



# **EDF toolkit on inclusion of refugees and migrants with disabilities**

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## Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Acronyms</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<i>About the European Disability Forum</i> .....	5
<i>EDF Advocacy work on refugees with disabilities</i> .....	5
<i>Journey at sea</i> .....	6
<i>Arrival at hotspots and reception centres</i> .....	6
<i>Asylum seeking</i> .....	7
<b>Legal and policy framework</b> .....	<b>8</b>
International framework .....	8
<i>UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)</i> .....	8
<i>Sustainable Development Goals – 2030 Agenda</i> .....	9
<i>Global Refugee Compact and the Global Refugee Forum</i> .....	9
<i>IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action</i> .....	10
European Framework .....	10
<i>Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union</i> .....	10
<i>Common European Asylum System</i> .....	10
EU policy documents on migration .....	13
EU funding .....	14
<b>Examples of activities</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Disabled Refugees Welcome .....	14
<i>Documenting the situation</i> .....	15
Planning together: empowering refugees with disabilities .....	16
Perspectives of refugees with disabilities in CRPD alternative reports .....	17
Booklet on rights for newcomers with Down Syndrome .....	18
Participation of DPOs in emergency onsets in the Pacific Region.....	18
Access to services for migrants with disabilities .....	19
<b>Ideas and recommendations</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Ideas to consider.....	21

Advocacy towards policy makers .....	22
Advocacy towards service providers and the larger community .....	23
<b>Contact the EDF secretariat .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Annex .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Fleeing Syria in a wheelchair .....	25
The specific challenges of deaf refugees and asylum seekers.....	27

## Acronyms

- CRPD – UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- DPOs - organisations of persons with disabilities
- EU - European Union
- LGBTI – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, acronym used to refer to members of sexual and gender minorities
- NGO – Non-governmental organisation

## Glossary

- **Asylum seeker:** An individual who is seeking international protection and whose application for asylum has not yet been processed (in countries where individualized procedures are in place).
- **Hot spot:** A first reception facility for identification, registration, and fingerprinting of asylum seekers that aims to better coordinate EU agencies' and national authorities' efforts at the external borders of the EU.
- **Migrant:** An individual who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate.
- **Refugee:** Someone who is outside of the country of their nationality due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.
- **Reception centre:** A facility that provides services to migrants, including refugees.
- **Transmigrant:** a person passing through a country or region in the course of emigrating to another region.

## Introduction

This toolkit aims to inform our community of members and partners, in particular organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) in Europe, about the perspectives of migrants, including refugees, with disabilities, and how to include them in your work. It includes:

- A brief background about the situation of conflict driven migrants
- Good practices on how to include the voices of refugees and migrants with disabilities in DPOs work
- Ideas and recommendations on how to move forward
- A testimony on fleeing conflict in a wheelchair

This is a living document which we aim to update as we become more and better informed.

## About the European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in the European Union. We are a unique platform which brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. We are run by persons with disabilities and their families, and as such represent a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

## EDF Advocacy work on refugees with disabilities

We started [our advocacy work on refugees with disabilities](#) in 2015, in cooperation with our members and organisations such as Human Rights Watch, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

We brought the issue to the European Commission and the [European Parliament](#), advocating for all EU funding for refugees to also reach those with disabilities. During a [mission](#) in Greece, we were able to evaluate the difficult situation of refugees with disabilities.

At the [Conference of State Parties](#) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), we [called](#) for the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migrants to include the voices of persons with disabilities.

We repeatedly called on the European Union (EU) and its Member States to

take a human rights-based approach to conflict driven migration by ensuring we receive migrants with disabilities in dignified conditions. We demand it, because our vision of Europe is one where human rights are upheld for all.

“The EU needs to respect the human rights of all refugees. Additional funding should be allocated to cope with the refugee crisis and all actions should take into consideration the needs of refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities. No refugee, including refugees with disabilities should be locked up or segregated.”

- Yannis Vardakstanis, EDF President

## Migration journeys

Millions<sup>1</sup> of persons fleeing war, persecution and human rights violations across the world arrive to Europe, primarily by sea through Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Malta.

These journeys include dangers such as torture and ill-treatment, kidnapping by human traffickers and smugglers, sexual violence and exploitation, and denial of healthcare. Unaccompanied children, women, LGBTI+ people, and persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups particularly those with intersecting identities. Some persons acquire disabilities throughout the journey.

