NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

CHALLENGES OF ADDRESSING DISASTER-INDUCED URBAN DISPLACEMENT IN EL SALVADOR

BRIEFING PAPER

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DISASTERS CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT

EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

PARTNERS

THE NANSEN INITIATIVE
DISASTER-INDUCED CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT

iDMC internal displacement monitoring centre

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

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1. INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper presents key findings of research into the challenges of protecting people displaced by disasters and how to improve disaster management in urban areas of El Salvador. Intended to support the Nansen Initiative, this study is part of a research project commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) – entitled 'Urbanisation, disasters and displacement in Central America and Southeast Asia' – which combines a global desk study with country studies on El Salvador and the Philippines. It explores challenges related to protection of the displaced and disaster management in urban areas.

Focusing on the prevention of displacement, protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and facilitation of durable solutions, the research explores complexities of disaster management in urban areas characterised by:

- rapid growth driven by rural to urban migration and displacement
- densely populated marginalised and informal settlements
- inadequate infrastructure that does not match the needs and the settlement patterns of the population
- populations vulnerable both to disasters and social protection challenges that accompany poverty and marginalisation.

This paper provides a Salvadoran perspective on the challenges of disaster management and protection of individuals displaced by disasters. Hopefully this research will be of relevance in other countries also experiencing rapid urbanisation, highly prone to disasters and facing the daunting challenges of the human mobility implications of climate change. In El Salvador and elsewhere government disaster management (DM) and humanitarian actors will face more frequent and more intense disasters, triggering further displacement in urban areas. In order to most effectively protect populations before, during and after displacement, they will have to adjust their policies and protection interventions to meet the intricacies of the urban landscape, the needs of IDPs and those who might be displaced across borders.

This paper identifies emerging policy and practical challenges confronting humanitarian actors in El Salvador. It does not seek to apportion blame regarding how actors currently provide protection. Rather, it seeks to help governmental and non-governmental actors throughout Central America understand the challenges that DM, humanitarian actors and communities face in El Salvador, identify commonalities and differences and discuss how they may address them.

Findings presented below are based on 23 key actor interviews that the principal researcher conducted over ten days in February 2014. Semi-structured interviews were held with representatives of the national government, local government, national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international NGOs and UN agencies. In addition, there was one community focus group. Interviews were conducted in the Área Metropolitana de San Salvador (AMSS) and in San Miguel Province. It should be noted that the research particularly focused on the AMSS and did not explore characteristics that might differentiate one city from another. In order to respect confidentiality, and as promised to each interviewee, this brief does not specify the names of individual informants.

2. DISASTERS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND URBANISATION IN EL SALVADOR

2.1 BACKGROUND

El Salvador is prone to multiple sorts of disasters. These include storms, floods, earthquakes, droughts and volcanic eruptions. El Salvador is the ninth-most risk prone nation in the world and the ninth-most exposed to natural hazards.[1] Climate change is expected to increase the intensity of rainfall, heat waves and drought.[2]

Population growth and rural-urban migration has resulted in rapid, uncontrolled urban expansion since the mid-20th century.[3] During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a significant shift from primarily rural to primarily urban.[4] Migration has been complemented by a historic trend of conflict-induced displacement from rural to urban areas, in particular to San Salvador.[5] Secondary cities such as Santa Ana and San Miguel have had similar patterns of rapid urbanisation as the AMSS, but with far less planning capacity to deal with the implications.[6]

Historically, El Salvador has experienced an absolute displacement rate of 12,200 people per year as a result of disasters. This corresponds to a relative rate of 2,023 individuals per million. Earthquakes have caused the greatest proportion of displacement.[7]

The World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)[8] note that several factors increase vulnerability to displacement by disasters within El Salvador:

> *Severe land degradation, unplanned urban growth in areas unsuitable for development and weak enforcement of building codes and zoning regulations are the main drivers of most of the current vulnerability [to floods and landslides] in El Salvador.*[9]

IDMC and NRC estimate that displacement by disasters between 2014 and 2018 will be higher than the historic rate, at 16,791 average per annum (absolute) and 2,654 per million inhabitants. This represents a 31 per cent change in the relative rate of displacement.[10] The data does not distinguish between rural and urban origins of displacement. The report notes that high population density and exposure to risk are significant factors in the country's disaster risk configuration.

