



GLOBAL YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2018

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

Global Youth Advisory Council Delegates attending an event at the Palais des Nations, Geneva.
UNHCR/Jean Marc Ferré, 2017.

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GYAC Delegate with the High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. Filippo Grandi at UNHCR HQ Geneva, December 2017 (UNHCR/Jean Marc Ferré).

Background

During 2015-2016, UNHCR and Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) led the Global Refugee Youth Consultations (GRYC), which involved over 1450 youth from 34 countries. The GRYC was a participatory process that engaged young people to share their perspectives on the challenges that young refugees face and empowered them to propose solutions. Participating youth crafted a framework for action, the Core Actions for Refugee Youth, and recommendations for different actors on how to implement that framework. The overwhelmingly positive engagement of these young people in the youth-themed UNHCR-NGO Consultations, as well as the High Commissioner's 2016 Protection Dialogue on Children on the Move, prompted the High Commissioner to commit to the creation of a more sustainable mechanism to facilitate the engagement of young people of concern at the global level.

WHO WE ARE

The GYAC 2018 is comprised of 15 refugee youth between the ages of 18 and 25, who come from diverse backgrounds and who currently live in Australia, Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Kenya, Morocco, Pakistan, Switzerland, Uganda, the United States of America and Zimbabwe. Each has travelled his/her own path and lived his/her own unique story.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

What the GYAC Delegates have in common is engagement in their communities and enthusiasm to bring a youth perspective to global level discussion on refugee issues. GYAC Delegates are committed to use their voices to represent and amplify the concerns and suggestions of young people and other community members who might otherwise not be heard.

ABOUT THE REPORT

The GYAC Annual Report 2018 highlights the activities and achievements of the GYAC as a body and also celebrates the individual contributions of its members during this inaugural year. It showcases how youth leaders can advocate for refugee education, promote peace processes, bring community-level voices into global level policy forums, empower young people to speak out against sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), foster youth-to-youth mental health and psychosocial support, build livelihoods initiatives, and combat discrimination and xenophobia.

GYAC contributions and achievements

During January and February 2018, the GYAC established internal leadership and communications structures. The group elected **Foni Joyce Vuni** and **Arash Bordbar** as Co-Chairs of the GYAC. Based on their interests and areas of expertise, GYAC members took responsibility to serve as focal points for key thematic areas including sports, culture, SGBV, women's empowerment, gender equality, education, mental health and psychosocial support, and outreach to vulnerable youth.

Arash
Bordbar
and Foni
Joyce Vuni.



GYAC engagement in the consultation process on the Global Compact on Refugees

Leading up to the drafting of the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), the GYAC members had been involved in the Thematic Consultations II & III in October and IV & V in November 2017, and also participated in the High Commissioner's Dialogue in December 2017.

At that time, GYAC members drafted and submitted a [Recommendations Paper](#) and produced a [video](#) sharing their recommendations to inform initial drafting of the GCR.

During March through May 2018, the GYAC continued its involvement in the GCR drafting process by conducting community consultations in 10 countries with over 250 young refugees, community leaders, members of the host country and service providers to gather their feedback on the early drafts of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Consultations were undertaken virtually via an online survey, but also through in-person focus groups.



Mariama Saran Sow leading a community consultation in Germany.



Daniela María Pérez Obando leading a community consultation in Ecuador.



Community consultation in Zimbabwe held by Barthelemy Ngane Mwanza.



Safia Ibrahimkhel leading a community consultation in Pakistan.

GYAC members found the process of the community consultations to be a learning opportunity in more ways than one. As Safia, who facilitated focus group meetings with refugee and host community youth in Pakistan, noted:

“Refugee youth really loved these consultations because they felt that they were able to share their ideas and be engaged in policy making. Young people who participated in the community consultations commented positively, saying that the GYAC Delegates take their actual voice to the stakeholders”.

In May 2018, GYAC members travelled to Geneva to participate in the **Fourth Consultation on the GCR**. The GYAC organized a side session to share the findings from the community consultations.

Based on the input from the **community consultations**, GYAC members also helped to draft and presented the statement prepared by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) to State Members at the Palais de Nations.

