

Input for the Youth Engagement Strategy 2.0

Background

The following input to YES 2.0 has been formulated by the Danish Red Cross Youth (DRCY) and is based on consultations with 120+ young volunteers and leaders across the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. **The consultation of youth has been a part of DRCY's YELL (Youth Engagement and Lived Leadership)-project.** The consultations took place during regional youth leadership academies where youth volunteers from across the RC/RC Movement participated. In total three regional academies were organized: One global academy in Copenhagen, one academy in Nairobi (African region), and one academy in Nepal (Asia-Pacific region). Young people in the MENA-region were engaged through an online consultation due to the cancellation of the planned Academy in Lebanon because of the dire situation in the region. Meetings with Europe region were ongoing, whereas the Americas has not been sufficiently represented in this consultation process. The youth at the academies and consultations were a wide range of volunteers with different experiences and included both on the ground volunteer leaders and young board members.

The consultations were designed in dialogue with the IFRC youth secretariat and representation. It was partly framed by strategic questions formulated by the IFRC, but most importantly it was a bottom-up process in which more than 100 youth have been engaged and consulted their National Society and community. The consultations were built around discussions on what encourages and discourages youth engagement in the various National Societies **based on the youth volunteers' own experiences.** In the consultation the youth volunteers focused on concrete and innovative problem solving which led to recommendations on how best to solve these issues and recommendations for strengthening youth engagement in the Movement.

The following pages outline the inputs and recommendations developed during the consultations. The inputs are divided into five overall themes:

- 1) **RESOURCES:** The potential of youth led community engagement is unfulfilled and needs dedicated resource allocation, supporting structures and risk willingness.
- 2) **STRONGER CAPACITIES:** By fostering cultures of continuous learning and exchange amongst youth volunteers and leaders we can build a solid platform for stronger capacities and better leadership rooted locally.
- 3) **MENTAL HEALTH:** The promotion of good mental-health practices and relevant safeguarding mechanisms for youth target groups, youth volunteers and youth leaders are key to locally based community engagement and health.
- 4) **TRANSITION TO ADULT VOLUNTEERING:** An enhanced focus on the transitional period between youth volunteering and adult volunteering has the potential to build stronger, more competent, and more efficient response in humanitarian crisis.
- 5) **CONSULTATION OF YOUTH:** The promotion of inclusive and peaceful communities can be enhanced through representative youth consulting structures and youth programmes.

Each of the five themes include recommendations and action points on the following levels:

- What can be done at IFRC level to address the issue
- What can be done at National Society level to address the issue
- What can be done at local community/branch level to address the issue
- What can youth do themselves to address the issue

1) The potential of youth led community engagement is unfulfilled and needs dedicated resource allocation, support structures and risk willingness.

During the consultations it became clear that a general challenge experienced amongst the youth leaders and youth volunteers as well as in the youth activities in the communities were a lack of resources and funds. Several youth leaders considered it one of their primary challenges to convince senior leadership and local branches that allocation of finance and resources is instrumental to ensuring youth engagement in terms of youth targeted activities, youth mobilization and youth volunteer capacity building and management. Another obvious constraint experienced by the youth leaders was the lack of capacity, trust and risk willingness when allocating finance to youth-led activities. Often youth are addressed with expectations to try something new, to innovate and to do it on their own. However, on the other side, the youth express that they lack concrete capacity building for mobilizing and managing the resources. Finally, the youth express that they lack the feeling of trust, that they will do their best with the resources allocated and lack the support to also make mistakes and learn from them. Finally, during discussions on the need for innovative finance for the future the youth underlined, that the engagement of youth in these processes were crucial - not only as stakeholders and representatives of important insight, but as a crucial capacity building for the future.

A. What can be done at IFRC level?

1. Make the action and capacity of youth volunteers and leaders more visible across the Movement to showcase to management on different levels the pay-off from investment in youth.
2. Consider youth as a pivotal stakeholder in innovative finance and involve young people in strategies towards new and innovative financing.
3. Promote cultures of trust and risk willingness when working with youth volunteers and youth activities. You might not be able to see the direct effects of allocated resources immediately, but with time, the learning will be worth more.
4. Make global youth friendly curriculum and online trainings on financial management and fundraising that are free and accessible for all young volunteers.

B. What can be done at National Society level?

1. Support youth volunteers in showcasing their results to underline the importance of resource allocation to youth activities
2. Allocate time and effort to assess and evaluate the potential of youth volunteers, youth leaders and outreach to youth communities. This can lead to better argumentation of budget allocation and improved fundraising.
3. Support capacity building of young volunteers with a focus on resource mobilization and fundraising.
4. Commit to allocating a percentage of the national budget to youth activities - both on a national and branch level.
5. Support exchanges of young volunteers in challenging humanitarian settings. Make use of their insights and experience as a key point for advocacy and coordination with stakeholders.

