



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-fifth session

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**Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations**

## **International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/115](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve the international response to natural disasters and to report thereon to the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session. The report provides an overview of progress made and outlines related trends, challenges and thematic issues. It concludes with recommendations for further improvements. The period covered in the report is 1 January to 31 December 2019.

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\* [A/75/150](#).



## I. Year in review

### A. Disaster data for 2019

1. The year 2019 was the second warmest year on record<sup>1</sup> and marked by frequent and destructive disasters, exacerbated by climate change, leading to loss of lives and livelihoods, large-scale displacement, food and water insecurity and severe health impacts. Disasters disproportionately affected the most vulnerable, especially women, children, older persons, displaced persons and persons with disabilities, and eroded their resilience to future disasters and other shocks.

2. For 2019, the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters recorded 396 disaster events which affected 98.7 million people, caused 11,750 deaths, and inflicted nearly \$103 billion in damage.<sup>2</sup> The number of disaster events was 15 per cent above the annual average of 343 events over the past 10 years and a 25 per cent increase from 2018. Floods were the deadliest type of disasters, responsible for 45 per cent of recorded deaths. Floods and storms accounted for 68 per cent of the total number of people affected. Asia was the continent most affected, with 40 per cent of all disasters, 45 per cent of total deaths and 74 per cent of people affected globally.<sup>3</sup>

3. Disasters caused an estimated 24.9 million new internal displacements in 140 countries and territories in 2019, which is the highest figure recorded since 2012. Weather-related hazards caused more than 95 per cent of these displacements, most of them in Asia.<sup>4</sup>

4. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that 5.1 million people in 95 countries and territories, including people displaced in previous years, remained internally displaced as a result of disasters at the end of 2019. This is the first time that the Centre has compiled such a global stock figure, which remains an underestimate due to limited data collected on the duration of displacement following disasters.<sup>5</sup>

5. Extreme weather events were the primary driver of acute food insecurity<sup>6</sup> for 34 million people in 25 countries, in particular in the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, Central America and South Asia, reflecting an increase of 5 million people since 2018. Of the 135 million acutely food insecure people globally, conflict and insecurity remained the main driver of food crises in 2019.<sup>7</sup>

### B. Overview of disasters associated with natural hazards in 2019

6. Across Africa, disasters inflicted a heavy toll. In Southern Africa, a prolonged cycle of droughts and floods affected millions of people and increased vulnerability to new shocks. The region's worst sudden-onset disaster in two decades occurred

<sup>1</sup> World Meteorological Organization (WMO), *WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019* (Geneva, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, Emergency Events Database, available at [www.emdat.be](http://www.emdat.be) (accessed on 14 August 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, "Disaster year in review 2019", *CRED Crunch*, Issue No. 58 (April 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020* (Geneva, 2020). Owing to the scarcity of data, displacement estimates are conservative regarding slow-onset hazards including drought, coastal and riverbank erosion and sea level rise.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and Cadre harmonisé (CH) Phase 3 or above.

<sup>7</sup> Food Security Information Network, *2020 Global Report on Food Crises: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions* (2020).

when Tropical Cyclones Idai and Kenneth struck Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe within six weeks of each other, resulting in over 1,000 deaths and damage affecting more than 3.8 million people.

7. In the Horn of Africa, drought left 11.7 million people severely food insecure, and floods affected nearly 3.4 million people. Some areas faced global acute malnutrition rates that were more than double the emergency threshold. Lack of access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation worsened disease outbreaks. In Somalia, drought resulted in the lowest harvest yields in 25 years, and floods displaced over 400,000 people. In South Sudan, flooding affected 900,000 people.

8. In Central Africa, unprecedented floods in the Central African Republic, Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo affected 50,000, 170,000 and 900,000 people, respectively. In the Sahel region and in the Middle East and North Africa, climate-related disasters and stressors compounded humanitarian needs in areas already affected by conflict, violence and insecurity.

9. In Asia and the Pacific, Cyclone Fani caused over \$1.8 billion in damages in Bangladesh and India. Heavy monsoon rains led to flooding in Bangladesh and Myanmar, affecting 7.6 million people in Bangladesh and displacing over 400,000 people in these countries. Drought affected 5 million people in Pakistan. Heavy rainfall caused unseasonal flooding in Afghanistan, affecting 280,000 people. In the Philippines, Typhoon Phanfone displaced 145,000 people and affected 2.4 million. Another 458,000 people were displaced by Typhoon Kammuri, while a series of powerful earthquakes in Cotabato affected more than 350,000 people and displaced 160,000. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Typhoon Lingling displaced more than 6,000 people and inundated 46,000 hectares of farmland. The Mount Ulawun volcano erupted in Papua New Guinea, displacing over 16,000 people. Tropical cyclones displaced thousands of people across Pacific islands, including Fiji, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Tonga and Vanuatu.

10. In the Caribbean, Hurricane Dorian struck the Bahamas in September, bringing category 5 winds, heavy rains and storm surges, with economic damages estimated at \$3.4 billion. In Central America, 4.4 million people experienced acute food insecurity, primarily due to drought, while parts of South America saw displacement due to floods.

