

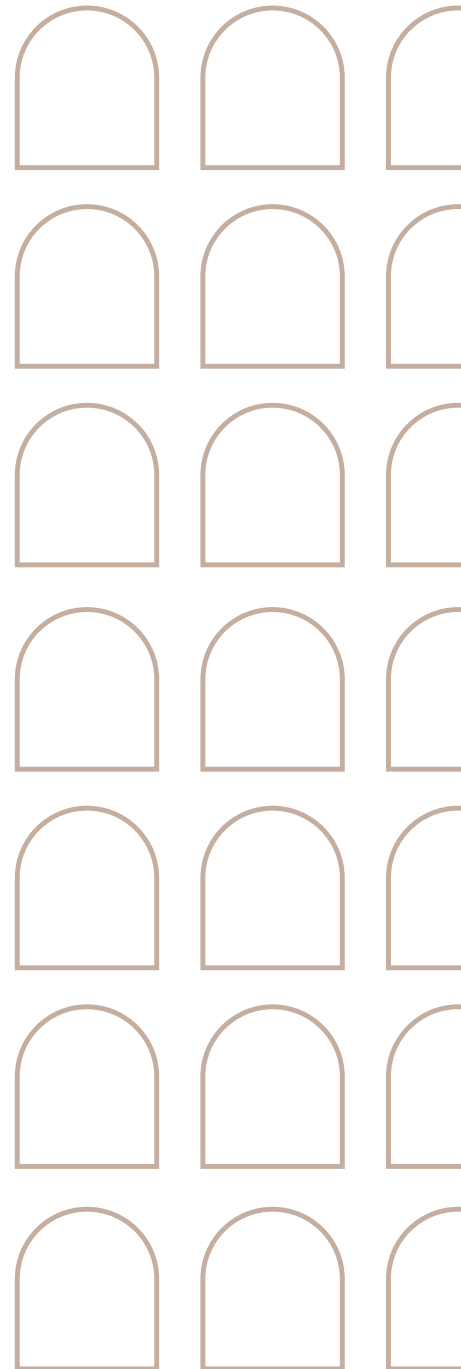
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION POLICIES IN A FAST-CHANGING SCENARIO: HOW TO IMPROVE OWNERSHIP AND INCLUSION.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief intends to provide information and support for advocacy in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policy making. It develops around the idea, shared among others by the United Nations (UN) the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), as well as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, that there is no such thing as a natural disaster, and the risk of what disasters there are can therefore be reduced by people. The brief addresses the need to build ownership and to foster inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction framework and its associated policies. It first presents the main concepts and frameworks of reference for DRR actors. Then it gives an overview of the main global trends, both positive and challenging, drawing from experiences matured during recent disasters. Finally, it proposes recommendations to policy actors.

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1. GENERAL CONCEPTS

Natural disasters do not exist. Natural hazards, however, do occur, and when meeting certain factors, have disastrous effects on the environment, including its human inhabitants. Those factors are produced or exacerbated by humans and can be categorised into physical, social, economic, political and environmental. By considering our responsibility in disasters, we humans also tap into the power that we have in reducing their impact.

When working on Disaster Risk Reduction policies and practices, it is important to understand the nature of the risk in order to address it. Usually, the Risk equation is expressed as follows: **Risk = Hazard and Exposure x Vulnerability ÷ Capacity**. People can reduce risk by acting on each of the components of the equation. This policy brief will mainly address vulnerability which, according to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), is "The condition determined by physical, social, economic and environmental

factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards."

