

CHANGE THE CODE

act:onaid

YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND THE
WORLD REFLECT ON
THE HUMANITARIAN RESET



FEBRUARY 2026

**GLOBAL
PLATFORMS**
NETWORK FOR
YOUTH-LED
ACTIVISM **act:onaid**

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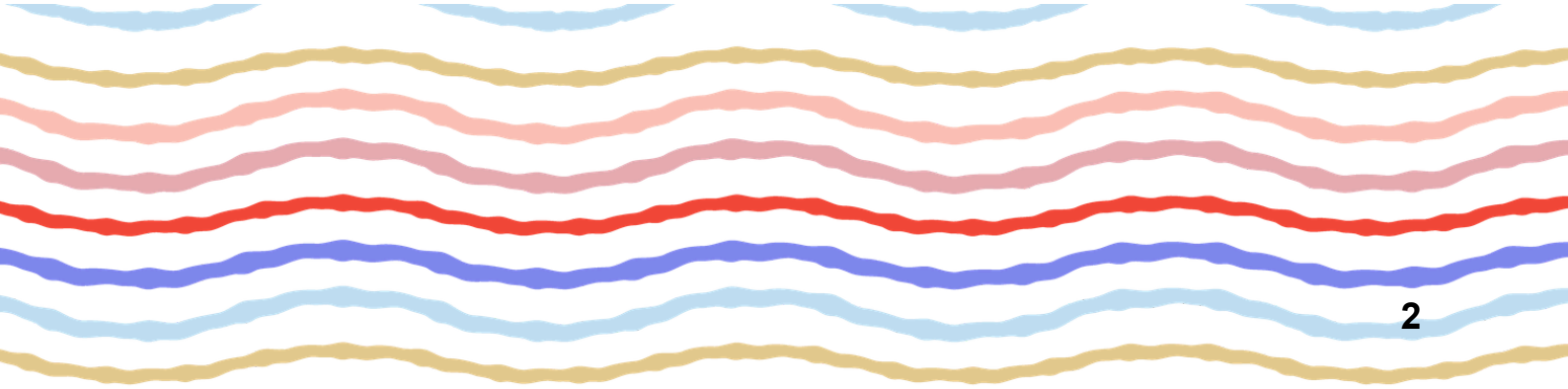


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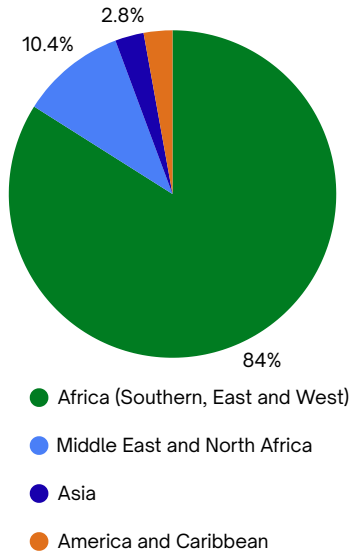
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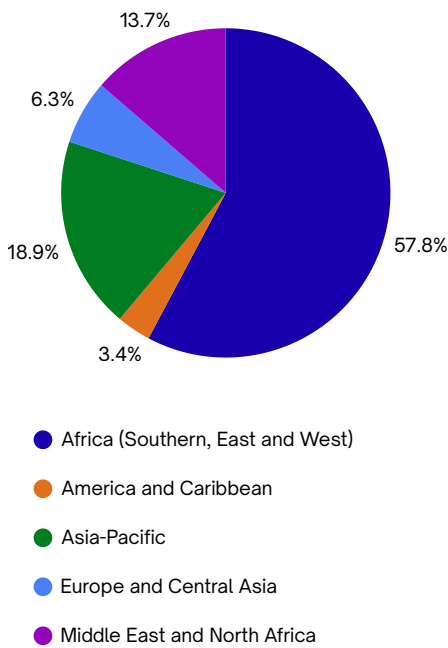
IN SUMMARY

WHO WE ENGAGED

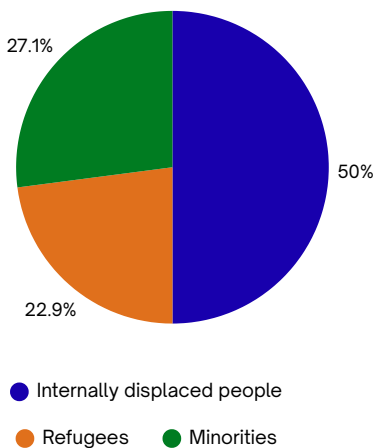
Global survey participants



Regional consultations participants

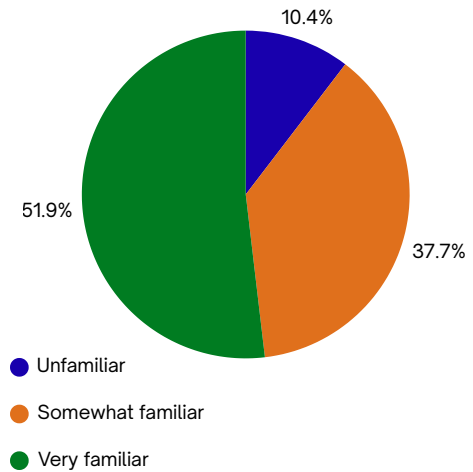


Representation



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Level of awareness of the Reset



Exclusion from Decision-Making

Youth included at operational level but excluded from strategic processes, participation often symbolic.



Limited Access to Information

Inconsistent awareness of the Reset and limited communication across regions.



Funding & Resource Barriers

Youth-led groups lack direct, flexible, multi-year funding and struggle with bureaucracy.



Localization & Power-Sharing

Youth demand recognition as equal actors, not beneficiaries.



Inclusion & Representation

Request for inclusive governance for women, refugees, LGBTQI+, minorities and disability groups.



Accountability & Transparency

Youth call for feedback mechanisms and public reporting systems.



Development + Humanitarian Nexus

Strong push for resilience, long-term planning and climate integration.



Safety & Mental Well-Being

Especially in MENA/Sudan/Syria — emotional stress + protection risks high.



Accountability & Transparency

Youth call for feedback mechanisms and public reporting systems.

ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Humanitarian Reset refers to a proposed overhaul of the humanitarian aid system aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness in response to “a profound crisis of legitimacy, morale, and funding”. Led by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), the Reset is largely, but not solely, catalysed by the shock of the United States of America’s suspension and termination of humanitarian assistance that began in late January 2025. The Reset seeks to address structural weaknesses in the humanitarian system and move away from slow, centralised, and highly bureaucratic mechanisms toward a locally-led model that is more efficient and accountable to crisis-affected communities. The Reset seeks to address long-standing concerns, including:

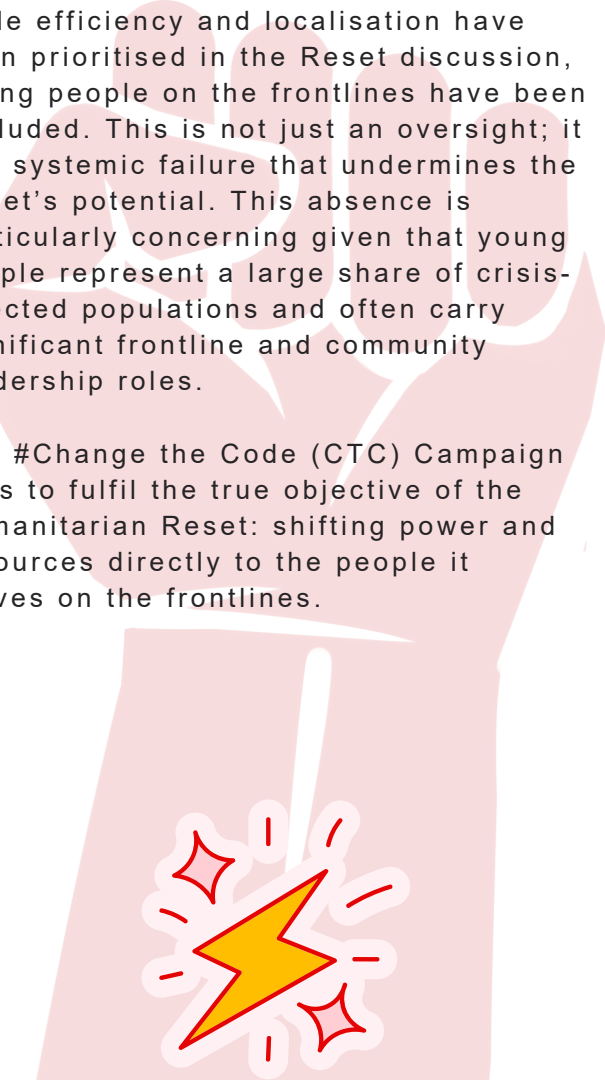
- fragmented and slow decision-making;
- rigid, top-down coordination structures;
- limited inclusion of local and community-based actors;
- chronic underfunding of women-led organisations.

In its 2025 [statement](#), the ERC outlined four pillars guiding this reform:

Pillar	Focus
<i>Define</i>	Clarify roles, mandates, and priorities
<i>Deliver</i>	Improve efficiency in response
<i>Devolve</i>	Shift power and funding to local actors
<i>Defend</i>	Safeguard, protection and rights of crisis-affected communities

Despite these ambitions, repeated commitments to strengthen the role of young people in the humanitarian architecture, and multiple frameworks to recognise and institutionalise youth leadership including the [2016 World Humanitarian Summit](#), the [IASC Guidelines on working with and for young people \(2020\)](#), and the [Young Humanitarian Handbook \(2024\)](#), youth advocates from the [#ChangeTheCode campaign](#) highlight a critical gap: The Humanitarian Reset doesn't include young people as stakeholders and there is no commitment to resourcing youth-led action. While reforms include commitments to support women-led organisations through pooled funding mechanisms, no comparable obligations have been made for youth-led organisations. Additionally, while efficiency and localisation have been prioritised in the Reset discussion, young people on the frontlines have been excluded. This is not just an oversight; it is a systemic failure that undermines the Reset’s potential. This absence is particularly concerning given that young people represent a large share of crisis-affected populations and often carry significant frontline and community leadership roles.

The #Change the Code (CTC) Campaign aims to fulfil the true objective of the Humanitarian Reset: shifting power and resources directly to the people it serves on the frontlines.



CTC believes that to change the system, it must model the alternative and build a movement rooted in evidence, solidarity, and youth leadership. Led by a dedicated team of young humanitarians representing all five regions and supported by two allies committed to localisation (Global Platforms and ActionAid International), CTC is guided by principles of localisation, decentralisation, intersectionality, feminist approaches, transparency and accountability, and intergenerational collaboration.

To generate evidence to support the CTC goals, a collaborative, youth-led research approach was launched in late 2025. This approach aimed at building a better and more nuanced understanding on how young people perceive the Reset including what barriers they face, and changes they believe are necessary.

Through an online survey and regional consultations across the Americas and Caribbean, Africa, Europe, Central Asia, and the Asia-Pacific, insights from a diverse group of young people are brought together. This group includes refugees, internally displaced youth, young women, LGBTQI+ youth, youth with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and community-based youth leaders across more than 40 countries, and key stakeholders (including WHO, UNICEF, and local NGOs). This intersectional representation is essential to understanding how structural exclusion, centralised decision-making, and inaccessible funding mechanisms affect different groups of young people in distinct ways.



This report presents the outcomes of this research, consolidating youth-generated evidence, amplifying diverse regional and intersectional perspectives, and providing concrete recommendations for humanitarian agencies, donors, youth organisations, and governments. By grounding its analysis in the lived experiences of young people, the report positions young people as essential contributors to humanitarian reform—not as passive beneficiaries, but as actors whose leadership and expertise must inform the direction and implementation of the Humanitarian Reset, which must be developed with youth, not merely for them.

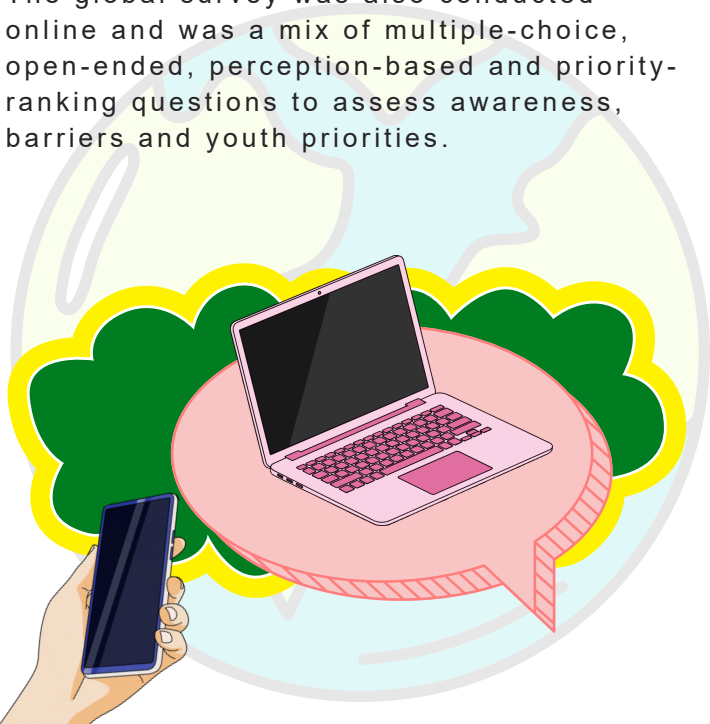
TWO: METHODOLOGY

In late 2025, a mixed-methods research process was designed and led by young people to generate evidence to ensure that the Humanitarian Reset is informed by youth realities, leadership, and needs, rather than reinforcing existing inequalities. The research sought to:

- assess youth awareness and understanding of the Reset;
- document concerns, expectations, and priorities across diverse regions;
- identify structural barriers to participation and funding;
- capture the perspectives of displaced youth, young women, LGBTQI+ youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalised groups;
- generate youth-led evidence to influence humanitarian reform processes.

