

**Submission to the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on
Internal Displacement from
the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)
08 May 2020**

1. Introduction

In response to the 12 March 2020 call for written submissions of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, the [United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) (UNDRR) herewith offers its views for consideration in the Panel's analysis of the internal displacement crisis.

UNDRR is the custodian agency for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework), which was adopted by all UN Member States in March 2015 as the global plan to reduce disaster risk and build resilience across all sectors and societies. The Sendai Framework with its seven targets for the prevention of disasters and the reduction of disaster losses is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UNDRR proposes that **the Panel prioritize disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures to prevent displacement caused by disasters in its analysis**, and herewith submits the UNDRR Words into Action guidelines "[Disaster Displacement: How to Reduce Risk, Address Impacts and Strengthen Resilience](#)" (WiA on Disaster Displacement) as an input to the Panel's review.

We also refer to the submissions to the High-level Panel from the [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#) and the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#), who co-developed the WiA on Disaster Displacement with UNDRR and implementing partners of the project, "Reducing Disaster Risk, Supporting Resilience and Protecting Disaster Displaced People—Implementation of the Words into Action Guide on Disaster Displacement"¹.

As set out in the [UNDRR Global Assessment Report 2019](#) (GAR 2019), unresolved vulnerabilities, rising exposure and proliferating, multiple hazard events continue to drive catastrophic loss of life, disrupt livelihoods and fuel new displacement – an additional 17.2 million people were internally displaced in 2018 alone as a result of climate-related disasters and natural hazards ([IDMC 2019](#)). It is estimated that people in least developed countries are, on average, six times more likely to be injured, lose

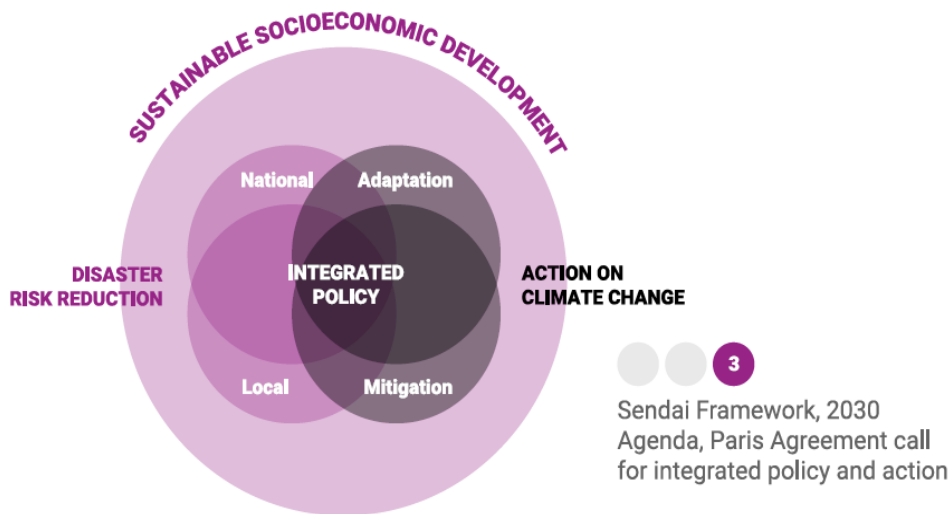
¹ The project is financially supported by the German Federal Foreign Office and implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council in partnership with the Platform on Disaster Displacement and UNDRR.

their home, be displaced or evacuated, or require emergency assistance, than those in high-income countries.

Disaster displacement is thereby often a result of a multitude of inter-connected factors. These include climate change and environmental degradation driven by unsustainable economic growth and poor development practices, which may further lead to conflict over water, land and other natural resources. Health disasters and their effects within our global interconnected systems are another rising concern given the large number of people already displaced and expected to be displaced in the future by the COVID-19 pandemic and its expected long-term effects on economies and societies².

“If I had to select one sentence to describe the state of the world, I would say we are in a world in which global challenges are more and more integrated, and the responses are more and more fragmented, and if this is not reversed, it’s a recipe for disaster.”
UN Secretary-General António Guterres

In this context, it is vital that local, national and regional DRR policies across contexts must formally and explicitly recognize the interlinked risks of disasters, conflict and displacement with an eye to present and future conditions. Both current, and a range of likely future, conditions, should inform the design of immediate humanitarian and long-term development strategies.



