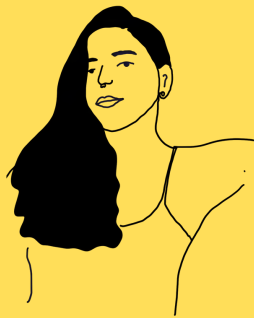


# Youth at the Forefront of Resistance Shimmering Solidarity Summit Report 2021



**Lead Consultants:** Swatee Deepak (UK) and Jody Myrum (US)

**Youth Engagement Leads:** Gabrielle Bailey (Barbados), Daniela Alejandra Moisa (El Salvador)

**Youth Engagement Support:** Kate Matheson (UK/Portugal), María Fernanda Salazar Rodríguez (Portugal/Colombia)

**Wellbeing Lead:** Carmen Morcos (US/Bolivia)

**Youth Activists:** Eyda Nohemí López (Guatemala), Gilda Rachel Rojas Ordóñez (Bolivia), Mwangi Irungu (Kenya), Jayaa Jaggi (Pakistan), Mahjabeen Naaz (India), Rebeca Olascoaga Carbajal García (Mexico),



# Youth at the Forefront of Resistance

## Shimmering Solidarity Summit 2021

### Report

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## 1. [Background and overview](#)

The [Shimmering Solidarity: Global Rights Summit](#) was a four-month virtual summit held in 2021, convened by the Global Philanthropy Project (GPP) and co-convened by Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG), among others. It focused on grantmaker responses to the “anti-gender” movement and related global anti-rights agendas. The Global Rights Summit provided an opportunity for grantmakers, philanthropic networks, and aligned colleagues to build shared analysis around anti-rights attacks and strategize towards multi-sectoral progressive philanthropic responses.

Leading up to the Global Rights Summit, the GPP and ECFG commissioned research called “[Manufacturing Moral Panic: Weaponizing Childhood to Undermine Human Rights](#)”. The research explores two central questions:

1. How have conservative forces used the cloak of child protection to push back against SRHR, LGBTI, and other rights?
2. What can progressive forces learn and what should progressive activists and funders do?

The Global Rights Summit provided an opportunity to share this research and ECFG was committed to ensuring that children and youths’ perspectives and voices were central in the conversation. ECFG is the leading global network of funders focused exclusively on the wellbeing and rights of children and youth, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. ECFG partnered with a number of its members and partners, including the Fund for Global Human Rights, the Oak Foundation, the With and For Girls Collective, the Children Right’s Innovation Fund, the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Global Fund for Children, Comic Relief UK, and the Children’s Rights and Violence Prevention Fund to co-host a youth designed and led session at the Summit.

In designing the project, ECFG wanted not only to elevate youth voices within the conversations, ensuring that those on the front lines facing anti-gender movement were speaking directly to funders, but also wanted to facilitate the participation of young people in a deliberate way that would enable the building of knowledge and lessons-learned about good practice and be an example for funders of what is possible.

To make this a truly youth-led and owned process, two youth leaders were hired to help select and lead a cohort of young activists from around the world to design the session. Through an application and interview process six young activists were selected. Members of ECFG also helped to review and narrow applications prior to interviews. From March until May 25, 2021,



the youth activists met to explore and contextualize the research and the relevance of anti gender movements in their lives; to better understand funders as an audience; craft key messages for funders; and design a session that would speak to, and transform, funders. By spending time with the researchers and each other in advance of the session, the youth session organizers made linkages between child rights and anti-gender forces, explored how children and youth are creating progress in this space, and made recommendations for what grantmakers can do to support young people's activism. They published [a short](#) and a [long film](#) outlining their contexts and recommendations for funders.

The young people also hosted a mix and mingle space to create an opportunity for funders and young activists to be in direct dialogue. . This created a unique and rare opportunity for young people to be in direct conversation with funders and to share their critical perspectives with them. It also provided another opportunity for the young people to share their recommendations for what grantmakers can do to support young people's activism. This was held outside of the Shimmering Solidarity platform so more funders could join and be in conversation with the activists.