C. What can be done at local branch/community level?

1. Create initiative funding pools which youth volunteers can apply for without too many requirements.
2. Allocate resources to youth volunteers with trust and willingness to take risks.

3. Follow-up and support the learning process with the youth volunteers when allocating resources to youth activities and projects to ensure continuous learning.
4. Engage youth in community fundraising - fundraising, awareness raising, and youth-to-youth activities and events has the potential to go well together

D. What can youth do themselves?

1. Begin with activities that do not require funding to showcase the capacity of youth in your community and to showcase the impact of your work. Think creatively in how you communicate about the work you do.
2. Look into creative and alternative funding resources for example from stakeholders, companies etc. in your local community.
3. Look into who else is active in your community and learn from how they work. Building friendship across difference and learning from each other is always a way forward.

Example of a specific solution from the academies

Establish youth led youth innovation centers in each National society. The centers should be supported and be in dialogue with a global youth innovation reference center. These centers have the responsibilities to provide technical support and capacity building for resource mobilization, funding opportunities, including innovative financing strategies. These centers will also ensure better global coordination and exchange amongst youth across the movement.

2) By fostering cultures of continuous learning and exchange amongst youth volunteers and leaders we can build a solid platform for stronger capacities and better leadership rooted locally.

Another challenge highlighted for most of the youth representatives were weak organizational structures around the work of supporting youth. This was addressed as a challenge on a global, a national and a local level. Many of the representatives experience little support and guidance on how to develop actual youth-led activities and projects that can engage youth. In many National Societies the youth even experience that seniors block or do not respond to their requests.

During discussions on this issue suggestions about creating better opportunities of exchange and mutual learning between peers and across generations were made. A general paradox referred to as the **children's table-structure** was also discussed. In some National Society an effort has been made to create independent youth departments and focused youth led activities. This can result in empowered youth volunteers on one hand, but on the other it can also marginalize the youth volunteers and the youth-led and youth-targeted activities if the youth are not also engaged with the **'adult' National society and branches. In most cases the marginalization is probably unintentional.** It might be a sincere attempt to create a dedicated youth space. However, youth volunteers experience that the expectations of their performance often do not align with the resources and support given. In some cases, a dedicated youth space or department seems to have been intentionally established to keep the youth at an arm's length - out of sight when not needed, but sufficiently close when needed. This underlines that a dedicated youth space, youth department or the like in itself is not a guarantee for strengthening the youth engagement in a National Society.

Youth need capacity building targeted to their specific needs. Capacity building that matches the tasks they are expected to solve and matches the known needed skills for the future humanitarian work and leadership. The RCRC movement is de facto the largest humanitarian youth movement in the world. This requires the RCRC to be frontrunners on youth engagement and youth capacity building.

A. What can be done at IFRC level?

1. Ensure continuous opportunities of global learning and exchange experiences amongst peers.
2. Encourage and work for intercultural collaboration. Youth not only needs to be listened to, but they also need to be considered legitimate stakeholders with relevant insight and know-how to influence decisions.
3. Invest in organizational structures that can support youth to ensure more wide-ranging support to National Societies, as well as global coordination, learning and influence.
4. Assess and share the impact of youth led action to show the importance of investment in youth
5. Never speak on behalf of young people **if you haven't consulted them**. Ensure mechanisms and good practices of consulting structures that can be used on global, national, and local level to continuously qualify your youth targeted intervention.
6. Host IFRC youth assemblies alongside IFRC general assemblies.
7. Make it mandatory for all National Societies to have and implement youth policies and guidelines. Provide direct support for the National Societies on how to develop and implement this.
8. Accommodate more seats for youth in the governing board.
9. Ensure exchanges of young people in most challenging humanitarian contexts. Often young people on the frontline have little time and opportunity to engage in learning and exchange opportunities, either due to travel restrictions or because they simply have their hands full. However, the feeling of solidarity and exchange can be a crucial support during harsh conditions.

B. What can be done at National Society level?

1. Ensure that youth, also the most marginalized, are engaged in the full program cycle - from problem identification to intervention design, implementation, and evaluation. Do not design and create initiatives for youth without youth.
2. Do not undermine young **people's** skills and know how, but do not underestimate the need for support.
3. Do not underestimate even the smallest efforts by youth - they might have more impact than what meets the eye, and it provides youth with hand-on experiences.
4. Invest in organizational structures that support youth and prioritize a continuous follow up and exchange with the youth. Create opportunities to share your knowhow and for young people to share their knowhow and be curious about what the young volunteers needs in their work.
5. Develop and implement youth consulting structures that ensures you gain a broader insight.
6. Ensure the young volunteers receive a good introduction to the global RC/RC Movement, the global family, and the opportunities within.
7. Accommodate more seats for youth in the national governing boards
8. Be a strong mediator between IFRC and national level.

