



# Adolescent Girls in Disaster & Conflict:

Interventions for Improving Access to Sexual and Reproductive  
Health Services



**PUBLICATION CREDITS**

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Cover photo:  
Adolescent girls in Dalori IDP camp, Borno State, Nigeria, displaying their hand woven caps. These hats are made in the IDP camp and sold to the neighbouring communities or visitors. UNFPA has established safe spaces in Borno and Adamawa States, to provide a platform for women and girls such as these to learn vocational skills and as an entry point to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and psychosocial counselling for survivors. © UNFPA/Simi Vijay

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**DESIGNATIONS**

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# Adolescent Girls in Disaster & Conflict



Interventions for Improving  
Access to Sexual and  
Reproductive Health Services



United Nations Population Fund





*Srijana, 16, gave birth to her daughter in a camp that was established in 2015 for earthquake survivors in remote Goljung, Nepal. A UNFPA-supported mobile team was providing services for safe delivery in the camp.*

## Adolescent Girls in Disaster & Conflict

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# Introduction

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Safe spaces, mobile medical teams and youth engagement are effective ways to reach displaced, uprooted, crisis-affected girls at a critical time in their young lives. Adolescent Girls in Disaster & Conflict: Interventions for Improving Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services is a collection of UNFPA-supported humanitarian interventions for reaching adolescents when crisis heightens vulnerability to gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection, early and forced marriage and other risks.

Adolescent girls are overlooked in turbulent times of disaster and conflict. Traumatized, constrained by tradition, torn from school and family structures and familiar social networks they can be lost in the crowd in a refugee camp or disrupted community. We must look harder to see the realities of girls aged 10 to 19, include them in humanitarian programming, and plan interventions that restore health and hope at a critical time between childhood and adulthood.

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Adolescent girls are overlooked in turbulent times of disaster and conflict.

Millions of adolescent girls are in need of humanitarian assistance – displaced by conflict or uprooted by disaster. A crisis heightens their vulnerability to gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection, maternal death and disability, early and forced marriage, rape, trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse. To meet their needs and respect their rights, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, provides operational, programmatic and technical support for adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) as part of its humanitarian programming.

Three areas of intervention in particular are making an impact on adolescent girls in crisis-affected settings:

- **Safe spaces** provide adolescent girls with livelihood skills, psychosocial counselling for gender-based violence, access to sexual and reproductive health information and referral to services;
- **Mobile clinics and mobile outreach teams** bring life-saving services and supplies, including contraceptives, to adolescent girls in hard-to-reach locations when health systems are damaged or destroyed and not functional;
- **Engagement and participation of adolescents and youth**, especially female, is a strategy that empowers and respects girls as part of humanitarian response – as first responders, agents of change and volunteers – consulted and engaged in planning, distributing dignity kits, collecting data and communicating with peers within their communities.

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Millions of adolescent girls are in need of humanitarian assistance –displaced by conflict or uprooted by disaster.

Effective interventions for adolescent girls tend to share certain characteristics, starting with planning and programming before or early in a crisis. Such interventions are flexible, culturally sensitive, innovative, multisectoral and integrated. An integrated approach addresses not only HIV, for example, but also maternal health, family planning and gender-based violence as well as certain sexuality issues, and these comprehensive services should ideally be provided in an adolescent-friendly manner by qualified health professionals at a single site. They offer protection, life skills, literacy, numeracy, vocational training and livelihood skills – elements valued by girls and that serve as entry points for adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH).<sup>1</sup> They also provide the essential supplies to support ASRH services.

In this initial collection of effective interventions, we feature seven countries, with more examples in development.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Refugee Commission, Save the Children, UNHCR, UNFPA (2012). Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs in Humanitarian Settings: An In-depth Look at Family Planning Services.

## About Humanitarian Emergencies

UNFPA supports initiatives taking a variety of approaches in response to disaster and conflict, whether natural or caused by humans, acute or protracted. UNFPA works closely with governments, United Nations agencies, community-based organizations and other partners to ensure that sexual and reproductive health is integrated into emergency programming. Local NGOs that know and work with the crisis-affected populations are often involved as implementing partners. Organized youth groups are sought out for partnership to reach adolescents and youth in their own communities.

UNFPA provides hygiene supplies, obstetric and family planning supplies, trained personnel, and other support to vulnerable populations, and works to ensure the needs of women and adolescents and young people are served through both the emergency and the reconstruction phase. Ensuring that adolescent girls, who eventually engage in sexual activity, have the information and means to decide the number, timing and spacing of their children is essential to protecting their basic human rights to health, life, dignity and equal opportunity.

## Adolescents and youth

UNFPA commits to working with adolescents and young people towards a future in which they can enter freely into a productive adulthood because they are educated, healthy, free from STIs and HIV, and are not exposed to violence, unintended pregnancy or unsafe abortion; a future where girls are treated with dignity and respect

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