**Investigate adolescents’ situations** 

An important step in planning your work with the Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation (Adolescent Kit) is to identify the adolescents in your programme context, especially those most in need of support, and to understand key issues that affect their lives.

Adolescents are an extremely diverse group with different needs, interests and challenges. As you get started with using the Adolescent Kit, find out as much as you can about adolescents in your area. Think about *which* adolescents might benefit from the approaches and activities within the Adolescent Kit, and how you can design your intervention so that it meets their needs. Once your intervention is underway, continue to update information about adolescents’ situations regularly and adapt activities to meet changes in their circumstances, needs and interests.

Make sure that you **involve adolescents!** Adolescent girls and boys know more about their situations than anyone else, and may have creative ways of collecting information about their peers. *Refer to the* ***Collecting information about adolescents*** *tool for guidance on collecting data and consulting adolescents.*

Use the questions below to guide your investigation of adolescents’ situations. Add any others that make sense in your particular context. *Refer to the* ***Questions for investigating adolescents*** *tool*

**1. Who are the adolescents?**

As a first step, try to find out *who* the adolescents are in your area and where they can be found. This may include adolescents of different ages, ethnicity, clan, language, sexual orientation and religion, and those with disabilities. In particular, **try to identify the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys,** who are typically overlooked in programmes and need support the most. [[1]](#footnote-0)

***Insert icon for: Reach out to all adolescents***

**2**. **How many adolescents are there?** 

Try to obtain the strongest demographic profile possible of adolescents in your community, calculating the overall number of adolescents, as well as the number of adolescent girls and boys from different ethnic, language, religious and other backgrounds. This will help you to set enrolment targets for your intervention with the Adolescent Kit, and to reach those most in need of support.

**3. What kinds of humanitarian circumstances are adolescents dealing with?**

Consider whether adolescents are in the first few weeks of a crisis, undergoing a longer-term humanitarian emergency situation (such as ongoing displacement within a refugee or IDP camp), experiencing a conflict, or living in a fairly permanent and stable development context.

The type of humanitarian context, anticipated duration of adolescents’ displacement, and the prospects for recovery can affect how you design and run your intervention with the Adolescent Kit. It’s also important to bear in mind that adolescents’ circumstances can change rapidly in humanitarian settings – and that it is likely that you will have to adapt your intervention in response to those changes.

*Link to the* ***Adapting to the humanitarian context*** *tool to understand how different humanitarian circumstances may affect activities and approaches with adolescents.*

**3. What kinds of challenges do adolescents face?**

Find out what is happening in adolescent girls’ and boys’ lives and use this information to design an intervention that helps them to cope with their challenges and build on opportunities in their environments.

Adolescents may face unique challenges in humanitarian situations. These could include disruption to their communities, interruption to their education and separation from their families, exploitative labour, child marriage, violence and abuse, or recruitment into fighting forces. Adolescents may live in over-crowded, unsanitary conditions, and lack basic food, health, security and other services. Adolescents may be bored and idle, lacking opportunities to go to school or support themselves and their families, or they may be overwhelmed and burdened with adult responsibilities such as work, child care and domestic chores that make it difficult for them to participate in programmes intended for them. They may feel frustrated, discouraged, frightened or anxious about the future. Like adolescents everywhere, they may also be concerned about their friendships, families, romantic relationships and futures.

*Link to the* ***Exploring challenges and opportunities*** *tool*

**4. What kind of family situations do adolescents have? What are their roles and responsibilities?**

Try to get a sense of adolescents’ family situations, and their roles and responsibilities at home. Many adolescents may take on new roles in humanitarian situations, such as heading households, minding siblings, working, and becoming parents themselves. These new roles have implications for the type of activities with the Adolescent Kit that may be relevant to adolescents’ needs and interests, as well as for the time they may have available to participate in interventions.

**5. How do adolescents spend their time?**

Investigate how adolescent girls and boys spend their days, where they go, and what they do. Adolescents’ daily lives may leave them with long periods of the day when they are unoccupied and unsupervised, or their days may be very busy with household tasks or work. Adolescents may be confined to their homes due to household responsibilities, social norms or disabilities, or they may spend long periods away from their homes earning income (or seeking to do so), often through unsafe and potentially harmful activities.

