



**PLATFORM  
ON DISASTER  
DISPLACEMENT**  
FOLLOW-UP TO THE NANSEN INITIATIVE

**ADDRESSING  
THE PROTECTION  
NEEDS OF PEOPLE  
DISPLACED ACROSS  
BORDERS**

**IN THE CONTEXT  
OF DISASTERS AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE**



## THE CONTEXT

DISASTER DISPLACEMENT, ONE OF THE BIGGEST HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES OF THE 21st CENTURY

**Haiti, January 2010: an earthquake left more than 1.5 million people homeless. Philippines, November 2013: Cyclone Haiyan/ Yolanda displaced four million people. Every year, millions of people are forced to leave their homes because of floods, tropical storms, droughts, glacier melting, earthquakes and other natural hazards. Many find refuge within their own country, but some have to move abroad. Scientists keep warning that climate change is projected to increase displacement in the future, both internally and across borders.**

Large-scale displacements have devastating effects on people and communities. They create complex humanitarian and development challenges that call for urgent partnerships and action beyond traditional silos. They require going beyond strides made in

the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) process and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

Concerted efforts at all levels are needed in order to strengthen the goal of collective outcomes between these policy processes and their action areas and to find ways to better protect and assist disaster displaced persons. A change is also needed in how national and international actors continue to approach crisis, from managing crisis to managing risks, and preparing for crisis. Efforts should be scaled up to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards and build resilience to disaster displacement risks.

# OUR RESPONSE

THE PLATFORM ON DISASTER DISPLACEMENT:  
IMPLEMENTING THE PROTECTION AGENDA,  
A TOOLBOX FOR DISASTER DISPLACED PERSONS

The main objective of the Platform on Disaster Displacement is to follow-up on the work started by the Nansen Initiative consultative process, and to implement the recommendations of the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, endorsed by 109 governmental delegations during a Global Consultation in October 2015.

The Protection Agenda offers States a toolbox to better prevent and prepare for displacement before a disaster strikes, as well as to better respond to situations when people are forced to find refuge, either within their own country or across an international border.

People who are forced to cross a border in the context of a disaster and the effects of climate change have limited protection when they arrive in another country. Rather than calling for a new binding international convention on cross-border disaster-displacement, the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda supports an approach that focuses on the integration of effective practices by States and (sub-) regional organizations into their own normative frameworks in accordance with their specific situations.

The enormous challenges that cross-border disaster-displacement generates are diverse. Because of their 'borderless' nature, international cooperation as well as regional and national engagement will be crucial. While being a state-led process, the Platform will build strong partnerships between policymakers, practitioners and researchers and will constitute a multi-stakeholder forum for dialogue, information sharing as well as policy and normative development.

## KEY MILESTONES



# OUR ARCHITECTURE

A STATE-LED PROCESS ADDRESSING THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF PEOPLE DISPLACED ACROSS BORDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Under the leadership of member states, the multi-stakeholder Platform on Disaster Displacement is built on three pillars: a Steering Group, an Advisory Committee, and a Coordination Unit.

## STATE LEADERSHIP

The Steering Group is directed by Germany as the Chair for 1.5 years (July 2016-December 2017). During this period, Bangladesh acts as the Vice-Chair and assumes Chairmanship thereafter (January 2018-July 2019). The Steering Group provides overall strategic leadership and guidance on coordination, policy and advocacy of the Platform.

The Steering Group contains between 15 and 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.

Founding members of the Platform on Disaster Displacement:



## TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND ADVICE

The Advisory Committee consists of, inter alia, representatives of international and regional organizations, research institutions, academia, private sector, non-governmental organizations and other civil society stakeholders with expertise in 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 the implementation of the Platform's activities.

## COORDINATION SUPPORT

The Coordination Unit supports the Members of the Platform's Steering Group and relevant partners at the national, regional and global levels in developing and implementing the Platform's activities to fulfill the strategic priorities. The small unit will support, under the guidance of the Chair and the Steering Group, the work of all States, agencies and other stakeholders interested in implementing the recommendations of the Protection Agenda. The Coordination Unit is funded by the generous contribution of Germany.



