



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction Third Session, Geneva, 8-13 May 2011

IOM Statement

When there used to be clear seasons, there also used to be an easier way to distinguish between humanitarian work and development work; at least they were anchored to a timeline, linking one phase to the other. The reality in which we operate today is more complex, seasonal lines are blurred and disasters affect countries and communities previously considered immune or developed enough to “bend but not to break”: such is the case of wildfires in Europe and Russia, tornados in the USA, the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan, the never-ending rainy season in Colombia and Namibia, and the extended dry season in the Sahel to mention just a few more recent events.

These events have a point in common: they force people to move. Research has shown that there is a steady increase in the number of people moving as a result of environmental factors, some probably exacerbated by climate change. Environmental factors – mainly natural disasters – are already contributing to forced displacement figures at a higher level than conflicts. This is without even counting people moving because of slow environmental processes – like coastal erosion or desertification – or as a result of complex situations where natural and man-made disasters are closely interlinked.

The floods in Pakistan in the summer 2010 were of a scale hardly ever seen before – comparable in size to the United Kingdom under water and leaving 1.9 million households in need of shelter. A few months before that, the earthquake in Haiti displaced almost 3 million individuals. Eight hundred thousand (800,000) of them, including single-headed households, orphans and old people with special needs are still living in makeshift camps more than a year after the disaster.

Both events have again clearly demonstrated not only the need for responding to the impact of disasters but more importantly to reduce populations’ exposure to hazards and their vulnerability to risk. Both events have also highlighted the need to go one step further: Beyond disaster risk reduction and the Hyogo Framework for Action, beyond bridging humanitarian assistance with developmental goals, Governments and key stakeholders need to integrate a comprehensive approach to environmental migration, along the migration management cycle – from preventing displacement to addressing its consequences. Integrating migration raises essential questions, for instance in relation to rural-urban migration and urbanization – that, if unmanaged, can expose vulnerable populations to numerous risks, including floods and landslides but also diseases.

What can be done? In response to the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) took a leading role within the UN system in providing humanitarian assistance to the displaced. But we did not stop there. Based on a strong partnership with the authorities and local partners, we looked to reshape development efforts through recovery plans and community based risk reduction. And it worked: with local partners we used mass communication as early warning and information system to reach out to the affected populations, we looked at a shelter strategy to would allow to build back better, we build the local capacities to deal better with displacement, we looked at comprehensive packages and solutions to facilitate sustainable return through livelihood diversification and at many other forms of response to increase resilience.

The level of attendance at this Global Platform is indeed a testimony of the consensus that DRR works, so why is it still difficult to secure funding? We hope to see political commitments translate into new instruments to complement the already stretched humanitarian funding system and help better link with structural investment in sustainable development. We also hope for a wider recognition of human mobility as an essential paradigm in understanding people's and communities' vulnerability. Migration does not have to be perceived as a worst case scenario; in most cases, it is not a failure to adapt but rather a form of adaptation to climate and environmental changes that helps reducing exposure, anticipating risks and minimizing the impact of disasters.

Progress has already been made on several fronts since the previous edition of the Global Platform in 2009. On the climate change front, with the inclusion of migration, displacement and planned relocation in the agreement reached in Cancun at the end of last year under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Within the disaster risk reduction community, migration is considered as one of the emerging issues, as recently communicated by the ISDR Secretariat. These are encouraging changes that we expect to see continue.

IOM stands ready to support and substantiate those efforts; as the global international migration organization with a strong presence on the ground –400 field locations– we are committed to devoting our expertise and resources to help the governments and partners to make disaster risk reduction a reality for community potentially exposed to migratory pressure.

[Please visit us at the IOM stall in the hall for further info.]