GENDER & ADOLESCENCE: GLOBAL EVIDENCE

Adolescents in crisis: unheard voices

Episode 2: 'There is no school and that's a big problem': adolescent refugees and education

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

December 2021

PODCAST | Adolescents in crisis: unheard voices

'There is no school and that's a big problem': adolescent refugees and education

Fri, 10/22 9:01AM • 33:58

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Makani, adolescents, refugees, GAGE, education, people, Myanmar, Jordan, Yasin, Bangladesh, camps, family, life, UNICEF, support, felt, researchers, research, Syrian refugees, world

SPEAKERS

Yasin:[1] Adolescent refugee living in Jordan
Dr Nicola Jones: Director of GAGE
Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan
Layla:[2] Adolescent Syrian refugee
Martha Dixon: Journalist
Sarah Alheiwidi: GAGE Qualitative Researcher (Jordan)
Dr Khadija Mitu: GAGE Qualitative Research Lead (Chittagong)

00:03
The world's fastest growing humanitarian crisis as 1000s of Rohingya refugees...

00:08
It's estimated that 10,000 Palestinians have had to leave their homes to flee the Israeli...

00:13
For almost as far as the eye can see left and right, a tide of humanity...

Martha Dixon: Journalist 00:20
Welcome to Episode 2 of the GAGE podcast series - Adolescents in crisis: unheard voices. I'm your host journalist, Martha Dixon. In this landmark series, we ask, how can we help create a better future for the millions of young people who've been caught up in the increasing tide of global displacement? This episode is all about education. With groundbreaking research, we get to the root of what's needed to turn young adolescent lives around by handing the microphone to those affected.

Yasin: Adolescent refugee living in Jordan 01:01
There are teachers in the camp, but they charge money for lessons, and I can't afford to pay that money. That's the biggest problem for me now.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 01:11
We look at what works and what doesn't work to support adolescents who are living in refugee camps, or in new unfamiliar host communities, the things that could make or break life ahead.

Sarah Alheiwidi: GAGE (Jordan) 01:25
School dropout is a dream killer for refugees and for adolescent refugees. Whenever they drop out, it's the end of the curve they can't move on.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 01:36
We hear from GAGEs researchers on the ground, who are speaking in depth to adolescents who've had to leave everything they know behind. Because of conflict, persecution, or climate crisis.

Layla: Adolescent Syrian refugee 01:47
We found that they were happy to be heard, as if they were never heard. Nobody was listening to them.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 01:55
And we hear from external stakeholders who are using the evidence from GAGE to reframe policy that supports adolescents in these difficult situations.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 02:06
Without evidence our work is incomplete. And it is not actually important, it is critical. It's the ABC.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 02:19
Millions around the world are currently in refugee camps or unfamiliar new places after being forced from their homes. But what if you're one of those and you're meant to be at school? 14-year-old Yasin lives in a two room tent with seven members of his family in a Rohingya refugee camp in the city of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. He's talking today to his

1 Pseudonym used to protect the identity of interviewees.
2 Pseudonym used to protect the identity of interviewees.

mum about what they can eat, and whether they can afford to pay for lessons. Yasin is one of 20,000 young people all around the world being interviewed for GAGE or Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence. This pioneering study is led by the Overseas Development Institute, and its research partners in East Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. It's all about following adolescents living through crisis situations over a period of nine years to understand their life paths. Yasin tells researchers why his family left Myanmar.

Yasin: Adolescent refugee living in Jordan 03:38

At that time, the Myanmar army was trying to send us away. They forced those of us who were hiding inside our houses to leave, they locked up and burned our houses. It was a really bad situation. They were burning so many houses around us. We were really frightened at the time. But now there is no school. I am feeling really bad about that. Thinking back to when we were in Myanmar, I was really scared that they would come and kill us. So emotionally right now I feel depressed and stressed. We also felt very stressed back in Myanmar, and it was like living in hell.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 04:30

Yasin has endured an extremely traumatic time. He needs stability and to go back to school, but there's no formal provision of education for him now. Bangladesh didn't sign up to the 1951 Global Refugee Convention. And it doesn't consider Rohingya as refugees or as citizens. That puts people like Yasin in a limbo. He's now stateless, and not given any formal support in his adopted home.