While the purpose of this project was to elevate young people's voices with funders and draw attention to how young people are on the forefront of pushing back on anti-gender ideology, it was important that the process was intentional and a positive experience for the young people. Therefore, the team developed a thoughtful 5 month engagement with the activists that included community building and access to one-on-one and group healing sessions with Carmen Morcos. Because the way funders engage with young people is critical, this report includes lessons and recommendations for engaging with young people.

## [2. Outputs and outcomes](#)

### **Youth voices successfully elevated within philanthropy:**

- Young activists developed and shared reflections and a set of recommendations with 41 participants at the session, more than half from philanthropic institutions.
- The youth developed [a short](#) and a [long film](#) to share their experiences and demands with funders. These videos can be used for ongoing advocacy with funders to move more and better resources to young activists.
- The video was featured at the closing ceremony and several of the closing contributions from participants specifically mentioned the youth session as a highlight of Shimmering Solidarity.
- The youth developed very specific recommendations for how funders can better support young activists that has circulated throughout philanthropy.
- The youth hosted a curated mix and mingle with the broader donor community to have more intimate conversations about their contexts, their work and their



recommendations for what funders can do to better support young activists. A total of seven funding organisations attended the session for deeper conversations with the young people and to follow up with entry points and opportunities.

### **Young people supported to come together in community and collective solidarity**

- The young activists were grateful for the chance to participate and to connect with other young people around the world. Many shared that the chance to meet other young people outside their country was so rare and this provided an opportunity for them to learn from each other's strategies for countering anti-gender ideology. As a result of coming together they had new relationships, and also new ideas for how to organize in their communities to counter anti-gender ideology. .
- The intentional process reminded all of us that in our social justice work, the moments to ground and center, replenish, connect, move, and breathe can be as important to the “success” of a project than what the deliverables formally entail.

### **Yielded**

- The youth were excited about the commitments they created for funders who want to work in solidarity with young people against the weaponization of their rights. They want to see more funders sign the commitments and to think about how these commitments don't just become a stagnant document but a tool for promoting dialogue with young people and deeper funder accountability.
- Documented important lessons about how to support young rights activists in vulnerable situations in philanthropic spaces, particularly in COVID.

A 60-min post-Shimmering Solidarity session created space for young people to reflect on the impact it had on them. Below are the guiding questions and some of the impact the young people shared.

**What's something Shimmering Solidarity has given you? What are you grateful for? Something you learned? What will you miss? What will you remember/value most about each other?**

*“Confidence in my ability to lead effectively.”*

*“I'm grateful for this experience and the feeling that this time in these types of events we really were heard and taken in count.”*



*“There is a stronger voice and power in coming together to fight the work and the effect of the opposition.”*

*“I will value the courage that all the people in this group have, we are in difficult times resisting. Thank you for everything you do.”*

*“That there was a space where we could talk about sensitive issues that we/our countries face.”*

*“I'm grateful to be in community, especially amidst the isolation of Covid.”*

*“A safe space to speak about issues that are considered "sensitive" in my country.”*

*“A space where we were all seen.”*

*“I am grateful for the opportunity I got to be part of the team. I remember doing my interview with Gabby and Kate :) :) and my dog barking..and getting anxious and to this whole journey. :)”*

*“Life has a way of putting challenges in the way, but everyone has continued to show up anyway. I'm very grateful.”*

*“The efforts that we all have in addressing these issues and making Earth a better place for ALL :) :)”*

*“Will definitely miss the team :( :( .. speaking about these issues, our strategies is empowering.”*

*“Charismatic and kind; I will remember being in this group, not being alone, leaving with high self esteem.”*

*“What I value: dynamics, the healing with Carmen to destress, leave the work for a moment, feel supported, have time to think and process.”*

*“Having a space for trans is very important.”*

*“What I learned: solidarity, patience, learn new ways of living.”*

*“It was emotional to meet so many people from so many countries.”*

## 2. Some lessons learned

Considerations must always be made when working with youth, including access to technology and other necessary resources, financial considerations, safety and security, and time commitment. And the Global Rights Summit took place during extraordinary times where it is even more challenging for young people to show up. Many of the youth activists are under lock down, restricting them from traveling to internet and computer access; there are new



waves of COVID-19 ravaging communities and impacting young people and their families; youth activists are experiencing heightened political backlash; and fear of retribution is taking a huge psychological toll. The youth activists showed up to calls amongst absolute pain and chaos-- with relatives and friends lost from COVID-19, the murder of a fellow movement leader, and ongoing stress from doing such brave work in difficult circumstances. **These youth activists showed us again, the incredible courage and resilience they bring to the work.**

Below are some lessons and considerations that are always present when working with young people, with some specifics for the moment we are in.

