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Contributing to the Workplan for Member States  
The role and priorities of youth  
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Good morning. Thank you to the organizers and to all of you for being here to discuss such a pressing matter. I am very excited to be speaking today with my fellow panelists and on behalf of the UN Major Group of Children and Youth.

To give a bit of background, the UN MGCY is a General Assembly mandated space for the engagement of children and youth in intergovernmental processes within the UN. It is a space for young people to discuss ideas, build networks, and work collectively towards expanding and advancing the role of children and youth. The group also acts as a bridge ensuring that children and youth are afforded the right to attend and intervene in official UN meetings.

I'm going to touch on a couple of focus areas that the Major Group would like to advocate for and stress in these discussions. To reiterate some figures, the number of international migrants reached 244 million people in 2015. More than 65 million people around the world are forcibly displaced. 21.3 million are refugees, and more than half of refugees are youth under the age of 18. Because youth makeup such a large portion of the community, it only makes sense that youth be given opportunities to be involved in the design and implementation of humanitarian and development frameworks related to migration at different levels.

You may have read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which Freire demonstrates the importance of allowing individuals to have a voice because they themselves are experts on their own situations. Who knows what life is like for migrants and refugees living in run-down buildings in urban centers or cold tents in refugee camps better than the migrants and refugees who live there and experience this reality? Civil society and youth organizations are able to provide an understanding and a perspective on the current conditions of migrants. Thus it is imperative that they have a seat at the table. The fact that a UN mandated and self-organized youth representative is at the table today on this panel is huge and shows that such interventions must keep taking place in order to ensure that everyone in communities has a voice and the ability to participate beyond the reach of dialogue

UN MGCY strongly believes that the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration should be reflective of the needs of *all* migrants, whether migrating by choice or by need. Additionally, the scope for this should be expansive. It should include, but not be limited to factors, such as conflict, climate change, epidemics, chemical pollution, and human induced hazards.

To make this a reality, the process should take into account the perspectives of migrants from a range of backgrounds, paying particular attention to the needs and rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups. This includes young people who often face a particular set of challenges during their journeys and in their host communities. Such challenges, of course, include accessing traditional youth priorities such as security, education, and employment, but also accessing basic social services including healthcare, legal recognition within their countries of residence, and safe and legal travel routes.

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While a rights-based and people-centered approach should be at the core of any migration policy, simply meeting the basic needs of young migrants will not be enough to truly utilize their potential. Youth must be provided with designated spaces to innovate and to create solutions to complex problems. Born out of a class where the main goal was to come up with a digital solution to the refugee crisis, Urban Refuge, a team of students that I'm a part of, is working to map organizations and services to make aid more accessible for refugees and vulnerable individuals in Amman, Jordan. This was the first class of its kind at my university and as mainly international relations students with no technical or coding background, we didn't know if we'd even be able to create something. Now, a year after the start of the class, we have built the app with the help of Microsoft, we've compiled hundreds of organizations to add to our database, and we are working to assemble a team of interns in Amman to continue verifying locations for our launch this spring. I share the story of Urban Refuge because there are many groups of students and young people like us who are committed to building something to abate the effects of migration and to advocate for the rights of refugees and migrants.

However, these types of innovations are difficult when youth do not have the education or the support to do so. The UNHCR reports that only 50% of refugee children under their mandate have access to primary education. To put this into perspective in the Syrian case, if the Syrian refugee population were a country, that country would have the lowest school enrollment rate in the world. Education is a key component of the 2030 Agenda because through education many of the other Sustainable Development Goals can be fulfilled. For instance, studies have shown that education helps in reducing the rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, allowing girls and women to reach their full potential and bridging gender gaps. In order to mitigate the difficulties associated with providing education to refugees, formal and informal educational programs must be promoted.

In addition to education, UN MGCY also advocates for vocational and skills trainings to create opportunities for the economic, social, and political empowerment of migrants and refugees. Similar to education, livelihood and vocational programs have several benefits. They allow individuals to learn skills; they create work opportunities, especially for women and youth; they help to improve host community relations by often bringing together refugees and vulnerable individuals from the host state to participate together in trainings; they provide psychosocial support; and they allow refugees to feel a greater sense of independence because they are able to work rather than rely on cash assistance. In order to promote capacity development through vocational programs, a greater emphasis on the incorporation of local actors in the planning and implementation of these programs is imperative. Refugees are not a homogeneous group and different individuals have different skills, experiences, and needs. For this reason, mapping existing skills in communities and also studying market needs can allow for the creation of more sustainable and effective vocational trainings. In addition, efficient processes for the evaluation of foreign qualifications and protection from exploitation in the labor market is crucial in ensuring the financial empowerment of young migrants and refugees.

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With the global migration crises moving from emergency to protracted, a shift from humanitarian to development responses is necessary to ensure that the needs of migrants, refugees, and host communities are met. At the end of 2015, the 10 countries with the most refugees were all developing nations. By shifting funding and objectives from a long-term humanitarian assistance approach to a more development-based agenda, migrants and refugees and host countries and their populations can all prosper from the sustainable programs put in place. Displacement, although tragic and uprooting, can lead to opportunities that states should seize. Aid spent on development can provide far-reaching programs, and migrants and refugees bring different skills and backgrounds to host communities that can be utilized to build up that country.

Before I conclude, I want to share a short anecdote that I think highlights the way many people underestimate the power of youth until they are proven wrong. While the Urban Refuge team was conducting outreach with other apps and digital solutions to learn about best practices, we stumbled upon a company that was mapping organizations for refugees just as we planned to do. They had launched in other countries and were planning to launch in Jordan in a couple of months. Instead of duplicating efforts, we considered teaming up with this company in order to help them create the app. However, the company was apprehensive to work with students because they feared we weren't committed enough and that we would become less dedicated to the project after the class ended. We ended up deciding against the partnership and continued pursuing our own app. Needless to say, the other company has still not launched their app and was not as established as they made themselves out to be and every member of our original class is still an active member of the group.

Youth have skills, creativity, and ideas and when we have the opportunities to learn and grow we can make a large impact. The expertise of youth must be tapped into, and migrant and refugee youth must have a say in their futures and the programs that are being planned to address issues that directly affect them. We must continue to recognize the impact and the power of children and youth and empower young people to be a part of the planning, decision-making, and implementation of programs and processes to create a just and sustainable future for all. Thank you.