Yasin: Adolescent refugee living in Jordan 05:06

When I was in Myanmar, I went to lessons in the mosque, and I really wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to see all sorts of students. It was my dream. But now I can't do this because of what's going on. I can't carry on with my studies because of everything that's going on.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 05:24

There are some classes for younger children in the camps set up by NGOs and UN agencies, offering informal education and a space to interact with peers. But older children have little apart from tuition classes they need to pay for given by tutors who are fellow refugees.

Yasin: Adolescent refugee living in Jordan 05:48

There are teachers in the camp, but they charge money for lessons and I can't afford to pay that money. That's the biggest problem for me right now.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 06:00

Yasin seeing is just one of an estimated million plus Rohingya refugees living in 32 makeshift camps around the city of Cox's Bazar. You're seeing his family came in one of the large waves of refugee arrivals in 2017. But Rohingya Muslims have been fleeing persecution in Myanmar for decades. Families who fled to Bangladesh are not allowed to build permanent houses, and they remain reliant on food assistance. Local schools have also been off limits, although there is now a pilot programme to take in 10,000 children up to the age of 14, following pressure from the international community. For Yasin life is not easy. He told us more about where he's living right now.

Yasin: Adolescent refugee living in Jordan 06:57

I don't feel good here because we're staying is so tiny. There are only two rooms, we can't fit eight members of our family into the two rooms we have. The space is very, very small for us. We are also facing lots of problems because the camp is in a hilly area so there are landslides. It always feels like our house might be buried. There were rats who ate the floor of our tent. We also can't go anywhere freely. The army in the Bangladesh government are always checking on us. We're always being monitored. And that's not a nice feeling because we just want to be free.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 07:46

Restricted in movement and school on hold. Yasin seemingly faces a difficult transition to adulthood. In this cramped camp, it's difficult to do the normal things teenagers do.

Yasin: Adolescent refugee living in Jordan 08:06

There is no school, especially since the pandemic and that's a really big problem for me. I really want to hang out with other kids my age. I like messing around with friends who are similar ages to me, and I like to play football as well as studying for school. I like going off and visiting people. But here it's just so difficult. I can't play around there is no space to play and no place to study. So it's really difficult to be a teenager here.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 08:46

Yasin's story is just one of 1000s that GAGE researchers are capturing the methods are in depth looking at different aspects of adolescent capabilities. And crucially speaking over that period of nine years to find out what really happens over time to these young people caught up in impossible situations. Analysis by GAGE has found there's a long way to go to meet the goals described in the new UN blueprint, the Global Compact for refugees. In it education was prioritized. The UN asked the international community to support national systems. This way local schools and universities could welcome refugees. For the Rohingya, that's not the reality.

Dr Khadija Mitu: GAGE Qualitative Research Lead

(Chittagong) 09:35

With GAGE we are working with adolescent girls and boys in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. And I'm really passionate about this research.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 09:47

Dr Khadija Mitu is GAGEs qualitative research lead in Bangladesh.

Dr Khadija Mitu: GAGE Qualitative Research Lead (Chittagong) 09:53

And they are one of the most persecuted, displaced people in the world. But still a huge number of adolescents and population are in a limbo. And their futures are uncertain. And they don't know what they are going to do in the future, how they would be surviving, and how their life-changing transitions will come into place. But then, what we find is that, although different UN organizations and all these humanitarian organizations that are working in the camps, basically it was to respond to the emergency situation.

But now that they have been in Bangladesh for a few years, we found that there are no long-term vision or long-term plans for these population, and the government policy and all the humanitarian organizations' collaboration, were focusing on emergency response. And also, since the government is focusing on the repatriation of the Rohingya people to Myanmar, they are not willing to do anything long term. And as we know, these Rohingya adolescents are not allowed to work outside, they don't have a work permit or they cannot go outside the camps, they are restricted in the camps, and they're not adopted to the public education system on the Bangladesh education system. All they get is non-formal education in the camps, and then some very limited skills development programmes that they're having in the camps, and (this is) not really helping them for their future, for their aspirations.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 11:57

Khadija explains why GAGE is focusing on adolescents with its research.

Dr Khadija Mitu: GAGE Qualitative Research Lead (Chittagong) 12:02

But at the ground level, when we went to them, when our researchers talked to them, we found that they were happy to be heard, as if they were never heard, nobody was listening to them. And they, we felt that they were a group of people at a certain age that are left out from the big scenario. You know, if we want to meet the Sustainable Development Goals in the world, we have to include adolescents. I can see the depressions you know, because there's a vacuum there, you know, when I asked them about – I want to give some examples – when we interviewed the young, you know, adolescents and we were asking about their aspirations, their dreams, they tell us that they want to be that, but they corrected themselves saying we wanted to be that – so they had dreams, they had aspirations, but they know that they're not going to have that in these particular situations.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 13:20

There's no easy solution to giving access to education for the Rohingya refugees. GAGE research suggests that because repatriation looks unlikely, providing schooling in the camps has to be the best way forward. But with that comes work and future life options, which are currently very restricted for the Rohingya in Bangladesh.

