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Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Azerbaijan

European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement

**Workshop on Human Rights approach in Disasters:
Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in Disaster Risk Reduction**

**18-19 September 2019
Baku, Azerbaijan**

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

We live in a world that is increasingly affected by disasters. Recent decades have seen significant growth in the number of reported natural disasters affecting millions of people and their livelihoods. Science tells us that this trend is likely to be exacerbated by climate change.

People are being adversely affected by these events. When natural disasters strike, vulnerable groups bear a disproportional risk to hazards and these risks do not affect everybody in the same way.

Despite all efforts to increase awareness about risks and to improve disaster management all over the world, there is still a need to develop new innovative approaches and practical tools to reduce the risks of the most vulnerable people. Therefore, we must give them a voice and actively involve them in disaster risk preparedness and response. Ensuring protection of rights and increasing resilience of vulnerable groups during and in the aftermath of disasters, require a multi-stakeholder and international approach.

A distinctive feature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is its emphasis on ensuring that *No One is Left Behind: reaching the most vulnerable*. Paragraph 23 of the Agenda refers to the empowerment of the most vulnerable and includes, among the groups “whose needs are reflected in the agenda”, “all children, youth, persons with disabilities refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants”.

In 2011, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the [European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement \(EUR-OPA\)](#) of the Council of Europe adopted the “[Ethical Principles on Disaster Risk Reduction and People’s Resilience](#)” providing a good compilation of guiding principles already recognised by the Council of Europe. These Ethical Principles serve as a basis to develop both policy recommendations and practical solutions to improve the resilience and preparedness of vulnerable groups:

- people with disabilities;
- migrants, displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees;
- children.

The most vulnerable groups need special protection of their rights considering their specificities to help them to better cope with natural and man-made disasters.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires States Parties to take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, “*all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters*”.

People with disabilities are confronted with a number of difficulties regarding disaster risk reduction. They may experience difficulties in obtaining the correct information on prevention or even in receiving alerts in case of emergency situations. There may be physical barriers to enter or leave a building (for instance lifts cannot be used in some circumstances) or emergency services may not be prepared to efficiently handle people with some disabilities.

The help that is given should ensure that they are not put into a position of disadvantage with respect to vulnerability reduction, communication, warning, evacuation, shelter, recovery, reconstruction, or any of the other fundamental actions associated with risk reduction and disaster response. Special instructions on how to communicate with people with physical, mental, visual, hearing and even deaf-blind impairments should be developed and innovative tools should be designed to facilitate communication.

Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network (DiDRRN) has been established as a consortium of like-minded Disabled People's Organisation (DPOs) and disability-focused development and relief organisations. The aim is to secure the active participation, and meaningful contribution, of persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction policy and practice post - Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

To promote a more integrated, efficient and effective approach to the problem of ensuring that people with disabilities in Europe are protected against emergencies and disasters, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement adopted the [Recommendation on the inclusion of people with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response](#).

The Council of Europe's publication "[Major Hazards and People with Disabilities](#)" offers an overview of the state of the art in emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction for people with disabilities and shows that there is much potential to improve them. To complement this publication, the Council of Europe created a [Toolkit for good practice on major hazards and people with disabilities](#). The aim of the Toolkit is to provide practical guidance for the improvement of services, plans and assistance to people with disabilities in the light of risks, crises, emergencies and disasters. Its focus is on empowering people with disabilities in the scope of a new "human rights-based approach" to ensure security of all people. Persons with disabilities do not deserve to have fewer rights than other groups, not just in emergencies, but in the whole "disaster cycle" (prevention - including adaptation of buildings and education for risk - preparedness, emergencies and recovery). The Toolkit provides guidance and examples of good practices for civil protection professionals, decision-makers and people with disabilities to reduce their vulnerability to disasters. Initiatives already undertaken in some Council of Europe member States include alerts via mobile devices, sign language courses for firefighters and communication materials for rescuers and people with disabilities.

MIGRANTS, DISPLACED PERSONS, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

When conflicts or natural disasters erupt, they can disproportionately affect migrants living, working, studying, traveling or transiting in the country experiencing the crisis. Migrants are more vulnerable in case of a disaster given their limited access to information. They may not master the language of the State where they are displaced, not be aware of risks familiar to local communities.

Building on growing international attention to issues related to human mobility and the environment, the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) has explicitly called for the inclusion of migrants in DRR the policies and practices of their host countries and communities.

[The European Convention on Human Rights of 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.

The EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement is promoting improvements in emergency planning, disaster response and risk mitigation for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers:

- recommend strategies to reduce migrants' vulnerability and exposure to risks;
- improve co-ordination between civil protection and other agencies supporting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees;
- exchange good practices to better engage young people in civil society and in all phases of the disaster risk management cycle, as well as actions for engaging with migrants and using their skills and capacities for vulnerability reduction.

These activities contribute to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement adopted the [Recommendation on the Inclusion of Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in disaster preparedness and response](#) to promote a more integrated, efficient and effective approach to protecting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Europe from the risks and impacts of disasters, and to integrate them into national disaster risk reduction policies, planning processes, training curricula and emergency management, by investing in long-term strategies that would reduce their vulnerability and exposure to disaster.

Council of Europe has developed, in collaboration with the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), the joint publication on [Migrants and Disaster Risk Reduction: Practices for inclusion](#), a collection of good practices. It presents existing practices and lessons learned on the integration of migrants into decision-making, policy-setting and implementation of disaster risk reduction initiatives.

The EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement has also developed the [Guidelines for including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in disasters preparedness and management](#).

The political importance of this issue for the Council of Europe led the organisation to appoint a Special Representative on Migration and Refugees at the beginning of 2016.