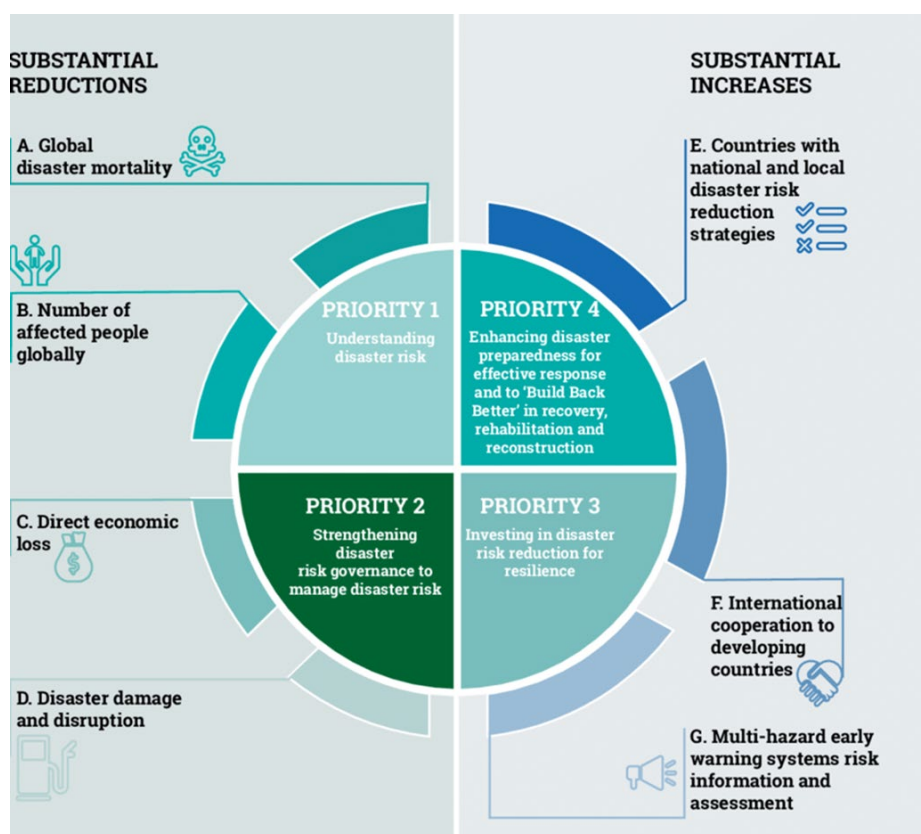
This brief refers to inclusiveness as to the capacity of a strategy plan or policy, to take into consideration, understand and appreciate needs, skills and abilities of each individual, considering meaningful intersectional factors, such as disability, gender, religion, age. Local ownership of DRR is defined as the extent to which local communities understand and get engaged in DRR.

2. CURRENT FRAMEWORKS

The Sendai Framework was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015. It was signed by 187 member countries and is the global Disaster Risk Reduction policy. It outlines seven global targets (see Figure 1).

Targets E and F are directly linked to the policy process at national and transnational level, and they are a key factor regarding

Figure 1



Source: Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022, <https://www.undrr.org/gar2022-our-world-risk-gar>

the achievement of all other priorities. The Sendai framework is also explicit in the need for governments to engage with “relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards”¹, and in the need to determine roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder².

The Sendai Framework recognizes [poverty as both a cause and an effect of disasters](#). For this reason, the Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is often considered a complementary framework, as it underlines the need to put an end to poverty, hunger, inequalities and reduce the negative impact of climate change.

As disasters are directly linked to this latter factor, the third framework for reference is the Paris Agreement with its pledge to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius and the willingness to strengthen countries’ capacities to deal with the impacts of climate change. The Paris agreement underlines the need to pursue both mitigation and adaptation actions, therefore creating a bridge to [DRR](#).

3. WHAT IS GOING WRONG?

[The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022](#) (GAR) shows an annual growth in the number of national and regional DRR policies. However, it also provides evidence of an increased occurrence of disasters and resulting damage. In addition to these already alarming data, it underlines how 2 years of the COVID 19 pandemic exacerbated vulnerabilities and in doing so weakened [community resilience](#).

A growing number of countries acknowledge the need for a policy process which is inclusive towards all actors, including those who could be directly affected by disasters. However, very few have created mechanisms that allow the

framework, once finalized, to take contextual changes into account: DRR policy cycles rarely offers enough opportunity for reception of new contextual elements and adequate updates. In a fast-changing world, where disasters are becoming more frequent, a national DRR policy which is not able to take cues from updated contextual analysis is soon obsolete.

Certain factors have recently proven to be especially complex when interacting with DRR plans. Examples show (Myanmar-Bangladesh Rohingya migration 2017-2018; Türkiye earthquake 2023) that governments can be reluctant to acknowledge their responsibility to protect and include people in certain vulnerable situations, especially when these are linked to the forced displacement of a population. Often, policy actors in countries hosting refugees consider them as something separate from their territory and citizenship, and neglect the interactions and impact of migration fluxes on communities. Protection is left to those organizations (mainly NGOs and the UN) providing humanitarian support. In this way, territory and to all effects the people living there, are not included in DRR strategies.

Lack of inclusion in each phase of the cycle brings lack of ownership. Risk increases when disaster occurs, as people do not consider themselves actors who could limit damage and save their own lives and those of others. Lack of adequate context analysis, including factors related to conflict sensitivity, leads to DRR policies and plans that are not suitable for the context and that therefore cannot be used as sustainable roadmaps.

