ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FRONTLINES

Discussion paper with Policy recommendations and Compendium of resources

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PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

The **primary audience** of this report with the compendium of resources are youth engagement practitioners in the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies as well as technical experts and policy makers across the humanitarian landscape that thrive for meaningful interventions with and for children, adolescents, and young adults experiencing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Informed by a comprehensive analysis of internal and external environments, this paper aims to contribute to a more **holistic and intersectional understanding of the impact** the COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have **on the constituency of children, adolescents, and young adults**.

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Built around innate and compounded vulnerabilities, this paper challenges the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescents Societies (IFRC) and other practitioners to better explore the **nexus** between **youth engagement and various programmatic areas** of humanitarian aid and development, especially the design and delivery of our interventions and programming. Ultimately, by pointing out intersections between meaningful youth engagement and mental health, child protection, education, trust, climate crisis, and others technical fields of humanitarian aid, this paper aspires to **catalyse** Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) **niche** and **locally driven humanitarian action targeting youth constituency.**

More specifically, through setting the broader context, introducing central conceptual theories of human behaviour, and featuring the realities of lives of children, adolescents, and young adults under the COVID-19 from renowned agencies and humanitarian actors (*The New York Times, WHO, UNICEF*, etc.), this Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) discussion paper offers a unique mapping of the **COVID-19 pandemic reality**. Through analysis and extrapolation of both the emerging COVID-19 reality and pre-COVID trends in youth development, we propose the **Humanitarian excellence 2030: with you and for youth** - youth engagement specific policy recommendations for the next decade. Lastly, with the view of bridging the gap between the potential, current practice, and policy recommendations towards 2030, a **Compendium of resources**, a curated list of multilingual and operational tools, has been created.

Through this paper, the IFRC encourages continuous fine-tuning and recalibration of youth engagement strategies and programming, incl. the phasing-out of obsolete ones and the introduction of new ones, to address the humanitarian consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic effectively. Moreover, this paper will help National Societies, regional RCRC Youth Networks, and the IFRC Secretariat to effectively advocate and influence **policy and decision-makers** to invest in and initiate youth-friendly, youth-driven, and society-owned solutions to improve the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults under the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, built on the pre-COVID-19 developmental, social, and societal factors influencing positions and well-being of children, adolescents, and young adults and complemented by the COVID-19 impact analysis, this paper **extends the developmental trajectory and understanding of meaningful youth engagement within the IFRC and wider humanitarian landscape.**

WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THIS PAPER?

Brevity is the second nature to this paper, as it is built for **independent** and **non-consecutive** chapter reading, solely based on the interest of the reader.

The *Setting the scene* and *Dynamics of the pandemics* chapters offer a **bigger picture content** and set the situation of children, adolescents, and young adults living under the COVID-19 pandemic in a wider societal context. These sections will help the reader better discriminate youth-specific vs overall phenomena as well as understand the **overarching principles and drivers of human behaviour and decision making in pandemics**, as studied by social and developmental psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. In addition, readers are going to understand the **key concepts and paradigms helpful in pursuing national-level partnerships** for COVID-19 youth-led and society-owned programming. Lastly, the sample of **global data** shall guide National Societies in their search of locally relevant evidence.

The *Living as COVID-19 affected youth* through to the *Empowered, enabled, and protected* chapters explore the realities of youth under the COVD-19 pandemic across several themes such as mental health, climate crisis, vaccination, trust, child labour, education, health, or poverty and race. The primary purpose of these chapters is to **document and point out multifaceted impact** of the COVID-19 on youth and help the practitioners better understand the complexity of the situations that youth living under COVID-19 find themselves in. In these chapters, we bring **curated content** reported by **renowned news agencies** such as *The New York Times, Dear Spiegel, The Guardia, or The Telegraph* as well as findings of the most recently published research studies (*World Economic Forum, IFRC, Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, Save the Children, WHO,* and others) that capture the voice of children, adolescents, and young adults during the pandemic. Evidence-based substance from external sources in these chapters is enriched by analytical content that points out lessons learnt form the past and their pertinency to today's situation in the domain of youth programming and youth development. Furthermore, findings and positions referred in external sources are analysed against the key IFRC principles of meaningful youth engagement, so that areas of possible synergies with potential partners are highlighted.

To ensure and safeguard value-add and unique content, these **cut-off criteria** were applied when selecting resources featured in this paper:

- Demonstrated thought leadership exploring interconnections between traditionally isolated and soloed topics that are pertinent to creating a better world with and for children, adolescents, and young adults.
- Intersectional and holistic take-on the role of youth and solutions tailored for the youth constituency,
- Novelty in understanding implications for humanitarian actors vis-à-vis children, adolescents, and young adults as stakeholders in crisis management,
- Unorthodox perspectives featuring the needs, rights, and potential of children, adolescents, and young adults during and post-pandemic,
- Recognition of multi-layered identities of individuals and heterogeneity of the constituency of children, adolescents, and young adults.

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The impression of content repetitiveness in some parts is precisely a reflection of the "repetitive" but not same impact coming at youth and children from several domains of life such as education, protection, climate crisis, health, loss of jobs of primary care givers, etc. This differently sourced or originated impacts exists due to a number of youth-specific and overlapping vulnerabilities that are not, have not been, and will not be unique during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Humanitarian excellence 2030: with and for youth is a chapter in which we come to a full circle with bringing in the RCRC work, ambitions, and collective aspirations, and commitments. In this chapter, we present transformative **policy recommendations** and **call** on ourselves, our partners, and decision and policy makers for **tangible action** to:

1. Address developmental roadblocks hindering well-being of youth and meaningful youth engagement under the COVID-19,
2. Accelerate localisation and wide ownership of solutions tailored for youth constituency,
3. Elevate well-being and protection as key pillars of youth engagement,
4. Nurture youth-led influence and impact.

The _Compendium of resources_ is a final substantive chapter. It is rich in **multilingual resources** to support National Societies when they decide to enrich their activities with and for young people living under the COVID-19. Resources featured in this section are organised in subcategories: Young people as frontliners, Youth-friendly mental health and psychosocial support resources, Domestic and gender-based violence, Child safeguarding and protection, Education, Flighting misinformation. The Compendium is completed with a list of principal RCRC and our major partner e-hubs for humanitarian operations and programming in the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Colombian RC fundraising with Colombia's president of the Republic, (2011)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary audience of this report with the compendium of resources are youth engagement practitioners in the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies as well as technical experts across the humanitarian landscape that thrive for meaningful interventions with and for children, adolescents, and young adults experiencing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, informed by a comprehensive analysis of internal and external environments, this paper aims to contribute to a more holistic and intersectional understanding of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have on the constituency of children, adolescents, and young adults.

By placing the constituency of children, adolescents, and young adults at the centre, this discussion paper challenges thematic and programmatic silos that usually govern humanitarian aid. More explicitly, constituency-centred approach of this paper promotes genuine nexus explorations between youth engagement and various programmatic areas of humanitarian aid and development from a non-biased perspective, incl. mental health, child protection, education, poverty, trust, climate crisis, economy, etc.

Primarily, this paper will serve as an evidence-based advocacy and operational resource for National Societies, regional RCRC Youth Networks, and the IFRC Secretariat to influence policy and decision-makers to invest in and initiate youth-friendly, youth-driven, and society-owned solutions to improve the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults under the COVID-19 pandemic. Concurrently, we aim for this paper to help catalyse RCRC niche and locally driven humanitarian action targeting the constituency of youth.

Under the chapeau of the Humanitarian excellence 2030: with and for youth, this report proposes novel and youth engagement specific policy recommendations pertinent for the next decade of youth development in the humanitarian aid. Through these transformative recommendations we call on ourselves, our partners, and decision and policy makers to:

1. Catalyse scaling and scoping-up of the role that young people play in RCRC programmes, services, and operations as leaders, volunteers, and members of affected communities.
2. Address developmental roadblocks hindering well-being of youth under the COVID-19 and point out niches for institutional capacity building "from within",
3. Accelerate localisation and wide ownership of solutions tailored to youth constituency,
4. Elevate well-being and protection as key pillars of youth engagement, and
5. Nurture youth-led influence and impact.

Built around the compounded pre-COVID-19 developmental, social, and societal factors influencing positions and well-being of children, adolescents, and young adults and complemented by the COVID-19 impact analysis, this paper extends the developmental trajectory and understanding of meaningful youth engagement within the IFRC and wider humanitarian landscape.

1 SETTING THE SCENE

Terminology

Young people are a heterogeneous group with diverse backgrounds, expertise, skillsets, and needs requiring appropriate human development approaches for meaningful engagement. Across the humanitarian landscape, agencies use the terms youth, young people, adolescents, children, etc. to refer to a variety of age brackets. National Societies are guided by their national legislation when adopting the IFRC's global age definitions set out in the IFRC Youth Policy (2017). The table below compares the age brackets and terminology used within the IFRC with the definitions established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines (2021). It also indicates the degree of congruence. For the purpose of this paper, no major inconsistencies have been identified in the use of the terms listed.

Source / Term	IASC Guidelines (2021)	IFRC Youth Policy (2017)	Degree of congruence[1]
Children	0–17	(0) 5–12	SIGNIFICANT
Adolescents	10–19	13–17	RELEVANT
Youth/Young adults	15–24	18–30	SIGNIFICANT
Young people	10–24	5–30	SIGNIFICANT

Key data

In 2017, 1.8 billion people – **a quarter of the world's population** – were young people (aged 10 to 24), and this group comprises more than **half the total population** in the **48 least developed countries.**

Africa's youth population accounts for 20 per cent of the world's total youth population (aged 15 to 24), and this proportion is expected to rise to **35 per cent by 2050.**

Children and young people (aged 0 to 24) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) **account for nearly half** of the region's population, representing a **powerful force** as agents of change.

