



# *Women as Refugees: A Health Overview*

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## *Definitions*

- ✦ **Refugees** – a person residing outside his or her country of nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return because of a ‘well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a political social group, or political opinion.’
- ✦ **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)** – also forced to flee suddenly or unexpectedly as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systemic violation of human rights, but they remain within the territory of their own country.



## *Key Statistics*

✦ Refugees and asylum seekers

**12 MILLION**

✦ Refugee displaced 5 years or more

**8 MILLION**

✦ Internally displaced persons

**21 MILLION**

*Source: US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, World Refugee Survey 2005*



*Principal Sources of Refugees  
(as of December 31, 2004)*

- Former Palestine....3 million
- Afghanistan.....2 million
- Sudan.....700,000
- Burma (Myanmar)....700,000
- Burundi.....500,000
- Colombia.....300,000
- Liberia.....300,000

*Internally Displaced Persons  
(as of December 31, 2004)*

- Sudan.....6 million
- Colombia.....3 million
- Congo-Kinshasa.....2 million
- Uganda.....1 million
- Iraq.....1 million
- Burma (Myanmar)....700,000
- Liberia.....500,000

*Source: US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, World  
Refugee Survey 2005*



*Half of all  
refugees are  
women and  
girls*

*Source: UNHCR, 2004 Global Refugee Trends*





Forced displacement from homes, exposure to violence and sudden abject poverty along with separations from families and communities cause refugees and IDPs, in particular women and girls, to face extraordinary difficulties that affect their health.



*Darfuri  
refugee in  
Chad*



## *Darfuri refugee camp - Chad*





## *Kosovar refugee camp - Albania*







## *Physical protection/security*

- ⊕ Gender-based violence
  - ☒ Rape
  - ☒ Sexual abuse and exploitation
  - ☒ Trafficking
  - ☒ Forced impregnation
  - ☒ Forced marriage
  - ☒ Forced prostitution
  - ☒ Forced recruitment
  - ☒ Child labor
  - ☒ Harmful traditional practices



*Refugee women fleeing conflict/natural disaster seek survival needs for themselves and children*



*Displaced Darfurian refugee in Chad*



## *Shelter*

- ❁ Lack of adequate shelter
- ❁ Problematic camp structure – latrines, lighting

*Displaced woman and child - Mozambique*





## *Water, Food and Fuel*

- ✿ Registration and documentation
- ✿ Inequitable distribution of food and supplies
- ✿ Collection of firewood
  - ✿ Sexual violence and consequences
  - ✿ Physically laborious
  - ✿ Interferes with women's and girls' ability to participate in school and/or skills training



*Azerbaijani IDP  
collecting water*





## *Health*

- ✦ Malaria
- ✦ Diarrheal diseases
- ✦ Respiratory infections
- ✦ Infectious diseases, including measles, meningitis, cholera
- ✦ Malnutrition



## *Reproductive Health*

- ✿ Gender-based violence
- ✿ Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- ✿ Unwanted/unplanned pregnancy
- ✿ Maternal morbidity and mortality

*Guatemalan refugee family in Mexico*

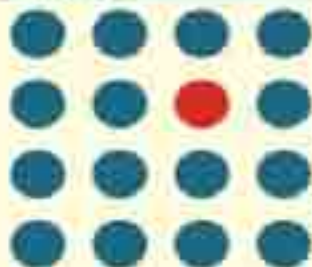




## Women at risk

1 in 16

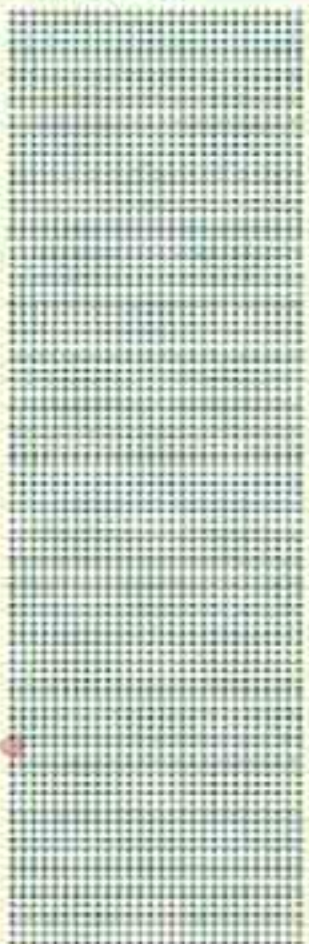
1 in 2,800



The risk of a sub-Saharan African woman dying from a complication related to pregnancy or childbirth

The risk of a woman from a developed country dying from a complication related to pregnancy or childbirth

Source: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA



# 201 million

women would like to use contraception but are unable to access it



This is about one in seven women of reproductive age in the developing world

## Without contraception



6 out of 10 women in sub-Saharan Africa (60%)



3 out of 10 women in Latin America and the Caribbean (29%)



Nearly 3 out of 10 women in Asia (26%) are at risk of unintended pregnancy

It would cost about  
**US\$3.9bn**

a year to provide the missing services





## *Education*

- ❁ Girls drop out at lower grades than boys
- ❁ More girls than boys drop out
- ❁ Girls may not attend because of:
  - ❑ Lack of sanitary materials
  - ❑ Pregnancy (which may result from early marriage or abuse)
  - ❑ Security concerns traveling to and from and within schools
  - ❑ Parents may keep girls at home for domestic chores
- ❁ Girls who drop out are at higher risk for:
  - ❑ Exploitation
  - ❑ Recruitment by armed factions
  - ❑ Early and forced marriage



*Afghan refugee girls learning to read in Pakistan*



## *Solutions*

- ✿ Individual registration and documentation
- ✿ Inclusion of women and girls in the identification of risks and proposed solutions
- ✿ Presence of female staff
- ✿ Camp layout/design
- ✿ Protected areas/safe houses



*Mother and child displaced by the tsunami  
in Aceh, Indonesia*



## *Solutions cont'ed*

- ❁ Access to health care
- ❁ Access to reproductive health
  - ❁ Prevention of gender-based violence and care for survivors of gender-based violence
  - ❁ Family planning
  - ❁ Prevention and management of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
  - ❁ Safe motherhood, including emergency obstetric care

*Burmese refugees in  
Thailand*





## *Solutions cont'ed*

- ✦ Provision of fuel/wood
- ✦ Income-generation activities
- ✦ Access to education
- ✦ Codes of conduct
- ✦ Legal solutions – prosecution of perpetrators



## *Solutions cont'ed*

- ❁ Monitoring mechanisms
- ❁ Relocation of vulnerable women and girls
- ❁ Asylum claims that recognize gender persecution
- ❁ Resettlement
- ❁ Early and simultaneous pursuit of durable solutions



*Displaced adolescents in Liberia*



*Women's Commission  
for Refugee Women and  
Children*

*[www.womenscommission.org](http://www.womenscommission.org)*



*IDP in Sierra Leone*