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1 2013 World Risk Index

2 The World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction (GFDRR), 2010, *Disaster Risk Management in Latin America and the Caribbean Region: GFDRR Country Notes,* p.146, http://goo.gl/QJvS4E

3 Hild, Anne, 2009, *RIESGOS URBANOS: LA POBLACIÓN DE SAN SALVADOR ENTRE VOLCANOS, BARRANCOS Y SISMOS,* "La Gestión del Riesgo Urbano en América Latina: Recopilación de Artículos", Plataforma Temática de Riesgo Urbano – UNISDR, pp.194-195, http://www.unisdr.org/files/11118_eird.pdf; Lungo, Mario and Baires, Sonia, 1995, "San Salvador: crecimiento urbano, riesgos ambientales y desastres", *Alternativas para el Desarrollo* 29, pp.5-6, http://www.repo.funde.org/282/

4 Lungo, Mario and Baires, Sonia, 1995, "San Salvador: crecimiento urbano, riesgos ambientales y desastres", *Alternativas para el Desarrollo* 29, p.3, http://www.repo.funde.org/282/

5 Brockett, Charles D, 1994, "EL SALVADOR: The Long Journey from Violence to Reconciliation", *Latin American Research Review* 29, p.179, http://goo.gl/Tz2l3o

6 Rajack, Robin, and McWilliams, Katie, 2012, *Expanding Land Supply in Rapidly Urbanizing El Salvador: A Latin American Success,* Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, Washington 2012, p.8., http://goo.gl/6BUq4x

7 Lavell, Chris and Ginetti,J. , 2013, *Technical Paper: The risk of disaster-induced displacement: Central America and the Caribbean,* IDMC/NRC, p.34, http://goo.gl/V5R2Tb

8 See https://www.gfdrr.org

9 World Bank and GFDRR 2010, *op. cit.,* p.145.

10 Lavell and Ginetti, 2013, *op. cit.,* p.34

A house remains next to the scar of a major 2001 landslide in Santa Tecla. The residents apparently refuse to relocate in spite of the risks. Photo © Jeremy Harkey

2.2 DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN EL SALVADOR

The Ley de Protección Civil, Prevención y Mitigación de Desastres (2005) governs disaster management in El Salvador. It establishes the Comisión Nacional de Protección Civil, Prevención y Mitigación de Desastres, which is the national coordination and oversight body. El Salvador does not presently have a DRR policy but there is a regional Plan Regional de Reducción de Desastres (PRRD) for Central America. The Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central (CEPREDENAC) of the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA) and national actors created the PRRD as a strategy for reducing vulnerability toward and the impact of disasters in the region.[11] On a national level as in El Salvador, CEPREDENAC contributes to the development of a national DRR policy through advocacy and technical consulting.

The Política Centroamericana de Gestión Integral de Riesgo a Desastres of 2010 (PCGIR) is a relevant regional document. The PCGIR – which does not differentially address urban areas – emphasises the importance of DRR as a tool of risk management. The PCGIR was created under SICA to stand as an orienting framework for disaster risk management policies in the region. Though non-binding, Salvadoran NGOs have used it as a guide in their advocacy to encourage the government to revise national legislation.

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[11] Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central (CEPREDENAC), 2006, *Plan Regional de Reducción de Desastres 2006-2015,* http://goo.gl/scNTqT

[12] See http://www.sica.int/cepredenac/pcgir.aspx

3. PROTECTION CHALLENGES FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE IN URBAN AREAS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER DISASTERS

3.1 LOCAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Each municipality and community must have a Comisión de Protección Civil, Prevención y Mitigación de Desastres (hereafter 'commission'). It is particularly difficult in urban areas to create, strengthen and maintain these commissions. When municipalities lack commissions there are significant implications for the prevention of displacement and preparedness for the protection of displaced people. If disaster management tools such as DM plans do not comprehensively consider risks and vulnerabilities, the local system may not be prepared to protect displaced people in disaster situations.

