

**Second Preparatory Meeting of the 22nd OSCE.
Session II : Cross-dimensional Impacts of Natural and Man-Made Disasters,
Population movements in the context of natural disasters**

UNHCR is grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important OSCE meeting and address the issue of population movements in the context of disasters and climate change.

The most recent IPCC report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, recognizes for the first time that climate change is projected to increase the displacement of people over the 21st Century. In introducing the report, the IPCC chairman¹ stressed that “Climate change will force people into increasing poverty and displacement, exacerbating the factors that lead to conflict”.

It is today better understood that climate change will multiply the impact of food insecurity and water scarcity, to cite just two examples, and exacerbate the vulnerability of millions around the globe. In addition to slow onset events such as droughts and sea level rise, others will be forced out of their homes and see livelihoods destroyed by rapid-onset events, becoming displaced in the process. Philippines Typhoon Haiyan of 2013 is emblematic of the type of disaster scenario that we will be seeing more and more often as climate change begins to bite hard. While adaptation can help to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience, it is unlikely to stop the need for some people to migrate as a means to diversify income and cope with the effects of climate change. Climate-related human mobility will take different forms and will require a variety of responses, especially the protection of the most vulnerable, at all levels.

Why is the Refugee Agency concerned? First, persons of concern to UNHCR – refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons – are huddling in most of the major climate change hotspots around the globe. The major influx of Somalis into Kenya in the last years was motivated as much by the drought affecting Somalia as by the death and disruption by Al Shabab and other forces.

Secondly, UNHCR is increasingly involved in responding to large-scale disasters considered Level.3 emergencies by the UN system. It recently played the global protection lead in response to Philippines Typhoon Haiyan. UNHCR is particularly concerned about the enjoyment of human rights by people relocated or displaced by the effects of disasters and climate change, either within their own borders or across borders. The affected populations may have protection needs and vulnerabilities similar to those whose flight is provoked by violence or human rights abuses.

¹ Rajendra K. Pachauri

While the most affected populations will be those with less resource in least developed countries, OSCE countries are also vulnerable to natural hazards including climate change impacts. To cite just one example, tens of thousands of people are currently made homeless by historical flooding in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. On the other hand, OSCE countries are also concerned as potential countries of destination when people flee disasters and climate change impacts. To better understand how governments, donors, civil society and other actors can prevent, prepare for and respond to these displacements, the Nansen Initiative on Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacement was launched by Norway and Switzerland in October 2012. I will leave the introduction of this Initiative to my colleague Nina Bikeland but one of the main findings so far is that given the magnitude of the issues involved, there is a need for regional collaborative approach, based on principles of international cooperation and burden – and responsibility-sharing. The OSCE provides a particularly relevant platform for this cooperation. UNHCR reaffirms its support in this process, including in providing expertise on the protection dimensions of displacement.

Recommendations

OSCE countries are particularly concerned by climate and disasters induced displacement both as vulnerable countries and as destination countries. UNHCR strongly encourages OSCE countries to:

- mitigate their greenhouse gases to diminish climate change effects and avoid displacement
- support adaptation and DRR actions to enable people to remain in their original settlements or, as a last resort, to support planned relocation of populations who are at risk
- engage in the Nansen Initiative and other processes that aim to promote cooperation and build solutions on these issues
- document the impact of environmental changes on habitats and communities at local level, including whether this is leading to population movements

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