



Leave No Refugee Behind

Inclusion and Forced Migration

Issue Brief – October 2020

Summary

- ▶ By WHO estimates, at least 12 million forcibly displaced people worldwide have a disability.
- ▶ Displaced persons with disabilities face violence, discrimination and barriers to services at a higher rate than other refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- ▶ Humanitarian actors have to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in contexts of forced migration.
- ▶ This must include accessible services as well as active participation of refugees and IDPs with disabilities in decision-making structures.

A) Forced Migration in a Nutshell

Forced migration has been rising significantly. From 38.5 million in 2011, the number of forcibly displaced persons increased to 79.5 million in 2019, 40% of those children. This amounts to 1% of the world's population. 45.7 million of them are IDPs, who are forced to flee their homes but remain within their country's border. The reasons for displacement range from persecution, conflict or human rights violations to natural disasters.¹

B) Refugees and IDPs with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities are part of any refugee population. The WHO estimates a disability prevalence rate of 15%.² Disability rates increase up to 20% in contexts of poverty and conflict. This means that 12 to 16 million refugees and IDPs worldwide have some form of disability.

1 UNHCR (2019): Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2019. www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf.

2 WHO (2011): World Report on Disability. www.who.int/publications/i/item/world-report-on-disability.

Situation of Forcibly Displaced Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities, especially children, women and older persons, belong to the most vulnerable individuals in contexts of forced migration. However, they are often underserved. The challenges they face may be overlooked, or inadvertently even posed, by aid and development providers.³ These include:

- ▶ **Invisibility:** Refugees and IDPs with disabilities are often not identified during registration. Subsequently, this excludes them from most interventions.
- ▶ **Access to Services:** Within camps, refugees and IDPs with disabilities are often living far away from essential services such as health centres, schools and food collection points. This makes it difficult for them to reach and use those services. Evidence from South Sudan shows that 35% of IDPs with disabilities report such barriers.⁴
- ▶ **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:** Sanitation facilities and toilets are regularly not physically accessible.⁵ 49% of IDPs with disabilities in South Sudan report not having access to safe and clean water.⁶
- ▶ **Employment:** Data from Turkey and Syria shows that refugees with disabilities struggle to find a job and experience stigma. Due to increased cost of care but a lack of stable income, they are more likely to face financial hardship.⁷
- ▶ **Safety and Security:** Due to loss of community networks and independence, forcibly displaced people with disabilities experience violence at much higher rates than others.⁸ For instance, 70% of female IDPs in South Sudan report experiences with sexual violence.⁹
- ▶ **Discrimination:** Discrimination on basis of disability is aggravated. For instance, 38% of IDPs with disabilities in South Sudan report having no community engagement at all.¹⁰ Additionally, refugees and IDPs with disabilities often face exclusion from decision-making processes and leadership in camp management structures.¹¹
- ▶ **COVID-19:** The pandemic deepens these structural vulnerabilities. Information on prevention and hygiene is usually not available in accessible formats. Distribution of soap, food, and other necessities is not inclusive. Physical distancing is unfeasible in most camps, particularly for those who rely upon personal assistance.¹²

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- 3 UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs (2020): Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Internal Displacement. A/HRC/44/41. \$18. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/41>.
- 4 Light for the World (2020): Submission to the Call of the UN Special Rapporteur. www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IDPersons/Call/LightfortheWorld.docx.
- 5 UNHCR (2019): Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement. www.refworld.org/docid/5ce271164.html.
- 6 Light for the World (2020): op. cit.
- 7 Rohwerder, B. (2018): Syrian Refugee Women, Girls, and People with Disabilities in Turkey. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syrian_refugee_women_girls_and_people_with_disabilities_in_Turkey.pdf.
- 8 UN Special Rapporteur (2020): op. cit. \$57.
- 9 Light for the World (2020): op. cit.
- 10 ibid.
- 11 UN Special Rapporteur (2020): op. cit. \$11.
- 12 Women's Refugee Commission (2020): COVID-19 Updates. Displaced Persons with Disabilities. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/In-Their-Own-Words-COVID19-Disability.pdf>.