Today, some **408 million young people** aged 15 to 29, or **23 per cent** of the global youth population, are affected **by violence or armed conflict.**

South Asia is home to more adolescents (aged 10 to 19) – **nearly 350 million** any other region, followed by East and the Pacific, with **over 300 million.**

Approximately **175 million** children **every year** will be affected by **natural hazards** caused by **climate change.**

There were **9.7 million young people** aged 15 to 24 internally displaced because of **conflicts, violence, or disasters** at the end of 2019. Of those, **3.1 million** were under the age of 18.

A total of **225 million** young people in the **developing world (20 per cent)** are not in **education, employment, or training.**

Nearly **3 in 10** young people (aged 15 to 24) in countries affected by **conflict or disaster** are illiterate.

Of the **70.8 million people** to flee their homes, **25.4 million were refugees**, and of these, over **half were under** the age of 18.

Enrolment in **secondary education** among refugees rose from **23 to 24 per cent** in 2020 but is still far below the global rate of **37 per cent.**

Internal migration peaks **among those in their twenties**, who often migrate **to learn new skills or make the most of those already** acquired.

Only **one in four adolescent** refugees attend **school.**

(IASC Guidelines, 2021; UNFPA, 2019)

From equality through anxiety to shame and back

Manifestations of individual power, popularity, prestige, and privilege have become unacceptable with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the appeal of the "rich and famous" faded and the cult of celebrity was dismantled, humanity underwent an undeniable shift towards preferring values and behaviour grounded in caring, compassion, togetherness, and fairness.

At the same time, sociologists and anthropologists have rightly pointed out that pandemics unavoidably generate an unthinkable amount of uncertainty that for many individuals becomes a source of anxiety. The tangible difference between anxiety and fear is that fear comes from the "known". Therefore, unlike in natural and short-term disasters and crises, it is angst in the COVID-19 crisis that has driven a rather "conservative" attitude to the needs of others and overridden "generosity" towards out-group members. However, this "cutback in generosity" naturally elicits shame, another affect behind people's attitudes and actions during pandemics. (Schwab, Malleret, 2020)
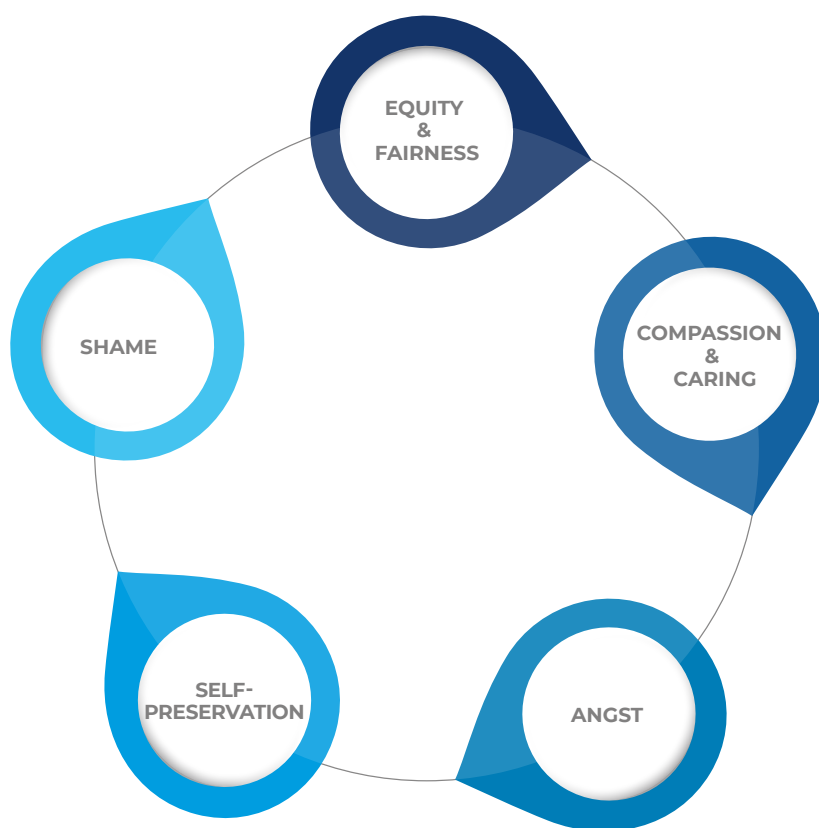
Fortunately, there are always exceptions to the chain of reactions and behaviours described above. This time around, we also saw individuals across professions (nurses, bakers, physicians, drivers, etc.) who did not give in to rising emotions and instead poignantly embraced the adage: "IF NOT ME, THEN WHO". Globally, the power of humanity prevailed, and we saw volunteering under the chapeau of the Fundamental Principles skyrocket across National Societies.

From globalization to localised "glocollaboration"

From previous global pandemics, the world has learnt that interconnectedness was the tipping point for "making it through", and hence we have witnessed the birth and strengthening of globalization efforts. Today, when we step back from the COVID-19 pandemic and observe, for example, the LGBTQI+ movement, the Black Lives Matter movement or the Climate Crisis and Education for All movements led by young activists, it seems that global collaboration in solidarity – "localised glocollaboration" – is the critical catalyst of betterment.

On cognitive closure during pandemics

In the context of "global togetherness" and solidarity, equality and morality become weighing factors in decision-making. Justifications of actions stemming from the personal and social domains of reasoning (personal domain – it is my right and my personal entitlement; social domain – this is how we have always done it and it is customary to run things this way) are increasingly challenged. The reason behind this is the rising importance of fairness, which represents a universal thread in social contracts and the social fabric across many communities and cultures. The pandemic has just made fairness more prominent in the narratives.

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Against the backdrop of social contract theory and the paradigm of community resilience strengthening, the world has for over a year been fiercely investing in the post-COVID-19 rebuild and transformation.

Decisions about these investments will have a long-lasting post-COVID-19 effect at personal, societal, and global levels. The COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity to build the foundations of "glocolaboration". The big question is therefore: Are our decisions and actions driven by personal and/or in-group attainments and interests rather than doing the right thing?
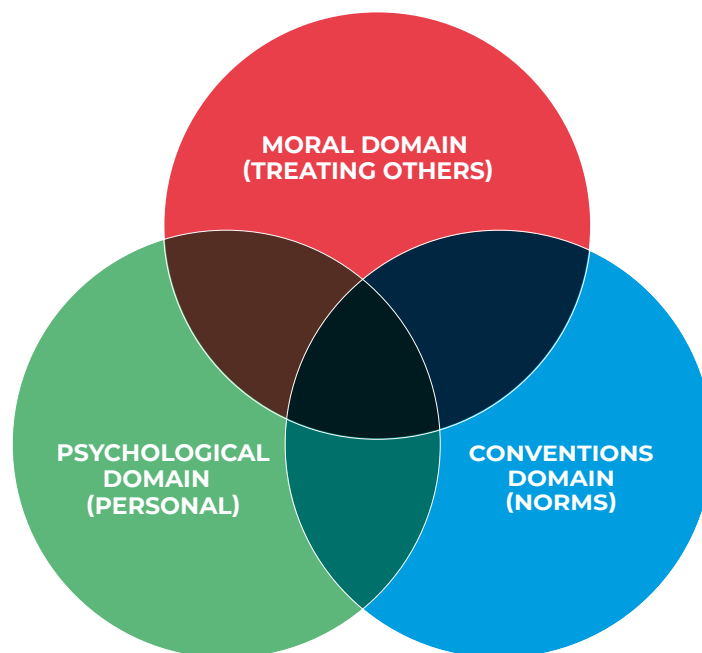
Figure: *Interplay of domains of social knowledge in reasoning (Social Domain Theory, Wainryb et al., 2008).*

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Principles governing how we treat each other belong to the moral domain of social knowledge, and the role of National Societies in influencing decision-makers with humanitarian perspectives is paramount when profound and momentous shifts are on the horizon.

Therefore, so much attention has been given, for example, to vaccination for all in RCRC global advocacy. As for the end of the pandemic, according to psychology experts, a pandemic is over when people individually and collectively arrive at cognitive closure (Schwab, Malleret, 2020). With everybody craving this "arrival", we should all look out for our own:

- overuse of linear thinking,
- denial of complexities and oversimplification,
- preference for unsophisticated solutions,
- trust-seeking from authorities,
- in-group vs out-group identity preference heightening a sense of vulnerability,
- worries about the established order.

The above are fuel to the fire of manifestations of tribalism and patriotic and nationalist sentiments (Schwab, Malleret, 2020) which rise during pandemics and greatly influence global collaboration, solidarity, and the fair distribution of resources, hence another niche for National Societies and humanitarian values-driven aid, a pillar of community resilience strengthening.

Space for your reflections and notes

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3 LIVING AS COVID-19-AFFECTED YOUTH

The global COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly evolved from a health crisis into a socio-economic crisis which, while affecting the entire global population, has impacted certain groups disproportionately (OECD, 2020). It has swiftly unveiled and extended omnipresent inequalities with immediate and long-lasting implications for the RCRC humanitarian mandate and advocacy rooted in the Fundamental Principles.

Initially, children, adolescents and young adults were considered less vulnerable to the virus, but developments during the pandemic have shown otherwise. The Children's voices in times of COVID-19 research, conducted across 13 countries (World Vision International, 2020), revealed three key factors that changed the lives of children and young people on a massive scale: school disruption, emotional distress due to social distancing and increasing poverty. During interviews, 71 per cent of the respondents said that they felt isolated and lonely due to school closures. Not only did they point to disruption of their learning and daily routines, but they also spoke about their sense of isolation and despair. An even higher percentage of respondents (91 per cent) acknowledged that they were facing emotional distress and troubling feelings, including anxiety, anger, and worry. The root cause of these emotional affects was uncertainty about how long the crisis and imposed isolation would last.

With severe disruptions to education, livelihoods, development, safety, and mental health as a result of the pandemic, long-term repercussions have unfolded for young people around the world. In the heterogeneous constituency of children, adolescents, and young adults, it is especially unaccompanied child migrants and refugees, young people without a permanent home or legally recognized status, adolescent girls and young women, young people from indigenous and ethnic minorities, young people with disabilities and those living in informal settlements (IASC Guidelines, 2021) that continue to be unseen, too often left behind and unable bounce back. In addition to the impact stemming from social and societal positions and rooted in comparatively limited personal resilience, young people experience the multi-layered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic first-hand as members of struggling families or spectators of fraught communities and states.