Municipal governments are not consistently able to serve as effective local disaster management leaders. Political leadership is essential to ensuring the existence of the commissions and the quality and integrity of their work. Other factors that contribute to commissions' weaknesses include insufficient technical capacity of Protección Civil staff, difficulty in accessing funding and insufficient consideration of gender-specific needs.

Municipal commissions should be able to provide technical support to community commissions and offer a model for community DM tools. Even in the absence of strong municipal counterparts, some community commissions exist when communities themselves establish them and/or receive support from non-governmental actors.

The degree to which local government and communities create and maintain effective commissions hinges on:

- **Community mobilisation:** Few communities create and strengthen their commissions without the help of municipal commissions or national or international NGOs. In contrast to rural areas where Salvadorans are often well organised, community mobilisation does not occur organically in urban areas. This is due to diverse and long work schedules, lack of community solidarity, population mobility and divisions caused by political affiliation, religion and football allegiances. One advantage to community organising in urban areas is that women participate more in organising and training than they do in rural areas, given increased flexibility in their schedules.

- **Politics:** Electoral cycles and variable political will undermine the continuity of commissions' membership and the content of disaster management plans. Mayors may prioritise support for communities mostly voting for their party.

- **Gangs:** Gangs (known as maras) are present in most urban areas of El Salvador. NGO and INGO informants indicated that maras support community organisation for disaster management. Communities and NGOs must however reckon with the maras' requests and preferences. They harass and threaten the staff of NGOs and agencies have had to make logistical adjustments to respond to their demands.

3.2 DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Given that not all municipalities or communities have commissions, there is a high degree of variability in disaster preparedness within urban areas. This means that adjoining or upstream communities facing similar risks may have significantly different preparedness systems and capacity. This has implications for preparedness tools such as early warning systems and coordination mechanisms.

- **Disaster management plans:** Not all communities have disaster management plans and other tools prescribed by law such as risk maps. Thus communities are limited in their ability to prevent displacement and plan for the protection of individuals or families with specific needs. Among disaster management plans that do exist there are gaps in their consideration of existing but infrequently occurring risks, such as earthquakes. NGO informants observed that risk maps and disaster management plans do not consider the borders of gang territories. Neither civilian nor gang-affiliated community members can cross these boundaries, either in normal or disaster situations, for risk of being targeted by the gang that controls the neighbouring community. If disaster management plans do not consider these risk factors, and plan accordingly to ensure access to shelters and humanitarian assistance within defined territories, individuals could be forced to displace across boundaries.

- **Shelters:** Municipal and community disaster commissions do not consistently prepare and approve shelters prior to disasters. Each municipality and community must have multiple shelters in order to host large numbers of IDPs. Official shelters are considered in municipal and community DM plans and are, typically, schools, community halls and sports facilities. Not all official shelters are structurally sound and many lack sufficient pre-positioned relief goods. IDPs use unsanctioned shelters in communities where there are not sufficient official shelters, or when they do not want to go to official shelters. These structures are similar to official shelters but authorities have not previously examined or approved them.

3.3 DRR AND PREVENTION OF DISPLACEMENT

- **DRR in development plans:** Neither private nor public developers consistently adhere to environmental risk-related regulations for new construction and authorities do not consistently enforce them. This results in formal communities being established in risk-prone locations. Particularly in San Salvador, municipal authorities face operational challenges in preventing informal and unplanned settlements in risk-prone areas.

- **Risk mitigation:** Many communities most vulnerable to disasters and displacement, particularly informal settlements or older informal settlements that were formalised in spite of disaster risk, have significant disaster and non-disaster-specific improvement needs. Cities have built river retention walls and filled sinkholes but have paid little attention to risk mitigation projects such as soil retention walls and systems to channel water. Instead, they focus on improving paving, water, electricity and sewage, activities which are more likely to win votes.