### Journey at sea

Thousands drown or go missing at sea. In 2018 there were an average of six deaths at Mediterranean Sea per day.<sup>2</sup> People in need of healthcare are often kept off land for days before being able to disembark. Many are intercepted and detained by the Libyan Coast Guard in unsanitary conditions with limited access to food, which leads to diseases and death.

### Arrival at hotspots and reception centres

Those who make it to the hotspots (first reception facilities in the EU) and other reception centres also face multiple barriers:

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<sup>1</sup> In 2015, more than 1 million people arrived in Europe. In 2016 the number lowered to 373,652 people. During the last two years 185,139 and 141,472 arrived in Europe. [UNHCR statistics](#)

<sup>2</sup> between in 2016 5000 deaths and in 2017 3000 deaths.

- No identification of disabilities, or lack of adequate support for those who are
- Inaccessible services (including assistance programmes) and facilities
- Lack of access to medical care and insufficient access to assistive technologies and other disability related services (such as sign language interpretation and mechanisms of supported decision making, etc.)<sup>3</sup>

## Asylum seeking

The asylum claiming process presents more difficulties for persons with disabilities:

- Persons with intellectual disabilities may face difficulties in preparing interviews and collecting the necessary information to demonstrate the credibility of their claims
- Persons who are blind, deaf or with reduced mobility may need assistance to communicate or overcome architectural barriers

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<sup>3</sup> EDF took part in October 2016 in a [mission of the European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\) to Greece to investigate the situation of refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities](#); Human Rights Watch [report](#) 'Greece: Refugees with Disabilities Overlooked, Underserved - Identify People with Disabilities; Ensure Access to Services'  
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## Legal and policy framework

The asylum seeker and refugee statuses provide a framework for conflict driven immigrants to be received and legally protected in host countries.

### International framework

#### [1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)

Asylum was first recognised as an international obligation in the [1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#) which all EU countries have acceded to. It is a fundamental right granted to people fleeing persecution, violent conflict; serious human rights violations or serious harm in their home country.

The status of refugee applies to those individuals who meet the criteria established under Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention:

“who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”.

The demonstration of the requirements included in the definition of “refugee” of the Convention may be challenging for persons with disabilities, as persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities may lack the support needed to demonstrate ‘well-founded fear’.

#### [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)

The [CRPD](#) is an international legally binding instrument that sets minimum standards for the rights of persons with disabilities. It includes provision of international protection in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. All countries in Europe except Liechtenstein are parties to the CRPD.<sup>4</sup> The EU is party to the CRPD since 2011.

Article 11 addresses the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, stating that:

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<sup>4</sup> At the date of the publication of this toolkit: February 2020.

“States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.”

The EU received [recommendations](#) from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2015 to “mainstream disability in migration and refugee policies and to issue guidelines to its agencies and member states that restrictive detention of persons with disabilities in the context of migration and asylum seeking is not in line with the CRPD.”

## **Sustainable Development Goals – 2030 Agenda**

The [2030 Development Agenda](#) recognizes the importance of empowering people in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons.

[Goal 8](#) on decent work and economic growth includes a specific target to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for migrant workers

[Goal 10 on reducing inequalities](#) embraces two separate targets: to empower persons with disabilities, and to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. It is essential to enhance the linkage between disability and migration in the future international dialogue.

## **Global Refugee Compact and the Global Refugee Forum**

The [Global Refugee Compact](#) (GRC) is a policy document that aims to improve the international response to new and existing refugee situations. It was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2018.

The Compact sets out arrangements for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host countries receive predictable and sustainable support; that refugees can contribute to their host communities and secure their own futures; and that solutions are sought from the outset. The document recognises persons with disabilities as persons with specific needs, requiring additional resources and targeted assistance from States.

The first Global Refugee Forum is a unique opportunity for the international community, including representative organisations of persons with disabilities to come together and lay the foundations for the implementation

of the Global Compact over the longer term. The first Global Refugee Forum took place in Geneva, Switzerland on 17 and 18 December 2019. It included an exchange and showcase of [good practices](#) and experiences on inclusion of refugees and migrants in the host communities.

There is also a [Global Compact for Migration](#) which addresses broader migration.

## **[IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#)**

The UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action developed [Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#) which were endorsed by the IASC Principals in October 2019 and launched on 12<sup>th</sup> November.

