



# PLATFORM ON DISASTER DISPLACEMENT

FOLLOW-UP TO THE NANSEN INITIATIVE

A STATE-LED INITIATIVE  
**WORKING TOWARDS BETTER  
PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE**  
DISPLACED ACROSS BORDERS  
IN THE CONTEXT OF DISASTERS  
AND CLIMATE CHANGE

[www.disasterdisplacement.org](http://www.disasterdisplacement.org)



# THE CONTEXT

## DISASTER DISPLACEMENT, ONE OF THE BIGGEST HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

**Hurricane season is on. The floodwaters have receded, but you still hear the sound of your house being torn apart by the wind while waves crash at your doorstep. Your neighborhood is devastated and your home destroyed. Your ability to make a living is wiped out overnight. Humanitarian assistance is insufficient. Your child needs urgent medical care, but no functioning hospital remains.**

**This scenario is improbable in some regions of the world, but it is a reality for many people in all hemispheres.**

Every year, millions of people are forced to leave their homes because of floods, tropical storms, droughts, melting glaciers, earthquakes and other natural hazards. Many find refuge within their own country, but some have to move abroad. While some movement is well documented, the total number is unknown. Present international law does not provide a right to admission and stay for those fleeing to another country. Scientists warn that climate change is projected to increase displacement in the future, both internally and across borders. Displacement has devastating effects on people and communities. It creates complex humanitarian and development challenges that urgently call for partnerships and action.

Since the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, international recognition of the role that disasters, adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation have on population movement, has grown. The topic has been addressed in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the 2016 Agenda for Humanity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the 2015 Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). These agreements recognize the need for cross-sectoral, coordinated action to address the diverse and region-specific challenges of human mobility in the context of disasters and climate change.

📍 A victim of Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines in front of what used to be their home in the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines (2012). ©IOM

📍 Cover photo: In the Sahel region, the rainy season starts towards the end of the summer. Often the ground is so dry that it can't absorb the water and flooding occur. Climate change has made the rains erratic and farming and life in general is often plagued by too little or too much rain (2012). ©Suomen Punainen Risti/Finnish Red Cross







## FACTS & FIGURES

- ➡ East Asia and the Pacific, January-December 2020: Storms throughout the year – cyclones Tino Harold and Yasa, typhoons Vongfong/Ambo, Hagupit, Maysak, Haishen, Molave, Goni and Vamco, and tropical storms Higos and Nangka – caused 5.5 million new displacements across the region.
- ➡ Yemen, February-August 2020: Flooding and related disasters led to 223,000 new displacements.
- ➡ Central America and the Caribbean, August/November 2020: 2.7 million new displacements were triggered by Hurricanes Laura, Eta, and Iota across 14 countries
- ➡ Australia, January-February 2020: Wildfires triggered 65,000 new displacements
- ➡ Turkey, Croatia, and Greece, 2020: 82,000 new displacements were recorded due to a series of earthquakes with magnitudes ranging from 5.4 to 7.0.

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC/NRC)








# OUR RESPONSE

## THE PLATFORM ON DISASTER DISPLACEMENT: TOWARDS BETTER PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE DISPLACED ACROSS BORDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Following the call to action to address displacement related to climate change in 2010 at the Climate Change Conference in Mexico and based on the outcome of the Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement in Oslo in June 2011, Norway and Switzerland decided to join forces. At the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Ministerial Conference in December 2011, the two governments pledged to address the need for a more coherent approach to the protection of people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change. As a result, the Nansen Initiative – a bottom-up, State-led consultative process – was launched in 2012. The consultations resulted in the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change (Protection Agenda), endorsed by 109 States in 2015. The State-led Platform on Disaster Displacement (the Platform), launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, continues the work of the Nansen Initiative by bringing together a group of States committed to support the implementation of the Protection Agenda.

The Protection Agenda offers States a toolbox to better prevent and prepare for displacement before a disaster strikes. When displacement cannot be avoided, it helps States improve their responses to situations when people are forced to find refuge, either within their own country or across an international border.

Rather than calling for a new binding international convention on cross-border disaster-displacement, the Protection Agenda supports the integration of effective practices by States and (sub-) regional actors into their own normative frameworks, in accordance with their specific context.

