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EMERGENCIES

REFUGEES, IDPs AND CHILD SOLDIERS
NATURAL DISASTERS

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SITUATION REVIEW ON REFUGEES, IDPs AND CHILD SOLDIERS

Children’s rights must be protected at all times, including when children are forced to leave home, and especially if they have to leave their country, which may be due to natural disaster, conflict or as a by-product of development projects.

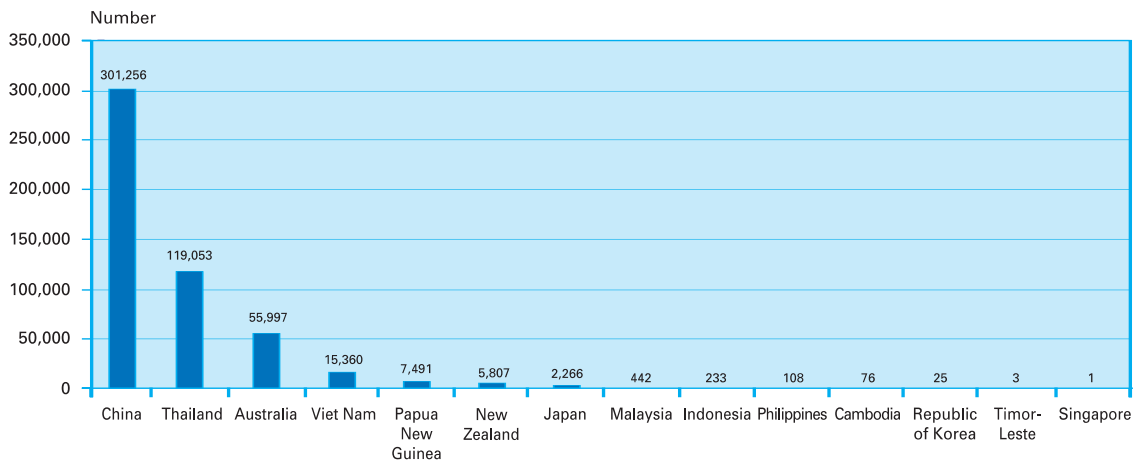
Refugees

A convention relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by the United Nations in July, 1951, for the specific purpose of protecting the rights of refugees. To date, 11 out of 33 state parties in the East Asia and the Pacific region (33 per cent) have ratified this important convention. Tuvalu and Fiji have

signed the Convention but, as yet, have not ratified it. This contrasts sharply with Africa where almost 90 per cent of state parties have either signed or ratified the convention.

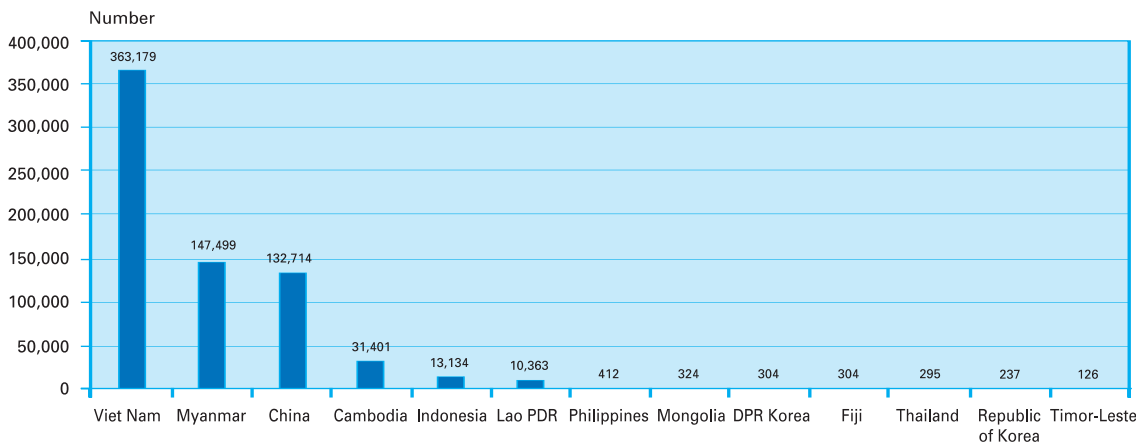
According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the estimated refugee population in the world for 2003 was 9,671,800. Of these, 508,118 (5.3 per cent) are hosted within countries of the East Asia and Pacific. However, more refugees (700,426) have originated from countries in this region than are hosted here.

