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The impact of global challenges and trends on humanitarian response: a look at migration, urbanization and population growth

**ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment Side Event
Tuesday, 19 July, 1:15 – 2:45PM
Room XXV (Geneva)**

Organized jointly by IOM, UNFPA, UN-Habitat

The Secretary-General's report on "*Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations*" cites irregular migration, rapid population growth and urbanization as part of many global challenges which "are contributing to increasing vulnerability and humanitarian need, as well as a rapidly changing landscape for humanitarian organizations." The United Nations predicts that by October 2011, the world's population will reach 7 billion. Since 2008, over 50% of the total global population already lives in urban areas - an estimated 3.3 billion people. Future population growth is expected to reach 9.1 billion by 2050, with the numbers of urban dwellers to increase to approximately 6.3 billion. Most of the future population growth during this time period is expected to be absorbed by cities of the developing world.

Rapid growth in urban areas challenges the ability of local authorities to regulate properly land use and building codes, possibly leading to the growth of slums and informal settlements. This further increases vulnerability of this population, leading to particular threats to their security, including as a result of climate change and environmental degradation. The 2010 flooding in Pakistan, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and post-election violence in Kenya in early 2008 exemplify the scope of these urban vulnerabilities and how they create, or have the potential to create, large scale humanitarian needs and challenges.¹

Whether as a result of increased birth rates or rural-urban migration, humanitarian agencies have raised major humanitarian policy and operational concerns related to rapid growth in urban areas and must re-examine their traditional field-based approach. Providing humanitarian assistance in rural areas is challenging, but as the above examples have amply demonstrated, not as challenging as addressing the needs of similar types of vulnerable populations living in slums and dense urban areas where overcrowding and lack of proper urban planning make the delivery of humanitarian assistance more complicated. Indeed, unlike camp situations, the displaced will be spread out, rendering it hard to identify them amidst other migrants or even the locally destitute. Beyond the difficulties of beneficiary identification is whether and how best to

provide assistance on an equitable basis to already marginalized communities in informal settlements and slums which host most of the displaced.

¹ Urban Vulnerability concepts, challenges, policy responses and operational tools; Follow-up Study to the 2010, IASC Strategy for Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas



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Within the context of humanitarian situations in cities, the challenges faced by each city's administration are bound to differ. This is especially true when considering the varying durations of emergencies. They can span from relatively short-term natural disaster recovery efforts, with diminished municipal resources, to long-term protracted refugee and IDP situations with a large population size, and varying degrees of functionality of the local government. Developing countries are disproportionately predisposed to such crises.

In response to this growing challenge, the IASC Working Group in December 2010 published its Final Strategy for Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas.² The Strategy identifies six objectives and supporting actions to enhance humanitarian actors' expertise and operational capacities in urban areas to improve their humanitarian response, thereby saving more lives and accelerating early recovery. The objectives are divided into two broad categories: to get the humanitarian response priorities and initial strategies right, and to maximize the sustainability of the humanitarian response.

The objective of this panel is to discuss how best to improve humanitarian responses to meet the challenges of migration, urbanization and population growth by examining:

- The major factors making humanitarian response and recovery in urban settings of a different character and complexity than response in rural camp settings
- Best practices and lessons learned from Government interventions in assisting IDPs in urban displacement.
- The principal impediments to effective humanitarian response in urban environments
- The changes needed to enhance humanitarian response today and in future in light of population growth and urbanization projections.
- Durable solutions for IDPs in urban contexts: Return, Resettlement, urban integration

² <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-documents-default&publish=0>