**Build enough time and spaciousness into a process + create space for young people to learn about philanthropy & other necessary content:**

- So often session organizers have one prep session with young people and then put them on a panel. This longer session design process created space for learning, sharing, connection and planning. It was a deep investment in young people and it was critical to the success of the panel. It also meant that young people walked away with new skills, connections and perspectives on their own work.
- In order for young people to be able to develop messages for funders, it is important they understand how philanthropy works, how funders think, and what kind of arguments speak to them. Build in time for these discussions about funders and with funders as a part of the process. The team developed funder archetypes and role play scenarios to engage the young people as a way for them to develop their key messages.
- It is also important for young people to understand the overall context and framing of the summit/event and the session. The purpose of this particular session was to bring to life research findings through the perspectives of young people and for young people to share their experiences, organizing strategies and recommendations with funders. The research is dense and complex, and very long. As a part of the process the team developed a shorter version of the report for young people, and a powerpoint presentation. Additionally, there was a session with the young people and researchers together to be in dialogue about the research. This meant that the young people could better situate their contexts and experiences in the broader context of the research. It also provided space for the researchers to further contextualize their research in the lives of young people.

**Space for joy and care:** These are young people working on the front lines, often in the face of real threats to their lives and the lives of their loved ones and community members. People are isolated and feeling the toll of being in lockdown. Access to healing and spaces for joy and care should be central to every part of the process.



- For this process, it was important to create space for connection and relationship building to counter isolation and build solidarity. This included space for joy and care in every meeting and access to a healing & wellness track with a specialist. This not only allows for healing to happen but it supports young people to be fully present and bring their full selves to the session. Providing tools for healing and wellbeing also supports them in their everyday activism, strengthening their sustainability in working in very difficult circumstances.
- Space for joy and care also meant that the young people were better prepared for the session, were able to show up as their full selves, and were able to be fully present.

**Language:** Existing systems and infrastructure to support language justice are limited.

- In a mixed language group, there were a lot of complexities. In order to support the multi-lingual group, the team had two youth co-leaders, Gabrielle and Daniela, Daniela is bilingual in Spanish and English, the team also brought on an additional consultant, Maria Fernanda who was both an expert in working with youth and is bilingual in English and Spanish and could provide live translation and interpretation. Also for the healing and collective care space, the team brought on Carmen, a healing expert who was also bilingual.
- It was important to have access to a Zoom pro-account that allows for closed captions and the ability to support live translations. To promote language justice it was important to equally translate each language so one group is not always bearing the brunt of translation.
- These were some of the efforts the team took to accommodate language, but more could be done. It is important to constantly consider how we can make these spaces more open to those that don't speak, not only English, but other colonial languages like French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian, etc. Doing this well involves holding multilingual places with facilitators who could work across these languages, including translating all materials and live interpretation. Models of this are seen across feminist funds and groups such as AWID and whilst have a cost consideration, move substantially away from a colonized approach to development.

**Technology:** Virtual gatherings create an obvious dependence on technology. In many ways the use of technology can create access for people to participate, who might not otherwise be able to. It also creates many considerations- from access, to safety, to the selection of platforms.

- Consider if young people have access to tech - a computer or a smartphone and the limitations of both. For example, some tech tools work great on a computer but are limited over the phone. In this project we used Zoom and Kumospace for our sessions which both have good mobile interfaces compared to other conferencing tools and used





WhatsApp or Signal to follow up with young people. Find and use tech that can accommodate both the use of phone and computer.

