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Policy makers and practitioners of humanitarian action currently pay little attention to the plight of older women and men displaced in the population upheavals created by human rights violations, conflict and natural hazards.

While older internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees share many basic needs with the rest of the population and experience similar insecurities, they also face additional challenges and protection risks related to their age.

Even in the most developed countries, extreme weather events lead to the breakdown of safety networks and dramatic differential impacts on older people. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the USA in 2005, people over 60 years of age, who made up 15 % of the general population of New Orleans, accounted for 75 % of the bodies found immediate afterwards, and 65% of the total deaths of 2000 people.

The IFRCRCS 2012 World Disasters Report tells us that 73 million people are forcibly displaced across the world, 43 million by conflict and violence, 15 million by natural disasters and another 15 million ironically by development.

We know that 49% of forced migrants are women and girls and that 46% are children under 18 years of age. These statistics are supposedly sought so those with special needs can be assisted. But there is no accurate head count of women and men over 60 years of age in humanitarian action. Sex-and-age-disaggregated data is rarely collected in the needs assessments that structure humanitarian response programmes. Older people are for planning purposes, invisible.

How do we know this? A 2011 study by Boston's Tufts University found "almost no documented and published cases in which lead agencies in the UN cluster system collected Sex-and-Age-Disaggregated Data properly, analysed the data in context and used those findings to influence programming."

Two consecutive studies carried out by HelpAge International in 2010 and 2012 found that less than five per cent of humanitarian projects mentioned older people as a vulnerable group, less than one per cent included at least one activity that targeted older people, and only about 0.2 per cent of these projects was in fact funded.

HelpAge International's recent report ***The neglected generation: the impact of displacement on older people***, published jointly with the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in Geneva, shines a spotlight on the experience of displacement for older people and the humanitarian community's lack of response.

HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty so that they can lead dignified, healthy and active lives. HelpAge works in 60 countries with over 100 affiliate organisations and nearly 200 other partners across the world.

The neglected generation draws primarily on contexts of internal displacement rather than refugee contexts, largely because IDPs represent a higher proportion of those who are displaced globally, because the number of IDPs is increasing, and because IDPs are often among the most neglected in humanitarian contexts. Nevertheless, the findings and policy recommendations are applicable to both refugees and IDPs.

Our report identifies the concerns of older IDPs based on programme evidence from more than 10 country contexts and includes examples from different locations to inform practice.

Older persons form a significant proportion of IDP and refugee groups sometimes as high as 30-65 per cent in contexts where there are high numbers of older people in the population and where younger or more able-bodied members of the IDP population have migrated elsewhere, returned home or integrated into local communities.

The following key issues and challenges for older IDPs are identified in the report.

- Levels of vulnerability among displaced older persons often increase with age. For example, in comparison to 50 or 60-year-olds, people in their late seventies or eighties may have significantly reduced physical or mental capacity.
- Issues of limited mobility, visual and hearing impairment, and reduced muscle strength amplify the challenges of living in displacement camps and accessing services such as food, health care, and water and sanitation. Specific nutritional needs, chronic health, disease and mental deficiencies may require further tailored assistance not usually included in packages provided to displaced populations.
- Older women require specific attention; due to increased their life expectancy, they are more numerous and more likely to be living alone. Protection risks are thus increased for women, most of whom are not afforded equal status in their societies. In addition, in many IDP and refugee camps, older women take on the huge responsibility of supporting children whose parents have died or migrated elsewhere.

Global ageing is recognised as a major driver of non-communicable disease predominance in developing countries. Evidence from conflicts and natural disasters shows that much excess morbidity and mortality results from the exacerbation of existing non-infectious diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and cancer.

In displacement-related emergencies, older people are often the last to leave IDP and refugee camps when sustainable/durable solutions have been found for other populations groups.

In Gulu District in northern Uganda in 2009, 65% of IDPs remaining in camps were over 60 – this is out of over 10,000 people categorised as Extremely Vulnerable Individuals. Crucially, they continue to form the majority of IDPs and refugees left behind in camps or collective centres while younger people begin new lives elsewhere.

Older people also make up a high proportion of people who choose not to flee in times of conflict. The hardship associated with a long trip to find assistance or refuge, as well as a reluctance to leave homes, land, livestock or orphaned children under their care, makes them less likely to receive any assistance.

Some of the main challenges to protecting the rights of older displaced persons include obtaining access to vulnerable older persons who are left behind when more able-bodied people flee; securing identification and documentation; ensuring housing rights; providing for basic needs; reuniting them with families and other individuals; providing appropriate health care and ensuring access to social support and income.