The regional consultation process was conducted online, clustered by regions and languages to reach a good cross-section of young people, and featuring guided breakout rooms, collective prioritisation, and open-reflection Google Docs to capture insights beyond real-time dialogue. This diversity ensured intersectional representation across displacement, disability, gender and minority status.

The global survey was also conducted online and was a mix of multiple-choice, open-ended, perception-based and priority-ranking questions to assess awareness, barriers and youth priorities.



Data was analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Closed-ended survey responses were analysed through descriptive statistics to identify patterns in demographics, awareness, engagement, and perceived inclusivity. Open-ended responses in the survey and consultations were analysed using thematic analysis methods, allowing for the identification of key themes, insights, and recommendations from youth participants.

Combined, the data generated quantitative and qualitative evidence on awareness, participation pathways, funding barriers, and regional disparities.

LIMITATIONS

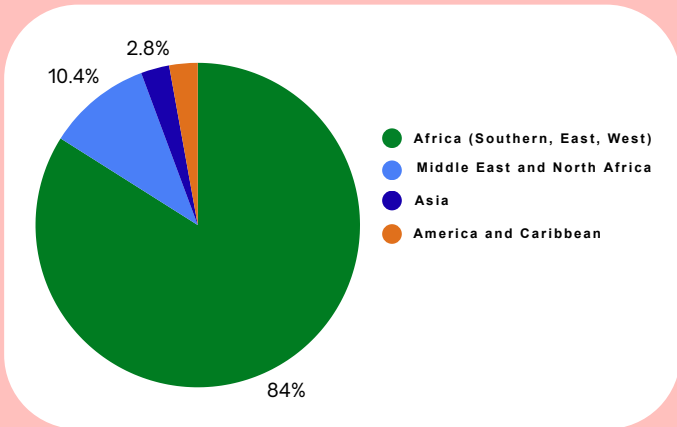
- **Low non-African representation:** the findings are Africa-weighted, though this is in direct proportion to where some of the world's worst humanitarian crises are located.
- **Connectivity:** The reliance on online data collection methods, while allowing for significant reach, meant that remote-based youth or those with limited internet access may have been excluded from the research.
- **Timeframes and scheduling:** Working across different time zones with a small team meant some respondents weren't able to engage within the parameters of the research timeline.
- **Language:** Despite a multi-lingual team, there is an under-representation of French, Portuguese and Spanish speakers.
- **Self-selection bias:** More engaged youth may be over-represented in the sample.

Despite these limitations, the sample remains credible and sufficiently diverse to inform the Reset reform analysis.

THREE: YOUTH PROFILE

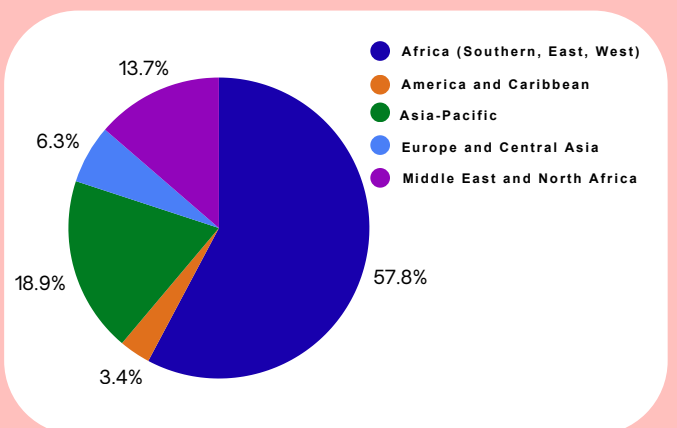
Youth were engaged from across the globe, with the online survey reaching 107 young leaders, activists, and youth-led organisation representatives from the regions depicted below.

Figure 1: Regional representation in the youth survey (%)



The gender spread in the survey process was even, with 47% female and 52% male, and 1% indicating 'other'. The age range was predominantly youth aged 19-35 (74.8%), though some respondents fell into the 35-49 age range (19.6%), and 3.7% were over 50 years of age. Additionally, consultations grouped into key regions saw engagement with 360 young people globally, dispersed as indicated below. This regional grouping was generated by the research process as a way of organising across time zones and languages.

Figure 2: Regional representation in the youth consultations (%)



Participants were diverse, including youth activists and movement leaders; local civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based groups; regional institutional representatives; refugees, internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and asylum-seekers; and independent advocates and students.

These participants, despite being young people and not having the structural access, already have a wealth of experience that is underutilised in humanitarian responses. Some examples of their leadership are shared below – and it is this leadership and experience that informs many of the responses and recommendations made in this research.

“ SPEAKING FROM MY WORK IN NIGERIA WITH THE HEALTHY CHILD AND ADOLESCENT INITIATIVE, I’VE SEEN HOW YOUNG PEOPLE DRIVE MOST OF THE REAL COMMUNITY WORK, HEALTH OUTREACH, MOBILISATION, AWARENESS, AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE. BUT THE SAME YOUNG PEOPLE DOING THE WORK ARE OFTEN MISSING AT THE TABLES WHERE DECISIONS ARE SHAPED.

I HAVE DONE LONG-TERM RESILIENCE THROUGH PRACTICAL LIFE SKILLS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING FOR YOUNG GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN MY COMMUNITY. I LED INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON TEACHING ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY LIKE PRODUCING REUSABLE SANITARY PADS, AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES LIKE MAKING DETERGENTS.