Indeed, in times of shock and stress, access to cognitive faculties and competencies is temporarily impaired for everybody. Yet, the situation is worse for children and young people than it is for adults because in the after-shock period, they cannot draw on faculties, competencies, or resilience that they do not have or have not yet practised sufficiently. Children, adolescents, and young adults have been caught in a critical moment of transition towards adulthood and independence. Furthermore, the known and established life pathways entrenched in the "DNA of communities" became obsolete. Therefore, the pandemic has had an unparalleled effect on perceptions of control and agency in youth which have often led to a nihilistic attitude towards personal development and the future in general.

In the Global Risks Report (WEF, 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic is acknowledged as both an accelerator of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and an engine of disillusionment. More specifically, the report points to the digitalization of human interaction, e-commerce, e-education and remote work as the main areas of development. However, the authors also consider the digital leap to be an inequality risk, especially on account of its "selective" value-add for in-groups within the heterogeneous cohort of young people. Furthermore, the unprecedented build-up and combination of shocks, such as environmental degradation, the impact of the recent financial crisis, disruption caused by industrial transformation and the current COVID-19 pandemic, poses challenges for young people in envisaging a successful future (The Global Risks Report, WEF, 2021). Against the backdrop of this unparalleled situation, current generations of young, qualified individuals are entering the labour market in what the authors call an employment ice age. This disillusionment stemming from various sources beyond the control of young people, or any individual for that matter, presents a risk for societal development and resilience. The authors of the report also warn that if neglected, youth disillusionment will become a serious threat to the social fabric and the social contract. From the RCRC standpoint, it is imperative to provide youth with structured and equitable opportunities to envisage and co-create adequate and decent pathways to their future.

4 BEYOND EDUCATION

As early as April 2020, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General reported that the pandemic was turning into a child rights crisis (The Washington Post, 2020; AP News, 2020). More specifically, the 2020 UN Policy Brief on COVID-19 and children said 188 countries have imposed countrywide school closures, affecting more than 1.5 billion children and young people. It also asserted that parents of nearly 369 million children in 143 countries who rely on school meals for daily nutrition must now look to other sources. When launching the brief, Guterres urged governments and donors to prioritize education for all children and give special priority to the most vulnerable – youngsters in conflicts and refugee camps and those who are displaced and disabled. The UN estimated that at least 24 million children will drop out of school due to the pandemic (The New York Times, 27 September 2020), and UNICEF was alarmed about the pandemic potentially rolling back years of social and public health progress, for example, the reversal

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of the achievement of taking 94 million children out of work since 2000 (UNICEF, 9 September 2020; The Telegraph, 2020).

> " I think we have to take a holistic view of the impact of school closures on kids and our families. I do worry at some point, the accumulated harms from the [COVID-19] measures may exceed the harm to the kids from the virus."
>
> *Dr Jennifer Nuzzo, John Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health (The New York Times, 6 October 2020)*

The fact that 1.5 billion young people have had to stay home (UN Policy Brief, 2020) has had a serious impact, especially in low-income communities, where schools represent a lifeline because they provide a decent livelihood and serve as nutritional, social and health centres, and early warning systems for abuse. Unfortunately, all too often, home was far from being an environment conducive to learning, personal safety, healthy development or personal resilience strengthening. Regrettably, based on compelling evidence from various recent studies that children might asymptomatically transmit the coronavirus, governments decided to slow down school reopening.

For children and young people out of school, the chances of getting a decent job with fair pay and safe working conditions are slim. With this meaningful engagement gap growing, young people progressively gravitate towards alternative structural opportunities that speak to their need to belong (herd identity as an intrinsic attribute in human development), give them a sense hope and appeal to their need for purpose. Too often, they become the focus of sophisticated targeting by armed groups and organized crime machinery, including for sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Research from the Children's National Hospital, Washington DC (The New York Times, 1 September 2020) shows that children of colour make-up an overwhelming majority of child patients who develop the multisystem inflammatory syndrome, a life-threatening complication associated with the coronavirus. According to this new study, Hispanic children were six times more likely to test positive for the coronavirus than white children. As for black children, they fared better but were still twice as likely to test positive as white children. In fact, it is poverty rather than race or ethnicity that matters here, asserted Dr Goyal, the lead researcher. Her conclusions are seconded by Professor Maldonado from the Stanford University School of Medicine who argued that these are children from low-income families whose parents are frontline, blue-collar, or essential workers and cannot afford any loss of income.

Additionally, a study spearheaded by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (The New York Times, 1 September 2020) highlights the heightened risk for children from underprivileged backgrounds. According to the published findings, almost 80 per cent of COVID-19 patients under the age of 18 hospitalized in 14 states were non-white. In this group, 45 per cent of Hispanic and 29 per cent of black children had at least one underlying health condition, such as obesity, chronic lung disease or premature birth, compared to just 15 per cent among white children, which represented only a fraction of those children who were hospitalized and therefore included in the study.

Born to poverty or born with an ethnicity, which one can change? As evidenced in life, the interplay between poverty and race is intricate and as a society we must never become complacent in pursuit of understanding root cause(s) of compounded vulnerabilities. Though, is it not powerful to know already today and with no additional study needed that by lifting children from poverty, we are equaling the life playing field for each and every child, universally and regardless of their origin and background?

" There's nothing to indicate that there's some sort of genetic predisposition to Covid based on race or ethnicity... They live in homes where their parent or caregiver doesn't have the luxury of telecommuting, so they are at increased risk of exposure. They are also more likely to live in multigenerational households. It's all connected."

Dr Monika Goyal, Children's National Hospital in Washington DC (The New York Times, 1 September 2020)

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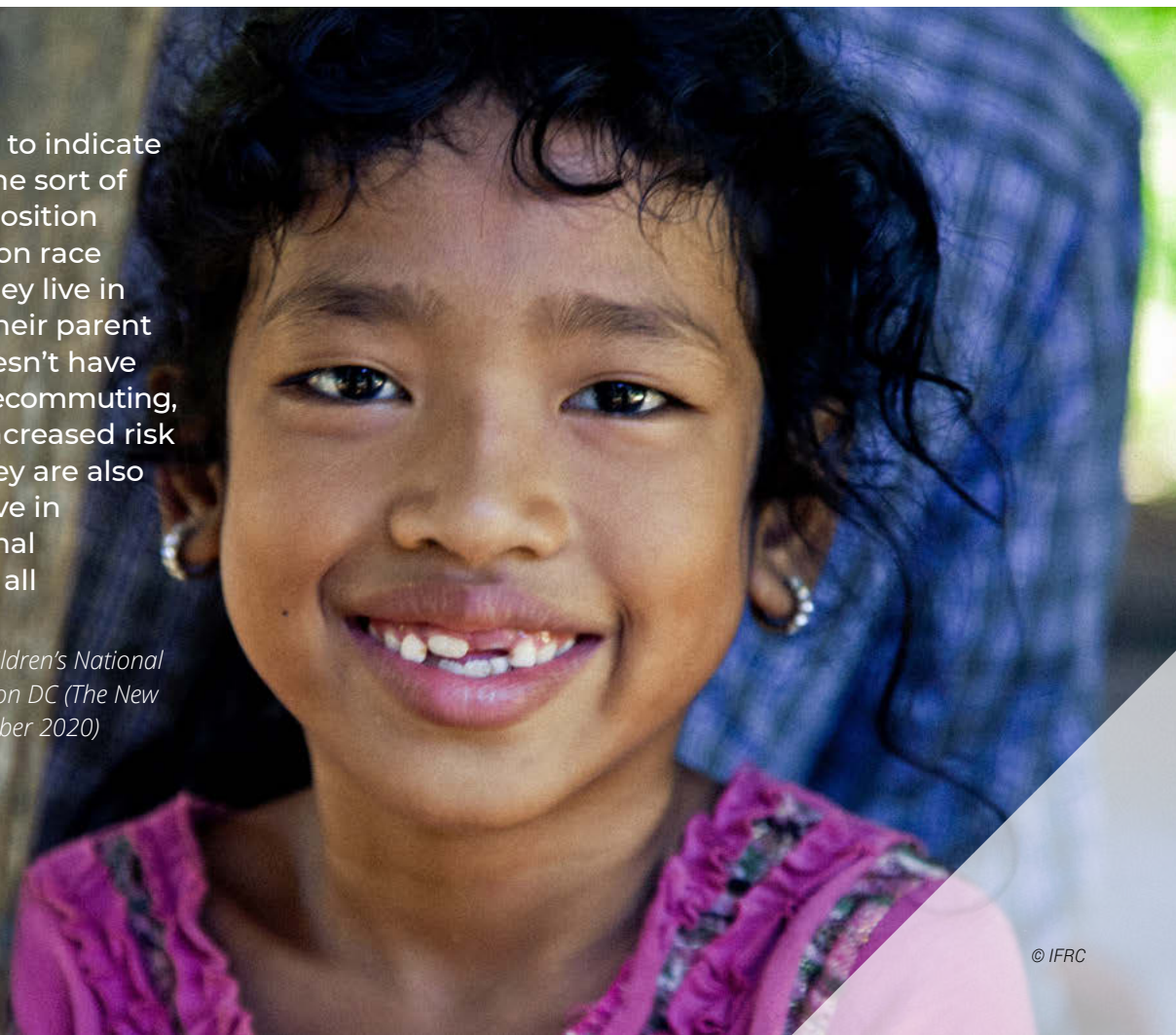
6 MENTAL HEALTH IS NOT SECONDARY HEALTH

With the resolution "Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies" adopted at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2019, significant progress has been made in moving mental health up the agenda of both governments and National Societies. The resolution turned out to be a timely springboard and value-add for National Societies when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

One in six people are aged 10–19 years.

Mental health conditions account for 16 per cent of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10–19 years.

Half of all mental health conditions start by 14 years of age, but most cases are undetected and untreated.

