

Disaster-induced displacement

Disaster-induced displacement in the Guiding Principles

The Principles use a broad definition of "internally displaced persons" as persons "forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence" for an array of reasons, such as conflict and civil strife, as well as "human-made and natural disasters".

Although the major human rights treaties upon which the Principles are based do not directly refer to internal displacement, the protection these instruments provide certainly applies to displaced persons, including those displaced by natural disasters. Likewise, when natural disasters strike in the context of ongoing armed conflicts, the requirements of international humanitarian law continue to apply.

Typology of disasters¹

The United Nations has defined a disaster as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a society, causing widespread human, material, or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected society to cope using its own resources". By this definition, not every fire, earthquake, drought, epidemic, or industrial accident constitutes a disaster, only those where the losses exceed a society's ability to cope and external aid is required. Most classifications of disaster identify two main types: natural and human-made. Natural disasters may be broken down into three sub-categories—sudden impact, slow-onset, and epidemic diseases—while human-made disasters include two sub-categories— industrial/technological disasters and complex emergencies:

1. **Sudden impact disasters** include floods, earthquakes, tidal waves, tropical storms, volcanic eruptions, and landslides. Floods are the type of natural disaster most frequently associated with sudden migration of large populations and food shortages. Earthquakes cause the greatest number of deaths and overwhelming infrastructural damage.

2. **Slow-onset disasters** include droughts, famine, environmental degradation, deforestation, pest infestation, and desertification (conversion of arable lands to deserts). These disasters are usually the result of adverse weather conditions combined with poor land use.

3. **Epidemic diseases** such as cholera, measles, dysentery, respiratory infections, malaria, and, increasingly, HIV, generally do not trigger large-scale displacement even during a severe outbreak although they often threaten displaced populations, especially those clustered in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions following a major disaster.

4. **Industrial/technological disasters** result from a society's industrial and technological activities that lead to pollution, spillage of hazardous materials, explosions, and fires. They may occur from poor planning and construction of facilities or from neglect of safety procedures. Sudden-onset disasters such as earthquakes and floods as well as human factors such as armed conflict or a

¹ From: Risks and Rights: the Causes, Consequences and Challenges of Development-Induced Displacement, by W. Courtland Robinson, the Brookings Institution-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, May 2003

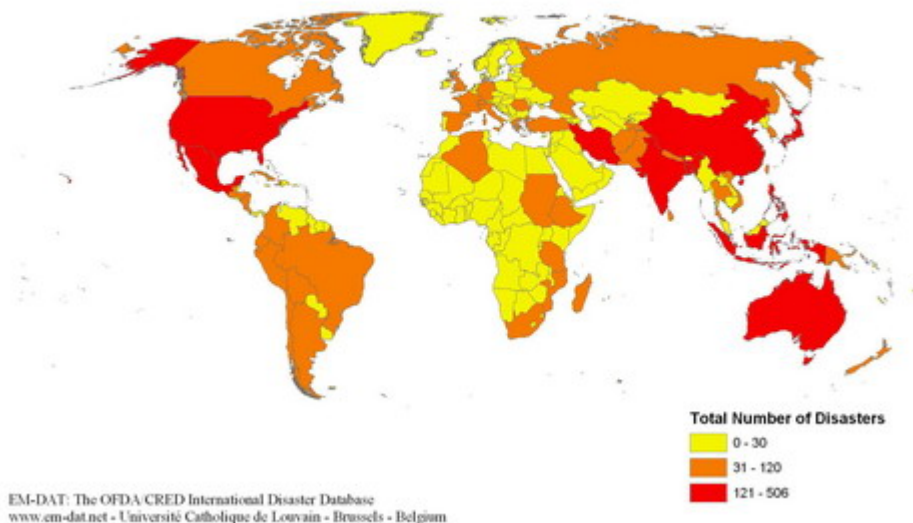
terrorist attack may trigger secondary disasters such as fires, industrial explosions and pollution/contamination.

5. **Complex emergencies** are usually human-made with multiple contributing factors (these may include war, internal conflict and natural disaster) and are marked by large-scale displacement, food insecurity, human rights violations and elevated mortality.

