



Youth Excel: Our Knowledge, Leading Change

Global Protection Assessment

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development and IREX for Youth Excel and was prepared by the Protection Policy Task Force led by Mena Ayazi and Rachel Walsh Taza of Search for Common Ground. Task Force Members include ABAAD, The Youth Cafe, UNOY Peacebuilders, USAID, IREX, Biz Nation, Youth Venture, Tech Tribes, and the African Youth Movement.



Table of Contents

[Section 1: Introduction to the Global Protection Assessment](#)

[Section 2: Assessing Main Protection Challenges Facing Youth](#)

[Section 3: Existing Protection Mitigation & Prevention Mechanisms](#)

[Section 4: Global Protection Assessment for Youth Excel](#)

[Section 5: Recommendations for Youth Excel](#)

[Section 6: Annex](#)

Section 1: Introduction to the Global Protection Assessment

This Global Protection Assessment serves an important function in the creation of a Protection Policy for Youth Excel, providing key insights into the necessary protection and safeguarding protocols and policies for Youth Excel programs and activities. The aim of this Protection Assessment is to help inform key areas of need and focus on the protection policy for Youth Excel through better understanding the main protection challenges and risks for young people's inclusive leadership and participation throughout the Youth Excel program.

Key objectives include:

- Assess the main protection challenges and risks facing young people, staff/partners, programming, and operations throughout their participation in the Youth Excel program, including but not limited to sociocultural, emotional / mental health, physical, legal, political, financial, gendered, digital risks, and more;
- Understand contextual differences and nuances in protection by country or region; and
- Identify appropriate and existing risk prevention and mitigation measures / protection mechanisms to ensure safe and inclusive participation of youth in Youth Excel programs.

This report is an adapted version of the detailed analysis prepared for Youth Excel, in order to protect the confidentiality of respondents. This Protection assessment will be used alongside the [desk review](#) to develop the overarching Protection Policy for Youth Excel.

Methodology & Process

The assessment took place from January 2021 - March 2021 online due to COVID-19 restrictions. This data was collected through triangulation or mixed methods, including focus group discussions, individual interviews, and an online survey. Through non-probability sampling, participants of this assessment were selected based on a set of criteria to support representation from different countries and regions, as well as age groups, and included members of the Youth Excel Protection Policy Task Force. We had a total of **45 participants** in focus group discussions and key informant interviews, as well as **19 respondents** to the online survey.

Nearly 85% of our participants were between the ages of 25 - 30 years, followed by nearly 10% adult participants over 30 years old and 5% 18 - 24 years. There was generally equal gender representation. The majority of participants' work focuses on youth development and capacity building, particularly training and education. Nearly half of the participants also focused on gender equity work, peacebuilding, governance and democracy, and civic engagement. All survey participants worked with youth between the ages of 20-24, 94% of participants worked with 25-29 year-olds, and 80% of participants worked with 15-19 year-olds.

Due to the sensitivities around the topic at hand and for the protection of participants from either direct harm or vicarious trauma, all participants were required to sign a confidentiality agreement and consent form to give permission to include their participation in the consultations and

guarantee their confidentiality during the focus group discussions. The key consultant and a notetaker, both staff of Search for Common Ground, conducted these consultations and signed confidentiality clauses as well. All data is stored in a secure digital location with access available only to principal actors on this Protection Assessment.

This assessment comes with shortfalls and biases. The small sample size makes it hard to generalize protection challenges facing young people globally. For this reason, it is clear that Youth Excel will need to conduct specific protection assessments in each context. Further, sensitivities and relative awareness levels around certain topics and the virtual nature of the assessment likely influenced which protection challenges and capacities participants discussed and highlighted, leading to a potentially skewed representation of digital protection capacities and an underreporting of psychosocial challenges, considering stigma and low awareness levels around mental health issues in many contexts. Lastly, language barriers between those conducting this assessment and the young people engaged in the assessment influenced our ability to accurately capture information and the experiences with protection.

Guiding Questions for the Protection Assessment

- What are the main protection and security challenges and risks facing young people and vulnerable adults in the contexts targeted by Youth Excel? From whom? *Note: consider sociocultural, emotional / mental health, physical, legal, political, financial, gendered, and digital risks*
- What are the main protection risks facing young people and vulnerable groups from Youth Excel staff, partners, programmes / activities, and operations? *Note: Place particular focus on risks associated with youth participation in research, USG-funded programs, public advocacy and leadership (elevated visibility), receiving (micro)-grants, and intergenerational engagement (with power holders for example). Consider sociocultural, emotional / mental health, physical, legal, political, financial, gendered, and digital risks.*
- What capacities do young people and local partners have to identify, prevent, or mitigate potential risks during the Youth Excel program?
- Which vulnerabilities do Youth Excel partners and participants and programs have that potentially exacerbate risks or make them more likely to happen?
- What policies, procedures, tools and other actions are needed to best identify, prevent, and respond to risks facing young partners and participants? Who should be responsible for those protection actions during the duration of the Youth Excel program?