I HAVE ASSISTED CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT WAYS. I LOOK FOR DONORS WHO CAN ASSIST. IN PARTNERSHIP WITH A FOUNDATION, TWO ALBINO CHILDREN WERE ASSISTED WITH EYE CHECK-UPS, AND THEY WERE GIVEN EYEGLASSES, GROCERIES, AND LOTION. THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY, ONE OF MY STUDENTS GOT OVER 100K VIEWS THROUGH A CERTAIN NEWS CHANNEL IN CHIREZDI. HE GOT DONATIONS FROM ZIMBABWE CLIMATE CHANGE MENTORSHIP IN THE FORM OF UNIFORMS.

I HAVE LED A SMALL GIRLS' ONLY GROUP, EDUCATING AND CREATING SAFE SPACE FOR YOUNG GIRLS TO TALK OPENLY ABOUT THE MENSTRUATION

I COORDINATE GBV-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING SCHOOL VISITS, PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS, AND YOUTH-LED DISCUSSIONS ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING TRAFFICKING, HEALTH, AND STIGMA. I WORK DIRECTLY WITH STUDENTS, COMMUNITIES, AND FELLOW MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS TO BRING ACCURATE INFORMATION AND SAFE DIALOGUE TO SPACES WHERE IT'S OFTEN MISSING.

This experience is further summarised in the table below, which highlights regional, youth-led impact in the humanitarian system.

Region	Example
Africa (Southern, East and West)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nigeria and Zambia: WASH, climate and Disaster Risk Reduction advocacy Uganda: refugee-led policy engagement at RELON Nigeria: youth-led planning implementation and monitoring at SAHEI Gender Development Initiative and Rise to Inspire Africa Initiative
Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India: youth-led planning implementation and monitoring at the Totem Resource Centre
Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine and Serbia: community-based relief, low-cost innovation, independent organising
Middle East and North Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sudan, Palestine and Syria: frontline protection and emergency response in high-risk environments



THREE: FINDINGS

The research revealed high levels of willingness by young people to participate, but low access to information and decision-making, and persistent structural barriers to inclusion in the Humanitarian Reset. The specific findings are structured as follows to evidence these:

- Awareness
- Engagement
- Barriers
- Priorities.

3.1 AWARENESS

“THE RESET FEELS PROMISING, BUT [ITS] STILL UNCLEAR ON HOW YOUTH WILL BE MEANINGFULLY INCLUDED. WHAT'S MISSING IS STRONGER MECHANISMS FOR YOUTH REPRESENTATION, ESPECIALLY FROM LOCAL AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES, AND MORE INVESTMENT IN YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES INSTEAD OF ONLY YOUTH-TARGETED ONES.”

There is high interest, but uneven knowledge of the Reset. While 51.4% indicated they are familiar with the Reset, almost half were either somewhat familiar (37.4%) or had no awareness at all (10.3%). This data reflects both a limitation in the sample (a majority of responses from Africa, with 70% of those from Nigeria, and a dedicated campaign by Action Aid Nigeria on the Reset) as well as the success of youth awareness-raising campaigns on the Reset. The data shows that while youth in some key settings have some level of familiarity, the remaining gap in awareness limits meaningful engagement.

Youth who are aware of the Reset generally identify it as an opportunity for reform toward localisation, accountability and community-driven decision-making. However, awareness does not equal understanding, and the depth of knowledge varies by region.

The data found that in Africa and MENA, there was strong operational experience, but limited policy access. In the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe regions, there was lower awareness and limited exposure to humanitarian architecture.

Similarly, there were challenges accessing information depending on where youth are found in the humanitarian ecosystem; information is often shared with international NGOs and agencies, but not structurally relocated to youth spaces, and some youth are more disadvantaged and readily excluded than others. Additional challenges relate to displacement and refugee status, gender identity or sexual orientation, being a young woman, or living with a disability. These intersecting challenges further limit access to information, reduce the ability to prioritise the consultations, and contribute to low engagement in the Reset process.

By region, challenges differed too. In Europe, digital connectivity can be difficult for those in areas with airstrikes, and in countries like Serbia, some ethnic minorities do not feel solidarity with other youth. Language barriers and literacy were also identified as specific challenges in Europe and Asia, filtering out participation in international advocacy and collaboration.

Targeted information-sharing and education efforts are essential to empower all youth to contribute effectively to humanitarian transformation.



3.2 ENGAGEMENT

“
NEVER DOUBT THE POWER OF YOUR EXPERIENCE: YOU ARE THE EXPERT AND THE ARCHITECT OF RESILIENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY. ORGANISE, DOCUMENT YOUR INNOVATIVE WORK, AND RELENTLESSLY DEMAND THAT THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM RECOGNISES YOUR AGENCY, FUNDS YOUR LOCAL INITIATIVES, AND PLACES YOUR WELL-BEING AT THE ABSOLUTE CENTRE OF EVERY DECISION. YOUR VOICE IS THE CODE THAT MUST CHANGE THE SYSTEM.
”

Youth engagement in the Reset was found to be uneven, with 35.5% indicating they found it very inclusive, and the remaining 57% finding it somewhat inclusive, or not inclusive. A small number (6.5%) were not sure. While some young people felt empowered and represented, a larger proportion experienced only partial or minimal inclusion. Ensuring structured opportunities for youth participation at both operational and strategic levels will be key to making the Reset truly inclusive of young people's perspectives.

Youth engagement in humanitarian responses primarily occurs at operational and programmatic levels, where young people are actively involved in community mobilisation, needs assessments, peer learning initiatives and leading or supporting workshops and campaigns. These activities position youth as key actors in delivering frontline humanitarian and development interventions, especially within grassroots and crisis-affected communities.

In advocacy spaces, young people participate in policy dialogues, youth conferences, regional platforms, and Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus discussions. Their roles here emphasise amplifying local perspectives, advocating for stronger accountability and influencing conversations about humanitarian reform. Despite this involvement, their participation often remains consultative rather than authoritative.

Decision-making influence for youth is strongest at the community level, where they are directly embedded and able to shape local interventions. However, representation significantly declines at national and global policy levels, where strategic decisions remain largely adult-led. In many cases, youth contributions are filtered through larger organisations, limiting their ability to influence final decisions or shape system-wide reforms. This highlights a persistent gap between youth participation in implementation and their inclusion in strategic leadership and governance processes.

Five enabling conditions were identified by youth participants in the research that could support meaningful engagement in the Humanitarian Reset:

- 1. Access to information and capacity building:** Clear guidance on the Reset is needed in a range of languages and supported by training on humanitarian architecture.
- 2. Decision-making opportunities:** Participation to have influence, rather than for tokenistic visibility, is needed for youth engagement to be meaningful.
- 3. Flexible funding and resources:** Information and access to multi-year grants, quick access funds, and digital and mobility support would greatly enhance youth engagement.
- 4. Recognition and safeguarding:** Visibility of youth agency and safety protections for young responders.
- 5. Inclusive participation pathways:** Ensuring and enabling a cross-section of youth representation by girls and young women, refugees, LGBTQI+, and disability groups would ensure an intersectional engagement and more meaningful outcomes.