Globally, depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15–19-year-olds (WHO, 28 September 2020).

A 2020 Sapien Labs survey (WEF, 2021), conducted in eight English-speaking countries but capturing responses from people in 130 countries, reveals that the risk of young people suffering from a clinical mental health disorder varies according to geographical location. Interestingly though, it reports that the size of the generational divide in mental well-being is "large everywhere" across the surveyed countries and that it is greatest for respondents living in Singapore, and smallest for those residing in Canada. In addition, the study underscores another common occurrence across all eight countries. Compared to their male peers in the study, young non-binary respondents suffer more from suicidal thoughts, including intentions, and a sense of being detached from reality (average Mental Health Quotient of 22 for non-binary youth compared to 71 for young male participants).

To counter the repercussions on mental health in youth, the Sapien Labs report suggests lifting the measures that have led to the social isolation of young people and makes a case for sleep and exercise which are effective in boosting mental health. Given the long-standing recommendations from medical professionals about sleep and physical exercise, it is pertinent to call on the authorities and policy-makers, especially in the education and health sectors, to ensure that children, adolescents and young adults are taught techniques and approaches to help them sleep better, choose, start, keep up and enjoy a physical activity in the long term and balance socializing with time for themselves as pillars of mental hygiene that are relevant beyond the pandemic.

Leaving the consequences of emergencies aside and focusing on youth as a cohort, even before the pandemic, it was known that depression was one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents globally, and suicide was ranked the third most common cause of death in 15-to-19-year-olds (WHO, 28 September 2020). Several reports published recently reiterate the finding that the consequences of the pandemic are having a disproportionate impact on the mental well-being of young people, even though this group is considered to be at least risk from COVID-19 itself (WEF, 2021). Therefore, approaching mental health solely as a side-effect of crises and disasters, albeit a severe one, as opposed to a well-researched stand-alone vulnerability, is an alarming prospect for all young people and the generations to come.

To better understand what is at the root of the belief that mental health and psychological well-being are a "secondary vulnerability", it is necessary to explore traditional vulnerability frameworks (CharimNET). In recognized disaster response paradigms, vulnerability is measured as a sum of a) risk of exposure to a stressor, b) ability to cope with loss, and c) resilience. Traditionally, in vulnerability and capacity assessments, emphasis is given to vulnerabilities linked to direct loss. The more direct loss assessed, the higher the degree of vulnerability calculated and assigned to an individual or community. It is worth noting that direct losses are defined as fatalities, loss of livelihood or shelter (under human-social vulnerability), damage to buildings and infrastructure (under physical vulnerability), loss of workforce (economic vulnerability) or destruction of cultural heritage (cultural-environmental vulnerability).
Based on an orthodox understanding of the hierarchy of

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needs pyramid, mental health/psychological well-being is classified as a human-social vulnerability with indirect loss ("second category vulnerability"). Mental health vulnerability in the COVID-19 crisis is therefore often downplayed and expected to automatically decrease once a) exposure to COVID-19 ("stressor" or shock) is limited, b) measures are put in place to minimize loss (ability to cope with loss is strengthened), and c) the ability of individuals to recover and bounce back post-crisis increases (resilience).

According to the Lancet study (2021), within just six months of the pandemic starting, mental health was top of the charts in terms of published papers and reprints on the effects of COVID-19. There is therefore no doubt that the global pandemic has effectively increased awareness and reduced stigma about mental health, even in cultures where psychological health issues are taboo and those suffering from them are ostracized, as reported by MENA National Societies, for example. Less encouraging news in the report was that the quality of some of the papers was not up to standard.

Quality control is not just an issue for scholarly papers. The poor quality of papers and the influence of published authors leads to misinformation being spread. For example,

one of the recurring narratives is that people regain their mental health once the temporary social distancing and lockdown measures are lifted. This argument is flawed and not informed by the most recent academic findings and reviews, such as the Lancet 2021 paper on COVID-19 and mental health. Nevertheless, the risk of government agencies making decisions on mental health services during and after the pandemic based on unfounded narratives is extremely high.

Lastly, as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 28 September 2020), the consequences of not addressing adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults and contributing members of society.

In conclusion, combining humanitarian reasoning with socio-economic analysis and insight from vulnerability and capacity assessment theory helps us better understand that the mental health of young people is a whole-of-society issue, rather than just a youth issue, and fuels the impetus to challenge the systemic classification of mental health as human-social vulnerability involving indirect loss.

Space for your reflections and notes

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7 CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AS LABOUR, SOLDIERS, AND COMMODITIES

Given that life was not a level playing field for children, adolescents, and young adults prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it cannot be expected to be so now either.

Before the pandemic, young people were three times more likely to be unemployed. Even those with a job, often in the grey economy, were more often than not in low-pay, unstable and unrecognized jobs that would under no circumstances qualify as decent work. As a result, their vulnerability to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely high (OECD, 2020). Former students are taking illegal and often unsafe jobs in developing countries (The New York Times, 27 September 2020).

> " I fear that even if school reopens, I will have to keep [going to the construction site] because of the family's debt."
>
> *Mumtaz, 12 (The New York Times, 27 September 2020)*

As reported in The New York Times (27 September 2020), emotionally distraught former pupils now find themselves rummaging through garbage dumps in search of recyclable plastic to earn a few cents an hour. Millions have already been sucked into work, mining sand (Kenya), chopping weeds on cocoa plantations (West Africa) or begging for money as silver-painted statues (India). Children working in illegal jobs have no proper protective garments, no masks and often no shoes.

According to Plan International (2021), child labour has a long history in various cultures, and UNICEF observes that child labour has become a "coping mechanism" in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, ILO, 2020). Several studies, including from the World Bank, suggest that for every 1 per cent increase in poverty, there is at least a 0.7 per cent rise in child labour (UNICEF, 9 September 2020).

Sexual and gender-based violence and abuse in childhood and adolescence cause multi-layered acute and/or chronic trauma that affects emotional, physical, and mental health. According to Human Rights Watch and its longitudinal study, the key driver of both child marriage and adolescent pregnancies is the lack of access to education (Reliefweb, 2020). The sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls are at extremely high risk and, according to Save the Children (2020), the pandemic-induced economic fallout will force an additional 90 to 117 million children into poverty, putting girls at a greater risk of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy than at any time in the past 30 years.

When support nets and services were still relatively functional in the Philippines, a drastic increase in online helpline contacts was reported (up from 76,000 cases in 2019 to 280,000 cases in 2020), with a significant number linked to parents selling their children for online sex, an extremely grievous emerging trend, with parents justifying their actions by the fact that the child suffers no physical harm (The Telegraph, 2020).

Taking advantage of the lack of structural engagement for children, adolescents and young adults, their need to belong and have a meaningful life and the overall disruption of communal life, established and well-organized criminal networks for child trafficking are seizing these "emerging business opportunities" driven by the pandemic crisis. For example, data from Colombia, a conflict-ridden country, show that armed groups have already recruited as many children in the first six months of this year as in the whole of 2019 (The New York Times, 27 September 2020).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has for over 60 years worked on establishing evidence-based international standards and finding solutions to a range of social, economic, and environmental challenges. From improving economic performance and creating jobs to fostering strong education and fighting international tax evasion, the OECD influences lives across almost 40 countries in Europe, the Americas and Asia-Pacific (OECD, 2021). According to OECD data for 2019 (OECD, 2020; CompareTheMarket, 2021), not only did young people aged 15 to 29 represent a third of employees in low-paid and insecure jobs across OECD countries, but they also surpassed the number of employees in such jobs from two older age groups combined.

Therefore, even in almost 40 advanced economies,[2] where 80 per cent of world trade and investment happens (OECD, 2021), young people have been dealt a hard economic blow by the COVID-19 pandemic. As young people had, in general, only been on the job market for a couple of years before 2020, they have little if any savings. The financial impact of the pandemic on this age group will therefore have to be carefully monitored, taking into account in-group heterogeneity.

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2   In Europe, the Americas and Asia-Pacific.

8 FACTORING IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

There is a growing recognition across the RCRC network and the humanitarian sector more broadly of how much climate change is affecting people. We are collectively aware that we simply will not be able to cope with rising humanitarian needs unless we act urgently, impactfully and, most importantly, holistically.

In the Youth Voices of Solferino Call for Action (2019), young RCRC volunteers recalled the power of the IFRC, as a humanitarian organization with 192 active members, in changing the discourse during the Ebola crisis. The IFRC network stood up for Ebola-struck communities and insisted on there being "dignified burials" in the belief that even words have an impact on human dignity. Encouraged by this most recently demonstrated position of influence, young people called for the IFRC leadership to change the narrative by championing the use of the term "climate crisis" rather than "climate change", especially when highlighting the multifaceted humanitarian consequences and underscoring the interconnectedness of climate-triggered phenomena, including disasters.

The *World Disasters Report 2020: Come Heat or High Water* (IFRC, 2020) reveals that in 2019 disasters affected 97.6 million people and claimed the lives of 24,396 people. A comparison with data from the 1990s shows an increase of almost 35 per cent in the number of disasters triggered by extreme weather and climate-related events.

In its *Cost of Doing Nothing* report (IFRC, 2019), the IFRC presents comparative projections for the rise in humanitarian needs with and without urgent action. A pessimistic scenario with 200 million people needing international humanitarian aid by 2050, twice as many people as in 2020, is extremely alarming. What proportion do children, adolescents and young adults represent in these statistics?

In 2017, 40 per cent of the world's population was under 24 years of age, and 600 million people aged between 10 and 24 lived in conflict-affected or fragile environments (Open Democracy, 2017). Comparatively, the 2021 Save the Children study estimates that 710 million children living in 45 countries are at the highest risk of suffering the impact of climate change.

> " I tell my story not because it is unique but because it is not."
> *2014 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan, a country with 60 million young people under the age of 18.*

Floods, droughts, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events will therefore have an especially severe impact on vulnerable children, adolescents, and young adults and, by extension, on their families. Specifically, the Save the Children study shows that 70 per cent of countries facing a high risk of climate impact are in Africa.