Framework of Analysis

This analysis will focus on answering the above questions by analyzing the responses in the consultations and surveys. The analysis will look at these key threats and protection challenges as defined within the desk review and builds upon the main protection challenges and frameworks for youth protection from the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace & Security Working Group on Protection and the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth's forthcoming report on Youth Protection.

Main protection challenges that will be analyzed include:

- **Financial** (adult dependence, lack of accessible funds)

- **Physical** (violence, torture, abuse, imprisonment)
- **Gendered** (GBV, cultural stigmas, exclusion on the basis of gender)
- **Political** (targeted persecution, disabling environment, exclusion)
- **Legal** (legislation, policies, lawsuits, freedom of assembly)
- **Sociocultural** (stereotyping, pressure, stigmatization)
- **Psychosocial** (mental health disorders, PTSD, intimidation, age-based health disparities)
- **Digital** (online harassment, censorship, surveillance, violation of privacy)

In particular, this analysis will unpack the **probability, impact, vulnerabilities, and existing capacities** related to a specific risk. It will also analyze risks by **region and country** to provide contextual protection information. Then, it will look at protection risks through an **intersectional lens**, paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities associated with the layered identities of young people that shape their complex experiences around protection. Lastly, this analysis will provide **concrete and actionable recommendations** for the Youth Excel Protection Policy development.

Section 2: Assessing Main Protection Challenges Facing Youth

Main Protection Challenges facing Youth -

Breakdown by Region

The internal version of this report includes detailed accounts of the types of barriers and protection risks that youth face in different countries, however, for confidentiality and protection, this report instead summarizes the main threats by region.

As one participant noted, *“The challenges are so different from village to village. I cannot give any justice to this,”* and another added, *“Safety and protection is more important than ever for us, which is why we need to get into the nitty gritty. Without unique, specialized support, we will be in fact less safe.”*

These two accounts indicate that the findings in this Protection Assessment are not to be generalized, particularly as we evaluate the main threats facing youth by region or country. Participants highlighted the unique challenges facing youth in all regions around the rural - urban divide and how safety and security is so different for youth depending on their respective locations in a country or city. Over and over we heard the need to localize protection assessments and protocols as much as possible. Thus, the analysis by region and country must not be understood as all encompassing of the threats facing young people in the respective contexts.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The main threats facing young people in the MENA region were mostly around government surveillance, state threats, and financial challenges. Youth in the MENA region reported specific threats around freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and digital safety, and a high prevalence of psychosocial threats, in comparison to other regions. Many participants noted the

clampdown on youth activity by governments in terms of internet and digital access, anti-government sentiment, and societal pressures or threats surrounding youth engaging in ‘Western’ programs or receiving Western funding (although this varied by country). Limitations on assembly were notable in the MENA region, restricting the ability to organize or protest due to historic sentiments (i.e. the Arab Spring). Bureaucratic barriers to youth access to funding or participation in institutions were also notable in the MENA region. Targeted killings, arrests, violence in civic spaces (protests) and persecution were notable in this region due to its direct ties with the targeted youth’s activities that were often framed or seen as ‘anti-government’ or ‘anti-religion.’

Sub-Saharan Africa

Unique threats facing youth in Sub-Saharan African regions centered around lack of governmental or institutional support for youth, freedom of assembly or expression, securitized policies towards youth, threats from militia or violent extremist groups, and high surveillance of youth activity. Sociocultural norms and barriers were a significant threat to youth in this region coming from both policy makers, adults in communities, militia groups, peers, and families. Trust, power dynamics, and exclusion were cited as major problems in this region both within youth organizations and outside. Many youth reported having to control their work and carefully monitor it so as to please governments, both at local and national levels. Some youth mentioned struggles with collecting data and having major protection challenges from communities who suspect or mistrust data collection efforts.

Latin America

In Central and South America, the most prevalent threats and risks include social and cultural stereotypes of youth, gendered, securitized¹ policies towards youth, criminal activity and violence from both the state and criminal gangs. Many youth noted the lack of infrastructures within society to withstand the unique challenges facing their countries because of COVID-19. Participants specifically cited U.S. involvement in Latin American conflict and how that has caused a trust deficit between youth and US government-related or funded activities. In particular, gendered risks stood out in Central and South America with femicide, gender-based violence, and human trafficking disproportionately affecting women and girls. Freedom of movement was notable here as many refugees from around the region faced increased persecution or abuse and gang controlled areas prevented youth activity and freedoms. Gang violence and gang controlled territory was noted as a potential threat or hindrance of research related activities in the region.

South Asia

¹ Government policies that preemptively treat young people as security threats, leading to physical or legal retaliation and negative stereotypes of young people.