YOUNG PEOPLE WANT A SYSTEM THAT RECOGNISES LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, INVESTS IN COMMUNITY LEADERS, AND TRUSTS YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES. MY WORK IN GBV SHOWS HOW EFFECTIVE LOCAL YOUTH ARE WHEN THEY RECEIVE SUPPORT, WE REACH PLACES MANY INTERNATIONAL ACTORS CAN'T.

3.3. BARRIERS

I THINK THE HUMANITARIAN RESET IS A NECESSARY REFORM EFFORT AIMING TO MAKE THE GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM MORE EFFICIENT AND LOCAL. HOWEVER, FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE, ESPECIALLY ONE FROM A MARGINALISED COMMUNITY FACING DISPLACEMENT (LIKE THE GWAYI-SHANGANI AREA IN MY COMMUNITY), THE PROCESS FEELS ABSTRACT, LACKS ACCOUNTABILITY, AND MISSES MECHANISMS FOR GENUINE YOUTH-LED ACTION.

Barriers identified through the research analysis include:

1 Information gaps: Almost half of the youth who participated in the research were either partially or unaware of the Reset. In addition, young people reported limited understanding of humanitarian systems in general due to information not being disseminated in an accessible way. This reduces their ability to participate effectively at strategic or operational levels.

2 Centralised processes: 56% of participants indicated they had limited or no influence, with decision-making remaining top-down; youth voices do not shape outcomes. There is a feeling of disconnect between global decisions and local realities. Young people noted that although they manage frontline response roles, their strategic influence remains minimal. Their observations include:

- Youth leadership is strong at the local level.
- Decision-shaping is weak at the global/regional level.
- Participation is often symbolic, not structural.
- Exclusion is higher for girls, rural youth, LGBTQI+, disabled youth and refugees.

3 Funding and mobility constraints: Less than 15% accessed any funding, and in fact, some did not know this was available. This means that youth—especially rural and crisis-affected—struggle to join events or implement activities. Respondents repeatedly emphasised that without direct funding mechanisms, youth inclusion cannot move beyond consultation. Youth want:

- rapid micro-grants
- multi-year core funding
- financing for connectivity and mobility
- equitable, non-extractive partnerships.

4 Digital inequality: Connectivity/device limitations were widely reported, which excludes rural, low-income, and conflict-affected youth from online consultations.

5 Tokenism/low influence: Youth are often invited to speak, but don't feel like their inputs influence outcomes or final decisions. Young people want trust, space to lead, and opportunities to shape solutions, not to just be invited at the end. They are asking for protection, dignity, and real participation in decisions that affect their bodies, safety, and futures; it is critically important that decision-making power is shared, especially when it is about issues that affect young people personally.

IN MY HONEST OPINION, INCLUSIVITY IS A KEY HERE, INSTEAD OF COMING WITH A NICE PLAN AND ASKING YOUTHS TO EXECUTE IT, YOUTHS SHOULD BE PUT INTO LEADING PATHS FROM ALL THE WAY TO CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PLANS.

6 Geopolitical and administrative barriers: Restrictions are the highest for refugees and displaced youth, with both their instability and travel and related visas and bureaucracy, blocking participation.



7 One size does not fit all: While the research found common barriers globally, there were also regional variations in experiences and priorities. Additionally, across all regions, some commonalities emerged across different groups. This diversity and intersectionality reinforce that the Reset cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach; it must be grounded in contextualised and region-specific realities.



Region	Core barriers identified
Africa (Southern, East and West)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tokenism in strategic spaces • Digital gaps in rural contexts
Americas and Caribbean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low visibility of Reset reduces engagement
Asia-Pacific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical/administrative barriers limit leadership
Europe and Central Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict disruption • Exclusion of minorities
Middle East and North Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline risk without protection • High displacement vulnerability

Group	Core barrier identified
Refugees and IDP youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation • Connectivity exclusion • Often viewed as beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance rather than agents of change and decision makers.
Young women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based violence (GBV) risk • Leadership exclusion • Participation spaces are still largely occupied by men • Women are often not given the conditions, encouragement or safety to participate with confidence
LGBTIQ+ youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity-based discrimination in several regions
Rural youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major digital divide
Individual youth v organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations have more influence, while individuals struggle to access spaces

3.4 PRIORITIES

Priority areas identified in the research include (but are not limited to) the following:

- **Direct, flexible, multi-year funding:** Participants in the research emphasised the need to prioritise real localisation through direct, flexible, and multi-year funding to youth-led, women-led, grassroots, and refugee youth-led organisations, enabling them to lead responses rather than relying on international intermediaries.
- **Meaningful participation:** Participants called for meaningful, non-tokenistic participation where youth and marginalised groups, notably women, refugees, IDPs, minorities, LGBTQI+ youth, and persons with disabilities, hold genuine influence in decision-making spaces. In practice, this requires structured engagement platforms that elevate youth leadership, simplified and faster administrative processes that reduce bureaucracy, and strengthened transparency and accountability to ensure equitable resource distribution.

DURING ONE OF MY COORDINATED CAMPAIGNS, THE SCHOOL VISIT ABOUT GBV, I MET YOUNG GIRLS WHO WERE AFRAID TO SPEAK, EVEN ANONYMOUSLY, BECAUSE THEY FELT THEIR PAIN 'DOESN'T MATTER.' THAT MOMENT SHOWED ME HOW DISCONNECTED THE SYSTEM CAN BE FROM THE LIVED REALITY OF THOSE IT CLAIMS TO PROTECT. THEIR SILENCE WAS THE REMINDER THAT THE SYSTEM NEEDS TO BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE, YOUTH-CENTRED, AND CULTURALLY AWARE.

- **Longer-term commitments:** Respondents stressed sustainability and the need to shift from short-term emergency aid to long-term resilience, and environmentally responsible approaches that support community self-reliance.

MANY FRAMEWORKS INCLUDE YOUTHS; HOWEVER, THEY DO NOT EXPLAIN HOW YOUTHS - ESPECIALLY THOSE IN MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES - WILL BE INCLUDED IN SPACES [WHERE] POLICIES AND BUDGETS ARE SHAPED.