(Source: UNDRR 2019)

For this to happen, we need to enhance our ability to collect disaggregated hazard, exposure and vulnerability data and comprehensively assess risks, including cascading and interconnected hazards and risks; mobilize better uptake of scientific evidence in national and local strategies and plans with focus on the most vulnerable; develop appropriate disaster risk financing frameworks to support effective

² See also UNDRR webinars on COVID-19 and displacement: <https://www.undrr.org/event/humanitarian-needs-and-challenges-migrant-population-response-covid-19>
<https://www.undrr.org/event/webinar-reducing-covid-19-vulnerability-amongst-displaced-populations-and-migrants>

implementation of the strategies and, last but not least, encourage risk informed investment across all sectors to prevent the creation of new risks.

In the following, this submission sets out issues and challenges, as well as available solutions and lessons learned from the implementation of the Sendai Framework to address disaster displacement.

2. Key issues and opportunities: People affected and systemic risks – the face of displacement³

As demonstrated throughout [GAR 2019](#), a single unavoidable natural event may trigger preventable repercussions across sectors and systems that expand the breadth, duration, scale and size of adverse consequences. These negative impacts may come in the form of internal and cross-border displacement, preventable business disruption leading to supply chain breakdown, economic distress, social unrest, hunger, poverty and diseases, to name just a few.

Over the period 2008–2018, disasters stemming from natural hazards have displaced an average of 23.9 million people each year (GAR19 based on IDMC data). Disasters, which are the main triggers of forced displacement recorded, show no signs of abating. People choose to respond to disaster impacts with a web of in situ and ex situ strategies, including mobility. They may flee to other areas within their country or cross borders in search of a safer and less exposed place. Within this, economic motives play a key role as push and pull factors shaping migration paths from rural to urban centres.

On a global scale, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) counted 17.2 million people as newly internally displaced due to climate-related disasters and natural hazards in 2018 (IDMC 2019). Displacement in the context of disasters is a global and increasingly alarming reality. According to the UNHCR Protection and Return Monitoring Network, around 883,000 new internal displacements were recorded between January and December 2018, of which 32% were associated with flooding and 29% with drought. Many more people are believed to be on the move, resulting from the slow-onset effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The effects of climate change are predicted to increase the irregularity and intensity of extreme weather events, as well as to drive slow-onset disaster displacement risk through exacerbating existing natural resource scarcity such as water stress. The situations in Yemen or Somalia are clear examples and reminders of the face of displacement over dwindling resources and the interconnections between and mutually reinforcing effects of disasters, conflict and displacement.

“At no point in human history have we faced such an array of both familiar and unfamiliar risks, interacting in a hyper-connected, rapidly changing world. New risks and correlations are emerging. Decades-old projections about climate change have come true much sooner than expected. With that come changes in the intensity and frequency of hazards. Risk really is systemic, and requires concerted and urgent effort to reduce it in integrated and innovative ways” (UN Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Mami Mizutori)

³ Excerpt GAR19 Chapter 8, page 231-233; <https://gar.undrr.org/report-2019>

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, displacement may exacerbate vulnerabilities by exposing people to new risks and challenges such as inequality, climate change, poverty, under/unemployment and fast-paced urbanization. Fleeing home to escape the impacts of a hazard is often a decision between life and death. But disaster displacement – which includes evacuation and, in some cases, planned relocation following environmental stressors – often has severe and long-lasting social, economic and legal impacts, particularly in protracted contexts. Climate change effects and poor natural resource management, leading to the gradual erosion of livelihoods, are often decisive factors for alternative household strategies, to diversify risks of environmental stressors and disaster impacts. Fast-paced and unplanned urbanization comes with new risks. Employment opportunities for displaced people are often confined to poor-quality daily labour, which has a negative impact on household budgets, savings and spending, and compounds their ability to further manage risks and cope with negative shocks. In addition, displaced people are often obliged to settle in high risk areas – such as floodplains, subsiding land or hillside slopes – which are less controlled and often the most affordable yet hazard-prone areas. This further increases the likelihood of secondary displacement risk.

