



Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

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This tipsheet is one of a series of six aimed at applying the specificities of the AGD approach. It highlights the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as age, gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, physical appearance, etc.) combine, overlap, or intersect. It draws our attention to the impact of various overlapping social identities or intersectionality¹ on our work with groups of concern to UNHCR, more specifically persons with disabilities, youth, children and adolescents, minorities and indigenous peoples, older persons and LGBTIQ+ persons. This tipsheet should be read in conjunction with UNHCR Need to Know Guidance [Working with persons with disabilities in forced displacement](#), which includes additional information for the implementation of these recommendations.

Who are we talking about?

UNHCR adopts the approach to disability enshrined in the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), according to which “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.² This highlights that persons with disabilities are persons first: women, men, girls and boys, and that

¹ **Intersectionality** is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g. gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies advantages and disadvantages that are felt by people due to a combination of factors (Oxford English Dictionary).

² Adapted from the [Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities](#), Article 1.

disability does not reside in an individual, but is contextual and the result of interaction between societal and individual factors. This also includes barriers that may prevent equal access to the benefits of humanitarian programmes, services and protection.

Why does it matter?

Estimates indicate that about 15 per cent of the world's population has some form of disability³ and the incidence of disability is expected to be higher in situations of forced displacement. This suggests that there should be several million persons with disabilities among the persons of concern to UNHCR.

Disability inclusion is an institutional commitment at UNHCR as outlined in the AGD Policy. It is rooted in the human-rights based approach and is in line with global standards, including the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) (UNDIS) launched by the UN Secretary General in June 2019. UNHCR has been an active contributor to the [IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#) and is committed to strengthening the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in programming and coordination.

Forcibly displaced persons with disabilities have the same basic needs as other persons and can contribute in different ways to the well-being of their families and communities. In humanitarian crises, persons with disabilities and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) can play critical roles as responders, technical experts, advocates and conduits of information and services. In mass displacement contexts, OPDs are well-placed to contribute to the protection and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

At the same time however, difficulties in moving, hearing, seeing, communicating or learning, coupled with the physical, environmental and attitudinal barriers that marginalize and discriminate against them may hinder the access of persons with disabilities' to protection, assistance, and solutions, as well as their capacity to fully and effectively participate in society on an equal basis with others. In addition, persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group; they are diverse in the ways they experience these barriers and, in their identity, including their age, gender, ethnicity, location or race. Due to the intersection of these factors, persons with disabilities are more likely to be left behind or abandoned during forced displacement, are often at higher risk of violence, including GBV, exploitation and abuse, face barriers to access to basic services and are often excluded from education and livelihood opportunities.

What can UNHCR do?

Persons with disabilities must be able to access and benefit from protection and humanitarian assistance on the same terms as other members of the population. This requires the combination of inclusive programmes and targeted interventions. Below is a list of actions required if persons with

³WHO, [World Report on Disability](#), 2011.

disabilities are to be meaningfully included in UNHCR interventions. Actions are organized around the three key areas of engagement of the 2018 AGD Policy.

AGD inclusive programming

- Collect data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability, as well as data relating to the capacities of persons with disabilities and the specific risks and barriers they may face; this includes information on physical, information and attitudinal barriers and how they intersect with gender, age and other discrimination factors.
- Promote systematic integration of the [Washington Group Questions](#) (and forthcoming guidance) into standard data collection tools and processes, including at registration;
- Train staff and partners on ethically and technically sound data collection methods, data protection protocols, the management of sensitive information and techniques accessible to all persons with disabilities.
- Use data on disability to inform the UNHCR operation management cycle, for example by applying recommended actions from the [IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#) to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the cycle.
- Use the online [IASC Gender with Age Marker tool](#) during programme design and monitoring to assess whether programmes meaningfully consider gender and age differences among persons with disabilities.
- Build the capacity of UNHCR staff and partners to understand disability and the principles and practical approaches to achieving disability-inclusive humanitarian programmes and combining inclusive programmes with targeted interventions.⁴

Accountability to affected people

- Enable persons with disabilities to participate equally and meaningfully in all UNHCR programmes and all phases of the operation management cycle, including at decision-making level
- Establish effective, safe, gender-sensitive, dignified, accessible ways to exchange information and communicate with people with disabilities.
- Seek the advice of and collaborate with persons with disabilities and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) where available when designing, implementing and monitoring interventions.
- Engage persons with disabilities as content producers as much as users, in awareness-raising, information sessions, advocacy and communication on protection, including contextualized messages on relevant protection risks, including gender-based violence (GBV) and services in formats accessible to them (e.g. oral, print, video, pictograms, sign language, easy-to-read, etc.).
- Identify and mitigate the attitudinal, environmental, communication and institutional barriers that persons with disabilities face when trying to access humanitarian services and programmes.
- Identify and promote factors enabling the participation of persons with disabilities (attitudinal, environmental, communication, and institutional)

⁴ UNHCR staff can access the e-learning document Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement via [Learn&Connect](#).