- **Relocation of populations at risk:** There are multiple challenges to relocating formal and informal homes and settlements located in risk-prone sites. In many cases IDPs resist relocation because of social ties to their community and because they would face challenges in re-establishing livelihoods elsewhere. Public housing loan programmes require high and secure income, which makes them difficult for residents of the most risk prone urban areas to access. Relocation programmes do not consider social protection factors in destinations, such as proximity to families' sources of livelihoods or security factors related to gangs. Institutional support for livelihoods recovery at relocation sites is not typically available.

- **Social protection as disaster resilience:** Local governments and NGOs do little to strengthen the resilience of urban residents to disasters. Those employed in the informal sector, and especially single mothers, are particularly vulnerable to such shocks while those with formal employment may lose their jobs if their employer is affected by the disaster. Residents have little access to financial and livelihoods recovery support.

3.4 DURING DISASTERS: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION OF DISPLACED PEOPLE

Particularly in dense urban areas, residents flee to official shelters, unsanctioned shelters, impromptu shelters and the homes of family or friends that serve as family shelters. This variety of destinations of displacement makes it challenging to ensure protection for IDPs. As one INGO informant put it:

> *following natural disasters in urban areas, the high number of shelters, both formal and unsanctioned, creates a context of many different mini-disasters in the course of providing protection to the displaced population.*

It is particularly difficult to identify IDPs and monitor and respond to their needs.

IDPs in urban areas primarily flee temporarily within their city or to an adjoining city and then return to their place of origin once it is safe. Residents of rural areas prefer to flee to shelters in rural areas in order to stay near their properties. Despite this, some rural disaster commissions have designated shelters in nearby small cities as official evacuation centres.

3.5 CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING DISPLACEMENT DESTINATIONS

IDPs consider multiple factors when determining their destination of displacement. Each is related to protection considerations during and in the aftermath of their displacement. Informants provided evidence that:

- Urban populations flee to locations where they will feel comfortable and protected: many thus stay with family or friends.
- They seek to remain within urban areas and as close to their home as possible in order to check on and protect their homes and other assets.
- They want to protect the assets and relationships vital to livelihoods, such as holding on to a location in a marketplace.
- Informal vendors may wish to remain close to the customers who know them.
- Some residents flee with a group of neighbours: by staying together they can retain social solidarity and self-protection mechanisms.
- Residents of gang-controlled areas must consider the boundaries of gang territory when deciding their destination of displacement. Even if the IDPs are not gang affiliated, they would risk being targeted if they crossed a demarcation line to go to a shelter in the territory of a rival gang.

3.6 DESTINATIONS OF DISPLACEMENT

A range of informants provided information on the reasons why IDPs opt for one destination over another:

- **Official shelters:** Because official shelters are established promptly and managed by government officials, IDPs can rely on them to, at least minimally, meet their needs.
- **Unsanctioned shelters:** If IDPs cannot reach an official shelter, due to distance or obstacles including gangland boundaries, or if these are overcrowded, they may go to unsanctioned shelters. These are in community centres or churches, and are not managed by DM officials. IDPs may also prefer these because they are closer to their homes, they have a personal affiliation and sense of comfort and because they are often less crowded than official shelters.
- **Impromptu shelters:** Especially after earthquakes, IDPs create shelters or receive shelter materials. They typically establish these in front of their home or in a nearby open space. IDPs prefer this because it allows them to remain close to their community and to protect their assets.
- **Family shelters:** Many IDPs who have a network that allows it, and who are physically able, flee to the home of a family member or friend unaffected by the disaster. These are perceived to offer greater comfort and to better meet IDPs' needs.