- **Prioritising GBV areas of responsibility (AoR):** There is a real concern that structural mergers could weaken or dilute GBV-specific services, rather than protect them. For young women refugees or IDPs, transactional or survival sex in exchange for gifts, money, food, or to get permission to leave camps is highly prevalent. In areas with multiple and uncoordinated actors, this can expose them to further abuses, and put them at high risk for unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections or HIV, given the often limited access to health and sexual and reproductive health services and commodities. Merging GBV services may result in lower service quality and access barriers, the loss of survivor-centred referral pathways and a failure of services to adapt to high-risk contexts.

- **Better coordination and support:** Participants highlighted the need for better coordination across agencies; long-term capacity building in areas such as monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding, conflict sensitivity and proposal writing; and greater integration of humanitarian action with development priorities. These include climate resilience, mental health, education, GBV, WASH, and livelihoods.



FOUR: DISCUSSION

The research demonstrates that the humanitarian system is at a critical crossroads. While it is positive that the Reset has emerged in growing recognition of the need for reform, it remains distant from the lived realities of young people. This is especially the case for those who are refugees or displaced, marginalised, or already leading community-based humanitarian responses. Research participants expressed a strong desire to contribute, but the participation pathways are either unclear or nonexistent. While there is some recognition of youth capacity and their operational leadership, strategic access is limited to a small minority. Even with the renewed interest in localisation, this rarely explicitly includes youth, despite the ready evidence of youth as frontline responders. These young people are already performing tasks the Reset claims to value — response coordination, community mobilisation, awareness work, climate response — but their leadership has not been embedded structurally. Readiness exists in will, not yet in architecture. Funding and power remain centralised and inaccessible to young people in all their diversity.

Across the regions, youth participants believe that the humanitarian system is not yet fully prepared to implement a truly inclusive, locally-led, and accountable Reset.

The research identified five critical areas that must be addressed for the Reset to truly succeed:

1. **Information inequity:** Youth lack consistent access across all regions to information about the Reset and humanitarian architecture, limiting meaningful participation.
2. **Decision-making remains centralised:** Young people rarely influence policy or resource allocation and are often invited only at operational or symbolic levels.
3. **Direct funding is still the biggest barrier:** Less than 15% of respondents accessed resources, and most youth-led groups operate without a core budget or multi-year support.
4. **Inclusion is uneven and identity-dependent:** Women, LGBTQI+ youth, refugee and displaced youth, rural youth and persons with disabilities face compounded exclusion.
5. **Protection and psychosocial needs are overlooked:** Youth in conflict contexts report emotional burden and safety risks without adequate support or safeguarding structures.

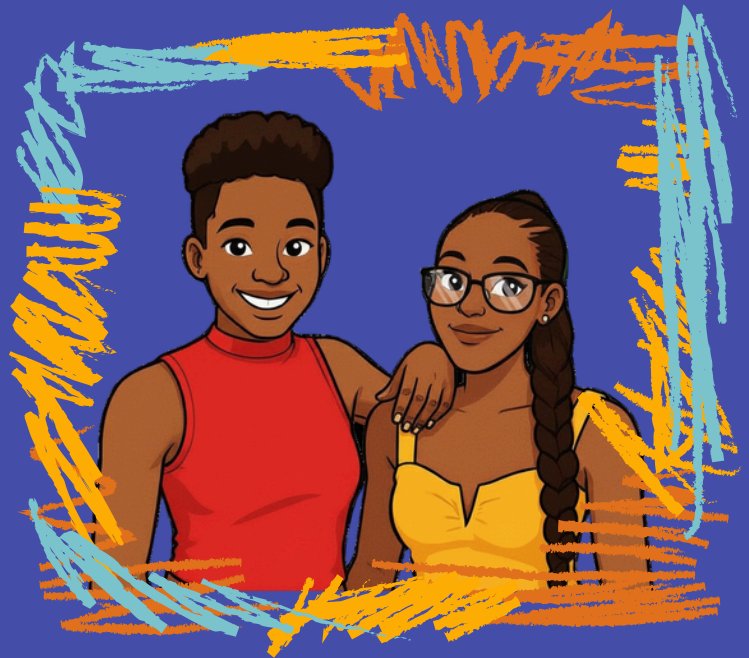
These gaps suggest that without significant structural reform, the Reset risks becoming a conceptual shift rather than a practical transformation.

These gaps suggest that without significant structural reform, the Reset risks becoming a conceptual shift rather than a practical transformation.

Young people have proven capacity, lived experience and readiness to lead. The question is no longer if youth should be involved, but how systems will make space for them — not symbolically, but structurally, sustainably, and with shared power.

Despite these challenges, the research identified opportunities that could result in meaningful, systematic change, if leveraged intentionally:

1. Already active youth leadership at the community level allows rapid scaling of interventions with funding and policy inclusion.
2. Experience in digital organising and virtual participation expands access across borders and crises.
3. Tested youth-led monitoring and evidence production strengthen accountability and reform legitimacy.
4. Piloting localised funding models in key regions can guide global scale-up.
5. Strong consensus across regions provides a unified youth mandate for advocacy, without leaving behind young people with specific characteristics and additional vulnerabilities, such as those mentioned above.



These findings show that the humanitarian sector can move from consultation to co-leadership if mechanisms, funding, and governance structures evolve accordingly.

The Humanitarian Reset presents a rare opportunity to recode power, redistribute resources and redesign humanitarian governance — but only if youth and affected communities move from the margins to the centre.



FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are drawn from the research findings and organised by actor to guide structured action toward a Humanitarian Reset that is inclusive, accountable, and youth-led.

FOR HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

Establish clear, permanent pathways for youth participation: Agencies must move beyond one-off consultations and create formal, funded, and ongoing participation spaces for diverse youth, including refugee youth, young women, LGBTQI+ youth, and youth with disabilities.

This may include:

- standing youth advisory bodies within coordination mechanisms;
- co-led working groups with shared decision-making power;
- paid youth roles embedded in clusters, AoRs, and operations;
- youth-friendly information dissemination (simplified, multilingual, accessible).

Participation must be safe, compensated, and supported through mentorship, rather than voluntary or symbolic.

Ensure flexible and direct funding for youth-led and local actors: Funding models must be redesigned so that youth-led, refugee-led, and women-led organisations can access funding without institutional barriers.

Required shifts include:

- multi-year, unrestricted funds—not short cycles;
- simple application and light reporting requirements;
- small-grant rapid mechanisms for grassroots response;
- funding accessible even to unregistered refugee-led groups;
- coverage of core costs (staff, connectivity, safeguarding, mobility).

Without these reforms, youth participation remains theory, not practice.

Make inclusion and intersectionality non-negotiable: Humanitarian agencies must embed inclusion at every stage—assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring.