### **C. Funding for disaster response in 2019**

11. In 2019, a total of \$741.8 million was reported to the Financial Tracking Service of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in response to emergencies classified as disasters, including \$409 million in response to cyclones and hurricanes, \$188.1 million for response to droughts, \$121.1 million in response to floods and landslides and \$23.6 million for response to earthquakes.

12. The Central Emergency Response Fund allocated \$214 million for operations targeting the effects of disasters. This included \$133 million to address needs in drought-affected countries, \$43.4 million to respond to tropical cyclones, \$34.5 million for response to floods and \$3.1 million for response to an earthquake. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs country-allocated \$176.6 million for disaster-related activities through its based pooled funds, often complementing Central Emergency Response Fund allocations and reinforcing targeted and timely responses.

## II. Progress in strengthening disaster preparedness, response and resilience

### A. Humanitarian implications of the climate crisis

13. The climate crisis and the associated increase in disaster risk is rapidly outpacing the ability of countries to adapt, prepare and respond. Of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change, 11 have appealed for international humanitarian aid in each of the past seven years.<sup>8</sup> The climate crisis and advancing sea-level rise represent an existential threat to many small island developing States. Heatwaves are projected to become more common, with higher mortality and other health impacts. Recurring droughts and intensifying water stress and scarcity threaten livelihoods and aggravate the risk of competition for scarce resources, insecurity, famine and displacement. Climate-related security risks are likely to fuel violence and conflict. Consequently, the demands on the international humanitarian system will continue to increase and challenge its capacity to respond. The number of people requiring humanitarian assistance and protection owing to climate-related disasters could double to over 200 million by 2050 and climate-related response funding requirements could increase up to \$20 billion annually by 2030.<sup>9</sup>

14. To adapt to this outlook, the humanitarian system has to continue to increase efforts to anticipate natural hazards and act early and rapidly to prevent them from becoming major disasters. Humanitarian organizations have to continue to adapt their analysis, capacities and planning to address the humanitarian impacts of climate change, and strengthen their partnerships with development, climate change and disaster risk reduction actors. Humanitarian organizations need to better understand climate science, future trajectories and scenarios, systemic and intersecting risks and cascading effects of climate extremes and stressors to inform actions to address multidimensional challenges aggravated by the climate crisis, such as disease outbreaks, famine, instability, conflict, displacement and disruption to essential services including health and education.

15. The international community must accelerate and intensify efforts to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to avoid an escalation of the climate crisis and associated risks and impacts, build resilience and reduce the need for humanitarian assistance. This requires greater ambition, commitment, leadership and joined-up action by all stakeholders. Following the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in November 2019, and in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement and the latest science of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, more ambitious nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and increased and improved means of implementation are imperative to ensure transformative mitigation, adaptation and resilience outcomes, in particular for vulnerable communities and countries. It is also critical that all countries heed the invitation of the Paris Agreement to come forward with long-term low greenhouse gas emissions development strategies.

16. Milestones such as meeting Sendai Framework target (e) on substantially increasing the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by the end of 2020 and the initiatives launched at the United Nations 2019

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2020* (2019).

<sup>9</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "The cost of doing nothing: the humanitarian price of climate change and how it can be avoided", 2019.

Climate Action Summit, held in September, such as the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership and the InsuResilience Global Partnership for Climate and Disaster Risk Finance and Insurance, are crucial steps in strengthening capacity to reduce risks and withstand and respond to the impact of disasters. Key intergovernmental events in 2019, including the sixth Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the high-level mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway, the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, and the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week assessed progress and gaps and focused on priority actions and future directions for addressing disaster and climate risks and impacts.

17. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored the systemic and interconnected nature of risk, including when interacting with disasters and climate change, and the need for the humanitarian system and partners to adapt accordingly.<sup>10</sup> The pandemic poses challenges for operations and the delivery of assistance and protection, including movement restrictions and other containment measures, reduced access to people in need and requirement for remote support approaches. The risk of disease outbreaks during disasters increases when water and sanitation and health services are disrupted, and people seek shelter in evacuation centres and other crowded locations. Climate change and ecosystem degradation are expected to contribute to the spread of biological hazards such as vector-borne diseases to previously unexposed locations. It is essential to strengthen disaster-resilient water, sanitation and health systems and capacity to respond early and quickly to disease outbreaks, including through multisectoral and multi-hazard disaster risk reduction and increased investment in prevention and preparedness. The Secretary-General's climate change strategy emphasizes a green recovery from COVID-19, outlining six climate positive actions: invest in green jobs; do not bail out polluting industries; end fossil-fuel subsidies; take climate risks into account in all financial and policy decisions; work together to meet the challenges presented by climate change; and, most importantly, leave no one behind.

## **B. Lessons learned and best practices in the response to Tropical Cyclones Idai and Kenneth**

18. Taking place in a region already impacted by drought and severe food insecurity, Tropical Cyclones Idai and Kenneth reinforced the urgency of strengthening preparedness, early warning and action, rapid response, resilient recovery and risk-informed development, and of addressing the risks and vulnerabilities underlying recurrent humanitarian need. The response and needs received high-level attention and engagement, including at the special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on the response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe in April, its 2019 humanitarian affairs segment and a joint high-level mission of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Vice-Presidency of the Council to the affected countries.

