

**IFRC written contribution on internal displacement in the context of the
adverse effects of climate change**

to inform the report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

June 2020

The IFRC welcomes the opportunity to inform the report of the Special Rapporteur, which is an important vehicle to highlight the challenges as well as the opportunities and good practices in addressing internal displacement in the context of disasters and climate change. The report also offers an opportunity to emphasize the important role of locally based organizations that are, in many cases, part of the communities that are experiencing increased risks of climate and disaster induced displacement. They work with communities before, during and after the impacts of disasters and climate events, seeking to ensure people can lead safe, healthy and dignified lives and have an opportunity to thrive. In that respect, the IFRC network addresses displacement as part of our broader humanitarian approach and as one of the risks arising from disasters and climate change.

1. Key issues to consider: the IFRC experience, challenges, and good practices

Every year, millions of people are forced to leave their homes as a result of disasters linked to natural hazards such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones and droughts. Since 2008, an average of 24 million new displacements have taken place each year because of sudden-onset disaster events, a majority of which are weather- and climate-related. This number is likely much higher when accounting for people compelled to move from their place of origin in the context of slow-onset events and processes linked to the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

The IFRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world have just adopted a new 10-year strategy ([Strategy 2030](#)) that puts climate change as the number one threat facing the world. This is in large part due to the increased impact of weather-related disasters around the world and the rising gap in available capacities to respond to humanitarian needs they create, including the rising risk of disaster displacement. In recognition of the need to scale up action, the IFRC as part of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has developed a new set of bold [Ambitions to Address the Climate Crisis](#), which **prioritizes addressing climate displacement** as one of four “Pillars of Action”.

In 2018-2019 IFRC undertook a global [review of IFRC and National Society responses to displacement](#) as a result of disaster and crisis and in the context of climate change. *The following **challenges and good practices** have emerged from the study:*

The negative consequences of displacement can be minimized and managed through for instance the use of early warning systems, contingency planning that can safeguard against displacement or facilitate returns when it is safe to go back, good policy and practice on evacuation and planned relocation.

That said, human mobility and pre-emptive displacement are also coping measures that help people respond to the impact of disasters. Preparing people for displacement entails a **community-based approach**, that considers existing coping mechanisms and strategies that can be shared or further supported.

A first step towards effective prevention and preparedness is to improve the understanding of **displacement as a “risk” triggered by disasters or climate change**, which has the potential to be reduced or prevented. The second step is to use existing tools and methodologies to consider the specific risk of disaster-induced displacement and to identify targeted mitigation or prevention measures.

Preparedness and contingency plans should therefore integrate a **“displacement lens”**, to better anticipate and prepare for different displacement scenarios, considering the broader issues and needs for host communities and others impacted by displacement.

The challenges that are often encountered when responding to situations of displacement include: a) the **perception** that displacement following rapid-onset disasters is short term; b) **resource limitations** and a lack of donor willingness to support longer term plans; c) **access** to displaced people who may flee to locations which are difficult to reach for assessments and assistance; and d) **timing** which is critical if one wants to adopt responses that are relevant, for instance through the preparation of comprehensive emergency operations plans in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

There is therefore a need to ensure that emergency operation plans are comprehensive and include mid-long-term measures such as recovery and livelihoods. But also, to explore and scale up early action measures such as **forecast-based financing** mechanisms, to better anticipate displacement needs ahead of impact. Forecast-based Financing (FbF) is an anticipatory humanitarian mechanism that releases humanitarian funding for pre-agreed early actions based on scientific forecasts and risk data.

The **Philippines Red Cross** has for instance integrated Forecast-based action and financing into existing disaster management systems at national, local and community level, using long run local government funds for early actions triggered by a forecast. This mechanism can play a key role in preventing and reducing disaster-induced displacement, acknowledging that displacement as a coping mechanism is often the only resort people have, to avoid imminent danger or hardship.

Forecast-based financing (FbF) shows clear promise as a tool to assist and protect communities from the risks and impacts of disaster displacement. FbF has already been used to facilitate the evacuation of people (as well as livestock and moveable assets) in advance of sudden onset hazards, including in contexts where impact data surveys and community consultations had highlighted that the lack of transportation for people and livestock would deter them from evacuating ([IFRC, 2018](#); [IFRC 2019](#)). FbF has supported the pre-deployment of food and safe drinking water at evacuation centres, including where communities had identified that a lack of food and water would have deterred them from evacuation ([IFRC, 2018](#)). FbF has also demonstrated an ability to pre-identify at risk communities, including with indicators relevant to displacement risk. For example, in **Bangladesh** prioritisation of FbF funds was based on a combination of forecast and an exposure and vulnerability map, that estimated the percentage of houses that could be at risk of destruction in a particular area.

IFRC findings also indicate that **solutions to ending displacement** should be already integrated in the response phase and unfortunately, both governments and humanitarian agencies have tended to fall short on this.

Displaced people and host communities should be **actively involved and meaningfully consulted** in the planning and implementation of durable solutions. To be able to make voluntary choices, they

must have access to adequate information on the conditions in the place of origin, local integration or resettlement, in a language and format they can understand.

The pursuit of durable solutions is a **gradual process** that involves displaced people overcoming needs and vulnerabilities related to their displacement. There are often complex **barriers** to voluntary, safe and dignified return, including housing, land and property issues, which need to be carefully considered and addressed. Local integration requires acceptance by the host community to be successful and we know that social tension and access to resources may be obstacles to ending displacement. Resettlement is also a challenge for governments and communities: identifying suitable locations can be complex, especially site and community selection. **All these issues must be carefully considered when developing response plans.**

Displacement is also **increasingly urban**. Of the average 17 million people at risk of being displaced by floods, over 80% are in urban or semi-urban areas.

