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

**VULNERABLE GROUPS:
MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES
AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

EUR-OPA PROJECT 2014-2016

Concept Paper

1. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

Since its setting up in 1987, the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) has been supporting cooperation amongst its member States in the area of natural and technological hazards. It has helped develop a wide range of valuable expertise, tools and materials in the management of disasters.

In 2011 the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of EUR-OPA adopted the [*Ethical Principles on Disaster Risk Reduction and People's Resilience*](#), whereby Human rights are to be respected in all circumstances. The Committee decided then in 2012 (* [*APCAT\(2012\)16: Improving Disaster Risk Reduction in certain vulnerable groups*](#)) to focus part of its work on guidance for a more operative practice with vulnerable groups (people with disabilities; migrants, refugees, asylum seekers; children). The key issues are to identify how civil protection bodies take into account the specificity of such groups while conceiving and implementing protection and evacuation schemes; and how these populations can be encouraged to take an active part in this work and contribute to the development of even more effective schemes, adapted to their specific needs.

In 2013 and 2014 work was conducted on how to improve emergency planning, disaster response and risk mitigation for people with disabilities. The results of this project are available on the EUR-OPA website: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/europarisks/people-with-disabilities1>)

In 2014 work started on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the context of major risks prevention and management. A Questionnaire has been developed and circulated in order to collect examples of good practice and already existing regulations and laws in the field. A Workshop in June 2014 brought together experts to exchange on "[*Civil protection in diverse societies: migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the context of major risks prevention and management*](#)". This Workshop was jointly organised with the Intercultural Cities Programme. The [Report](#) of the Workshop, prepared by Oliver Freeman, integrated the results of the Questionnaire as well as the set of recommendations to be further worked on.

A Working Group on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the context of major risk prevention and management has been set up. Its aim is to assist the Secretariat in drafting a Report, Guidelines and a political Recommendation, to be endorsed by the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of EUR-OPA and submitted to the Committee of Ministers. A Conference will conclude the project in 2016. It is also envisaged to work towards a practical Toolkit for the use of civil protection professionals' bodies at local, regional and national level.

The results of this research project will enable the community to have tools at their disposal to assist them in guaranteeing the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers while responding to their own needs.

2. CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH ON MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Migrants¹ and asylum seekers have been a permanent concern for the Council of Europe, especially as migration driven by globalization continues to be a shaping force of European society.² In line with the

¹ Terminology as established by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR): Migrants is a wide-ranging term that covers most people who move to a foreign country for a variety of reasons and for a certain length of time. Different from "immigrant", which means someone who takes up permanent residence in a country other than his or her original homeland.

European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe, following the principle of non-discrimination, has encouraged the protection of the rights of migrants, refugees and displaced people and the improvement of their living conditions. Encouraging civil protection for all, the Council of Europe contributes to cohesive societies.

Clearly these groups are also more vulnerable in the case of a disaster given their limited access to resilience information (they may not master the language of the State in which they are displaced, not be familiar with cultural practices, nor be aware of natural or technological risks familiar to other population groups, etc.). These groups may also experience increased vulnerability if their living conditions are below average or if, as a consequence of their situation, they have poor health, relatively low education, etc. Yet, the experience of these vulnerable groups can also contribute to disaster preparedness in the society that welcomes them. The integration of migrants has been on the agenda of the Council of Europe for a very long time, aiming to identify and share good practice and encourage access to better living conditions.

In 2015 many countries face an unprecedented large scale arrival of migrants. Council of Europe activities can contribute to the ability of countries to better understand and cope with such a challenge and to develop comprehensive policies.

3. PROJECT CYCLE

Following up on the work carried out in 2014, a [Questionnaire](#) was developed and circulated in August 2015. It is currently being evaluated. The first results will be presented in October 2015. They will be critically analysed at a Second Meeting of the Working Group on Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the context of Major Risks Prevention and Management. A report, practical Guidelines and political Recommendations will be drafted, in order to ensure that the topic is brought closer to the attention of civil protection officials and is encompassed in general by a larger audience. Furthermore, the examples of good practice collected will be made available in the form of a publication/toolbox for civil protection professionals in order to reduce the vulnerability of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to natural and technological hazards.

A Conference (addressed to the 47 member States) on the “Implementation of the Guidelines for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers during Emergency, Crises and Disasters” and the Recommendation on “Including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Disaster Preparedness and Response” will

Asylum-seeker is someone who has made a claim that he or she is a refugee and is waiting for that claim to be accepted or rejected. The term contains no presumption either way; it simply describes the fact that someone has lodged a claim. Some asylum-seekers will be judged to be refugees and others not.

² Cf.: Parliamentary Assembly documents:

- Recommendation 1917 (2010), “Migrants and refugees: a continuing challenge for the Council of Europe”, PACE, encouraging the signature and implementation of the European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers by member States and requesting the Council of Europe to further develop hard and soft law instruments and practical activities pertaining to migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons.
- Resolution 1655 (2009), “Environmentally induced migration and displacement: a 21st Century Challenge”, natural disasters and environmental degradation will cause human migration, with humanitarian and security dimensions. In this Resolution, the Parliamentary Assembly calls, amongst other actions, to promote policy coherence in migration, development and humanitarian policies, as well as climate change adaptation policies including dealing with their effects on migrants.

Furthermore, the Council of Europe Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has also promoted the development of policies for the protection of the rights of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons and the improvement of their living conditions.

conclude the project in October 2016. Member States will be invited to acknowledge the project results, to endorse the concrete tools for the use of civil protection professionals at local, regional and national level in order to reduce the vulnerability of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to natural and technological hazards.

4. WORKING GROUP

A Working Group has been set up. Its aim is to collect good practices, to identify documents, focusing on different practices, return of experiences, identifying concrete associated actions in the member States and to go beyond conceptual approaches and identify concrete actions to actually improve resilience of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to natural and technological hazards.

5. MANDATE OF THE WORKING GROUP

In close cooperation with the Secretariat, the main tasks will consist of:

- piloting the process by collecting good practices on “Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Disaster Preparedness and Response”, e.g. through the EUR-OPA Permanent Correspondents and the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction;
- to prepare an Action Plan to implement the findings in the Report and the Guidelines;
- putting forward suggestions for the implementation of the Recommendation;
- setting up accessibility features to be taken into consideration in the development of disaster management plans, both at the level of preparedness before a disaster strikes, as well as during and after a disaster;
- developing a user friendly toolkit for civil protection professionals in order to reduce the risks of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees within the disaster cycle;
- formulating policy recommendations to be forwarded to UNISDR for their inclusion into its future Framework of Action;
- contribute to the preparation of a Workshop and the Final Conference in 2016.

6. CALENDAR

Questionnaire:

- Elaboration of a Questionnaire and circulation: July-August 2015: done
- Evaluation: October 2015: in process

Working Group meetings:

- 11 June 2015, Council of Europe office, Paris: done
- 22 October 2015, Council of Europe office, Brussels
- March 2016, Council of Europe office, Paris

Workshop

- Spring 2016: presentation of the first findings and planning of the Final Conference
- Final Conference: Portugal October 2016 – with the presentation of the Project Report, including its Guidelines, a Recommendation, as well as concrete tools for the use of civil protection professionals.