- There is a need to consider safety and security of where a young person is taking the call from and if it is safe for them to be in these conversations in their home or in public. One strategy is to develop codes or signals for when someone's safety/comfort status has changed throughout a call and make sure all young people know the codes/signals and as facilitators watch out for them. Decide early on what to do if someone uses one of these codes. Another is to ensure young people have access to headphones/headsets so they have more privacy.
- Access to technology creates one barrier, cost is another barrier. At the beginning of the process ask people about costs related to wifi credit, computer rental, travel to access a computer, etc. and develop a plan for moving these resources quickly to them.
- Plan for tech outages and surges. For example, before the event session make sure people have written down or pre-recorded their key messages. If something happens in the session, have a plan for who or how you will share their messages.
- During times of lock-down, consider that those who need to use internet cafes or borrow equipment need to navigate restrictions, curfews, etc.

#### **Accessibility and flexibility in the application process:**

- Given the pace, timeline of the project, limited language capacity on the team and our reliance on technology to apply and participate, we would suggest a longer timeframe to recruit young people. Below are some strategies given the limitations but more time on the front end would have benefited the process and lowered access barriers for young people.
- Due to the pace of the project, the call went out on social media and through philanthropic networks, such as Elevate Children and their members. The call did not go directly to youth networks and organisations. Consider where the call for applications is advertised, and the process for submitting applications. Lower barriers to entry results in a more equitable process to get a more diverse group of applicants.
- Consider how language justice and financial considerations might enable more voices to be heard. By publishing the call for applications in Spanish and English and outlining the financial stipends and financial support for travel, credit etc., participation was accessible to a broader range of young people.
- It is important to partner with organizations that are able to reach young people, especially those who often have less access to opportunities. Partnering with With and For Girls and the Global Resilience Fund, both a part of Purposeful, were central to the recruitment of these young activists.
- Consider how the timeline and time commitment impacts who applies and who has the time to be involved. Considerations taken in this process included scheduling different times to support timezones, asking young people for their school/college/work timings



and key dates in advance, clearly communicating the timeline and responsibilities and offering a stipend and expenses so young people were not out of pocket.

### **COVID Outbreaks and Lockdown**

- Lockdowns hindered people's participation, especially for those who need to travel to access the internet. When travel was restricted, participation was restricted. This is true for many during COVID-19 but outside of the pandemic people across contexts face lock down regularly for a variety of reasons. For those under lock-down/curfew, it's important to be flexible and understand that some individuals may not be able to join or will only join by dialing in. It is also important to be aware of curfew times, scheduled power surges, etc. and consider this in planning.
- COVID spiked in regions where some of the young people are based, meaning they were dealing with sickness and death in their families and communities. For many young people, the reality of crises is not new- from political crises, climate related crises, conflict and more. Consider always being inclusive of those in crisis contexts, as they provide a unique and critical perspective, and the considerations necessary for their accessibility. Some considerations we took was to always be flexible, respond and plan with empathy and offer collective and healing space for young people to be supported (more information on this below).

### **Resourcing and recognizing young people:**

- Resource people for their time and also to be able to show up (phone credit, travel to a safe place). It is a determining factor in who is able (or not able) to join.
- Resourcing people adds a layer of bureaucracy that might be new to young people, consider providing the support needed to complete forms and understand foreign processes, and plan for the time this takes. This meant creating templates as examples on how to complete the forms as well as 1:1 calls to walk through the documents.
- Consider how you can move money to people who do not have bank accounts, are in rural areas or have other barriers to receiving money and plan for it from the beginning. This involved paying people through PayPal, Venmo, and for those without bank accounts, through Western Union.
- In addition to financial resources, issue certificates or letters for the young people to recognize their role and contribution. This is especially important given the heightened security considerations and lack of ability for the young people to publicise their involvement in the conference or work on social media etc. This can support them in job, college or university applications, and create access to other opportunities.

### **[3. Reflections on supporting care for young people](#)**

#### **Lessons from the healing sessions:**



ECFG invested in this project in order to elevate young people's voices with funders and draw attention to how young people were on the forefront of pushing back on anti-gender ideology. And, ECFG was also committed to ensuring it was a positive and healing space for the young activists, knowing the extremely difficult circumstances they are working under. Therefore they hired a healing expert, Carmen Morcos, to accompany the process and support the wellbeing of the young activist session organizers in partnership with the Youth Engagement Leads, Dani and Gabby. Carmen designed and facilitated regular collective and/or individual healing space.

