

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Information Sheet

International Disaster Law project

Centre for Criminal Justice & Human Rights, School of Law,
University College Cork & the Irish Red Cross Society

When a disaster such as a flood, earthquake or typhoon strikes, local communities are the first to respond to rescue those in peril and to provide support and assistance to those in need. Often, the international community will also respond, by providing humanitarian assistance and expertise.

However, **there is no such thing as a “natural” disaster**. Disasters occur when a natural hazard overwhelms a vulnerable community. Therefore, reducing individual and community vulnerabilities while strengthening their resilience is the core of disaster risk reduction (DRR).



Image: Nicole Robicheau (IFRC)

The importance of prevention, mitigation and preparedness

Reflecting our increasing understanding of vulnerability and resilience, in recent years there has been an increasing focus on DRR measures in advance of a disaster occurring. As explained by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](http://www.unisdr.org)):

- **Prevention** encompasses activities and measures to avoid existing and new disaster risks.
- **Mitigation** is the lessening or minimising of the adverse impacts of a hazardous event.
- **Preparedness** is the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organisations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters.

What is Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)?

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) defines disaster risk reduction as:

“Disaster risk reduction is the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systemic efforts to analyse and reduce the causal factors of disasters. Reducing exposure to hazards, lessening vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improving preparedness and early warning for adverse events are all examples of disaster risk reduction.”¹

Disaster risk reduction therefore encompasses a broad range of activities – from ensuring that legislative and policy approaches reflect known hazards, to community-based initiatives and technical solutions such as early warning systems.



Images: VectorOpenStock

How can law support DRR activities?

Good laws can help to strengthen critical infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals and roads, as well as assisting governments to respond to people’s needs more effectively. Law can also help communities understand the risks they face and to make themselves safer. Legal frameworks should motivate, organise and promote cooperation between government, civil society and the private sector, and guard against forgetfulness when it has been a long time since the last major crisis.

On the other hand, weak or ineffective laws can sap public confidence, entrench old ways of thinking and enable a culture of inactivity. They make it even harder for committed individuals to make a difference.

For more information, see: <http://disaster-law.ucc.ie>

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)

The conclusion of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction² at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in March 2015 highlighted the importance that states and the broader international community place on preventing, mitigating and preparing for known hazards.

Priorities for action

1. Understanding disaster risk.
2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk.
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.
4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

To promote accountability of governments and other stakeholders, the Sendai Framework sets out **seven specific targets** to be met during the period 2015-2030:

- a) Substantially reduce global disaster mortality.
- b) Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally.
- c) Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP).
- d) Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services.
- e) Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.
- f) Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support.
- g) Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments.

While not legally binding on states, at the adoption ceremony in March 2015, government representatives highlighted their “determination to enhance our efforts to strengthen disaster risk reduction to reduce disaster losses of lives and assets worldwide.” Governments also stressed their strong commitment to the implementation of the Sendai Framework, and called on all stakeholders to take action.³

¹ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, [What is Disaster Risk Reduction?](#)

² UN, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* (18 March 2015) A/CONF. 224/CRP.1.

³ UN, *Sendai Declaration* (18 March 2015) A-CONF.224/CRP.2.

Relevant International Standards & Guidelines

The **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** has recognised that states have a binding obligation to protect the lives of all persons in their territory. While it may not be possible for a government to prevent all disasters occurring, they do have a duty to minimise potential risks.

Selected ECtHR Caselaw

Öneriyildiz v. Turkey (2004) – states have a positive obligation to take appropriate steps to safeguard the lives of those within their jurisdiction.

Kolyadenko & others v. Russia (2012) – lack of evacuation warnings or rescue operations was a violation of the right to life.

Hadzhiyska v. Bulgaria (2012) – there is a duty on the state to do “everything within the authorities’ power in the sphere of disaster relief for the protection of [the right to life].”



Image: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

ILC Draft Articles on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters (2016)

Article 9: Reduction of the Risk of Disasters

1. Each State shall reduce the risk of disasters by taking appropriate measures, including through legislation and regulations, to prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters.
2. Disaster risk reduction measures include the conduct of risk and past loss information, and the installation and operation of early warning systems.

Centre for Criminal Justice & Human Rights

School of Law, University College Cork, Ireland

Web: www.ucc.ie/en/ccjhr/

Irish Red Cross Society

16 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, Ireland

Web: www.redcross.ie