In South Asia, the most common threat was sociocultural, followed by financial and then gendered risks. Most participants shared difficulties around doing their work due to social stigmas around youth, particularly around young women and youth of other marginalized backgrounds. Gendered risks were prevalent in the South Asian region with risks like rape, human trafficking, and family or community imposed gendered norms making work of young women more difficult. Youth shared how government bureaucracies made youth access to financial resources more difficult to receive and the lack of funding as an increasing problem. Ageism was very prevalent in South Asia as youth often did not see societal support for their activism and discouragement from families to do this work and engage in politics or security work. Police corruption was also cited frequently, with many youth dealing with government and police crackdown and a wider lack of transparency.

Intersectional & Gendered Nature of Risks

A main take away from this Protection Assessment is the disproportionate experiences and prevalence of risks facing youth with multiple intersectional identities - regardless of regional or country context. Risks and threats to safety and protection do not happen in isolation, but rather in layers and at multiple levels - simultaneously. This must be taken into account when addressing protection issues facing young people, vulnerable adults, and children and underlines the importance of intersectional, gender analysis to inform and complement protection assessments.

The groups facing the most frequent, multi-layered risks include:

- Girls and young women
- LGBTQIA+ youth
- Youth with Disabilities
- Young refugees and other displaced youth (IDPs)
- Youth with lower socio-economic status
- Black youth (in predominantly non-Black communities and case of South Africa and institutional racism)
- Indigenous youth

Even if youth do not belong to any of these minority groups, youth who advocate or work on their behalf are also targeted. One young participant notes,

“Between December 2019 - Feb 2020, I have been abused and shamed publicly several times in-person and online by extended family members, friends and unknown connections on social media while advocating for minority rights and refugee rights.”

Section 3: Existing Protection Mitigation & Prevention Mechanisms

Overall, many participants noted the major gap in existing protection mechanisms to adequately mitigate or respond to the risks youth face. Many non-youth participants noted legal frameworks and mechanisms to potentially pull from in the creation of a policy. Many youth themselves discussed the need for training, easy to use resources, and contacts for fast-responding personnel to reach out to during serious situations. While youth generally express awareness of the risks they face, they identify a lower level of awareness around existing resources available to them in the event of an emergency and their rights for protection. This is even true for youth who are well-connected with international groups, groups who are relatively well-funded, and youth who have higher socio-economic status.

Participants also expressed the need for adapting protection measures from area to area, similar to the earlier remarks from participants on the need to recognize the unique and specific risks in different communities. The chart below outlines some of the existing capacities and capacities needed for protection, as mentioned by the participants.

Risk	Protection Capacities Existing	Protection Capacities Needed
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commitment to volunteerism and using existing assets, particularly peer support, to support work - Many resources on organizational and programmatic capacity strengthening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contingency budget for protection, emergencies, unexpected program adaptations - Financial literacy training - Budgeting guidelines and training - Healthy, flexible, and responsive funding - Participatory and transparent grantmaking
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal youth networks for protection - Safety protocols during transportation - Youth practice discretion in revealing their identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individualized security plans - Communications trainings - Health related safety mechanisms
Gendered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many high quality gender guides on gendered research - Many international and legal frameworks on gender protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting young mothers or women with familial responsibilities to enable their participation - Gender analysis as part of protection assessment
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International advocacy networks and access - Civic engagement (voting, protesting, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding power dynamics - Political support from local community youth leaders

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> running for office) - Informal youth networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure data storage - Protection and anonymity of identity
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal youth networks - International advocacy by international organizations - Local and community leaders that are supportive of youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accountability mechanisms - Confidential reporting - Consistent feedback channels - Protection-focused personnel at all levels - Clear consent process
Sociocultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes families (if they are not the threat) - Informal youth networks - Local and community leaders - Being discreet about personal life (sexuality, religion) - Team/community building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using inclusive and enabling language - Hiring local staff that equitably represent different sociocultural groups and who are trained in inclusive programming - Allowing youth to guide and create programs
Psychosocial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer-to-peer counseling - Self-care guides internally - Encouraging work-life balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to professional MHPSS² when needed - Clear, informed consent process - Acknowledging the need to decolonize development work, relationships with international actors, and youth attitudes themselves - Preventing vicarious trauma
Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encryption - Private or fake accounts - VPN - Minimal to no usage of digital platforms - Cybersecurity (<i>systems of storage, networks, computer systems, safeguarding data</i>) - Digital safety (<i>individual security, self-censorship, assets, online identity</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal access to technology - Data protection, coding - Avoiding digital platforms when possible - Using safe apps and digital platforms

The risks participants felt most confident about mitigating or took the most steps to prevent were digital risks. As noted in the chart above, participants use a variety of different strategies and mechanisms to protect themselves from digital harm and have many resources available to take precautionary measures to prevent digital related risks. As noted in the introduction to the

2 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

assessment, these capacities may be overrepresented by the sample of participants and nature of virtual consultations.