### **Accessible information and content**

Carmen shared a healing google folder for all young people with folders in English and Spanish, which included:

- A video introducing herself and the healing offerings + a written overview of the healing work
- Journal prompts which were emailed every 2-3 weeks with a centering exercise at the beginning
- Pre and post-Shimmering Solidarity session powerpoints and jamboards

Collective moments of healing for the group, including:

- Dedicated time and space for grounding and centering, movement, breathing, meditation, journaling, sharing, and reflection
- A 60-min pre-Shimmering Solidary session focused on connecting the young people to themselves/each other, movement, music, and having them reflect on:
  - i. How do you feel going into this session?  
***“Happy, proud, relieved, excited, present, clear, focused.”***
  - ii. What would success look like?  
***“Less stressed; donors have an understanding, see the work, and put in resources / commitment; how we help others (directly and indirectly).”***
- All the young people were offered private coaching sessions (either two, 30-min sessions or one, 60-min session); four of the young people signed up (although one didn't show) and one of them signed up for three sessions (Carmen offered her sessions that others didn't take + an extra one because she really needed it).

### **Carmen's reflections:**

- The healing part felt very important to the whole process. The young people seemed to greatly value and enjoy it - and wanted more. It provided a space for the young people to open up about themselves without a specific agenda (or need for work), where they could be more vulnerable and free. For those that signed up for private coaching sessions, these seemed to be one of the most valuable pieces because the young person had an entire session dedicated to THEM and what they needed. They were



able to open up and share difficult issues. Carmen listened, they felt heard, and where she could, Carmen offered advice and strategies that might be helpful. This not only helps them in the moment but helps them sustain their activism over the longer term.

**Lessons/What Carmen would do differently next time:**

- Integrate the healing into the entire schedule from the beginning and not just at specific moments. Carmen was introduced briefly in the beginning and then brought in much later to do a pre and post-session, which made it hard for the young people to get to know (and trust!) her. If someone has never had a coaching session, it can be intimidating to sign up and/or you may not understand its value. Integrating healing into each or most sessions demonstrates its importance and value.
- Split up sessions into English and Spanish with occasional sessions to bring everyone together. A lot of time was lost and the sessions were impacted by constantly worrying and translating every session in real-time for the young people.

**Reflections from young people on the healing sessions:**

Most young people indicated that the one-on-one sessions were the standout aspect of Carmen’s involvement. There was one note in particular that indicated it helped a young person to develop ideas and strategies to become a more active activist. Generally, however, all aspects of the healing sessions were at some point highlighted, with other responses pointing out that it was good to have the space to relax and forget that they are saturated in work. The journal prompts were also highlighted as a favorite aspect. When asked if healing spaces like this should be offered to other young people, all persons said a resounding yes.

One note was that “many of us have a burning passion, and sometimes we forget ourselves within the work we do, and it’s important to ensure self care and rest”. Another note was that “Carmen is an incredible person who has helped to create healing from some difficult aspects of life, and provided tools to overcome what hurts them”.

**4. General Feedback from the young people on the process**

**Overarching feedback**

Overall there was positive feedback from all the young people about the process and experience.

- All participants remarked on a need for more time together to bond and build community and share more personal experiences with each other and have time for discussions and conversations.
- Many were grateful for the chance to participate and to connect with other young people around the world. Many shared that the chance to meet other young people



outside their country was so rare. There was also a feeling of wanting to learn each other's languages so they would have learnt more and stay in touch more deeply. This was particularly evident in those who wished to learn Spanish and English.