C. What can be done at local branch/community level?

1. Be open to change and do not block new ideas or initiatives - even though it looks like it was done before - rather engage with enthusiasm and guidance.
2. Ensure motivated senior volunteers and staff are supporting the youth - nothing is more contagious than demotivating support structures.
3. Trust the process and contribute to a culture where youth volunteers feel safe and are encouraged to learn from mistakes.
4. Accommodate more youth in local governing boards

5. Be aware that you are dependent on a good reputation and youth engagement strategies if you want to recruit and retain youth volunteers.
6. Follow up with new tendencies and opportunities on a global and national level and share these with youth in your community.

D. What can youth do themselves?

1. Get to know the people across the National Society that develop and make decisions on projects. Present yourself to them as someone willing to help and learn.
2. **Be as active as you can and don't give up. When invited to participate in processes, meetings, events, and such, show up well prepared with a positive attitude**
3. Lead by example: Make sure you always consult your fellow youth before you represent them. Bring your colleagues or most affected youth from the community when you are allowed to meet with seniors and are invited into decision-making spaces.
4. Follow up as much as you can with new tendencies and opportunities on a global, national and local level - and share with fellow youth.

Example of a specific solution from the academies (Asia-Pacific)

Conduct a complete revision of constitutions and policy documents to empower youth involvement by defining their specific roles, responsibilities, and mandate on every level of the RCRC-movement. Ensure that this is done in a space where youth can meet and discuss with seniors with the purpose of changing mind-sets and learning from each-other. This can open the mind to and strengthen the understanding of the youth-led activities and needs of the youth. Remember that the youth need to be well-prepared for this encounter.

3) The promotion of good mental-health practices and relevant safeguarding mechanisms for youth target groups, youth volunteers and youth leaders are key to locally based community engagement and health.

In 2021 The DRCY conducted a survey consulting more than 5.000 youth across the movement and summarized their input into a mental health manifesto for youth. During the consultation for the YES 2.0 it became evident that the issue of mental health, mental well-being and the availability of psycho-social platforms and resilience of young people is a recurring topic that demands careful attention by all stakeholders. Through-out the consultations the topic intersected with the overall concern of how to safeguard young volunteers and youth in the most affected communities. A surprising number of young leaders articulated a fundamental fear of failing. Failing the organization, their co-volunteers, and their community. The discussions evolved around the feeling of being over-stretched, not having the needed capacities or time to fulfill their responsibilities and not being able to fully safeguard their volunteers and their community. Young people operating under especially challenging humanitarian situations such as war and armed conflict, highlighted that the supporting structures and awareness of the mental load were crucial to their ability to continue as volunteers and to also be able to function in ordinary life.

A. What can be done at IFRC level?

1. Support the breaking of stigmas of mental health challenges and support exchanges of good practices for and with youth.
2. Promote cultures of learning and exchange. No success and no new things have ever occurred without failures.

3. Support intergenerational meetings and participation based on honesty and trust filled dialogue.
4. Ensure that youth volunteers understand the meaning of safeguarding and the lines of responsibility, support, and referrals.
5. Involve volunteers in the assessment when developing safeguarding guidelines
6. Develop campaigns sharing the stories of youth in challenging humanitarian context.
7. Involve youth in advocacy efforts with stakeholders.

B. What can be done at National Society level?

1. Support the establishment of safe spaces for youth volunteers in which they can share experiences, share their fear and their needs.
2. Establish a national strategy and guidelines of safeguarding youth, which consider both youth volunteers and youth in target communities.
3. Recognize mental health burnouts and the fear-of-failure as challenges which must be addressed. Involve youth in how to address these challenges.
4. Ensure the listening ear: Have a whistleblower or complaint/concern mechanism and ensure relevant referral pathways. Ensure that children and youth are aware of their opportunity to seek comfort and raise their concerns in a trustful environment
5. Implement first aid trainings as well as trainings in psychological first aid and establish peer-support mechanisms.
6. **Don't make promises you can't keep**
7. Recognize youth in difficult and in safe volunteer positions and engage the community in the creation of safeguarding structures. The more the community is involved and knowing of their role the safer.