When asked what protection mechanisms should be most important for Youth Excel activities, participants responded and ranked the following as most important to consider (ranked most important to least important):

- Gendered protection
- MHPSS
- Digital safety guidance
- Accountability mechanisms & secure reporting
- Legal guidance
- Localized protection guidance
- Connection with national or international protection actors
- Protection focal points / personnel
- Individual security plans and protocols
- Contingency budgets for protection and emergencies
- Transportation support
- Risk assessment tools
- Decolonizing research and applied anthropology
- Communications or visibility protection
- Security or safety tools
- Research risk protocols

Section 4: Global Protection Assessment for Youth Excel

Youth Excel and Risks

The assessment thus far has analyzed risks facing young people in their respective contexts and communities. While these risks cannot be generalized to the local contexts in which they were identified, an overall analysis of the most common and likely risks is useful in creating a global policy and procedures for Youth Excel.

This section analyzes the most prevalent risks and threats facing youth in their contexts from the assessment and how they may present themselves during Youth Excel activities. Specifically, this section will explore which vulnerabilities Youth Excel partners, participants, and programs have that potentially exacerbate risks or make them more likely to happen, as well as the capacities needed to address these risks.

Risk	Probability /Impact	Vulnerabilities (factors increasing probability /impact of risk)	Capacities Existing within Youth Excel and youth-led/youth-serving groups	Capacities Needed
Local or national government conducts data and physical surveillance of youth groups involved in Youth Excel - violating privacy, tracking physical movement, or hacking data collected. (Political, Legal, Digital)	Medium / High	<p>Groups or individuals working/ advocating on politically sensitive issues</p> <p>Groups or individuals perceived to be affiliated with government opposition (due to identity)</p> <p>Groups or individuals with limited digital safety knowledge/practices/tools, noting that rural youth and young women tend to have</p>	Some digital safety, encryption, cyber security practices (<i>level of capacity varies widely</i>)	Digital and cyber security, anonymous coding of data to protect identities and confidentiality, discretion in visibility and communications

		less digital access and capacities in some contexts		
<p>Policymakers and adult decision makers feel threatened by Youth Excel recommendations, data, or advocacy by young people and retaliate (Political, Psychosocial, Physical, Legal)</p>	Medium / High	<p>Contexts with hierarchical age norms around decision making and policy making</p> <p>Recommendations, data, or advocacy on sensitive topics</p>	<p>Adult allies, political support, resilience already (<i>held by YLO's</i>)</p> <p>Communications and product development capacities within (<i>Youth Excel and YSO's in particular</i>)</p>	<p>Various channels of engagement and communication with policymakers and decisionmakers early and throughout Youth Excel activities</p> <p>Identify decision makers and policymakers that already support youth leadership and engage them as influencers</p> <p>Support youth to develop tailored advocacy products for a variety of different audiences to more effectively communicate</p> <p>Train youth on collaborative and non-adversarial advocacy</p>
<p>Youth face pressures from community, family, or peers not to participate in</p>	Medium/High	<p>Contexts or communities with negative perceptions of</p>	<p>YLOs and YSOs have already built support</p>	<p>Engage communities and families in trust</p>

<p>Youth Excel activities due to stigmas around youth development work, research, or U.S. / Western affiliations, receiving funding from the USG, etc. and possibly face long-term retaliation or reputation damage due to participation (Sociocultural, Psychosocial, Physical)</p>		<p>youth development work or of U.S./Western affiliations</p> <p>Young women typically face more barriers to participation due to familial restrictions or obligations</p> <p>Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds pressured to prioritize work to support family</p>	<p>among community and local leaders <i>(all have varying capacities)</i></p> <p>YLOs/YSOS already engaging and relying on support from families and communities (if they are not the threat) <i>(all have varying capacities)</i></p> <p>Informal youth networks for support (YLO's)</p> <p>Using discretion in activities and various vulnerabilities (like sexual or religious identities) <i>(all have varying capacities)</i></p>	<p>building for Youth Excel programs from the beginning of activities when appropriate to build support</p> <p>Contingency budget for dealing with unexpected threats and pressures</p> <p>Plans for adapting to youth dropout from Youth Excel</p> <p>Removing branding of USAID / U.S. from Youth Excel programs in communities where appropriate</p> <p>Using discretion in visibility and communications when youth in sensitive environments with anti-Western sentiment are engaged</p>
<p>Generational differences and intergenerational power imbalances make it difficult for youth to share perspectives on needs, risks, and</p>	<p>Low / High</p>	<p>Low levels of trust and meaningful interaction between adult and youth partners</p>	<p>Youth Excel global consortium includes youth partners in co-design of tools,</p>	<p>Risk (protection) assessments conducted by and with young people from</p>

