

## ISSUES THAT CONCERN NCWC

### Who is Meeting the Needs of the Older People and Persons with Disabilities in War-Torn Syria?



Aid workers say some elderly Syrians refugees...are in need of support.

Photo: Heba Aly/IRIN

The plight of the population in civil war-torn Syria, has led to the forced unprecedented transition of thousands of dispossessed people to leave their destroyed homes and seek safety and an opportunity to rebuild their lives in another country. By now, most Canadians have read the newspapers or seen on television, the graphically recorded images of thousands of hungry, exhausted parents carrying scared crying babies, or children by the hand, and youth walking miles over barren land, and into cities and train or bus stations seeking transportation for a place to settle. The courage and hope, mingled with desperation on their faces, should move even the most hard-hearted among us. Some will find sanctuary in another place eventually, but many will not.

What of the situation of those we do not see or hear about? For instance, [the older people and persons with disabilities, who are not among the droves of walkers](#), no doubt, as such travel requires healthy bodies, strong legs and the physical power of endurance as well as the ability to undergo prolonged strain on body and mind? Given that fact, [where is the world's response to the urgent needs of those left behind?](#) Why has there been a vacuum of information about them and their wellbeing? Surely it must have been a heart-breaking experience for them and for their children and grand-children to leave without them.

It has been noted that Germany and the U.K. have committed themselves to take in thousands while the E.U. countries are also planning to absorb some people and the United Nations are in the process of addressing the problem. [Congratulations to many Canadian families and organizations who have stretched out their hand to take in some families.](#) But, a humanitarian response is also needed for those left behind that must include food, shelter, health and support services including a plan for reconnection with their family; the least of which needs to be communication, if not resettlement, with them.



A relevant model that may offer a plan of action to address those needs is HELPAGE–International Nepal which initiated its 2015 Nepal Earthquake Response (NERP). First, they discussed the urgent needs with Nepal's local partners. In the Syrian case, [it would need to be the United Nations with the European Union](#), to address the possible steps to urgently respond to the needs of Older People and those persons with Disabilities, as well as those families who perhaps cannot afford to leave.

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For example, [HELPAGE](#) itemized a plan of “Unconditional Cash Transfers” to address the cost for shelter repair and/or temporary shelter construction. They also itemized the following: Food Items, Shelter Materials, Health/Medicine, Clothes etc. See [www.helpagecanada.ca](http://www.helpagecanada.ca) and [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org). Older people and persons with disabilities are among vulnerable groups that require specialised care and attention especially in disaster areas. Based on our knowledge and information, another essential concern is the protection of older women, older and younger



women with disabilities and older and younger widows, from neglect, abuse, and age and gender-based violence, must be a priority. It is very progressive that HELPAGE also recognizes, strengthens and utilizes the skills, and experience of older people and persons with disabilities in the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes.

Perhaps, while citizens are caught up here in Canada in a lengthy federal election, it would be an opportune time to put pressure on all major party leaders to address such action for those in need in Syria. While we have heard of some plans to resettle those who have left Syria, we have yet to hear about the plight of those in dire need left behind. Canada, as do other countries in the G20, has a responsibility and must honour their financial pledge to help people who are the victims of war, especially since Canada has joined the U.S., U.K. and Australian forces to destroy the enemy, ISIS, that has caused the destitution and migration of its people.

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Dilmaya (foreground), 70, was rescued from the rubble of her house by her sister-in-law, destroyed by the earthquake in Nepal in April 2015.