19. Early warning systems helped save lives and protect livelihoods. The trajectory, evolution and impact of Tropical Cyclone Idai, which caused most damage through flooding, highlighted the importance of strengthening multi-hazard, impact-based forecasting and early warning, further improving evacuation planning and pre-identifying and communicating shelter locations for at-risk communities. This is critical where people are less familiar with safety measures, as was the case with

<sup>10</sup> See the Secretary-General's policy briefs on COVID-19, available at [www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-secretary-general/](http://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-secretary-general/); and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's guidance on COVID-19, available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/covid-19-outbreak-readiness-and-response>.

Tropical Cyclone Kenneth, which struck in Mozambique further north than previously recorded cyclones.

20. The response highlighted the added value of international and regional support to affected countries. After Tropical Cyclone Idai struck, humanitarian organizations delivered life-saving assistance to a million people within one month, reaching over 886,000 people with food assistance, carrying out a cholera vaccination campaign to immunize 900,000 people – preventing a possible epidemic – while also distributing bed nets and shelter materials and re-establishing water systems.

21. International humanitarian actors demonstrated effective coordination across the United Nations, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in support of Government-led response. These efforts included the activation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Protocols in Mozambique, which quickly established coordination structures and emergency operations centres for enhanced collaboration and deployment of senior staff and technical personnel, including experts in information management, civil-military coordination, needs assessment and environmental emergency. The civil-military coordination structure set up in Mozambique helped foreign military and civilian defence assets provide specific capabilities to support the response. Regional air assets assisted immediate search and rescue and assessment efforts. Joint preparedness planning by international actors and the National Institute of Disaster Management contributed to the timeliness and effectiveness of the response, despite delays in reaching some affected communities due to the scale of the disaster and access constraints.

22. International funding was made available rapidly. The Central Emergency Response Fund demonstrated its role as a critical, rapid and flexible lifesaving funding instrument, allocating \$21.4 million for the response within 48 hours after Cyclone Idai struck and \$13 million for the response to Cyclone Kenneth. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) mobilized \$20 million to restore crop production capacities, preserve livestock assets and revitalize sustainable fisheries and reached over 1 million people with agricultural kits and farming tools, including with electronic vouchers worth over \$2.5 million to assist 59,000 households to recover agricultural livelihoods and food security.

23. Community engagement and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse were priorities in the response. Messaging was shared with communities in accessible formats and local languages, aid workers were required to sign and implement a code of conduct, and referral systems were established to ensure that people reporting potential sexual exploitation and abuse received victim- and survivor-centred support.

24. Greater use of triggers for early action and cash-based interventions and involvement of local civil society and the private sector, together with larger quantities of pre-positioned relief items and better transition to early recovery, could have further strengthened the response and mitigated disaster impacts.

### **C. Strengthening response preparedness, early warning and resilience: reinforcing local capacities**

25. Greater investment in disaster preparedness is essential to save lives and livelihoods, and reduce the cost of response in the face of the climate crisis. International support should augment national and local efforts, systematically strengthen their capacities, leadership and community engagement and reduce need, risk and vulnerability over time. In 2019, good progress was made towards this in a range of efforts.

26. Humanitarian and development actors continued to reduce need, risk and vulnerability related to disasters, including in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Somalia and the Sudan. Collective outcomes achieved included strengthening community climate resilience, as well as national and local capacities to both anticipate and respond to climate shocks, thereby reducing the proportion of affected people and vulnerable households. In many other countries, humanitarian-development collaboration was strengthened across sectors. For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) focused on improving access to water and sanitation, health, education and social protection before, during and after disasters and other shocks in a number of countries, including Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Yemen, Zimbabwe and in the occupied Palestinian territory.

27. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Response Preparedness approach was implemented in 69 countries to develop a shared understanding of risks and ensure readiness to respond to shocks with increased speed, predictability and effectiveness. The approach provided a framework for ensuring international support complements national and local preparedness and response and is increasingly focused on greater community engagement and localization.

28. The United Nations and partners increased support for developing the capacities of countries vulnerable to disasters. The Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative supported the assessment and development of disaster risk reduction capacities in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Comoros, Jordan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mauritius and Togo and took steps to expand its support capacity at the regional level to address additional requests for services.

29. Considering the interconnections between natural hazards and disease outbreaks, the World Health Organization, FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health and other partners worked to strengthen national capacities to manage the risks of outbreaks and other health emergencies and to implement the International Health Regulations (2005). The measures included national action planning for health security, simulation exercises, after-action reviews, multi-hazard risk assessments and workshops to develop national road maps addressing the human-animal interface.

30. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system, managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, adapted its methodology and services to requests for tailored support to national and regional response capacities. In 2019, United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams strengthened national and regional capacities to access international humanitarian support and lead responses. This included support for needs assessment and national response coordination in Comoros and Mozambique and in the Bahamas, including in support of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency. Joint induction training was carried out with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management and Emergency Response and Assessment Team members to strengthen collaboration and interoperability.