- Many shared feedback about a sense of safety and space in the group and a lot of empathy which felt needed given the stress of work, life and other responsibilities.
- Despite the limitations of language and technology, the young people said that the virtual experience had advantages of an extended process which gave them a sense of responsibility to being present in the sessions. This helped a lot during isolation because of Covid-19 and weekly meetings helped them mentally to keep continuing with their job.
- Film - many of the young people were really proud of the film and loved the chance to participate. It felt powerful and full of young people's voices on this issue.
- Specific aspects were mentioned in the feedback and evaluation:
  - The platforms used: Zoom and Kumospace
  - The mode of leadership - and having two young feminist activists, Daniela and Gabrielle, leading sessions
  - The young people really enjoyed the 'Into the minds of funder' session which gave them insights into how different funders think and how the young people's stories might better resonate with them
  - The application and interview process for many felt much more accessible and friendly than other opportunities for young people
  - There was a commitment to holding diverse voices, languages and contexts which felt authentic

### **The research and meeting the researchers**

Overall the young people were really interested in the research and felt that the overview they received helped them frame and contextualise the issues they were facing in their own activism and work in a local context.

Meeting with the researchers was a highlight of the experience for them and many found the discussion illuminating. Many said that the session with the researchers and discussing the research *"I really liked this because despite the geographical distance we share similar problems, we understand this is a global issue and the most important (thing) is that we fight to enforce our rights. I wish we could give this to other young people"*

### **Conference involvement**



Many felt that their session went well and was well attended with an engaged audience. Many wish that there was more time for discussion with funders in the session but felt connected, authentic and powerful in the session.

Although all had access to the Shimmering Solidarity conference and website, they felt it hard to navigate and use and the Spanish speakers felt the platform was mostly unusable for them as most sessions were not bilingual and they couldn't attend or participate. In our team Maria offered to accompany any spanish speakers and translate on WhatsApp but this was only taken up once and both felt it wasn't a good solution to participation.

### **Mix and mingle**

The mix and mingle with funders was well liked by everyone. There were mixed reviews from the participants on the use of the Kumospace platform which was new, but overall the design and thought that went into it were extremely well appreciated.

The overarching feedback was that more time was needed but reiterated that they appreciated the space and that it was extremely useful and they felt like there was genuine interest in their work, perspectives and activism.

### **Next Steps from the perspective of young people**

The group and participants indicated a general interest in staying in touch at least once monthly as a form of cross context trans-national solidarity. Many also wanted to have continued access to a healing space/ Carmen, and expressions of gratitude to the entire team for their efforts in this.

Many participants also indicated wanting to keep in contact and contribute to ongoing work at Elevate Children - perhaps when research is formally launched or when events in which young people's perspectives would be important to have representation.

Although they were grateful for the chance to meet and keep in touch virtually, there was a desire to meet in person someday.

Finally the young people were excited about the commitments that they created for funders who wanted to work in solidarity with young people against the weaponization of their rights. They want to see more funders signing up to these and would love to think about how these commitments don't just become a document but how they can be useful, provide access to dialogue with young people and how they also can be involved in their accountability.



## 5. Recommendations for next steps

Beyond the considerations and lessons learned we shared throughout this report, we also recommend some immediate next steps specific to this session and group of young people.

- **Re-engage the young people in the future to come together:** this group of youth activists have created a significant bond with each other and have expressed interest in continuing to meet. They have committed to doing this informally. If there are opportunities for them to come together - to an ECFG meeting to share about their experiences, future panels or mix and mingles or other opportunities, this group is ready to be engaged.
- **Promote the commitments and ask others to sign:** The youth activists came up with a list of commitments they are asking funders to commit to and sign. Please circulate [these demands](#) among your membership and community and ask people to share. It might also be an opportunity for
- **Share the videos:** the young people created two videos, a shorter one to kick off the session at Shimmering Solidarity and a longer version to get their messages out into the world. Please share these videos with your membership, community, social media, etc. to help spread their critical messages to funders.
- **Post a blog:** some of the young people are interested in writing a blog about their experiences in doing this work. This may take time to materialise given their schedules but would be great if Elevate could post on their newsletter and relevant channels.

## Annex: Key documents

- ★ Link to the shortened version of the report that is youth friendly
  - [Walk through research powerpoint](#) + in [Spanish](#)
  - [Research 'key takeaways'](#) + [Spanish](#)
  - [Glossary](#)
- ★ [Video hype reel from youth activists](#)
- ★ [Longer video from youth activists](#)