Doubly jeopardised: Provoking discussion for visibility of EU’s refugees with disabilities

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Abstract
At present, there is marginal scholarly work covering the intersection between disability, forced displacement and refugee asylum intervention. Equally and perhaps more precariously, there is limited data and statistics as to experiences and actual figures concerning refugees with disabilities. The resultant effect is a curtailment of a full assessment of concerns and a corresponding complication of informed intervention. Bearing in mind the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as our point of reference, the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2010 adopted the Conclusion on Refugees with Disabilities and other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR to streamline inclusive humanitarian intervention in favor of refugees with disabilities within its programming, and in the States in which it operates. Irrespective of its specific intention being for policy guidance and its limited application (only to the UNHCR), the Conclusion constitutes a good starting point for disability inclusive refugee intervention. Perhaps more comprehensively, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) lays down tangible benchmarks for member States, to realise inclusion generally for all persons with disabilities. From a vantage policy perspective, it would be remiss not to consider whether or where disability inclusive refugee intervention fits within the inclusive 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Consequently, the main objective of this work is to contribute to the current limited resource pool in favor of disability sensitive refugee asylum intervention among EU refugee host States and other safe countries.

With the current upsurge of populist ideals in favor of stricter border controls generally within the western developed world, the uncertain status of refugees has never been more unclear and non-more so than refugees with disabilities. Admittedly, a lot still has to be done to re-conceptualise the current refugee question as an opportunity to reflect our commitment to our shared humanity. Nevertheless, it is never too early to question these inequities and, especially in this case the current invisible and hence, marginalised status of refugees with disabilities. Although this paper is targeted to EU refugee hosting states, its relevance is general in nature and is applicable to all refugee hosting countries.

Keywords: Refugees with Disabilities, Inclusive Refugee Intervention, Disability Inclusion.
Introduction

The current upsurge of refugees, especially from war torn parts of Syria and volatile parts of the Middle East, into Europe has reignited discourse on the pragmatism of humanitarian responses and raised questions concerning the practicality of the objectives of the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol among a host of EU States. Indeed, a populist re-emergence of fear driven nationalist ideals in favor of protection of national interests, security and stricter border control is fast questioning decades-long development in refugee humanitarian practice. Nonetheless and despite the above war of ideologies, real conflicts and catastrophes leading to displacement continue to occur. In 2015 alone, Europe recorded an estimated 1.3 million asylum seekers - an almost threefold increase from the previous year and comfortably above the record of 695,000 recorded in 1992. Although that figure is reported to have substantially fallen in 2016, this is largely attributed to stringent closure of migrant routes and/or documented experiences of extreme hardships and even deaths during asylum migration and stay in EU States as opposed to any real drop in the actual causes of forced displacement. Notably, a key contributor to the current forced displacement trend has been the ongoing persistent conflict - especially in Syria and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Unsurprisingly therefore, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends Report 2015, the highest numbers of present refugees hailed from Syria and Afghanistan.

In response to the increased refugee numbers that have successfully made it within its borders, EU refugee hosting States have been forced to devise reactionary, albeit reluctant measures to cater for the influx. The result has seen the opening of temporary camps, and evolving state departments as quick fix prescriptions. However, even this level of hospitality or open door approach (as some people believe it to be) has not gone unquestioned amid growing concerns from a fraction of EU citizens. Foremost among these concerns are national financial capability of individual states, security, and the fear of losing national identity. Obviously, it is entirely legitimate for the above concerns to subsist. Regardless, this should at the very least, spark constructive debate among and within EU States, individually and collectively; to first and in the long term, find comprehensively solutions for causes of forced displacement, and secondly and in the short term, to devise options to address these concerns whilst maintaining commitment to the principles of human rights. Simply advocating for stringent or closed border controls may not necessarily be sufficient, to say the least, and neither will it reflect any positive progress from an already chequered history of uncheck ultra nationalism, which fueled two World Wars in the first half of the 20th Century. As such, history and experience would suggest that an humane response to refugee issues is preferable.

Is it therefore too early too soon for disability inclusive refugee intervention?