31. In 2019, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group conducted three regional earthquake simulation exercises in Azerbaijan, Cuba and Thailand to strengthen national and regional capacities to respond and coordinate with international urban search-and-rescue teams. Altogether, more than 600 responders and stakeholders were trained.

32. Timely and actionable information provided by multi-hazard early warning systems is essential for taking effective early action to prevent and mitigate disaster impacts. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is developing the Global Multi-Hazard Alert System for collecting, standardizing and making available early warning information and alerts produced by national and regional systems. This will

be complemented by the WMO mechanism to provide climate, weather and water-related information products and services to humanitarian organizations.

33. The Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems initiative implemented 11 projects to increase access to early warning and risk information, covering 44 of the least developed countries and small island developing States. In 2019, the initiative supported the launch of new early warning systems in Burkina Faso, Fiji and Papua New Guinea and commenced new projects to strengthen early warning capacities in Afghanistan, Chad and Togo.

#### **D. Importance of logistics and customs procedures during disasters**

34. Recent disasters highlighted the importance of efficient cross-border management and customs procedures for the expedited importation of relief consignments and effective responses. Affected countries and their airports, ports and customs administrations have an essential role in facilitating the timely importation of relief goods. During disasters, the volume of incoming cargo flights, ships and relief consignments may increase significantly and lead to logistical bottlenecks and delays. If these challenges are not addressed, relief goods may be released too late or even never reach the people in need and, in the case of unsolicited or inappropriate relief items, may not meet actual needs and instead end up burdening the capacities of customs authorities.

35. Mutually reinforcing initiatives to address this challenge are ongoing. The World Customs Organization review of the revised Kyoto Convention on the Harmonization and Simplification of Customs Procedures, including annex J, chapter 5, on relief consignments, provides an opportunity to update the framework to address contemporary challenges for customs procedures.

36. In 2019, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development presented a plan for implementing the Automated System for Relief Emergency Consignments tool to support Member States and their customs administrations with simplified customs procedures and an automated mechanism for needs-based prioritization for clearance and release of relief consignments.

37. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business is developing, in consultation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Importation and Customs Clearance Together! Working Group, a policy recommendation and guidelines for cross-border facilitation measures for disaster relief. The Working Group is also working on a mechanism to assist customs administrations quantify and reduce the time and cost of border clearance processes of relief consignments during disasters.

38. In 2019, Importation and Customs Clearance Together! helped mobilize key actors in the importation of relief, including national authorities, customs administrations, humanitarian organizations and the private sector, to facilitate and expedite customs and immigration procedures during disaster responses in the Bahamas, Comoros and Mozambique.

39. Co-chaired by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Expert Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response in Aviation aims to improve the effectiveness and resilience of airports as hubs for humanitarian assistance during disasters by enhancing their capacities and ensuring efficient information flow and coordination between humanitarian actors and aviation stakeholders. In the Bahamas and



Mozambique, the Expert Group provided situation reports on operational constraints at the airport to support decision-making for deployments.

40. Since its launch in 2009, the Get Airports Ready for Disaster partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Deutsche Post DHL has supported the response capacity of 53 airports in 27 countries and trained 1,340 professionals in related fields to manage the influx of humanitarian aid and personnel and address logistical challenges during disasters. In 2019, workshops and airport response plan analyses were conducted in Honduras, Iraq, Madagascar, Nepal and Peru. Under the Memorandum of Understanding between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Deutsche Post DHL, disaster response teams were deployed to provide logistical support in response to Tropical Cyclone Idai and Hurricane Dorian.

## **E. Enhancing the collection, sharing and use of data**

41. Significant progress has been made in collecting robust and comparable disaggregated data on disaster risk, damage and loss. The Sendai Framework monitor and the DesInventar Sendai disaster loss database system enable reporting against the targets of the Sendai Framework and relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Launched at the sixth Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the aim of the Global Risk Assessment Framework is to improve understanding of the hazards and risks covered under the Sendai Framework and inform planning and decision-making. Such data should systematically link with operational response data and inform efforts to strengthen resilience, preparedness and future responses. People affected also require access to information to support their decisions and ensure transparency and accountability of assistance.

42. The lack of shared standards for the collection, exchange and comparison of disaster-related statistics forms a major challenge and may also affect the effectiveness of regional and cross-border collaboration. To address this and strengthen related capacities of national statistics offices, the Statistical Commission is developing a common statistical framework for disasters and a multisectoral network of experts.

43. The Centre for Humanitarian Data of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs oversaw record growth in the Humanitarian Data Exchange platform, which, as at mid-August 2020 hosted more than 17,600 datasets shared by 279 organizations, including information about disasters. Its new Data Grid feature covers the most relevant data for understanding a country context by prioritizing and grouping core data. The significant growth in the number of users and data downloaded from the platform since its launch in 2014 indicates that more data is being used to inform decisions. In 2019, the Centre focused on enhancing predictive analytics capacities, in particular the design and validation of projections and triggers for the drought anticipatory action pilot framework in Somalia.