The Sendai Framework pays due attention to the systemic complexities of population movements as drivers of risk and to the opportunities for strengthened resilience. It highlights consequences of disasters in terms of displacement, but equally acknowledges the contributions that people displaced by disaster can make – through remittances, networks, skills and investments – in addressing root causes and promoting resilience. The relationship between disaster risk and displacement has also been recognized by the Global Compact for Migration, aiming to mitigate the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to move and hinder them from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods.

However, advancements in the development of global normative frameworks and policies has not been matched by implementation and adequate investment in preventing and addressing disaster displacement challenges.

Without scaled-up action to reduce risk and strengthen resilience, vulnerability and exposure will continue contributing to driving disaster risks upwards over the years to come, thereby increasing the scale of disaster displacement and its vast humanitarian consequences.

2. Catalysing and cultivating national political will, action and capacity

In order to effectively address and reduce the rising number of disaster displacements across the globe, it is imperative for Governments and the international community to increase efforts to implement the Sendai Framework, including through recognising potential risks, mitigating them where possible and ensuring that countries and communities are robustly prepared to avoid displacement and respond resiliently where displacement does occur. Furthermore, measures to “build back better” by not recreating risk in disaster recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction enable displaced people to rebuild their lives.

In line with the UN Secretary General’s focus on prevention, the Sendai Framework, puts a strong emphasis on disaster risk management as opposed to managing disasters and emergencies. It promotes increased investment in preparedness and risk reduction in order to prevent and reduce disaster displacement and mitigate its devastating impacts. The Sendai Framework reiterates the responsibility of States for preventing and reducing disaster risk and encourages “*the adoption of policies and programmes addressing disaster-induced human mobility to strengthen the resilience of affected people and that of host communities*”.⁴

The Sendai Framework also recognises that successful DRR is linked to sustainable development and global efforts to combat the adverse impacts of climate change through the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Likewise, the SDGs acknowledge DRR as a cornerstone of sustainable development. The integration of displacement risk reduction into broader DRR efforts also helps to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus. A comprehensive response to disaster displacement risk, including across borders, requires collaboration among a wide range of actors in different domains, including urban planning, basic services, humanitarian assistance, migration management, human rights, climate change, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Of the seven Sendai Framework targets, Target (B) is particularly relevant for disaster displacement as it sets the goal of substantially reducing the number of people affected by disasters globally by 2030. “*Directly affected* are those who have suffered injury, illness or other health effects; who were evacuated, displaced, relocated or have suffered direct damage to their livelihoods, economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets.”⁵

Target (E) identifies the *development of disaster risk reduction strategies* at national and local levels to guide disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Importantly, unlike the other Sendai Framework targets, Target (E) has a timeline of 2020. A 2018 review of national DRR strategies⁶ revealed that the great majority of DRR strategies did not address disaster displacement. As the previous international DRR framework was silent on disaster displacement and the Sendai Framework was only adopted in 2015, this omission is partially explained. Implementation of Target (E) is thus a timely opportunity for Governments to include measures on disaster displacement when revising or developing their strategies.

In order to support Government authorities and the international community in their efforts to integrate disaster displacement and other related forms of human mobility into regional, national, subnational and local disaster risk reduction strategies, UNDRR published in 2019 the guidelines “[Disaster Displacement: How to Reduce Risk, Address Impacts and Strengthen Resilience](#)”. Developed in partnership with the [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#) and the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#), and

⁴ UNISDR, ‘Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030’ 30 (I). <https://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf>

⁵ United Nations General Assembly, ‘Report of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Indicators and Terminology Relating to Disaster Risk Reduction’ <<http://undocs.org/A/71/644>>.

⁶ Platform on Disaster Displacement, 2018. Mapping the Baseline – To What Extent Are Displacement and Other Forms of Human Mobility Integrated in National and Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies? <https://disasterdisplacement.org/portfolio-item/drrmapping>

generous funding from the German Government, the guide offers specific and practical guidance to improve the management and coordination of disaster displacement through prevention and planning. Aligned with the four Sendai Framework priorities for action, the recommendations aim to support policy makers and practitioners to 1) increase their understanding of their disaster displacement risk; 2) strengthen governance to better manage disaster displacement risk; 3) invest in policies and strategies for resilience; and 4) enhance disaster preparedness for effective response to disaster displacement and to “build back better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The guide will be complemented by a companion assessment tool, available separately at [PreventionWeb](#), that summarises the most important activities for addressing disaster displacement within local, sub-national, national, and regional DRR strategies.