GYAC members also held **bilateral meetings** with State representatives from Turkey and the United States of America (USA). Finally, the GYAC polished their recommendations based on their consultations with community members and submitted a [Recommendations Paper](#) recommending specific language changes for the subsequent drafts of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Also during May, and as part of ongoing efforts to engage UNHCR leadership, GYAC members made a video focused on refugee engagement to be shown at the opening of the Annual Meeting of UNHCR Country Representatives.

In June 2018, GYAC members participated in **UNHCR's Annual NGO Consultation**. Foni spoke at the opening plenary session and Arash spoke at the closing plenary. During the NGO consultations, Safia, Laura, Mariama and Karim moderated sessions, spoke on panels, and served as lead respondents.

In addition to their work as a body members of GYAC have been active in advocating for young refugees and their communities at the local, national, regional, and global levels in many different capacities.

GYAC PROFILES



Abdul Karim Albrm, is 22 years old, is originally from Syria and now lives in Hamburg, Germany.

Karim completed training as a psychosocial counsellor and now works as a stress-management trainer at CORESZON, a psychosocial project based at the University Clinic of Hamburg.

In my work with CORESZON, I am able to give back - I teach migrants and German citizens simple relaxation skills that they can use to regulate their nervous systems and strengthen the ability to handle stress in their daily lives and be more resilient. I am also very active with the National Youth Advisory Council formed by Plan International Germany, which is an important mechanism that enables young refugees to improve refugees' situation in terms of integration and participation of young people. This group has been active in working with local and national authorities as part of the federal initiative "Protection against Violence in Refugee Accommodation". We have held consultations with refugee youth to get their inputs on Minimum Standards to Protection Children and Youth. One of the major highlights for me was in November 2018 when I met with the Federal Minister for Families in Berlin to discuss and advocate for the Minimum Standards and speedier family reunification procedures. I also participated in a forum organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross on "Humanizing Borders", in Geneva, and spoke at a seminar organized by the Norwegian Permanent Mission on "Humanitarian Innovation", and at the UNESCO Global Education meeting panel session "Validating Education Achievements - the Key to Opening Doors to Opportunity and Sustainable Societies".

Barthelemy Ngane Mwanza is 24 years old. He comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and now lives in Tongogara refugee camp in Zimbabwe.



Barth is a youth leader in Tongogara Refugee Camp and is part of the steering committee of the Adolescent Girls and Young Women Empowerment Program (AGAYWEP), sponsored by the Youth Initiative Fund. As a GYAC delegate, he advocates for youth development, engagement and recreation in order to support youth to better navigate life's challenges and to ensure that the potential of youth and their dreams is not neglected.

The highlight of my activities and accomplishments as a youth leader and member of the GYAC in 2018 were steering the Adolescent Girls and Young Women Empowerment Program and creating links between young Zimbabweans students, young refugees and refugee students. I was nominated to be a part of community leadership for 2018 and I was successful in advocating for urban refugees to Government officers. The most valuable aspect of my experience with the GYAC has been the capacity-building and being able to transfer the training I acquired to my community. It has also been important for me to be able to make meaningful and positive changes in my immediate community. I also enjoyed the opportunities for self-development, for travel and exposure, such as learning how to formulate a recommendation, and learning from other GYAC members.



Aya Mohammed Abdullah, 22, fled Iraq to Syria with her family at the age of 14 and then again in 2011 to Turkey due to war in Syria.

Aya and her family eventually resettled to Switzerland. She now studies at Webster University, where she is the Co-president of the Webster Humanitarian Society.

I believe that the Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) is an important conduit for the fresh ideas and perspectives of youth. The work of international organisations and others working on humanitarian issues can be made much easier by involving young people. As a GYAC member, I am more than honoured to be a voice for refugees and human rights. As a youth delegate, I am given a great platform to talk about refugee issues. It is important that we not only focus on the negative side but also find ways to solve problems. What I love about GYAC is that it involves us - refugees - in contributing suggestions and solutions. The GYAC has been a great opportunity to work with other youth delegates for almost year. Being a member of a courageous refugee group encouraged me to work harder to increase the visibility of the refugee community. The GYAC experience gives me a sense of the diversity and solidarity amongst the refugee community. Delegates are from different countries around the world, but they have similar problems to which they are trying to find answers and they are willing to bring their youth energy to change the world for the better.

Safia Ibrahimkhel, 25, was born and grew up in an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan.



