

## Protecting urban refugee women and girls with disabilities from abuse and discrimination in Kenya

→ Implemented by Women Challenged to Challenge (WCC), Nairobi, Kenya

### Background

In Nairobi, women with disabilities who are refugees are particularly vulnerable, both as refugees, and as women with disabilities. By the end of 2017, the registered urban refugee population in Nairobi was more than 65,100 people; 79% of the overall refugee population in the country are women and children.<sup>i</sup> Urban refugee women with disabilities in Nairobi are often survivors of sexual violence.

Research by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) in collaboration with Women Challenged to Challenge (WCC) and other partners, estimates that in the Kakuma camp which accommodates around 180,000 refugees<sup>ii</sup>, refugee women and girls with disabilities experience discrimination and exclusion in emergency response programs. WCC involvement with WRC and discussions within the Network of African Women With Disabilities (NAWWD) and with urban refugees, led the organization to engage specifically with urban refugee women with disabilities. They partnered with WRC, NAWWD, and HIAS – a UNHCR implementing partner for refugees – and worked together to address the issue of violence and discrimination against refugee women with disabilities. According to Pauline Nkatha a HIAS staff member, “even in

Kenya, [refugee women with disabilities] are vulnerable and face violence because they are seen as very low down in society.”

### What happened?

In 2016 WCC started including refugee women and girls with disabilities as a priority group in all of their programs. The organization started assessing the situations of urban refugee women with disabilities through home visits, in order to better understand the challenges they face. WCC facilitated 20 urban refugee women with disabilities' participation in the 2016 Humanitarian Action Training for Women Leaders of Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) organized by WRC. This training presented an opportunity for the women refugees to interact, and share their experiences, with key actors such as UN Women, HIAS, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and DPOs. As a result of this training, refugee women with disabilities were able to strengthen their advocacy messages and learned from the experiences of those involved in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) programs. In addition, participants nominated by the NAWWD attended the World Humanitarian Summit 2016 in Istanbul, where they advocated for the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action to specifically mention the need to empower and protect women and girls with disabilities.

Following these activities, WCC developed a new training program for urban refugees with disabilities in Nairobi. This program was described as a “life-changing event” by all of the women attending. The women learned about economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, and legal rights. They

also developed their self-esteem and discovered that they were not alone in their situation.

WCC continued their efforts to make the voices of refugee women with disabilities heard on the international stage by participating in a side event at the 2016 Conference of State Parties (COSP) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in New York. WCC spoke about their experience of working with refugee women with disabilities, highlighting the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services as well as general health services, and the exclusion, discrimination and communication barriers faced by refugee women with disabilities. WCC also managed to meet with the Head of the Kenyan government delegation to the COSP, to discuss the importance of the government's commitment to protecting the rights of refugee women with disabilities in Kenya.



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Chantari, member of WCC

### What changed?

WCC has had a significant impact on the plight of urban refugee women and girls with disabilities they worked with; they also played a role internationally by raising awareness of the situation of refugee women with disabilities. Following her participation in one of the training courses, Chantari a WCC member, stated: “Yes, our perception has changed. We now know we are just like anyone else with potential. We have a right to live free from violence”.

The women who participated in the WCC training programs now speak up more both for themselves and their children, and also know where to get the help they need. They declare that their self-esteem has also improved by gaining knowledge and by sharing with, and supporting, other women who are living the same situation.

In addition to the training courses, WCC also has begun to address other issues affecting the lives of refugee women with disabilities. Firstly, WCC has worked on facilitating the issuing of refugee identification cards. Secondly, they have referred refugee women with disabilities to the Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya (APDK), which provides supplies and assistive devices, allowing some women with physical disabilities to obtain the equipment they require.

WCC has also succeeded in raising awareness among partner organizations, including DPOs, of the need to include refugee women and girls in their work. As a result, WCC is now identified by humanitarian actors as an organization with expertise on the needs and rights of refugee women with disabilities.

### What worked?

The leadership of women with disabilities in WCC has been the key to the success of their activities. Their leadership has empowered the refugee women with whom they work to feel more comfortable and more inclined to participate. In addition, the creation of partnerships with key stakeholders nationally and internationally has raised awareness about the plight of refugee women with disabilities within Kenya and at the UN, in particular those who are working on the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. All the

partners of Women Challenged to Challenge are convinced they need to continue their collaboration in order to further improve the conditions for refugee women with disabilities. WCC's expertise has contributed to bringing about change in other organizations' work, and some of them are now fundraising to develop humanitarian actions for urban refugee women with disabilities. As Boram Lee, WRC's Disability Advisor, puts it, "WCC is a small project with minimal cost but a big impact as it has demonstrated at global, regional and national level a model that works."

**For more information**, please visit:

<http://www.wcc.or.ke/> or contact:

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<sup>i</sup> UNHCR, KENYA Registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of 31 December 2017, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/61712>

<sup>ii</sup> UNHCR, Kakuma Camp Population Statistics, by country of origin, sex and age group, May 2017 available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/57210>