It is no coincidence that it is the poorest of older persons, indeed of all vulnerable groups, that find it most difficult to respond to and recover from, the overwhelming challenges that displacement brings.

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognises some older IDPs as among the most at-risk individuals, characterising them as “persons with special needs” alongside the chronically ill or disabled, and those who have experienced very high levels of trauma.

UNHCR’s current definition of persons with special needs include child-headed households; older persons with minor children; older persons alone without accompanying family; female-headed households; persons with disabilities; persons with chronic illness; and persons living in a large family. UNHCR, “Protection starter kit”, n.d., www.unhcr.org/refworld/protection_kit.html

- Each stage of the displacement cycle – flight, the period of displacement and the process of return, resettlement or local integration – confronts an older IDP and service providers with specific challenges that need to be addressed.
- Prolonged displacement can have a particularly devastating impact on family ties and the community support available to older persons; it cannot be assumed that communities will always assist their older members. In many cases, families have had to make painful choices leading to abandonment of older persons in order to survive.
- HelpAge and IDMC research and data concludes that older people are consistently neglected in humanitarian operations and policy; that general programming does not integrate their needs; and that they are rarely consulted within IDP operations.

- But our report also illustrates that older people have a range of skills, capacities and roles. They frequently make major contributions to household income, support household management through childcare and play an important role as community leaders, decision makers or mediators. The degree to which these roles are recognised and supported during displacement can have a significant impact on the challenges older people face and their ability to survive and recover.

Without an adequate analysis of their needs informing every stage of decision making during displacement, older persons – a growing demographic group – will continue to be marginalised within policy and programmes intended to support the displaced.

To bring about greater inclusivity in humanitarian response, older people must have a voice in all the decisions that affect them.

The HelpAge report makes the following recommendations to national governments with significant IDP populations, international donor governments and United Nations agencies contributing to IDP response

- Address older persons' specific needs and their active contributions within national IDP legislation, policy and assistance and the development of regional and human rights law.
- Ensure that national disaster risk reduction plans and frameworks recognise and address the risks that older people face, such as by covering their potential evacuation from areas affected by natural disasters.
- Establish adequate systems for the collection of sex-and-age-disaggregated data on numbers and locations of IDPs, including older people. HelpAge recommends that age data be disaggregated as follows: 50-59, 60-69, 70-79 and 80+.
- Assist older IDPs during flight and while displaced to secure their basic needs and provide adequate levels of protection.
- Pay sufficient attention to the facilitation of durable solutions for older people, including return, resettlement and local integration. Steps may include facilitating adequate social support for older IDPs, such as ensuring that they are integrated into any existing national pension and health care schemes and that these provisions incorporate greater sensitivity to the needs of older adults.
- In collaboration with key stakeholders – including older people themselves and service providers such as the UN, national and international NGOs – develop and support further research on older IDPs and related issues of concern, such as older people in urban displacement, inter-generational relationships and roles during displacement, and options for durable solutions for older people.

The HelpAge report also challenges development and humanitarian actors in the UN, donor governments, international organisations, NGOs and community-based organisations working with IDPs to

- Take active steps to consult with older people and ensure their participation in the decisions that affect their lives, recognising their capacities as well as the risks they face.
- Integrate older person's concerns into sectoral and multi-sectoral assessments.
- Collect registration and monitoring data disaggregated by sex, age and location to inform programming
- Ensure that older people have access to information concerning their rights and entitlements. In this context, consider the mobility, visual and aural challenges that older people may have.
- Where populations are fleeing from conflict and natural disasters, liaise with relevant actors to enable access to the most vulnerable remaining behind; to assist with transportation and movement for the most vulnerable; and to support family tracing and reunification for older people.
- Promote programmes to involve older adults and ensure that community centres include "older-friendly" spaces for meaningful social interaction and informal support groups.
- Develop appropriate community-level identification and referral systems for older persons and monitor their access to services.
- Ensure that support for older people is integrated into strategies to assist other age groups. For example, child protection strategies must include their older carers and families should be supported to take care of their older members.
- Ensure that livelihood support for IDPs, returned IDPs and those seeking to integrate locally – including training and small business loans – does not discriminate against older men and women who are still able and willing to work.
- Include and specifically target older people in cash transfer schemes.
- Facilitate access to identification documents that enable older people to obtain social support and provide assistance with administrative processes for the most vulnerable.

These essential changes will not come about without the recognition in all sectors of humanitarian action that targeted assistance for the special needs of all vulnerable groups including older people is not only a pressing need but also a fundamental right. ENDS