4. WHAT IS WORKING?

An increasing number of governments are modifying DRR frameworks making them more inclusive and taking into account not only the Sendai Framework, but also the SDG agenda and the Paris Agreement. The GAR 2022 reports that in Mozambique, the ruling authorities developed the National Policy and Strategy for Internal Displacement Management through an innovative process. This process connected

¹ The Sendai Framework, United Nations – Headquarters, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, page 10, chapter 7. Retrieved from: <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

² *Ibid*, page 23, chapter 36

Case Study:

Türkiye hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees. UNHCR reports how by 2021 resentment and negativity around Syrian Refugees in Turkey had sharply increased. [The percentage of Turkish citizens demanding that the refugees be returned grew from less than 49% in 2017 to 82% in 2021](#). This data mirrors a divided community, where trust and fear are dominant and social cohesion is scarce, with migrants and refugees being increasingly vulnerable and isolated. Nevertheless, this information was not concretely embedded in DRR policies, planning and actions. After the earthquake that shook the country on the night of February 6th 2023, this fragility of the social fabric worsened, and several reports from the first weeks of response show the challenges that Syrian refugees met in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. These challenges ranged from being harassed in the communities they were living in, to even becoming the targets of political campaigns asking them to return to Syria.

all relevant stakeholders, and considered all triggers for displacement, including disasters, climate change and conflict. All relevant ministries are bound to respect the framework and to budget adequately. The creation of a nation-level multisectoral and transdisciplinary team helped promote ownership at governmental level; implementation is now underway, but such conditions look promising.

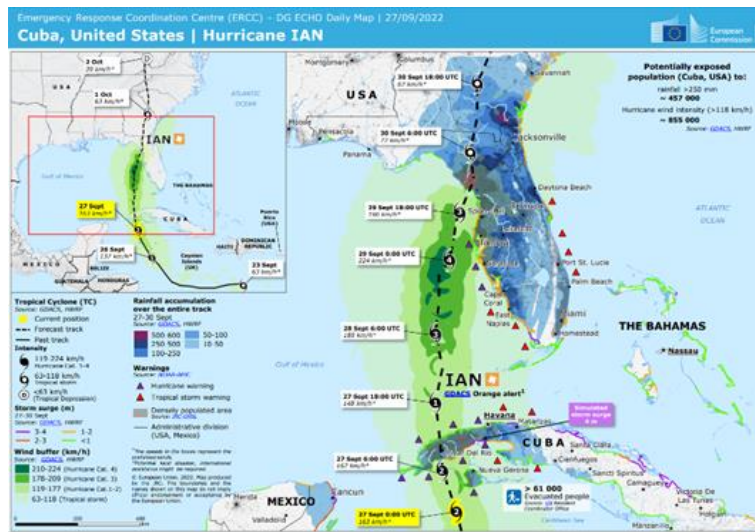
Other countries are increasingly promoting community ownership and agency. Cuba, affected by several crises and by 60 years of US unilateral sanctions, is not in the position to invest in sustainable reconstruction. Therefore, the National Civil Defense is working, together with International Non-Governmental Organizations, United Nations Agencies and the DG ECHO, to improve Early Warning Systems through the active engagement of communities, which are trained in preparedness, monitoring, adequate communication and response. Appropriate procedures are put in place by and for persons with disability, elderly citizens, and women. Indigenous knowledge is progressively being incorporated for asset protection. Indeed, Hurricane Ian (see Figure 2, page 6), which affected the western part of the island in September 2022, resulted in 5 casualties in Cuba. The same hurricane, registered with the same strength, recorded 149 casualties in Florida a few days later.

5. HOW CAN WE DO BETTER?

Every DRR policy framework needs to be context specific. Nevertheless, DRR policy actors can take into account certain general considerations that, with due adaptation, can be useful for an improved and more down-to-earth policy cycle:

- Build DRR policies on solid conflict analysis. Policy actors should look at conflict not exclusively as armed conflict but as “a clash or struggle between groups who perceive that their needs, goals or strategies are incompatible, mutually exclusive or antagonistic. Conflict can involve contestation around demands, interests, collective memory, emotions, perceptions, values, beliefs, history, culture, behaviours, actions, symbols and power. Conflict can manifest from micro interactions to macro systems” (UNICEF). Every context presents pre-existing conflicts that might escalate after a disaster occurs.
- Accompany conflict analysis with a conflict-sensitive approach, which, according to [Interpeace](#), is the capacity of an organisation or an institution to “understand the context in which it operates; understand the interaction between its operations and the context, and act upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on the context”. A conflict-sensitive approach will prevent from doing harm and reinforcing existing gaps and inequalities.