<p>realities they face and result in Youth Excel programming and protection mechanisms doing more harm than good, while real risks and needs are overlooked. (Sociocultural, Psychosocial)</p>		<p>New partners joining the Youth Excel activities who are less committed to addressing intergenerational power imbalances or are less familiar with approaches for addressing them and do not have the benefit of the longer co-creation process that global consortium partners had</p> <p>Young women, refugee/IDP youth, youth with disabilities, gender minorities, and other vulnerable groups of youth are more likely to face exclusive power dynamics, particularly when their digital access is limited, given the primarily virtual nature of Youth Excel’s design processes</p>	<p>approaches and activities, including for development of the protection policy (<i>Youth Excel</i>)</p> <p>Informal youth networks already existing (<i>YLO’s</i>)</p> <p>Peer-to-peer support and counseling where existing (<i>YLO’s</i>)</p> <p>Advocacy skills among YLOs for their own needs (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p>	<p>local contexts;</p> <p>Engage youth in protection assessment and measures before, during, and after Youth Excel Programming;</p> <p>Train Youth Excel partners on intergenerational and gender inclusive dialogue and non-adversarial collaborative action;</p> <p>Create group of adult allies for youth</p> <p>Track power dynamics and inclusion within consortium and within activities (Pando network analysis tool for example)</p>
<p>Youth Excel participants are discriminated against, stigmatized, excluded or suffer from hate crimes for participation in Youth Excel by community and Youth Excel staff or</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>	<p>Young women, refugee/IDP youth, youth with disabilities, gender minorities, and other vulnerable groups of youth</p>	<p>Partners already have built support among community and local leaders for their work (<i>all have varying</i></p>	<p>Prioritize the protection of vulnerable groups knowing their increased likelihood of</p>

<p>partners due to increased visibility of identities and vulnerabilities. (Sociocultural, Psychosocial, Gendered, Physical)</p>		<p>are more likely to face such discrimination</p> <p>Youth Excel related travel and public visibility can heighten these risks</p> <p>Youth Excel activities will be led by extensive network of partners and groups at various levels, making it harder to ensure /monitor discrimination, implicit bias, etc</p> <p>Societal norms around discrimination / exclusion of vulnerable groups exacerbated by Youth Excel’s programs</p> <p>Youth Excel organizational hierarchies and global powers</p>	<p><i>capacities)</i></p> <p>YLOs/YSOS already engaging and relying on support from families and communities (if they are not the threat) <i>(all have varying capacities)</i></p> <p>Informal youth networks (YLO’s)</p>	<p>facing threats</p> <p>Include and integrate GESI analysis with protection, with a focus on all types of and overlapping vulnerabilities</p> <p>Ensure Youth Excel teams hire and work with diverse youth representative of the populations being engaged</p> <p>Include bias training for partners in programming at all levels</p> <p>Provide guidance for sensitive communications and visibility</p> <p>Provide access to MHPSS for staff and participants when needed</p> <p>Safe travel protocols</p>
<p>Funding provided through Youth Excel</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>High visibility and</p>	<p>Youth Excel emphasizes</p>	<p>Sensitive</p>

<p>increases pressure on recipients from other youth, their communities, politicians or other stakeholders for access to that funding or creates/exacerbates adversarial dynamics between youth-led/youth-serving groups (Financial, Sociocultural, Psychosocial)</p>	<p>/Medium</p>	<p>misaligned expectations around funding and the financial benefits of the program</p> <p>Corrupt work environments and practices</p> <p>Highly competitive environment for youth funding, due to lack of sufficient resources and/or high numbers of YLO/YSOs</p>	<p>the need for continual process of engaging communities and stakeholders for buy-in and expectations management (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>Participatory grantmaking part of the approaches within Youth Excel</p> <p>NPI categorization of Youth Excel entails 50% of funding goes to new and underutilized local partners</p>	<p>communications/visibility guidelines</p> <p>Preparatory meetings with community leaders and relevant stakeholders in ecosystem separately during Youth Excel activity startup in each context to ensure buy-in and manage expectations</p> <p>Ensuring transparent, participatory grantmaking processes where possible</p>
<p>Financial insecurity leads YLOs to accept funding and activities that don't reflect operational realities or needs and leave them less financially secure or viable in the long run and more vulnerable to threats (Financial, Psychosocial)</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>	<p>Youth-led groups tend to be under-funded and under-resourced, driven primarily by volunteers</p> <p>Unregistered YLO's face elevated financial insecurity</p> <p>COVID-19 has exacerbated financial insecurity for many</p>	<p>Many program budgeting guidelines and resources to draw from (<i>Youth Excel, YSO's</i>)</p> <p>Staff support and training on budgeting literacy (<i>YSO's, YLO's</i>)</p> <p>Youth Excel designed to accommodate various levels of YLO capacities (<i>Youth Excel</i>)</p>	<p>Budget support for YLO's in managing subawards</p> <p>Trainings on budgeting programmatically and organizationally</p> <p>Templates for YLO's to learn how to effectively budget for protection</p>

