



# Forced Migration, Older Refugees and Displacement: Implications for Social Work as a Human Rights Profession

Sofie Ghazanfareeon Karlsson<sup>1</sup> · Jessica H. Jönsson<sup>2</sup>

© The Author(s) 2020

## Abstract

This article explores the conditions of globally displaced older refugees and outlines the implications for social work as a human rights profession. The study is based on a literature review and two current case examples of globally displaced older refugees facing long-term structural discrimination and human rights violation: older Rohingyas at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and older Palestinians at the Israel-Gaza and Lebanon borders. The authors suggest that social workers as ‘front-line human rights workers’ are uniquely placed to identify needs, and take actionable steps to support and advocate for the human rights of older displaced refugees. It is argued that global social work ethics and principles of social justice and human rights should underpin social work practices that engage people and structures in order to address life challenges and enhance the well-being of displaced older refugees in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps. Future research and welfare projects that aim to analyse the political context that forms the living conditions of forcibly displaced older refugees, whilst enhancing the importance of social workers in interprofessional collaborations in these areas, are discussed.

**Keywords** Displacement · Forced migration · Human rights · Older refugees · Social work

## Introduction

The global population of forcibly displaced people resulting from war, conflict, persecution or human rights violations is at a record high level; according to the UN Refugee Agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017a), globally 68.5 million individuals have forcibly been displaced. A substantial number (8.5%) of forcibly displaced refugees are older people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017a). The increasing number of forcibly displaced people not only testifies to global injustice and inequality at a time of increasing ‘small wars’ and ethnic and religious conflicts but also requires social workers globally to become proactive in confronting the human cost of

war (Kamali 2015), including its implications for a rapidly aging population that is on the move.

A world influenced by rapid global transformations and increasing social problems, such as forced migration and displacement of older refugees, influences many aspects of human lives and related caring professions. Social work as a global profession needs to include adequate critical, global and gerontological perspectives in its practices (Ghazanfareeon Karlsson 2018; Jönsson 2014). The political context of economic, political and social conditions, which form the living conditions of forcibly displaced older refugees who have fled violence, discrimination and persecution, has not been given proper attention in social work research. Whilst recognising the challenges faced by older refugees regarding financial support, health and social care, and how national social and welfare systems might address such challenges, less attention has been paid to social work with globally displaced older refugees in relation to forced migration, i.e. older people in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps.

Built on the tradition of social work as a global and human rights profession (Healy 2017; Ife 2012; Sewpaul 2016), this article explores the literature on globally displaced older refugees and the involvement and responses of social workers to living conditions of this group of people. Focusing on older Rohingyas at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and older

---

✉ Sofie Ghazanfareeon Karlsson  
sofie.karlsson@miun.se

Jessica H. Jönsson  
jessica-hanna.jonsson@oru.se

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology & Social Work, Mid Sweden University, Östersund, Sweden

<sup>2</sup> Department of Law, Psychology and Social Work, Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden

Palestinians at the Israel–Gaza and Lebanon borders, this study aims at showing the necessary engagement of social workers for improving the living conditions of displaced older refugees facing long-term structural discrimination and human rights violation. This article attempts to identify, summarise and analyse literature, in order to illuminate gaps and clarify areas for further research (Jesson et al. 2011) that applies to the following key questions:

- What is the human and social impact of forced migration on displaced older refugees?
- Which specific needs make it important for social workers to consider the vulnerability of displaced older refugees?
- How can social work be involved in recognising the human rights of displaced older refugees and in making changes in the context of war zones, at borders and in refugee camps?

Research strategies include developing ideas, principles and practical tools that practitioners, researchers and policymakers can use to support displaced older refugees in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps. Further, the article discusses strategies for social work educators in curriculum development and teaching methods, such as: expanding critical, global and gerontological perspectives; displaced older refugee–related discussions; and critical reflection in the education with future social workers.

Defining *forcibly displaced older refugees* as a group is complicated. Older refugees may have different experiences of forced migration and displacement, and societies may define old age differently. This article is guided by the definition of the UN Refugee Agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1951) and the World Health Organization (WHO 2010) defining older refugees as aged 60 years and over, with ‘refugee status’ and forcibly displaced for various reasons such as from war, conflict, persecution or human rights violations.

In the following section, we summarise the literature on globally displaced older refugees and the involvement and responses of social workers.

## Globally Displaced Older Refugees

Importantly, there has been increasingly more critical literature on the impact of neoliberal globalisation and its consequences, such as war, military occupations, environmental disasters, forced migration and political and economic restructuring, on social work. Recently, the relationship between colonial past, post-colonial presence, imperialism, neoliberalism and war, as well as their importance for the research and practices of social work as a global profession, has been observed and analysed (Kamali 2015; Sewpaul 2016).

Although colonialism and its related discourses for framing the research in social science have been elaborated upon by many researchers (Essed 1991; Eze 1997; Goldberg 1993, amongst others), the same has not been true until recently for research and practices of social work. The ‘practical tradition’ of social work that has influenced the lower interest in theoretical perspectives can be a reason for why colonialism, post-colonialism and related discourses have not been of great interest for many researchers in social work. As Kamali (2015) and Jönsson and Kamali (2012) argue, forced migration cannot be properly understood without critical understanding of colonial past and post-colonial present for the phenomenon of forced migration. This undoubtedly has relevance for this article with its focus on older displaced refugees, who often are forced to leave their countries and areas because of war and violence with roots in colonial nation-buildings. There are also studies that focus on the role of social work institutions, social workers and community activists during war, military occupations, environmental disasters, forced migration and political and economic restructuring on social work (Campbell et al. 2018; Ferguson et al. 2018; Harrop and Ioakimidis 2018; Jönsson 2016, 2019; Lavalette and Ioakimidis 2011; Worland 2019). The common arguments in the mentioned literature is that social work as a critical and global profession must be guided by principles of human rights and social justice in order to improve the life conditions of people in need of social work interventions and counteract institutional and structural mechanisms that reproduce global inequalities and injustices.