Policy Framework and Legal Requirements

182 states have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Its legal provisions apply equally to refugees and IDPs.¹³ This includes Article 11, which obliges state parties to:

“ Ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.¹⁴ ”

Multiple frameworks supplement this legal obligation. The UN Global Compact on Refugees mainstreamed disability-inclusion. The recent IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action include actions for refugees and IDPs. Further, most countries, UN Agencies, leading international organisations and humanitarian NGOs further endorsed the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.¹⁵

In addition, Article 32 of the CRPD obliges state parties to ensure that development and humanitarian action are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disability.¹⁶ Regardless of this commitment, only 2% of international development assistance is allocated to persons with disabilities. Only a fraction of this reaches refugees and IDPs with disabilities.¹⁷

C) Our Work

While forced migration affects all our focus country, our longest-standing engagement with refugees and IDPs with disabilities is in South Sudan. 16% of its population lives in a context of forced migration.¹⁸ In this context, we implement a comprehensive approach based on technical skills, disability mainstreaming and partnership. This includes:

- **Policy:** Our Humanitarian Policy articulates cross-organisational guiding principles and a common approach to implementation and partnerships.
- **Mainstreaming:** We offer regular capacity-building training to UNHCR partners and camp management NGOs, facilitating their delivery of disability-inclusive humanitarian and development responses.
- **Assistive Devices:** We support persons with disabilities in the Mahad and Gumbo IDP camps near Juba by providing assistive devices such as wheelchairs and crutches.

13 UN Special Rapporteur (2020): op. cit. §22.

14 UN (2006): Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Art. 11. www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible.pdf.

15 UN (2018): Global Compact on Refugees. www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf; IASC (2019): Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disability in Humanitarian Action. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-inclusion-persons-disabilities-humanitarian-action/documents/iasc-guidelines>; Humanitarian Disability Charter (2016): The Charter. <http://humanitariananddisabilitycharter.org/>.

16 UN (2006): op. cit. Art. 32.

17 Walton, D. (2020): Disability-Inclusive ODA. <https://devinit.org/resources/disability-inclusive-oda-aid-data-donors-channels-recipients/>.

18 UNHCR (2019): South Sudan Situation Regional Update. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan>.

- ▶ **Visibility and Involvement:** We support the South Sudan Union of People with Disabilities. It advocates disability inclusion, including for refugees and IDPs. One of its representatives is deputy chair of the resident committee at his refugee site.
- ▶ **Safeguarding and Gender:** We provide training for mainstream organisations that work in a context of forced migration, including UN Agencies. All training includes components on women's rights and child safeguarding. We aim for gender balance among our trainers.
- ▶ **COVID-19 Response:** We conducted awareness-raising sessions with IDP camp managers in Juba and provided residents at various sites with accessible information, education and communication material on the pandemic.

D) Recommended Action

Overcoming the marginalisation of refugees and IDPs with disabilities requires a twin-track approach. Humanitarian actors operating in the context of forced migration need to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into their programmes, while at the same time providing them with specialised services.

To leave no refugee behind, governments, UN agencies, development agencies and NGOs need to:

- ▶ Consistently act in line with the requirements of the CRPD, especially Articles 11 and 32, and international refugee law.
- ▶ Collect accurate, comprehensive, disability-disaggregated data on refugee populations and use this data as the basis for programming of services.
- ▶ Ensure that services are accessible to and inclusive of refugees with disabilities, including information, health, education, shelter, food and sanitation.
- ▶ Provide sensitisation, capacity development and coaching on disability-inclusion to all personnel working in refugee camps, IDP camps and resettlements sites.
- ▶ Actively consult with persons with disabilities, including women and children with disabilities, and ensure their participation in camp management and habitant committee meetings.
- ▶ Support organisations of persons with disabilities in refugee camps, IDP camps and resettlement sites.
- ▶ Mainstream disability into humanitarian response coordination systems for refugees and for IDPs, including through the establishment of a disability working group.
- ▶ Ensure that calls for proposals and submissions are disability-inclusive and include adequate budgets for accessibility.

Further Reading

- ▶ UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (2020): Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Internal Displacement. A/HRC/44/41. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/41>.
- ▶ UNHCR (2019): Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ce271164.html>.
- ▶ UNHCR (2020): Emergency Handbook – Persons with Disabilities. Version 2.1. <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/43586/persons-with-disabilities>.
- ▶ Women’s Refugee Commission (2020): In their Own Words: COVID-19 Updates. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/In-Their-Own-Words-COVID19-Disability.pdf>.



About Light for the World

Light for the World is a global disability and development organisation, breaking down barriers to enrich society and unlock the potential in all of us. Our vision is an inclusive society for all where no one is left behind. We enable eye health services and empower people with disabilities in some of the poorest regions of the world.

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