3.7 CHALLENGES TO PROTECTING THE DISPLACED IN URBAN AREAS

3.7.1 Identifying and responding to needs

Neither DM nor humanitarian actors have managed to adapt response systems to the various kinds of displacement. This appears in part to be a result of the government's focus on strengthening official shelters. Government agencies do not provide assistance to IDPs in unsanctioned shelters or in home shelters. DM officials object to unsanctioned shelters because the facilities have not been vetted and because they consider them to present a risk of abuse by local government or community actors. Family shelters are formally considered a shelter mode, but the DM system has not

extended its reach to them. The onus to protect these IDPs therefore falls largely on humanitarians. However, they do not comprehensively have policies, capacity or mechanisms to do so.

Identifying IDPs in unofficial shelters requires those displaced to communicate their location, partnership between humanitarians and community leaders to determine where people are staying and proactive efforts by humanitarian actors to locate IDPs. The degree to which humanitarians achieve this varies according to the destination of displacement. In the case of unsanctioned shelters, IDPs are able to communicate their location and needs to humanitarian agencies and they respond with support. In the case of impromptu shelters, informants indicated identification was fairly comprehensive in the aftermath of earthquakes, but tended to miss those IDPs who were most isolated. In practice this population is not tracked. Such IDPs are not considered eligible to receive humanitarian or recovery assistance from the government because they have not fled to an official shelter. A few NGOs provide assistance, but it is not systematic.

3.7.2 Partnerships and coordination

Government actors are able to react to disasters more readily in urban areas than rural areas. In addition to local governments, an array of government ministries, humanitarian agencies and the private sector can become involved in the response. Some of the same factors that facilitate disaster response in urban areas also create challenges. Informants noted that it can be more difficult to coordinate and distribute responsibilities. Humanitarian agencies accustomed to being strong protagonists in rural settings must adjust to government leadership. There is a greater chance of political interference by municipal authorities.

Humanitarian response in urban areas may require coordination with gangs that exercise significant control over communities and agencies operating in their area of control. This does not entirely subside in disaster situations. Gangs may prove to be helpful to the disaster response by assisting the unloading of supplies, but they may also divert supplies or challenge the authority of responders. This clearly poses a challenge to humanitarian neutrality.

3.7.3 Protection gaps

Each of the destinations of displacement presents specific protection risks. IDPs make choices based on which options are available to them, and their perception of how their needs will be satisfied in each. All of the displacement modalities present inherent protection risks.

Official shelters

Overcrowding and inadequate facilities are the primary cause of protection issues in official shelters.

- **Water, sanitation and hygiene:** The infrastructure of shelter facilities and limitations in public services in districts surrounding shelters render them inadequate for the displaced population. Consistent problems include insufficient toilets, showers and wastewater drainage. Facilities are not segregated by gender or age, and e.g. lactating women cannot consistently access privacy. DM actors endeavour to remedy these gaps to the extent possible with temporary fixes, but this is complicated by logistical and financial limitations. These gaps contribute to the risk of other protection challenges such as sexual violence and gender-based violence (GBV). Some official shelters such as sports facilities are better outfitted to host large populations.

- **Nutrition:** IDPs in urban areas may have existing nutritional problems upon displacement in which case humanitarian assistance may fill nutritional gaps. However, reportedly, DM and humanitarian responders do not conduct nutritional assessments or allocate food rations according to age or other specific needs. One advantage for programmes in urban areas is that DM actors may have greater access to food donations and purchasing.

- **Sexual violence and GBV:** NGO informants indicated that verbal harassment that is sexual in nature is a risk, as are rape and other forms of sexual violence. This is particularly true for girls and single women. This violence occurs in dormitories and toilets not separated by age and gender. Security in dormitories is not adequately monitored, especially during the day when men leave the shelter to work or to check on their home. Intra-family violence reportedly occurs in shelters as well, but DM and humanitarian actors do not regularly identify or respond to it. It is unclear whether this increases during disasters, but informants indicated that abusive behaviour outside of disasters appears to continue in shelters. According to one informant, cultural acceptance of domestic violence appears to contribute to failure to address the issue.