Nevertheless, and as suggested by Strong et al. (2015), there has been little focus on social work with the specific group of displaced older refugees in war zones, at the borders or in refugee camps. The limited literature that focuses on displaced older refugees mainly concerns psychosocial factors and health factors and, in turn, individualistic interpretations and solutions, rather than structural and global solutions. The impact of economic, political and social conditions on forcibly displaced older refugees, including human rights violations, has not received much attention. Some literature about the challenges faced by older people in the context of war and conflicts states that barriers common to displaced people in general have a more significant impact on older people (Virgincar et al. 2016). For example, older people suffer from considerably higher rates of psychological distress than the general refugee population (Loi and Sundram 2014) and more often suffer from health issues, injuries, violence and malnutrition during displacement—a fragile state that can be worsened by time and uncertainty (Strong et al. 2015). The increasing harm to health and well-being amongst older refugees (Hinton et al. 2005), combined with experiencing a greater number of hostile events during their lifetime (Chee and Levkoff 2001), may significantly influence the health and well-being of displaced older refugees. Another problem

concerns the destruction of local communities in which older people provide wisdom, stability and crucial knowledge based on experiences.

War, conflicts and, consequently, the destruction of local communities force many older people to leave their homes and search for better living conditions. In exile, they can often not only become socially isolated and physically separated from their families and communities (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East 2017) but also may become a burden on surviving family members and communities, as their contribution to survival can be limited (Burton and Breen 2002; Loi and Sundram 2014). The inability to play a meaningful role during a time of crisis can result in the loss of social/family support/respect, precipitate loss of self-esteem and further contribute to increased vulnerability (Burton and Breen 2002; Kirmayer et al. 2011). It can also make older refugees even more vulnerable to psychosocial problems (Carballo et al. 2004; Skinner 2014; Strong et al. 2015). However, it is also true that older people are often left behind when the rest of their community has been displaced (Calvi-Pariseti 2013; Jönsson 2016; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017b). Physiological, social and economic changes commonly affect older people and frequently contribute to dependency, making them vulnerable to their human rights being violated (Cox and Pardasani 2017).

Many forcibly displaced people have no opportunity to return home, and in many cases, they are growing old in refugee camps or in exile in neighbouring countries, as for example displaced Afghans in Pakistan, Somalis in Eritrea and Ethiopia, Palestinians in Lebanon and Jordan, and Syrians in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In this respect, the global population of displaced older refugees is, in reality, likely to be much higher than the 8.5% stated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017a).

We have concluded that even though researchers stress the role of social work during war, conflicts and forced migration, it appears that little research has been conducted and published about the everyday lives of displaced older refugees and the challenges faced by social workers in war zones, at borders or in refugee camps. The majority of articles that focus on the needs and rights of displaced older refugees have been published in the field of psychology and mental health, with minimal focus on structural support for social workers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing services for displaced older refugees in conflict settings.

In the following section, we elaborate on the impact of economic, political and social conditions on forcibly displaced older refugees, including human rights violations, by illustrating two groups who have fled violence, discrimination and persecution.

## The Case Examples of Forcibly Displaced Older Rohingyas and Palestinian Refugees

### Case Example 1: Older Rohingya Refugees at the Bangladesh-Myanmar Border

The persecution of Rohingyas by the Myanmar government is an established fact. According to the UN, the Rohingyas of Myanmar are amongst the most persecuted minorities in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2018). The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has described the current situation for the ethnic minority as a ‘humanitarian and human rights nightmare’ (United Nations Meetings and Press Releases, 28 September, 2017) and the UN human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad al-Husseini the Myanmar army operation 2017, a ‘textbook example of ethnic cleansing’ (UN News, 11 September, 2017). For decades, the Rohingya people, a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar, have been systematically marginalised, persecuted, abused and deprived of their basic human rights (Bhatia et al. 2018; Ibrahim 2018; Islam and Nuzhath 2018; Olivius 2014; Oxfam 2017; Shivakoti 2017; Ullah 2016). As argued by Ullah (2016), the Rohingyas are deliberately excluded from being citizens of Myanmar in order to build a mono-religious nation and, as a consequence, are subjected to state-sponsored violence. Nationalist, anti-Muslim riots and ethnic discrimination have long fueled violence and displacement in Myanmar regarding the ethnicity of Rohingya people (Wills 2014) who have been fleeing by the ‘hundreds of thousands’, as reported by the organisation Doctors Without Borders (2017). The influx to Bangladesh is one of the largest and fastest-growing refugee crises in decades (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2018).

The Myanmar government has been persecuting the Rohingyas by restricting their freedom of movement, assembly and association, appropriating their land, making demands for forced labor, and randomly arresting and detaining the Rohingyas (Human Rights Watch 2017; Ibrahim 2018; Ullah 2011, 2016). Because of deliberate isolation (political, economic and social) and persecution, the Rohingyas have had to find their own way out of Myanmar in order to seek safety and security. However, as has been reported (Ullah 2016), when fleeing to neighbouring countries, human traffickers take advantage of their vulnerable situation and, at borders and in refugee camps, they become the target of *Nay-Sat Kut-kwey Ye (NaSaKa)*—a Myanmar border security force. Rohingya refugee women, given their status as women, stateless and part of an ethno-religious minority, are vulnerable to a wider range of sexual and gender-based violence (Kojima 2015). Also, older refugees are vulnerable to forced displacement. A report by the UN Refugee Agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017b) illustrates that many older Rohingyas rely on their relatives to carry them to safety to Bangladesh. Forced to walk for days, often

through difficult terrain, older people are amongst the most vulnerable. Older people's voices from inside 'Myanmar's hidden genocide' (Ibrahim 2018) tell us about the injustices and violations of the human rights of the Rohingyas.