As a UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council Youth Delegate, **Safia** wants to take advantage of the opportunity for direct dialogue with key stakeholders in the international community on key refugee issues, like education, and opportunities for adolescent girls and young women.

On 15 August, UNHCR celebrated International Youth Day. I arranged a panel discussion on the theme of “Youth as Peace-builders”, which included of both refugee and host community youth. I developed a youth network to reduce communication barriers between local people, UNHCR and other service providers. The youth network will train and motivate other youth in camps, urban areas and remote areas to work voluntarily for their community. I have also been working with the Directorate of Refugee and Repatriation on a UNHCR project to encourage refugees to undertake voluntary repatriation and to take active part in peace-building processes and rebuild their country.

Being a GYAC member is a great honour for me because the GYAC provides me with a platform to raise youth and adolescent girls’ voices on a global level. I believe the GYAC is like a bridge between local-level people and global-level people, like UN staff, international NGOs, and state representatives. Before I became a GYAC member, I worked at the community level and thought that UNHCR was the only organisation that supported refugees. When I came to Geneva, I realised that there were multiple organizations that support and advocate for refugees. Through the opportunities offered by being a Youth Delegate on the GYAC, I managed to change the ideas that members of my community had concerning refugees as being solely victims under the responsibility of UNHCR. They realised that refugees can be contributors who can work and support refugee communities and individuals from host communities as well.



Foni Joyce Vuni is 25 years old and hails from South Sudan. She currently lives in Nairobi, Kenya.

Foni has established an organization that links unemployed youth to mentors and other opportunities. She thinks the GYAC should support and inspire youth play a large role in solutions for their communities, especially as peace builders. One of the key highlights of my activities as a GYAC Delegate was being able to take part in the South Sudan Peace Negotiations.

I was able to represent almost 2.4 million south Sudanese and share some of their key messages. Another highlight was being able to meet other young people from South Africa, Rwanda and other countries who reached out to me and wanted to know what they could do. Together, we looked at the Core Actions for Refugee Youth and they are currently trying to come up with solutions for their communities. Participating in the Consultations on the Global Compact on Refugees and the UNHCR-NGO Consultation have allowed me to bring the perspective of refugees from the local level and also share some of their good practices at the global level. I have also had the opportunity to learn more about UNHCR by doing online courses, which has enabled me to effectively understand the principles used. Interacting with UNHCR staff has also enabled me to better understand their work and in turn enabled me to better explain it to some youth within my community. I have been able to attend events at the local level where I was able to engage with young people, share and exchange experiences and also gather information from them.

The most exciting aspects of being a member of the GYAC were: working with everyone to create structures that will ease the work of the future GYAC cohort. I was also able to learn different good practices and create a network of youth leaders who are based in different regions but have the same goals. The most rewarding part of the GYAC for me has been the friends I made along the way and being able to have access to learning platforms and learning from experts in different fields.

Arash Bordbar, 24, is originally from Shiraz in Iran. He lived in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for 5 years before being resettled to Australia.



Arash is keen that other refugees should not have to make the same mistakes he did and can benefit from his learning. With that goal in mind, Arash is involved in running events for new arrivals to Australia. For Arash, the GYAC can bring new attitudes, perspectives and creative way of approaching and addressing problems to UNHCR's work.

One of the key highlights of my activities as a GYAC member during 2018 was being selected as an Australia Day Ambassador, which enabled me to raise awareness about refugees, youth and how we can bring positive change to our society. I was able to consult with the refugee community on the issues that matter to them and raise their concerns internationally. I was also selected as a One Young World Peace Ambassador to share peace-building methods with young people around the world and speak about how young people can be human rights champions. I have been interviewed by the media to speak about the achievements of refugees and their positive contributions to Australian society.

Thanks to the advocacy, policy and negotiation skills I learned by being involved in GYAC, I was also able to negotiate with the Government of Australia on issues that matter to refugees and young people, and to propose recommendation and possible solutions. I have been able to co-organise educational conferences to encourage universities to provide better access to higher education for refugees. The most exciting and rewarding aspects of being a member of GYAC during 2018 was learning about the high-level policies and decision-making processes like the consultation process related to the Global Compact on Refugees. I also enjoyed meeting like-minded people from different parts of the world and learning about their journeys and their resilience.