IOM remains committed to supporting the design and rollout of disaster risk reduction policies and practices that fully account for migrants and their needs and capabilities, and build upon their active participation.

At global level, in 2016, the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative (MCIC) of IOM launched a set of guidelines to protect migrants in countries experiencing conflict or natural disaster. The guidelines contain ten fundamental principles, fifteen targeted guidelines and a selection of examples which illustrate practical ways of improving the protection of migrants at the crisis preparedness, emergency response and post-crisis recovery phases. The guidelines apply to states, private sector actors, international organisations and civil society.

The MCIC Initiative supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals of reducing inequality (Goal 10), including through (Target 10.7) facilitating safe, regular, and orderly migration through well-managed migration policies.

The International Organization on Migration, in collaboration with the Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe and the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement developed [an online course to help practitioners at local level including migrants in emergency management \(E-Campus\)](#).

CHILDREN

During emergency situations children constitute another group of vulnerable people needing special protection because they are dependent upon adults (for food, safety, information, care) and can often be victims of violence, abuse or neglect. Children may account for 50 to 60 per cent of those affected by any emergency.

Children are directly affected by death and injuries as well as from diseases related to malnutrition, poor water and sanitation - conditions that are exacerbated by disasters. In addition, disasters disrupt education and can cause psychological trauma. Disasters also separate children from their families and increase vulnerability to trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) children have inalienable rights in all circumstances - including disasters, when they are most vulnerable - and the right to participate in decisions that ultimately affect them. The CRC and disaster risk reduction are mutually reinforcing. For instance, educating a child about disaster risk and empowering the child to use that knowledge supports Article 6 (life, survival and development), while ensuring the participation and voice of a child in disaster risk reduction efforts upholds Article 12 (respect of the child's views).

The subject of children and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has been addressed by UNICEF, UNESCO, SAVE THE CHILDREN and other actors. UNICEF works to protect and assist children during emergencies, including refugee and migrant children, children caught in conflict and those affected by natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods and landslides.

A lack of child-sensitive disaster risk reduction plans leaves children vulnerable to hazards. UNICEF supports child-centred DRR in 10 countries across Europe and Central Asia to prevent or mitigate humanitarian emergencies by reducing the impact of natural hazards. UNICEF also recognises the importance of gender in disaster risk reduction and that ignoring the different capacities of girls and boys means undermining those of the community as a whole to address disaster risk and cope with disasters.

The publication on "Disaster Risk Reduction in Education: Knowledge and Learning Resources - *Building Resilience with and for Children in Central Asia and South Caucasus*" has been developed in collaboration between UNICEF, the European Commission DRR programme and respective governments. It describes a collection of the teaching and learning materials on Disaster Risk Reduction in Education from Central Asia and South Caucasus. The materials presented were developed to educate school children on how to reduce risks, prepare for and respond to disasters, as well as give tools and knowledge to their parents and teachers to make schools and communities safer and resilient.

UNICEF published a very complete report in 2009 entitled "[Children and Disaster Risk Reduction: Taking stock and moving forward](#)", gathering experiences and hinted to a possible more active role of children in DRR.

The EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement has also been active on children, particularly regarding education, as a priority in its programme of activities for building a risk culture to make societies more resilient. The two following fields have been the main instruments:

- the development of the Internet [BeSafeNet learning tool](#) - in collaboration with the Cyprus Civil Defence - mainly aimed at children, teachers and the general public. The website provides knowledge on different kinds of natural disasters and technological hazards, as well as guidelines on how to protect yourself and your dears from risks;

- active participation in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Thematic Platform on Knowledge and Education (in collaboration with UNISDR, UNESCO and other partners), promoting analysis such as [“Let our children teach us!”](#) (a review of the role of Education and Knowledge in Disaster Risk Reduction).

It is important to examine national school programmes on risk education to assess whether they provide the knowledge and practice needed by children to be safe from all possible disaster risks, to promote the elaboration and exchange of relevant educational materials, such as; films, pedagogic and didactic publications, manuals and brochures, case studies and other suitable educational tools. Using new information technology and experiences from other schools or countries, promoting research and innovation on education for disaster reduction, supporting pilot projects in schools, publishing positive experiences and EUR-OPA and other international organisations' recommendations through education at school.

AIM OF THE WORKSHOP

The main aim of the workshop is to bring together international partners, government agencies, stakeholders, representatives of civil society and local NGOs, and experts from countries with concrete experience and knowledge of good practices in the field of protection and promotion of human rights in disasters and inclusive approach of vulnerable groups.

The workshop will be an opportunity to present the results of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement and other international and national activities in these areas, to identify the needs of vulnerable groups and challenges faced by people with disabilities, migrants, displaced persons, refugees and children.

In order to be beneficial to Azerbaijan, the workshop will be structured as follow:

- Take stock of the Azeri experiences, projects and actions at local and national level to protect vulnerable groups from natural and technological hazards.
- Assessment of main problems, needs and challenges to protect vulnerable groups from disaster risks in Azerbaijan.
- International experiences, projects and tools to protect vulnerable groups; examples from EUR-OPA, UNICEF and IOM.
- Identification of new pilot projects, initiatives and research to strengthen the Azeri capacity to protect vulnerable groups from natural and man-made disasters.
- Drafting Workshop conclusions and recommendations to promote a human rights and inclusive approach to vulnerable groups in local and national strategies and policies for disaster risk reduction.

The outcomes of the Workshop should be disseminated at local, national and international level (e.g. through EUR-OPA, IOM and UNICEF networks), as good practice for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction policies and strategies.

ORGANISERS AND PARTNERS

The workshop will be organised and hosted by the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in cooperation with the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) of the Council of Europe, UNICEF and IOM Baku Offices.