The words of Nur Alum, a 65-year-old grandfather in Balukhali camp, Bangladesh, echo those of many accounts of violence and persecution: "If the international community wants to move us, we can go, but returning us by force – it would be better to throw us in the creek and bury us" (cited in Oxfam International 2017, p. 2). Displaced older Rohingya women and men have told devastating stories of killings, rapes, sexual violence and living in overcrowded camps without their basic needs being covered. The conditions in Bangladeshi refugee camps are even more challenging as far as high mortality, education, livelihood, food, water, sanitation and hygiene, vaccination and healthcare access are concerned (Bhatia et al. 2018; Farrington 2019; Islam and Nuzhath 2018; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2018). Most Rohingyas are traumatised and terrified of returning to Myanmar whilst the discrimination that forced them to migrate remains in place. As reported in *The Guardian*, Namugia, an 82-year-old Rohingya refugee in the Moinerghona refugee camp, Bangladesh, says: "They burned my house and my whole village and they stole my crops"; Namugia adds: "I saw them throw young children and old people who could not run onto the fire. They cut people's throats and bellies and left them to die. I cannot go back. What am I going to go back to?" (cited in Doherty 2018). As declared by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (2017), the targeting of houses, fields, food stocks, crops, livestock and trees by government forces alone made it almost impossible for the Rohingyas to return home. For many older Rohingyas, this situation is not new as many of them fled violence in the 1970s and 1990s. For generations, the Myanmar government has refused to recognise the Rohingyas as legitimate inhabitants of the country. Along with being denied citizenship, the Rohingyas have been forbidden to leave their villages, not permitted to enter higher education or be given job opportunities, as well as being denied health and social care. Although they have been victims of persecution in the past, older Rohingya people argue that this time, it is worse than before and that the violence is worst for the elderly as they are unable to run to safety (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017b).

Despite political pressure from the international community and local activist groups who are calling for the government to stop the violence, research shows that the Rohingyas' recent and current situation goes far beyond the standards of human rights. International organisations have failed to protect the refugees and the refugees' rights in the face of their desperate need (Shivakoti 2017). Referring to global responses to end the violence and realise human rights and social justice for the Rohingya people, Ullah (2016, p. 298) suggests that

[...] demilitarization of ethnic areas, investment in development and infrastructure, legal reforms to ensure an end to discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and religion are immediate steps that need to be taken [...] the Rohingyas should be given concrete guarantees of security on return, of a restoration of identity documentation and citizenship status, and of practical support to ensure future livelihoods.

Humanitarian professions and social workers can do much internationally in addressing the needs of refugees in Bangladeshi refugee camps, and there are examples of engagement amongst humanitarian agencies. In the context of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee settlement, Oxfam International provided essential water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities: latrines, water points, bathing units and social spaces and activities for displaced Rohingya people (Farrington 2019). Other organisations such as ActionAid have also been involved in providing humanitarian support in the district. However, it is argued that such interventions and 'social work in extremis' (Lavalette and Ioakimidis 2011) contexts require critical analytical and practical tools to resist the structural mechanisms of oppression in order to foster emancipatory ideals. As shown, for example, by Farrington's (2019) work, humanitarian (WASH) responses need to be appropriate to the gender- and cultural-specific needs of women and girls. Olivius (2014) provides another example in the context of Bangladesh refugee camps, arguing that gender equality operates not only as a tool of emancipation but also as a tool of domination in the global governance of refugees. Accordingly, neoliberal strategies and governing practices can be used in the reproduction of gender inequalities in the name of gender equality and humanitarian aid to refugees. Similarly, as studies on social work and social development (Jönsson 2010) have shown, the lack of post-colonial and critical perspectives in social work and development may result in defining poor people as deviant generally and women as a helpless group in need of social services. Social workers who, in the name of 'empowering others', become engaged in a process of labelling, targeting and providing services must instead become more self-reflexive in order to avoid objectifying refugees as 'the others', taking from them their agency role and reproducing social injustices. If empowerment strategies seek to achieve an emancipatory effect on people who are marginalised and discriminated against, such strategies must go beyond developmental goals, such as higher productivity, higher consumption and a higher level of formal education (Jönsson 2010; see also Worland 2019). Instead, social work practitioners have to consider the social structures, barriers and power relations that maintain inequalities and injustices, which limit the opportunities of individuals to improve their living conditions in society and increase their access to the means of power and influence in society.



Displaced older Palestinian refugees are another group who face routine violence, random arrests and detention, pressure and other forms of abuse. Many social workers engaged in the Palestinian people's struggle against occupation have witnessed the deteriorating living conditions of displaced Palestinians, as shown in the following example of older Palestinians at borders and in refugee camps.

