



Strasbourg, 31 August 2012

APCAT (2012) 16
Or.E

EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT (EUR-OPA)

IMPROVING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN CERTAIN VULNERABLE GROUPS

**63rd meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents,
Dubrovnik, Croatia
4-5 October 2012**

www.coe.int/euoparisks

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents is invited to:

- examine the present document aimed to identify possible work of the Agreement concerning the resilience of people from vulnerable groups

- exchange views on the actions proposed, so as to instruct the Executive Secretariat on possible activities to be carried out in the field.

1. Introduction

In April 2011 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. The Committee recognised the value of applying best ethical principles in disaster risk reduction, in improving the resilience of societies and in responding efficiently to emergencies.

The intention of this document was manifold. On the one hand, the Ethical Principles provide a good compilation of principles already recognised by other Council of Europe legal texts and helped to well present the DRR work of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement within the main concerns of the Council of Europe. Disasters create exceptional circumstances but human rights cannot be ignored because of an emergency. On the other hand, the Ethical Principles may serve as a base to develop innovative work within the Agreement that will result in guidance to governments and other actors as how to improve DRR (involving prevention, reduction of vulnerability, preparedness, assistance in emergencies and recovery), in particular circumstances as regards vulnerable groups.

2. Possible work in the framework of the Agreement

At the last meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents in April 2012, the Executive Secretariat invited the Head of the Social Cohesion and Integration Division of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorsten Afflerbach, to present activities of the Organisation regarding people with disabilities. The Committee instructed the Executive Secretariat to work in cooperation with other Council of Europe Sectors on vulnerable people and DRR, aiming at producing both policy recommendations and practical solutions to improve the resilience and preparedness of vulnerable groups.

The "Ethical Principles" deal with vulnerable people:

- a) in the chapter devoted to ethical principles applied **prior** to disasters:

Principle 11 – Special prevention measures for the most vulnerable groups

Pregnant women, children, disabled persons, elderly persons, the sick, the wounded, indigenous populations, environmentally displaced persons, ethnic and religious minorities and the most disadvantaged members of society, including persons or groups of persons who are victims of racism, benefit from disaster prevention measures tailored to their already existing vulnerability.

- b) in the chapter devoted to ethical principles applied **during** disasters:

Principle 6 – Emergency assistance for the most vulnerable persons

Allowing for local circumstances and without prejudice to the priority assistance to be given to all who have a chance of survival, priority for humanitarian assistance, first aid and any emergency evacuations go in priority to the most vulnerable people, such as pregnant women, children, people with disabilities, elderly people, the ill and the wounded.

States train and provide special equipment to members of the emergency services and doctors and nurses, so that they are able to search for and provide first aid to the most fragile persons.

c) in the chapter devoted to ethical principles applied **after** disasters:

Vulnerable people who may have been victims of disasters or are wounded or lost their homes will benefit (**principle 3**) from economic, social and cultural rights like other victims.

The Executive Secretariat has identified three vulnerable groups receiving the attention of other Council of Europe sectors on which the Agreement could focus its work in the period 2012-2014:

- people with disabilities
- children
- displaced people, migrants and refugees.

2.1 People with disabilities

One of the General Principles in the Ethical Principles is the Principle of Non-discrimination:

“Measures to prevent, reduce and prepare for disasters and to distribute relief and promote recovery, and also the enjoyment of fundamental rights are secured and implemented without distinction on any ground such as gender, sexual orientation, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, ethnic group, affiliation to a national minority, socioeconomic circumstances, birth, disability, age or other status.”

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 the 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. Public authorities have the duty to see that people with disabilities are not discriminated because of their disabilities in prevention, preparedness, during emergencies and in recovery.

