
- We are open to feedback and criticism and take corrective action when necessary
- Our organization advocates for the importance of youth leadership in MHPSS responses within our own networks and in broader policy and funding contexts

THE SCORING SYSTEM

Total your scores for each statement. The maximum possible score is 100 and the minimum is 20.

- 20-40: Your organization has significant room for improvement in integrating youth leadership into MHPSS responses
- 41-60: Your organization has made some progress in integrating youth leadership, but there are still many areas for improvement
- 61-80: Your organization has a fair level of youth leadership integration but could still enhance its practices
- 81-100: Your organization is exemplary in its integration of youth leadership into MHPSS responses. Continue to innovate and share your best practices with others

INTEGRATING YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN MHPSS RESPONSES IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This section aims to provide a curated list of resource suggestions that can help organizations enhance their level of youth leadership integration. These resources, ranging from training materials to policy guidelines, are designed to equip organizations with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively engage young people in their work. By leveraging these resources, organizations can increase their knowledge for creating an environment that not only values youth leadership but also actively promotes it.

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

- IASC [Guidelines on Working with and for Youth in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#) (2020)
- [Shifting Power to Young People](#) – How young people can lead and drive solutions in humanitarian action (Action Aid/Restless Development, 2019)

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN MHPSS

- Young people's participation and mental health: a [protocol](#) for practitioners (UNICEF, 2022)
- MHPSS and Participation: [Guidance Document](#) to accompany the MHPSS Compendium of Resources (UNICEF, 2020)
- [Mainstreaming Psychosocial Care and Support through Child Participation](#) (REPSSI, 2007)
- [Practical Tips](#) on Engaging Adolescents and Youth in the COVID-19 Response (UNICEF, 2020)

ON MHPSS RESPONSE

- IASC [Handbook](#) MHPSS Coordination (2022)
- [IASC Minimum Service Package MHPSS](#) (2022)
- Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support into Youth Programming: A [Toolkit](#) (USAID, 2019)

COMMUNITY-BASED MHPSS RESPONSE IN EMERGENCIES

- IASC [Guidance Note](#) on community-based approaches to MHPSS in Emergencies (2018)
- IOM [Manual](#) on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Displacement (2019)

MHPSS SUPPORT FOR YOUTH

- [Improving Well-Being Through Education](#) – Integrating Community-Based Psychosocial Support into Education in Emergencies (Finn Church Aid, 2018)
- COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS: Three-tiered support for children and families. [Operational Guidelines](#). Field Test Version (UNICEF 2020)

PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- [Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policy and Decision-Making](#), Our Common Agenda Policy Brief, (United Nations 2023)
- [Principles and Barriers for Meaningful Youth Engagement](#) (UN Major Group for Children and Youth, 2017)
- Meaningfully engaging with youth [Guidance and training for UN staff](#) (UNESCO, 2019)
- A youth participation [best practice toolkit](#): Part I (Save the Children, 2016)
- Engaged and Heard! [Guidelines](#) on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement (UNICEF, 2020)

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN ADVOCACY

- Youth Leadership, Participation and Accountability 2.0. Part 3. The '[unofficial](#)' handbook' (Restless Development & UNFPA)

MONITORING & EVALUATION

- IASC [Guidance](#) MHPSS in Emergencies. Monitoring & Evaluation with Means of Verification: Version 2.0

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Annex

This annex features a number of documents used during the research project to provide further details about the research project.

Annex I: Literature Review

Please note that the full literature review might be published as a journal article and, therefore, cannot be fully displayed here. This version is only providing a rough overview of its structure.

Integrating Youth Leadership in Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) Responses in Humanitarian Emergencies

A Literature Review

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7 July 2023

Introduction

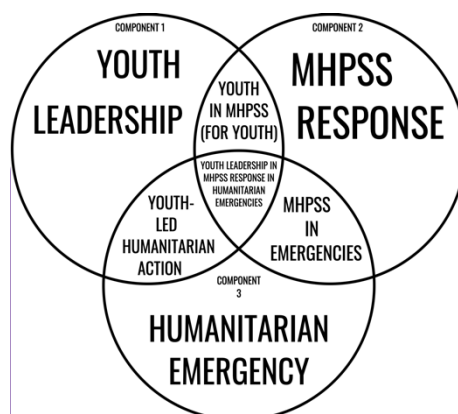
Young people act as leaders in humanitarian settings and positively impact humanitarian response (Hoban et al. 2019; Apollo & Mbah 2022). The trend of recognizing their contributions to the humanitarian sector coincides with a simultaneous increase of attention towards mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) response and the active involvement of community therein (IASC 2018; Larieta et al. 2022). Despite the importance of both developments, they seemingly do not intersect, i.e. young people are commonly not considered to play an active role in providing MHPSS response in emergencies.

