

Positive Practices in Disability Inclusion

“We all have a role”: The valuable contributions of persons with disabilities in community outreach

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Lebanon and its partners are working to strengthen their community-based approach to assisting Syrian refugees through the creation of a Refugee Outreach Volunteer (ROV) network. With 331 ROVs throughout Lebanon, the ROVs have become advocates for persons with disabilities, identifying those who are most at risk, providing them with information and working to decrease social isolation.¹ Persons with disabilities are also being recruited as volunteers, sharing their skills and capacities with both the Syrian and Lebanese communities.

Ahmad is working as an ROV in northern Lebanon. In this role, he provides information to other refugees about how to register with UNHCR, and the services and assistance that are available. He learned about the ROV position from another refugee who is also a volunteer. Ahmad explains, “I thought this program might help me to be active and to support other people. I like it because it is a humanitarian program and I am interested in this type of work.”

Ahmad has a physical disability and uses a walking frame to move. This doesn't stop him from performing his task at hand and he has his own way of doing things. One day when he was conducting a home visit, the family he was visiting wanted him to come up the stairs to look at the latrine. “I went up with my walker. It took time and was hard work, but I took photos with my phone of the latrine to share with UNHCR. I would do it the same again,” Ahmad says.

Ahmad works alongside his wife, also an ROV, conducting home visits and providing support to both men and women. “We can complement each other... together we can also do a deeper assessment,” explains Ahmad.

Persons with disabilities may face protection concerns as a result of many factors. They may be isolated in their homes, and experience emotional abuse from family members and others in the community. “This affects their confidence to do things,” says Ahmad. “They will feel like they don't have one disability, but rather many disabilities... I can provide support, communicate and encourage them. I can sensitize the family, but I understand that in some cases, when there is violence, I must refer.”

Ahmad is proud of his role as an ROV—“The community should not isolate persons with disabilities—they all have a role.”

Key messages

Persons with disabilities should have equal opportunity to participate in humanitarian programs as both volunteers and beneficiaries.

- **Raise awareness with staff about ensuring non-discrimination in any recruitment processes.²**
- **Set quotas for the number of community volunteer positions that should be filled by persons with disabilities** (for example, 15% of volunteers should be persons with disabilities).
- **Focus on the strengths and capacities of individuals with disabilities in the recruitment process.**
- **Consult with individuals with disabilities on appropriate adaptations to a position or role.** There are many simple strategies, such as getting volunteers to work in pairs, which will facilitate access and inclusion—the individual will be your best resource.

Additional Resources

UNHCR (2011) *Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement*. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4e6072b22.pdf>

Women's Refugee Commission (2013) *Disability Inclusion in the Syrian Refugee Response in Lebanon*. <http://wrc.ms/1qCJypy>

Women's Refugee Commission (2014) *Disability Inclusion: Translating Policy into Practice in Humanitarian Action*. <http://wrc.ms/DisabilityInclusion>

The Women's Refugee Commission has been partnering with UNHCR Lebanon on disability inclusion since 2013, conducting field visits to identify strategies to promote access and inclusion for persons with disabilities in humanitarian assistance. These positive practices were identified in the WRC's third field visit to Lebanon in May/June 2014. More information is available online at: http://wrc.ms/disab_inc_Leb.

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Notes

1 The goal is that ROVs can provide insight into protection priorities, identify community-based solutions to problems and identify and refer refugees in need of urgent support. The initiative was first launched in August 2013 in the Qobayat, Tripoli, Mt. Lebanon and south Lebanon field offices. As of June 18, 2014, there were 331 ROVs based in the community. UNHCR has set a goal to try to scale up to 1,000 ROVs by the end of 2014. (Refugee Outreach Volunteer Initiative: Building stronger linkages, enhancing outreach and community-based protection, UNHCR Lebanon, January 24, 2014.)

2 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) describes discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability, including failure to make reasonable accommodations for inclusion.” UNHCR *Guidance on Working with Persons with Disabilities* elaborates further that exclusion of persons with disabilities “can be inadvertent or purposeful: in either case it is nevertheless discriminatory.” Making such a shift at all levels in an organization requires an ongoing process of awareness raising and reflection using case studies, as well as personal experiences among staff.