			<p>Youth Excel offers different types of subawards accompanied with organizational capacity strengthening support (<i>Youth Excel</i>)</p>	<p>Creating transparent selection process for subawards</p>
<p>Sexual or gender-based harassment or assault of youth during Youth Excel activities (Gendered, Sociocultural Physical)</p>	<p>Medium-High</p>	<p>Contexts where sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination is widespread</p> <p>Survivors are afraid to speak up about their abuse because of previous lack of accountability for previous cases</p> <p>Risks heightened during travel to/from activities and during public activities</p> <p>Women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to face GBV</p>	<p>Many national and international frameworks around gender protection (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>International and national buy-in for gender sensitive programming and against GBV (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>GESI analysis tool can help identify vulnerabilities (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>All Youth Excel partners sign onto USAID requirements around safeguarding and prevention of sexual harassment and abuse</p>	<p>Safe, secure, confidential, independent, and rapid reporting mechanisms</p> <p>Diverse points of contact for survivors to report incidents</p> <p>Trauma-informed response training and mechanisms</p> <p>Contingency budget for providing MHPSS, legal or any other support needed for survivors</p> <p>Training and capacity strengthening for Youth Excel staff,</p>

			<p>in subawards (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>USAID reporting mechanisms and requirements</p>	<p>partners and affiliates on gender sensitivity and PSEA</p> <p>Safe travel protocols</p>
<p>Youth Excel programs, operations, and staff perpetuate or exacerbate existing power imbalances, exclusive dynamics, tension or mistrust among divided groups (whether among youth, between youth and adults or institutions, or across conflict divides) (Psychosocial, Gendered, Sociocultural)</p>	<p>Medium-High</p>	<p>Contexts where age-based and other discriminations based on gender, religion, ethnicity and more are widespread and entrenched in the environments surrounding Youth Excel</p> <p>Traditional grant dynamics and requirements and relationships between donor/prime/subawardee reinforce this discrimination and civil society is often accustomed to the traditional process</p> <p>Lack of internet access, time, and language differences make it more difficult for some groups to access Youth Excel</p> <p>In contexts where there is already research fatigue, Youth Excel may reinforce mistrust or tension</p>	<p>Youth Excel principles and global partners committed to focusing on addressing power dynamics (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>Informal youth networks (YLO's)</p> <p>Peer-to-peer support (YLO's)</p> <p>GESI group & guidelines (<i>Youth Excel</i>)</p>	<p>Provide guidelines for creating space, enabling environment for youth participation</p> <p>Take activism culture, oppression and privilege, intergenerational power dynamics, and other factors into consideration when implementing protection and designing programs</p> <p>Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach to monitor power dynamics and inclusion and adapt accordingly</p> <p>Accountability for inclusion, consideration of</p>

				<p>views/opinions</p> <p>Trust building in consortium, especially between youth partners and non-youth partners</p> <p>Clear recruitment and selection criteria for participants</p> <p>Balancing pay, empowering local people to minimize translocal power imbalances</p> <p>Incorporate accessible means of participating in Youth Excel activities</p>
<p>Youth Excel participants experience depression, anxiety, PTSD, or reduced physical or mental wellbeing due to elevated stress, pressure, or exposure associated with Youth Excel activities (Physical, Psychosocial, Sociocultural)</p>	<p>High/High</p>	<p>COVID-19 pandemic, surrounding conflict or crisis contexts and instability heighten this risk in terms of health as well as mental and emotional tolls</p> <p>Implementation research on contexts, programs, or topics dealing with sensitive or traumatic topics such as violence, crime, substance</p>	<p>Informal youth networks already existing (<i>YLO's</i>)</p> <p>Community-based support (if not offering threats) (<i>all have varying capacities</i>)</p> <p>Peer-to-peer support (<i>YLO's</i>)</p> <p>Research ethics</p>	<p>Conducting youth-led risk assessments prior to implementation</p> <p>Creating localized security and risk plans</p> <p>Supporting YLO's by offering sick leave, COVID-19 mitigation and prevention plans, budgeting in Personal</p>

		<p>abuse, etc.</p> <p>Extractive or insensitive research methods could elevate this risk</p> <p>Environments with high mental health stigma make it more difficult for participants to recognize issues or seek treatment</p> <p>History of trauma (personal, group, and societal) among Youth Excel participants</p> <p>YLO's with limited resources, high number of volunteers are more likely to experience this risk and be unable to properly mitigate</p> <p>Restrictions on freedom of movement across towns or borders due to government surveillance of activities, internet laws, gang or militia activity providing physical challenges in travel</p> <p>Mistrust of USG funded programs and research by community and youth</p>	<p>guidelines around protecting participants (<i>Youth Excel, YSO's</i>)</p> <p>IR is built into programs and designed to be actionable and improve programming (<i>Youth Excel, YSO's</i>)</p>	<p>Protective Equipment (PPE - masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, soap) and biosecurity guidelines (social distancing, fever checks, pre-gathering testing)</p> <p>Offering MHPSS guidance and resources to participants including awareness of symptoms</p> <p>Ensuring IR tools are trauma-informed and sensitive</p> <p>Engaging youth in community in research design and Youth Excel programs from beginning to end to build trust</p> <p>Having risk plans for direct engagement in research and mobility to cities / transportation</p>
--	--	---	---	--