Figure 5.1 Number of refugees by country of asylum - 14 countries



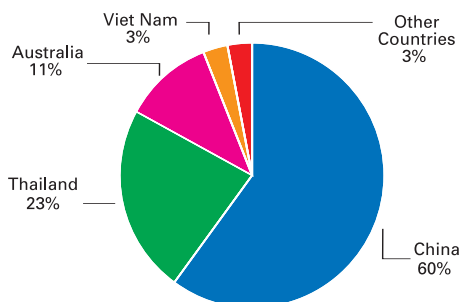
Sources: UNHCR. Global refugee trends, 15 June 2004

Figure 5.2 Number of refugees by country of origin - 13 countries



Source: UNHCR. Global Refugee Trends, 2004

Figure 5.3 Proportion of refugees by country of asylum



Source: UNHCR. Global Refugee Trends, 2004

Almost 60 per cent of refugees in the region are hosted in China. Thailand accommodates about 23 per cent and Australia and Viet Nam host 11 and 3 per cent, respectively. Thailand and Viet Nam, which have not ratified the 1951 UN Convention, are hosting approximately 27 per cent of the entire refugee population in the region.

It is important to note that there are displaced people identified by the UNHCR who are not registered as refugees, and as a consequence are not reflected in the statistics. These people include asylum seekers and/or those who have not been recognized as refugees by the host states. For example, the UNHCR estimates that in Malaysia nearly 20,000 undocumented foreigners are residing in refugee-like circumstances. The majority of these people are Achenese and Rohingyas (approximately 10,000) who have fled their countries of origin (Indonesia and Myanmar respectively) as a consequence of political turmoil. The number of displaced persons in Malaysia has

rapidly increased over the last 12 months, although recently the Malaysian government has agreed to recognize the Rohingyas as refugees, which represents a positive step towards the provision of adequate protection and basic services, including education for children.

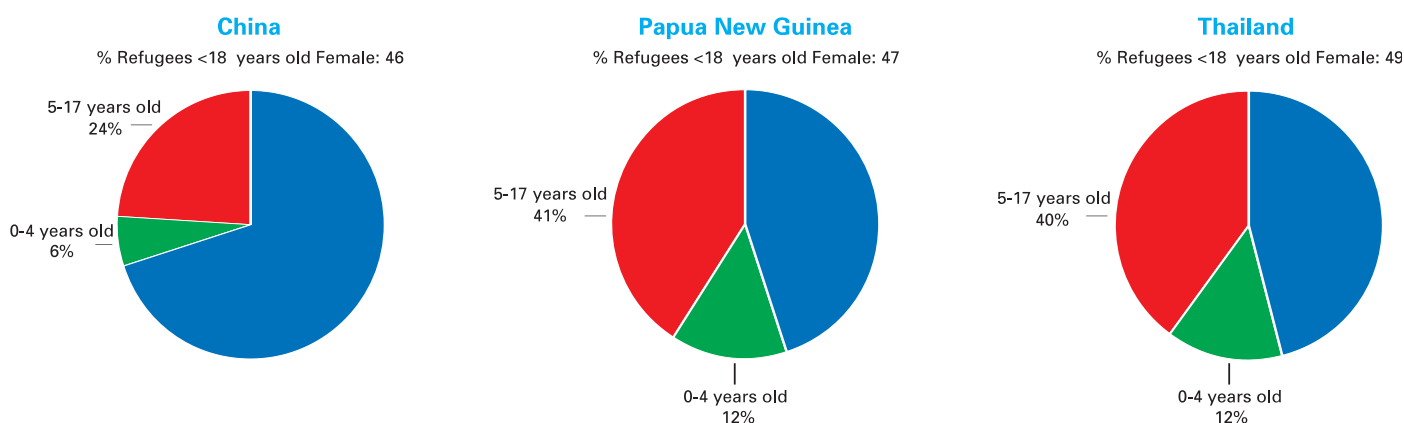
Unfortunately, very little information is available on the demographic composition of refugees, with the exception of refugees in China, Papua New Guinea and Thailand, where reliable statistics are available. **Figure 5.4** shows that the proportion of children under five years of age is between 6 and 12 per cent of the entire refugee population, whereas that of children under 18 varies between 30 and 53 per cent. Almost half of the refugees in Papua New Guinea and Thailand are children, and between 47 and 49 per cent of the children are girls.