This requires:

- co-creation workshops and decision-making spaces with directly affected youth;
- safeguarding, trauma-informed approaches, and disability inclusion;
- context-specific methodology, not one model replicated globally;
- safe reporting channels and accountability structures for minors and survivors.

Intersectionality cannot be added later—it must be foundational.

FOR GOVERNMENTS

Create policy environments where youth, women, and refugees can participate: Governments must ensure that local groups led by youth, refugees and/or women can legally organise, register, and participate in humanitarian coordination.

This includes:

- Simplified registration for emerging youth organisations
- Legal recognition of informal refugee-led initiatives and organisations
- Reduced administrative and tax barriers
- Protection of civic space and freedom of association.

Participation must be safe, non-discriminatory, and rights-based.

Remove barriers to participation and mobility: Youth are often excluded due to documentation requirements, travel restrictions, and bureaucratic approval procedures.

Governments should:

- ensure refugees and IDPs can quickly access the necessary documentation through streamlined and efficient processes;
- facilitate visas, permits, and transportation for youth representatives;
- create entry points for youth-led groups in national coordination spaces.

If youth are expected to influence reforms, they must be allowed in the room.

Institutionalise youth and women in decision-making bodies: Governments must ensure permanent seats—not temporary invitations—for youth-led, refugee-led, and women-led organisations in:

- national humanitarian coordination bodies;
- disaster-risk management platforms;
- refugee-response committees;
- multi-stakeholder accountability working groups.

Representation must reflect diversity, not only elite or capital-based youth.

Co-design reforms with youth and local communities: Governments should collaborate with youth-led organisations to shape humanitarian reform agendas, including Humanitarian Response Plans, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plans, national development strategies and GBV/protection frameworks. This ensures reforms are context-driven, not headquarters-driven.

FOR YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Strengthen coalitions, alliances, and internal consultation: Youth organisations should scale collective advocacy through:

- regional and global coalitions;
- rotating youth advisory groups;
- community-based evidence and listening mechanisms.

Collaboration across youth networks amplifies impact and bargaining power.

Generate high-quality local evidence for policy influence: Youth-led research is essential to influence reform.

Organisations should invest in:

- community-based monitoring and rapid assessments;
- research on GBV, climate, mental health and protection access;
- ethical data practices and responsible communication;
- knowledge translation into briefs, infographics, and reports.

Data is leverage. Evidence makes youth undeniable stakeholders.

FOR DONORS

Create dedicated, long-term funding streams for youth-led action: Donors must fund not only projects, but organisational survival and growth.

Funding should include:

- multi-year unrestricted grants;
- institutional support;
- safe spaces, psychosocial support, translation and childcare;
- youth-led monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Short-term funds create dependency; long-term funds create leadership.

Invest in digital access, connectivity, and safe mobility: Digital inequality limits youth participation more than willingness to engage.

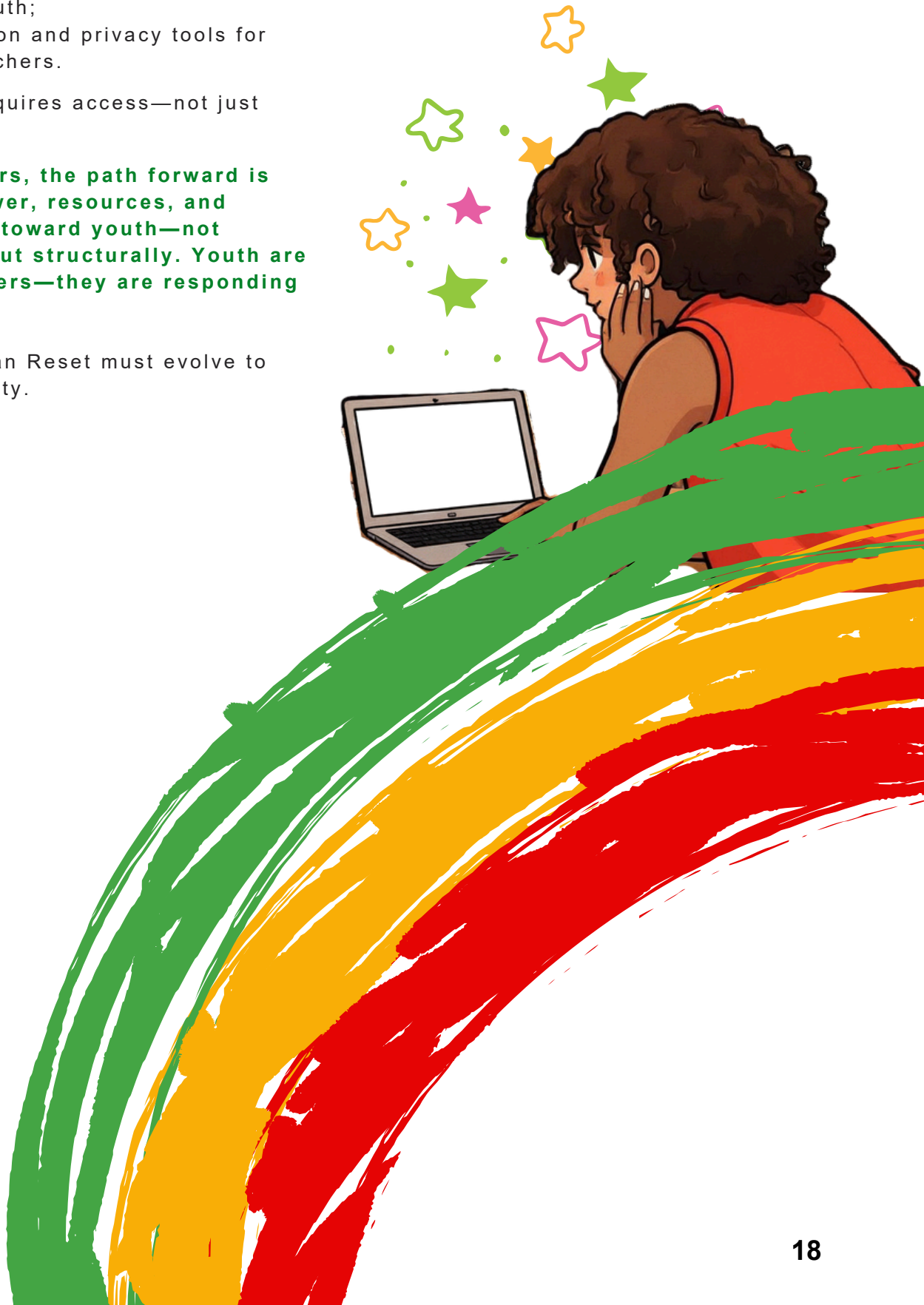
Donors must fund:

- connectivity packages and devices;
- hybrid consultation models and offline access options;
- mobility stipends for refugees and displaced youth;
- data protection and privacy tools for youth researchers.