 Children planting sea grapes on the coastline of Port-Salut, Haiti (2014). Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation initiatives help reduce vulnerability and build the resilience of people at risk of disaster displacement. ©IOM





# OUR WORK

## SEVEN THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO:

### ① WE ARE A STATE-LED INITIATIVE

**Working towards better protection** for people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change.

### ② WE PROMOTE MEASURES

- **To help people at risk of displacement stay in their homes.** Infrastructure improvement, urban planning, land reform, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation help reduce vulnerability and build the resilience of people at risk of disaster displacement. Over recent decades, the international community has shifted its focus from responding to the impacts of natural hazards to proactively reducing disaster risks. Likewise, the Platform advocates for risk reduction, climate change adaptation and development measures to include the risk of displacement.
- **To help people affected by disasters move out of harm's way.** People should have a choice whether to move or to stay but sometimes, displacement cannot be avoided, in order to save lives. Evacuations and planned relocation can ensure that human rights are protected, and that people are supported to return home or settle elsewhere. Efforts are more likely to be sustainable if undertaken in close consultation with affected people and host communities, taking into account cultural and psychological factors. Opening pathways for regular migration to other countries preventively can also help people move out of harm's way before a disaster strikes.
- **To better protect people forced to leave their homes** in the context of disasters and climate change, especially when they need to cross international borders. While present international law recognizes the rights of internally displaced persons, those displaced across borders remain without specific international protection. In recent decades, at least 50 countries have received or refrained from returning persons from disaster-affected countries. The Nansen Initiative identified a multitude of effective practices used by several States to admit and protect these individuals, including granting a humanitarian visa or temporary protection status. Such practices should be harmonized at regional levels, and replicated where needed.



### 3 WE BRING TOGETHER PARTNERS

Such as States, international and regional organizations, research institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations and other civil society stakeholders in a community of practice on disaster displacement. Effective responses to disaster displacement require coordination among different ministries, policy areas, and organizations.



### 4 WE FRAME AND FEED KEY MESSAGES

About disaster displacement into relevant global policy processes addressing issues such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, human rights, humanitarian action, refugee protection, and migration. The Platform has facilitated increased international recognition of the challenges of human mobility in the context of disasters and climate change in global policy processes, including the process leading to the formal endorsement of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in December 2018. Ensuring that these global agreements are implemented at the regional, national and local level is essential.



### 5 WE FACILITATE REGIONAL EFFORTS

To share experiences and develop effective practices as well as normative frameworks that respond to local realities. So far, the Platform has supported such efforts in the Pacific, the Horn of Africa, South Asia, and the Americas, helping countries review and improve their national and regional responses to disaster displacement.



### 6 WE AIM TO FILL GAPS

On disaster displacement data and knowledge. More comprehensive and systematic data collection is needed about why, where, when, and how people move in the context of disasters, particularly when they cross international borders. Advisory Committee members are advancing practices to harmonize data collection, understand how people move in response to slow-onset hazards, and make the best use of big data such as cell phone records and social media.

### 7 WE GET THE WORD OUT

And engage our audience about disaster displacement challenges and solutions using traditional and creative tools from communication and the arts.

# OUR ARCHITECTURE

## STATE LEADERSHIP

**The Steering Group** provides strategic leadership and guidance on coordination, policy and advocacy of the Platform. In a Steering Group meeting in December 2020, the Steering Group welcomed Fiji as the Chair of the PDD from 1 January 2021 and France as interim Vice-Chair from 1 January 2021, followed by the European Union as Vice-Chair from 1 January 2022. On 1 July 2022, the European Union took over the Chairmanship and will remain Chair of PDD until 31 December 2022. Kenya will assume the Vice-Chairmanship of the PDD and support the EU in their priorities. The Steering Group consists of 15-20 States and the European Union, represented through their Permanent Missions in Geneva. Its composition reflects a wide and balanced geographic representation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are standing invitees to the Steering Group, and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is an *ex officio* member.

**The Group of Friends** strengthens awareness on the protection and assistance needs of disaster displaced persons. It is an open-ended group and consists of States and regional organizations.

## TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND ADVICE

**The Envoy of the Chair** provides strategic advice to the Chair and the Steering Group and represents the Chair in high-level public events to promote the Platform's work and raise awareness about the Protection Agenda at the global and regional level. He also serves as the Chair of the Platform's Advisory Committee.

**The Advisory Committee** consists of, inter alia, representatives of international and regional organizations, research institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations and other civil society stakeholders. The Advisory Committee's expertise includes fields such as humanitarian assistance and protection,

human rights, migration management, refugee protection, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and development. It provides expert input and strategic advice to the Steering Group and supports implementation of the Platform's activities.

## TECHNICAL AND COORDINATION SUPPORT

**The Secretariat** supports the development and implementation of the Platform's activities. Under the guidance of the Chair and the Steering Group, the Secretariat works with States, agencies and other stakeholders interested in implementing the recommendations of the Protection Agenda at national, regional and global levels. The Secretariat is funded by the generous contribution of Germany and is hosted by UNOPS in Geneva, Switzerland.

📍 Madagascar is one of the countries most affected by climate change, cyclically ridden by droughts and floods, and battered by cyclones of increased intensity (2012). ©IOM

## STEERING GROUP MEMBERS OF THE PLATFORM ON DISASTER DISPLACEMENT



Argentina



Costa Rica



Kenya (Vice-Chair)



Norway



Australia



EU (Chair)



Madagascar



Philippines



Bangladesh



Fiji



Maldives



Senegal



Brazil



France



Mexico



Switzerland



Canada



Germany




Morocco









## PROGRESS TOWARDS BETTER PROTECTION FOR DISASTER DISPLACED PERSONS ACROSS REGIONS AND THEMATIC AREAS

**May 2016**

In his Agenda for Humanity, the UN Secretary-General makes a call to reduce the number of internally displaced persons by 50% by 2030 and many States commit to support this target.