Dr Khadija Mitu: GAGE Qualitative Research Lead (Chittagong) 13:41

Bangladesh is not a rich country, it is a developing country, and the area where Rohingyas are migrated in Bangladesh, is one of the poor areas. And that area is already suffering from poverty, illiteracy, you know, less economic opportunities and climate change effects as well. So now in that area, the local people, the Rohingya people, sort of outnumbered the local people. So, there was a huge impact in that local area, on the lands on the market, on their lives and everything. So in that context, we found that Bangladesh is not ready to accept it. So altogether it's a situation where the government is in a context where they want these people to go back. And Myanmar is not taking them back. So this situation is making adolescents and Rohingya people in general, very vulnerable.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 14:56

In another part of the world where GAGE works, it's a very different education story. 14-year-old Layla is a Syrian refugee now living in Amman in Jordan, where her family rent an apartment. GAGE researchers have been following her story for the last few years. Like all Syrians in Jordan, Layla can go to normal state school. Although literacy and numeracy rates are still low. School in Jordan is split into two shifts, and refugees are relegated to the afternoons where there are often fewer resources. As well as that though in the mornings, Layla has been going to UNICEF's Makani community programme, she explained it to GAGE researchers.

Layla: Adolescent Syrian refugee 16:00

Teachers at Makani, they speak really nicely to us and give us advice on how to have a better life. You can love them very easily because they're so nice. When I was young I joined Makani because there were things I didn't know, like speaking

English. My mom told me to go that I learned English really well. And I'm continuing now. They really helped me.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 16:28

I work with UNICEF Jordan, managing what we call the Makani program, Makani in Arabic means 'in my place' or 'in my space'.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 16:39

Kenan Madi from UNICEF in Jordan explains what Makani is.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 16:43

It's like a community programme which consists of around 140 community centers called Makani center. And in those centers we provide all that UNICEF does under one roof, meaning we provide different services like education, with the theme of Learning Support Services, and we provide child protection services. We also have the skills building theme, and that's mainly focusing on adolescents and youth for children above 13.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 17:13

For Layla, it's had a positive impact. She now has big plans for her continued education and the future. But the journey to get here from her home country of Syria has been hard.

Layla: Adolescent Syrian refugee 17:28

I remember when I was young, there was no war. Everything was normal. After that, the war came and the bombs started. We were very worried one of us was going to be caught in the explosions and die. So we came to Jordan. Before I was living with my extended family in my grandparents' house. It was a big house. When we came to Jordan, I was really shocked. And I said to myself, how can we leave Syria because it was my home country.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 17:55

Despite all this and being just 14 Layla has a positive outlook about life in her adopted country. She says the Makani classes have really helped

Layla: Adolescent Syrian Refugee 18:06

I noticed that Makani has helped a lot of girls is made some people's personality much better. Some of the people who went were really angry and had no self-esteem. They go into a better place where their mood was really good. They made them happy. Some of the families tell their children that they're idiots and they can't finish that education. At Makani, we are told no one is an idiot. Everyone is smart, you can succeed. You just have to try. I really noticed this at Makani.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 18:42

Layla sees Makani classes as a great way to help integration as well as providing aspirations for a settled future.

Layla: Adolescent Syrian refugee 18:55

Makani has made me love Jordanians and show me that they are nice. They tell us there is nothing called a refugee. Everyone is the same. They love everyone. They love Syrians as much as they love Jordanians. For me, they changed me. I had no confidence in communicating with Jordanian people. But afterwards, I felt I could really talk to them and I realized they're nice people. I used to love Syria but Jordan is now my second country. Now I'm used to my daily routine here and now consider Jordan my second home.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 19:28

Layla now has big plans.

Layla: Adolescent Syrian refugee 19:31

I'm so happy that Makani was able to change people. For me. They told me how to invest time. I want to be an astronaut. I love space. I love the stars and everything in space. I'm always looking on the internet to research all of this. My mom knows about my dream because I tell her everything I found out on the internet about space. She encourages me and tells me to move on with education. It is not an impossible thing to do. I'm good at school, and I'm very good at science. She sees my results and says that I could be an astronaut and it's not impossible if I work hard.