C. What can be done at local branch/community level?

1. Ensure safe spaces for local youth volunteers and youth communities.
2. Have clear communication on responsibilities in terms of safeguarding and well-established reference pathways ensuring young people know who to call and what to do if a situation arises.
3. Make sure youth volunteers and leaders are aware of their level of safe-guarding responsibility, and make sure to frequently follow up with them and their needs and challenges.
4. Ensure a trustful environment and remember to embrace and recognize different work cultures and experiences.
5. Have jointly developed and recognized code of conducts.

D. What can youth do themselves?

1. Help break the stigma and speak out loud, when you are feeling stressed or under pressure.
2. Take care of your peers by taking their mental health into consideration when you plan activities.
3. Do no harm: When conducting activities on mental health topics always make sure that you do not do any harm.
4. Know that youth cannot solve it all alone. Make sure you have the right pathway to send people, who are suffering from severe mental health challenges.

Example of a specific solution from the Academies

National and global youth reference and support centers can become a point of departure for contextualizing and developing approaches to tackle challenges for youth in terms of mental health and safeguarding of youth. Such a center will also be pivotal for capacity building and training and will

work in close coordination with other reference centers across the Movement. It will conduct assessments and best practices and push for constant adjustments and development of easy to access tools to tackle the challenges. It can also support campaigns to tackle stigmas and challenges for youth across the movement. Finally, it can be a place in which youth volunteers and other youth stakeholders find the support to assess and advocate their needs as humanitarian actors.

4) An enhanced focus on the transitional period between youth volunteering and adult volunteering has the potential to build stronger, more competent, and more efficient responses in humanitarian crisis.

Discussions regarding the transition phase between youth and adulthood showed an urgent need to engage in open and honest discussions which can lead to focused practices. The question of volunteer transition from youth volunteering to adult volunteering was a heated matter of discussion. For many of the participants a feeling of distress occurred caused by a fear of losing relevance and opportunity to be meaningfully engaged as a volunteer as the transition to adulthood. Some feel that there is no place for them in the 'adult' sector, **some do not feel ready to leave their 'youth community' behind, some feel that they will lose power and not be** recognized for their actual know-how and skills, or a combination of all the above. For some the age limit of 30 caused a challenge based on the argument that the definition of youth depends on so many factors and the context you are in.

Diving into this challenge, most current youth volunteers recognized that it is important to focus on the transitional period and installing meaningful transition policies and practices, which can lead to maintained brainpower, experience sharing and the retention of volunteers transitioning from youth to adulthood. Furthermore, enhanced policy and practice can remove the bottlenecks, when youth volunteers outgrow their role, but do not leave the space open for new young volunteers to take over. The challenge of transition seems to be a very relevant topic across all backgrounds and a challenge which has not been very efficiently solved anywhere.

A. What can be done at IFRC level?

- 1) Be aware that the transition from youth volunteering to adult volunteering can be an emotional process. The volunteers might be forced to say farewell to a community and role before they are fully included in a new one.
- 2) Be aware that in some cultures and countries, youth are considered a wider group than just determined by age.
- 3) Promote cultures and opportunities of honest intergenerational exchange and learning opportunities.
- 4) Involve youth stakeholders in the development of transition policies, plans and mechanisms.
- 5) Recognize and support a larger eco-system than within the movement. Young people can create change and learn outside the movement, and they might come back again as volunteers, staff, or partners. Support ongoing partnerships, exchanges and learning opportunities with other stakeholders

B. What can be done at National Society level?

- 1) Pay attention to the emotions the volunteers might experience when they **get too 'old' to be** defined as youth anymore.
- 2) Create social events between senior and youth volunteers to facilitate natural community transitions.
- 3) Allow talented and experienced youth in relevant leadership positions at senior level.

- 4) Have clear communication about the volunteer journey and possible transitions and paths.

C. What can be done at local branch/community level?

- 1) **Support the 'senior youth'** by embracing their experience and skills. Ensure they do not become bottlenecks but is recognized for their capacity. Allow them to mentor new youth, while being mentored by senior volunteers.
- 2) Create a concrete role for the volunteers that turns 30
- 3) **Mindset is more important than age, don't create big divisions**
- 4) Cook and eat together and get to know each other across of ages - social activities build bridges for transition.

D. What can youth do to push the agenda?

- 1) Embrace that it can feel sad that you are forced out of your volunteer work.
- 2) Give space to those younger than you, when you are approaching the age, where you are no longer considered a youth.
- 3) Remember that you do not lose your friendships or the network.