<p>Gaps in digital access, lack of cyber or digital security, and barriers in digital literacy leads to increased exclusion, hacking of sensitive data, and other digital threats. (Digital, Psychosocial)</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>	<p>Gendered literacy and digital literacy and accessibility gaps</p> <p>Youth in lower socio-economic status or in remote locations lack digital or internet access</p> <p>YLO's without digital literacy or strong digital or cybersecurity knowledge</p> <p>Oppressive governments that restrict internet and digital access</p> <p>COVID-19 limitations on movement and in-person activities will increase use of virtual platforms and activities</p>	<p>Encryption and cyber/digital security practices <i>(all have varying capacities)</i></p> <p>Digital security guidelines from INGO's and international stakeholders <i>(all have varying capacities)</i></p>	<p>Budget in cybersecurity protocols and digital security training in programs where appropriate</p> <p>Offer digital literacy trainings for vulnerable groups</p> <p>Adopt hybrid (in-person and online) forms of activities and programs to engage youth without access to digital spaces</p> <p>Have back-up plans and physical means of storing data</p> <p>Coordinating with data protection guidelines</p>
---	----------------------	---	--	--

Section 5: Recommendations for Youth Excel

Key takeaways

1. The risks facing young people in regards to protection are **multifaceted** and **range from political to psychosocial to gendered to digital and beyond**.
2. The most prevalent general barriers were: **financial, political, gendered, legal** (freedom of expression and assembly), and **digital**, although psychosocial risks are likely also predominant, though underrepresented in this assessment.
3. Main actors in perpetuating protection risks facing youth: **governments, police**, and other **state actors**, followed by **community members** including **families** and **peers**.
4. Risks and protection cannot be looked at just through an inclusion / exclusion lens, but must be looked at through a **rights based lens**, focusing on the legal protections and generally agreed upon basic human rights afforded to young people - particularly for safety and security.
5. Protection risks do not show up on their own or in isolation, but rather **multiple risks can be prevalent at one time**, making protection **multi layered and complex**, and even more so when intersectionality comes into play.
6. Young people are generally aware of the risks posed to them, but are **less aware of protection mechanisms and resources** available to them.
7. The risks youth felt **most equipped to mitigate were digital risks**, followed by sociocultural risks, although the assessment may overrepresent those capacities due to its virtual nature and focus on youth partners already connected to Youth Excel.
8. Young people with **intersecting identities**, particularly those from minority or marginalized groups, face the most prevalent risks. Groups identified as most vulnerable include: **women and girls, refugees and IDPs, LGBTQIA+ youth, youth with disabilities**, and youth from **lower socioeconomic status**.
9. **Risks cannot be generalized** and **vary from local contexts** making initial risk assessments so important for prevention and adaptability.
10. **Perceptions** of risks and protection issues INGOs and Youth Excel may have are not necessarily the realities of young people.

Main Recommendations

1. Develop an **easy-to-use protection assessment template** that can be applied to the different Youth Excel contexts and updated and revisited throughout the program cycle. The protection assessment should be youth-centered and easy to use by youth and adults alike. It should include considerations for context and conflict analysis, risk analysis, and resource mapping to ensure that protection measures are assets-based and actionable.

2. Protection must be a **key component of programming throughout the project cycle** -starting before program implementation through program closeout. This can be done through holding protection assessments prior to program implementation and updating them during the program cycle, strengthening protection capacities among staff and participants, assigning staff and partners at all levels to act as protection focal points, reviewing the global protection policy and measures on an annual basis, and regularly reflecting on and evaluating protection measures at the local level.
3. **Youth self-protection capacities, agency, and decisionmaking** must be central to the protection policy. This starts with using enabling and inclusive language and recognizing existing capacities and resources for protection, including informal and formal sources of protection. It also means ensuring young people are aware of their protection rights and are central actors in identifying risks and vulnerabilities as well as protection capacities and resources, and mitigation and response processes.
4. Ensure **gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) considerations are integrated in protection assessments and plans**. Consider and build on the findings of the global GESI analysis and your own intersectional rapid gender analysis (iRGA) in the protection assessment and policy. This includes ensuring protection measures account for the different needs and capacities of young people's intersecting and diverse identities, prioritizing the protection of vulnerable groups who face elevated risks,, and explicitly reflecting on and addressing how power dynamics affect protection. It is important that diverse youth who are representative of the populations being engaged are part of the protection assessments and evaluations, and that youth and adult partners reflect on patterns of inclusion and exclusion as well as biases within protection assessments and responses.
5. Include **trust building** at all levels of Youth Excel, recognizing that trust is key to effective protection mechanisms. This includes trust building among the Youth Excel consortium and partners, within ICONs, grantmaking, and implementation research activities. Protection concerns are most likely to be disclosed to trusted staff or partners, and not necessarily to a protection focal point, so it is important that all Youth Excel affiliates are aware of the protection policy, protocols and resources. In contexts where there are negative perceptions of U.S. or Western affiliations, ensuring that youth participants and their communities are informed about the program's affiliation with USAID is important to the sense of trust and transparency.
6. Protocols and **policies must be clear**, with an outline of rights and resources available to young people. Clear and simple policies that can be easily translatable and used by young people and adults alike will make for a more effective policy.
7. **Secure, fast, and effective** response mechanisms must be in place. Some participants noted that a secure, encrypted hotline would be helpful, as well as protection focal points throughout Youth Excel's consortium and partners, at all levels. To ensure efficient, local responses it is likely that Youth Excel partners will need to establish a localized reporting process and confidential feedback mechanism in each context to complement any central processes and mechanisms.