The Guidelines aim to ensure that all phases of humanitarian action are disability-inclusive. They also emphasize that persons with disabilities should be recipients of humanitarian assistance as well as empowered actors in humanitarian response.

## **European Framework**

### **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**

The [Charter](#) obliges the EU institutions, bodies and agencies to respect fundamental rights in all their actions. It similarly obliges EU countries to respect fundamental rights when they are implementing EU law.

The following non-exhaustive list highlights the most relevant rights for refugees with disabilities: Right to the integrity of the person (Article 3), Prohibition of slavery and forced labour (Article 5), Right to education (Article 14), Right to asylum (Article 18), Non-discrimination, including on the grounds of disability (Article 21), Rights of the child (Article 24), Integration of persons with disabilities (Article 26) and Healthcare (Article 35).

### **Common European Asylum System**

The EU is an area of open borders and freedom of movement of persons. Its countries have adopted a joint approach to receive and protect asylum-seekers and refugees by harmonising national legislation. The EU established a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and developed

common standards for a fair and efficient asylum procedure, the reception of asylum seekers, and on the recognition and content of the refugee status. EU asylum law has developed significantly since the establishment of the CEAS and several pieces of legislation have been adopted:

- 1) the Council Directive on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced<sup>5</sup>;
- 2) the Council Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers<sup>6</sup>;
- 3) the Council Regulation establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application (Dublin Regulation)<sup>7</sup>;
- 4) the Directive for a uniform status for the qualification of refugees<sup>8</sup> and,
- 5) the Council Directive on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status.<sup>9</sup>

Significant changes have occurred in the last years. The most recent EU rules set out common high standards and stronger co-operation to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system – wherever they apply. In short:

- The **revised Asylum Procedures Directive**<sup>10</sup> aims at fairer, quicker and better-quality asylum decisions. There should be greater protection of unaccompanied minors and victims of torture. Asylum seekers with special needs, including persons with disabilities, should receive the necessary support, including sufficient time, to explain their claim and to create the necessary conditions for the effective access to procedures and for presenting the elements needed to

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<sup>5</sup> Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

<sup>6</sup> Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers.

<sup>7</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national.

<sup>8</sup> Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted.

<sup>9</sup> Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005 on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status.

<sup>10</sup> [Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection](#)

substantiate their application for international protection.<sup>11</sup> The obligation to guarantee appropriate support is crucial for ensuring fair access of persons with disabilities to all stages of the procedure on an equal basis with others.

- **The revised Reception Conditions Directive**<sup>12</sup> ensures that there are humane material reception conditions (such as housing) for asylum seekers across the EU and that the fundamental rights of the concerned persons are fully respected. It also ensures that detention is only applied as a measure of last resort.
- **The revised Qualification Directive**<sup>13</sup> clarifies the grounds for granting international protection and therefore will make asylum decisions more robust. It aims at improving the access to rights and integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection. However, it still fails to recognise ‘disability’ or ‘discrimination based on the ground of disability’ amongst the grounds of persecution that qualify for international refugee protection. **The revised Dublin Regulation**<sup>14</sup> enhances the protection of asylum seekers during the process of establishing the State responsible for examining the application, and clarifies the rules governing the relations between states. It creates a system to detect early problems in national asylum or reception systems and address their root causes before they develop into fully fledged crises.

In 2015, the European Commission presented a comprehensive European Agenda on Migration, intended to address immediate challenges and equip the EU with the tools to better manage migration in the medium and long term in the areas of migration as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> para. 29 Directive 2013/32/EU

<sup>12</sup> [Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection](#)

<sup>13</sup> Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted

<sup>14</sup> [Regulation No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and the European Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person](#)

## EU policy documents on migration

The following policy documents are strategic and do not refer to the rights of migrants with disabilities:

- The [Common basic principles for immigrant integration](#) (2004) lay down the main principles for integration of migrants at the EU level.
- The [Action plan on the integration of third-country nationals](#) (2016) provides a comprehensive framework and concrete actions to support Member States' efforts in developing and strengthening their integration policies, including education, language training, employment and vocational training, access to basic services such as housing and healthcare and active participation and social inclusion, fighting discrimination.
- The [Council Conclusions on the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU](#) (2016) invites Member States to focus their efforts on a several areas, in accordance with the national policies and priorities. These areas include early integration measures, and in particular those favouring early access to education, to vocational training and to the labour market, but also areas offering opportunities to third-country nationals to actively participate in the economic, social and civic life of Member States, and combating discrimination and segregation.
- The [Communication on the protection of children in migration](#) (2017) sets out priority actions including ensuring protection upon arrival, adequate reception conditions for children, effective guardianship, early integration measures, access to inclusive and non-discriminatory education, timely access to healthcare etc.