A few illustrative recommendations offered by the WiA on Disaster Displacement include:

- Collect, analyse and use disaster displacement data to strengthen disaster risk assessments and land-use planning;
- Facilitate the replacement of lost or destroyed legal documents by establishing advance measures to reduce administrative hurdles for displaced people in accessing services;
- Allocate land for use as temporary displacement sites and for potential permanent relocation;
- Protect land, property and other productive assets during displacement through laws and policies;
- Include the participation of people at risk of displacement and those previously displaced by disasters in preparedness, contingency and disaster response plans;
- Establish and strengthen public and private employment partnerships and provide skills and language training to help match displaced people with local employers’ needs and facilitate their integration into the local labour market.

Linked to the above, the following opportunities for concrete action to reduce disaster risk and thereby the number of displacements across the world, emerge:

a) Integrating displacement considerations into DRR strategies at all levels

The Panel could encourage Governments to ensure that regional, national and local DRR strategies include considerations related to of disaster displacement risk and its prevention across the three dimensions of sustainable development. DRR strategies should also include provisions to strengthen cooperation on the prevention, preparedness and response to transboundary displacement.

As outlined above, the integration of disaster displacement considerations into DRR strategies and plans is paramount for effectively reducing both the number of displaced persons as well as the strengthening of their resilience once displacement has happened.

The Panel could specifically highlight the aforementioned WiA on Disaster Displacement as a key tool for the integration of displacement concerns into DRR strategies. The project “Reducing Disaster Risk, Supporting Resilience and Protecting Disaster Displaced People—Implementation of the Words into Action Guide on Disaster Displacement” supports interested Governments in using the WiA on Disaster Displacement for policy revision, as well as builds awareness at regional level of the need to address disaster displacement in DRR strategies, policies and programmes. The project further aims to encourage policy makers and practitioners to use the WiA on Disaster Displacement through online tools and the development of a companion checklist to assess progress in addressing disaster displacement. During 2018-2019, a previous project enabled support to South Africa and Nepal to begin the policy making process to address disaster displacement. In 2019, the current project built capacity in the Andean Region in collaboration with the Andean Disaster Prevention and Response Committee (CAPRADE). In the period 2020-2021 the project is continuing its support to South Africa and is likely to extend it to Mozambique, as requested, as well as to the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for the Eastern Africa Region.

b) Enhanced data collection and risk assessment, including on complex and systemic risks

The Panel could encourage Governments to enhance their ability to collect, analyse and monitor displacement data over time. Specifically, the Panel could encourage national statistics bureaus to include disaster displacement data among that collected in their national statistics schemes.

Tackling the causes and impacts of disaster displacement is complex but having good data is a key part of the solution. As highlighted in the WiA on Disaster Displacement, to build comprehensive understanding in terms of disaster displacement risk, appropriate systems to collect, analyse and share disaggregated data on displacement are needed. Collaboration between States in sharing technologies and innovation must accompany investments in better data gathering that maps risks, losses and trends. Together with the development of displacement risk models to better understand patterns, drivers and impacts, this will go a long way towards reducing the human and economic burden that defines disaster displacement.

Specifically, data is required before displacement occurs to assess the risk of it happening; during a disaster to identify the number of people displaced, their locations, needs and intentions in terms of durable solutions; and over time to monitor the conditions of displaced people and displacement-affected communities, including their progress toward durable solutions and assessments of their exposure and vulnerability to future risk. All data should ideally be disaggregated by age, gender and health status, and should identify those with specific needs, including women, children, older people, people with disabilities and indigenous and marginalized groups. The tools and systems used to collect and analyse the data should be interoperable to facilitate sharing, exchange and comparison.

c) Promoting monitoring and reporting of disaster displacement through the Sendai Framework Monitoring system, including development of national customary indicators on disaster displacement

The Panel might encourage the development of standardized custom indicators on disaster displacement based on the work of the [Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics](#) (EGRIS) for national reporting through the Sendai Framework Monitor.