Example of a specific solution from the academies

As one of many possible solutions for this problem, the youth suggested that the National Societies create new categories in addition to the existing one, where young people between 31-35 will be categorized as adult youth. The role of the new category will be to function as mentors and advisors for the youth. The goal with this solution is to recognize and mobilize the knowledge of the youth in this category and create generational sustainability. Furthermore, the youth suggested a level of **mentorship/buddy system, supported by social events which could ensure that the 'senior youth'** were naturally integrated in the senior volunteer community and leadership.

5) The promotion of engaging, inclusive, and peaceful communities can be enhanced through representative youth consulting structures and youth programs.

Another point of discussion which occurred consequently was concerned with the challenges related to inclusion and engagement of youth looking across backgrounds, gender, educational background, occupation etc. Discussions circulated around how young people in hard-to-reach areas are often left behind in global and national exchanges and trainings. The engagement and potential of displaced youth communities was also a matter of discussion and something that several suggested should be given an attentive focus in IFRC strategic work.

The economic differences amongst youth volunteers emerged as a difficult topic to address but resulted in concrete recommendations on how to even out costs for volunteers and support education and personal growth for volunteers, including paving the path for income generating skills and opportunities. The question of gender differences also occurred in discussions, highlighting that gender-inequality still seem to be a hindrance in youth engagement and that it remains a challenge to address potentials and challenges with reference to gender-inequalities. Finally, it was highlighted that young people who are engaged as volunteers and at the same time are members of the most affected communities during humanitarian crises such as armed conflict and war need comprehensive support and follow-up. Mediating between their Red Cross/Red Crescent role and their private role becomes increasingly challenging the more difficult, restrictive, or violent the situation becomes. When you do not feel safe it becomes more difficult to trust and to act on basis of the principles. Thus, recognition hereof and engaging of youth, as both volunteers and members of community, in defining relevant supporting structures is crucial.

A. What can be done at IFRC level?

- 1) Allocate resources to support youth in hard to reach and difficult humanitarian contexts, countries, and regions to be engaged in meetings, trainings, and exchange.
- 2) Encourage interaction across backgrounds to break stereotypes and support inclusive environments for youth engagement.
- 3) Encourage different kind of leadership styles and talents amongst youth volunteers. It is not a one size fits all and there is a need to showcase different types of youth leaders.
- 4) Support networks globally in which learning, and exchange of challenges can take place with youth representing different places and lived experiences.
- 5) Provide more socio-economic innovation programs such as the Limitless program.
- 6) Keep strategies, policies and other official talks and documents in a language that can be understood by all. This includes local languages, but also steering clear of academic terms, buzzwords, and technical terms.
- 7) Ensure to engage with and include youth from the most difficult humanitarian settings and learn from their experiences.

B. What can be done at National Society level?

- 1) Make sure that the marginalized voices are being represented and are targeted directly in consultation structures and representation.
- 2) Support marginalized youth to be engaged in all steps of the program cycle.
- 3) Create links to the job market, relevant institution, internships, and educational institutions.
- 4) Support peer-to-peer exchange
- 5) Have better digital solutions which can reach further and connect youth across distances.
- 6) Establish a youth core team with youth representation of all branches and communities. They can work as an outreach and engagement taskforce.

C. What can be done at local branch/community level?

- 1) Create safe spaces where the voices of the marginalized groups can be heard
- 2) Ensure opportunities for the youth volunteers, such as free transport, cost recovery, reimbursement systems and food.
- 3) Create income generating activities for young people
- 4) Have psychosocial therapy/supervision/counselling and activities that create bonding and motivation amongst the volunteers.
- 5) Create social and easily accessible activities (like games, sports, talent shows and camping).

D. What can youth do to push the agenda?

- 1) Remember to consult with those youth that are not part of youth leadership, as leadership tend to be those with more formal education, thus leaving the more marginalized out.
- 2) Don't only stay in the larger cities or within universities when talking to volunteers and strengthening youth engagement, but also travel to rural areas.
- 3) Keep strategies, policies and other official talks and documents in a language that can be understood by all. This includes local languages, but also steering clear of academic terms, buzzwords, and technical terms.

Example of a specific solution from the academies

Youth volunteers from different regions identified the issue of not including youth from marginalized and hard to reach communities when updating strategies and policy papers. Often National Societies make updates and develop new policies, projects and strategies based on the opinion of youth leadership and senior management, all which were often from the larger cities and easy to access.



A solution to this is problem is that all National Societies commit to making a consulting structure, where youth in different communities are heard, when there is a need to update or make a new strategy or development of projects. This structure should be youth-led and could be digital. Furthermore, it is encouraged to ensure sharing of **opportunities to youth who don't get access easily**, and to allocate specific budget to support hard-to-reach youth in trainings and networks.