### Case Example 2: Older Palestinian Refugees at the Israel-Gaza and Lebanon Borders

Since 1948, displaced Palestinians have persistently faced human rights violations. Today, 1.5 million individuals, nearly one-third of all registered Palestinian displaced persons live in 58 recognised Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The remaining two-thirds of registered Palestinian displaced persons live in and around the cities and towns of the host countries, and in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, often in official camps (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017a, b). The socio-economic conditions in the camps are generally poor, with high population density, restricted living conditions and inadequate basic infrastructure such as roads and sanitation. In Lebanon, Palestinian displaced persons currently compete with nearly two million Syrian displaced persons entering the country in search of jobs and aid. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) organise aid for Palestinians, whilst the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) covers Syrians—and the difference in the aid provided is unambiguous. The UNHCR gives USD 175.00 per month, per family to 150,000 Syrians in Lebanon. However, the UNRWA can only give 61,000 Palestinians USD 10.00 for each family member every three months, as told by Human Rights Watch spokesperson Lisa Khoury to an Al Jazeera reporter in December 2017 (The Guardian 2018). Both agencies say that they target whoever is considered the most vulnerable. This scarce support to the refugees can be linked to the international political situation in recent years, which resulted in severe reductions in the US aid funding to humanitarian agencies working in Palestinian territories. Not only have the cuts in international aid had a devastating effect on the most vulnerable Palestinians, they have also indirectly affected the Palestinian economy, which is already heavily strained by Israel's blockade (The Guardian 2018). Palestinians, unlike the inhabitants of the host countries such as Lebanon, do not qualify for free hospital treatment, and life is particularly hard for those Palestinians of so-called stateless status. The UNRWA has opened 27 medical clinics in Lebanon, but the clinics are only for general check-ups, whilst displaced persons with serious illnesses must seek help from other NGOs. Many of the 110,000 people over the age of 50 who live in Gaza are affected by the displacement and/or by the forced

migration. Seven percent of older people (or 8000 people) in Gaza live on their own away from their families and the social support networks upon which they often rely to meet their basic needs (Help Age International 2014).

The fact that older Palestinian refugees face long-term displacement compared to shorter-term displaced persons means that they face higher levels of depression and experience more depression that stems from fear (Chaaya et al. 2007). They are also more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, poor physical functioning, physical limitations and impaired vision and hearing compared to shorter-term displaced older persons. A study of Syrian and Palestinian displaced persons in Lebanon reported that over 97% of older persons experienced problems in accessing medical services and medicines (Strong et al. 2015).

A long-term Palestinian refugee, Zahiya Dgheim, 90 years old (cited in Najjar 2018), is living with her daughter Leila and grandchildren in the refugee camp Bourj el-Barajneh outside Beirut, Lebanon. Zahiya had to flee Palestine in 1948 when she was in her twenties. Originating from the village of al-Kabri in the Galilee, Zahiya fled to Lebanon with the belief that she would only stay for a few days. After seven decades in Bourj el-Barajneh, Zahiya (cited in Najjar 2018) still recalls the home of her youth:

“Al-Kabri is the most beautiful place on Earth”, she says “I tell my grandchildren, one day, I hope you go back and see our home”, says Zahiya. “Every time I talk about my home, I see myself in it”.

Though the right of return has been slipping away year after year, her daughter Leila says “We were closer to the right of return decades ago than we are now”.

For a long time, Israel has maintained an intensive military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which includes various ways of controlling and dominating the Palestinians. In different ways, both internal and external borders are controlled. Despite Israel's violation of international laws, for example violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention against Torture, no interventions by the international community have been made. As a result, from the Israeli state political system where discriminatory laws are established and enforced, racism has been institutionalised and collective punishments are everyday realities for stateless Palestinians. Stateless Palestinians have forcibly been used to live in socio-economic, political and human insecurity. This situation has made the informal support systems like family and friends even more necessary especially in situations of emergency (Rabaia et al. 2014). On the ground in times of crises and/or need, neighbours and communities help each other out and, as testified by Jones and Lavalette (2013), ‘magnificent welfare projects’ are conducted by unqualified people through social work.

If peace, justice and human rights are to be secured in the context of the Palestinian conflict, transformative political systems that promote social equality, inclusion and prosperity are

a must. The situation also requires a social work that challenges the dominant narratives and practices that perpetuate sectarianism and the militarisation of social services (Campbell et al. 2018). Practicing social work on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem is a highly complex task as the circumstances around the work are extreme (Harrop and Ioakimidis 2018). As shown by Harrop and Ioakimidis (2018), Palestinian social workers are able to have a holistic picture and understanding of the problems faced by their service users as they share similar experiences and explanations of the Palestinian situation. This leads to a necessary engagement not only in terms of expressed individual problems but also in an understanding of them that results from a society characterised by conflicts, occupation and political oppression. The Palestinian social workers interviewed in the study of Harrop and Ioakimidis (2018) express a strong sense of communitarian ethics, meaning that the universality of the experience of occupation could not be separated from the personal and professional experience. A holistic social work is necessary since older long-term displaced Palestinians have been living a life of poverty, oppression and occupation caused by a political system creating structural and institutional discrimination in general for Palestinians (Lavalette and Ioakimidis 2011; Jones and Lavalette 2013; Lavalette 2016).

The literature review and current examples of globally displaced older refugees illustrated studies that demonstrate the human and social impact of forced migration on older people and the vulnerability of the group that should be considered in social work. In the following sections, we elaborate on how social work practitioners and educators could be involved in recognising the human rights of displaced older refugees and making changes in settings of war zones, at borders and in refugee camps.

## The Role of Social Work as a Human Rights Profession in Forced Migration of Older Refugees

The global challenges of forced migration and displacement of older refugees necessitate adequate critical, global and gerontological perspectives in social work (Ghazanfareon Karlsson 2018; Jönsson 2014). Yet, it would appear that debates on global transformations and their local consequences, including the human and social impact of forced migration on older refugees, often take place without the participation of the social work profession (as illustrated by the literature review). It may be related to a misrecognition of social work as an important field of research, education and professional activity concerning macro-social developments (Dominelli 2010; Jönsson 2016). Others argue that social work has placed more emphasis on the *needs* of vulnerable groups rather than on

their human *rights*, at the risk of ignoring the human dignity, security and autonomy of the (older) individuals (Cox and Pardasani 2017; Healy 2008; Ife 2012, 2016).

