

**United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

***Call for Input: Human Rights Council resolution 43/L.34***

**Contribution by UNHCR**

UNHCR welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for consideration in relation to the proposed study on sports following article 30 of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**UNHCR’s mandate**

UNHCR is the global UN entity with a mandate to provide international protection and to work for solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers, among others. It has been granted the authority to supervise the application of international instruments for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular the *1951 Convention* *relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol* (hereinafter jointly referred to as the *1951 Convention*). State parties to these instruments are required to cooperate with UNHCR in the exercise of its functions (Art.35 of the *1951 Convention*). UNHCR’s role is also reflected in many regional refugee law instruments. Over the years, the UN General Assembly has expanded UNHCR’s mandate to various groups of people, who are not covered by the *1951 Convention*. Some of these people are qualified as “mandate” refugees; others are returnees, statelessness persons and, in some situations, internally displaced persons (IDPs).

**UNHCR and Sports**

UNHCR works to utilize the unique potential of sports programmes and partnerships to achieve better outcomes for displaced and stateless communities – including girls, boys, young women and young men with and without disabilities. These efforts are part of a focussed contribution to UNHCR’s mandate, the Global Compact on Refugees, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) and the ongoing implementation of the core tenants of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD).

The pivotal role that sport and play can have in creating a safe and protective environment and a place of exchange for young people with disabilities and without is now widely recognised. UNHCR’s ‘Sport for Protection’ approach builds on this understanding, and the unique capacity of sport to actively and meaningfully engage young people. ‘Sport for Protection’ programmes create a safe and conducive environment that supports children and youth to learn and grow, developing a stronger awareness of their rights, self-protection mechanisms and opportunities for building peace.

Young people living with disabilities are frequently marginalised before, during and after they are forced to flee and often face greater protection risks and challenges than their peers. ‘Social Inclusion’ is, therefore, one of the key protection outcomes that the ‘Sport for Protection’ approach works to achieve for young people with disabilities. UNHCR and partners work to promote the social inclusion of marginalized groups by engaging them and creating leadership opportunities through sports, ensuring that they can positively contribute to their communities, access the services they need and participate and fully in the processes that concern them.

UNHCR had direct interest in the study on sports following article 30 of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNHCR wishes to share some initial observations on the questions raised.

**UNHCR’s preliminary observations**

**2(a) (c).** *Do you have any knowledge of laws, policies, plans, strategies or guidelines on physical education, including in special education, informal education and extra-curricular activities, relating to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly children and young people, to avoid their exclusion or exemption from physical education and facilitating contact with disability-specific sports? What are the challenges to implementing the above? Are you aware of any good practices related to the above?*

Physical and social barriers in many forced displacement settings often exclude people with disabilities from sport and other community activities. However, even minor adaptations to the physical space, meeting times, equipment or activities can result in significant protection outcomes for a wide range of young people. These barriers can be overcome by for example training coaches to include young people with disabilities; adapting sports and games to be inclusive, supporting peer-to-peer engagement and encouragement; involving people with disabilities in all aspects of sports programming, including leadership; and conducting education programmes to sensitize the community to the needs of people with disabilities[[1]](#footnote-2).

The above guidelines are noted inthe **Sport for Protection Toolkit, Programming with Young People in Forced Displacement Settings**, developed by UNHCR, the International Olympic Committee and Terre des Hommes. The toolkit is aimed at supporting humanitarian field and programme staff and sports organisations working with refugees, to develop, implement and monitor, sports projects and programmes that can achieve positive protection outcomes in social inclusion, social cohesion and psychosocial well-being. Guidelines and good practices are showcased that promote the inclusive participation of young people with disabilities.

**UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy** holds that all persons of concern to UNHCR, including those with disabilities, shall enjoy their rights on an equal footing with others, and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities. UNHCR’s Sport for Protection programmes ensure the application of the AGD policy in which persons with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in programme formulation, implementation and monitoring processes. To date, inclusive Sport for Protection projects have been implemented in Ethiopia, Colombia, Rwanda, Mexico, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya supported by the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Refuge Foundation.

**3(b) (c).** *Do you have any knowledge of disability-specific competitions that have a similar structure to mainstream competitions to organize local, regional, national, continental and international competition? Do you have any knowledge of the challenges that persons with disabilities face to access training centers prepared for high-performance sports at local, regional and national levels?*

UNHCR works together with the **International Paralympic Committee (IPC)** to build on the potential for the Paralympics Games to support differently abled refugees and other displaced persons participate in para-sport opportunities and competitions.

In 2016, two refugee para-athletes competed at the 2016 Rio Paralympics for the first time as independents. UNHCR welcomed the participation of the first-ever refugee Paralympians in the Paralympic Games as an example of what can be accomplished when refugees with disabilities are given the opportunity to pursue their dreams and apply their skills. UNHCR will work closely with IPC in supporting the refugee para-athletes who are aiming to compete in the Paralympic Games Tokyo 2021.

For refugee para-athletes, access to training opportunities and facilities are limited in displacement settings and remain a challenge. UNHCR partners Agitos Foundation and the Hellenic Paralympic Committee have been supporting refugees with disabilities with sports activities and training opportunities with a view to the participants empowering themselves, contribute to their social inclusion and integration; as well as supporting them to compete at the national and regional Paralympic level.

**3(e).** *Are joint activities between sportspersons in disability-specific sports and mainstream sports encouraged or carried out to facilitate exchange among sportspersons within similar disciplines?*

UNHCR and **Special Olympics** are working together to engage displaced young people, both with and without intellectual disabilities, in fully inclusive community-based sports programmes under the ‘Unified with Refugees’ platform. Special Olympics ‘Unified Sports’ model joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

Special Olympics currently has active, inclusive programming in refugee settings in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Thailand; working to transform the lives of refugees with and without disabilities through sport and related programming.

**UNHCR**

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1. [Sport for Protection Toolkit](https://www.unhcr.org/publications/manuals/5d35a7bc4/sport-for-protection-toolkit.html), ‘Disability’, pg.15 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)