



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM

The number of forcibly displaced people and refugees has significantly increased over the years and is going to continue increasing, primarily due to conflict and environmental disasters. Of the estimated 100 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, 42% are children<sup>1</sup> and as many as 15–20% are people with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> At all levels, refugee enrolment in education is lower than that of non-refugees. **Close to half of all refugee children – 48 percent – remain out of school, and this percentage is higher for children in secondary education.**<sup>3</sup> Girls face additional barriers to access to education, in particular at secondary level.<sup>4</sup>

If the situation is dire for refugee children generally, for children with disabilities it is considerably worse<sup>5</sup>. Children with disabilities in refugee camps are especially vulnerable to stigmatization, exclusion, and violence. These barriers stemming from their disability, their gender and their refugee status limit their abilities to access education, essential services, form relationships with their peers, and foster healthy psychosocial well-being.<sup>6</sup>

#### Momentum at the global level

Education in Emergencies is gaining political attention. However, in 2021, only 2.9% of global humanitarian financing was allocated to education, considerably below the UN target of 4%.<sup>7</sup> Recognising these gaps, a specific Call To Action on Education in crisis situations was launched at the UN Transforming Education Summit, in 2022<sup>8</sup>. Then in 2023, the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) developed its Policy and Accountability Framework on Disability Inclusion and has a commitment to ensure that the Fund reaches 10% of children with disabilities across its investment portfolio.<sup>9</sup>

Canada has made significant commitments to advance disability inclusion through the intersectional focus of its Feminist International Assistance Policy and in line with efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to “Leave no one behind”. Commitments were also reiterated in the 2018 and 2022 Global Disability Summit. Further, the 2019 Minister of International Development mandate letter specifically includes a commitment to provide greater assistance to persons with disabilities. As part of its 2023 report, Canada’s Auditor General recommended a stronger intersectional and inclusive focus.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, very little targeted programming for disability inclusive aid is funded by the Canadian government, or by any donor countries. Less than 5% of Canada’s international aid is inclusive of people with disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2023). Global trends – Forced displacement in 2022

<sup>2</sup> According to WHO (2022), an estimated 1.3 billion people – about 16% of the global population – currently experience significant disability.

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2022). Education Report 2021: ‘Staying the course’ - The challenges facing refugee education.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO (2018). Making rights to education real for refugees with disabilities

<sup>6</sup> Thomas M. Crea, Elizabeth K. Klein, Oladoyin Okunoren, Maria Paula Jimenez, Greg St. Arnold, Truphena Kirior, Eric Velandria & Daniela Bruni (2022). Inclusive education in a refugee camp for children with disabilities: How are school settings and children’s behavioral functioning related?

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/education-crisis-situations>

<sup>8</sup> Education in crisis situations: A commitment to action, September 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Education Cannot Wait Policy and Accountability Framework on Disability Inclusion, May 2022.

<sup>10</sup> International Assistance in Support of Gender Equality—Global Affairs Canada, Independent Auditor’s Report, March, 2023

<sup>11</sup> Development Initiatives (2020). Disability-inclusive ODA: Aid data on donors, channels, recipients.

The Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 will provide an opportunity to build on the progress made towards the implementation of the Global Compact of Refugees, particularly for boys and girls, youth and adults with disabilities.

### **Barriers to realise their right to education**

Inclusive education requires transformations in educational governance, pedagogy, and environments with the ultimate goal to cater for the needs of all learners, enable them to learn together and thrive in systems that value diversity. These transformations require stepping up domestic and international efforts worldwide, in particular where resources are stretched – bearing in mind that 27 per cent of refugees are located in the world's least developed countries<sup>12</sup>.

For children and youth with disabilities, who are refugees, barriers to realise their right to inclusive and quality education are compounded by intersecting forms of discrimination<sup>13</sup>:

- Education facilities for refugees often have poor physical accessibility (ex. multiple stairs), both in refugee settlements and urban areas. Improvised learning centres may be opportunity driven, located in neighbourhoods with poorly maintained roads and footpaths. Suitable schools may be distant and appropriate transport limited or very expensive.
- Teachers and staff who provide education services to refugee populations and/or in refugee settlements, often lack appropriate training and learning materials to support equal participation. In addition, the high student-to-teacher ratios and extremely limited resources in refugee settlements affect the quality of education and the possibility to tailor pedagogy based on individual needs<sup>14</sup>.
- Often when a child with disabilities is identified, schools and communities tend to send him/her to special school rather than making efforts to transform the nearby school to be more inclusive to welcome the child.
- Access to health care, rehabilitation and assistive technology, which facilitate inclusion in education, is significantly hindered in situations of displacement. Many children and youth who have fled their homes might not have been able to take their assistive technology with them or might need adaptation of their assistive technology as they grow.
- Children and youth are stigmatized both because of their disabilities and because of their refugee status. The fear of rejection often leads parents to hide children with disabilities or under-report their needs. This is particularly true for girls with disabilities, who are subjected to negative perceptions and attitudes of families and the community and whose education is deprioritized because of gender norms.
- Children with disabilities are twice as likely to face neglect and/or sexual, physical or mental abuse than children with no disabilities<sup>15</sup>. Girls with disabilities are more exposed to these risks than girls without disabilities and boys with disabilities<sup>16</sup>. Violence and abuse suffered both inside and outside schools have a devastating impact on the development and the well-being, and are a major obstacle to their education. The situation exacerbates during crisis and displacement.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> UNHCR (2022). Education Report 2021: 'Staying the course' - The challenges facing refugee education.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO (2019). Global education monitoring report: Migration, displacement and education: building bridges, not walls.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas M. Crea, Elizabeth K. Klein, Oladoyin Okunoren, Maria Paula Jimenez, Greg St. Arnold, Truphena Kirior, Eric Velandria & Daniela Bruni (2022). Inclusive education in a refugee camp for children with disabilities: How are school setting and children's behavioral functioning related?