As outlined above, the uncertain status of refugees generally has never been more unclear. Outside of status, one inconspicuously and hence doubly jeopardised group of refugees are refugees with disabilities. Unlike specific groups - for example, women and children - persons with disabilities have been historically invisible in their communities and consequently in State policy and intervention. As a result, poverty, unemployment, dependence and inaccessibility to essential services including healthcare are just some of the challenges they

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3 Pew Research Centre, “Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015”, August 2016 Report
incur in their daily life. One can therefore only imagine the heightened nature of their vulnerable status during forced displacements. Unfortunately, with limited coverage as to the experiences of persons with disabilities during and in forced displacement, and almost non-existent data about issues encountered by them, little to nothing has been done to redress their plight under their new title as refugees with disabilities.

Nonetheless, isolated estimates suggest that as many as 15% or 7.7 million of the world’s 51 million displaced people by conflict have a disability. As noted earlier, these figures are likely higher, especially since the impact of conflict as a cause of disability and what forms of disability manifest thereafter is not specifically reported. It is also unclear how many disabled persons are displaced for reasons other than conflict. Yet, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) persons with disabilities are more likely to be sidelined in every aspect of humanitarian assistance owing to a combination of physical and environmental barriers resulting in inaccessibility to information, healthcare, rehabilitation services and human rights protection. Ultimately, refugees with disabilities (as a group and individually) are owed rights by their virtue of being human. As this work shall point out, it is long overdue to ensure enforcement of existing rights guaranteed to refugees with disabilities. No doubt, doing so has important practical advantages for all.

Bearing in mind limitations to refugee time frames under different legal frameworks, and that in many cases refugees end up permanently residing in their host States, it is crucial that States ensure a productive population pool in the long term. With the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda and its overall theme - Leave no one behind - the need for inclusion of all in national and regional development cannot be clearer. Specific to the relevance for disability inclusion, according to the UN Special Rapporteur Report of August 2016, a significant amount of future resources can be saved if only government invested in disability inclusion from the beginning. For example, investing in disability inclusion in addition to preserving respect for human rights also enables States to tap into the untapped potentials of persons with disabilities, thereby ensuring their positive participation in employment and in the economic market whilst substantially reducing their dependence on the national welfare budget. Indeed, with the new shift in paradigm, overcoming main barriers rooted in the current status quo of environmental and attitudinal barriers that effectively curtail inclusion of persons with disabilities and hence attainment of their full potential and achieving ‘an equal basis with others’ is key to any meaningful development.

Several questions arise with respect to refugees with disabilities. For example, what international instruments are there to hold States to their duty to refugees with disabilities? What are the salient challenges confronting refugees with disabilities, and in effect, what steps and/or recommendations can States take to realise disability inclusive refugee policy? Ultimately, in its exploration of the above questions, the main objective of this work is to contribute to momentum for disability sensitive refugee intervention in EU refugee host States and other safe countries.

Briefly however, the Executive Committee of the UNHCR in October 2010 adopted the Conclusion on Refugees with Disabilities and other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR. Unfortunately, the Conclusion only applies to activities of the UNHCR and even then, only lays down policy direction at best without necessary specificity. Avoiding interrogations on the adequacies of the Conclusion for now, what of States? What legal instrument(s) can be used to commit them to respond to issues relating to refugees with disabilities?

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6 See footnote 3 UNHCR Global Trends Report 2015
The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has been fundamental in bringing disability rights to the core of international human rights law. It constitutes the single most widely accepted disability rights code with currently 172 member states.\(^8\) Crucially, the EU as a regional integration body has ratified the Convention. Naturally therefore, the CRPD is a vital European regional advocacy tool. Sadly, there is still little scholarly work covering the intersection between disability under the CRPD and refugee humanitarian response. Regardless, the CRPD contains specific recommendations and/or steps that are potentially beneficial in order for States to meet their mandate to refugees with disabilities. Specifically, its provisions on accessibility and reasonable accommodation as anecdotes to overcoming existing barriers to disability inclusion in daily life echo important lessons. Equally vital as well is reflecting on the relationship between the SGDs and disability inclusive refugee policy, and the apparent lack of statistics/literary works to provoke and in the long run inform appropriate related policy.