While some general guidelines for youth participation in humanitarian response and for youth engagement in MHPSS as well as guidelines on community-based (CB) MHPSS exist in the humanitarian sector, there are currently no existing guidance with specific recommendations on integrating youth leadership in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies. Guided by the question **what is the current state of knowledge about integrating youth leadership into MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies**, this literature review first situates the literature on youth-led humanitarian response, youth in MHPSS and CB MHPSS, then discusses chances and challenges, possible steps as well as principles for working with young people in MHPSS response.

A. Approach

Three main content components were identified for this review: youth leadership, MHPSS, and humanitarian emergency. To approximate this triple nexus, the desk research was guided by identifying overlaps of these components as illustrated in the graphic.

Overall, 88 academic and non-academic resources were identified to be included in this review following extensive search of various databases and pertinent keywords. Not restricting this review to academic sources has two reasons. On the hand, only a limited amount of academic works provides insights into the overlapping three



components. On the other hand, guidance documents used in practice best reflect the dominant perceptions, current trends and importance of the subject.

Databases and Keywords

[...]

Clustering of sources

[...]

B. Definition of key components

[...]

C. Situating the Literature and Current Trends

[...]

Interim Conclusions

The existing literature allows us to identify several trends. First, youth leadership in humanitarian action is increasingly recognized, demanded, and supported. Second, this recognition does not yet extend to young people's agency in MHPSS responses; young people are predominantly seen as beneficiaries of MHPSS responses. Third, the current push towards community-based MHPSS response opens the doors for integrating youth leadership into MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies.

D. State of Knowledge on Youth Leadership in MHPSS Response in Humanitarian Emergencies

The following section specifically addresses chances and opportunities (I), barriers and challenges (II), possible steps and areas for integrating youth-leadership in MHPSS response (III), and principles for partnerships with and support for young people (IV) as well as accountability mechanisms (V).

[...]

E. Summary and Conclusion

While some general guidelines for youth participation in humanitarian response and for youth engagement in MHPSS as well as guidelines on community-based (CB) MHPSS exist, there are currently no existing guidance documents that provide youth-leadership specific recommendations on MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies.

Summary

In reviewing 88 academic and non-academic sources, we identified several trends. First, youth leadership in humanitarian action is increasingly recognized, demanded, and supported, including through existing guidelines. *Second*, this recognition in the broader humanitarian sector does not yet extend to young people's agency in MHPSS responses who are predominantly perceived as "beneficiaries" for whom MHPSS response is provided. *Third*, while young people's contributions to general MHPSS outside emergencies are increasingly recognized, youth leadership is hardly mentioned in guidelines on

MHPSS in emergencies. *Fourth*, the current trend towards community-based (CB) MHPSS response opens the doors for integrating youth leadership into CB MHPSS response in humanitarian emergencies.

In spite of the absence of specific guidance, four conclusions can be drawn from the literature within the nexus of youth leadership, MHPSS response and humanitarian action. *First*, chances and opportunities of integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response lie in the unexplored potential of youth for improving such responses through increased relevance, reach, and capacity as well as benefits for young people engaged in MHPSS response themselves. *Second*, barriers and challenges pertain to a lack of trust in young people's capacities, a lack of funding and resources, lack of time and evidence as well as possible risks. *Third*, possible steps and possible areas for integrating youth leadership in MHPSS response cover all stages of MHPSS response and require systematic efforts. *Fourth*, partnerships with and support for young people should be based on a set of principles to ensure the meaningful nature of the partnerships and support.

Concluding Remarks

A comprehensive guidance document could contribute to the literature and compendium of existing guidelines on the intersecting areas of youth leadership, MHPSS response and humanitarian emergencies by providing explicit and practical recommendations for supporting youth-led MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies. This need is further reflected in the fact that many conclusions for this review have been drawn from various sources not dealing with the triple nexus of youth leadership, MHPSS response, and humanitarian emergency but with only one or two overlapping areas.