<sup>15</sup> Zuyi Fang, Ilan Cerna-Turoff, Cheng Zhang, Mengyao Lu, Jamie M Lachman, Jane Barlow (2022). Global estimates of violence against children with disabilities: an updated systematic review and meta-analysis

<sup>16</sup> UNFPA (2018). Global Study on Ending Gender-based Violence and Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

<sup>17</sup> Humanité & inclusion (2020) Être une fille et handicapée en Afrique de l'Ouest : La situation éducative en question

## LESSONS LEARNED

Humanity & Inclusion implements projects on disability-inclusive education in development and emergency settings, including in protracted crises in Burundi, Chad, Mali and South Sudan as well as in refugee camps and settlements in Kenya (Kakuma and Dadaab Camp), in Uganda, and in Bangladesh (Cox Bazaar).



### Uganda

In 2019, Humanity & Inclusion initiated education programming to refugee boys and girls in settlements in Uganda through both ECHO and Education Cannot Wait-funded consortia, led by Save the Children. While collectively, the ECW-funded reached 267,707 children, from 2019 to 2022, Humanity & inclusion was able to target 4495 children with disabilities (1.7% of total). The percentage is small as data on children with disabilities was only reported by Humanity & Inclusion. Accurate data reporting remains a challenge, and HI is actively working to strengthen the sector's use of using the Washington Group Module on Child Functioning. The primary purpose of the module is to identify functional difficulties that place children at risk of experiencing limited participation in an unaccommodating environment through 13 domains, including physical, learning and mental health.

The data collected by HI enables a better understanding of the diversity of disabilities found in refugee settings. In Uganda, of the children screened for functional difficulties: 41% had vision difficulties, 33% had hearing loss or auditory problems and 18% had varying degrees of gross motor difficulties, such as difficulty walking. However, the most common disability was related to cognitive learning difficulties at 49%. Further, refugee children, especially from conflict countries, experience trauma and at least 20% suffer from emotional difficulties. Depression and anxiety can place the child at a higher risk of dropping out of school, forming relationships or harming themselves. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the prevalence of functional difficulties between girls and boys.

What is clear is that the evidence indicates that children have functional difficulties in multiple domains, which provides guidance on how education programs should be designed: they require a multi-sectoral and comprehensive approach. For example, Humanity & inclusion works with the health sector to include rehabilitation services and the provision of assistive products. HI also develops learning materials and supports teachers to acquire teaching techniques and methods to be inclusive of children with disabilities. Working on stigma is also important to reduce barriers to education, such providing support to families, teachers and community leaders. Providing refugee children with psychosocial and mental health services is also an important best practice for increasing learning outcomes, as not all psychosocial services are inclusive.



### Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

HI has worked to improve access to education for all children, including children with disabilities, in camps for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh since 2017, and recently through an Education Cannot Wait consortium again led by Save the Children.

An often overlooked but essential step to inclusive education is ensuring proper screening is provided in the refugee camps to ensure children with disabilities are identified and enrolled in schools. Working with teachers and developing teaching learning materials with facilitators for children with disabilities is essential to ensuring children not only enroll, but attend, and thrive in educational settings. Already the average attendance rate of children with disabilities increased from 65% in June 2022 to 82% in December 2022 because of targeted interventions.

Finally, HI cannot overstate the importance of considering community, environmental and socio-economic barriers to inclusive education. School Management Committees, inclusive sports and

recreation, engagement of Self-Help Groups are essential for community sensitization actions at school and within the community. From working with teachers, staff, community to family members, transformative gender practices must be targeted to combat discriminatory social norms and so that the specific barriers facing girls with disabilities are targeted.

### **Recommendations for the inclusion of refugee children with disabilities**

1. Donors must increase funding for disability inclusive education, particularly in emergency settings. At least 10% of education in emergencies project budgets should be allocated towards addressing the rights and meeting the requirements of children with disabilities. Funding should be earmarked (for example, by using the OECD/DAC disability and gender markers) in order to ensure accountability and report against equity indicators.
2. In line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, governments and international donors should strengthen policy and planning to create an inclusive education system and to move away from provisions in education separating children and young people based on ability and/or identities.
3. All educational, development and humanitarian stakeholders must use an intersectional approach in the development of education strategies and programmes, in order to understand and address situations of exclusion and discrimination caused by the combination of multiple factors, and in particular, to address the barriers to education faced by girls with disabilities and to address their risk to gender based violence.

More specifically, all educational, development and humanitarian stakeholders should take action to:

4. Improve the capacity to identify children and youth with disabilities among the refugee population and systematically collect disaggregated data (a minima by disability, gender, and age), and according to the Washington Group Question Set, to design appropriate strategies to improve their access to education, protection, and other essential services.
5. Increase the number of school facilities, address the shortage of teachers and educators who have inclusive education skills, provide appropriate and accessible learning materials, training and support the professional development of teachers and educators on disability and gender inclusion.
6. Provide solutions for reducing direct and indirect costs of education for the most vulnerable children (for instance, via targeted funding, free rehabilitation services, assistive technologies and health services, school grants, cash transfers, canteens, and transport).
7. Ensure the accessibility and the safety of infrastructure (encompassing school buildings, gender-separated toilets, roads, and transport means) both in refugee camps and in all other settings, also with a view to reduce the risk of gender-based violence.
8. Engage with host and refugee communities, as well as with organisations representing persons with disabilities and women, in order to ensure their participation in the planning and delivering of educational programs and public awareness campaigns to fight stigma and discrimination.