Understanding how adolescents spend their time can help you to identify windows of opportunity (both time and place) for reaching them through the Adolescent Circlesapproach. ***Insert icon for: Improvise and adapt***

**6. What kind of environments do adolescents live in?**

Learn as much as you can about adolescents’ cultural, social and physical environments, as these can affect opportunities to play, learn and interact with others through interventions with the Adolescent Kit.

*Cultural environment:* Cultural, social, and religious norms may influence the types of activities that are considered acceptable for adolescents. In many contexts it is considered inappropriate or unsafe for adolescent boys and girls to interact, and/or for adolescent girls to move about or be seen unaccompanied in public. Marginalised adolescents may face discrimination or stigma, limiting their opportunities to participate in activities with other adolescent girls and boys. Religious practice, including daily prayer or annual holidays, can also affect the time adolescentshave to participate in activities.

*Social environment:* Adolescents’ ethnic, religious or clan identity, as well as their family connections, place of origin or association with a political or military group, can shape how they relate to others – particularly in conflict-affected situations.

*Physical environment***:** Adolescents who live in remote areas may not have the time or money to reach programmes that are located in community centres. Hazards such as traffic, road conditions, or the possibility of harassment, sexual assault, or robbery can also inhibit adolescents’ movement around their communities (often disproportionately creating barriers for girls and those with disabilities) and their participation in Adolescent Circles*.*

**7. What kind of activities are adolescents interested in?** Even in difficult circumstances adolescents may enjoy activities such as playing sports, meeting friends, cooking, or caring for younger siblings. Ask adolescents what they enjoy or would like to try, and use this information to plan and run activities with the Adolescent Kit. ***Insert icon for: Let adolescents take the lead***

**8. What knowledge and skills do adolescents want to gain?** A top priority of adolescents in humanitarian circumstances is to gain knowledge and skills that will help them in their adult roles as heads of households, parents, students, earners and citizens. They may be curious about certain issues, or want to know how to manage their current circumstances and contribute to their communities. Take time to discuss the type of skills and knowledge that adolescents want to gain through an intervention with the Adolescent Kit and select activities that meet their interests and needs. ***Insert icon for: Challenge and encourage adolescents***

**9. What kind of relationships do adolescents have?** Adolescents may experience shifts in their relationships as they grow and develop and their circumstances change. In humanitarian settings, adolescents are often isolated from their peers, and may experience tension with others in their households or community. Talk to adolescents about their relationships with peers, friends, family members and others. Use this information to plan and run activities with the Adolescent Kit that help them to strengthen positive relationships, and to address challenging ones.[[2]](#footnote-1)
***Insert icon for: Build connections***

**10. What are adolescents’ hopes and goals?** Feeling *hopeful with realistic goals for the future* is a key element of psychosocial wellbeing. Talk to adolescents about their hopes and goals for their families and communities, and the changes they would like to see in their lives. As much as possible, plan and run activities that can help adolescents to develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their goals and improve their immediate circumstances. ***Insert icon for: Build on the positive***

**Bringing it all together**

The information that you collect regarding adolescents’ circumstances and lives will help you to plan and run your intervention with the Adolescent Kit. The most important thing to remember is to take a flexible approach, and to design your activities and approaches in line with the particular needs of adolescent girls and boys in *your* community.

**Monitor and adapt**

Investigating adolescents’ situations is not just a one-time exercise that you do before setting up your intervention with the Adolescent Kit. It is something that you will need to do continuously as you work with adolescent girls and boys. As their situations change – as the humanitarian context evolves, as they grow and develop, and life throws new challenges at them – you will need to keep adapting your approach.

As you move forward, make sure that you continue asking questions, observing adolescents closely and monitoring the overall situation in the community. Run activities that can help you to learn more about their lives and use this information to plan your work together. *Link to the* ***Activities for learning from and about adolescents*** *tool*

1. This can be difficult – vulnerable adolescents often disappear in humanitarian situations, and you may need to enlist the support of community members and other adolescents to actively seek them out. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Adolescent Circles can also help adolescents to form new relationships by providing opportunities to make friends (or to spend time with friends they don’t see very often). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)