Exploring a yet missing perspective would not only add value but complement the literature with a significant perspective: young people's views and experiences on youth-led MHPSS response in both research and development of practical guidance documents. Furthermore, a review of resources in other languages could provide additional insights.

We recommend conducting further research on the importance of youth leadership in MHPSS response, possible barriers and their underlying factors to their exclusion despite a general recognition of youth leadership in humanitarian response, and how these barriers can be addressed. Based on the various challenges identified, exploring principles for meaningfully partnering with young people in MHPSS response should be an important component of future research. Furthermore, defining key steps and success factors for promoting young people in MHPSS responses could allow for developing strategies which serve as orientation for humanitarian organizations. Lastly, ensuring commitment in supporting young people's leadership requires analyzing possible ways to hold organizations accountable or at least provide incentives.

Overall, more research on the impact of youth leadership on the effectiveness and efficiency of MHPSS response could lead to findings encouraging funders, researchers and implementing organizations to adopt participatory approaches and promote young people in their very own interest. Likewise, young people and youth organizations themselves could build technical expertise and engage in advocacy to better demonstrate their positive contributions to MHPSS response.

Bibliography

See original document.

Annex II: Research Methodology

This research project adopted a qualitative approach to respond to the research question. It explored how youth leadership can be integrated into MHPSS response in humanitarian emergencies using focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. A qualitative design was the most appropriate for this study as it enabled the researchers to gather and present data from the perspective of young people and policymakers involved in humanitarian response, as well as the meanings they ascribed to these realities. With this approach, participants were given a voice in an open-ended inquiry, to incorporate their valuable perspectives, experiences, and priorities in drafting the aimed guidance document. From the onset to the conclusion of the research project, highest ethical research standards were upheld.²

I. Sample selection criteria

The purposive and snowball sampling approach was used to select study participants. This technique ensured that respondents were selected based on their function and firsthand knowledge of the humanitarian context rather than their representativeness (Sharma 2017). Hence, we selected youth leaders for the focus group discussion in order for them to share their unique field experiences, and we conducted interviews with policymakers, MHPSS practitioners, and funders to elicit specific information. The researchers initiated contact with suitable respondents and then inquired if they knew other potential participants. The initial individuals we contacted also recommended other potential participants. Each potential participant was contacted through email, the purpose of the study was explained, and meeting times scheduled.

II. Data Collection

This section discusses in detail the two main data collection approaches used for the study.

1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus group discussions are a well-established qualitative research method that can be used to collect data on complex topics. The researchers were motivated to use this data collection tool for a number of reasons. First, FGD is a particularly useful data collection tool considering that it has been used successfully to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of young people in various settings (Morgan 1997). Secondly, FGDs are an effective way to generate data that is rich in detail and can reveal new insights and perspectives that may not have been identified through individual interviews (Kitzinger 1994). Finally, FGDs also promote interaction and dialogue among participants, which can lead to the generation of new ideas and insights (Krueger & Casey 2014).

To conduct two online focus group discussions (FGDs) lasting up to 90 minutes each, the researchers extended invitation emails to 10 individuals. These individuals were youth activists and MHPSS practitioners actively engaged in diverse humanitarian contexts. Out of the invited participants, 7 individuals representing different countries in Europe and Africa participated. The researchers developed a discussion guide that consisted of open-ended questions related to integrating youth leadership into MHPSS (see Annex IV). The discussion guide was divided into three sections: Youth leadership in MHPSS, strategies for engaging youth, and co-creating a guidance document on integrating youth leadership into

² Participants to the interviews and focus group discussions were requested to sign a consent form for participation in the research and permission that the conversations will be recorded and their content used for academic purposes. The consent forms are available in the Annex III. Participants were informed about the possibility to withdraw their consent and participation at any time and had the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had concerning the study. Participants' identities were and are kept anonymous to protect their privacy, and all data has been stored solely for the purposes of this study. The research team strictly adhered to the [Geneva Graduate Institute's Research Guidelines](#).