**Existing international legal framework in favor of disability inclusive refugee asylum intervention**

**The Conclusion on Refugees with Disabilities and other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR**

*The Conclusion on Refugees with Disabilities and other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR* is a policy document adopted in 2010 during the sixty first Executive Committee Sessions of the UNHCR to streamline disability inclusion within UNHCR’s humanitarian and refugee programming in respective States.\(^9\) Briefly, the UNHCR was established in 1950 by UN General Assembly and tasked with the mandate to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees.\(^10\) The UNHCR in effect serves as the guardian of the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The former consolidates previous refugee instruments and provides the most comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees generally at international level while its later Protocol extends the time and geographical application of the 1951 Convention to *all refugees* internationally irrespective of the previous deadline of 1\(^{st}\) January 1951. Without a doubt, the persistent reference to beneficiaries of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol to be ‘any (refugee) person’ infers a non-discriminatory and all-inclusive obligation to all intended member State refugee intervention and UNHCR refugee activity.

The UNHCR conclusion codifies the Commission’s policy in favor of disability inclusive humanitarian and refugee intervention. Once again the Conclusion notes that persons with disabilities are often the most vulnerable and yet continue to be persistently overlooked in humanitarian emergencies. As a consequence, they face discrimination, exploitation, and in some cases violence with minimal access to support services.\(^11\) The Conclusion calls on States and the UNHCR “to protect and assist refugees with disabilities against all forms of discrimination and to provide appropriate and sustainable support services”. Among its salient recommendations is; raising awareness and training on disability issues during emergency, \(^8\)CRPD ratification http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CRPD&Lang=en last accessed January 18, 2017  
\(^9\) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Conclusion on Refugees with Disabilities and other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR”, Executive Committee Sixty First Session, UN General Assembly Document No. A/AC.95/1096  
\(^10\) History of the UNHCR http://www.refworld.org/publisher,UNHCR,EXCONC,,,,0.html last accessed January 16, 2017  
\(^11\) See footnote 6 Conclusion on Refugees with Disabilities and other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR, General Assembly Document No. A/AC.95/1096
systematic identification and registration of refugees with disabilities, ensure participation of refugees with disabilities during intervention design process, ensure accessibility of services and accessibility of information, and implementation of appropriate reasonable accessibility standards.

Overall, the conclusion recognises the progress made by the CRPD in respect of rights in general for persons with disabilities, and seeks to interpret the same in situations of humanitarian emergencies. Despite its adoption over 6 years ago, its effect in favor of positive change for refugees with disabilities within and among States hosting UNHCR activities is still unclear.

The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 13th December 2006 and came into force on 3rd May 2008 after submission of its 30th instrument of ratification. Essentially, it reinterprets pre-existing human rights instruments in favor of all persons with disabilities without necessarily creating new rights. The Convention is credited for ushering into international law a social and human rights based understanding of disability by attributing disability to social, environmental and attitudinal barriers (CRPD Preamble). It notes that disability is an evolving and interactive effect between impairment and the society. Rightly so, it lays great emphasis on accessibility12, appropriate support and reasonable accommodation13 as tools to address discrimination and ensure that all persons with disabilities participate and enjoy rights on ‘an equal basis with others’.14

The CRPD in its preamble recognises the indispensable need for full protection of persons with disabilities during armed conflict and foreign occupation and consequently calls on State parties to do all that is necessary to ensure the safety and protection of all persons with disabilities in situations of risk including during conflict, humanitarian emergencies and during the occurrence of natural disasters.15 Relatedly, the Convention also provides for the right to freedom of movement and the right for persons with disabilities to choose their residence and nationality on an equal basis with others.16

Furthermore, the CRPD acknowledges, and in so doing, seeks to compliment previous international instruments and policy that guide inclusive refugee disability policy including the 1982 World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons17 and the 1993 Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities18.19 Importantly, the World Programme of Action highlights the situation of displaced persons and calls for the removal of social and physical barriers confronting persons with disabilities within refugee population. Equally, the Standard Rules on Equalization urges that the equalisation of opportunities of refugees with disabilities should be integrated into general development programs.