Internally displaced persons

There has been a 20 per cent decrease in refugees from 2002 to 2003, but globally the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), or those who have been forced to leave their homes and have become displaced within their own country, is increasing. The refugee population in 2003 was 9.6 million but the global IDP population is estimated to be 24.6 million.

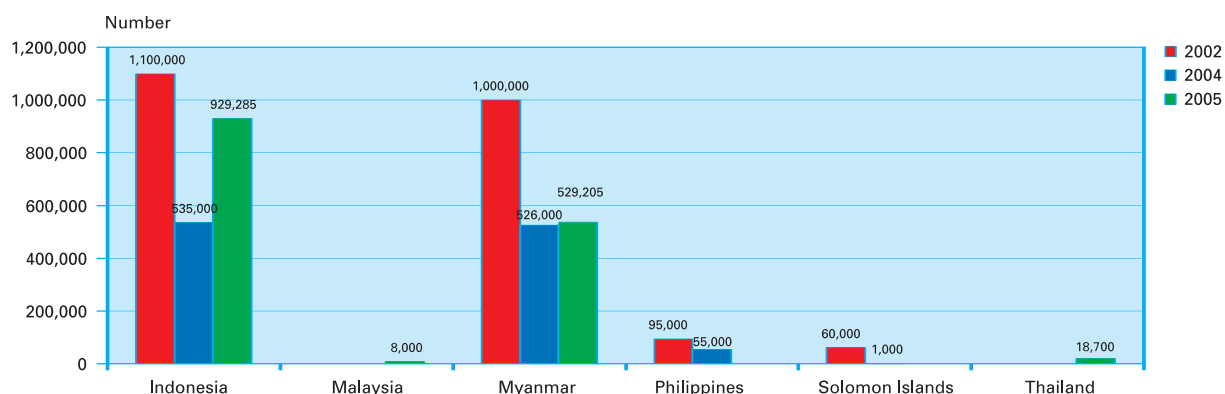
Most internal displacement in this region is caused by armed conflict and other violence. Many IDPs have been displaced for many years as a consequence of continuing insecurity and armed conflict in Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines (see figure 5.5). Even though global numbers of IDPs have increased, the number in this region has in fact decreased by almost half between 2003 and 2004, largely as a consequence of the efforts that governments have made to improve security and stability through such measures as cease-fire agreements with opposition

Figure 5.4 Demographic/sex composition of refugee population



Source: UNHCR. Global Refugee Trends, 2004

Figure 5.5 Number of IDPs*



* 2005 figures refer to the January 2005 number of IDPs as a result of the Tsunami, December 26, 2004

Sources: Global IDP Database (www.udpproject.org), Norwegian Refugee Council; Indonesia: OCHA Situation Report, January 24, 2005; Malaysia: UNICEF Malaysia Situation Report, January 22, 2005; Myanmar: OCHA Situation Report, January 18, 2005; Thailand: UNICEF Thailand Situation Report, January 24, 2005

groups (see figure 5.5). Other examples include the use of peace-keeping forces, such as the Pacific Community Force that has, since 2003, largely restored law and order in the Solomon Islands and facilitated a return home for almost all of those who were displaced by the conflict.

It is important to note, however, that as countries in this region are increasingly prone to natural disasters, more and more people are being displaced for both short and long-term periods as a result of typhoons, floods, tsunamis and earthquakes.

Strategies for dealing with displacement that occurs as a consequence of development projects, such as the construction of dams, should be carefully planned. In China, for example, close to 1.9 million people have been displaced as a result of the Three Gorges Dam project.