- **Gangs:** Gang members enter shelters along with the rest of the population. According to NGO informants, gangs may forcibly recruit children and youths and to extort money from residents. Although authorities patrol shelters, it is difficult for them to combat gang crime. This may be because although the community recognises gang members, individuals fear reporting crimes. Gangs know each member of their community and can readily follow through on threats made in shelters.

- **Sex work and trafficking:** Informants indicated that shelters seem to allow criminals to coercively recruit females into sex work. This is not verified, however. Several sources suggested shelter managers do not take steps to prevent it.

Unsanctioned shelters

Shelters which are not officially recognised pose similar infrastructure-based protection challenges as official shelters. However, often the conditions are even worse. It is difficult for DM and humanitarian actors to reach the shelters, and to monitor and respond to the protection needs of the displaced. One informant described conditions in some unsanctioned shelters as "inhumane".

- **Relief assistance:** Because only non-governmental actors provide assistance to IDPs in these shelters, assistance may be delayed and insufficient.

- **Shelter management:** Unofficial shelters are not managed by trained officials. Community members must manage the shelters themselves, with limited support from humanitarians. This contributes to a risk of protection challenges such as sexual violence and GBV.

- **Exposure to hazards:** Unsanctioned shelters may be in risk-prone locations and may not effectively protect IDPs from further hazards.

Impromptu shelters

Unless they receive shelter materials IDPs outside official shelters will take shelter in a structure that they have built or another structure that appears to not have been affected by the disaster. These shelters are a means for IDPs to remain close to their homes and belongings. However, their distribution and the fact that there may be many throughout an urban area, makes it difficult to respond to and monitor them. Impromptu shelters may be prone to collapse and unable to withstand subsequent hazards. IDPs in these facilities may not have access to humanitarian assistance or services.

Sheltering with families

Official shelter guidelines call for linking those who take shelter in homes (officially designated as albergues familiares – family shelters) with commissions for the purpose of distributing assistance and monitoring protection. In practice, however, this has not been done. The degree to which family shelters satisfy the protection needs of IDPs varies depending on the characteristics of the dwelling and their hosts and the relationship of the displaced with their hosts.

- **No tracking or protection assistance:** For the most part, neither DM nor humanitarian responders register or trace IDPs who flee to family shelters. They do not regulate or monitor their protection needs, nor provide humanitarian assistance. IDPs sheltering with families may not be eligible for recovery assistance.

- **Inadequate facilities and satisfaction of basic needs:** The homes in which IDPs stay may not be spacious enough. Sleeping space may be cramped, and may not allow for gender and age segregated sleeping. Such IDPs generally do not receive food rations and must contribute to the purchasing of food or rely on the ability of their hosts to share with them. This may cause food security gaps.

- **Sexual violence:** NGO informants indicated that IDPs, particularly females and children, may be exposed to sexual violence by members of their host family and may not have access to reporting and protection mechanisms.

3.8 DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Non-governmental informants indicated that the national disaster management system places minimal emphasis on durable solutions. Displaced and other affected populations must work creatively and in partnership with governmental and non-governmental actors to attempt to address needs following disasters.

3.8.1 Consultation and information

Except in cases of severe localised devastation, DM and humanitarian actors offer little accompaniment or other support to help residents of urban areas assess the safety of return following disasters. Instead officials and the media offer general advice for whole urban areas. Urban residents may return to unsafe conditions. Some community and NGO actors conduct home damage assessments in order to advocate for rebuilding support from the municipality and to inform their own interventions.

3.8.2 Recovery assistance

- **Humanitarian assistance:** Although some municipalities and NGOs provide assistance, this is severely limited. DM actors calculate that residents of urban areas have sufficient capacity to recover following disasters and will be able to count on support from their neighbours. It appears that urban populations receive less support than rural populations.

- **Psychosocial support:** DM and humanitarian actors identified psychosocial support as being necessary, but insufficient.

- **Resumption of public services:** Disasters can damage precarious urban water and sanitation systems. This can leave communities without water and with clogged or damaged drainage and sewage systems. According to NGO informants, authorities work to fix these problems, but their response is slow.