“Refugees, migrants and asylum seekers with disabilities continue to be detained within the EU in conditions which do not provide appropriate support and reasonable accommodation. The Committee is concerned that the migration decision-making procedure is not accessible for all persons with disabilities and that information and communication are not provided in accessible formats.”

- The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the EU review process in 2015

## EU funding

Member States have several EU Funds at their disposal to invest in the integration of migrants, including persons with disabilities. These include funding instruments under shared management (management by both the EU institutions and national authorities), including the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and direct management (management only by the EU institutions), for example the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation, Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, the Health for Growth programme.

## Examples of activities

This section of the toolkit describes examples of activities from our members, partners and other DPOs on inclusion of refugees and migrants with disabilities.

### Disabled Refugees Welcome

[Disabled Refugees Welcome](#) (DRW) is a project run by the Swedish Independent Living Institute Stockholm and is financed by the Swedish Inheritance Fund - Allmänna Arvsfonden.

DRW creates new methods to facilitate the reception process of newcomers with disabilities in Sweden and contributes to developing more accessible integration policies.

Its main activities include

- documenting the needs, wishes and solutions of newcomers with disabilities;
- providing recommendations to the authorities, organisations and institutions working on the integration of newcomers to ensure that their activities include the perspectives of those with disabilities;
- providing peer support to refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities;

- facilitating their participation in language learning by requesting the necessary reasonable accommodation;
- providing support in accessing social services, assistive devices, or obtaining a personal assistance, accessible housing or being taught for example to use the white stick for blind persons and finding employment in Sweden.

## Documenting the situation

Here are some examples of the work done by DRW to show the range of barriers facing refugees with disabilities.

### No roof over one's head

**Story:** A woman with disability, resulting from childhood polio is living in Stockholm with her two children. She and her family were forced to move to an inaccessible apartment in the woods of Västernorrland. It is difficult to go to the shops, school, doctor etc. without a car.

**Results:** Isolation. No training in the Swedish language for the mother or her children. Difficulty to sleep. Worsening health condition. Increased difficulty and symptoms of the polio injury.

**Problems:** Short contracts for living arrangements and remote areas with poor transport solutions are common for the newcomers within the establishment period. This leads to difficulty in establishment of a social network and then possibility to employment and language development.

### Inaccessible Swedish training

**Story:** A man who is blind has not received the support for an accessible Swedish language training. He is therefore dependent on others for communication.

**Result:** Loneliness and isolation in the home. Due to isolation he has developed depression, sleep complications, has lost his self-confidence and has a drastic deterioration of his self-esteem.

**Problems:** The Swedish language training as a service for establishment lacks the disability perspective. This means that the functionality perspective was not taken in account for the formulation of the training, for example access to transport and health status. This shows that the knowledge of the target groups' living conditions is faulty. Even the cooperation between authorities for the reception of migrants lacks the



disability perspective.

### **Refused personal assistance**

**Story:** Man, with a permanent residence permit is refused support and services. He has extensive needs due to back injuries with chronic pain. The man is isolated in his living arrangements due to the denial of assistance and access to adapted transport.

**Problems :** Denial of support and service causes problems for persons with disabilities in general. The denial of assistance violates the human right to self-determination. This also leads to painful consequences for an individual's psychological health.

### **Denied family reunification**

**Story:** A newcomer with a refugee status was denied family reunification. This mother has applied for a permit for both of her underaged children. The application was refused as she has no employment. Mother and children have not seen each other for four years.

**Reason to denial:** Nonfulfillment of the maintenance requirement partly due to a lack of information and adapted establishment program.

**Problems:** Unemployment is high both among people with disabilities and among newcomers. Additionally, the work that can be found is often physically demanding and not accessible.

Contact: [info@disabledrefugeeswelcome.se](mailto:info@disabledrefugeeswelcome.se).