The responsibility to protect and provide necessary relief and support to IDPs rests with governments. However, if no clear policies, laws and mechanisms are in place, and/or IDPs are not recognized as people requiring special support and protection, IDPs can become the most vulnerable population in a country. In Indonesia, in January 2004, the government declared Indonesia's internal displacement crisis resolved and withdrew IDP status from the displaced persons that remain in Indonesia. IDPs are now classified as 'vulnerable people' and the responsibility for providing assistance to them has shifted from the central government to provincial authorities.

Child soldiers

The use of children as combatants by government armed forces and other armed groups still occurs in the East Asia and Pacific region, in particular as related to armed conflict and insecurity in Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines. Progress has been slow on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (see table 5.1). Three state parties – Cambodia, Mongolia and Timor-Leste – ratified or acceded to the Protocol in 2004, while the Philippines fully committed to deal with the issue of child soldiers by ratifying the Protocol in December 2003. Australia, Brunei Darussalam, China, New Zealand, DPR Korea and Singapore continue to permit the voluntary recruitment of under-18s into their armed forces, though under-18s are barred from active service in New Zealand.

Countries that have not signed the Optional Protocol include Brunei Darussalam, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, DPRK, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Myanmar, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

While it is impossible to know the actual scale of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Myanmar, there continue to be credible reports about the recruitment and use of minors by government forces and a range of non-state groups. A Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Under-age Children, which was established by the Office

Table 5.1 State parties that have signed or ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict as of June 2004

Country	Signed	Ratified
Australia	2002	
China	2001	
Indonesia	2001	
Nauru	2000	
Federated States of Micronesia	2002	
Singapore	2000	
Cambodia		2004
Japan		2004
Republic of Korea		2000
Mongolia		2004
New Zealand		2001
Philippines		2003
Timor-Leste		2004
Viet Nam		2001

Source: OHCHR www.humanrightswatch.org/campaigns/crp/ratifications.htm

of the Chairman of the State for the Peace and Development Council in January 2004, adopted in October 2004 a Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of that Committee. Upon the intervention of humanitarian agencies, approximately one dozen child soldiers were demobilized in 2004.

In the Philippines the government has established a programme to manage the rescue and reintegration of child soldiers, including the requirement that the armed forces hand over captured under-18s to civilian authorities and provide medical treatment. In Indonesia, the use of children by armed political groups and in communal conflict is widespread, although no specific data is available on the number of children involved. Some progress has been made in strengthening legal protection for child soldiers, with legislation criminalizing the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict introduced in 2002 in Indonesia, and in 2003 in the Philippines.

Concerns still remain for thousands of former child soldiers in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where few provisions have been made for them. This has caused difficulties and delays in efforts aimed at community/social reintegration, though the Solomon Islands has recently made education free, which has allowed former child combatants to return to school.

Action points

The most effective way to deal with refugee and IDP issues is to reduce the number of refugees and IDPs through the **prevention of violence, and conflict resolution**, for peace building and risk reduction, as well as effective preparedness to minimize the impact of natural disasters.

- There is an urgent need for countries of the region not yet committed to the Refugee Convention to **ratify the Convention** so that the rights of refugees, including children and women, are protected and their vulnerability reduced.
- The **Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement**, issued in December 2000 by the Representative of the Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons, must be promoted, respected and widely observed by all countries in the region.
- Gender-sensitive support, including protection from abuse and exploitation for refugee and displaced girls and women, should be part of any government policy for the protection of refugees and IDPs. Vulnerable children and adolescents have different needs, and wide-ranging protective measures are also required.
- Relief assistance to refugees and IDPs as a result of sudden crises must envisage a smooth **transition to a rehabilitation and reconstruction** phase, with a long-term development perspective.
- **Resettlement plans and social security measures** to re-establish livelihoods of populations displaced by development projects should be designed in advance.
- All countries that have not ratified the **Optional Protocol** to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, should do so.
- A proper **disarmament, demobilization and reintegration** process for child soldiers must be carried out by governments, supported by UN agencies and civil society organizations.

