

Foreword

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While the international community has already been addressing many aspects of disasters, climate change and human mobility, in order to really make progress it is essential to bring together different strands of the discussion so as to develop a comprehensive response that also anticipates future challenges associated with climate change. The Governments of Norway and Switzerland are contributing to the development of future responses to disaster displacement through the Nansen Initiative.

On 12 March 2015, the Pacific island state of Vanuatu was hit by a Category 5 tropical cyclone – stronger than anything previously experienced on the islands – that affected 166,000 inhabitants, leaving 75,000 of them without adequate shelter and 110,000 in need of fresh water.

Projections indicate that previously unprecedented extreme weather events may become the norm rather than the exception. Worldwide, sudden-onset hazards such as earthquakes, floods, landslides and tropical storms displaced some 165 million people between 2008 and 2013. Consequently, both sudden- and slow-onset climate-related hazards – combined with rapid urbanisation, population growth and pre-existing social vulnerabilities and poverty – are likely to increase displacement and migration in the future, including across international borders.

States prepared the ground for linking climate change and migration when they agreed on paragraph 14(f) of the Cancun Adaptation Framework in December 2010, calling upon themselves to undertake “measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change-induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at the national, regional and international levels”.

The Nansen Initiative

The Nansen Initiative was launched by the governments of Norway and Switzerland in late 2012 with the aim of building consensus on key principles and elements regarding the protection of people displaced across international borders in the context of

disasters, including those linked to the effect of climate change. It has since organised a series of regional consultations to bring together a wide range of representatives from governments, civil society, international organisations and experts.

As a consequence of the consultations we now know a lot more about the impacts of disasters and climate change on displacement and migration, and have identified effective practices currently used to prevent, prepare for and respond to such challenges, such as when people are forced to flee across international borders. Potential areas of future action have been compiled in a ‘Protection Agenda’ on cross-border displacement in the context of disasters and climate change, which will be presented and discussed during a global intergovernmental consultation in Geneva in October 2015.¹

Findings from the Initiative have already been fed into various international policy agendas. Prevention of displacement and migration as adaptation turned out to be major concerns of stakeholders and for this reason it was important to bring these issues to the table of the negotiators of the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. We are happy that the language about displacement adopted by the Sendai meeting in Japan reflects this.² The initiative has also fed similar language into regional instruments like the Cartagena +30 declaration.

The timing of this issue of FMR about how climate change will affect us in terms of human mobility could not have been better. With the final global consultation of the

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Nansen Initiative coming up in Geneva in October and the COP 21 meeting in Paris one month later,³ the international community has a significant opportunity to make sure that human mobility in the context of natural disasters is addressed in a more coherent and comprehensive manner.

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1. www.nanseninitiative.org/global-consultations/
2. www.wcdrr.org/uploads/Political_Declaration_WCDRR.pdf
3. www.cop21paris.org/