## **Planning together: empowering refugees with disabilities**

This is a project of the [National Confederation of Disabled People Greece \(NCDP\)](#), funded by the [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#). It won the prize "Integrating Children with Disabilities" under the "Project Urban Refugee Children- Innovation Challenge" by UNHCR in March 2017.

Included activities:

- training of 500 professionals working with refugees on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and how to support the inclusion of refugees with disabilities in Greek society;
- providing information and guidance to organisations working in the field;

- supporting and guiding refugees with disabilities and their families through a hotline and individual meetings regarding their inclusion in education, health care, accessible housing, disability assessment and certification;
- influencing policy and practice with feedback received on the most pressing issues for refugees with disabilities during consultation meetings with them;
- establishment and activation of an advisory committee consisting of refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities and members of their families;
- providing peer support and counselling for refugees who are parents of children with disabilities.

Positive outcomes:

- the development of an accessible environment and the improvement of the relevant assistive technologies (assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices) for refugees with disabilities;
- providing valuable suggestions on how to design programmes/services suitable for each person with a disability;
- overcoming negative stereotypes and prejudices against persons with disabilities;
- improving the efficiency of policies and practices at local, regional and national level.

Contact: [s.worker.refugees@esaea.gr](mailto:s.worker.refugees@esaea.gr) or [refugees@esaea.gr](mailto:refugees@esaea.gr)

## **Perspectives of refugees with disabilities in CRPD alternative reports**

The representative organisation of persons with disabilities in the Netherlands, Ieder-in decided to include the voices and perspectives of refugees with disabilities in their alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The report is part of the future review of the Netherlands by the Committee and will inform the Committee about progress in making the rights of the CRPD a reality for all persons with disabilities, including refugees with disabilities. Ieder-in will advocate the Committee to obtain recommendations on ways to improve the lives of persons with

disabilities, including refugees with disabilities in the Netherlands.

Contact: [post@iederin.nl](mailto:post@iederin.nl)

## Booklet on rights for newcomers with Down Syndrome

The [Italian Association of People with Down Syndrome](#) published a booklet for refugees with Down Syndrome in [Italian](#), [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#). This booklet is part of the [project “Easy Info. Knowledge Empowers”](#). It is aimed at foreign families with Down’s syndrome relatives who are living in Italy. It provides accessible information on your rights as newcomer to Italy regarding social protection, work permits, health care, and education.

Contact: [aipd@aipd.it](mailto:aipd@aipd.it)

## Participation of DPOs in emergency onsets in the Pacific Region

This project aimed increasing the collaboration between DPOs and national humanitarian NGOs in the development, planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes, as a response to the Tropical Cyclone Gita in Tonga.

Its activities included:

- assessment of the needs of persons with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies;
- training to build the capacity of DPOs to advocate for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the work of humanitarian responding agencies: the DPOs were supported to map key humanitarian stakeholders in Tonga, and develop key messages using the lived experience of disability and disaster.

The results are significant:

- A DPO Resource team was created with 16 members and acting as a DPO focal point for humanitarian responding agencies;
- After the training, the capacity of the DPO Resource Team to lobby humanitarian responding agencies for inclusion increased and local organisations are welcoming inputs from the members of the DPO Resource Team;
- Mainstream responding agencies are targeting persons with disabilities in response programmes;

- Connections have been established with humanitarian responding agencies which will be maintained and useful for future disaster responses.

The learnings of the project:

- The concept of non-discrimination was used as a basis for advocating mainstream humanitarian responding agencies to guarantee protection and equal access to assistance for all people with disabilities;
- Persons with disabilities and their representative organisation, through the DPO Resource were participating and involved in the development of the methodology for the needs assessment, the implementation of advocacy and inputs into accessibility audits;
- Cooperation and coordination between the DPO Resource Team and the humanitarian responders will lead to cross-learning and sharing of information, tools and resources;
- The coordination that has been fostered with development and humanitarian actors may also strengthen national service systems- using the response as an opportunity to rebuild a more inclusive society and community;
- Ongoing advocacy from the DPO Resource Team will sensitise and strengthen national humanitarian staff on the rights, protection and safety of person with disability and may further strengthen their capacity and skills to identify and include persons with disabilities in preparedness and response mechanisms;
- Recommendations made in the needs assessment report can be used within inclusive policy and the disaggregated data collected can be used on an ongoing basis to assess and advance inclusion within humanitarian assistance.