In many ways, human rights-based values of social work, including the promotion of social and economic equalities and the dignity and rights of people, clash with the reality of war, violence and forced migration. Accordingly, we need to identify the limitations of conventional legal-based human rights narratives of social work. This may occur by extending the idea of human rights to concentrate on the ‘human’ and by recognising the limitations of individualist liberal constructions of human rights for human rights-based social work that is grounded in the humanities (Ife 2016). In this respect, a social justice framework may enhance the opportunities to change. With a (human) rights-based focus, we argue that the structural relationships that ignore the vulnerability of displaced older refugees in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps could be emphasised.

Human rights constitute a set of interdependent guiding principles that have implications for meta-macro (global), macro (whole population), mezzo (at risk), micro (clinical), meta-micro (day-to-day life) and research interventions in order to solve social problems and promote well-being (Wronka 2016). In the case of displaced older refugees in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps, both individual (such as physiological) change and structural (such as social and economic) change affect older people and make them vulnerable to their human rights being violated. As stated in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (IASSW 2018), social workers as ‘front-line human rights workers’ (Healy 2008) are uniquely placed to help, support and protect displaced older refugees.

## Human Rights and Its Relevance to Displaced Older Refugees

Older people are not specifically recognised as a group in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) nor have they been mentioned in conventions subsequent to the Declaration. Under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and their Additional Protocols, older people are protected as persons who do not participate in hostilities alongside other members of the civilian population. The Geneva Conventions also mention older persons as requiring special protection because of their weakened condition, alongside other vulnerable groups. The rights of older people are implicitly referred to, for example, in the Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

However, there has been no UN convention on the rights of older people, which is perceived as being necessary to ensuring that rights are actually realised. In 1991, the UN issued a document, *Principles for Older Persons* (UN 1991),

emphasising that priority should be given to the situation of older persons, particularly in five areas focusing on Independence, Participation, Care, Self-fulfilment and Dignity. Similarly, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA; United Nations 2002) issued a plan for the rights of older persons, although not legally binding on any government. The plan focused on challenges faced by the global population of older people in countries of both the ‘global north’ and the ‘global south’—discrimination on the basis of age, poverty and health issues, violence and abuse and lack of specific measures and services. In the UN General Assembly report, *Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing* (United Nations 2011), governmental measures to protect the rights of older persons were criticised as being ‘inconsistent, scattered, and insufficient with a general lack of comprehensive, target legal and institutional frameworks’. As suggested in the report, increased focus should be placed on violence against older persons and women in particular, as well as financial exploitation, health, long-term care, participation in policymaking and political life and work.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (United Nations Internal Displacement Monitor Center 1998), based on international humanitarian and human rights law, are intended to serve as an international standard to guide governments, international organisations and all other relevant actors in providing assistance and protection to IDPs. The principles identify the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of the internally displaced in all phases of displacement. Although they do not constitute a binding instrument, the principles reflect and are consistent with international law. Since their introduction, they have enjoyed moral endorsement by a number of international forums and many states have developed national legislation.

However, whilst other principles go into more detail about the needs of children and women—such as on the forced recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups and on education for children and women—older persons are not specifically mentioned in any other principle (ICRC, guiding principles). The most senior humanitarian policy body in the UN system—the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group (IASC-WG)—considered the concerns of older people caught up in crises during an inter-agency review in 2007. This process revealed that the needs of older people were not being systematically identified or acted upon within a humanitarian response or coordination. One year later, the IASC developed guidelines on humanitarian measures and older persons, a key policy statement on the part of the humanitarian community, although it remains relatively unknown within humanitarian country teams (IASC 2008). In 2000, the UNHCR developed a Policy on Older Refugees. The statement acknowledges that older refugees could comprise over 30% of displaced groups and that they tend to be

insufficiently recognised (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2010).

Although older people as a group are not specifically recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a key practice of social work is the protection of humanitarian rights (Ife 2016). The fact that forcibly displaced older people are refused any rights of citizenship, denied any freedom of movement and subjected to violence, forced labor, expulsion from their lands and property, violence and torture means that the practice of social work in the field of forced migration involves working in the context of human rights processes.

As illustrated by the two case examples, older Rohingya people at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and older Palestinians at the Israel-Gaza and Lebanon borders, these global problems crystallise the structural disadvantages of forcibly displaced older people who are also members of socially marginalised groups, including ethnic and religious minorities. To end human rights violations globally, the commitment of all stakeholders, for example the UN, individual governments, humanitarian agencies, local communities and human rights professions, including social work in collaboration with its sister organisations (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), is essential. As we will discuss in the next section, all areas of the social work profession, including research, education and practice, need to address issues and work together in order to face the increasing threats to human rights and well-being amongst displaced older refugees.

## What Can Social Work Do?

People displaced by disasters, including wars, conflicts and political instability, have required social work interventions since the social work profession started. Because of current and future increases in climate change, disasters and conflicts, social workers must develop strategies to respond to conflict contexts (IFSW 2016). Social workers play an important role in operating in settings in which displaced persons live, by receiving material aid for the camps and using their skills to advocate for displaced refugees (Hardy 2016; Jones and Lavalette 2013). The presence of social work is vital, dealing with basic needs such as food, clean water and shelter, helping people who are in crisis. Similarly, during the global refugee crisis of 2015–2016, through their social work associations, educational institutions and various voluntary organisations, social workers supported migrants and displaced persons (IFSW 2016).