**OUR MISSION:** WORKING TOWARDS ENHANCED COOPERATION, COORDINATION AND ACTION TO IMPROVE THE PROTECTION OF DISASTER DISPLACED PERSONS, AND PROMOTING CONCERTED EFFORTS AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS AND AMONG STAKEHOLDERS DEALING WITH A BROAD RANGE OF POLICY AND ACTION AREAS INCLUDING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION, HUMAN RIGHTS, MIGRATION MANAGEMENT, REFUGEE PROTECTION, DISASTER RISK REDUCTION, CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION, AND DEVELOPMENT.

## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A STATE-LED PROCESS ADDRESSING THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF PEOPLE DISPLACED ACROSS BORDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### 1 ADDRESS KNOWLEDGE AND DATA GAPS

By linking up with existing data gathering mechanisms, the Platform will seek to address knowledge gaps on why, where, when, and how people are displaced in the context of disasters and climate change. It will also map and consolidate existing information management systems, review them and propose measures to address gap areas regarding comprehensive, reliable and timely global data on disaster displacement.

### 2 ENHANCE THE USE OF IDENTIFIED EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Although persons displaced across borders in disaster contexts are not adequately protected under international law, the Protection Agenda indicated that at least 50 countries have received or refrained from returning children, women and men from disaster-affected countries. For example, after the earthquake in Haiti, 200,000 people were admitted in the Dominican Republic and neighbouring Caribbean countries.

Yet, disaster displacement risks can also be reduced. The Protection Agenda identified measures States can take to help people stay or move out of areas at risk, and address the needs of people who have been internally displaced in the context of disasters and climate change. The Platform will, inter alia, engage with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) to support States in implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction that explicitly references actions related to displacement.

When living conditions deteriorate, individuals commonly use migration to seek opportunities within their country or abroad. Managed properly, **voluntary migration** has the potential for affected communities to better cope with recurrent natural hazards and climate change. On the other hand, the risks posed by disasters have prompted communities and governments to choose **planned relocation** to help people move to safer lands, before and after a disaster strikes. IOM and UNHCR have often assumed organizational leadership in the areas of voluntary migration and planned relocation. The Platform will work closely with both agencies to enable enhanced action.

### 3 PROMOTE POLICY COHERENCE AND MAINSTREAMING OF HUMAN MOBILITY CHALLENGES IN, AND ACROSS, RELEVANT POLICY AND ACTION AREAS

Disaster displacement is multi-causal with climate change being an important, but not the only factor. Population growth, underdevelopment, weak governance and poor urban planning in rapidly expanding cities are important drivers of human mobility as they weaken resilience and exacerbate the impacts of natural hazards and climate change. Efforts to address displacement and its root causes therefore require systematic work across sectors, mandates and areas of expertise. A key gap highlighted by the Nansen Initiative is the need to work across traditional silos and bring together policy and action areas that to date have been uncoordinated to address issues as diverse as humanitarian action, human rights protection, migration management, refugee protection, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and development.

The Platform will promote coherence and enhanced cooperation across relevant global policy dialogues like the WHS, the UNFCCC, the Global Forum for Migration and Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the SDGs.

### 4 PROMOTE POLICY AND NORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT IN GAP AREAS

People who are forced to cross an international border in the context of a disaster and climate change have limited protection when they arrive in another country. In most cases, they will not be considered refugees under international refugee law and human rights law does not give them a right to be admitted and to stay in another country. This is a legal gap, identified by the Nansen Initiative, for a situation that is anticipated to become more frequent in the future.

The Platform on Disaster Displacement, like its predecessor the Nansen Initiative, will not seek to develop new global legal standards or normative frameworks but recognizes that safe humanitarian pathways and protection measures are needed for people who are forced to cross a border in the context of disasters and climate change. As the Protection Agenda sets out, standard-setting activities can be appropriately undertaken at the domestic and regional levels.

# 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” (UNISDR). 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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