The DPOs whose members were part of the DPO Resource were Tonga National Visual Impairment Association (TNVIA) and Naunau 'o e 'Alamaite Tonga Association Incorporated ([NATA](#)).

Contact: [manager@pacificdisability.org](mailto:manager@pacificdisability.org)

## Access to services for migrants with disabilities

'Access to services for migrants with disabilities' - [AMiD](#) project aimed at supporting the reception and integration of refugees and migrant with

disabilities.<sup>15</sup> The European Disability Forum and our [Greek](#) and [Italian](#) members were part of the project.

The [Needs Assessment tool](#) (NAT) was developed by the project. NAT is an interactive platform to identify refugees and migrants with disabilities, when arriving in the European Union. It aims at

- supporting NGOs and local authorities in the assessment of the support needs of migrants and refugees with disabilities, and to provide them with the adequate responses for inclusion in society;
- improving their registration process, as it can be used at any stage of the asylum procedure and/or of the reception process;
- increasing the knowledge and responses of multi-disciplinary professionals working with migrants and/or persons with disabilities.

NAT takes a human rights-based approach to assessing the support needs of persons with disabilities, and is based on the [Washington Group short set of disability questions developed to identify persons with disabilities during data collection](#).

AMiD project also delivered training for professionals and local organisations working in migrants and refugees' services and analysed the situation of refugees with disabilities in Austria, Greece, Finland and Italy.<sup>16</sup>

The final project conference underlined the importance of a stronger and better collaboration between DPOs and the organisations working with migrants.

Contact: European Association of Services providers for Persons with Disabilities at [info@easpd.eu](mailto:info@easpd.eu).

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<sup>15</sup> EDF participates in this project together with European Association of Services Providers for persons with disabilities and several European and national DPOs and service providers. More information on the [AMiD website](#). [The project ends in December 2019](#).

<sup>16</sup> The training modules and the country reports can be found on the [AMiD website](#).  
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## Ideas and recommendations

Based on a short review of our members and partners' work, actions which can be taken by DPOs could include:

### Ideas to consider

#### Support migrants, including refugees

- Create links between host and refugee/migrant communities and peer support networks between persons with disabilities from the host country and refugees and migrants with disabilities;
- Organise an awareness raising campaign to inform refugees and migrants with disabilities about the CRPD and the contact details of DPOs, equality bodies and service providers at local and national level
- Support refugees and migrants with disabilities in accessing mainstream services, such as shelter and housing, food distribution, poverty reduction and income generation (including employment), mainstream education, health care, protection against discrimination and legal advice.

#### Involve refugees and migrants in your work

- Recruit refugees and migrants with disabilities and welcome them in your team;
- Consult and involve refugees and migrants with disabilities and organisations supporting them in your work, and in the decision-making processes of your organisations, such as through participation in your governing bodies;
- Consult refugees and migrants with disabilities about their main concerns and provide accessible information on how to find solutions in the local context, on the available services and barriers and how to overcome them;
- Involve cultural mediators to ensure a meaningful involvement of refugees and migrants in your work;
- Ensure that the perspectives of refugees and migrants with disabilities are included in your advocacy and communication work, and in

particular the perspectives of women and girls, unaccompanied minors, older people, LGBTI people, people from ethnic minorities, people with intellectual disabilities, people with mental health or psychosocial disabilities, deaf-blind people, persons with multiple disabilities, as they are at a higher risk of violence, exploitation and abuse;

- Train your staff and members about the specific concerns of refugees and migrants with disabilities, build their capacity to engage in policy making on refugee and migration response and do so in collaboration with refugees and migrants with disabilities.

### **Create alliances with other organisations:**

- Build an alliance between local disability service providers, local DPOs and refugees with disabilities to bring about a fundamental improvement of the condition of refugees with disabilities;
- Create links between the disability movement and the civil society organisations and agencies working refugees and migrants in general;
- Work closely with international and EU refugee agencies and encourage them to include refugees with disabilities in their programmes.