As we have learned from this study, displaced older refugees are likely to face specific constraints in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps. Yet, related social problems in their

displacement and what social work could actually do on an individual, agency and institutional level to help displaced older refugees are less recognised and discussed in the social work literature. It is important that social work focus on research and interventions related to needs and, more specifically, advocates the realisation of the human rights of older displaced refugees. Social work actions should include changing real circumstances of older and not-older people alike who are suffering under a discriminatory system. We believe there are opportunities to work in progressive ways with this group of refugees that are beyond individual, medicalised and national boundaries in social work. This may be realised through social work academics and practitioners, as well as educators who have been updated about critical and global thinking, human rights and social justice—global ethics and the commitments of the social work profession (IASSW 2018). Social work research is necessary in order to keep us informed about the social realities and living conditions of displaced older refugees in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps. This may motivate the global community of social workers and the profession to play a key role in meeting the needs and rights of this group. This could also lead to the development of interprofessional collaborations and practices between social workers and, for example, health professionals and NGOs, actors who are already engaged in the settings, and could be strengthened through the competencies and skills of social workers. Accordingly, it is of great importance to make visible, through empirical studies, the important efforts and roles of social workers, including interprofessional collaborations for meeting the needs and rights of globally displaced older refugees.

In the examples of Rohingya people and Palestinians discussed in this paper, either no state is present or the state which governs them is part of the oppression or is the cause of their state of oppression (Jones and Lavalette 2013). Older displaced Palestinians and Rohingyas are living in extremely vulnerable life situations that are embedded in practices of regulation and control, and where benefits are contingent and based on notions of ‘eligibility’ that draw a distinction between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’, primarily based on ethnicity.

Thus, a critical social work agenda is needed in which the role of social work as a global and human rights profession should be discussed. By recognising the circumstances of forcibly displaced older refugees who have fled violence, discrimination and persecution, a social justice framework can be used that does not define or find solutions to social problems as a result of ‘individual weakness or pathology’ but recognises the social problems in the social and political realities in which displaced older refugees live.

The IFSW and IASSW themes of social justice in social work can guide social work in the field of older displaced people because social workers could highlight and challenge the negative discrimination faced by older displaced persons through negative social selection according to their advanced

age. Social workers have the professional ability to recognise the diversity within the group of displaced older persons, highlighting the specific needs of elderly persons, away from durable solutions that follow an approach of ‘one-size fits all’. In camps, in shelters and during flight/at borders, social workers have the professional skills to organise help and assistance that focuses on a fair distribution of resources according to needs and rights, based on conducted needs interventions. Social work as a profession, in research, education and practice, must challenge unjust policies and practices in the context of displacement in order to draw the attention of policymakers, politicians and the general public to the situation of older displaced persons. With the aim of making change possible, not only on an individual level but also in terms of structural and political changes, social workers could focus on how the living conditions of older displaced persons are inadequate, oppressive, unfair and harmful, as the overall aim of social work is to work towards an inclusive society by challenging social conditions that cause social exclusion and stigmatisation.

These developments also include the role of social work in supporting education with a critical, global and gerontological perspectives in order to support the advancement of social work education that is relevant to the new global definition of social work (IFSW 2014) and of the updated Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles last year (IASSW 2018). This includes shaping curricula and courses that are relevant to the role of social work in the context of forced migration and displacement of older people. We suggest the development of critical curriculum guided by global ethics of social work (Jönsson and Flem 2020) that encompasses critical, global and gerontological perspectives, including displaced older refugee-related discussions and critical reflection on education of future social workers (Ghazanfareon Karlsson 2018, 2020). Apart from classroom teaching, utilising critical, global and gerontological perspectives in international field practice contexts could serve as a springboard for the recognition and willingness to deal with global ethics and the role of social work (Jönsson and Flem 2018, 2020), by including students conducting their field training in war zone settings, at borders and in refugee camps.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The overall aim of this paper was to explore the literature on globally displaced older refugees and the involvement and responses of social workers to living conditions of this group of people. In exploring the situation of displaced older Rohingyas and Palestinian refugees, we ask for active support of international social work bodies and voluntary organisations and engagement of social workers around the globe who are committed to end human rights violations and to be ‘front-line human rights workers’, not just in the case examples described above, but also globally.



Based on the findings of our paper, we argue that both individual and structural changes manifest the disadvantages of forcibly displaced older refugees. In this respect, social workers should deal with basic needs, such as food, clean water, and shelter, and also more age-specific needs and priorities through their social work associations, educational institutions and various global organisations, using their skills to support and advocate for realising the rights of displaced older refugees. We argue that social work can take actionable steps towards research strategies, including the development of ideas, principles and practical tools that practitioners, researchers and policymakers can use to support displaced older people in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps. Further, social work educators can be creative in curriculum development and teaching methods, such as expanding the critical, global and gerontological perspectives in refugee-related discussions and critical reflection in education and international field training of future social workers.

By using this paper as a starting point, our ambition is to contribute to the research field of social work on aging and migration with important knowledge about displaced older refugees, to be addressed in future research and by practitioners and organisations in the field. We hope that this paper can serve as a springboard for future research and welfare projects that aim to analyse the political context that forms the living conditions of forcibly displaced older refugees, whilst enhancing the importance of social workers in interprofessional collaborations in areas of forced migration and older refugees in war zones, at borders and in refugee camps. Such projects could create unique learning opportunities regarding aging and forced migration and living conditions at borders and in refugee camps, as well as create discussions beyond generational, national and professional boundaries whilst enhancing the importance of social workers as a human rights profession in such areas.