44. Innovative approaches can help overcome data scarcity. The Joint Analysis of Disaster Exposure initiative of the Pacific Disaster Center, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and WFP uses predictive analytics and hazard exposure modelling to inform preparedness and response across Asia and the Pacific by providing accurate estimation of disaster impacts and the number of people affected, including in geographic locations where data is scarce and challenging to access. In addition, enhanced use of mobile phone and satellite data to address data gaps should be pursued.

45. The INFORM initiative continues to publish its Global Risk Index biannually. Guidance and training material have been made available for countries and

organizations to conduct risk analysis using the INFORM methodology. INFORM partners have commenced development of a tool to monitor dynamic risks, such as seasonal and slow-onset hazards, support early warning processes and decisions around preparedness and early action. Partners are also exploring how INFORM could incorporate projections of future climate impacts to understand potential risk trajectories and guide longer-term programming.

## **F. Financing for anticipatory approaches**

46. Anticipatory action and forecast-based approaches and related financing should be expanded to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and impact of such initiatives in the face of the climate crisis and emerging disease outbreaks. Enhanced coordination, coherence and complementarity of anticipatory initiatives would help to achieve the necessary scale-up.

47. 2019 saw greater implementation of anticipatory approaches and early action. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs advanced collective anticipatory action and catalysing system change and learning, including through Central Emergency Response Fund allocations. In Somalia, the Office, the World Bank and the humanitarian country team established a system-wide anticipatory action framework to respond to forecast extraordinary droughts. Further pilot frameworks are planned in Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi and sub-Saharan Africa.

48. Launched at the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit, the Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership is driving a systemic shift towards more anticipatory action. The Partnership aims to cover, by 2025, 1 billion more people by leveraging new or improved early warning systems and financing and delivery mechanisms to act ahead of predicted disasters.

49. Disaster risk insurance and contingency financing were used in a complementary manner in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, when the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility paid out \$12.8 million to the Bahamas, while the Inter-American Development Bank provided a \$100 million loan, which encouraged the Government to use the funds for strengthening disaster risk management, exemplifying how risk financing instruments can incentivize further risk-informed investments.

50. The African Risk Capacity pay-outs provided nearly \$24 million for governments, Start Network and WFP to implement pre-agreed drought contingency plans in Senegal, Mauritania and Zimbabwe. By end of year, WFP and Start Network had purchased six African Risk Capacity Replica policies to match its insurance coverage of four countries, protecting 1.4 million people from the risk of drought.

51. Illustrative of the scale of pre-agreed contingency financing, the World Bank activated the International Development Association Crisis Response Window to provide \$545 million to restore livelihoods and repair infrastructure following Tropical Cyclone Idai. In Kenya, the International Development Association rapidly disbursed \$70 million to support the Government's flood response, as part of the \$200 million Disaster Risk Management Development Policy with the catastrophe deferred drawdown option for strengthening resilience.

52. Further collaboration is needed with international financial institutions and the insurance industry to develop bigger, better and faster contingency financing instruments and expand the range of insurance products that pay out earlier to mitigate the impact of shocks.

53. FAO implemented anticipatory action in countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America where forecast hazards materialized and the anticipatory measures triggered proved timely and appropriate, helping to safeguard agricultural livelihoods, improve food security and nutrition and strengthen resilience. Evaluations of early action in response to forecast droughts in Colombia and the Philippines showed that every \$1 invested had a return of \$2.6 and \$4.4, respectively, in losses avoided.<sup>11</sup>

54. WFP implemented forecast-based anticipatory actions for floods and storms with government and private sector partners in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines, where cash transfers provided to vulnerable families ahead of imminent hazards helped them move to safer areas, fortify their homes or buy essential supplies. These experiences generated evidence on the benefits of anticipatory action, including for scaling up anticipatory cash transfers with Central Emergency Response Fund support in Bangladesh.

## G. Disasters and food security

55. Disasters are among the main drivers of acute food crises and associated impacts such as crippled food production and livelihoods, malnutrition, disrupted markets and public health and animal disease outbreaks. Climate change continues to exacerbate disaster risk and impacts on food security with cascading effects. This was illustrated by how tropical cyclones and exceptionally heavy and prolonged rains following an extended drought created favourable breeding conditions for desert locusts, which led to a historic outbreak and devastation to crops and pasture in the greater Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia.

56. Humanitarian and development actors should continue to collaborate to address gaps in collection and use of food security data and engage with vulnerable countries. More reliable, timely and accessible data and analysis can inform early warning and early action and enable assistance, including social protection mechanisms, to target vulnerable people ahead of disasters to prevent food crises and their consequences.

57. Poor households, often highly dependent on agriculture and pastoralism, are among the most affected by disasters and the least resilient. Approximately 8 out of 10 people who are acutely food insecure rely on crops, fisheries, livestock or forestry assets for their survival.<sup>12</sup> Women are more likely to be food insecure than men and often lack access to resources, assets and technology essential to improving agricultural productivity. Shock-responsive social protection systems, cash transfers, scalable safety nets and disaster risk insurance help protect people's food security and livelihoods and build resilience, exemplified by the WFP R4 Rural Resilience Initiative, which in 2019 provided insurance coverage to over 93,000 farmers (60 per cent women) and benefited 600,000 people across seven African countries.<sup>13</sup>

58. Disasters, climate change and environmental degradation have a severe impact on pastoralist communities and their food security, livelihoods and access to water and grazing. Humanitarian partners are working in various regions to support pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities mitigate drought impacts on their food security and livelihoods, including by supporting cooperative arrangements and legal and policy arrangements for cross-border pastoral mobility and by using the

<sup>11</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Colombia: impact of early warning early action – boosting food security and social cohesion on the frontline of the migration crisis", 2019; and FAO, "The Philippines: impact of early warning early action – exploring the interplay between El Niño-induced drought, conflict and gender", 2020.