Sarah Alheiwidi: GAGE (Jordan) 20:28

Throughout our research, we have seen how it does change the attitude towards education, the attitude towards the community and relationships inside. Throughout Makani.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 20:42

Sarah Alheiwidi is a GAGE researcher in Jordan. She's speaking to hundreds of adolescents on the ground to find out many aspects of their lives, including education, and extra support schemes like the Makani programme.

Sarah Alheiwidi: GAGE (Jordan) 20:57

I remember the first year we started working when we speak to an adolescent. He can't describe all these words life skills, and empowerment and self-care, self-love, self-confidence. These words weren't common, and (after a) few years now, participating especially in Makani, we can hear all of this, they could speak clearly about their emotions, they could speak clearly about their needs, about their demands, they can demand clearly their rights. It is quite different we can all see the huge impact.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 21:34

Despite positive reviews schemes like the UNICEF Makani programme are not widespread resources for refugees around the world. Here's UNICEF's Kenan Madi again.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 21:45

I think it's a new model, where actually, I mean like any other sector, you have people who are used to do the business in a specific way. People get used to what they do and they it becomes suddenly the norm and the trend and it's like anything like community behavior becomes like any and again, it's like any sector, you come and you start the work, those are the SOPs, those are the work you have done. When you are responding to emergency you do this, when you are responding to development, you do that, and all of that.

However, I mean, here in Jordan, we had an innovative team who were thinking about things differently from children perspective. And they need a lot of things: they are here in a in a new country, they escaped a war, disaster or whatever they are coming from, they need different and actually, they should be the ones who decide what they want. One service is not enough. I mean, all of us will need to have this holistic approach, specifically where you are vulnerable and you're coming from a vulnerable background. With a very weak support system. There is not really a support system at the house, at the neighborhood, at the street at the family. So you need to come to that center and choose what they want are actually take all what is there to help you to reach your full potential.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 23:20

Kenan says he believes schemes like Makani can help adolescents take different life paths.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 23:26

What I say to our colleague, sometimes, because we questioned what are we doing really, are we helping those vulnerable community at the end of the day or not? So this is a big question for anyone working in the sector will have. And I say we are giving a hand for those people who need just to grasp and go to that opportunity. In a matter of days or months or short term, they can be dragged in a totally different direction. Someone who has the potential to be a very successful person could be and end up in a vegetable market, just moving the cart at 13 years old.

What Makani is doing now as we are doing what we call the mechanic graduation strategy, where we are referring those adolescent and youth to the TVET to the technical and vocational training and we say okay, you are working now at a young age. But let's do this right. I mean, you are now 13 and – wait a second – let's build your capacity and try to put you in school. You are 15 years, 16 years, 17 years old now? Good. Let's go to this school six months and get a certificate, certified training and then get a better job – a job actually which has terms and conditions.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 24:51

Kenan says a new programme brought in during covid to help with computer and digital skills is proving successful.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 24:59

It's a game changer by the way. So, if you're in a refugee camp you don't have access, you definitely don't have a computer at home. If we don't do this, access to them they will definitely not be able to deal with a computer for the whole of their life. Imagine how those children are feeling that where they can see the world heading towards digital and they cannot have this access. Imagine how traumatizing is this, Honestly speaking. I mean, one of the things which we got to know through research – we were not actually aware that they are aware – that the adolescents and youth they were talking about how this is should be their basic rights now.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 25:51

Kenan says capturing what the refugees themselves actually want, as GAGE is doing is crucial to UNICEF and future education programmes around the world.

Kenan Madi: UNICEF Jordan 26:02

Without evidence our work is incomplete. And it is not actually important, it is critical. It's the ABC. So we need to listen to the beneficiary from a different length. So when someone like GAGE comes and they have their own developed and advanced framework, because it's very important to hear from those adolescent and youth what does those services are this programme Makani is doing to them and why it is important and where we can do better. And when again, when you talk about the GAGE, it's longitudinal. So this is very important because all of us do evaluations of programmes and we know the impact now, but we don't know how this impact will continue after three years. And that's very critical and very unique to the ODI GAGE context by the way,

We get a lot of requests from other countries to understand Makani and how they can replicate it. Impact and evaluation and research will help us to replicate that in case it proves successful. I know that specific country in the region, they are really thinking about it. I mean, we hope there will be no emergencies in the world. But in any new emergencies people will be thinking about how they do businesses better.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 27:38

The Makani programme in Jordan has been an important addition to schooling for Syrian refugees. Since the Syrian

conflict erupted in 2011 Syrian refugees have been flooding into Jordan. Officially the numbers are at 650,000. But unofficially, it's more than double or even triple that. A large percentage of these refugees are at school age. Although Jordan has opened up its schools to refugees, dropout rates are high, and figures show fewer than half complete secondary education. This is the director of GAGE, Nicola Jones.