## **Advocacy towards policy makers**

- Discuss inclusion of refugees and migrants with disabilities with the government structures responsible for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Advocate with government structures that all policy measures should include the voices of refugees and migrants with disabilities and not perpetuate exclusion and segregation;
- Request that the government involve and consult with representative organisations of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities in developing programmes to include and support refugees and migrants with disabilities in society (e.g. vocational training programs, learning of job search techniques, information on labour legislation in the country, information on employment opportunities, provision of support for the development of business schemes, implementation of subsidized employment programs, etc.);
- Advocate for the adoption of programmes and activities focusing on

families with children with disabilities, in collaboration with DPOs. Such activities could include creative and educational activities for the children and peer counselling for the parents of the children with the disabilities;

- Advocate for collection of data disaggregated at least by age, gender and disability, using the [Washington Group short set of questions](#);
- Advocate for funding of training of professionals working with refugees and migrants with disabilities in the human rights-based approach to disability and the identification and support needs of persons with disabilities, as to improve case management.

## **Advocacy towards service providers and the larger community**

- Ensure that all mainstream services provided to refugees and migrants are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Identify partners who may be able to build capacity for inclusion of persons with disabilities in programmes and mainstream services



## Contact the EDF secretariat

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## Annex

### Fleeing Syria in a wheelchair

My name is Nujeen Mustafa and I am 18 years old. I am from Syria and I grew up in Aleppo. When the war started, we could not evacuate easily because of my disability, particularly as we were living on the 5th floor of a building with no elevator. I felt like I was a barrier for the safety of my family. Everybody was trying to be strong for me. It was very stressful and depressing. Our worst fear was that the army would break into the city and that we wouldn't be able to leave after that, so we fled. It turned out to be a wise decision. We first fled to Turkey and in August 2015, crossed the Mediterranean sea, got to Greece and from there to Germany.

'Why did you bring her?', people wondered with surprise and shock. There was even a debate whether we should bring my wheelchair on the boat because it would be too heavy. I was told I was the first person in wheelchair to arrive in Greece. Camps are hastily built and nobody expects that people with disabilities will be coming.

The camp in Moria in Lesbos, Greece, was not accessible so I had to change camps. But everyone who arrives in Lesbos must go to Moria first. I was lucky not to stay there long. Many other people with disabilities have to stay there much longer than me. As a refugee with disability you have to be a good "bladder holder", as you don't find many accessible toilets. For example, I couldn't use the toilets in Moria because there were no ramps. The terrain was also very bumpy and I got bruises. People think you're sitting comfortable in your wheelchair doing nothing. As a matter of fact, it really hurts. If there was a slope, I was afraid to roll out of my wheelchair. We also had to sleep outdoors on cardboard boxes.

Like all people with disabilities, I am often told that I can't do anything, but so far I have proven everyone wrong. Refugees with disabilities, like all other people, deserve to have access to services, like toilets and showers in the camps. These are simple things. People with disabilities should be considered in conflict situation, as well as in normal daily life. Our needs are not different in daily life than in conflict. I feel lucky that I now have a normal life in Germany. I go to school and I can dream of my future again. But there are still so many other refugees with disabilities in camps facing the same barriers to access even basic services. They should not be forgotten or ignored.

Nujeen wrote a book in collaboration with journalist Christina Lamb:

["Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey from War-torn Syria in a Wheelchair"](#)  
. You can purchase it through the usual online and physical retailers (for example, Amazon)

Special thanks to Human Rights Watch for putting us in contact with her.

## The specific challenges of deaf refugees and asylum seekers

The language barrier exists at multiple levels for asylum seekers and refugees who are deaf. Refugees rarely know the language of the host country. Combined with this, deaf asylum seekers are highly exposed to isolation in reception centres. They face inability to communicate with hearing staff, inability to communicate with other hearing refugees and lack of sign language interpreters of the sign language they understand. Even if an opportunity to use an interpreter in their own national sign language is encouraged, it may not answer this need because of the diversity of sign languages in the world.

Regarding the educational barrier, studies<sup>17</sup> show that 90% of the world's deaf children and adults have never received an education. This poor education in the deaf asylum seeker's country of departure may pose difficulties in his or her ability to succeed from an educational point of view in the host country (e.g. low level of literacy)

With these linguistic and educational elements in mind, we can imagine the challenges these deaf refugees face in learning new languages, accessing services and integration in the society. Especially the asylum procedure. The latter is crucial for any applicant and it is important to explain the reasons for the asylum application and it must not leave room for misunderstanding as the decision will impact the deaf refugees.

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<sup>17</sup><https://www.rasit.org/files/Deaf-People-and-Human-Rights-Report.pdf>