<sup>12</sup> FAO, "Changing the way disasters are managed: linking social protection mechanisms with early warning early action systems", 2019.

<sup>13</sup> WFP, *R4 Rural Resilience Initiative Annual Report 2019*.

Displacement Tracking Matrix of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to track transhumance movements.

## H. Disaster displacement

59. Addressing disaster displacement requires a collaborative long-term approach involving humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation actors, with whole-of-government engagement and community participation. Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation strategies should address the drivers and consequences of disaster displacement and contribute to durable solutions. Launched at the sixth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Words into Action guidelines on disaster displacement provide practical guidance to help Governments in these efforts. In 2019 their piloting commenced in the Andean region, South Asia and Southern Africa. In addition, the national policies and guidelines on disaster displacement, planned relocation and durable solutions developed recently by the Governments of Fiji and Vanuatu are examples of national leadership that could be pursued in other contexts.

60. Important steps were taken in 2019 to strengthen political commitment and action on displacement, including in the context of disasters and climate change. The Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Internal Displacement initiated work to identify concrete recommendations on improving the response and solutions to internal displacement, including in the context of disasters. The tenth anniversary of the Kampala Convention, together with the African Union Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, catalysed greater awareness and strengthening of national frameworks, including new ratifications of the Convention. The multi-stakeholder plan of action (2018–2020) launched during the twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement continued to advocate for collective action to reduce and resolve internal displacement through prevention, protection and solutions. The beginning of the second phase of the Task Force on Displacement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the new strategy of the State-led Platform on Disaster Displacement set new priorities for addressing displacement challenges. The appointment of the Special Adviser on Climate Action at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will help strengthen responses to protection needs caused by the climate crisis and provide guidance on application of existing international protection frameworks as relevant.<sup>14</sup>

61. Regional collaboration on cross-border disaster displacement increased in 2019. The member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) endorsed the new Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region, which includes a provision on disaster displacement. The Pacific Response to Disaster Displacement Project was launched to support Pacific small island developing States to address disaster displacement. Inter-agency efforts with United Nations regional commissions and regional consultative processes on Migration were undertaken in Africa and the Americas to strengthen the capacities of disaster risk reduction and migration actors on disaster displacement.

62. Much of the new disaster displacement reported in 2019 related to pre-emptive evacuations. Cyclones Fani and Bulbul triggered more than 5 million displacements

<sup>14</sup> See also Sanjula Weerasinghe, *In Harm's Way: International Protection in the Context of Nexus Dynamics between Conflict or Violence and Disaster or Climate Change*, Law and Protection Policy Research Series (Geneva, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018).

in India and Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> While evacuations save lives and are mostly temporary, disaster displacement and resulting needs and vulnerabilities may become prolonged for those unable to return owing to damaged or destroyed homes and infrastructure, disrupted basic services or other reasons. To reduce the risk of secondary displacement during the monsoon and cyclone season in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, IOM, UNDP and UNHCR supported the repair and strengthening of shelters and used satellite imagery to map landslide risks and relocate families from high-risk areas to safer locations in the refugee settlements.

63. Better understanding is required of the drivers, scale, patterns, duration and spatial distribution of disaster displacement. This should inform preparedness frameworks and the provision of assistance, protection and durable solutions that are adapted to the distinct situations, including needs, vulnerabilities and capacities, of different groups and individuals, including those at risk of secondary displacement. Greater investment is required in data collection, research and analysis and the development of tools and frameworks for monitoring progress in reducing disaster displacement across sectors.

64. Owing to the lack of systematic collection of data over time, understanding and evaluating the impacts of disaster displacement remains challenging, including in relation to identifying the number of people who remain displaced over time and their changing needs. This is because such data tends to be collected through the immediate recovery phase; however, it often ceases to be collected prior to resolution of the displacement challenges. Data on displacement over time is especially incomplete or scarce in situations of slow-onset disasters such as drought. Consequently, the evidence base required for effective responses and solutions is often limited. Recent advancements to address this gap by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre,<sup>16</sup> the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics of the United Nations Statistical Commission (see [E/CN.3/2020/18](#)) and other stakeholders, in particular the first-ever global stock figure estimate for disaster displacement, improved methodologies to monitor displacement associated with drought and the development and endorsement of the international recommendations on internally displaced persons statistics,<sup>17</sup> together with enhanced use of the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix and innovations such as tracking displacement patterns through mobile phone data, are important steps towards improved outcomes.