Ibrahim Sallet Mahamat, 23, is originally from the Central African Republic (CAR). Ibrahim was studying in Morocco when war broke out in CAR in 2013, unable to return home he sought asylum in Morocco, where he currently lives in Rabat.

In Morocco, **Ibrahim** is the President of Living Together, a local NGO that supports refugees to integrate into Moroccan society. Being a member of the GYAC allows him to engage and help refugees locally and globally. He believes that every refugee has the right to live a normal life. He fights for this right and is committed to understand the daily challenges that refugees face during their journeys around the world in order to bring about lasting solutions.

At the community level, my highlights included participating in a marathon in Rabat in April 2018 with the young refugees from the “Living Together” youth organisation, which I am currently leading, and which focuses on sports participation, awareness-raising, non-discrimination, and cultural tolerance. The goal of the organisation is to raise awareness of socio-cultural integration of refugees in Morocco and to improve the social and cultural conditions of refugees amongst the Moroccan population. During World Refugee Day, the youth won a football tournament organised by the Foundation Orient Occident in partnership with UNHCR Morocco. I also took part in a workshop organised by UNHCR Morocco, which brought together migrant associations so as to evaluate refugees’ actual situation in terms of the fulfilment of their different rights. The workshop touched upon the themes of: status, stay and regularisation, education, health, physical safety, juridical assistance, access to employment, and accreditation of refugees’ and migrants’ organisations. Being a part of the GYAC has given me a chance to use my experience to the benefit of other refugee youth, particularly in Morocco. The most gratifying aspect of the experience has been creating and nurturing bonds with all the members of the GYAC, on a professional as well as a personal level. I also appreciated the opportunity to participate in training opportunities which helped me develop my professional skills.

Asif Safdary, 24, fled the conflict in Afghanistan at the age of 14 and travelled on his own as a separated child through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. He finally reached Austria in 2008, where he currently lives in Vienna.



I had a great opportunity to present the Human Rights situation from a youth and refugee perspective during “Vienna+25, Building Trust, Making Human Rights a Reality for All” on 22-23 May 2018 in Vienna. The recommendations were shared with States, human rights organisations, members of the private sector, etc. In addition, during the European Youth Initiative Fund process, I was able to get deeper insight into the refugee-led projects that are active in Europe and work for and with refugee youth. Participating to the consultations on the Global Compact on Refugees and contributing to the drafts of the GCR was a unique experience. The chance to shape some recommendations in favour of refugees in the draft was a huge accomplishment. It is very satisfying for me to have the opportunity to bring the voice of my community and also young refugees who are facing a lot of difficulties to an international level. It is also very exciting to meet international organisations and diplomats and discuss topics that the world is currently dealing with.



Laura Elizabeth Valencia Restrepo, 21, was born in Colombia and fled to Ecuador with her family in 2007 to escape the conflict in her own country.

Being chosen as a member of GYAC was incredibly rewarding for me - as a young dreamer and a woman. I have been fortunate to experience the entire process of youth engagement including the national GRYC consultation in Ecuador, the global refugee youth consultation in Geneva in 2016 and the inception of the GYAC. As part of this process, I have worked with incredible people and have accumulated so many experiences. I was able to use my experience and my voice to talk about being a refugee, but I have focused my work especially on young people. I enjoyed the many opportunities to be co-chair and moderator of various panels with wonderful people, especially with other young people who are also looking for opportunities to talk openly and honestly about our needs, but also about our capacity to help and to take part in youth mobilisation around the world. I think that one of the biggest achievements was being a member of the first cohort of Youth Delegates of the GYAC, and being involved in different discussions pertaining to themes that matter to us and that affect us. It was gratifying to be in contact with so many young people, hear their needs and work together to look for solutions. Personally, my focus has always been supporting youth projects, and this experience has allowed me to have a much clearer idea on how to work so that those projects become a reality.

One of the most emotional moments for me was to be invited to a school in Geneva to talk about our story and for them to see that we are real and normal people, just the same as them. Despite the fact that we are young people, we are also working for other young people, because an important part of the solution is to talk with members of the community for them to know us and accept us. Another gratifying aspect was being able to show that we can do a good job; for example sharing the results of our community consultations in front of a panel of experts on the theme of mobility, and receiving excellent feedback. This demonstrates that, as young people, we can be of tremendous value when it comes to protecting and supporting each other.