MHPSS. These insights helped inform the follow-up interviews as well as the final output of the research project.³

2. Key Informant Interview

Key informant interviews were conducted as part of the data collection. The purpose was to gather insights and perspectives from individuals who were knowledgeable in the field of MHPSS and youth leadership on specific gaps in the literature in order to enhance the practicality and relevance of a guidance document to be developed. Invitations were sent to 20 people, including youth experts, MHPSS practitioners, funders, experts and policy makers, which was assumed sufficient for achieving a saturation throughout the interview process (Small 2009). With a 50% positive response rate, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted online as participants were located in different countries. Although an interview guide was created based on the objectives of this study (see Annex V), it was flexible enough to accommodate any new topics that surfaced during the interviews. The interview guide was organized into three key sections; integration of youth leadership into MHPSS, strategies for engaging youth and specificities of a future guidance document on integration of youth into MHPSS.

III. Data Analysis

The recordings of the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews were meticulously transcribed on a rolling basis and subsequently subjected to both deductive and inductive thematic analysis.⁴ Both approaches were crucial for this study; the deductive method enabled us to assess and advance the findings from the literature review about the nuances of integrating youth leadership in MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies, while the inductive method gave us flexibility for developing new ideas based on observations and experiences of research participants. In order to establish familiarity with the data, the transcripts were first read numerous times. The next step was to identify key words, common patterns and recurring themes. All coded sections were then categorized and aligned with the relevant sections of the structure of our analysis. Based on the categories and newly identified elements, the questions for interviews were adjusted and complemented in a reiterative process to reach saturation and cover a broad range of issues. Finally, the major findings were examined, sorted, and presented in a coherent set of conclusions that were supported by evidence from quotations. The analysis of the collected data is discussed under section G.

IV. Guidance Document Development Process

This section outlines the development process of the guidance document. The document emerged from a collaborative effort, beginning with an initial draft based on our data analysis and followed by a co-creation workshop involving youth and various practitioners. The subsequent stages involved rigorous reviews and revisions, culminating in the final version of the guidance document.

1. Initial drafting

Based on the data analysis following the focus group discussions and interviews, the research team proceeded to draft the initial version of the guidance document. This phase involved synthesizing the gathered insights, perspectives, and recommendations into a coherent framework that would serve as the basis for further development. The document was then shared with

³ The recordings will be transcribed and the data analyzed using thematic analysis.

⁴ According to Joffe (2012), an inductive method comprises coding data based on emerging themes, while a deductive method entails applying pre-existing codes to the data.

research participants to gather feedback and additional input and foster a collaborative approach in shaping the final guidance document.

2. Co-Creation Workshop

To ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences, the research team facilitated a co-creation workshop with 7 previous research participants, bringing together a range of stakeholders, including young people and practitioners working in the field of MHPSS. The workshop provided a structured platform for in-depth discussions, allowing participants to offer their input across the various sections of the draft document with a view to increasing its practical relevance. By harnessing the collective knowledge and expertise of the participants, the workshop played a pivotal role in refining the draft document, ensuring its relevance, comprehensiveness, and effectiveness. For the workshop outcomes and changes it informed, see Annex VII.

3. Expert Reviews

To ensure the document's quality and credibility, a series of rigorous reviews were undertaken. The draft document was circulated among all previous research participants and an advisory group comprising different MHPSS and youth experts, practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers. Their valuable feedback and suggestions helped refine the document, addressing gaps, inconsistencies and merging some sections. The iterative review process continued until a consensus was reached regarding the content, structure, and clarity of the guidance document. Just like the co-creation workshop, a set of guiding questions informed the review process (see Annex VI).

4. Final Development

Taking into account the inputs received, the research team revised the guidance document accordingly. Clear, concise, and actionable recommendations were incorporated in the final draft. The document underwent its final review, including thorough proofreading, fact-checking, and formatting, resulting in the development of a comprehensive guidance document on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS.

Annex III: Consent Forms

Focus Group Discussion Consent Form

The following consent form was shared with and signed by research participants prior to the focus group discussions.

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study that involves focus group discussion. Before agreeing to participate in this focus group discussion, it is important that you read and understand this consent form. Please ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Research Title

Developing guidance for integrating youth leadership into Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) responses in humanitarian emergencies.

Purpose

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to elicit the views and perspectives of young people on how youth leadership can effectively and meaningfully be integrated into MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies, including unique chances and challenges, key principles for success, and specific recommendations.

Procedure

As part of the focus group discussion, you will be placed in a group of 3-4 individuals. A moderator will ask you several questions while facilitating the discussion. The discussion will be recorded and notes taken. The discussion will take place online and is expected to last up-to 90 minutes.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and any identifying information will not be associated with any reports or publications resulting from the study. Recordings of the focus group discussion will be kept secure and will only be accessible to the research team.