Granted, the CRPD does not expressly mention the term ‘refugees with disabilities’ and neither does it make specific reference to disability inclusive refugee intervention. Nevertheless, its underlying objective, as reflected in Article 1 and its text as a whole, is to

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12 See note 6, CRPD article 9
13 Ibid, CRPD article 2 & 4
14 Ibid, CRPD article 1
15 Ibid, CRPD article 11
16 Ibid, CRPD article 18
19 See note 6, CRPD Preamble
'promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities'. Importantly, the contrary argument that CRPD does not apply to refugees with disabilities sits uncomfortably with well-established human rights jurisprudence. Simply, human rights are, by definition, for everyone. The natural rights theory, the forerunner of modern conceptions of human rights, is premised on the assumption that a person is endowed with certain rights simply because he or she is human. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 prescribes that 'all human beings are born... in equal dignity and rights'.

Additionally, although the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is yet to make a General Comment clarifying the above rights of refugees with disabilities and other forcefully disabled displaced persons, the general purpose of the CRPD to protect persons with disabilities in all situations is undoubtedly clear. Of relevance, other treaty bodies have in the past already determined that human rights obligations are owed to individuals regardless of whether they are citizens or not. For example, the Human Rights Committee's in its General Comment number 31 stated that enjoyment of rights under the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights (ICCPR) are not “limited to citizens of state parties but must also be available to all individuals, regardless of nationality or statelessness such as asylum seekers, refugees, migrants workers and other persons”.

With regard to enforceability and potential effectiveness, the CRPD has been impressively ratified by 172 countries - an unprecedented feat for a relatively new Convention. Specific to the European Union (EU), all but one (Ireland- signed but not yet ratified) of the 28 EU member states have ratified the Convention. Equally and perhaps more significant for regional advocacy, the EU as a regional integration body has ratified the Convention.

Already and at a regional level, the EU has adopted the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 whose main aim is to empower persons with disabilities to enjoy rights and participate in society. Using the CRPD as its point of reference, the Strategy aims at creating a barrier free Europe with action in eight priority areas including: accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education, training, social protection and external action. Exclusive to humanitarian response and as per its report to the CRPD Committee, the EU noted that its humanitarian aid and assistance is guided by the principles of international law and impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination. Accordingly, these EU measures and those of member states should complement and reinforce each other. Despite this, the CRPD Committee still questioned how EU humanitarian intervention is inclusive of all persons with disabilities, and particularly refugees with disabilities in the European Union. Eventually, in its Concluding Observations, the CRPD Committee recommended that the EU adopt inclusive measures to ensure that the rights of refugees with disabilities are protected and respected.

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21 See note 6, CRPD article 34
22 United Nations, Human Rights Committee on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, General Comment No. 31 adopted during its Eighty Eighth Session on 29 March 2014, CCPR/C/21/Rev. 1/Add 1326 May, 2004
and accessible humanitarian programs to all persons with disabilities, share good practice among different EU institutions and member States, establish a respective monitoring and evaluation framework, maintain collection of appropriate disaggregated disability data, and implement the general mainstreaming of disability in its migration and refugee policy.

Importantly, the above mainstreaming interaction between the CRPD Committee and EU ought to form a common platform for advocacy for visibility for all persons with disabilities including refugees. Sadly, this invisibility is not exclusive to the EU and neither is it specific to EU member states. Despite overwhelming international support for disability rights and inclusion in all aspects of life, many policies and legal instruments are yet to be translated into real action. Nonetheless, there is now clear evidence that the CRPD has the potential to play an important role in pushing and galvanizing regional efforts for uniform realisation of inclusion and visibility for refugees with disabilities.

**The Sustainable Development Goals 2030**

In discussing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the relevance here is to provoke thought and reflection other than make specific reference. The SDGs are more generally crafted than their predecessor - the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). One cannot help but wonder whether discourse on refugees with disabilities is at all relevant within the SDGs framework and its 17-point agenda. And if so, where it does fit? It is in the opinion of this paper that this may constitute perhaps the most persuasive argument for the need for not just disability inclusion but *inclusion for all* as positive contributors in the economy and as beneficiaries of appropriate policy and intervention.