Daniela María Pérez Obando is 19 years old and was born in Colombia. She fled with her family to escape the conflict and now lives in Quito.



This year was really productive for me. My university major in International Relations was the perfect complement to my participation in the GYAC's activities. I had an [interview](#) with my university magazine on the theme of Empowered Women. We discussed the situation of refugees in Ecuador and the reform of the Human Mobility Law, which gives refugees a card to facilitate procedures. I mentioned the GYAC and its role in the making recommendations regarding the creation of policies and reforms that concern us. I was able to facilitate consultations online and also in person. I was invited to take part in a panel discussion organised by the Soy Pluralidad campaign in Ecuador, which focused on diversity in migration. As a member of the GYAC, I expressed my point of view on the situation of Colombian refugees in Ecuador and spoke on the response mechanisms that Governments and organisations must take into account. I created my first awareness campaign about refugees, [Somos Potencial](#), which was destined to emphasise the professional and academic abilities of refugees both in the professional and academic spheres.

During World Refugee Day, I was able to act as the representative of the refugee population in Ecuador in the National Assembly. I was able to put forward the recommendations that we drafted in Geneva and answer the public's questions about different issues faced by refugees in Ecuador. One of my goals as a youth leader was to garner the interests of youth, State representatives and members of the private sector regarding the potential and current condition of the refugee population in Ecuador. Being a part of the GYAC taught me so much about the importance of refugee activism across the world. As refugees, we are people that can bring value to a country in a multiplicity of ways: through our abilities, our knowledge and above all our drive to go forward. To bring visibility to this process was an important aspect of this year.



Mugisha Willent is 25 years old and was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She fled conflict with her family in 2000 and has since lived in in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

Mugisha joined the GYAC to bear witness to refugees' lives, to promote refugees' wide-ranging abilities, to be listened to and heard, to play a part in decision-making and to meet the various partners. Thanks to her courage and tenacity, she now trains young girls in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement who do not go to school, helping them to develop their personal autonomy by starting and running small businesses. She helps to implement on-the-ground solutions in her own way.

It's time to ask refugees to help look for solutions. We are asked about the problems. We should also be asked what must be done. On the GYAC, we are very careful to propose our ideas about long-term solutions. The international community must encourage the export of ideas and solutions that have proven their value in the field to other countries that host refugees. The GYAC needs to promote support, training and networking for large numbers of young refugees. One of the highlights of my year was being recognised as a game changer in my community when I was presented with a Voices of Courage Award from the Women's Refugee Commission's, aimed at celebrating the resilience of refugee women.

Simon Marot Touloung, 25, fled from his home in South Sudan (Sudan at the time) as a separated child in 2000, and sought asylum Keri Transit camp in Northern Uganda. He currently lives in Kampala, Uganda.



Simon is active in promoting education and peace building and believes that the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) Youth Delegates have the responsibility to advise UNHCR on how they can best work with and support young refugees to be part of solutions around the globe.

2018 has been an exciting and busy year for me in terms of activism and advocacy at the local, national, regional and global levels. One of my major achievements was being appointed by the Chairperson of the African Union as a member of the African Union Youth Advisory Board. I was also invited at the South Sudanese Peace Talks to represent South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. I participated in two youth dialogues focusing on participation, sustainable peace and governance accountability organized by our initiative, the African Youth Action Network, in Uganda. I was the winner of the 2018 Uganda Refugee Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge organized by NOT FOR SALE and the COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa. I also helped in establishing the Network for South Sudanese Civil Societies in Uganda, a platform that organizes monthly dialogue to bridge the gaps between South Sudanese civil population and organization leaders. Finally, I attended the CRRF Steering committee meeting with the members of Diplomatic corps and the CRRF Secretariat in Uganda in January 2018.

The most inspiring part of my work with GYAC has been the knowledge and confidence in public speaking that I have gained. I have also learned how to effectively advocate for my community's needs. The idea of being solution-oriented has allowed me to address the problems faced by my community and suggest possible solutions. This has greatly improved my work in peace-building with the young people from South Sudan.



Mariama Saran Sow is 25 years old and is from Guinea. Faced with the risk of Female Genital Mutilation in her home country and the prospects of a forced marriage to a man much older than her, Mariama fled in 2010, travelled to Germany as an unaccompanied child and sought asylum in Germany, where she currently resides.

