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**EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
(EUR-OPA)**

**2ND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES
IN THE CONTEXT OF MAJOR RISKS PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT**

22 OCTOBER 2015, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE WORKING GROUP**

Within the framework of the Council of Europe's "European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)", a Working Group on "Migrants, Asylum seekers and Refugees in the context of major risks prevention and management" met in Brussels on 22 October 2015. The purpose of this Working Group was to identify good practices and prepare guidance on how to improve the way in which authorities, in particular Civil Protection authorities, deal with Disaster Risk Reduction for Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Even if the work in the field is far from being completed, a few general recommendations (hereafter) are seen as critical for its immediate implementation in view of the present migrant and refugee's crisis in Europe.

We would like to recall the Secretary General's letter dated 8 September 2015 addressed to the Heads of Government of the Council of Europe's member States which refers to guidance on the treatment of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, including their reception, temporary living conditions and the special safeguards required for children.

The following general recommendations seem appropriate regarding disaster risk reduction for the concerned populations:

1) It is urgent to use cultural mediators (especially young people of the same cultural background) to be able to communicate fluently and efficiently with the population at risk so they may be alerted of the dangers they face. It is of particular importance that those cultural mediators be trustworthy, so ideally they should already be integrated into the States receiving migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and have skills in using social networks, as these can be used effectively to spread the appropriate information. They need to convey information from authorities to the target population and vice versa.

2) train, as a matter of urgency, people involved in planning disaster risk reduction and rescuers in intercultural skills, so that they may be able to understand better and deal more effectively with populations of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees under risks; improve alarms so they may be understood by all, using where appropriate pictograms; adopt a "universal design" approach to information on disaster risk reduction.

3) improve coordination of all actors involved in rescue operations (police, local authorities, civil protection, Red Cross, NGOs) while taking into account that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees may see with reluctance people wearing uniforms; therefore communication with them should be channelled through people trusted by them.

4) be aware that, on top of higher risks from natural hazards and technological accidents (due to possible bad housing, low economic resources or limited language skills) migrants, asylum seekers and refugees may face other risks to their security such as the hostility of some xenophobic people, so they need extra protection to ensure their security;

5) whenever establishing transit centres or places of temporary hosting of migrants, make sure they are well protected from natural hazards or technological accidents and take into account in the practical arrangements the different cultures of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, the need to keep families together, the religious issues (asking if needed for support of local representatives of those religions), as well as other cultural and political circumstances (for instance some groups may come from different ethnic or cultural background, a possible conflict in the countries of origin). Given the importance of communication for and with migrants, use social networks, provide those centres with wifi and other possibilities to help migrants communicate with their families, facilitate their access to authorities through electronic means (for instance for asylum requests). Use existing guidance for such centres elaborated by humanitarian agencies.

For implementing the points above it is necessary, as an enabling condition, to have appropriate information on the population to be helped or rescued. The information provided from the targeted population must be precise, nationality, age, gender, family structure, skills, IT literacy, level of knowledge of languages, level of formal education, religion or beliefs, food needs, health, economic level, cultural traits, expectations and family links to people left behind in the country of origin and links to friends or family in the country of reception, among other.