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Fact Sheet

The Most Invisible Population: Refugees with Disabilities

- Our new report, “Disabilities among Refugees and Conflict-Affected Populations,” estimates that between 2.5 and 3.5 million of the world’s 35 million displaced people live with physical, sensory or mental disabilities, and among people who have fled civil conflict or natural disasters, the number may be even higher.
- Refugees with disabilities suffer from discrimination, stigmatization, harassment, neglect and exclusion—both within their own communities and the communities in which they are stranded.
- They are often not identified or counted in refugee registration drives, and data on the number of displaced persons with disabilities is not available from the government, UNHCR or local partners. Where data does exist, it is often inconsistent or inaccurate.
- Major problems exist with the physical layout and infrastructure of refugee camps and settlements. Shelters, food and water distribution points, latrines and bathing areas, schools and other facilities are often not accessible.
- Urban communities are even less welcoming or accessible to refugees with disabilities than camps. Since most urban refugees are undocumented and lack any legal status, they are often afraid of the authorities—preferring to remain hidden and outside of the system.
- Refugees with disabilities do not receive additional or special food rations, and in the worse cases, go without food completely. They are often forced to walk long distances to food distribution centers and once there, aggressive, long lines make it difficult for many people with disabilities to receive their rations at all.
- Specialized health care and counseling services for people with disabilities is generally unavailable. In most cases, there are no specialized doctors, no specialist therapy, and no specialized medicines and treatments.
- Women with disabilities generally have access to reproductive health care and community health care and outreach programs (especially in refugee camps).
- Children with disabilities have access to a complete education, and rarely are refugee children with disabilities actively excluded from school.

Since 1989, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children has worked to improve the lives and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women and children. Our research and advocacy lead to life-changing improvements for this vulnerable, yet resilient, population.

For more information, go to: womenscommission.org/disabilities

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