Briefly, the SDGs, which are part of the broad framework of the “*Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”, is a wider 2030 agenda for sustainable development building on the 2015 MDGs. Nevertheless, besides its 17 point goals, what really sets the SDGs apart from the MDGs and other recent international development initiatives is its commitment to “*leave no one behind*” - including meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. Although it does not specifically mention refugees with disabilities, its emphasis on inclusion of *all* as a yardstick for meaningful development offers crucial insights for the topic at hand.

Accordingly, real development can only be achieved when all persons are included as equal participants, contributors and beneficiaries in the process. Affirming the above, the August 2016 Report by the Special Rapporteur on Disabilities, notes the positives of disability inclusion in all polices including enabling governments save in the long term. Indeed, inclusion marks maturity of our development and is a firm reflection of our humanity.

**Understanding and responding to issues affecting refugees with Disabilities today**

A salient challenge consistently highlighted in this work is the overwhelming lack of data and/or statistics on refugees with disabilities, accompanied with relatively low scholarly coverage in this area of human rights. Despite much clarity in terms of international legal frameworks, the sad reality is that refugees with disabilities continue to exist inconspicuously. Further, in spite of their high vulnerability status to exploitation and violation during the uncertain periods of asylum migration and in host country refugee asylum process, aggregated statistics on their numbers is limited and even, in most cases non-existent. Consequently, the lack of specific data has a disproportionately negative impact on refugees with disabilities since it curtails appropriate action and policy. Yet, the CRPD itself hinges its realisation on the

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availability of appropriate data and information on disability. It mandates States to undertake
to collect all necessary aggregated statistics and data on disability to enable formulation of and
implementation of the Convention. Unique to refugee intervention and in accordance,
UNHCR notes that “facts and figures are vital for preparedness and planning”.

A second challenge related to the above, is the limited existence of scholarly and academic
coverage devoted to concerns and issues of refugees with disabilities. First, despite the blossom
of disability rights since the turn of the century, specific disability groups including refugees
with disabilities are yet to assume prominence within the disability rights movement itself.
Secondly and perhaps even more curiously, according to some, mainstream human rights
movement has historically ignored and unwittingly perpetuated invisibility of persons with
disabilities generally. It was largely because of this very failure by mainstream human rights
that the argument for a disability exclusive international convention gained traction, hence the
CRPD. All the same, according to Janet Lord and following the adoption of the CRPD, a key
test for the human rights movement will be its level of accommodation for disability rights
including all groups under it.

To overcome challenges and ensure redress to issues facing refugees with disabilities, the
nexus between the human rights challenges of today, humanitarian law, disability rights and
domestic legislation has to be bridged. Of relevance also is the practical challenge of placing
rights of refugees with disabilities within two major international instruments, that is, the
CRPD, and the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol. The reality is that the ambiguous
status of refugees makes implementation of disability specific international instruments for
non-citizens less straight forward. Equally, the trend of categorisation of international law as
soft law enables States through national hard law, to prioritise its disabled citizens and
interests over those of refugees with disabilities. With the current populist wave in favor of
stricter migration control, the placing of refugees generally, let alone refugees with disabilities,
as a group in the human rights citizenry constitutes a significant impediment. Juxtaposing the
same, the irony is that the above murkiness is reminiscent of the special group or other label
which has been (is) a historical dark cloak over persons with disabilities, and was (is) often
overly used to exert protectionist paternalistic intervention in blatant disregard to their
human rights.

Perhaps more specific to the day to day challenges, as noted previously, environmental
and social barriers combined constitute the core barriers facing all persons with disabilities
including refugees with disabilities. UNHCR notes that persons with disabilities are more
likely to be sidelined in every aspect of humanitarian assistance owing to a combination of
physical and environmental barriers resulting in inaccessibility to information, healthcare,
rehabilitation services and human rights protection. Furthermore, according to the 2014
study by the Women’s Refugee Commission, refugees with disabilities and their caregivers in
refugee settlements are often victims of violence due to their vulnerability, discrimination,
stigma and isolation, all of which ultimately affects their participation, potential and full
enjoyment of rights.