**September 2016**

In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, States recognize climate change and disasters as root causes of displacement, and pledge to assist those affected.

**September 2016**

Pacific Leaders at the 47<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum meeting endorse the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, a regional framework for integrated approaches to disaster risk management and climate change action.

**November 2016**

The Regional Conference on Migration in Central America welcomes and adopts a “Guide to Effective Practices for RCM Member Countries: protection for persons moving across borders in the context of disasters”.

**December 2016**

States address the migration, environment and climate change nexus in the IOM Council.

**January 2017**

UNHCR, in its Strategic Directions 2017–2021, explicitly commits to contribute to advancing legal, policy and practical solutions for the protection of people displaced by the effects of climate change and disasters.



📷 Madinga Island, Guna Yala, Panama (2014): one of the islands already being submerged by rising sea levels. ©Kadir van Lohuizen / NOOR

#### March 2017

Costa Rica and Panama hold the first ever disaster displacement simulation exercise on their shared border.

#### May 2017

The 5<sup>th</sup> Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) includes disaster displacement in its outcome documents.

#### June 2017

ECOSOC Resolution E/2017/L.24 encourages all relevant actors to strengthen efforts aimed at addressing the needs of persons displaced within the context of disasters, including those induced by climate change.

#### June 2017

Human Rights Council Resolution HRC/35/L.32 calls for better protection of migrants and persons displaced across international borders in the context of the adverse impacts of climate change.

#### July 2017

New internally displaced persons policy includes disaster displacement: Vanuatu develops National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement.

#### November 2017

New immigration law includes disaster displacement: Brazil authorizes 'humanitarian reception' for a person from 'any country in a situation of [...] major calamity [or] environmental disaster'.

#### December 2017

UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/132 recognizes disaster displacement and encourages States to reduce disaster displacement risks.

#### June 2018

Words into Action Guidance on Disaster Displacement has been developed to help States implement the Sendai Framework on DRR, reduce risk, address impacts and strengthen resilience.

#### December 2018

The GCM is formally endorsed by the UN General Assembly. It recognizes climate change, disasters and environmental degradation as drivers of migration. States commit to actions to minimize such drivers and to better protect people compelled to leave their homes in the context of disasters.

#### December 2018

The 24<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties welcomes the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement's recommendations on how to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.

# KEY DEFINITIONS

**DISASTER** refers to a “serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources” (UNDRR). In the Protection Agenda, disasters refer to disruptions triggered by or linked to hydro-meteorological and climatological natural hazards, including hazards linked to anthropogenic global warming, as well as geophysical hazards.

**SUDDEN-ONSET DISASTERS** comprise hydro-meteorological hazards such as flooding, windstorms or mudslides, and geophysical hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis or volcano eruptions.

**SLOW-ONSET DISASTERS** relate to environmental degradation processes such as droughts and desertification, increased salinization, rising sea levels or thawing of permafrost.

**HUMAN MOBILITY** refers to three forms of population movement: i) displacement – understood as the primarily forced movement of persons, ii) migration – primarily voluntary movement of persons, and iii) planned relocation – planned process of settling persons or groups of persons to a new location (Cancún Climate Change Adaptation Framework).

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE** are people or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made

disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border (Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement).

**DISASTER DISPLACEMENT** refers to situations where people are forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of a disaster or in order to avoid the impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard. Such displacement results from the fact that affected persons are (i) exposed to (ii) a natural hazard in a situation where (iii) they are too vulnerable and lack the resilience to withstand the impacts of that hazard.

**CROSS-BORDER DISASTER-DISPLACEMENT** refers to situations where people flee or are displaced across borders in the context of sudden- or slow-onset disasters, or in the context of the adverse effects of climate change.

**PROTECTION** refers to any positive action, whether or not based on legal obligations, undertaken by States on behalf of disaster displaced persons or persons at risk of being displaced that aim at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of applicable bodies of law, namely human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law (Protection Agenda).

*NOTE: “Climate Refugee” is often being used in the media to define a person displaced in the context of disasters like droughts, sea level rise as well as extreme weather events like tornados or tropical cyclones. This concept does not exist in international law and is not endorsed by the Platform on Disaster Displacement.*

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**PLATFORM ON DISASTER DISPLACEMENT, Secretariat hosted by UNOPS**

International Environment House 2, 7-9 Chemin de Balexert, 1219 Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland

Phone: + 41 22 917 5483, E-mail: [info@disasterdisplacement.org](mailto:info@disasterdisplacement.org), [www.disasterdisplacement.org](http://www.disasterdisplacement.org)

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