Risks

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study beyond those encountered in daily life.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this focus group discussion. However, your contributions will be very helpful in developing the final output of this research project, which is a guidance document on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact (paul.klahre@graduateinstitute.ch).

Consent

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understood this consent form, and that all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation

is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Name & Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interview Consent Form

The following consent form was shared with and signed by research participants prior to the key informant interviews.

Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study that involves interviews. Before agreeing to participate in this, it is important that you read and understand this consent form. Please ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Research Title

Developing a guidance for integrating youth leadership into Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) responses in humanitarian emergencies.

Purpose

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to elicit the views and perspectives of young people on how youth leadership can effectively and meaningfully be integrated into MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies, including unique chances and challenges, key principles for success, and specific recommendations.

Procedure

As part of the focus group discussion, an interviewer will ask you several questions which will be recorded and notes taken. The interview will take place online and is expected to last up-to 60 minutes.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and any identifying information will not be associated with any reports or publications resulting from the study. Recordings of the interview will be kept secure and will only be accessible to the research team.

Risks

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study beyond those encountered in daily life.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this interview. However, your contributions will be very helpful in developing the final output of this research project, which is a guidance document on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact (paul.klahre@graduateinstitute.ch}

Consent

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understood this consent form, and that all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Name & Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annex IV: Focus Group Discussion Outline and Guide

Focus Group Discussion Outline and Guidelines for Participation

Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

- Facilitator welcomes participants and provides an overview of the discussion objectives and guidelines.
- Brief overview of MHPSS to get everyone on the same side
- Housekeeping
- Participants briefly introduce themselves.

Guidelines for Participation: 5mins

- Listen actively: Participants should listen to others carefully and respectfully without interrupting.
- Speak up: Participants should share their thoughts and experiences, and feel free to ask questions or seek clarification.
- Be respectful: Participants should respect others' opinions and perspectives even if they differ from theirs.
- Maintain confidentiality: Participants should keep the conversation confidential, and do not share others' personal information without their permission.
- Avoid distractions: Participants should refrain from any distractions that may interfere with the discussion.
- Participate fully: Participants should engage in the discussion, share their thoughts and experiences to the best of their abilities.

Sharing Experiences of MHPSS Challenges (5 minutes; 1-2 minutes each)

- Question: Can you share an example of a mental health or psychosocial challenge you or someone you know has experienced in an emergency context?

Youth Contributions to MHPSS in Emergencies (5 minutes)

- Question: In what ways can young people contribute to MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies?

Benefits of Integrating Youth Leadership (5 minutes)

- Question: What are some potential benefits of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies?

Strategies for Engaging the Youth (15 minutes)

- Question: What challenges do you foresee in engaging youth in MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies, and how can they be addressed?
- Question: In which stages should young people be included? (Needs-assessment, MHPSS design & programming, funding decisions, implementation of MHPSS response, monitoring & evaluation)

- Question regarding funding: What should be incentives for young people? How should young people involved in funding allocation.
- Question: How can youth leadership be integrated into MHPSS in a way that is empowering and inclusive of all young people, regardless of background or experience?

Developing an Accountability Framework (15 minutes)

- Question: What key components should be included in an accountability framework to ensure organizations integrate youth leadership into their MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies?
- Question: How can we monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of organizations in integrating youth leadership and hold them accountable for their commitments?

Creating a Guidance Document (15 minutes)

- Q°: Who should be addressed?
- Question: How could a guidance document on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS, along with the accountability framework, benefit young people in an emergency context?
- Question: What key elements should be included in the document?
- Question: How can we ensure that the guidance document is accessible and useful to a wide range of stakeholders, including young people and humanitarian organizations?

Conclusion and Feedback (5 minutes)

- Facilitator wraps up the discussion, summarizing key points and insights.
- Participants provide feedback on the discussion and identify any additional topics or questions for further exploration.
- Facilitator thanks participants for their participation and contribution to the discussion.