The climate crisis is recognized as a compounding factor in the already dire situation in Yemen, where the famine affects millions of children. Furthermore, floods, cyclones, rising sea levels, malaria and dengue fever are also identified as existing threats in countries such as Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Echoing the UN Secretary General's 2020 statement on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, the Save the Children report (2021) calls the climate crisis

a child rights crisis. For all of the above, Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies urge all decision-makers and humanitarian actors to: (1) recognize the impact of climate change related disasters on children; (2) invest in child protection and education systems, including localized coordination mechanisms; (3) include children, both boys and girls, in climate disaster related decision-making processes and the development of local solutions; and (4) prioritize anticipatory action to protect children from the impacts of climate disasters (IFRC, 5 July 2021).

As observed in The Global Risks Report (WEF, 2021), responses to the pandemic revealed additional domestic and geopolitical tensions that, in combination with the digital divide and a severely disrupted generation of

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> "Climate change related extreme weather and rising temperatures have increased the frequency of droughts and floods in Africa and around the world, leading to knock-on effects such as economic hardship, child labour, severe malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and WASH facilities, child marriage and lower school attendance. The consequences of these are felt today and will continue to undermine children's protection for years to come. We need to invest more in preventative action including anticipatory action with a specific lens on child protection."

Mohammed Mukhier, IFRC, Regional Director for Africa,
IFRC, 5 July 2021

youth, represent a great risk of further fragmentation between nations and within communities.

Finally, given the analytical views on the climate crisis supported by available data, the importance of climate action becomes paramount. The RCRC has been in the "business" of changing minds and saving lives for over 100 years, and this legacy will drive successful implementation of the RCRC Strategy on Youth-led Climate Action (2021) and efforts to address deteriorating mental health, the worsening climate crisis, increasing disaster hazards, long-lasting violence and eruptions of abuse in communities as compounding vulnerabilities that require a holistic rather than a silo approach and actions that aim to achieve a distributed, multi-layered and lasting impact.

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9 ECOSYSTEM, AGENCY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

With increases in malnutrition in children and adolescents, child and forced marriages, child trafficking, early unwanted pregnancies, sexual exploitation and abuse, there is no doubt that COVID-19 has been causing or has accelerated the fall of ecosystems built for children, adolescents, and young adults. Some even argue that families are commodifying their children (*The Telegraph*, 2020). Living the collective suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a loss of hope, disillusionment, and an alarming feeling of disempowerment among young people.

It is often mistakenly assumed that because young people are virtually and digitally connected, they have no need for social interactions or safety nets. Indeed, the pandemic has revealed that while digital skills can be a value-add for young people, they will never replace social relationships and being able to connect with peers in person. This is especially true for young people in rural areas and where internet penetration is low and access to digital means is limited.

It has perhaps never been so starkly apparent that, in countless communities, children, adolescents and young adults are not seen and treated as individuals with their own agency because of entrenched cultural, social, and societal norms.

Global consultations since 2015 have revealed clear calls for action:

- Empower and invest in young people through meaningful engagement.
- Acknowledge, utilize, and develop their capacities and skills.
- Ensure youth-focused protection.
- Support physical and emotional well-being.
- Facilitate networking and information sharing.
- Promote and support young people as connectors and peace builders.
- Generate data and evidence on young people to promote duty bearers' accountability to young people.
- Apply an age-sensitive, youth-centred approach in all phases of emergency response.
- Systematically consult with young people's organizations on conflict dynamics, causes of violence and priorities for peace.
- Involve young people in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes.
- Harness social media platforms to disseminate information and give young people a voice.

(IASC Guidelines, 2021)

Growing up under COVID-19 (GUC19, Nuffield Foundation, 2020) is an exemplary initiative co-created by youth and with effective support from key stakeholders. It is an umbrella transnational action research project, which aims to provide insights to the impact of the COVID-19 public health crisis on young people's lives and to inform the development of appropriate tools and measures to safeguard children's well-being and rights during and beyond the pandemic. Using participatory action research (PAR), young people document their lives and share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about how the authorities and the public are responding to the pandemic at different scales. Primarily centred around education (centralized school system) and mental health and well-being, the preliminary recommendations of the GUC19 project include strategic and developmental perspectives that are of utmost interest to policymakers. To enhance these, below we provide overarching references from the RCRC principles of meaningful youth engagement (IFRC YES, 2013) and the key developmental enablers of meaningful youth engagement.

Recommendations for governments and public authorities

1. Ensure the representation of young people on central decision-making forums and committees overseeing the management of the pandemic at a government level and engage young people directly in evidence gathering, analysis, dialogue, planning and the formulation of national recovery plans.

RCRC youth engagement references
Seat for youth at the National Societies decision-making tables at all levels.
Youth-led structures aligned with adult decision-making processes (peer and intergenerational collective decision-making).
Peer representation and genuine, equally footed intergenerational collaboration.
Participation of young people in decision-making at all levels is crucial not only for the improvement of RCRC programmes and services, but also for knowledge development and continuity.

2. Review the representation of young people on established national or regional youth democratic participatory structures, with a view to ensuring that they actively reflect the diversity of the populations that they purport to serve and take action to draw membership from grassroots organizations and groups, including those that work with vulnerable or marginalized young people.

RCRC youth engagement references
Youth as a heterogeneous cohort with in-group diversity and dynamics that influence the access of individuals to resources, services, and equal opportunities (identity through intersectionality).

3. Establish national minimum standards, setting out and ensuring effective communication of young people's educational entitlements during the COVID-19 pandemic and minimum requirements for schools, establish monitoring mechanisms and consider instituting new policies or legislative measures, where necessary, to ensure that standards are met.

RCRC youth engagement references
*Emp**owerment (3Es concept) builds on the provision of educational, competency-centred opportunities and complements the creation of enabling environments in RCRC meaningful youth engagement. Empowerment strengthens the ability of youth to act on their knowledge, abilities, values, and rights. Empowered RCRC youth co-create a culture of accountability.*
*Creation of Enabling Environment (3Es concept) builds on Education and Empowerment. It refers to the creation of institutional cultures and safe spaces in which processes, structures, policies, and regulations are evidenced-based, informed by intergenerational dialogue and youth needs and rights and conducive to safety, protection, and yo**uth-led action at all levels.

4. Independently evaluate schools' responses to the COVID-19 crisis, determining the range of measures taken and their effectiveness, appraise the relative effectiveness of educational, welfare and safeguarding measures adopted during the crisis and publish and disseminate the findings. This could include or be supplemented by a nationally representative survey of young people on their learning and well-being.

RCRC youth engagement references
Through the strategic directions and recommended actions in both the youth as volunteers and youth as members of affected community pathways, the evaluation of humanitarian programmes affecting children, adolescents and young adults is requested. Furthermore, the feedback solicited from children, adolescents and young adults is to inform the programme's design cycle to better meet the needs of communities.

5. Review the availability of and access to mental health and well-being services for young people in a post-COVID-19 context, include consideration of the role and capacity of school-based counselling and therapeutic services and support and share good practices regarding online support for mental health and well-being.

6. Review and strengthen forums for engaging young people in school or organizational planning and decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that mechanisms for decision-making are inclusive and that these forums actively reflect the diversity of the populations that they purport to serve.

7. Ensure the full transparency of decisions taken by school or organizational leadership regarding access, quality, and inclusion in school education during the COVID-19 pandemic and set out a service charter, or equivalent, formalizing schools' commitments to ensuring that young people's right to quality education is upheld.

8. Facilitate young people to create and oversee peer support and self-help forums about coping and thriving during lockdown, such as study groups, well-being support and service-user forums.

Recommendations for the media

9. Redress imbalances in the portrayal of young people during the pandemic, feature more young people in journalistic and reporting roles, ensure greater visibility of young people from diverse ages and backgrounds and celebrate young people's civic and social actions during the pandemic through personal stories.

A key and disconcerting take-away from the above analysis and previous references to, for example, the IASC overview of calls for action (2015–2019) and the 32nd International Conference Youth Engagement for a Better World Pledge (2015) is that society does not in fact lack the knowledge of how to better the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults. On the contrary, what is missing is action to improve their lives by scaling up meaningful youth engagement in both crisis and non-crisis situations. To address the bleak reality and build a better future, the in-group heterogeneity of the youth constituency and the theory of intersectionality need to become the cornerstones of a holistic view of the pandemic's impact on children, adolescents, and young adults. Lastly, unless the multi-layered impact on nuclear family units or other intentional social units and communities is examined, humanity will not successfully respond to or recover from the COVID-19 pandemic or rebuild and, most importantly, transform afterwards. Only by adopting this approach will it be possible to properly understand the exposure of children and youth to the shocks caused by the pandemic.

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10 NEGLECT AND STIGMA

While governments implement COVID-19-related policies and programmes to soften the pandemic's repercussions, these are often conceived in haste and therefore tend to overlook already vulnerable and underprivileged groups. More specifically, crisis-induced policy and consequent practice are often short-lived and count on communities to bounce back swiftly while neglecting to reflect the unique social, societal, and developmental position of children, adolescents, and young adults. Furthermore, the relative lack of resilience of children, adolescents and young adults before the crisis has left them at a disadvantage, and the complexities of creating an enabling environment for youth to take back control of their lives are often not appreciated.

The severe repercussions of COVID-19 on children, adolescents and young adults have also been largely ignored in the media, which has rather focused on non-representative in-groups within the largely heterogeneous cohort of young people who disregarded rules imposed by their respective governments. Furthermore, the role of young people as frontliners fighting the COVID-19 pandemic across the world has not made it into the mainstream media and shaped public opinion. It has been alarming to witness the increase in stigmatization and prejudice towards young people and their collective labelling as transgressors and intentional super-spreaders.

