

Chapter 9

The Educational Inclusion of Forced Migrants With a Disability: A Critical Analysis of the Washington Group Questionnaires

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ABSTRACT

The identification of disabilities is commonly considered a preliminary step in ensuring protection and assistance for forced migrants, as well as in meeting their educational needs. The WHO encourages authorities and agencies to use a set of questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics as a tool for screening and classifying disabilities. However, literature shows the use of classifications inspired by diagnostic models can have unintended negative effects on the ability to participate in education. The chapter critically examines the role the Washington Group questionnaires can play in the development of opportunities for inclusive education among forced migrants with disabilities. Reports and documents issued in connection with the development of the Washington Group questionnaires are studied through infrastructural inversion and intertextual thematic analysis. The findings critically review the use of the Washington Group questionnaires as a tool for assessing the disability conditions of forced migrants and their possibilities for inclusion in education.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), persons with disabilities currently comprise around 15% of the world's population. This percentage is presumably higher among those displaced by war or persecution. In the last few years, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Na-

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tions, 2006) has been widely adopted by most humanitarian institutions as a framework for interventions targeting forced migrants with disabilities (Duell-Piening, 2018; ExCom, 2007). However, scientific research on this topic remains limited, partly as a consequence of the polarisation engendered by the heated political debate following the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 (El-Lahib, 2016; Mirza, 2014; Pearce, 2015; Shivji, 2010). This knowledge gap is especially evident in relation to the access to education of forced migrants with disabilities (Miller & Nguyen, 2014).

A recent document from the UNHCR (2019) sheds light on the key principles guiding access to education, emphasising the importance of adopting a rights-based approach to foster inclusion, participation and non-discrimination as strategic tenets when developing interventions in this area. The document stresses that the lack of data related to the identification and record of persons with disabilities among forced migrants prevents host authorities and agencies from drawing up and implementing effective educational policies. The systematic recognition and registration of forced migrants with disabilities is commonly acknowledged as a preliminary step in ensuring them protection and assistance, as well as in meeting their educational needs (Crock & Smith-Khan, 2016; ExCom, 2010; Smith-Khan et al. 2015). To this end, data collection methodologies have been developed as tools for gathering the necessary information to design inclusive programmes for persons with disability. The WHO, the UNHCR and other organisations especially encourage authorities and agencies to use a set of questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WGDS) as a tool for screening and classifying disabilities (Asai, 2018a, 2018b; Quigley et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2019). Accordingly, assessment instruments that include the WGDS questions – such as the Needs Assessment Tool, developed within the framework of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMID Project, 2019) - have been designed to structure the reception and integration of forced migrants with disabilities in several international contexts. These screening procedures are intended to both raise awareness of the often-overlooked global phenomenon of forced migrants with disabilities and systematise the way data on this topic are collected by agencies and host authorities. However, the literature on inclusive education emphasises that the use of classifications inspired by diagnostic models can have unintended negative effects on the opportunities for learners with disabilities to learn and participate in mainstream education (Allan & Harwood, 2016; Biesta, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian, 2015; Slee, 2019; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Classification cannot be considered a neutral activity as it generates standards that function as working infrastructures, through which the organisation of data frames the professional approach and practice of policymakers and practitioners (Bowker & Star, 1999; Kozleski, 2016). Building on this conceptual framework, the paper critically examines the role the Washington Group questionnaires (WGQ) can play in the development of opportunities for inclusive education among forced migrants with disabilities. Reports and documents issued in connection with the development of the WGQ are studied through infrastructural inversion (Bowker et al., 1994) and intertextual thematic analysis (Coffey, 2013). The findings critically review the use of the WGQ as a tool for assessing the disability conditions of forced migrants and their possibilities for inclusion in education.

CHALLENGES CONCERNING FORCED MIGRATION, DISABILITY AND EDUCATION

A report from the Women’s Refugee Commission estimated that, in 2014, 6.7 million persons with disabilities around the world were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence and human

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