

Concept Note
2021 Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council
High-Level Panel

“Humanitarian action and climate change: advancing anticipatory approaches, strengthening resilience and enhancing collaboration in response to the climate crisis”

Thursday 24 June, 3:00-5:00 pm Geneva time/9:00-11:00am New York time

Hybrid (In-person in Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva & virtual)

Background

Climate change has been one of the key drivers of increasing humanitarian needs that have more than doubled over the last decade. This trend is expected to further escalate in the future as increasingly severe and frequent sudden- and slow-onset disasters amplified by climate change destroy livelihoods, erode resilience, fuel displacement, exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and intersect with other drivers of vulnerability, instability and conflict. For some, the climate crisis is an existential threat. In this context, existing humanitarian capacities and available resources will struggle to keep pace.

Significant initiatives have been launched to address the humanitarian implications of climate change, including at the Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary-General in 2019, while the 2021 Climate Adaptation Summit increased momentum for investments in adaptation and resilience. Recent experiences provide resounding evidence of how anticipatory action can provide a faster, more cost-efficient and more dignified humanitarian response ahead of climate hazards, aided by advancements in predictive analytics, risk analysis and forecasting. Early warning is increasingly translating into timely and effective early action that reaches the last mile and helps save lives and livelihoods. The importance and dividends of prevention, preparedness and resilience were made evident by the impacts and lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, much more needs to be done to accelerate and expand actions to address escalating climate risks and disaster impacts which threaten to overwhelm the capacities of affected countries and humanitarian organizations to respond effectively and reach those in need. The humanitarian system must strengthen preparedness, scale up anticipatory action and respond earlier and faster. These efforts need to be complemented with increased investment in prevention, adaptation and risk-informed sustainable development, including resilient infrastructure, while also increasing the availability and coverage of multi-hazard early warning systems for the most vulnerable in locations exposed to climate risks. International support needs to complement and reinforce local approaches and disaster preparedness, response and resilience at community level. Special focus must be on women and girls and Small Island Developing States, owing to the disproportionate impact of disasters on them. Recurring climate-related disasters leave insufficient time for communities to fully recover, rebuild their resilience and resume progress toward SDGs before the next shock.

Objectives

The high-level panel will explore concrete actions for the humanitarian system to better prepare for and respond to escalating climate risks and disaster impacts, in a timely, effective and cost-efficient manner. In particular, the panel will identify critical actions required to scale up anticipatory action and advance the system-wide shift, including solutions for planning, operations and financing. The panel will investigate opportunities for the humanitarian system to strengthen collaboration and complementarity with development, disaster risk reduction, climate and peacebuilding actors. The panel will discuss the essential role and leadership of women and girls in community resilience, preparedness and response efforts, as well as recent experiences and best practices in supporting resilience and responses in vulnerable countries and communities.

Guiding questions

- What are the concrete immediate and longer-term implications of climate change for humanitarian action? How can the humanitarian system ensure sufficient capacity and readiness at the global, regional, national and local levels to address the escalating risks and impacts of disasters and climate change, now and in the future?
- How can we advance the humanitarian system-wide shift to anticipatory approaches? What are the enablers and solutions to overcome challenges and scale up anticipatory action? How do we strengthen the coordination, coherence, complementarity, and coverage of anticipatory action initiatives? What are the lessons learned and best practices we need to capitalize on and replicate, and how should this be done?
- What are some of the recent best practices and recommended concrete actions to mobilize predictable and timely funding at required scale in support of prevention, preparedness and anticipatory action?
- What are some of recent lessons, best practices and key recommendations related to reinforcing local capacities, resilience and responses in communities and countries (e.g. Small Island Developing States) that are vulnerable to climate change and affected by recurring disasters?
- How can humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction, climate and peacebuilding actors work better together in support of the most vulnerable people and countries and strengthen their disaster preparedness, response and resilience efforts?

- How are disaster and climate risks and impacts affecting women and girls? What are the solutions needed to strengthen their resilience and leadership as responders?
- What are the challenges and required solutions to prevent, prepare for and respond to displacement in the context of disasters and climate change?
- What are the opportunities COVID-19 recovery and COP26 present for humanitarian assistance and strengthening climate resilience?

Chair

- H.E. Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council

Moderator

- Ms. Anja Nitzsche, Chief, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Branch, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Panel speakers

- Ms. Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Mr. Ibrahima Cheikh Diong, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Director-General, African Risk Capacity Group
- Ms. Bolormaa Nordov, Secretary-General, Mongolian Red Cross Society
- Ms. Elizabeth Riley, Executive Director (Acting), Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency
- Ms. Andrea Koulaimah, Director (Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and Pacific), Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission
- Dr. Daniel Clarke, Director, Centre for Disaster Protection