Facilitated by UNDRR, Governments report on their progress toward the seven global targets of the Sendai Framework, as well as related dimensions reflected in SDGs 1, 11 and 13, through the [Sendai Framework Monitor](#). Progress is self-measured according to 38 indicators established by the Open-ended intergovernmental expert working group on indicators and terminology relating to disaster risk reduction (OIEWG).

There is no target explicitly on disaster displacement but Target B calls to substantially reduce the number of people affected by disasters globally, which includes people displaced by disasters. However, Governments may also report progress through custom targets and indicators that are defined by Member States to measure their progress against the four priorities of the Sendai Framework. Aligned with the integration of disaster displacement concerns into national DRR strategies, the development of displacement related custom national indicators is an excellent opportunity for Governments to monitor, address and reduce disaster displacement.

d) Enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration, awareness and capacities through the integration of disaster displacement into national and regional coordination mechanisms for DRR

The Panel could encourage Governments and the United Nations to address disaster displacement through relevant national and regional coordination mechanisms and platforms for DRR, as a means to enhance collaboration among DRR, disaster displacement and development actors at the national and regional levels.

Reflecting the cross-cutting nature of disaster risk reduction, many Governments have established national cross-ministerial working groups, task forces or platforms for DRR that bring together policy makers from relevant ministries such as finance, housing, health, agriculture, environment, with risk experts.

At the regional level, UNDRR with host countries is organizing biannual Regional Platforms for DRR, which enable cross-sectoral discussions and information exchange between countries, monitoring of progress and agreement on concrete regional action plans for the implementation of the Sendai Framework. Last but not least, regional risk-monitoring centres share risk information such as seasonal forecasts, and regional intergovernmental institutions⁷ support the development of regional strategies to prevent and prepare for disasters that may affect the region. As disaster displacement increases, regional and national institutions are increasingly

⁷ Examples include CAPRADE, CEPREDENAC, IGAD and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), among others.

seeking to build the capacity of their members to address it; the project to implement the WiA on Disaster Displacement (described above) directly responds to this need.

Regional examples of collaboration include the UNDRR and IOM collaboration in Asia Pacific, which led to a Regional Disaster Displacement Working Group. UNDRR and the Overseas development Institute (ODI) are currently developing a policy paper on “Understanding protracted and multiple disaster displacements in the Asia-Pacific” which will feed into the discussions at the 2021 Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on DRR. In Africa, UNDRR is collaborating with partners at the regional level, specifically IGAD, to support States in their efforts to integrate DRR and displacement concerns. This work is supported by a UN Environment and Migration regional working group.

e) Building on COVID-19 lessons learned to enhance awareness, political buy-in and capacity for disaster risk reduction

The Panel could highlight the importance of building on the lessons learned from COVID-19 to integrate a comprehensive risk lens into the post-COVID policy discussions and action, including ensuring that economic support packages do not amplify or create new risk, but rather reduce risks and build resilience for the future.

Whilst recognizing the suffering and severe economic, social and financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lessons learned and discussions on long-term recovery provide an opportunity to catalyse political interest and action into DRR as a means to avoid a repetition of such scenario. Governments must not only take appropriate responsive action but also commit to better preparedness, building back better and importantly, prevention.

COVID-19 must be seen not only as a global health emergency but also an example of systemic risk, characterized by its cascading impacts. The pandemic highlights the precarious systems upon which trade, food, energy, transportation, and social safety nets rely. In the pandemic everyone is affected, but not everyone is affected equally. The most vulnerable, including internally displaced people, are disproportionately affected.⁸ As highlighted in webinars organized by UNDRR on the topic⁹ the pandemic is exposing underlying vulnerabilities, and the critical need to include displacement in national and local DRR strategies to ensure that no one is left behind.