65. Protection risks and rights violations increase during disasters and periods of displacement. These risks and violations include unequal access to aid, abuse and exploitation, family separation, the loss of personal documentation, physical and other forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking, and issues relating to land, housing and property rights. The inclusion of a protection perspective in all disaster risk management efforts is therefore essential. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee policy on protection in humanitarian action provides a framework for putting protection at the core of responses and reinforcing the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

## I. Gender and disasters

66. Disasters are particularly devastating for women and girls in exacerbating pre-existing inequalities, exposing them to increased risks and jeopardizing the

<sup>15</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019* (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, Statistics Division, *International Recommendations on IDP Statistics* (2020); and United Nations, Statistics Division, *Compilers' Manual on Displacement Statistics* (2020).

effective enjoyment of their human rights and their access to services and opportunities. Women and girls of all ages face heightened risk of mortality, morbidity and sexual and gender-based violence in disasters.<sup>18</sup> Local women and women's organizations are among the first responders in disasters and their leadership in post-disaster recovery and humanitarian action is critical. The gendered impacts of disasters and women's meaningful engagement have to be integrated into disaster preparedness, response and recovery and the development of solutions. Systematic collection and use of sex, gender and disability disaggregated data and gender analysis are essential for ensuring the different needs, vulnerabilities and capacities among women and girls and men and boys are better addressed during disasters.

67. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has prioritized working with women's organizations in humanitarian action. Implementing the Committee's Gender with Age Marker is strengthening the design and monitoring of gender and age responsive programming. To date, over 9,300 projects have used the Marker. In 2019, deployments of senior gender and protection advisers strengthened gender and protection, including from sexual exploitation and abuse, responses with deployments to 21 countries, including in disasters in Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Philippines. In Mozambique, these deployments helped identify and address risks and gaps related to gender-based violence in the response and supported actions to ensure protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Inter-agency efforts helped to set up the Linha Verde community complaint and feedback mechanism to, inter alia, manage the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence. The United Nations Population Fund distributed 32,800 dignity kits and delivered 71 mobile clinics to strengthen gender and health outcomes among affected women and girls in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and established women-friendly spaces and provided psychosocial support for survivors of gender-based violence in Mozambique. In Eritrea, Central Emergency Response Fund funding enabled a life-saving response by establishing maternity waiting homes for pregnant mothers and newborns in remote rural areas during a drought. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee *Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action*, Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, and the new Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming help integrate gender considerations, respond to needs specific to gender and age and address gender-based violence during disasters. In addition, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) collaborated with over 560 women's organizations in 2019 to facilitate their leadership in disaster resilience policies, assessments and response efforts.

68. The high-level conference on ending sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises held in May 2019 mobilized \$363 million in financial pledges to support humanitarian action to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and the implementation of commitments made in the context of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

## J. Persons with disabilities and disasters

69. Persons with disabilities continue to be disproportionately affected by disasters and face barriers to accessing assistance and protection. These barriers arise from lack of inclusive policies, physical obstacles, inaccessible information and communication and negative attitudes and beliefs. They are exacerbated by limited collection and use

<sup>18</sup> WMO, *Gendered Impacts of Weather and Climate: Evidence from Asia, Pacific and Africa* (Geneva, 2019).

of data on the situation of persons with disabilities and their requirements and priorities.

70. Persons with disabilities are increasingly recognized as key actors in disaster preparedness and response. They and their representative organizations have an essential role in identifying risk and informing inclusive preparedness and response activities that reach the most at-risk people. Despite this growing recognition, opportunities for them to engage in response and coordination mechanisms remain limited.

71. An informal reference group comprising United Nations entities, organizations of persons with disabilities and NGOs has been established to support the roll-out and implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action launched in 2019, including by supporting engagement of persons with disabilities and their organizations, capacity-building of humanitarian actors and the integration of disability inclusion across areas of work of the Committee, and in line with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, launched in 2019. Lessons learned and best practices are available<sup>19</sup> to improve disability inclusion in preparedness, response and recovery.

## **K. Mental health and psychosocial support in disasters**

72. Disasters have a major impact on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of affected people, which often exceeds local and international capacities, leaving most people without access to appropriate support. During disasters, diverse mental health and psychosocial needs require various support measures at different stages of response, and across sectors, clusters and line ministries.

73. The International Conference on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Crisis Situations, held in Amsterdam,<sup>20</sup> and the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Geneva, were milestones in 2019 in building awareness of the importance of addressing mental health and psychosocial needs before, during and after disasters and other emergencies and in developing recommendations to improve the collective response.

74. In 2019, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings continued to coordinate the implementation and dissemination of the Committee's guidelines and provided support to 20 country-level mental health and psychosocial support working groups, including field missions in six countries and over 250 requests for remote support. Current priorities for the Reference Group include the operationalization of the inter-agency surge support mechanism, the development of a common monitoring and evaluation framework to improve the quality of support and the publication of disaster risk reduction guidance.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Palmer and others, *Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action* (Geneva, CBM International, Humanity and Inclusion and International Disability Alliance, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> The Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Declaration: mind the mind now", 2019. Available at [www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/documents/diplomatic-statements/2019/10/08/amsterdam-conference-declaration](http://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/documents/diplomatic-statements/2019/10/08/amsterdam-conference-declaration).