Note: The facilitator should ensure that the discussion remains focused and on time. They should also encourage all participants to contribute while creating a safe and inclusive space

Annex V: Interview Guide

Key Informant Interview Guide for MHPSS Practitioners/ Policymakers

Agenda

- 1) Introduction (5 mins)
 - Brief summary of the research project & introduction of interviewers
 - Opening question to the interviewee
- 2) Youth leadership in MHPSS (10 mins)
- 3) Strategies for integrating youth leadership (15 mins)
- 4) Developing a guidance document (10 mins)
- 5) Accountability Mechanisms (10 mins)
- 6) Outstanding questions/remarks (10 mins)

Introduction

This interview aims at identifying successful approaches, requirements, and changes for strengthening and integrating youth leadership in MHPSS responses during humanitarian emergencies. The discussion will focus on the following thematic areas; Youth Leadership in MHPSS; Strategies for engaging and involving youth; Monitoring and Accountability; Development of a guidance document.

Opening question: Before we get into the interview, would you like to give us a brief overview of how you relate to the research topic, either MHPSS or youth leadership or humanitarian emergencies or all of it.

Youth Leadership in MHPSS

This theme focuses on the potential benefits and challenges of involving youth in leadership positions in MHPSS programs and the kinds of roles that youth can play in these programs, either independently and within their own initiatives or in collaboration with practitioners and policymakers.

1. Could you share your experience working on MHPSS in active humanitarian emergencies?
2. In your experience, how have youth been involved in MHPSS programs in these contexts?
3. Can you provide examples of successful youth leadership in MHPSS programs?
4. What are your thoughts on the potential benefits of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS programs in active humanitarian emergencies?
5. What are some potential challenges or barriers to integrating youth leadership into MHPSS programs in active humanitarian emergencies?

Strategies for Engaging and Involving Youth

This theme focuses on exploring the different strategies that MHPSS programs can use to effectively engage and involve youth in implementing MHPSS programs in humanitarian emergency

1. What steps can be taken to effectively integrate youth leadership into MHPSS programs in humanitarian emergencies?
2. How can MHPSS programs best support the development of youth leadership skills in these contexts?
3. Can you share examples of successful capacity-building initiatives that have strengthened youth leadership in MHPSS programs?

Developing a Guidance Document

This theme focuses on exploring the approach to developing a guidance document and its potential benefits

1. Are you aware of any existing resources or tools on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS? // which are you using in your work?
2. What are the potential benefits of having a guidance document specifically focused on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies?
3. What key elements would you want to see in such a document? In your personal experience, which information would have helped you?
4. How do you think a guidance document on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS in active humanitarian emergencies might be received by key stakeholders, including humanitarian organizations, governments, and young people themselves? What factors would determine their use?
5. Can you envision a scenario where an organization might be hesitant to incorporate youth leadership into their MHPSS programs? How might a guidance document on this topic help address those concerns?

Monitoring and Accountability Framework

This theme focuses on exploring how MHPSS programs can effectively measure the impact of youth leadership on program outcomes and what measures could be put in place to ensure that organizations incorporate youth leadership into their MHPSS programs

1. How can MHPSS programs effectively measure the impact of youth leadership on program outcomes?
2. What strategies can be used to ensure that organizations implementing MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies integrate youth leadership into their MHPSS programs?

Specific Interview Questions for Funders

1. In your opinion, how important is it to incorporate youth leadership into MHPSS programs in humanitarian emergencies?
2. Can you share any experiences you've had funding MHPSS programs that included youth leadership? What were the successes and challenges of those programs?

3. Are there any specific funding opportunities or initiatives established by your organization, or that you are aware of, to support MHPSS programs incorporating youth leadership in humanitarian emergencies?
4. What criteria do you typically use to evaluate proposals for MHPSS programs that include youth leadership? How do these criteria differ from those used to evaluate other types of MHPSS proposals? If not, what would be suitable criteria?
5. As a funder, what measures would you take to ensure that organizations you fund or support are held accountable for the integration of youth leadership in their MHPSS programs in humanitarian emergencies? How would you monitor and evaluate their progress in this regard?
6. What role do you envision for youth leadership in MHPSS programs in humanitarian emergencies in the future, and how do you see your organization supporting this work?

Specific Questions for Youth Experts / Leaders

Opening question: Before we get into the interview, would you like to give us a brief overview of how you relate to the research topic, either MHPSS or youth leadership or humanitarian emergencies or all of it.

