Disability & Forced Migration
Information on persons with disabilities in refugee contexts
Figures on forced migration and refugees

- 65.3 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide.¹
- Half of all refugees worldwide are children under the age of 18.
- 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution.
- Developing countries host 86% of the world’s refugees. The 6 richest countries (USA, China, Japan, Germany, France, UK) host only 8.8% of all refugees.²
- Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia and Jordan are the countries with the highest number of refugees per capita.³
- In 2015, Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries of the world, had a refugee population of 736,100.⁴

Refugees with disabilities

The idea that persons with disabilities either do not survive disasters and/or are unable to travel is a myth. Persons with disabilities are part of any refugee population. Having a disability may even contribute to the decision to flee, be it for treatment no longer available in the country, or to avoid disability-specific persecution. Those who flee, particularly those with older, disabled or injured people in their families, often face difficult journeys to reach safety within their own countries or across borders.⁵

Facts & Figures

- 15% of the world’s population have some form of disability – every 7th person in the world or about 1 billion worldwide.⁶
- This proportion is likely to increase to 18-20% in conflict affected populations.⁷
- Only about 1% of international humanitarian aid is specifically allocated to older people and persons with disabilities.⁸
- Around the world, an estimated 6.7 million persons with disabilities are currently displaced.⁹
- The situation is compounded by a lack of reliable and disaggregated data on the prevalence and numbers of these population groups, making the design of programmes to address their needs highly challenging.¹⁰
- In Jordan and Lebanon more than 30% of the Syrian refugees surveyed in a study had additional, specific needs: 1 in 5 refugees had physical, sensory or intellectual impairments; 1 in 7 had a chronic disease; 1 in 20 suffered from injury, with nearly 80% of these injuries resulting directly from the conflict.¹¹
• Half of refugees surveyed (49%) reported at least one frequent or permanent sign of **psychological distress**. In Jordan and Lebanon, more than 65% of **older people** presented signs of psychological distress – three times more than the general refugee population. (ibid)
• More than 250,000 people have lost limbs in the Syrian conflict.xii

**Situation of Refugees with Disabilities**

• Persons with disabilities remain one of the most vulnerable and socially excluded groups in any displaced community.xiii
• Refugees with disabilities remain un-identified in most circumstances. Even where efforts are made to record the diverse needs of refugees, less visible impairments – such as vision and hearing impairments, and mental illness – are likely to pass unnoticed.xiv
• As a consequence refugees with disabilities are neglected in the assessment, data collection, design and delivery of responses xv
• Women, children and older persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and violence. They may have difficulty accessing support and services which would reduce their risk and vulnerability.xvi
• In crisis, conflict and war persons with disabilities have difficulty accessing humanitarian assistance due to a variety of societal, environmental and communication barriers.xvii
• Refugees with disabilities in host communities face a number of barriers to equal participation in community, education, employment, and access to needed assistance, medical or rehabilitative care.xviii
• Displacement conditions can contribute to the acquisition of disability. Barriers to employment contribute to greater socio-economic vulnerability – this in turn can undermine access to health services and education, even basic nutrition and shelter. This can further exacerbate or cause disabilities. (ibid)

**Legal framework on the rights of refugees with disabilities**

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), states parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk (situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies, natural disasters etc.). Among the core human rights treaties, the CRPD is the only one to refer broadly to emergency situations – both man-made and natural.

The European Directive 2013/33 on ‘Standards for the reception of applicants for international protection’ explicitly defines persons with disabilities as vulnerable persons whose support requirements shall be assessed during reception procedures.xix
Recommendations for disability-inclusive response

**Identification**: The collection of accurate, comprehensive, disability-disaggregated data is essential. It is impossible to design and fund appropriate programmes and services without first knowing the specific numbers and requirements of any given target group.

**Awareness-raising**: Capacity development, sensitisation and training on disability-inclusion among personnel is a prerequisite to ensure that persons with disabilities in crisis (including refugee) situations are not discriminated.

**Accessibility & service delivery**: Information, education, employment as well as food and other distribution centres, buildings and transport have to be made accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Service delivery should address both basic and disability-specific needs. Ensuring participation of persons with disabilities is vital.

**Funding**: Funding for humanitarian action and refugee response has to address and include persons with disabilities to avoid discrimination and neglect of their rights and needs.

**LIGHT FOR THE WORLD’s role**

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD International is an international disability and development organization dedicated to eye health, community rehabilitation services, inclusive education and empowering persons with disabilities to have equal opportunities and a life in dignity.

In cooperation with local partners, LIGHT FOR THE WORLD is committed to make sure that persons with disabilities are not forgotten in emergency work.

In South Sudan, LIGHT FOR THE WORLD has been supporting persons with disabilities in the Mahad and Gumbo IDP camps near Juba by providing aids such as wheelchairs and crutches, medical and rehabilitative services. A specific focus lies on the support to and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities.

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD International has been active in South Sudan since 2005 and is presently considered the main actor in the country with regards to Community Based Rehabilitation, Inclusive Education and Disability Mainstreaming.
Our main objectives are
- to improve participation of persons with disabilities and the quality of humanitarian assistance for persons with disabilities
- to strengthen the capacity of UNHCR partners and IDP camp management NGOs in South Sudan to deliver disability-inclusive humanitarian and development responses

To ensure a comprehensive approach, we focus on three distinct pillars, that is:
- Skills development among technical and the field staff
- Establishment of a disability inclusion working group
- Establishment of a horizontal learning platform

More information about our work in South Sudan:

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Sources

iv UNHCR 2015, key figures Ethiopia: http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/5738#_ga=1.33455482.53348501.1473684449
xi Protection of Refugees with Disabilities. Multi-site fieldwork report.
xiii FAZ online „im Rollstuhl auf der Flucht“: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/behinderte-fluechtlinge-im-rollstuhl-auf-der-flucht-13785430.html. N.B.: This is a figure from 2015 which would be much higher by now.
xv Protection of Refugees with Disabilities. Multi-site fieldwork report.
xvi Hidden Victims of the Syrian Crisis.
xvii Mary Crock, Ron McCallan et al. University of Sydney, 2015.
xviii Hidden Victims of the Syrian Crisis.
xix Protection of Refugees with Disabilities. Multi-site fieldwork report.