In August 2020, WHO stated: *"One of the problems in COVID-19 transmission currently is amongst younger age groups, through gatherings and going to bars, etc., who act as amplification points to older age groups, which then leads to fatalities in the latter group. This is the biggest communications challenge that the UN system faces now of communicating the message of risk to younger people and the risk they pose to those who are vulnerable."*

Against this backdrop, WHO prepared suggested messages to be widely disseminated in youth groups and networks. Later and amid the commotion of Eli Lilly pausing their antibody treatment trials and Johnson & Johnson halting their vaccine trial too, WHO stated in its Global Covid report (*The Guardian*, 2020) that: "Healthy young people may have to wait until 2022 to be vaccinated against coronavirus." The WHO chief scientist should have instead referred to "low-risk groups".

In December 2020, Maria Van Kerkhove (43), technical lead of the COVID-19 team at WHO, highlighted the importance of vaccinating young people. In her interview with *Der Spiegel* (2020), she estimated that the decrease in COVID-19 cases could not be expected until the second half of 2021 and underscored that vaccination was an effective weapon against the pandemic but not a panacea. On the subject of prioritized groups for vaccination, Dr Kerkhove explained that, while the elderly and high-risk groups must be targeted to reduce the overall number of deaths, only the vaccination of young people would cause the number of COVID-19 cases to drop. From Kerkhove's interview, we may infer that, in the effort to halt the pandemic, it is not the number of vaccinated elderly people and at-risk people that should concern governments, but the number of unvaccinated young people, a fact that is unfortunately not made clear. Once again, the article gives readers the impression that young people are super-spreaders.

The root cause of young people being ostracized for their "role" in the pandemic is the failure to appreciate overall trends in behaviour, including mobility between different groups, such as elderly and young people. Young people as a cohort are not super-spreaders because they are careless or are spreading the virus intentionally but because, for example, they are more mobile, they are more active in socially connected environments, they are naturally more exposed, etc.

These are concrete examples of a global lead agency dismally failing to appreciate the damage that such narratives can do. In fact, a negative narrative generalizing the role of young people as a whole often causes a backlash because it undermines the morale of young people who are meaningfully engaged. Social self-isolation is also among the reactions to this toxic narrative observed in young people.

In conclusion, competencies in youth engagement, inclusiveness, holistic community resilience strengthening, and social capital generation are called for. Key players and decision-making agencies should look to partner agencies/stakeholders with these in-demand competencies – this is an effective starting point in building specific internal institutional expertise that is currently lacking. And again, appreciation and recognition of the difference in behaviour and overall societal trends across groups must inform public health policies, starting with WHO as the lead agency in global health.

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11 YOUTH TRUST IN SCIENCE AND VACCINATION

To reach specific groups appropriately and affectively, tailored approaches must be applied and expertise in community engagement and accountability is pivotal. However, evidence-based information that would provide an insight into the reality of the situation tends to be scarce, especially in the first phases of any humanitarian response.

Moreover, the failure to appreciate the importance of young people in community resilience strengthening means that few studies prioritize the objective of gaining a better understanding of youth-specific needs, attitudes, and behaviour.

The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception and, in the absence of robust and current data on the youth voice about the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings discussed below are of enormous value. Even though they come from external sources, they speak to the IFRC's fierce advocacy for equitable access to safe vaccines for across the world and within communities, regardless of an individual's social or societal status.

According to the IFMSA, UNESCO MIL Alliance, MVTTV, Global Shapers Community survey (July 2020), with over 2,600 respondents under the age of 30 from across 130 countries, most young people double check information about COVID-19 before sharing it further online. The most reliable sources for the respondents included WHO, newspapers and TV news.

On the subject of the effect of COVID-19 information on young people, two common experiences described by respondents were information fatigue and anxiety. Given the existing coverage, only 15 per cent felt interested in receiving additional information. Lastly, education opportunities, mental well-being and health, and financial stability were identified by young people as the top three "haves" that they most fear losing during or because of the pandemic.

In the Youth Vaccine Trust Survey (2020, 2021) on youth attitudes towards vaccination, almost 12,000 responses from almost 100 countries were collected.[3] Young people aged 18 to 30 were considered in the analysis, and the results show that most respondents worldwide are willing to be vaccinated. Vaccination as a strategy is viewed with most confidence by respondents residing in Brazil, Western Pacific, and Europe. The least confident respondents live in Africa, the Americas and India.

Protection (of self and others) was the top reason motivating respondents to have the vaccination against COVID-19. Other reasons included being a frontliner and/or health-care student or worker and trust in national government, health authorities or institutions running vaccine trials.

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3 Filtering out countries with less than 5 responses brings the number of countries to 83 across WHO regions. Due to the high number of responses, countries such as Brazil, India and the United Kingdom were also looked at separately, in addition to the regional and global analyses.

Overall, the transparency of data on the vaccine as well as information on risks, side effects and efficacy across different age groups were key decision-making factors for those respondents who expressed a desire to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Notably, the vaccination mechanism and the length of clinical trials were the key factors influencing decisions among those who are currently hesitant to get vaccinated.

Based on the above findings, it is safe to say that improving accessibility to credible, transparent, and comprehensive information on vaccines plays a critical role in encouraging young people to get vaccinated. Interestingly, the cost of the vaccine as well as access to it were only brought up by the group of respondents who were unsure about getting vaccinated.

It is also noteworthy that celebrities and influencers are the least trusted sources of information by a wide margin, and the most trusted sources include WHO, UNICEF and international health authorities. Finally, most respondents (over 75 per cent), regardless of their inclination to be vaccinated, felt confident that ongoing vaccine developments would help combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another new global study on digital crisis interaction among Gen Z and Millennials (WHO, 2021) was conducted with 23,500 respondents aged 18 to 40 across 24 countries. It confirms the findings of many developmental studies focused on youth (in principle, up to 30–35 years of age) from before the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the digital literacy of Gen Z and Millennials in the pandemic has been confirmed as they tend to consider science-based information shareworthy and reject myths and fake news. Many Gen Z and Millennials are aware of and can spot fake news. However, the challenge is in recruiting them to actively counter fake news and misinformation campaigns as they are inclined to just "let it slide".

While national mainstream media as well as their social media platforms continue to be trusted channels for Gen Z and Millennials, in a handful of countries respondents said they relied more on WHO and other alternative sources than on national media.

The authors of the study also point out that people between the ages of 18 and 40 are faced with multiple concerns, such as fear of family members contracting the virus, losing their job and the economy crashing. Health communicators need to be aware that these concerns can be interlinked and/or competing, and to acknowledge perceived trade-offs, for example, between lives and livelihoods.

As governments roll out their immunization programmes, interest in vaccines is likely to continue high but, according to data from the study, celebrities and influencers should not be actively involved in the roll-out. Reinforcing the findings of the IFMSA, UNESCO MIL Alliance, MVTTV, Global Shapers Community survey (July 2020), the Gen Z and Millennials study confirms that every other person aged 18 to 40 is overwhelmed by the amount of COVID-19 information, confessing that they have stopped paying attention. At the same time, the majority of respondents complained that media and governments, while bombarding them with information, do not provide the full picture on the pandemic.

In these crucial times when society can bring about a significant shift and halt the pandemic, information fatigue must be considered in government communication strategies about vaccination. It is also important to emphasize that people must stay vigilant and comply with health guidelines, which includes wearing masks, social distancing, and handwashing, if the vaccination rollouts are to be successful.

Finally, public health officials must endeavour to disseminate positive narratives about how crucial the vaccination of young people is for the whole community. Partnerships need to be urgently established to give children, adolescents and young adults easy access to youth-friendly information and services. Similarly, evidence-based, and local needs-driven initiatives co-created with youth must be promoted locally and globally (Youth Engagement Pledge, IFRC, 2015).

12 EMPOWERED, ENABLED, AND PROTECTED

Research carried out by World Vision International (2020) explored the reflections and perceptions of children and young people on the COVID-19 pandemic and found that they felt a great sense of social justice and a desire to serve others and support vulnerable and marginalized groups.

This resonates with the IFRC member National Societies. Accounting for more than a half of the active volunteer base globally, young people in our National Societies have been stellar examples of incredible solidarity across generations and social layers within communities. Faced with insecurities about the future, their livelihood and education and in anticipation of an unfavourable shift in power dynamics and an adverse disruption of the known order of the world, young RCRC volunteers and leaders did not procrastinate and swiftly acted on their innate drive to co-create a better world even if this meant risking their own health.

Early on, due to the nature of the COVID-19 crisis, young people were not able to plan activities in person. Planned awareness-raising activities have shifted online and to other remote collaboration systems instead. In the RCRC, the shift to virtual spaces also extended to practices such as volunteer recruitment and training. Ensuring safe virtual spaces has therefore emerged as a critical project component to be strengthened as part of child protection work.

 The National Societies have a wealth of examples of the selfless and continuous efforts of young people engaged with the RCRC to cultivate humanity and kindness, address discrimination and stigma and take on sensitive issues such as domestic violence. By promoting examples of RCRC youth-led action and calling out unfounded attacks targeting youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFRC played a key role in combating toxic narratives about youth and their stereotyping as careless and spiteful people. As a global influential network, we helped pivot the position of young people, making them contributors to community resilience strengthening and social capital generation. Ultimately, the RCRC played the role of a global leading advocate and champion of intergenerational collaboration and shared accountability.

The work of National Societies in meaningful youth engagement, education, child protection, and mental health and psychosocial support prior to the COVID-19 pandemic quickly became the cornerstone of our comparative advantage which naturally strengthened the position of National Societies as the "partner of choice" and enabled prompt mobilization of young frontliners.

Interestingly, during the COVID-19 humanitarian crisis, demand for information and resources on the RCRC principles of meaningful youth engagement increased (IFRC consultations with youth, 2020). In other words, an emergency in the field caused a rise in demand for practical development resources. This experience highlights the dynamic complementarity between humanitarian aid and development and supports the case for continued RCRC investment in community resilience strengthening, bridging the gap between aid and development.

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13 HUMANITARIAN EXCELLENCE 2030: WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are a resource with scope and scale, and their meaningful engagement is key to building not only more resilient, adaptive, and non-violent communities, but resilient institutions too. For the RCRC specifically, young people sustain the global RCRC reservoir of humanitarian competencies locally. If we effectively apply our transferable competencies in today's fragmented and divided world where fear and xenophobia can flare up, young people will help us bring humanity together, build bridges over the deep valleys of division and start living in a world, where saving just one life matters.

