

THE  
NANSEN  
INITIATIVE

DISASTER-INDUCED CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT



# HUMAN MOBILITY, NATURAL DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC

## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

**Nansen Initiative Pacific Regional Consultation**

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 21-24 May 2013

DISASTERS  
CLIMATE CHANGE AND  
DISPLACEMENT  EVIDENCE  
FOR ACTION

PARTNERS





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# CONCLUSIONS

**Participants from 10 Pacific countries, other countries, as well as representatives from regional and international organizations, civil society, and academia, met in Rarotonga from 21 to 24 May 2013 for a consultation on “Human Mobility, Natural Disasters and Climate Change in the Pacific.” They welcomed the Nansen Initiative. This Initiative is a state-led, bottom-up consultative process intended to build consensus on a protection agenda addressing the needs of people displaced across international borders in the context of natural disasters, as well as the effects of climate change.**

Participants reaffirmed the 2008 Niue Declaration on Climate Change, in which Pacific Leaders emphasise “the importance of retaining the Pacific’s social and cultural identity, and the desire of the Pacific peoples to continue to live in their own countries, where possible.” The participants stressed that having to leave one’s own country is the least preferred option. Participants expressed concern that cross-border relocation may negatively impact on nationhood, control over land and sea territory, sovereignty, culture and livelihoods.

Participants stressed the importance of climate change mitigation and adaption measures to prevent displacement and avoid the need for relocation. Planning within the region for population movement must be seen as complementary to these efforts.

Participants expressed concern that effects of climate change and recurrent natural disasters in the Pacific region increasingly trigger population movements. Cyclones, flooding, landslides, tsunamis, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions cause the displacement of communities. Already, coastal erosion and the salinisation of fresh water sources and agricultural land associated with sea level rise prompt people to move to safer places or even make the planned relocation of whole villages necessary. In this context, the identification of suitable land to relocate communities at risk of exposure to natural disasters, or whose land has been rendered uninhabitable, is a particular challenge.

Participants noted the long history of mobility in the Pacific region and the support provided to people through existing clan and kinship networks. Participants also acknowledged the history of solidarity between Pacific Island countries in assisting each other in the wake of natural disasters, as well as the

humanitarian and development assistance provided from within the region and beyond. Participants were impressed by the fact that many communities show a high level of resilience in the face of environmental degradation linked to climate change and natural disasters. They also welcomed the important role played by faith-based organizations and traditional support systems.

Participants also noted that voluntary migration abroad, while still mainly economic in character, in some Pacific countries is increasingly associated with environmental degradation linked to climate change and natural disasters. As a consequence of sea level rise, acidification and more extreme weather patterns, voluntary migration, planned relocation and forced displacement are expected to rise significantly in the next decades and beyond. While such population movements primarily take place within the borders of Pacific countries, some are already cross-border in nature. In this regard, participants recognized that some Pacific people affected by natural disasters and environmental degradation may freely migrate to states with which their country of origin has special ties. This avenue is not readily available for citizens of all Pacific Island countries whose territory will be particularly affected by the consequences of climate change and whose populations are at a heightened risk of having to move abroad.

While recognizing the need to strengthen mitigation and adaptation efforts, which, if effective, would allow people to stay in their homes, participants agreed that in the context of natural disasters and climate change these developments require action and resource mobilization to be taken at community, national, regional and international levels. Such actions include:



## 1. At the community level to

- Strengthen the resilience of communities through risk assessments, disaster preparedness measures, disaster risk reduction measures, and development interventions.
- Prepare, through consultation, education, and awareness raising, at-risk communities as well as potential host communities for the prospect of population movements, and what this entails.
- Ensure that in the context of planned relocation and displacement:
  - affected communities are informed, consulted and able to participate actively in relevant decisions and their implementation;
  - basic services, adequate housing, and access to livelihoods without discrimination are available for relocated people in the receiving community;
  - adequate mechanisms and/or safeguards are in place to prevent and solve conflicts over land and resources due to factors such as cultural diversity or population growth.

## 2. At the national level to

- Integrate voluntary migration, forced displacement, and planned relocation within national laws and policies, such as National Adaptation Plans, Joint National Action Plans, and National Disaster Management Plans.
- Continue to strengthen and deepen education, training and upskilling of Pacific Islanders, including through qualification and accreditation alignment, so that they can migrate with dignity if they choose to do so.
- Strengthen national capacities to identify and address the assistance and protection needs of particularly vulnerable persons among those affected by natural disasters and climate change.
- Take measures such as land audits, demarcation of uncontested boundaries and community land mapping to facilitate the identification of land when people need to be temporarily or permanently moved, within their own country or abroad.
- Encourage review of existing citizenship laws to ensure that they allow for dual nationality as a measure to help safeguard the cultural identity of those who move abroad. This helps to sustain ties to countries of origin and allows for the possibility of circular migration where appropriate.



- Encourage review, as part of regional processes, of existing admission and immigration policies:
  - to allow people affected by natural disasters and climate change to voluntarily migrate to another country in order to avoid displacement at a later stage, and to promote community resilience, e.g., through remittances and skills development;
  - to introduce mechanisms for temporary or permanent protection for people displaced from another country in the aftermath of a natural disaster.
- Ensure the full respect of the human rights of people admitted in the context of voluntary migration, forced displacement and planned relocation.
- Ratify and implement relevant international human rights instruments.

### 3. At the regional level to

- Continue the regional dialogue on voluntary migration, forced displacement and planned relocation.
- Integrate consideration of voluntary migration, forced displacement, and planned relocation within ongoing regional processes, such as the Pacific Plan Review and the revision of other relevant regional frameworks.

- Develop appropriate normative frameworks to address the protection needs of displaced or relocated populations, including temporary protection schemes or template agreements, which take into account lessons from past experience and incorporate existing good practices from the Pacific Island countries.
- Encourage regional agencies and national governments to continue to identify gaps in knowledge and collect relevant data.

### 4. At the international level to

- Ensure that the Pacific region maintains a strong voice in international fora, while also respecting and reflecting the diversity in the region.
- Ensure that donor priorities are better aligned with regional and national priorities.
- Encourage discussions regarding resources being made available within the framework of existing or new international financial mechanisms to cover costs and investments related to displacement and planned relocation, and to compensate for loss of community ties, land, and cultural assets.
- Encourage states and relevant international organizations to develop appropriate normative frameworks to address the protection needs of displaced or relocated populations.



DISASTERS  
CLIMATE CHANGE AND  
DISPLACEMENT



## EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

This is a multi-partner project funded by the European Commission (EC) whose overall aim is to address a legal gap regarding cross-border displacement in the context of disasters. The project brings together the expertise of three distinct partners (UNHCR, NRC/IDMC and the Nansen Initiative) seeking to:

- 1 › **increase the understanding** of States and relevant actors in the international community about displacement related to disasters and climate change;
- 2 › **equip them to plan for and manage** internal relocations of populations in a protection sensitive manner; and
- 3 › **provide States and other relevant actors tools and guidance** to protect persons who cross international borders owing to disasters, including those linked to climate change.

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