See note 6, CRPD article 31

History of the UNHCR http://www.refworld.org/publisher,UNHCR,EXCONC,0.html last accessed
January 18, 2017

Janet Lord, “Here’s why disability rights must be on the forefront of the human rights movement”,
blog post on Amnesty International website, available at http://blog.amnestyusa.org/identity-and-
last accessed January 22, 2017

Ibid

Clara Straimer, “Vulnerable or Invisible- Asylum seekers with disabilities in Europe”, Refugee

See footnote 3 UNHCR Global Trends Report 2015

See footnote 4 Women’s Refugee Commission Report, 2014
solutions accessible to refugees with disabilities, and in effect raises a red flag against current rampant discrimination by hosting States in favor of able bodied refugees over disabled refugees.

Relatedly, and in terms of intervention, the non-homogenous nature of disability hinges great significance on appropriate accessibility standards and individual adjustments. This effectively renders a one-size fit all approach as too simplistic and not necessarily sufficient. The CRPD’s recommendations on accessibility and reasonable accommodation as anecdotes to overcoming physical barriers and diversity of needs by persons with disabilities respectively are particularly relevant in this case. Unfortunately, despite disability related needs such as health care, rehabilitation and education often forming part of national intervention in most States, the reality is these needs are often far from being met. Many times, policy formulation processes are non-inclusive and persons with disabilities are hardly or not consulted at all. In the end, limited knowledge (data) amidst the reality of negative perceptions towards disability largely informs the nature of many interventions. In a nutshell, with a heightened reality of exclusion, violation, exploitation and discrimination during asylum migration and in the host country asylum process, coupled with little or no visibility, the almost insurmountable challenge of being a refugee with a disability cannot be overstated.

Conclusion

Generally, with recent developments in the US, parts of the EU and other places around the globe, refugees today face significant challenges in remaining relevant in national policy and intervention. With human rights arguments for favorable refugee intervention being discredited as being too liberal and naïve, the opposing tide in favor of stricter border and immigration control is gathering pace. A real concern of the later however is that, it was against such sentiments of closed, and even, myopic nationalistic devotion that the States collectively sought to start a new chapter in global humanity, drawing lessons following the end of the Second World War. The birth of the United Nations and the adoption of a global code of human rights in the form of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were the first blocks to be created. Shortly following, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees was adopted by the UN and later and expanded by its 1967 Protocol. Specific to refugee human rights, in fact, there is now a huge body of positive history in favor of humane response.

Nonetheless, amidst the above distraction the real questions resulting from the unmet needs of individual groups of refugees, and in this case, refugees with disabilities continue to gape. Despite a relatively clear international legal and normative framework in the form of the CRPD which is supplementary to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in this case, the UNHCR Conclusion on Persons with Disabilities and the insights from the SGDs and its commitment to “leave no one behind”, refugees with disabilities still continue to exist almost inconspicuously. The lack of national aggregated statistics and the related scarce literary work especially in human rights academia covering their experiences are not only indicators of their neglect, but as also, perpetuators their current invisibility in national policy and intervention. This is regardless of the fact that refugees with disabilities are more likely to be sidelined in every aspect of humanitarian assistance owing to a combination of physical and environmental barriers resulting in inaccessibility to information, healthcare, rehabilitation services and human rights protection.

In addition to their heightened vulnerability status, the uniqueness and diversity of disability concerns ensures that a one size fit all approach may not be sufficient to resolve the needs of refugees with disabilities. Fittingly the CRPD emphasises implementation of general accessibility standards and in the event of specific individual needs calls for the provision of reasonable accommodation. Accessibility and reasonable accommodation in favor of persons with disabilities in refugee intervention would go to the core of ensuring access to basic crucial
services including equal access to asylum processes, access to appropriate accommodation, equal access to integration programs, education and fair access to any other livelihood opportunities and services. It should be remembered that all but one (Ireland) of the EU States have ratified the CRPD, and importantly, the EU as an integration body has itself ratified the Convention. Although very little has been done so far, it is long overdue for the obligations to refugees with disabilities to be met by the EU States collectively and the individually. Certainly, commitment in this respect shall reflect heavily on our shared humanity and, our aspiration for equity, inclusion and protect of all, including the most vulnerable and often invisible.
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Pew Research Centre, “Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015”, August 2016 Report


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United Nations, “Sustainable Development Goals”, UN Resolution A/RES/70/1, September 2015