Recognition of their unique role, trust and power-sharing, commitment and accountability, and action with impact are the critical ingredients of collective success and continuity that young RCRC leaders demanded from senior leaders (Voices of Solferino, 2019).

While National Societies have been relatively swift to adapt and respond to the global COVID-19 pandemic, we have yet to surge our organizational capacity to address the more gradual and long-term socio-economic repercussions of the crisis. Notably, young people view "humanitarian aid fatigue" as a concern. More specifically, given the emergencies, crises, and disruptions of the last decade, including the protracted crises in Syria, Yemen, etc., young people expressed deep concern that humanity might have become rather inured to both human suffering and depriving individuals of dignity (Voices of Solferino, 2019).

Beyond lifesaving activities and alleviating human suffering and protecting human dignity, young people provide unique foresight into the "new normal" and insight about the future. Looking to 2030, it is necessary to closely examine the interplay between thematically driven humanitarian solutions across the domains of education, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, child rights and/or climate action. Furthermore, steps must be urgently and wisely taken to break the silos between the origins of all these solutions, taking into account that the target population is the same. This approach will be in keeping with the principles of "people-centred" aid, human aid.

Policy recommendations

Building on lessons learnt from previous global crises and the status quo in relation to meaningful youth engagement, the COVID-19 pandemic experience has provided the following key take-aways for the RCRC humanitarian excellence 2030: with and for youth.

Changing our ways

1   **Existing funding mechanisms, structural support systems,** and **engagement mechanisms** employed by various humanitarian aid organizations to engage youth are still extremely traditional at their core- too often they are top-down, exclusive, adult-led, and benefiting individual young people as opposed to the whole cohort and/or community. We must continue to advocate for **key RCRC principles of meaningful youth engagement** across our membership and towards our external partners and donors as these contributes to **offset the detrimental implications of obsolete approaches** and nurture equal opportunities, genuine representation, and the notion of shared success, thereby supporting the **"WE" mentality**.

2   The **business model of competition** in humanitarian aid does not provide the momentum for reshaping humanitarian infrastructure or for strengthening community resilience through meaningful youth engagement. As an alternative, we must immediately call for funnelling investments into **enabling and nurturing competitions of ideas** rather than competitions of young people.

3   Evidence of the irreplaceable role played by young people over decades for RCRC services and **leadership renewal**, together with the emerging lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, must feed into **today's decision-making**. Therefore, we must consider and apply the COVID-19 pandemic lessons learnt not only to better prepare the world for the next pandemic response, but to induce a holistic **transformation of society and a developmental "leap".**

4   The **disillusionment of youth**, stemming from various sources beyond the control of young people, or any individual for that matter, presents a risk for societal development and resilience as of 2021. Informed by the heterogeneity of the youth cohort, we therefore call policy makers to introduce a richness of **opportunities for young people to vision and co-create adequate and decent pathways to their future**. In the absence of such initiatives, we are going to be facing serious threats to the **social fabric and social contracts** at all levels.

5   Competencies in **youth engagement, inclusiveness, holistic community resilience strengthening, and social capital generation** are going to be increasingly **in high demand**. To bridge the expertise gap in time, we call the key players and decision-making agencies influencing the lives of young people to **tap into the expert pools of civil society partners** that have in-demand competencies inherently available. In addition, we call global stakeholders for increase of the number of their **young professional employees** with experience in community engagement and diversity programming. By giving these experts responsibility in influencing institutional narratives, divisive or judgmental messaging will turn into messaging that is empowering and sensibly tailored to the target audience(s) and informed by both grassroots engagement practitioners and behaviour change theories.

6   Lastly, we call on the **youth engagement practitioners to advocate for youth as a strategic resource pillar in the arcade of humanitarian programmes** and services and position youth engagement guidance, policy, or strategy as a lifesaving tool whenever possible and at all levels.

Tailoring and localizing for future

7 To address the bleak post-COVID-19 pandemic reality and rebuild and transform, the **in-group heterogeneity** of the youth constituency and the theory of **intersectionality** must become the cornerstones of a holistic view of the pandemic and its impact on children, adolescents, and young adults.

8 The **interplay between thematically driven humanitarian solutions** across the domains of education, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, child rights and/or climate action must be closely examined. Furthermore, steps must be urgently and wisely taken to break the silos between the origins of all these solutions, taking into account that the target population-youth - is the same. This approach will be in keeping with the **principles of "people-centred" aid, human aid.**

9 We urge senior public health officials and respected positional and non-positional leaders to endeavour to disseminate positive narratives about how crucial the vaccination of young people is for the whole community. Partnerships need to be urgently forged to ensure that children, adolescents, and young adults have easy **access to youth-friendly information and services**. Similarly, evidence-based and local needs-driven **advocacy and awareness raising initiatives co-created with youth** must be promoted locally and globally.

10 Deteriorating mental health, the worsening climate crisis, increasing disaster hazards, lasting violence, and eruptions of abuse in communities must be approached as **compounding vulnerabilities** that demand a holistic rather than a silo approach and initiatives that aim to achieve a **distributed, multi-layered, and lasting impact**.

Safety youth-friendly, protection, and well-being

11 **Safe communal spaces** with trusted chaperones and organized **protection-enriched activities** are key. Children and adolescents must be treated as **individuals rather than "objects"** and be protected and meaningfully accompanied rather than reared, especially in low- to middle-income communities.

12 In the RCRC, the shift from physical to virtual spaces has also applied to volunteer recruitment and training, etc. **Safety in virtual spaces** must therefore be effectively strengthened, as part of protection and safeguarding work streams across all humanitarian agencies.

13 As evidenced in the RCRC work in the MENA region, culturally entrenched taboos, such as mental health and well-being, can be broken in times of crisis. Therefore, child rights, child protection, and mental health and well-being must start to feature prominently in RCRC programmes engaging children, adolescents, and young adults and in our advocacy efforts. Benefiting from the **comprehensive understanding of local situation** by RCRC National Societies, this approach to **taking sensitive humanitarian topics "on" must be our operational imperative** irrespective of the "onrush on the battle- field".

14 With the increase in mental health issues (including increased youth suicide rates), the **threshold for becoming "eligible" for RCRC psychosocial support** must be lowered and services must be available before, during and after a crisis. We call for the RCRC mental health programmes and services targeting young people to be designed as **non-clinical** and factoring in approaches to **offset the amount of time spent in virtual spaces**. More specifically, we call on the authorities, policymakers, and service providers, especially in the education and health sectors, to ensure that children, adolescents, and young adults are appropriately taught a variety of mental hygiene techniques and approaches to help them sleep better, choose, start, sustain, and enjoy a physical activity in the long term as well as balance socializing with time for themselves. Young people need to be **equipped and empowered** to make **own and healthy decisions to foster their mental, physical, and emotional well-being**.

15 Combining humanitarian reasoning with socio-economic analysis and insight from vulnerability and capacity assessment theory helps us better understand that the mental health of young people is a whole-of-society issue rather than just a youth issue. To change perspectives and practice across the humanitarian landscape, we call for a reclassification of mental health in the existing humanitarian aid frameworks into a **human-social vulnerability with direct loss.**

Nurturing youth-led influence and impact

16 It is not in the self-interest of those in power to nurture influential networks of and for young people. In order to continuously reignite the hope of a better future in young people, we call decision makers for celebration of individual and collective success of young people to be complemented by the "extra mile", for example, **establishing opportunities for young champions and youth pioneering teams to connect and network** with their "non-champion" peers.

17 The complexity of meaningful youth engagement and getting it right can be daunting for decision-makers and thematic experts. We therefore urge youth engagement experts to **promote youth engagement resources and technical guidance as knowledge-rich tools** to be used by professionals in charge of thematic humanitarian projects.

14 COMPENDIUM OF RESOURCES FOR NATIONAL SOCIETIES

This is a collection of reviewed tools, tutorials, campaigns, webinars, blogs, and resource hubs to be considered by National Societies when planning youth-led action during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Young people as frontliners

- **COVID-19: Working with and for young people** – Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action
  This guidance note is intended to assist humanitarian organizations, youth-led organizations, and young people themselves across sectors working at local, country, regional and global levels in their response to the novel coronavirus pandemic. It begins diagnostically, exploring the impacts of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on young people. It then proposes a series of actions that practitioners and young people can take to ensure that COVID-19 preparedness, response plans and actions are youth-inclusive and youth-focused – with and for young people. Recommendations are structured around the five key actions of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action: services, participation, capacity, resources, and data. Where available, the recommended actions are accompanied by resources and concrete examples, which can inform approaches and support implementation.

- **Tip Sheet in Engaging Adolescent and Youth in COVID-19 Response** UNICEF
  This practical tool lists tips on engaging adolescents and youth as part of COVID-19 preparedness and response. The material belongs to the Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation: Adapted Resource Package for COVID-19, a resource package of activities that can be self-administered to promote psychosocial well-being and learn new skills in times of stress and while staying at home. Besides being adapted for the COVID-19 crisis, these activities can be promoted and used in any context where restrictions are in place, where adolescents are unable to gather due to safety concerns, social norms, disease outbreaks requiring social distancing, etc.

- **4 ways to be a real youth activist** WEF

- **Basic Psychosocial Skills for COVID-19 Responders** IASC
  This illustrated guide aims at building basic psychosocial skills among all personnel responding to COVID-19. Around 200 COVID-19 survivors as well as COVID-19 emergency responders in 24 countries participated in a consultation and the pilot of the document. For a preview, check out this short animation.

- **Young people's participation and civic engagement** UNICEF
  This is a guide to action by Generation Unlimited and the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, two multi-stakeholder alliances working together to mobilize action and foster skills, employment, and the meaningful participation of young people across the globe. Connecting secondary-age education and training to a complex and fast-changing world of work and easing the entry of youth to decent jobs are at the heart of this publication.