Youth Leadership in MHPSS

1. What motivated you to become involved in MHPSS and youth leadership in humanitarian emergencies?
2. In your opinion, how can young people contribute to MHPSS responses in humanitarian emergencies?
3. What do you think are the biggest challenges and barriers for youth engagement in MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies?
4. How do you think some of the challenges could be addressed? What would be required?
5. Can you describe any leadership roles you have held in the past? How have these experiences prepared you for a role in MHPSS in active humanitarian emergencies?
6. What do you consider to be the most important qualities or skills for a youth leader in MHPSS during a humanitarian emergency?
7. How can partnerships between different stakeholders, such as local organizations, government agencies, and international NGOs, be leveraged to support youth leadership in MHPSS?
8. What do you see as the potential benefits of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies?
9. Do you think women and men are equally involved in MHPSS? Is there sufficient human resource capacity to address the needs of both groups?

Strategies for Engaging the Youth

1. What specific skills or experiences do young people bring to the table when contributing to MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies?

2. How can youth leadership be integrated into MHPSS in a way that is empowering and inclusive of all young people, regardless of background or experience?
3. What are the most significant challenges facing youth leadership in MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies, and how can they be addressed?

Creating a Guidance Document

1. How do you think a guidance document on integrating youth leadership into MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies could benefit organizations and young people in emergency contexts?
2. What key elements should be included in the document?
3. How can we ensure that the guidance document is accessible and useful to a wide range of stakeholders, including young people and humanitarian organizations?
4. How can we ensure that the guidance document reflects the diverse perspectives and experiences of young people in different contexts?

Monitoring and Accountability Framework

1. How can MHPSS programs effectively measure the impact of youth leadership on program outcomes?
2. What strategies can be employed to ensure that organizations implementing MHPSS in humanitarian emergencies integrate youth leadership into their MHPSS programs?

Annex VI: Questions Guiding the Review of the Guidance Document

The following guiding questions were disseminated with research and workshop participants as well as expert reviewers and the external advisory group to coordinate the review process.

Clarity and Structure

- Is the purpose of the document clearly stated and easy to understand?
- Are the sections and subsections logically organized and easy to follow?
- Are the key terms and concepts clearly defined and explained?

Content and Relevance

- Does the document cover all the key aspects of integrating youth leadership into MHPSS responses?
- Is the content relevant and applicable to the intended audience?
- Are the benefits, barriers, and strategies for integrating youth leadership adequately covered and explained?
- Are there any important topics or issues that are missing from the document?

Language and Tone

- Is the language used in the document clear, concise, and easy to understand?
- Is the tone of the document appropriate?
- Are technical terms or jargon adequately explained?

Consistency and Coherence

- Is the document consistent in its use of terms and concepts?
- Does the document present a coherent and logical argument for integrating youth leadership into MHPSS responses?
- Are the different sections of the document well-integrated and do they flow smoothly from one to the next?
- Are there any contradictions or inconsistencies in the document?

Accuracy and Completeness

- Are there any gaps or missing information that should be addressed?
- Are there any errors or inconsistencies that need to be corrected?

Audience Perspective

- Does the document take into account the needs and perspectives of the intended audience?
- Are the strategies and recommendations in the document practical and feasible for the intended audience?
- Does the document address potential challenges or concerns that the audience may have?
- Does the document provide clear and actionable guidance for the audience?

Visual Presentation

- What key points in this document would benefit from visual representation (e.g., diagrams, infographics, charts)?
- Are there any examples of visual presentation from other documents or resources that you think we should consider or draw inspiration from?

Additional Questions - Conclusion/Call to Action/Dissemination

- Is a call to action necessary and what format would it take/who will it be directed at?
- Should this conclusion reiterate suggestions and recommendations on how to use the guidance? What else should the conclusion include?
- What are some suggested approaches for dissemination of this resource?
- Any suggestions on ideal opportunities to launch this resource?
- How do we ensure easy adoption and use?
- Are there any other questions that we should have been asking that we missed?

Annex VII: Workshop Outcomes

The initial draft of the guidance document was adapted in line with the following contributions from the co-creation workshop. A first general remark was that the bullet points for each section's subheading, while making the document easily comprehensible, should be complemented by full introductory phrases. This was subsequently mainstreamed throughout the document.

In the introductory part, minor changes were undertaken to specify the target audience and the document's purpose as relating to all stages of the programme cycle. While the delimitation of humanitarian emergencies was mentioned to possibly undermine the importance of the triple nexus, the research team acknowledged that the guidance is specifically designed for emergency situations when MHPSS response is most urgent.