- Together with partners, identify and mitigate the protection risks that persons with disabilities face, including the risk of exposure to GBV, as well as the factors underlying these protection risks, such as community attitudes and violence or discrimination based on disability.
- Build the capacity of UNHCR staff and partners to communicate about issues relating to persons with disabilities in forced displacement contexts.
- Set up confidential, culturally and gender-sensitive and disability-accessible mechanisms for gathering and processing feedback and reports from persons with disabilities.
- Flexibly adapt interventions based on the feedback and experience of persons with disabilities.

Gender equality⁵

- Ensure that the full diversity of persons with disabilities participate equally and meaningfully in leadership and decision-making structures, to mitigate the intersecting gender and disability barriers faced by women and girls of all ages who have physical, intellectual, psychosocial, hearing and visual impairments.
- Ensure that persons with disabilities are provided with individual registration and have access to personal documentation, including both girls and boys with disabilities (noting that in some countries they may not be registered at birth, which may increase their risk of statelessness).
- Work with communities and families to mitigate the intersecting gender and disability barriers and risks faced by women and girls and persons with diverse gender identity with disabilities as regards equal access to food, core relief items and cash-based interventions (e.g. using gender-sensitive distribution mechanisms and information that is also accessible to all persons with disabilities, regardless of their gender).
- Support the capacity of schools and households to mitigate attitudinal, physical and information barriers and their intersection with gender norms, in order to provide education to school-aged girls and boys with disabilities on an equal basis (e.g. providing equal access to assistive devices for children with disabilities, regardless of their gender; ensuring that gender-segregated toilets are both safe and accessible; facilitating access to menstrual hygiene supplies and information in accessible formats for girls with disabilities).
- Identify and mitigate physical, information and attitudinal barriers that may prevent women, girls and persons with diverse gender identity and/or sex characteristics with disabilities from accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare (e.g. addressing misconceptions of family members or medical staff regarding their right to access these services; providing information in accessible formats; planning outreach mechanisms for persons with disabilities who have less access to education or to health facilities where these services are available).
- Ensure the equal participation of all persons with disabilities in skills development and livelihoods opportunities regardless of their gender, mitigating barriers to accessing employment (e.g. attitudinal barriers and gender norms, physical barriers in the workplace, information barriers) and ensuring equal access to assistive technology and equal remuneration for work of equal value.
- Use accessible information and methods to raise awareness, among staff, communities and persons with disabilities, of gender-based violence (GBV)⁶, disability-based violence and how

⁵ In line with what is stated in the Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, although the Commitments focus on women and girls; attention is also paid to gender inequalities that affect men and boys as well as other genders

⁶ In line with what is stated in the UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence (2020).

the two may intersect; provide information on how to mitigate risk factors, including by developing safety plans that mitigate the potential physical and communication barriers that they may face and how and where to access safe services.

- Ensure that response and referral mechanisms are made accessible, confidential and safe for persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls, who are at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, and violence based on disability, as these areas may intersect.

Key resources

International legal and policy framework

- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), 2006
- [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy \(UNDIS\)](#), 2019

International guidance

- [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities](#), 2019
- [Humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities](#), 2018

UNHCR policy

- [Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy](#), 2018
- [Conclusion on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected by the UNHCR](#), 2010
- [UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence](#), 2020

UNHCR guidance and learning

- [UNHCR Gender Equality Toolkit](#), 2020
- [Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement](#), 2019
- [Resettlement Assessment Tool: Refugees with disabilities](#), 2018
- Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement e-Learning, available in [Learn&Connect](#)
- [UNHCR Emergency Handbook - Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [UNHCR Community-Based Protection - Community of Practices](#). The website includes a [section on Diversity&Inclusion dedicated to Persons with Disabilities](#).

*This resource is a living document that will be updated to reflect ongoing UNHCR work on the inclusion of older persons and application of the resource in the field. UNHCR works to include persons with disabilities and as the resource is applied in the field. UNHCR colleagues and partners can send questions and feedback to **UNHCR HQ Community-Based Protection Unit**, at hqts00@unhcr.org.*