



Topic A: Measures to guarantee the protection of refugees with disabilities

“At UNHCR, we work to ensure women, girls, men and boys with disabilities have access to vital services and have the opportunity to apply their skills and capacities to benefit themselves, their families and communities. We work around the clock to identify the issues they face and develop long-term solutions.”¹

I. Introduction

It has been estimated that between 2.5 and 3.5 percent of the world's 35 million displaced persons live with disabilities.² This number might be even higher among those who have fled civil conflict, war or natural disasters. This group of people remains among the most hidden, neglected and socially excluded of all displaced people today. They are often literally and programmatically “invisible” in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) assistance programs. They are excluded, forgotten, and ignored when talking about assistance, specialized establishments, services and community and leadership management structures. It is a priority to address the issue, because not only is their potential being lost by considering them a burden, but also they go under deplorable conditions, which is a Human Rights violation.

¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (s. f.). *Persons with Disabilities*. UNHCR. Recuperado 24 de noviembre de 2021, de <https://www.unhcr.org/persons-with-disabilities.html>

² OCHA Services. Reliefweb. *Disabilities among refugees and conflict-affected populations*. Recuperado 24 de noviembre de 2021, de <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/disabilities-among-refugees-and-conflict-affected-populations>





It isn't uncommon for the UNHCR to deal with matters such as disabled refugees protection; throughout the years, our committee has a record of suggesting and proposing solutions to the issue using policies, reports, documents, practices, funds and diverse resources designed to provide help for the current status of refugees. As UNHCR, we have prioritized helping refugees from across the globe. Actually, one of our main functions is dedicated to work with refugees with disabilities since it has statically been proven that people with disabilities struggle way more with adapting through their displacement and they seem to often feel more strained under that situation.

II. Concept definition

- **Advocacy:** Coordinated activities that seek to enhance protection by promoting changes that bring policy, practice or law into line with international standards.³
- **Barriers:** Inequalities that exist between different individuals in a society, caused because of several reasons, such as socioeconomic status, physical or psychological characteristics, religion, race, ethnicity, and gender.
- **Disability:** Those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers

³ UNHCR - Master Glossary. (n.d.) A#(Advocacy) <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary/#a>. Retrieved November 24, 2021.





may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁴

- **Discrimination:** The practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other groups of people.⁵
- **Forced Displacement:** Being displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations.⁶
- **Migrant:** Someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status.⁷
- **Refugee:** Someone fleeing conflict or persecution. They are specifically protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk. The actual definition of refugee is contained in The 1951 Refugee Convention.

III. Current situation

Migration and displacement are important issues for both, human rights and policy-making development. It occurs across geographic borders internationally or internally in the search of a better life. According to estimates, the number of international migrants had reached 232 million globally in 2013.⁸ Also, of the 59.5 million people forcibly displaced

⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities. (s. f.). *Persons with Disabilities* | Department of Health website. Republic of the Philippines Department of Health. Retrieved November 24, 2021, from <https://doh.gov.ph/persons-with-disabilities>

⁵ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Discrimination. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved November 24, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discrimination>

⁶ UNHCR. (2014). Forced Displacement in 2014. November 24, 2021, from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Website: <https://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

⁷ United Nations. (2016, July 22). *Definitions*. Refugees and Migrants. Retrieved November 24, 2021, from <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>

⁸ UNDESA, Population Division, 2013.





worldwide in 2014, about 19.5 million were refugees and 1.8 million were asylum seekers⁹. Moreover, there is an overwhelming majority of people who migrate inside their own country, the number of which approaches 740 million, almost four times as many as the international migrants.¹⁰ With regards to disability, however, there is a lack of broad data regarding the situation of refugees with disabilities.

This said, the World Health Organization estimates that about 15% of the world's population has a disability¹¹. In situations of forced migration or displacement, the incidence of disability is expected to be even higher owing to an increased number of persons with injuries, lack of access to quality medical services and the creation of new barriers in the environment.¹² This suggests that several millions of people who have disabilities are among UNHCR's groups of concern. However, individuals with disabilities are significantly under-identified in forced displacement current contexts.

Regarding these situations, people with disabilities have the same rights and basic needs as others and face the same challenges as the rest of individuals, but they also face particular vulnerabilities, such as heightened risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, as well as high levels of stigma, without mentioning that they are more likely to be left behind or abandoned. Furthermore, people with disabilities face numerous barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, education, livelihoods,

⁹ UNHCR, 2014.