⁸ According to the IOM Statement on COVID-19 and Mobility, “In the short-term, within countries that have been hardest hit, migrants are exposed to many of the same vulnerabilities as other citizens, and often to a greater extent. Foreign nationals are more likely to be in overcrowded households or employed in short-term, or precarious work with limited provision for sick leave. Other migrants, in both regular and irregular status, may have limited access to public health services, or fear accessing such services. They may also be excluded from public health information programming or, when informed, lack the financial means to manage periods of self-isolation or quarantine. Across the world, in less affected countries, displaced populations in camps or camp-like settings are already highly vulnerable to contracting infectious disease, in conditions where a virus can more easily spread. Others caught up conflict may be some of the hardest populations to reach and monitor, yet most ill-equipped to protect themselves against infection.” See https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/iom_covid_key_messages_19-03_final.pdf

⁹ <https://www.undrr.org/event/webinar-reducing-covid-19-vulnerability-amongst-displaced-populations-and-migrants>

f) New and creative financing solutions, including the role of the private and financial sector

The Panel could promote the critical importance of increased disaster risk reduction financing and integration of disaster and climate risk analysis into investment decisions in relevant policy fora, including the discussions on Financing for Development and climate finance at UNFCCC COP-26.

As outlined above, disaster displacement is often caused by a multitude of interconnected hazards and risks. The economic impact of natural and man-made hazards plays a key role in people's decision to remain or leave their location. To effectively address increasingly systemic risks and reduce disaster displacement risk, new and innovative systemic solutions and approaches are required.

Reducing disaster risk and associated impacts, including disaster displacement, requires engaging collaboratively with DRR and development partners to ensure development and climate finance is risk informed. Yet, when it comes to disasters, the international community continues to disproportionately focus on financing disaster recovery and reconstruction rather than financing risk reduction and resilience building. Collective efforts are therefore needed to scale up disaster risk reduction financing. Ministries of finance, economy and planning, International Financial Institutions and development banks must be engaged to ensure increased funding for DRR, and most importantly, ensure that all financial and development strategies and plans are based on a comprehensive understanding of disaster risk.

Next to action by the public financial sector, private financial sector actors, including credit rating agencies and institutional investors, need to integrate sustainability factors into their risk assessments, including corporate resilience to disaster risk. Regulators and standard setters must ensure standards, definition and regulations are developed to promote and enforce risk informed public and private investment, including in resilient infrastructure.

Beyond the financial sector, the private sector as the main investor, employer and integral part of communities, is a critical partner to bring about this change. Business can catalyse change within its own constituencies through the application of risk-sensitive business investment, as well as spur the development of risk-sensitive regulatory and institutional frameworks. Integrating disaster risk considerations across value chains is a critical element to develop resilient infrastructure, enhance the sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and protect workers and their communities – and with this, strengthen the resilience of national and local economies. Private-sector partners should engage in capacity development and education and participate in the development of required policies, standards, tools and regulations contributing their expertise and innovation to reduce disaster risks at the national and local level.

As seen in many disaster situations, including the current COVID-19 crisis, the resilience of SMEs is particularly important for the resilience and wellbeing of communities in the face of disaster. Where SMEs fail, displacement is often the next step. Aligned with ongoing research undertaken by UNDRR and partners, Governments, lawmakers and relevant business associations, regulators and financial

supervisors should take increased action to support the long-term resilience of SMEs, including within global supply and value chains. This should include, among other:

- Strengthening engagement of the banking sector and local governments to ensure better access to financial products applicable to SME contexts and needs;
- Building a new 'genre' of Business Continuity Plans which go beyond short term preparedness and immediate response phases to comprehensively prevent and reduce risks long-term;
- Strengthening the utility sector and better understanding of related dependencies;
- Building capacity and providing 'applicable' guidance.

3. Conclusion

The increase of disaster displacement is one of the biggest challenges of our time. As the UN Secretary-General noted, millions of people become internally displaced every year due to disasters. Internally displaced persons are among the most vulnerable and face a variety of risks to their lives, health and wellbeing. Ever more people are displaced for longer periods of time, undermining the efforts of affected countries to achieve the SDGs.

Enhancing our common efforts for the **successful implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is a direct response to the UN Secretary-General's request to the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement** to focus on finding solutions to internal displacement situations and alleviating the impact on millions of affected people. The Sendai Framework provides a clear blueprint for Member States, United Nations entities and other relevant stakeholders to increase global attention on and support for displaced persons, as well as concrete recommendations on priority actions and durable solutions to improve the approach and response to the issue, through effective risk reduction, prevention and resilience building.

UNDRR thanks the High-level Panel for its attention and consideration.