The scope of the crisis²

Over the past decade 1994-2004, the number of natural and technological disasters has inexorably climbed. From 1994 to 1999, reported disasters averaged 459 per year – from 2000 to 2004, this figure shot up by two-thirds to an average 728 disaster events each year. With 719 reported, 2004 was the third worst year of the decade, with Asia remaining the most frequently hit continent.

**Total Number of Natural Disaster Events by Country:
1974-2003**



Both hydro-meteorological and geophysical disasters are more common, becoming respectively 68 percent and 62 percent more frequent between 1993 and 2003. This reflects longer-term trends: between 1960 and 2003, the number of reported hydro-meteorological disasters has multiplied more than seven times, while geophysical disasters have multiplied five times. However, despite the increased number of disasters reported over the decade, average annual death toll dropped from over 75,000 per year (1994-1998) to 59,000 per year (1999-2003). The death toll from natural and technological disasters during 2004 soared to around 250,000, mainly due to the Indian Ocean tsunami on 26 December 2004.

However, over the same period, the numbers of people affected (people requiring immediate assistance for basic needs, injured or homeless) continued to climb. On the basis of available data,

² From: World Disaster Report 2004 and 2005, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society

an average 250 million people per year were affected by disasters between 1994 and 2004. Disasters during 2000-2004 affected one-third more people than during 1995-1999. Over this period, the numbers of people affected by disasters in countries of low development doubled, with Africa showing the greatest increase.

The fact that more people are being affected by disasters reflects a range of factors. Overall numbers of reported disasters are increasing, driven partly by a more variable global climate. Meanwhile, a rapid increase of population in poorer parts of the world – combined with rapid, unplanned development (particularly in urban areas) – is putting more people at risk.

Protection risks in situations of displacement caused by natural disasters³

- International assistance is denied access to victims of disasters or is subject to restrictions, while authorities are unable or unwilling to provide adequate assistance to their population
- IDPs face discrimination in the distribution of humanitarian and reintegration assistance, in particular in areas with pre-existing patterns of discrimination or ethnic conflict
- IDPs are forcefully directed into, and confined in, temporary shelters or camps, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and ensure their security
- IDPs are evicted from the shelters or settlements that they seek out on their own, without adequate provision of alternative accommodation
- IDPs in camps find themselves living in crowded, unsanitary conditions where food and other necessities may be scarce, and with risks of violence, theft and other crimes against and among the camp residents
- The military involvement in the initial rescue and humanitarian response increases risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as children's military recruitment, among displaced communities
- Displaced women and children face heightened vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, or trafficking
- Children are separated from their family
- Displaced children lack access to school, as a result of destruction and damage to schools, difficult transport conditions, lack of school uniforms and lack of teachers
- IDPs have lost their personal documentation, leading to the denial of access to social services
- IDPs, in particular women, find themselves excluded from the planning about the location and layout of camps and settlements, the planning of aid distribution, etc.
- IDPs are prevented from returning home to areas declared "security zones" or exclusion zones", where reconstruction is forbidden; or IDPs are pressed to return by the authorities to demonstrate normalisation
- IDPs have lost their properties and face obstacles to reclaiming them, for example in areas where landmarks for demarcation have been wiped out, or when property records have been destroyed.

Return to the tsunami-affected areas: Recommendations from the UN Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs (2005)

During his mission, the Representative noted that in many countries affected by the tsunamis, serious consideration was being given to introducing so-called buffer-zones in coastal areas where construction would not be allowed so as to limit destruction and devastation by any future disasters of a similar nature. However, in some countries, there were reports that these zones were being

³ Adapted from Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005

established sometimes in a discriminatory manner without proper scientific or other justification; for instance, some coastal areas would have a buffer-zone imposed reaching further inland than in other areas without any clearly identifiable reason. In some areas, construction of tourism facilities was permitted, while local residents were not allowed to reconstruct their homes. In other areas, the local fishing industry was very hard hit by such restrictions, furthermore their legitimate concerns were not taken into consideration. Generally, the Representative notes that the creation of such buffer-zones has to be done in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, balancing all relevant aspects, including geographical features, concerns for environmental protection, and impact on the livelihoods of traditional communities or indigenous peoples.

(Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters, Working Visit to Asia, 27 February to 5 March 2005, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights)

Disaster risk reduction: The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015

Less than one month after the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster that claimed up to 250,000 lives, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Hyogo, Japan, in January 2005, pledged to reduce the risks facing millions of people who are exposed to natural disasters. The 168 delegations adopted a framework for action calling on States to put disaster risk at the centre of political agendas and national policies. The “Hyogo Framework for Action: 2005 – 2015” will strengthen the capacity of disaster-prone countries to address risk and invest heavily in disaster preparedness. The conference also adopted a declaration recommending, among other things, that a “culture of disaster prevention and resilience” must be fostered at all levels and recognising the relationship between disaster reduction, sustainable development and poverty reduction. These non-binding documents will serve as a “blueprint” to guide nations and individuals to build disaster-resilient communities. Building on the commitments forged in Yokohama, Japan, 10 years ago, the renewed plan calls on the international community to pursue an integrated multi-hazard approach for sustainable development to reduce the incidence and severity of disasters.

The Hyogo Framework for Action: Priorities for Action (excerpt)

4. Reduce the underlying risk factors

19. Disaster risks related to changing social, economic, environmental conditions and land use, and the impact of hazards associated with geological events, weather, water, climate variability and climate change, are addressed in sector development planning and programmes as well as in post-disaster situations.

Key activities:

...

(ii) Social and economic development practices

(d) Promote food security as an important factor in ensuring the resilience of communities to hazards, particularly in areas prone to drought, flood, cyclones and other hazards that can weaken agriculture-based livelihoods.

(e) Integrate disaster risk reduction planning into the health sector; promote the goal of “hospitals safe from disaster” by ensuring that all new hospitals are built with a level of resilience that strengthens their capacity to remain functional in disaster situations and implement mitigation measures to reinforce existing health facilities, particularly those providing primary health care.

(f) Protect and strengthen critical public facilities and physical infrastructure, particularly schools, clinics, hospitals, water and power plants, communications and transport lifelines, disaster warning and management centres, and culturally important lands and structures through proper design, retrofitting and re-building, in order to render them adequately resilient to hazards.

- (g) Strengthen the implementation of social safety-net mechanisms to assist the poor, the elderly and the disabled, and other populations affected by disasters. Enhance recovery schemes including psycho-social training programmes in order to mitigate the psychological damage of vulnerable populations, particularly children, in the aftermath of disasters.
- (h) Incorporate disaster risk reduction measures into post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation processes and use opportunities during the recovery phase to develop capacities that reduce disaster risk in the long term, including through the sharing of expertise, knowledge and lessons learned.
- (i) Endeavour to ensure, as appropriate, that programmes for displaced persons do not increase risk and vulnerability to hazards.
- (j) Promote diversified income options for populations in high-risk areas to reduce their vulnerability to hazards, and ensure that their income and assets are not undermined by development policy and processes that increase their vulnerability to disasters.

Resources

Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters, A Working Visit to Asia by the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs, 27 February to 5 March 2005, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/20050227_Tsunami.pdf

The Hyogo Framework of Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities of Disasters, World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

<http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr/intergover/official-doc/L-docs/Hyogo-framework-for-action-english.pdf>

The Hyogo Declaration, World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

<http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr/intergover/official-doc/L-docs/Hyogo-declaration-english.pdf>

Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World, Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation, World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction Yokohama, Japan, 23-27 May 1994

http://www.unisdr.org/eng/about_isdr/bd-yokohama-strat-eng.htm

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – IFRC

<http://www.ifrc.org/>

United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP

<http://www.unep.org/>

Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters

Since 1998, the CRED has maintained EM-DAT, a worldwide database on disasters. It contains essential core data on the occurrence and effects of over 14,000 disasters in the world from 1999 to the present.

<http://www.cred.be/>

Living Space for Environmental Refugees – LISER FOUNDATION

<http://www.liser.org/>



Provention Consortium

Global coalition of governments, international organizations, academic institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations dedicated to increasing the safety of vulnerable communities and to reducing the impact of disasters in developing countries.

<http://www.proventionconsortium.org/>