8. **Adequate resources and budgeting are essential for effective protection mechanisms.**
Due to the highly localized and diverse nature of protection challenges and the need to respond to a potentially wide range of threats as they arise, a flexible budget line or pooled fund for protection needs and responses is important. These funds or budgets should be available to Youth Excel participants as needed.
9. **Engage the community, families, and other relevant stakeholders in protection** by communicating protection concerns and measures, having an open feedback loop, visible personnel for protection, and training stakeholders with basic protection protocols. Engaging the community from the beginning will be important to keep protection at the forefront of programming.
10. **Regularly monitor security situations facing young people** particularly in regards to movement or transportation and ensure youth are informed of any changes in security conditions or protection plans and protocols. Some participants noted this can be done by local staff and YLO's through weekly newsletters or having a secure communications channel to keep in touch with youth and provide regular updates for their safety.
11. **Ensure communications and branding are sensitive to conflict dynamics and local sensitivities** to avoid and reduce risks associated with affiliation with USG funded programs in sensitive contexts with high mistrust or anti-Western sentiment. These precautions can be taken through asking for consent, sharing stories or experiences ethically, and more.
12. Build on existing youth capacities for **digital security and cyber security** (which varies among YLO's and youth) by capturing their good practices in general protection guidelines, training youth on digital literacy for Youth Excel activities, and equal access to technology.
13. **Regularly raise awareness of and acknowledge common risks**, particularly mental health challenges, and threats to young people's participation within local Youth Excel contexts. Ensure youth partners and participants have access to and awareness of guidance and resources available to them on common risks and threats, from mental health to financial literacy and more, through easy to access mechanisms.

Section 6: Annex

Survey Results

With 19 respondents to the survey from a variety of different conflict contexts, we were able to assess generally the main protection challenges facing young people. This chart analyzes the probability and impact of certain risks.

Risk	Probability (<i>Never, Occasionally, Often, Constantly</i>)	Impact (<i>Low, Medium, High</i>)
Financial	Constantly (6) Often (5) Occasionally (5) Never (2)	High
Physical	Constantly (0) Often (2) Occasionally (4) Never (12)	Low
Gendered	Constantly (3) Often (6) Occasionally (5) Never (4)	Medium-High
Political	Constantly (3) Often (4) Occasionally (7) Never (4)	Medium
Legal	Constantly (3) Often (3) Occasionally (7) Never (5)	Low-Medium
Sociocultural	Constantly (2) Often (5) Occasionally (8) Never (3)	Medium-High
Psychosocial	Constantly (1) Often (4) Occasionally (5) Never (8)	Low
Digital	Constantly (3) Often (4) Occasionally (8) Never (3)	Medium-High

According to the survey, financial risks were the most prevalent, followed by gendered, sociocultural and then digital risks. The sources of these risks were mostly national and local governments, militia groups, law enforcement, adults, and families or activities. The most

vulnerable groups of people to threats and protection risks identified in the survey were women and girls, people of sexual and gender minorities, and displaced persons. If it wasn't people from these communities themselves facing these risks, young people who advocated on their behalf also faced these risks at large mostly from governments and institutions.

Consultation Results

Risk	Probability (<i>Never, Occasionally, Often, Constantly</i>)	Impact (<i>Low, Medium, High</i>)
Financial	Constantly	High
Physical	Occasionally	Low
Gendered	Often	Medium-High
Political	Constantly	High
Legal	Often	Low-Medium
Sociocultural	Often	Medium-High
Psychosocial	Occasionally	Low
Digital	Occasionally	Medium-High

Protection Task Force Protection Assessments

Protection Task Force members participated in a number of assessment activities, unpacking various risks that may arise from Youth Excel activities, including from programs, operations, and people within the project. Task Force members also looked at risks facing the different kinds of young people participating in Youth Excel activities, including youth-led and local groups, youth beneficiaries, and global youth partners. See their brainstorms below:



