



WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION

Research. Rethink. Resolve.



Women's Refugee Commission Annual Report 2017



The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects 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.

Cover photo: Young woman at the Sam Ouandja refugee camp - © Pierre Holtz for UNICEF
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Vision

Our vision is 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; and inform and drive their own solutions and development.

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.

How We Achieve Change: Research. Rethink. Resolve.

Our work begins in the community. We listen to displaced people, learn about their essential needs and capacities, and identify potential solutions to the challenges they face. The solutions we identify are detailed in our research reports and recommendations. We then advocate for their implementation globally, and develop tools and technical assistance that we provide to agencies and organizations worldwide. Our work ends back in the community as our proposed improvements in policy and programs lead to lasting change on the ground.



A mother and her children at the Berkasavo border crossing between Serbia and Croatia, where thousands of refugees traveled daily on their journey to safety in Europe. © Meabh Smith_Trócaire



From the Executive Director

These are precarious times for women and girls. They are facing unprecedented threats to their basic legal and human rights—and assaults on their dignity—in the United States and around the world. For refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, these threats are infinitely worse—translating into a daily struggle for survival.

The numbers alone tell a dire story. Some 66 million people have been displaced by deadly conflicts and other crises—more than at any other time in history. More than 70 percent of them are women and children. This means that 46 million women and children are living in unstable, often dangerous, conditions in which meeting basic needs can seem an insurmountable challenge. Uprooted women and girls also face increased risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, and other forms of abuse.

Yet refugee women refuse to be defined or defeated by these challenges. Women who have lost their homes, their communities, and their livelihoods are revealing the true strength of their characters. They are demonstrating steely resolve and ingenuity amid their new circumstances. They are seeking out opportunities to build small businesses, acquire property, and contribute in a myriad of ways to their new communities.

The Women's Refugee Commission is determined to respond to their challenges with innovative approaches. We see women not as victims, but as partners. We are charting a new course in humanitarian response that honors their stories, prioritizes their desires, and leverages their skills. Yes, it is a precarious time to be a migrant or refugee woman. But it is also a time of awakening and promise. We are pushing forward as never before to address their challenges in new ways that speak to the importance of gender equality and resilience.

The stakes are higher than ever before. And our resolve to continue to make a difference at this critical time for women and girls is stronger than ever.

This report highlights some of our work at the global, national, and community levels to advance gender equality and bolster individual and community-level resilience. With your support, we will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that refugees are safe, healthy, and self-reliant.

Sarah Costa
Executive Director



Our Year in Review

The Women's Refugee Commission Advocates for Gender Equality in Humanitarian Response

Although more than half of the world's refugees are women and girls, their needs and potential are often overlooked. The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) advocates for gender equality in all areas of humanitarian response. By applying a gender lens to our work, we are helping to improve program effectiveness, ensure equal opportunity, and channel limited resources to those who most need it.

Elevating the importance of family planning in humanitarian settings

A woman's ability to choose if and when she has a child is one of the most important determinants of gender equality—and this is no less important in emergency settings. In July 2017, with WRC at the table to help shape the agenda, the high-level London Summit on Family Planning presented the first-ever platform for countries and donors to fully commit to providing family planning to women and girls affected by conflict or crisis. In addition, the UN Population Fund made a commitment to provide family planning at the onset of a humanitarian crisis.

Ending child marriage

Findings suggest that adolescents in emergency settings are at heightened risk for child marriage. To shine a light on the prevalence and causes, WRC launched a major research project on this issue among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Somali refugees in Ethiopia, and internally displaced persons in Kachin State, Myanmar. With the data we collect and analyze, we will make recommendations to strengthen programming to prevent child marriage and improve public health interventions for married adolescent girls in emergencies. This will help ensure adolescent girls have a chance to get an education, pursue a vocation, delay pregnancy, and ultimately live a more healthy and prosperous life.

Preventing and mitigating gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV), which is deeply rooted in gender inequality, is one of the greatest threats to women's health and human rights. While incidents tend to rise sharply in emergencies, the prevention of and response to GBV historically have not been prioritized in humanitarian response.

WRC stepped in to fill this void by becoming a lead partner in the "Call to Action on Prevention from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies." The Call to Action is a groundbreaking commitment by all humanitarian actors to ensure that every response encompasses measures to prevent and mitigate GBV risk. We led a process with partners to develop a Call to Action "Road Map" for 2016–2020, which outlines steps humanitarian stakeholders can take to effect changes in humanitarian policies and systems in specific contexts. We also undertook a pilot project in 2017 to adapt the Road Map for northeast Nigeria, helping pave the way for its implementation in multiple emergency settings.

WRC Defends the Rights of Migrant and Refugee Women

The rights and dignity of migrant and refugee women are violated routinely around the world. Their journeys are rife with assaults on their legal and human rights, including unlawful detention, separation from their children, denials of medical treatment, arcane nationality laws, and other systemic barriers rooted in gender discrimination. WRC works to hold governments accountable to their obligation to provide refugees and asylum-seekers with a fair and humane reception, so they can rebuild their lives successfully.

Fighting for migrant rights and justice

The change in the U.S. administration in early 2017 swept in an unprecedented era of policies and rollbacks of protections targeting migrants and asylum seekers. Our Migrant Rights and Justice Program has been a leading voice in responding to this new landscape.

We helped lead a coalition of advocates working tirelessly to protect the rights of pregnant women detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, despite the government's own policy aimed at limiting this practice. And we published guides and tools, in Spanish and English, for parents with questions about family separation due to detention and deportation.

Campaigning for equal nationality rights

Women around the world continue to face enormous legal discrimination in nationality rights. In 25 countries, women cannot pass their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. In 50 countries, they do not have equal rights to acquire, change, and retain their nationality, or to confer their nationality to spouses who were born in another country.

The Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, housed at and led by WRC, advocates for policy reforms globally and at the national level. In December 2016, after a year of advocacy led by the Global Campaign, the National Assembly of Madagascar passed legislation enshrining women's equal right to confer nationality on their children. The Global Campaign also played a pivotal role in organizing a high-level workshop at the UN on best practices to promote women's equal nationality rights. The workshop signaled a dramatic shift in governments' awareness and understanding of the issue, and in their willingness to make strong calls for reform.



Women and children waiting to be processed at the Customs Border Protection Central Processing Center in McAllen, Texas. © CBP



WRC Works to Prevent Gender-Based Violence and Support Survivors

GBV is one of the greatest threats to women in emergency contexts. By working to strengthen protections in cash-based interventions and advocating on behalf of marginalized populations, WRC aims to fundamentally transform the way GBV is addressed in humanitarian settings.

Keeping cash safe for women

Cash assistance—the practice of distributing money rather than traditional relief items like food—is becoming an increasingly important tool in emergency response. However, humanitarian agencies must take steps to build in mechanisms to prevent and mitigate risks of GBV associated with cash transfers. In 2017, WRC, in partnership with international and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and affected communities, developed a toolkit to ensure that cash is a safe and inclusive part of humanitarian programming, and does not inadvertently introduce new risks. *Optimizing Cash-based Interventions for Enhanced Protection from Gender-Based Violence* was piloted in close consultation with stakeholders in Somalia, Jordan, and Niger.

Call to Action and Road Map

With the “Call to Action on Prevention from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies” and the accompanying “Road Map” for 2016-2020, WRC helped galvanize the humanitarian community around new ways to prevent and mitigate GBV in emergencies.

Combating GBV against refugees with disabilities

WRC continues to be at the forefront of efforts to combat GBV against people with disabilities. We launched a new partnership with UNICEF Lebanon in 2017 to develop guidance and trainings around disability inclusion in national systems for child protection and GBV prevention and response. We convened humanitarian and other actors in Beirut, including people with intellectual disabilities, to share experiences and resources to combat GBV in urban areas. We also helped shape inter-agency guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian settings.

Preventing and responding to GBV in urban areas

With nearly 60 percent of refugees now living in cities, WRC is working to strengthen urban refugees' protection and resilience in the face of GBV. After conducting assessments in four cities to identify the risks faced by women and girls, men and boys, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI individuals, we collaborated with local partners to pilot innovative GBV risk mitigation programming among select urban refugee subpopulations. Based on the findings from the research and the pilots, we have held workshops with a wide range of stakeholders to showcase key GBV mitigation strategies.

Elevating women's participation in decision-making

WRC partnered with the International Organization for Migration to examine how women's participation in governance structures could contribute to reducing their risk of GBV and other harms. The research was carried out in five internally displaced persons camp settings. It underscored the importance of including women's voices in decision-making about the type of assistance they need in times of crisis, and in strengthening protection systems in their own communities.

WRC Strengthens Resilience-Based Approaches in Humanitarian Response

WRC is deeply committed to moving the dial from a needs-based to a strengths-based approach to humanitarian response—thereby fostering resilience and self-reliance. By starting with refugees' capacities rather than their vulnerabilities, we engage them not as people with needs to be met but rather as partners in devising solutions and responses.

Improving refugee self-reliance

WRC, in collaboration with the NGO RefugePoint, developed the innovative Self-Reliance Index. This simple tool can measure changes in refugee vulnerability and resilience over time and help assess if humanitarian aid is making a difference in refugees' lives. We worked with a diverse community of practice, including organizations, foundations, government agencies, and other partners, to craft a definition of self-reliance and develop guiding principles for measuring self-reliance and standard indicators for measuring the effectiveness of self-reliance programming. Our aim is to reach 5 million refugees with self-reliance programming over five years.

Cash and livelihoods

Cash assistance, as well as being a means to reduce GBV, can help displaced people become more self-reliant. We are working with displaced women, girls, men, and boys to ensure that cash-based interventions are safe and gender-sensitive. We have joined the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP), a global partnership of more than 150 humanitarian agencies engaged in policy, practice, and research on cash-based initiatives. This will provide greater opportunities to promote gender and protection mainstreaming to best meet the immediate needs of displaced communities and build their resilience.

Giving refugee youth a seat at the table

Following an 18-month consultation process with more than 1,300 refugee youth in 22 countries, WRC and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) launched the "Seven Core Actions for Refugee Youth" in November 2016. The Core Actions highlight the priorities of refugee youth and how they want to participate in addressing them. Endorsed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Core Actions provide guidance to all UNHCR field operations on how to engage with and program for refugee youth. The consultations also resulted in youth participation in the consultations on the Global Compact on Refugees and led to the establishment of a Global Youth Advisory Council for UNHCR.

Building resilience through emergency preparedness

This year, WRC launched a five-year initiative to increase communities' resilience to the sexual and reproductive health and gender impacts of natural disasters and conflict in Pakistan. The project aims to increase community participation in crisis-prone provinces, districts, and communities. We conducted trainings on integrating gender and sexual and reproductive health into disaster risk management policies and procedures. A national-level training included government, UN, and NGO representatives, while subsequent district-level trainings included community participants, such as traditional birth attendants, physicians, paramedics and community activists.

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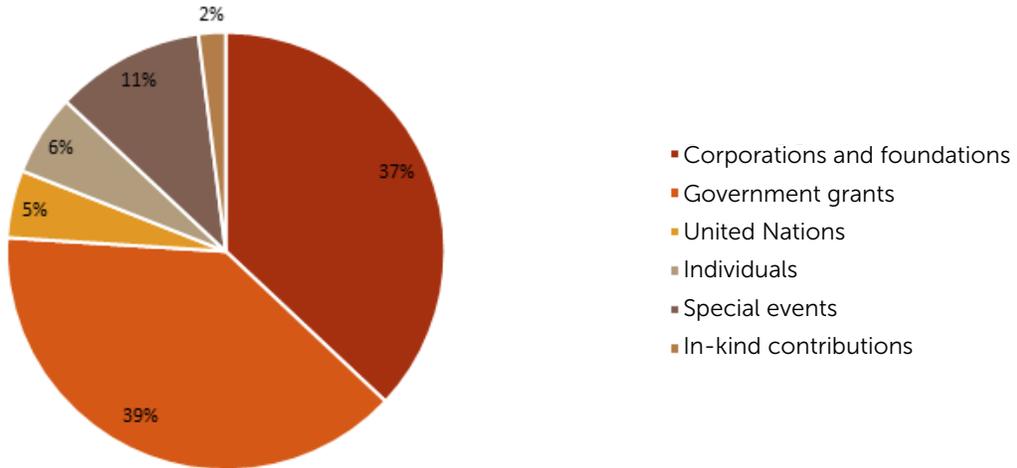
Adolescent girls in Uganda show off their knitting skills. © WRC



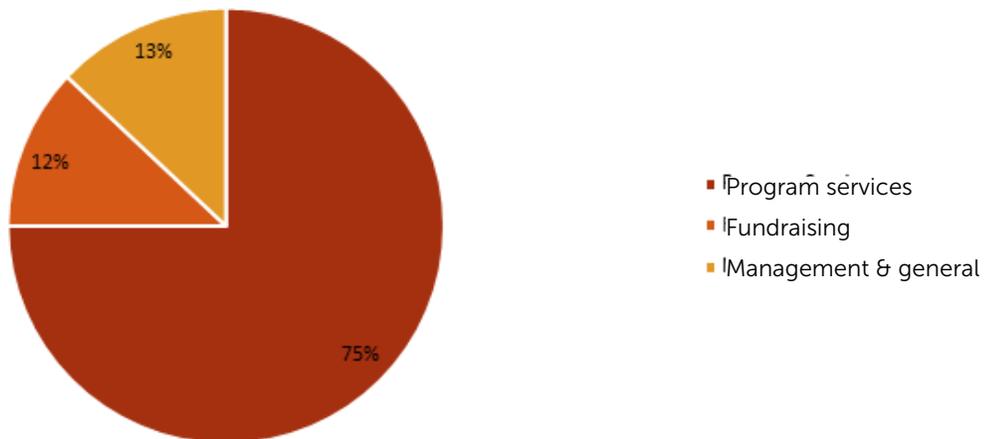
Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2017

The Women's Refugee Commission is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Copies of our audited financial statements for FY 2017 are available on our website, www.womensrefugeecommission.org.

FY 2017 Revenue
Total Revenue: \$7.5 million



FY 2017 Expenses
Total Expenses: \$7.3 million



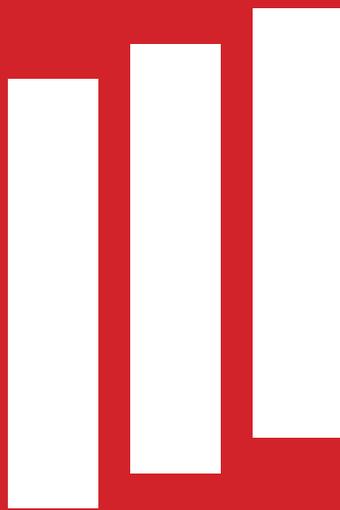


HELP US CREATE LASTING CHANGE.

The Women's Refugee Commission is the only international organization dedicated solely to protecting refugee women's rights to sexual and reproductive health care, to freedom from gender-based violence, and to economic and social empowerment. Please make your gift today at <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/donate-now> or contact us at info@wrcommission.org to join our mailing list and stay up to date on ways you can be involved.



A refugee woman sells bread in Tanzania. © WRC



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