- **Digital civic youth engagement** UNICEF
  This paper compiles evidence and explains available analytical frameworks to provide a better understanding of digital civic engagement by young people as a rapidly emerging area of adolescent engagement. It presents an overview of relevant research across this topic by asking about the nature and dimensions of engagement and enablers and constraints of digital civic engagement as well examining some key considerations for supporting young people's engagement.

⊙ Brief on how to care for volunteers in the COVID-19 pandemic IFRC
To effectively care for and support volunteers involved in a COVID-19 response, National Societies must establish a robust volunteer care system to enhance their safety and psychosocial well-being.

⊙ Weathering the Storm Global Resilience Fund
Report about girls, trans and young women's brave and transformative strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Supported through the Global Resilience Fund, 25 donors and foundations provided USD 1,000,000 in grants. *Weathering the Storm* lifts the hopes, dreams and realities of young activists organizing against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. It maps the journey of how hundreds of young activist groups from over 90 countries were funded, how they organized, what we learnt and how different stakeholders can collaborate to support girl- and youth-led collective action.

⊙ Young People Championing Post-Pandemic Futures Big 6, 2021
This paper offers 6 high-level policy recommendations to support youth development and alleviate the long-term societal consequences of the pandemic. It is a joint call of the 6 biggest youth organisations, including the IFRC, rooted in key challenges facing youth living under the pandemic. Thematic recommendations for decision-makers across following areas are provided: employment, mental health and safety, inclusion and equity, education, leadership and volunteering, and resourcing.

Youth-friendly mental health and psychosocial support resources

⊙ 14-day well-being toolkit Hong Kong Branch, Red Cross Society of China

⊙ Three faces of the negative spiral caused by COVID-19 Japanese Red Cross Society

⊙ Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide WHO
This illustrated stress management guide for coping with adversity aims to equip people with practical skills to help cope with stress. A few minutes each day are enough to practise the self-help techniques. The guide can be used alone or with the accompanying audio exercises. Available in many languages and in audio format too.

⊙ My Hero is You – Storybook for Kids IASC with the IFRC as a contributor

⊙ Studying at home due to COVID-19: How young people are coping UNICEF
Youth-friendly tool about studying at home due to the coronavirus and how young people around the world are keeping their mood up.

⊙ Studying at home due to coronavirus? This is how young people around the world are keeping their mood up Voices of Youth, UNICEF

⊙ Youth power from your living room Restless Development
Youth-friendly blog about how to face restlessness and how young people can fight the pandemic from their living rooms.

⊙ Young and anxious about COVID-19? Young Minds
A youth-friendly blog on what to do if young people are anxious about the coronavirus.

- Step up Leadership Activity Book United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
  It sets out COVID-19 adapted activities built on the biopsychosocial model that sheds light on self-care and mindsets and allows youth to deepen their understanding of how external influences and internal factors shape their day-to-day self.
- #Coping with COVID-19 webinars UNICEF, WHO, UN Youth Envoy's Office
  This webinar series on young people and mental health is available in many languages and covers themes such as: what young people are feeling inside, self-care, mindfulness, young people as caregivers, young LGBTQI+, mental health in emergencies and living with a disability in COVID-19 times. Each webinar features useful and evidence-based resources such as:
  - Teenagers and their mental health UNICEF
  - Coping with stress WHO
  - Mental Health Innovators on COVID-19 MHIN
  - Global Mental Health@Harvard Harvard University
  - This is an interdisciplinary initiative that aspires to elevate the profile of mental health as a fundamental public good and universal human right.
  - Coping with stress in COVID-19 flyer WHO

Domestic and gender-based violence

- Tips from survivors for survivors Sanctuary for families

- Gender-based Violence Risks within the COVID-19 Response

Child safeguarding and protection

- IFRC Child Safeguarding Policy (2021) and support tools
  The IFRC revised Child Safeguarding Policy will allow National Societies to ensure that the IFRC continues to be a safe organization. It brings greater clarity on our roles and responsibilities, has updated content, and comes with a series of practical guidance tools to implement the policy.

- Children as partners in protection in COVID-19 Columbia University, IFRC, IICRD, UNICEF
  The leadership demonstrated through these child-adult partnerships is the underlying inspiration for this guide. It is composed of five separate modules, which can be accessed individually or as part of the complete document. Module 1: Adapting Participatory Tools during COVID-19; Module 2: Rapid Engagement of Children during COVID-19; Module 3: Ethics and Safeguarding during COVID-19; Module 4: Meaningful Child Participation in COVID-19; Module 5: Moving from Children as Participants to Children as Partners.

- We Need To Do Better: Policy Brief on Enhancing Laws and Regulations to Protect Children in Disasters IFRC, 30 June 2020
  This study found that children are at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation in disasters. Yet, many governments are missing or lack adequate laws, polices or regulations to protect children in disasters. As climate change is leading to more frequent disasters, children face many risks. These include separation from their families, psychosocial distress, SGBV, trafficking, missing school, premature adoption, losing essential documents, and not participating in decisions. The study puts forward specific recommendations for Governments to pursue.

- ⊙ MOOC on Adapting Child Protection Case Management during the COVID-19 Pandemic
  This is a four-hour long, massive open online course (MOOC) starting on 29 June 2021. The course and materials will be available in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish. It is an interagency project that the IFRC co-led. It draws on some elements from the existing six-week

- ⊙ MOOC on Caring for Children Moving Alone (Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children) that was launched last year and has had 25,000+ participants. The course profiles interesting practices from the Icelandic Red Cross, the Italian Red Cross, and the Philippine Red Cross on their use of the Virtual Volunteer platform to reach migrants during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The course can be accessed from the IFRC Learning platform via this link.

Education

- ⊙ Guidance for RCRC education response to COVID-19 IFRC

- ⊙ Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools IASC, IFRC, UNICEF, WHO
  This is actionable guidance for safe operations through the prevention, early detection, and control of COVID-19 in schools and other educational facilities. Education can encourage students to become advocates for disease prevention and control at home, in school and in their community by talking to others about how to prevent the spread of viruses. Maintaining safe school operations or reopening schools after a closure requires many considerations but, if done well, can promote public health.

  - Annex A: Supply and Cleaning Recommendations
  - Annex B: Contextualization, Dissemination & Implementation
  - Annex C: Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS)
  - Supplemental Content D: Child Friendly Materials
  - Supplemental Content E: Protection of Children in and out of school in the context of COVID-19 pandemic
  - Supplemental Content F: Accelerated Education as COVID-19 Response

- ⊙ Distance learning solutions to mitigate COVID-19 school closure UNESCO
  Extensive list of multi-thematic educational applications, platforms, and resources to help parents, teachers, schools, and school administrators facilitate student learning and provide social care and interaction during periods of school closure. Most of the solutions curated are free and many cater to multiple languages.

Climate crisis

- ⊙ RCRC Strategy on Youth-led Climate Action
  The IFRC recognizes the key role that youth play in ensuring that people now and future generations do not suffer the consequences of a worsening climate. Filled with energy, young people across the world are ready to act and are doing so on an unprecedented scale. This strategy aims to continue that momentum by providing inspiration and direction for RCRC youth to take meaningful climate action.

- ⊙ World Disasters Report 2020 IFRC

- ⊙ The Cost of Doing Nothing IFRC

- ⊙ Online Course on Climate Change and Mitigation Actions Centre for Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CCM)
  This pilot course delivered in 2021 on the learning platform of the Spanish Red Cross gave participants the opportunity to join an international community, attend webinars and interactive workshops and participate in a dynamic space built to foster dialogue. Various mitigation best practices were shared to inspire participants. Based on scientific evidence on climate change,

the e-course enabled participants to explore the complexity of the climate crisis and provided an overview of mitigation responses, with a specific focus on the strategies of the Mediterranean National Societies. The course – taught in English, with a self-learning methodology – had a duration of 12 to 15 hours and targets volunteers and staff of the Mediterranean National Societies, in particular youth.

Fighting misinformation

- COVID-19 mythbusters, WHO

- Youth-led advocacy tool included on the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) page under the Prioritize, Protect, and Plan for Education resource section

- 10 tips to minimize the sharing of misinformation on social media UNHCR

Principal platforms and hubs

- IFRC Sokoni platform
  With a focus on COVID-19 matters, Sokoni is a global platform that allows RCRC volunteers and staff to discuss issues in forums, share experiences and approaches developed by National Societies, reflect on lessons learnt, post questions and access official guidelines and tools and a list of planned training and other events.

- IFRC Community engagement hub
  COVID-19 has been declared a global health emergency. Trusted, clear and effective communication and engagement approaches are critical to ensure that fear, panic, and rumours do not undermine COVID-19 responses. You can use the tools and resources available to incorporate community engagement and accountability into your COVID-19 operations. Updated regularly, all available resources can be viewed in a list format here. Should you require additional material, please explore these resource libraries Global Repository of COVID-19 IEC Materials and Risk Communication and Community Engagement Training Packages and Webinars

- COVID-19 hub for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action
  It provides various quality youth-friendly resources reviewed and shared by the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, including RCRC National Society tools, such as:
  - 14-day well-being toolkit, Hong Kong branch, Red Cross Society of China
  - Three faces of the negative spiral caused by COVID-19, Japanese Red Cross Society
  - My Hero is You – Storybook for Kids on how to fight COVID-19, IASC with the IFRC as a contributor

- UN hub for youth and COVID-19 initiatives
  Webinars and blogs featuring youth-led action against COVID-19 on various themes, with a focus on mental health, innovation and the sexual health and rights of youth, including projects spearheaded by young RCRC volunteers.

- Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Hub
  Hosted by the Collective Service Hub set up by the IFRC, UNICEF and WHO, the Behavioural indicators portal maps social-behavioural data and summarizes existing evidence against the core indicators defined in the first ever RCCE COVID-19 behaviour change framework. The portal draws on more than 126 datasets from 196 countries and aims to improve the availability of data to ensure community capacities, knowledge, feedback, and insights to inform decision-making at every step of the response.

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THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with **192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and around **14 million volunteers.** Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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