### III. Recommendations

75. On the basis of the present report, the Secretary-General recommends that Member States, the United Nations, humanitarian and development organizations and other relevant stakeholders:

(a) Continue to pilot, scale up and increase investment in anticipatory action and forecast-based financing initiatives and strengthen their coordination, coherence and complementarity, and increase the use of disaster risk analysis, climate science and related innovations, such as predictive analytics, forecasting, weather and climate services and risk assessments, and the sharing of data and analysis across sectors and at all levels, to better anticipate, prevent and manage disaster and climate risks and impacts;

(b) Intensify and accelerate efforts to manage the risks and impacts of disasters and climate change and in this regard continue to strengthen analysis, planning, programming and financing to better reduce need, risk and vulnerability and strengthen collaboration and partnerships among humanitarian, development, climate change and disaster risk reduction actors, including by accelerating the implementation of relevant outcomes, initiatives and transformative actions of the 2019 Climate Action Summit;

(c) Increase joined-up analysis and action to manage intersecting, compounding and systemic risks, including climate-related security, biodiversity loss, and famine risks and disease outbreaks;

(d) Systematically collect, analyse, share and apply best practices and lessons learned related to disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, including by actively seeking the views of affected people, to improve preparedness, response and resilience related to future disasters, including by strengthening and augmenting regional, national and local capacities and community engagement and reinforcing partnerships with regional organizations, drawing on private sector capabilities;

(e) Continue to strengthen multi-hazard early warning systems and the production, collection and timely dissemination of actionable early warning and risk information to enable effective early action at the global, regional, national and local levels;

(f) Strengthen the role and effectiveness of cross-border agencies, including customs administrations in disaster preparedness and response, including through expedited and simplified importation and customs procedures and increased support to enhance their capacity to process incoming relief consignments and strengthened efforts to reduce unsolicited in-kind donations and other inappropriate relief goods and address other challenges for customs administrations in the event of disasters;

(g) Continue efforts to establish a more comprehensive overview and understanding of disaster risk, impacts, damages and losses, including through more systematic collection, analysis and use of robust and comparable sex, age, and disability disaggregated data and statistics, to guide disaster and climate risk-informed investment and strengthen preparedness in areas and communities that are likely to be affected in the future;

(h) Increase support to the the Central Emergency Response Fund and Country-Based Pooled Funds to scale up anticipatory action and early and rapid response to prevent and mitigate the impact of disasters, including in underfunded contexts, and strengthen their complementarity with international



financial institutions and other financing mechanisms for risk-informed development and resilient recovery;

(i) Enhance the use of pre-agreed contingency finance mechanisms in response to disasters, increase the scale and speed of their disbursements, and ensure they are fit for purpose;

(j) Collaborate with international financial institutions and the insurance industry to develop insurance products that pay out earlier, ahead of shocks, and incentivize reducing and managing risk;

(k) Develop and strengthen climate-resilient food systems and risk-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection systems and the use of cash and voucher assistance and disaster risk insurance to strengthen livelihoods, food production, resilience and recovery, and increase efforts to address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition and improve the availability and use of data on food security risks and impacts in the context of disasters and climate change;

(l) Continue to strengthen collaboration and partnerships between humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction and climate change actors to prevent, reduce and address disaster displacement and achieve durable solutions, including through funding that incentivizes joined-up programming, and incorporate disaster displacement and durable solutions in national adaptation plans and strategies, policies and laws on disaster risk reduction and response;

(m) Continue to reinforce regional collaboration and practices to provide assistance and protection and achieve durable solutions in response to internal and cross-border displacement in the context of disasters and climate change, and enhance the collection, sharing, disaggregation and interoperability of related data at all levels to inform and strengthen responses and the achievement of durable solutions, and increase the sharing of best practices in this regard;

(n) Continue to strengthen efforts to prevent and respond to protection risks and needs in the context of disasters and climate change, incorporate a protection perspective in disaster risk management and reinforce protection capacities in surge mechanisms;

(o) Systematically increase efforts and strategies to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and ensure their full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making, through partnerships with local women's organizations and groups and supported by disaggregated data and robust gender analysis, including on disaster risks, impacts and vulnerability experienced by women and girls;

(p) Strengthen capacities to mainstream the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations into strategies, policies and programming and improve the collection, sharing and use of data disaggregated by disability and ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in disaster risk management and all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle, and in this regard encourages the use of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action;

(q) Increase efforts to provide and fund cross-sectoral mental health and psychosocial support services that are systematically integrated into preparedness, response and recovery to effectively address related needs during disasters, and in this regard work to improve the coverage and quality of these activities through a continuum of care that is multi-layered and involves

**complementary services, and ensure the provided support reduces stigma, discrimination and exclusion and is implemented with a longer-term vision that strengthens local capacities and community resilience and builds on evidence-based approaches and best practices;**

**(r) Ensure a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the implementation of six climate positive actions to recover better, namely: invest in green jobs; do not bail out polluting industries; end fossil-fuel subsidies; take climate risks into account in all financial and policy decisions; work together to meet the challenges presented by climate change; and most importantly, leave no one behind.**

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