Mariama believes that the GYAC empowers delegates to speak out on important and often taboo protection issues like sexual and gender based violence. As GYAC delegate she works to improve protection for vulnerable children and to fight against sexual violence against women, particularly in conflict situations. 2018 is a year that has been very successful for me as an activist at the local level and at the global level.

I was very happy that I was able to contribute to the formation of the inaugural GYAC. As a member of GYAC I have had the opportunity to develop my professional skills. I have also been enabled to speak about my experiences. I have also had the chance to speak out about my pain and my joy to a global audience. By doing so, I have helped to break the taboos around speaking out on SGBV. I have also been involved in a project supporting children without parents. All these things strengthen our voices, and contribute to changing social norms.

The best thing about 2018 at the local level is that I have worked to support many women in gaining access to therapy - psychosocial protection - and also helped to find accommodation for their families. In 2018, I have been working to set up the organization Women Empowerment and promote the initiatives of the Association against Violence and Discrimination against Refugee Women. We raise awareness on the spread of female genital mutilation in Africa - a topic that has been neglected so far. In addition, we regularly help women and girls against female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and against all violence.

Abbas Karimi, 20, was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. He fled Afghanistan and travelled through Iran to Turkey where he sought asylum. In 2016, he was resettled to the United States.



Abbas is a world class swimmer and the GYAC focal point for sports. In 2017 he took a silver medal at the Para Swimming World Championships in Mexico City and he is training hard with the goal of going to the Olympics. He sees his athletic accomplishments as being a win for all refugees. As a GYAC delegate Abbas advocates for refugee athletes and the importance of sports for young people.

My journey began six years ago when I left my family behind and fled to Iran, and from there I went to Turkey illegally by myself. It was very hard; the most horrible journey of my life. I was a refugee in Turkey for three years but kept swimming in every camp I found myself in despite the challenges. The Turkish Disabled Federation did not allow me to compete and it was hard to try to compete in their national championship, but eventually I obtained my license and competed for the first time in 2014 in the Turkish Championship. I won four medals and became National Champion in 2015. I won fifteen medals in Turkey, but as I was not a Turkish citizen I was not able to participate in the European Championship and World Championship, not even in the Paralympic Games which took place in 2016. I was eventually resettled in the US and moved there to begin a new chapter at the end of 2016. Upon arrival, I said to myself that I had been given a new life and another chance to make my Paralympic dream come true. I started competing after 3 months, becoming one of the top swimmers in the US. In 2017, I went to my first international competition, the World Series, and made the qualifying times in 50m Butterfly and 50m Freestyle. I also went to the World Championship in 2017 in Mexico and became the first refugee who made it to the podium and won Silver medal. Representing the refugees all around the world was great as it proved that refugees are also able to become champions, or anything else they want to become in this world. Working with UNHCR gave me a voice and I was able to spread my message to the world. It gave me and other refugee athletes a chance to compete in international competitions.



Carlos Alberto Melara García, age 19, fled his home in El Salvador with his family in 2014 to escape persecution and threats to his family from the gangs. They travelled to San Jose, Costa Rica where they currently live as refugees.

Carlos joined the GYAC to create change, find solutions for countries that receive refugees, and come up with new ideas. His motto is 'inform, socialise and change'. He hopes that, thanks to the GYAC, young refugees will be able to develop their skills and interact with people in a friendly and discrimination-free way. He feels that GYAC members and the international community should join together to advance work through initiatives implemented by young people.

For me, being part of GYAC has been a unique experience, especially for what it has meant to my community. For them, learning about what goes on in other countries to address the issues they face on a daily basis is a big source of hope. GYAC has helped me grow too, and I bring back ideas to Costa Rica that we can implement locally. At home, I am part of an organisation called "Jóvenes MADIBA", a group of young people from different nationalities who work for the transformation of Costa Rica into a more equal society, and for the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. We organize activities with young people, work with them, and help them develop their ideas and initiatives. We also organise English tutorials, and have held a session on sexual health awareness for at-risk youth; both refugee and local youth. This December, we are performing a theatre play called "El cambio esta en tí" (The change lies within yourself). The play represents the problems and difficulties we face, and how young people can overcome them. People are moved by the issues presented and are grateful to better understand the issues that young refugees face in Costa Rica.

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