Dr Nicola Jones: Director of GAGE 28:18

Even when refugee adolescents are allowed to access schooling, there are a number of challenges that make succeeding in school very difficult for them. First, transportation is expensive. But for girls in particular, this is often critical, as they're at high risk of sexual harassment on the way to school. And this is a big issue in a society where girls' honour is paramount. If girls report harassment to their parents, our research highlights that they may then be barred by their parents or older brothers for attending, for fear that it could bring the family's name into disrepute.

Secondly, the quality of education is often very problematic indeed. While Syrian refugees in Jordan are undoubtedly much better off than their Rohingya counterparts, in that they're allowed to go to school, the quality of that schooling is generally poor. So our research findings show that even on basic reading and math tests that they have very low literacy and numeracy rates on average.

There's then the issue of high levels of corporal punishment in boys' schools, with boys reporting often very violent forms of punishment, as well as poor quality teachers, again, especially in boys' schools, as teaching is not considered a prestigious occupation for men.

And then there are very real challenges in terms of affordability. So, while there is some cash for education assistance, for example, UNICEF in Jordan has the Hajati programme which provides about 10,000 families with cash stipends to encourage children to go to school. But these programmes do not meet the high level of demand. And then at university this is even more challenging. Scholarships are very, very limited. But without which the overwhelming majority of refugees can't afford to continue in their education. And this can be very demotivating.

Sarah Alheiwidi: GAGE (Jordan) 30:13

We have been interviewing so many families, so many, so many people.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 30:17

And Sarah Alheiwidi, again.

Sarah Alheiwidi: GAGE (Jordan) 30:19

We know that there is so many drop outs. We have been working with adolescents for years. And we have seen so many reasons for them to drop out. So many for girls, and also boys. So if we're going to talk about reasons it's going to be child marriage, it's going to be work, it's going to be community norms, as in girls have to stop their education at 14 or whenever they read and write. This is what we always hear. When a girl reads and writes, she has to stop her education.

We always hear from participants that if I were in Syria, I would continue my education, I will follow up my education, I will never stop it, I will get a degree. And the reason we have different reasons. One of the biggest challenges in education in Jordan, for Syrian refugees, and for non-Jordanian people is expensive education. It's not provided for free. And scholarships for Syrian refugees is very low numbered, and it needs very high grades, very high grades. So basically, the adolescents lose hope in continuing university and getting a degree. So basically, they stop early, because they know they can't continue, they can't pay for a private education. And there is no sponsorship for their education. So this is one of the things that is different.

Their hope is being buried because of limitations. So basically, I think our gap is reaching out to all the adolescents, not a part of them, not only part of them. We need more and extra funding to support their scholarships.

I think we can say the general overview that adolescents are fighting so hard to get what they deserve. They are not weak, they are so strong, and they are looking forward for, what they are planning for, they are searching for a future.

School dropout is a dream killer for refugees and for adults and refugees. It's not allowing them to build their futures. Whenever they drop out, it's the end of the curve, they can't move on after that. Their education is the key for their future, for whatever they want or they dream to be.

Martha Dixon: Journalist 33:09

You've been listening to Episode 2 of the GAGE Podcast Series – Adolescents in crisis: unheard voices, where we shine a light on the stories of young people who've been forced from their homes and look at what's needed to turn their lives around. You can access much more information on all of GAGE's work in their new book, *Adolescents in Humanitarian Crisis*, written by GAGE researchers across East Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. It synthesizes the research to date about adolescent refugees, as well as those who have been internally displaced.

About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org.uk for more information.

GENDER & ADOLESCENCE: GLOBAL EVIDENCE

GAGE Programme Office
Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom
Email: gage@odi.org.uk
Web: www.gage.odi.org

Disclaimer

This document is an output of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme which is funded by UK aid from the UK government. However, views expressed and information contained within do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies and are not endorsed by the UK government, which accepts no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

Copyright

ISBN: 978-1-913610-64-7

Front cover: © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE

UKaid
from the British people