



**OUR WORK AT A GLANCE**



**WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION**

**The Women's Refugee Commission leads the international community's work to protect and empower refugee women and girls. We ensure their right to sexual and reproductive health care, to safety from gender-based violence and to economic and social empowerment.**

## **WHY WE DO IT**

Unprecedented numbers of people are currently displaced. They live for an average of 20 years in transition, in refugee camps or, increasingly, on the margins of foreign cities. Some will never go home.

For almost three decades, the Women's Refugee Commission has identified the specific humanitarian needs of displaced women, children and youth. In every emergency, we advocate for programs that allow them not just to survive, but to rebuild their lives and their communities.

For humanitarians to address the modern global refugee crisis, interventions must protect the most vulnerable refugees. They must recognize their human rights and assist them in their desire to find safety and gain self-sufficiency.

Humanitarian response can no longer strive only to save lives; it must also create opportunity.

## **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

The abuse, rape, exploitation and trafficking of women and girls are exacerbated by conflict, flight and displacement when family and community protections are weakened or destroyed. Women and girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable. Twenty years after we identified the dearth of programming to protect displaced women and girls, funding and commitment remain shockingly low.

**We changed the face of humanitarian assistance by exposing rampant sexual assault against women as they collect firewood outside refugee camps. We led collaborative efforts to eliminate these attacks.**

Humanitarian response cannot be successful if it does not prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence from the outset of emergencies. Traditionally, programming focused on counseling and services for survivors. Prevention is more challenging, particularly during flight, but it must be part of every humanitarian response.

In protracted displacement, programs that address gender inequality and help women and girls build confidence and develop self-sufficiency can change deeply rooted gender dynamics and reduce women's vulnerability.



## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

In emergencies, women should be able to choose whether to become pregnant. Women who are already pregnant need access to care for safe delivery. Sadly, many women are raped during humanitarian crises and need reproductive health care in addition to counseling.

**We were the first to insist that sexual and reproductive health services are a basic need for refugee women. Today, SRH is integrated into 36 policies governing humanitarian assistance.**

The Women's Refugee Commission has worked tirelessly to expose the lack of reproductive health care for displaced women and girls. While there has been significant progress in providing comprehensive reproductive health services in crisis settings as a basic need, access to long-term contraceptive methods, life-saving obstetric care and safe abortion care is still limited.

Sexual and reproductive health care empowers displaced women to make choices about their health and their futures while they rebuild their lives. Healthy women are the drivers of change and sustainable development.

## RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Around the world, women and children undertake perilous journeys in search of safety. Under international law, all individuals have the right to seek asylum. Many nations, however, attempt to prevent refugees from reaching their borders. They detain those who arrive in facilities that violate their human rights and expose them to gender-based violence. And detention makes it difficult for refugees to access legal protections.

Even countries that open their borders in humanitarian emergencies often limit or prohibit refugees from legal employment, access to health care and education.

Gender discrimination is exacerbated in displacement. Nationality laws that prohibit women from conferring their citizenship to their children increase vulnerability, ensuring even fewer rights and less opportunity for some refugees.

Governments have a legal obligation to provide humane reception to refugees and asylum seekers during flight and upon arrival in a host country. They must ensure transparency of the agencies designated to protect refugees' safety and well-being, and provide full access to the legal and judicial systems that govern refugees' ability to rebuild their lives.

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

To survive displacement, refugee women and girls often take on the responsibilities of providing for their families. Nontraditional activities and increased visibility expose them to gender-based violence both from within and outside their communities.

Displacement can also provide women and girls, including those with disabilities, with resources and opportunities that might not otherwise have been available to them.

Women have skills and experience that can be leveraged to develop safe and sustainable livelihoods.

Access to education, mentors and skill-building can help adolescent girls develop self-sufficiency and leadership skills.

Humanitarian solutions must move beyond providing basic needs to implementing programs that allow refugees to plan for the future.



**Our relentless advocacy compelled the U.S. to drastically reduce the detention of refugee families and children. But an influx of Central Americans seeking protection has led the U.S. to revert to bad policies, so we continue the fight.**



## HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

The United Nations recognizes the need for the protection and empowerment of women and other vulnerable populations, though these needs are frequently not part of initial emergency response. The Women's Refugee Commission leads efforts to ensure that the policies, programs and guidelines that govern the international response to humanitarian emergencies reflect women's needs.

We are among the few organizations that consult displaced women, children and youth and take their voice to the policy makers. We work with community-based organizations, which are the first responders to any crisis but are rarely included in the design of programs. It is our engagement with women, children and youth that enables us to provide expert guidance to the United Nations and international nongovernmental organizations that drive humanitarian policy and practice.



## OUR VISION

We envision a world in which refugee and internally displaced women, children and youth

- are safe, healthy and self-reliant
- have their human rights respected and protected
- are empowered to contribute to their own solutions

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

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