

Midterm Review Plenary 2: Beyond natural hazards – operationalising the expanded scope of the Sendai Framework

26 May 2022 (16:30 - 19:00)

Statement by Mr Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary, European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) of the Council of Europe

Excellencies, Dear Participants,

Thank you for this opportunity to address this gathering on behalf of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement of the Council of Europe (EUR-OPA). Before presenting the contribution of the Agreement to the implementation of the priorities defined by the United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, I would like to briefly recall the main objectives of the Partial Agreement.

In 1987, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe created an instrument to promote governmental co-operation in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction and dealing with emergencies “the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)”. Today, the Agreement counts 23 members, among whom are two States (Morocco and Lebanon) that are not member States of the Council of Europe.

Since the Ministerial Session held in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2010, the Agreement has followed the guidelines established by Ministers that focus in different areas of work, on the Council of Europe core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Committee of Permanent Correspondents adopted its Resolution 2011-1 on Ethical Principles relating to Disaster Risk Reduction and contributing to people’s resilience to Disasters which provided a conceptual platform to expand its work on vulnerable groups.

One of the Ethical Principles adopted by EUR-OPA, is the Principle of Non-discrimination that is to be applied to people with disabilities. This group is confronted with several difficulties regarding disaster risk reduction. They may have problems in obtaining the correct information on prevention or even in

receiving alerts in the case of emergency situations. There may be physical barriers to enter or leave a building or emergency services may not be prepared to efficiently handle people with some disabilities.

In 2016, in the wake of the large number of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees reaching Europe, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents adopted a Resolution on the Inclusion of Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in disaster preparedness and response.

At its 74th meeting in November 2020, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents adopted a Resolution explicitly recognising the inclusion of biological hazards in the EUR-OPA Partial Agreement's scope of interest and programme of activities.

At the 14th Ministerial Meeting of the Agreement held on 24 November 2021 in Matosinhos, Portugal within the framework of the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction) the Ministers adopted at the Meeting two recommendations, namely:

- on “enabling and protecting persons with disabilities before, during and after public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics” and
- on “Inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics”.

The recommendation on “Enabling and protecting persons with disabilities before during and after public health emergencies resulting from viral and other pathogenic pandemics”, in particular, requests that the authorities promote standards for the protection and care of people with disabilities through information campaigns and make health care facilities accessible to persons with all forms of disabilities. Furthermore, when planning their national risk reduction policies, in the planning processes, training curricula, and emergency response practice, the authorities are asked to integrate specific measures to reduce vulnerability and exposure to people with disabilities during emergencies such as the current pandemic or emergencies resulting from viral and other pathogenic pandemics. The recommendation further asks that medical codes of ethics and other deontological codes of practice are reviewed to ensure that the provision of healthcare during disasters fully conform to the provisions of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and jurisprudence of the UN Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities. Measures to be adopted to counteract natural and technological disasters should provide people with disabilities with flexible access and flexible work arrangements that take into

account their disabilities. The recommendation asks that the Agreement continues to address this question through the development of standards through sharing experience, awareness raising, undertaking training programmes and promoting good practice.

The recommendation on “The inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics” contributes to the ongoing important work of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees. In particular, it stipulates that all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees regardless of their nationality or migratory status be included in disaster risk policies linked to public health emergencies. Furthermore, it asks that these groups have adequate access to information, health services, shelter, food and other social support comparable to what is offered to the rest of the population. In pandemic situations, some migrants possess unique experience and skills which could be used for the benefit of the society. In countries which ratified the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications in the European region and the European qualifications passport for refugees, their skills should be harnessed when combatting health emergencies.

These recommendations constitute specific fleshing out of the EUR-OPA’s Ethical Principles relating to Disaster Risk Reduction and more broadly to the Council of Europe’s focus on Democratic Participation.

Furthermore, the Ministers decided to base future work, of the Agreement largely on the priorities defined by the United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Building on the core values of the Council of Europe’s mission, the Medium-Term Plan for 2021-2025 promotes a human rights-based and community-led approach ensuring that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind when it comes to disasters. The principal goal of the Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025 is to make, by 2025, significant quantifiable progress to meet the seven global measurable targets set by the Sendai Framework. The Medium-Term Plan will thus set the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement on a path to work hand in hand with the UN 2030 Agenda agreements, including The Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the New Urban Agenda, and ultimately the Sustainable Development Goals. This in turn will contribute to the fight against environmental degradation and climate change which is one of the priorities of the Strategic Framework of our Organisation for the next quadrennium work programme.

Thank you for your attention.