**Funding Information** Open access funding provided by Mid Sweden University.

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## References

- Bhatia, A., Mahmud, A., Fuller, A., Shin, R., Rahman, A., Shatil, T., Sultana, M., Morshed, K. A. M., Leaning, J., & Balsari, S. (2018). The Rohingya in Cox's Bazar: when the stateless seek refuge. *Health and Human Rights*, 20(2), 105–122.
- Burton, A., & Breen, C. (2002). Older refugees in humanitarian emergencies. *The Lancet*, 360, 47–48. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(02\)11819-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11819-8).
- Calvi-Pariseti, P. (2013). Older people and displacement. *Forced Migration Review*, 43, 76–78.
- Campbell, J., Ioakimidis, V., & Maglajlic, R. A. (2018). Social work for critical peace: a comparative approach to understanding social work and political conflict. *European Journal of Social Work*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1462149>.
- Carballo, M., Smajkic, A., Zeric, D., Dzidowska, M., Gebre-Medhin, J., & Van Halem, J. (2004). Mental health and coping in a war situation: the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 36(4), 463–477. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610216000193>.
- Chaaya, M., Sibai, A. M., Fayad, R., & El-Roueiheb, Z. (2007). Religiosity and depression in older people: evidence from underprivileged refugee and non-refugee communities in Lebanon. *Aging and Mental Health*, 11(1), 37–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607860600735812>.
- Chee, Y. K., & Levkoff, S. E. (2001). Culture and dementia: accounts by family caregivers and health professionals for dementia-affected elders in South Korea. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 16(2), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A1010640527713>.
- Cox, C., & Pardasani, M. (2017). Aging and human rights: a rights-based approach to social work with older adults. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 2(3), 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-017-0037-0>.
- Doctors Without Borders (2017). *The Rohingya refugee crisis: a vulnerable community struggles to survive in Bangladesh*. Retrieved from: <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>.
- Doherty, B. (2018). 'There is no peace': traumatised Rohingya vow they won't go back to Myanmar. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/30/there-is-no-peace-traumatised-rohingya-vow-they-wont-go-back-to-myanmar>.
- Dominelli, L. (2010). *Social work in a globalizing world*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding everyday racism: an interdisciplinary theory*. London: Sage.
- Eze, E. C. (1997). *Race and the enlightenment: a reader*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Farrington, M. (2019). Social and feminist design in emergency contexts: the Women's Social Architecture Project, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. *Gender and Development*, 27(2), 295–315.
- Ferguson, I., Ioakimidis, V., & Lavalette, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Global social work in a political context: radical perspectives*. Bristol: Polity.
- Ghazanfareon Karlsson, S. (2018). Neoliberalism and social work education: student's ability to identify the elderly's rights and needs. In M. Kamali & J. H. Jönsson (Eds.), *Neoliberalism, Nordic welfare states and social work: current and future challenges* (pp. 193–202). London: Routledge.
- Ghazanfareon Karlsson, S. (2020). Looking for elderly people's needs: teaching critical reflection in Swedish social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 39(2), 227–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2019.1617846>.
- Goldberg, D. T. (1993). *Racist culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Hardy, R. (2016). The role of social work in the refugee crisis. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2016/mar/15/social-work-refugee-crisis>.
- Harrop, D., & Ioakimidis, V. (2018). Practicing social work in a 'stateless state': an exploration of the views, experiences and practice of children and family social workers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(5), 724–736. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2017.1318830>.