¹⁰ UNDP, 2009.

¹¹ WHO/ World Bank, World Report on Disability (2011), at http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

¹² Handicap International (2015) 'Disability in Humanitarian Context', at: <https://bit.ly/2AV1mWg>





health care and other services; in this sense, they may be denied certain legal rights, such as the right to a nationality, education, livelihood ambits, and are often excluded from decision-making processes and leadership opportunities.¹³ It is also pertinent to consider the cases where disability may be caused by the action of migrating when fleeing conflict or natural disasters: this can turn out to be even more complicated in relation to the displacement of the disabled person, due to the spontaneousness of the situation.

Clearly, people with disabilities are not a homogenous group. They face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination on the basis of disability and other intersecting diversity factors that may lead to situations of exclusion. For example, persons with disabilities from national, religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities; women; elder people; children; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons with disabilities may experience particular protection risks and inequality. For this reason, it is essential to apply an age, gender and diversity approach, if UNHCR tempts to achieve its commitment that protection, assistance and solutions are accessible to the full diversity of persons with disabilities.

Some of the main operational challenges that contribute to the cause and, therefore, should be addressed in order to improve the situation are the under-identification of people with disabilities, because it presents a significant challenge to monitor their access to protection and assistance to planning an inclusive response. The poor collection and

¹³ For example, persons with disabilities may be less likely to be registered at birth, thus placing them at risk of being denied a nationality.





use of reliable data and information on people of concern with disabilities, including on their access to protection, assistance and solutions, also represent an obstacle to a solution, because of the fact that it considerably decreases UNHCR's capacity to monitor and report on access and inclusion and to systematically identify gaps and good practices.

IV. International initiatives

The UNHCR has resorted to different international initiatives, such as policies and guidance documents, which talk about measures taken when it comes to refugees with disabilities in any refugee crisis such as:

- The Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity of 2018, which ensures that refugees and other displaced people enjoy their rights on an equal footing and participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives, families and communities.
- The conclusion on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected by the UNHCR.
- The policy known as Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement, launched in 2019.
- The official UNHCR Emergency Handbook - Persons with Disabilities.
- The Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement Facilitator's Guide.
- The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), which was launched by the UN Secretary-General in June 2019. It is a





comprehensive strategy for ensuring that the United Nations system is fit for purpose in relation to disability inclusion.

- The contribution to the development of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action to strengthen the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the design, planning, programming, monitoring, evaluation and coordination of its programmes.

Other resources taken into account are the general practices of people with disabilities. UNHCR's good practices, for example, are basically documented records of our committee regarding displacement and the disabled community; this is called "the UNHCR's approach to persons with disabilities in forced displacement". Also, it has added the "International Disability Alliance", which not only gives individual recognition to those disabled but also holds the UNHCR ideals that are established to help refugees around the globe of all kinds of different disabilities. Moreover, another initiative attributed to the main works of the UNHCR was the creation of the "Global Compact of Refugees" in 2019, which is a digital platform dedicated to keep up on social media the refugees actions and to give a safe space to those that have been displaced; it is a tool where the UNHCR can help with integration programs and activities to help social adaptation.

Essentially, there is the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which is another criteria taken into account to debate and find resolutions in relation to this committee's topic. Mainly because





the committee provides, as well, educational and material support adapted to the different capacities, such as blindness. The UNHCR has to provide specialized rehabilitative and educational services for children with disabilities. The overall objective is to improve the condition of children with disabilities, enhance their rehabilitation, enabling them to integrate into the communities and supporting their access to education.

Therefore, another document that is helpful and needs to be taken into account is the 2030 Development Agenda. The 2030 Development Agenda, created by the United Nations, acknowledges the importance of empowering people in vulnerable situations, such as persons with disabilities, refugees, and also internally displaced persons. Specifically, the 10th goal enhances a responsible migration in terms of people's mobility. It is essential to link the safeguarding of migration to refugees, especially if they live with disabilities.

V. Guiding questions

- In which ways is my delegation involved with the issue at hand?
- What has already been done in my delegation to contribute to fixing the problem?
- What are the flaws of what has already been done to help with the situation? What can we do as a committee to fix those flaws?
- What is my delegation capable of doing about this current situation?
- Does my delegation have any organization or preventive program regarding the protection of refugees with disabilities?





- How can my delegation create awareness in reference to the protection of refugees with disabilities?
- How has my delegation handled the cases of refugees with disabilities and how does it plan to improve for possible future cases?

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