Inclusive Futures
Promoting disability inclusion

UKaid
from the British people

Unlocking potential: transforming livelihoods and education for refugees with disabilities

Executive summary

Working in partnership with:

humanity &inclusion

Introduction

Inclusive Futures is UK aid's flagship disability inclusion programme. It brings together a consortium of development and humanitarian organisations, disability inclusion specialists, and experts working in media, research, and academia, in partnership with organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) to innovate and scale approaches to disability inclusion in global development and humanitarian responses. Together, we aim to address the global evidence gap about what works in disability inclusion by generating research, learning, and disseminating this information to national and local governments, donors, humanitarian actors and civil society, including OPDs.

Working with our consortium partner, Humanity & Inclusion, we have developed two practical learning products drawing on our experiences from Kakuma and Kalobeyei refugee settlements in Kenya. These learning products offer practical actions governments, humanitarian organisations, and civil society, can take to deliver inclusive education and livelihood programmes in humanitarian settings.

The challenge

The number of forcibly displaced people has more than doubled over the past decade[1]. The average period of displacement has tripled[2], highlighting the urgent need for durable, sustainable solutions. **While precise global statistics around disability in displacement settings are limited, it's estimated that 15–20% are individuals with disabilities**[3].

Refugees with disabilities face compounding intersectional discrimination based on their nationality, ethnicity, religion, impairment type, age and sex. They face numerous barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, education, livelihoods, health care and other services; may be denied certain legal rights, such as the right to a nationality, and are often excluded from decision-making processes and leadership opportunities[4].

The poorer educational outcomes and limited economic participation that people with disabilities experience are exacerbated in humanitarian and displacement settings. In addition, in humanitarian settings, people with disabilities are often at higher risk of violence, exploitation and abuse.

---

[1] Danish Refugee Council. **Global Displacement Forecast 2025.** (2025)

[2] UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNHCR. **Refugee Education Statistics: Status, Challenges and Limitations**. (2021) **www.unhcr.org/media/refugee-education-statistics-issues-and-recommendations**

[3] Humanity & Inclusion. **Inclusive Education for Refugee Children with Disabilities. Recommendations for the Global Refugee Forum**

[4] The UN Refugee Agency. **Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement**. (2019)

Legal frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Article 11), the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the Global Compact on Refugees, recognise the rights of people with disabilities. However, implementation varies due to political, financial and institutional constraints, making it essential to address these gaps to ensure equitable support.

Building inclusive refugee programmes

From our work in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, we identified seven key recommendations that national and local governments, humanitarian agencies, and civil society, can adopt to tackle social and economic inequalities and improve education and livelihoods for people with disabilities living in refugee contexts. The recommendations were drawn from the learnings in our inclusive education and livelihood products.

1. Intentionally target adults and children with disabilities in programming.

Ensure people with disabilities can take part in and benefit from all (government and humanitarian) programming by:

- Setting quantitative disability inclusion targets and monitoring progress through disability-disaggregated data using tools, such as the Washington Group Questions.
- Involving OPDs in data collection, particularly to identify and support individuals with invisible disabilities.
- Allocating specific budgets for reasonable accommodation and accessibility measures.

2. Use person-centred approaches.

Taking a person-centred approach is crucial in addressing the intersection of disability and refugee status:

- Engage directly with individuals with disabilities and their families to understand their specific barriers and needs.
- Provide mobility aids and financial support for transport costs to address barriers caused by movement restrictions and accessibility constraints.
- Strengthen referral systems linking health, livelihoods, and education services, to provide comprehensive support.

Figure 1: Children at school in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya. © Ninth Wonder Productions/Sightsavers

3. Collaborate and form strong partnerships, with governments and humanitarian agencies.

Refugee camps are managed by both government and humanitarian agencies, and programming addresses both emergency and post-emergency contexts. For a coherent approach to disability inclusion:

- Establish formal coordination mechanisms, such as steering committees, at both programmatic and policy levels.
- Promote cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure holistic disability inclusion (for example, education programmes should link with school feeding programmes and early assessment resource centres).
- Optimise limited resources by avoiding duplication and maximising joint efforts.
- Strengthen coordination among humanitarian actors, ensuring OPDs actively take part in sectoral discussions.

4. Engage with OPDs and refugee-led organisations (RLOs).

People with lived experience are best equipped to participate in, and contribute to, decisions that involve them:

- Support refugee-led OPDs to register and provide mentorship, training, and funding, to strengthen all OPDs' organisational capacities.
- Establish partnerships with refugee-led community-based organisations where formal OPDs do not exist.
- Ensure meaningful participation of OPDs in project design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Connect refugee OPDs with host-country OPDs and national networks to advocate for inclusive policies.
- Support OPDs to engage with government officials and advocate for improved inclusion policies at local levels.

Figure 2: Poni Anet, a refugee from South Sudan who has a motor disability, at her shop in Kalobeyei settlement, Kenya. © Imani Rugenge/ HI

5. **Develop and implement a robust capacity strengthening approach.**

   Due to lower qualification levels and high turnover rates among service providers in refugee settings:

- Adopt continuous training on inclusion to maintain capacity despite turnover. Ensure that training incorporates both intrinsic (knowledge and skills) and extrinsic (contextual constraints) factors affecting uptake.
- Address motivational challenges among service providers to enhance service quality.

6. **Navigate legal and regulatory constraints faced by people with disabilities in refugee camps.**

Work in consultation with local governments and humanitarian actors to increase access to regulatory services, and adapt host country policies for refugees with disabilities by:

- Training government officials, humanitarian actors, and private sector stakeholders, on disability inclusion - alongside training people with disabilities and caregivers on legal and regulatory processes affecting their rights.
- Organising opportunities for decision-makers and people with disabilities to discuss and propose localised solutions to immediate legal and documentation challenges.

7. **Adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to disability inclusion in humanitarian programming.**

Given the fragile nature of refugee contexts and existing tensions:

- Recognise that promoting disability inclusion involves shifting power dynamics, which may disrupt existing social structures.
- Recruit diverse staff and engage community leaders to foster inclusive decision-making.
- Allocate resources equitably to minimise conflict and resentment.
- Utilise methodologies that promote social cohesion, such as play-based approaches.
- Conduct regular stakeholder feedback sessions to ensure flexibility in adapting programming to changing contexts.

Why this matters

People with disabilities – and especially children – are amongst the most vulnerable during humanitarian crises. With the global refugee population growing, year on year, refugees with disabilities must not be overlooked.

Over the last seven years, Inclusive Futures has shown that including people with disabilities in refugee settings is achievable. While each refugee context is unique, our learning products offer clear actions that governments, humanitarian organisations and civil society can take to include refugees with disabilities in any setting, with adaptations to suit local contexts.

To read our full reports on transforming livelihoods and education for refugees with disabilities, visit our **resource hub page**.