- Healy, L. M. (2008). Exploring the history of social work as a human rights profession. *International Social Work*, 51(6), 735–748. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872808095247>.
- Healy, L. M. (2017). Situating social work within the post-2015 Global Agenda. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(1), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2016.1168788>.
- Help Age International (2014). *Gaza crisis: preparing to respond to older people's needs*. Retrieved from: <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/gaza-crisis-preparing-to-respond-to-older-peoples-needs/>. September 2019
- Hinton, L., Franz, C. E., Yeo, G., & Levkoff, S. E. (2005). Conceptions of dementia in a multi-ethnic sample of family caregivers. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 53, 1405–1410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2005.53409.x>.
- Human Rights Watch (2017) Burma: events of 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/burma>. September 2019.
- IASC (2008). *Humanitarian action and older persons. An essential brief for humanitarian actors*. Retrieved from: [https://www.who.int/hac/network/interagency/iasc\\_advocacy\\_paper\\_older\\_people\\_en.pdf](https://www.who.int/hac/network/interagency/iasc_advocacy_paper_older_people_en.pdf). February 2019.
- IASSW (2018). *Global social work statement of ethical principles*. Retrieved from: <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/2018/04/18/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles-iassw/>. February 2019.
- Ibrahim, A. (2018). *The Rohingyas: inside Myanmar's genocide* (2nd ed.). London: C. Hurst & Co..
- Ife, J. (2012). *Human rights and social work: towards right-based practice* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ife, J. (2016). Human rights and social work: beyond conservative law. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1(1), 3–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-016-0001-4>.
- IFSW (2014). *The global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <https://www.ifsw.org/sv/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>. April 2018.
- IFSW (2016). *Global agenda for social work and social development: second report. Promoting the dignity and worth of peoples*. Retrieved from: <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/global-agenda>. April 2018.
- Islam, M. M., & Nuzhath, T. (2018). Health risks of Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh: a call for global attention. *Journal of Global Health*, 8(2), 020309.
- Jesson, J., Matheson, L., & Lacey, F. M. (2011). *Doing your literature review: traditional and systematic techniques*. London: Sage.
- Jones, C., & Lavalette, M. (2013). The two souls of social work: exploring the roots of 'popular social work'. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 1(2), 147–165. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986013X673236>.
- Jönsson, J. H. (2010). Beyond empowerment: changing local communities. *International Social Work*, 53(3), 393–406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872809359867>.
- Jönsson, J. H. (2014). Local reactions to global problems: undocumented immigrants and social work. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44(suppl 1), i35–i52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu042>.
- Jönsson, J. H. (2016). Poverty alleviation, development, and social work practice in West Africa: a focus on Senegal. In M. Gray (Ed.), *The handbook of social work and social development in Africa* (pp. 243–255). New York: Routledge.
- Jönsson, J. H. (2019). Overfishing, social problems and ecosocial sustainability in Senegalese fishing communities. *Journal of Community Practice*, 27(2–4), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2019.1660290>.
- Jönsson, J. H., & Flem, A. L. (2018). International field training in social work education: beyond colonial divides. *Social Work Education*, 37(7), 895–908. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2018.1461823>.
- Jönsson, J. H., & Flem, A. L. (2020). Global social work ethics and international field training: the experiences and practice dilemmas of Norwegian and Swedish social work students. *International Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819889398>.
- Jönsson, J. H., & Kamali, M. (2012). Fishing for development: a question for social work. *International Social Work*, 55(4), 504–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872812436625>.
- Kamali, M. (2015). *War, violence and social justice: theories for social work*. London: Routledge.
- Kirmayer, L. J., Narasiah, L., Munoz, M., Rashid, M., Ryder, A. G., Guzder, J., ... & Pottie, K. (2011). Common mental health problems in immigrants and refugees: general approach in primary care. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 183(12): E959–E967. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.090292>.
- Kojima, Y. (2015). *Rohingya refugee and migrant women shadowed by sexual and gender based violence*. Tokyo: United Nations University, Human Security, Politics, Vulnerabilities, Women.
- Lavalette, M. (2016). Social work in contexts of political and military conflicts. In S. Hessle (Ed.), *Global social transformation and social action: the role of social workers: social work-social development* (Vol. 3) (pp. 71–75). London: Routledge.
- Lavalette, M., & Ioakimidis, V. (Eds.). (2011). *Social work in extremis: lessons for social work internationally*. Bristol: Policy.
- Loi, S., & Sundram, S. (2014). To flee, or not to flee, that is the question for older asylum seekers. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 26(9), 1403–1406. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610214001057>.
- Najjar, F. (2018). One family, three women, 70 years in exile. The collective story of being a female Palestinian refugee in Lebanon as seen through the lives of a family of women. Al Jazeera News Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/family-women-70-years-exile-180527112411783.html>.
- Olivius, E. (2014). *Governing refugees through gender equality: care, control, emancipation*. Umeå: Print & Media, Umeå University.
- Oxfam International, (2017). 'I still don't feel safe to go home': voiced of Rohingya refugees. Retrieved from [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/bp-voices-rohingya-refugees-181217-en.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-voices-rohingya-refugees-181217-en.pdf). May 2018.
- Rabaia, Y., Saleh, M. F., & Giacaman, R. (2014). Sick or sad? Supporting Palestinian children living in conditions of chronic political violence. *Children & Society*, 28(3), 172–181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12061>.
- Sewpaul, V. (2016). The west and the rest divide: human rights, culture and social work. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1(1), 30–39. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-016-0003-2>.
- Shivakoti, R. (2017). ASEAN's role in the Rohingya refugee crisis. *Forced Migration Review*, 56, 75–77.
- Skinner, M. (2014). The impact of displacement on disabled, injured and older Syrian refugees. *Forced Migration Review*, 47.
- Strong, J., Varady, C., Chahda, N., Doocy, S., & Burnham, G. (2015). Health status and health needs of older refugees from Syria in Lebanon. *Conflict and Health*, 9(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-014-0029-y>.
- The Guardian (2018). *Trump aid cuts hitting Palestinians hard agencies warn. Critics accuse US of using issue to force through White House-imposed peace deal, as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians suffer impact*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/aug/30/trump-aid-cuts-hitting-palestinians-hard-agencies-warn>. August 2018.
- Ullah, A. K. M. A. (2011). Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh: historical exclusions and contemporary marginalization. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 9, 139–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2011.567149>.
- Ullah, A. K. M. A. (2016). Rohingya crisis in Myanmar: seeking justice for the "stateless". *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 32(3), 285–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986216660811>.
- United Nations. (1991). United Nations principles for older persons. Resolution 46/91.

- United Nations (2002). *Madrid Plan of Action and its implementation*. Retrieved from: <https://un.org/development/desa/ageing/madrid-plan-of-action-and-its-implementation.html>. April 2018
- United Nations (2011). *General assembly, follow-up to the second world assembly on ageing*, Retrieved from: <https://www.undocs.org/A/66/173>. June 2018.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1951). The 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2010). *UNHCR's policy on older refugees, 19 April 2000 (Annex II of the Draft Report of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Standing Committee [29 February–2 March 2000])*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/standcom/4e857c279/unhcrs-policy-older-refugees-19-april-2000-annex-ii-draft-report-seventeenth.html>. February 2018.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017a). *Forced displacement worldwide at its highest in decades*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/6/5941561f4/forced-displacement-worldwide-its-highest-decades.html>. November 2018.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017b). *Older people*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/older-people.html>. October 2018.
- United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases (2017). *Amid 'humanitarian and human rights nightmare' in Myanmar, secretary-general urges full access for aid, safe return of displaced rohingya, end to military, 28 September, 2017*. Retrieved June 2018 from: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13012.doc.htm>.
- United Nations News Globa Perspective Human stories (2017). *UN human rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar, 11 September, 2017*. Retrieved June 2018 from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethniccleansing-myanmar>.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2018). *Rohingya emergency*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html>. November 2018.
- United Nations Internal Displacement Monitor Center (1998). *Guiding principles on internal displacement*. Retrieved from: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/ocha-guiding-principles-on-internal-displacement>. April 2019.
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (2017). *Palestine refugees*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>. November 2018.
- Virgincar, A., Doherty, S., & Siriwardhana, C. (2016). The impact of forced migration on the mental health of the elderly: a scoping review. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 28(6), 889–896. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610216000193>.
- Wills, N. (2014). The potential role of a discrimination law in Myanmar. *Forced Migration Review*, 45, 82–83.
- Worland, S. (2019). Literacy: a sustainable justice tool for refugee emancipation. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 7(3), 447–454. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986019X15627419530783>.
- World Health Organization (2010). *Definition of an older or elderly person*. Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/survey/ageingdefolder/en/index.html>. November 2019.
- Wronka, J. (2016). *Human rights and social justice: social action and service for the helping and health professions*. Sage.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.