Part I on the importance of youth leadership in MHPSS response was recomposed to highlight four instead of six main aspects without compromising on the content. For example, instead of using the term "quality", "relevance" was deemed to better capture more subsequent sub-points. A previously mentioned advantage of raising awareness was subsumed as an aspect of "expanding the reach" of MHPSS. Ultimately, some more contentious aspects such as young people's role in faith-based organizations were deleted from the guidance given a lack of consensus.

In Part II on barriers and challenges, already the title was adapted to highlight that those are only *possible* challenges whereas their actual manifestation depends on each context. An additional bullet point on the ignorance of young people's diversity was added following explicit mentions during the workshop. Furthermore, the importance of mentioning the limited available resources and training opportunities for youth was reinforced just as the limited understanding of young people's needs was added as part of a sub-point on limitations of organizations.

The Part III was renamed into "Principles for Meaningful Partnerships" to reflect the equality of young people as partners in MHPSS response. Previously nine categories were merged into six to reduce the complexity and lay the focus on overarching principles. For example, the aspect to include young people permanently in decision-making structures was assessed to rather be a strategy for promoting youth leadership and consequently included in Part IV, whereas ensuring influence, ownership and agency is an overarching principle. As the aspect about intentionality was contested, its language was adapted to be less offensive but rather acknowledge organizations of varying capacity and resources to work with young people. The use of youth-friendly language was included under the aspect of adapting to young people's realities.

Following the workshop, previous Part IV on Strategies for Promoting Inclusion and V on ensuring organizational commitment were merged into new Part IV "Strategies for Promoting and Integrating Youth Leadership" as both parts overlapped in their essential points and because the self-assessment scale is another means to provide guidance for increased organizational commitment. This new Part IV underwent some major revisions to accommodate both previous parts. Providing information and feedback was transformed into its own section, the section on funding was substantiated, and the importance of internal capacity and policy commitment prioritized by moving it up as the first instead of last point.

Annex VIII: Six-month Dissemination Plan

Month	Activity	Responsibility/ Target	Date
1 & 2	Design of Research Report, Guidance Document, Self-Assessment Scale, and Social Media Toolkit for Launch, Recording and editing of short videos, Preparing the email format and putting together the email list of partners to engage and invite for the launch.	In-house digital media expert Videos from Research team, [names not displayed in publication]	Month 1 starting 3rd week of July
2	Pre-Launch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email to Partner Organizations Media Outreach: Feature in The New Humanitarian Social Media Invites to Launch Release of Short Videos (90-sec version from the research team and videos from young leaders) Consider translating the guidance document to French/Arabic. Consider hosting the YLAS form and resource page on the Collab website 	Event Invites: MHPSS Collaborative Social Media; Partner Organizations Social Media and newsletters. Media: The New Humanitarian (Opinion Piece or Interview) Videos: Research team, [names not displayed in publication]	
3	Launch Webinar with MHPSS.net, Release of Executive Summary, Full Report/Guidance Document, and Social Media Launch.	Relevant Stakeholders	
3	- Website and Newsletter Features - Send out recordings and updated links to attendees, including the YLAS form and resource page on the Collab website	MHPSS Collaborative, MHPSS.net, MHIN, I-ASC MHPSS Reference Group	
4	- Printing of the assets - Public Presentation of the Final Report and Guidance Document at the Geneva Graduate Institute	Research Team	20 September
4	Global Refugee Forum and Other Events (Push for presence in Side events, Plenary presentations, etc.) - Propose event at Adolescents 2030: https://pmnch.who.int/news-and-events/campaigns/adolescents2030 - Propose an Event to Compact on Young People in Humanitarian Action - 19 September 2023: UK Youth Mental Health Day https://stem4.org.uk/youthmentalhealthday/ - Check if the 54th HRC sessions have a theme relating to youth and apply to host/speak at a side event.	Save the Children Netherlands, UNICEF, Save the Children UK	
5	Work on the literature review and consider submission to Academic Journals	Intervention Journal (Peer reviewed publication and/or Commentary)	

6	Development of Training Sessions on Integrating Youth Leadership (2-hour MOOC) - email HLA to get go-ahead and determine plan and cost for developing and launching course (in multiple languages)	Humanitarian Leadership Academy	
6	Review and Evaluation of Dissemination Strategy	Internal	