The work of the Agreement in this field may focus on two issues:

- participating (drafting a chapter on DRR and people with disabilities) in the revision of the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and participation of people with disabilities in societies (2006-2015). This plan is to be reviewed in 2013 and 2014.
- during 2012 a report could be prepared on the topic with precise proposals on the following issues (amongst others):

- information and awareness on risks to people with disabilities
- adapting alerts to people with disabilities
- engaging people with disabilities to preparedness for emergencies (training, definition of needs)
- engaging civil protection in disability inclusive disaster risk reduction
- adapting buildings to emergencies and evacuation of people with disabilities (applying universal design for emergencies)
- special needs of people with disabilities during emergencies (contingency plans).

The objective of the report would be to prepare draft European Guidelines on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR).

In the first months of 2013 a working group could meet to examine draft guidelines and make proposals to the Committee of Permanent Correspondents.

2.2 Children

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 depend upon adults in case of disasters and require special needs and attention during emergency situations. The Council of Europe programme on children has mainly focused on promoting children's rights in all Council of Europe policy areas (democracy, justice, education, health, etc...), promoting children's access to justice and eradication of all forms of violence against children.

The Agreement has also been active in focusing on children, particularly with regard to education, as a priority in its programme of activities - a real "cornerstone" of the building of a risk culture aimed to make societies more resilient. The two following fields have been the main instruments:

- the development of the Internet-base BE-SAFE-NET learning tool, mainly aimed at children, teachers and the general public. The website provides knowledge on natural and technological hazards and how to protect people from their effects;
- active participation in the ISDR Thematic Platform on Knowledge and Education (in collaboration with ISDR, 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).

The subject of children and DRR has also been further explored by other Organisations, including UNICEF (which 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), SAVE THE CHILDREN and other actors.

The Agreement may focus its work in this field on two specific actions:

- reinforcing in 2012-2014 the BE-SAFE-NET tool, increasing to at least 8 working languages
- preparing a main conference (event in 2014 aiming at examining positive European experiences and publicising the main conclusions and messages of UNICEF's work in the field).

2.3. Displaced people, migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees have been a permanent concern of the Council of Europe, especially as migration driven by globalization continues to be a shaping force of European society. The Council of Europe, following the principle of non-discrimination, has encouraged the protection of rights of migrants, refugees and displaced people. In particular the Parliamentary Assembly adopted in 2010 its Recommendation 1917 "Migrants and refugees: a continuing challenge for the Council of Europe", encouraging the signature and implementation of the European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers by member States and requesting the Council of Europe to further develop hard and soft law instruments and practical activities pertaining to migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons. The Parliamentary Assembly has also dealt with environmental and climate refugees in its Resolution 1655 (2009) on "Environmentally induced migration and displacement: a 21st Century Challenge", noting in particular that natural disasters and environmental degradation will cause human migration, with humanitarian and security dimensions. In this Resolution, the Parliamentary Assembly calls, amongst other actions, to promote policy coherence in migration, development and humanitarian policies, as well as climate change adaptation policies including dealing with their effects on migrants.

The Council of Europe Committee of Migration, Refugees and displaced persons has also promoted the development of policies for the protection of the rights of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons and the improvement of their living conditions.

Clearly these groups are also more vulnerable to suffer the effects of disaster given their limited access to resilience information (they may not master the language of the State where they are displaced, not be aware of risks familiar to locals, etc.). These groups may also have an increased vulnerability if their living conditions are below average (refugee camps, marginal settings in dangerous areas) or if, as a consequence of their situation, they have poor health, relatively low education, etc.

The integration of migrants has been on the agenda of the Council of Europe for decades, aiming to identify and share good practice and encourage access to better living conditions.

The Agreement may focus its work in the field in two specific domains:

- work in partnership with the Council of Europe Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons to prepare a common report on “Improving resilience to disasters of migrants, refugees and displaced persons” with a recommendation to the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. This work could be completed in 2013;
- prepare a possible conference (in partnership with OCHA, UN-ISDR, UNHCR, IFRC and other appropriate Organisations) on improving Disaster Risk Reduction with migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people. The Conference could be scheduled for 2014.