Figure 2



Source: <https://reliefweb.int/map/cuba/cuba-united-states-hurricane-ian-dg-echo-daily-map-27092022>

- Actively practise inclusion at every stage of the policy process, building on existing guidelines and [tools](#). A channel of communication needs to be open between authorities and other actors with a stake in policy, including those who could be directly impacted by disasters. This process is essential to creating a sense of ownership at all levels. It also helps to identify crosscutting factors that have the potential to be transformed into vulnerability, and to include them in action plans stemming from the DRR policy, thus mitigating their potentially negative impact.
- From a broader perspective, one could say that it is essential for policy makers to adopt a peace-responsive approach when undertaking the DRR policy process. Only this approach can **both avoid doing harm to community and contribute to social cohesion**. Social cohesion is essential to improving the resilience in the community, to increasing solidarity in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, and to triggering positive dynamics for reconstruction.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The scope of this brief was to address inclusion and ownership in a DRR policy framework, as I consider their attainment to be among the main challenges in achieving the goals of the Sendai Framework and, therefore, the

creation of communities that can prevent and face disaster with solidarity and effectiveness. However, it is important to acknowledge the current global landscape is presenting new challenges, especially when linked to the simultaneous occurrence of more than one disastrous event (for example, the Covid 19 pandemic, armed gangs and the earthquake in Haiti). A successful DRR framework therefore needs to engage in a multi-risk approach.

A final word stemming from my professional experience in Disaster Risk Reduction in complex contexts: when disasters are not appropriately managed, social gaps, poverty, vulnerability, abuse and tensions escalate, and the displacement of population increases. In a world where climate change is a growing concern for the safety and the survival of the human kind, we need to consistently consider DRR as one of the most effective tools for reducing climate change related displacement.

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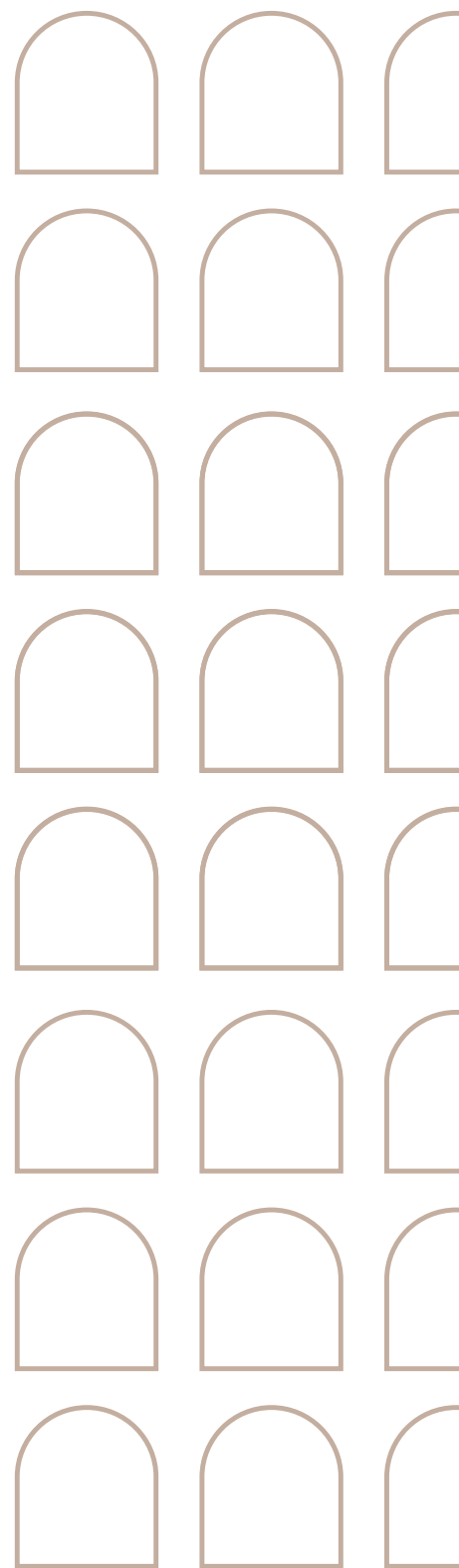
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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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doi: 10.2870/9320
ISBN: 978-92-9466-390-0
ISSN: 2600-271X
QM-BA-23-010-EN-N

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