



TIME TO ACT: HOW TO BE AN ALLY TO YOUNG REFUGEES

ROUNDTABLE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

It is essential to include those who will be impacted (“nothing about us without us”) in developing policies and programs that affect them. Refugees have for too long been left out of processes and decisions that impact their lives and communities. This is beginning to shift. Young refugee leaders are getting involved in identifying, implementing, and advocating for solutions that empower refugees, develop durable solutions, and support self-reliance. The world has begun to listen, but there are still barriers that limit young refugee leaders’ impact and influence.

On November 17th WUSC and the Global Refugee Youth Network (GRYN) convened a global virtual summit on the *State of Play on Refugee Leadership: Young Refugee Leaders in Conversation with Allies*, bringing together young refugees and allies to discuss ways to advance refugee youth inclusion, leadership, and influence. This is a condensed summary from the full report, *Time to Act: How to be an Ally to Young Refugees*, highlighting key actions young refugee leaders want allies to take.

1. **RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE AND EXPERTISE OF REFUGEE-LED INITIATIVES.**

Refugee youth want allies to recognize that their work, their perspectives, and expertise are valuable and essential. Refugee youth are “on the ground all the time,” have a vested interest in the success of their communities, and are well-positioned to work on local solutions. Shift the paradigm from refugees as beneficiaries, to refugees as change-makers.

2. **SHARE INFORMATION AND CREATE CONNECTIONS.**

Refugee-led initiatives are rarely given attention outside of camps and local contexts. Because they are not known, they are overlooked for opportunities (e.g., funding and partnership). Allies are well placed to distribute information to refugee leaders about what other refugee leaders are doing globally, and what opportunities are available.

3. **PROVIDE FUNDING TO REFUGEE-LED INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS.**

There is a lack of funding to support refugee-led programs. Many grassroots refugee-led organizations are not legal entities and face institutional barriers (e.g., citizenship requirements for registration). Allies need to make funding for refugee-led programs available at different levels (e.g., microgrants or scale-up funds) and have flexible criteria to evaluate capacity. Allies should ask refugee leaders to describe their support needs (e.g., materials and supplies or in-kind expertise). Support for refugee-led initiatives supports both the activities and refugee leadership.

4. **PARTNER WITH REFUGEES AND REFUGEE-LED INITIATIVES.**

Refugee youth want allies to stop mostly consulting with refugees and instead offer sustainable partnership opportunities. Create flexible tools and mechanisms for meaningful partnership with refugee-led organizations and leaders and include capacity-building for both allies and refugees (e.g., training refugees to grow their leadership and influence and training allies in anti-oppression work).

5. SUPPORT REFUGEE NETWORKS AND COORDINATE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEM.

Allies can create ongoing networking opportunities for young refugee leaders to engage with one another, share experiences, and build partnerships regionally and globally. These must include the resources to allow young refugees to participate (e.g., travel funds and logistics support) and should provide opportunities for young leaders to work together on shared projects, advocacy, and activities. Networks help to build confidence, experience, and exposure. They can play an important role in influencing policies and the global refugee response.

6. INVOLVE REFUGEE LEADERS IN PROGRAM DESIGN AND DELIVERY.

Even if not formally entering into partnership with refugee-led organizations, allies working with refugees must create ongoing ways to engage young refugee leaders in the design and delivery of refugee programs. Include a diversity of people and perspectives, and respect that the local solutions and successes of one context do not necessarily transfer to another. Allies should involve refugee youth right from the start to co-design projects and establish practices to follow-up and to share information about outcomes and decisions.





7. LISTEN AND AMPLIFY THE VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG REFUGEE LEADERS.

At the policy level and in public communications, allies can work with young refugee leaders to design messaging that amplifies and represents the needs of refugees. Reach out to diverse refugee communities and organizations and listen and amplify refugee leaders because of their experience and expertise.

8. SUPPORT CAPACITY-BUILDING AND PRACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEE YOUTH.

Allies can support training and capacity-build programs that support young refugees to develop labour-market relevant skills and leadership competencies (e.g., organizational leadership, advocacy, research and writing, and labour market relevant skills). These programs should include opportunities to apply learning in a practical setting (e.g., volunteering or funding for initiating advocacy projects).

9. CREATE SPACE AND SHIFT POWER DYNAMICS.

Allies can work within their own spheres of influence and institutions to shift power dynamics and meaningfully include young refugees. Consider how refugee youth can be part of their organization (e.g., hire refugees) and be embedded in decision making and planning processes. Allies should create organizational structures and practices that enable young refugees to share perspectives and ideas safely and freely.

10. FOCUS ON DECISION-MAKING INFLUENCE.

Ensure refugee leadership and participation is central in conversations and decision-making about refugees. Allies should involve refugee leaders and share power (e.g., support a young refugee leader to attend and speak at the next important global summit, instead of organizational leadership). Young refugees benefit from these experiences at high-level platforms and fora, and also at the local and national levels where their communities are most affected.

11. BE ACCOUNTABLE AND COMMITTED FOR THE LONG-TERM.

Refugee youth want allies and their organizations to commit to young refugees for the long-term. Allies can develop and share accountability measures (e.g., board representation targets) and build ongoing relationships of trust.

There are already many refugee leaders and refugee-led initiatives responding to, and advocating for, the needs and interests of refugee communities. Finding new ways to forge connections between allies and young refugee leaders is critical to ensuring that refugee perspectives help to shape and build smart, practical, and sustainable refugee programs and policies.