Displaced people who live dispersed in urban areas can become invisible to humanitarian organisations who often lack data and experience as they are more used to approaches that are more suitable for rural contexts than for urban settings. This in part explains the **tendency to concentrate humanitarian responses in camps**. The focus on camp context is often the result of humanitarian responses being built on the assumption that urban displaced outside camps are better off than those living in camps because they can count on the support of relatives or friends or can afford to pay rent – similar assumptions must be tested against local realities and individual circumstances.

Responses must focus more on people's dignity and resilience. Displaced people need to be supported before they become completely destitute and until they can regain their autonomy. In this regard, experience shows that capital and livelihoods (income) and access to basic services are key to people's recovery, as they contribute to people's protection in the long-term, reducing their dependency on external support and preventing people from resorting to harmful strategies to survive, such as selling assets, sending children to work instead of school, early marriage or engaging in transactional sex.

Finally, considerations of vulnerability do not just concern displaced people, but also **host communities**. It is possible for host communities to benefit from a growth in population in the longer term through the injection of knowledge, skills and business opportunities. However, more commonly the impact is detrimental at least in the short term, and can also amplify pre-existing challenges within the host community, which may have already been experiencing hardship and reduced capacities, and is likely to exacerbate tension with displaced communities when resources are further depleted, thus further reducing their resilience.¹

Another important group to consider is **those who remain behind**. In situations of displacement, whether triggered by conflict or disaster, some portions of the affected community may decide to stay or be unable to leave (for example, older or disabled people may remain behind because their physical conditions do not allow them to move). These people should also not be overlooked when responding to a displacement situation as they may be suffering not only from the impact of the event itself but also from the departure of a significant number of people from their community.

¹ UNOCHA. (2017). *Breaking the Impasse: Reducing Protracted Internal Displacement as a Collective Outcome*, p38.

2. Where do we need to invest?

At policy level, investments should translate into:

a) supporting States to **adopt national and local laws, policies and programmes that address disaster-induced displacement** engaging local civil society actors, such as RCRC NS, in the processes and strengthen the resilience of affected people and host communities (as per the Sendai Framework). This means incorporating human mobility into disaster risk management laws and policies, National Adaptation Plans and other relevant local, sub-national and national level legal and policy processes. The IFRC does this for instance through its Disaster Law Programme and has developed a variety of tools and research on the topic. IFRC is happy to share this work and contribute to the thinking of the Commission. In this connection, in [2015](#) and [2019](#), the state parties to Geneva Conventions adopted resolutions at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent recognising new checklists for lawmakers on (1) [law and disaster risk reduction](#) and (2) [law and disaster preparedness and response](#).

Most importantly, law and policy makers should take a **comprehensive approach** when developing and adopting laws and policies about disaster risk management, including disaster-related human mobility and disaster displacement. States are at times under pressure to adopt laws and policies about the disaster displaced as a stand-alone group even before they have basic law and policy in place for disaster management and/or civil protection (e.g., Kenya, Uganda). There is a potential here for creating parallel processes and institutional arrangements but also for institutionalising recovery provisions and rights only for one segment of a disaster-affected population (disregarding other segments affected by a given disaster).

b) supporting awareness raising of relevant government authorities on the need to **develop and enforce hazard-sensitive building codes** and coastal, urban, land-use and other planning related regulation, make critical infrastructure and buildings (hospitals, schools, power stations etc.) disaster- and climate-proof, through an HLP (housing, land and property) approach, that is community-driven. RCRC NS can use their sector expertise and leverage their auxiliary role in this respect.

At an operational level, interventions should support:

a) **vulnerability and capacity assessments** of disaster-prone communities, which analyse human mobility and displacement dimensions. The IFRC uses a well-developed methodology called VCA that contributes to enhance **disaster risk knowledge**, a key component of any Early Warning system and early action;

b) resilience-building of communities in the face of climate change impacts (as 97% of disaster displacement are from weather related (can the 97% be attributed to climate change?) hazards which are predictable), **strengthening institutional capacities and data, information and knowledge** management systems (as per the Cancun Adaptation Framework);

c) addressing the **root causes of vulnerability**. Often this includes livelihood strengthening and diversification, job creation, reproductive health, ecosystem management and restoration, community awareness raising, strengthening community institutions;

d) strengthening **early warning and early action systems**, including contingency and preparedness planning, evacuation mechanisms, and Forecast-based financing, adopting a **people-centred approach** that considers the demographic, gender, cultural and livelihoods characteristics of the target audience.

Early warning is often associated to evacuation. The choice of evacuation centres is an important one to be made if we want to avoid tensions with host communities. In the **Philippines**, where there is short term and recurrent displacement, people are displaced three to four times a year along the same axis. Here the challenge is how to prepare the population to mitigate the consequences of recurrent displacement for both displaced and host communities, notably to avoid disruption of access to education because evacuation centres are often located in schools.

This example illustrates the importance of looking at **displacement as a process** that considers the different parts of the population who are affected by the phenomenon, including both the displaced and the host community. Defining who are the *people at risk* during the pre-displacement phase and what their needs would be if affected, is crucial to any successful evacuation and hosting solution, even if short term.