Participation requires access—not just invitation.

Across all actors, the path forward is clear: shift power, resources, and representation toward youth—not symbolically, but structurally. Youth are not future leaders—they are responding now.

The Humanitarian Reset must evolve to reflect that reality.



#CHANGETHECODE: MANIFESTO FOR A REAL HUMANITARIAN RESET BY YOUNG PEOPLE

WE ARE NOT WAITING FOR A SYSTEM UPDATE. WE ARE REWRITING THE CODE TO UPGRADE THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM.

We are the young people responding in crisis-affected communities, who have long been excluded from humanitarian decision-making despite being the majority of first responders. The humanitarian reset is a chance to rebuild the system from its foundations, grounded in equity, inclusion, and lived experience.

OUR VISION

A humanitarian system where young people and affected communities have an equal say in decision-making.

OUR MISSION:

To shift power, decision-making, and funding towards young people.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Youth-led, Accountability, Transparency, Intersectionality and feminist lens, Solidarity, Decoloniality, and Intergenerational equity

For this Manifesto, we recognise **YOUNG PEOPLE** in all their diversity, extending beyond rigid age brackets to encompass the transition into adulthood. We are youth across all intersecting identities, including but not limited to young women, LGBTQI+ youth, youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, refugees and displaced young people.



OUR DEMANDS

1 Institutionalise equitable and meaningful inclusion by ensuring that young people have power and representation in humanitarian decision-making at all levels:

- Guarantee formally reserved seats for young people in all key coordination, planning, and review spaces.
- Build shared decision-making processes where young people participate as equal partners in shaping policy and programme decisions.

2 Empower young people in every phase of the humanitarian programme cycle:

- Integrate young people as equal partners, shaping the full arc of humanitarian action.
- Mandate co-leadership of young people in preparedness, need assessment, design, implementation, and M&E.

3 Fund power and innovation by young people directly, flexibly, and sustainably:

- Create simple, accessible, youth-friendly funding.
- Introduce quotas of young people in pooled funds.
- Guarantee multi-year, predictable support to youth-led, especially young feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations.
- Establish funding mechanisms where young people co-create strategies and priorities as equal partners.

4

Ensure accountability for youth inclusion in the humanitarian architecture

- Ensure the integrated collection of age-, gender-, and minority disaggregated data.
- Publish regular and accessible progress updates on the Humanitarian Reset.

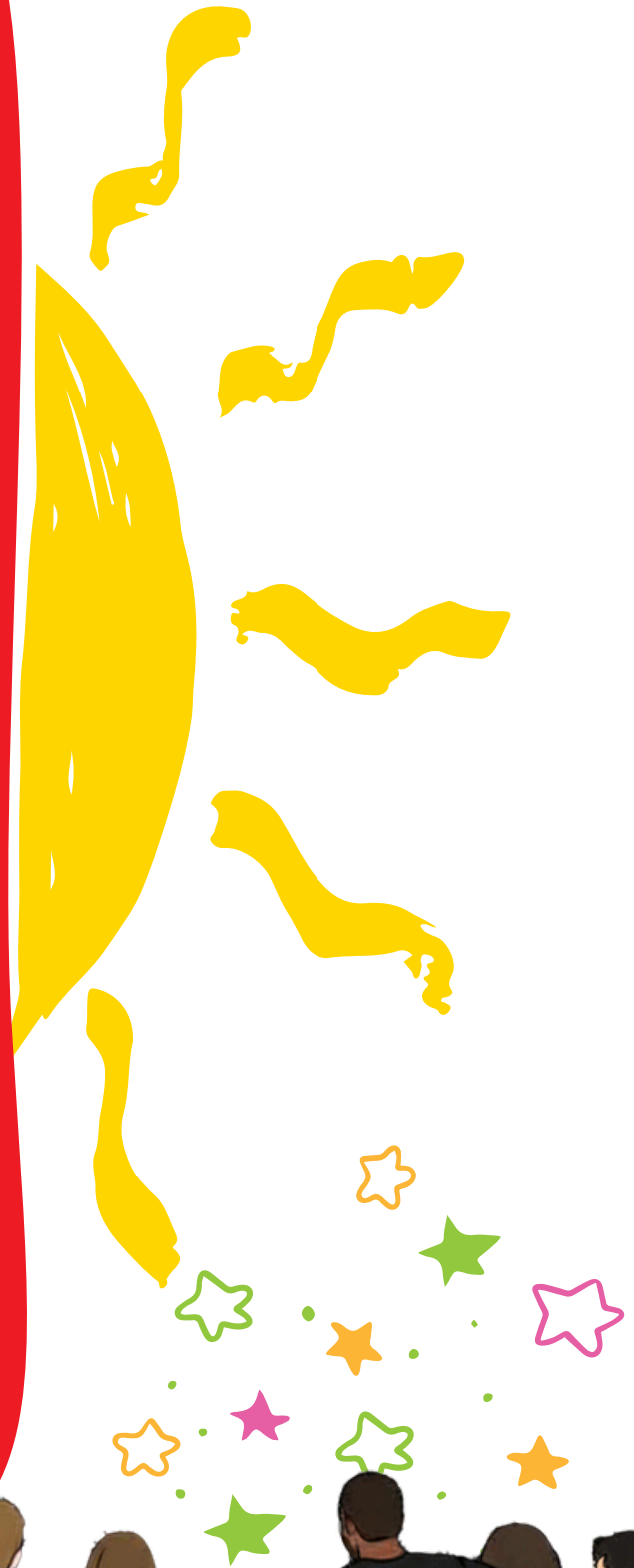
5

Invest in accessible and inclusive capacity development of young people.

- Ensure young people have the skills, tools, and resources to engage meaningfully in humanitarian decision-making.
- Make growth and learning accessible to every young person, leaving no one behind.
- Strengthen intergenerational support and mentorship structures to widen participation.

We call on all stakeholders: governments, humanitarian organisations, donors, and global institutions, to take forward the demands outlined in this manifesto. It is time to make the commitments matter by centring young people's leadership and intersecting identities in humanitarian architecture. We call on young people everywhere to unite, speak out, and drive transformation.

A reset without young people is only rebranding the old system. Together, we will #ChangeTheCode, rewriting the foundations of humanitarian action to build a system that works for, by and with the people it serves.



CHANGE THE CODE
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**GLOBAL
PLATFORMS**
NETWORK FOR
YOUTH-LED
ACTIVISM **act:onaid**