3.9 HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY (HLP)

- **Housing reconstruction:** Only minimal resources and services are available to help residents fix or rebuild damaged housing. The Viceministerio de Vivienda y Desarrollo Urbano has limited resources for reconstruction and the poor may lack the means to access commercial loans. Municipalities have some resources but an informant reported they may allocate them according to political considerations.

  Disasters have a disproportionally damaging effect on informal settlements and marginalised communities, making it more likely low-income residents will remain in risk prone housing. NGOs provide some support through loans, provision of materials and cooperative rebuilding assistance. They cannot, however, provide these services to informal settlers or to those living on plots of land deemed unsafe for occupation. Residents of damaged houses often take shelter in transitional housing such as a tent or a rudimentary shelter. Sometimes they remain in them for years.

- **Relocation:** Historically, particularly after the devastating earthquakes of 1965 and 1986, displaced populations self-relocated individually or as communities within the metropolitan area of San Salvador. This is no longer feasible given the density of buildings in urban areas and improved governance in urban planning. Those community relocation projects which have been launched have taken years to complete. If the relocation fails to occur housing intended to be temporary may become permanent.

3.10 CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT AND PROTECTION OF FOREIGN CITIZENS

- **Instances of displacement:** Informants could not identify historic instances of Salvadorans being displaced across borders by disasters, nor of neighbouring countries' residents being displaced into El Salvador.

- **Protection for individuals displaced across borders by disasters:** El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have a Central America-4 Border Control Agreement which allows citizens of these four countries to cross borders without additional visas for a limited (but renewable) period of time. This facilitates entry but does not provide permission to work and allows for deportation of those caught doing so. A government informant indicated that no humanitarian visa currently exists, but that this may be included in a revision of the country's migration law.

- **Humanitarian assistance for foreign citizens:** Several NGO informants indicated that foreigners (such as migrant workers or migrants in transit) who are present in El Salvador when a disaster strikes receive humanitarian assistance on the same basis as Salvadoran citizens. Informants presented varying information on whether government officials require disaster-affected and displaced individuals to present a Salvadoran identity document in order to enter a shelter or receive other assistance. One suggested that this practice might discourage migrants with irregular status from requesting assistance.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RISK REDUCTION

- Municipal and community disaster commissions should receive training and funding to enable them to serve as effective disaster management actors.
- Local DM systems should be institutionalised and not subject to being undermined by electoral cycles.
- Facilities used as shelters should be appropriate for the needs of the displaced and shelter management staff should be adequately trained in protection.
- Urban residents should be informed of which official shelter they should go to during disasters. Officials should also inform residents how they may access humanitarian assistance and protection support if they take shelter elsewhere.
- Disaster management plans should consider how urban risk factors such as gangland boundaries might affect displacement patterns.
- Urban planning and local development planning should be participatory and comprehensively consider disaster risk reduction needs.
- Relocation programmes should be participatory and rights-based and should meet the livelihoods and protection needs of potential beneficiaries.

4.2 PROTECTION FOR DISPLACED POPULATIONS

- Systems should be developed to provide assistance to those who chose to seek shelter in homes and in rural or in other urban areas.
- Governmental and humanitarian actors should partner with civil society actors and communities to improve assistance and protection mechanisms for the displaced.
- Shelter managers should be trained to prevent and identify sexual violence and GBV, and protect survivors.

4.3 DURABLE SOLUTIONS

- Recovery assistance should be provided based on needs assessments. It should not be assumed that urban residents will be able to immediately be self-sufficient.
- The government should improve preparedness for transitional housing needs after disasters.
- Support for housing reconstruction and repair should be expanded.
- Post-disaster relocation programmes should be participatory, comprehensively consider in-city solutions and be sensitive to the socio-economic and protection needs of potential beneficiaries.

4.4 DONORS

- Donors should consider funding projects to reduce disaster risk and prevent displacement. This should include the appropriate strengthening of vulnerable housing and relocation of populations at risk.
- Donors should support efforts to improve and retrofit shelters prior to disasters.

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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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