SITUATION REVIEW ON NATURAL DISASTERS

Trends

Natural disasters have been increasing in the second half of the 20th century due to the various factors such as urbanization, population growth, destruction of natural environments and climate change. From an average of 12 disasters per year in the first half of the century, the number increased to 163 per year in the second half, reaching 350 in 2004.¹

The East Asia region² has been the most affected region in the world in terms of natural disasters and, in 2004, suffered 26 per cent of all disasters, 78 per cent of fatalities and 45 per cent of the total affected people. This includes the December 2004 tsunami (**table 5.2**).³

Table 5.2 Summary of natural disasters, 2004

	Number of disasters	Number of people killed	Number of people affected
East Asia	92	250 (thousands)	63 (millions)
World	348	320 (thousands)	139 (millions)

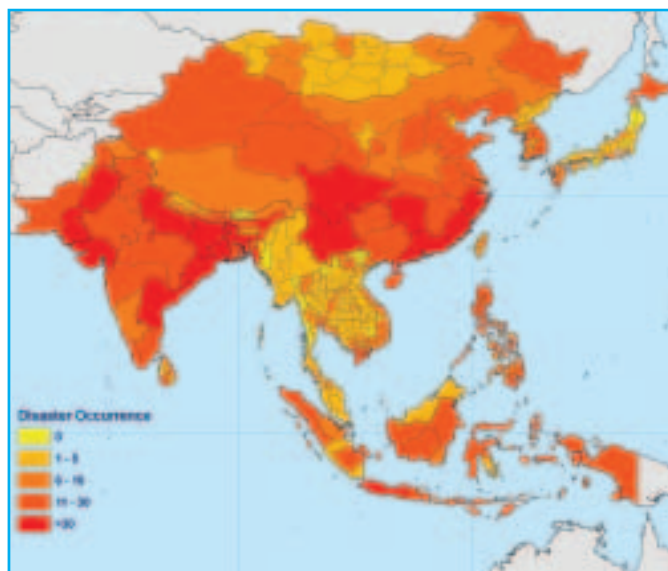
Source: EM-DAT: OFDA-CRED International Disaster Database.

East China has suffered the highest number of disasters, in terms of frequency (**figure 5.6**) – usually typhoons. Overall, floods cause the most significant impact on China, followed by droughts and earthquakes. South East Asia (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Viet Nam, Malaysia) is most generally affected by floods in the rainy season, landslides caused by rainfall and drought in the dry season. The coastal countries (Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, DPR Korea and Republic of Korea) and almost all islands suffer typhoons and cyclones that are very destructive. Indonesia is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, since it is situated near the Indian Ocean seismic belts and has 129 active volcanoes. The countries located near the Pacific Rim of Fire (Philippines, Japan and Papua New Guinea) are also prone to earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Inland, in Mongolia, major disasters are due to *dzud* (harsh winter conditions), snowfalls and sandstorms.

Among the different types of natural disasters in East Asia, the most frequent in the last 25 years have been wind storms (34 per cent) and floods (28 per cent) (**figure 5.7**).

On the other hand, in terms of the number of fatalities and affected people⁴, a different picture emerges. Floods have affected the largest numbers of people, followed by drought and wind storms, mainly in China.

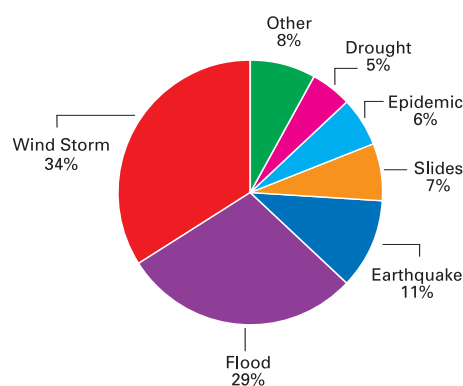
Figure 5.6 Natural disaster occurrence by first administrative level boundaries, 1975-2004



Sources: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database
(<http://www.cred.be> e-mail: cred@epid.au.be)

In the last 25 years the highest death toll came from two severe disasters: the famine in DPR Korea that lasted from 1995 to 2002 and killed 220,000 persons; and in December 2004, the South Asia tsunami, which caused more than 250,000 fatalities and affected several countries in the region, especially Indonesia and Thailand.

Figure 5.7 Number of disasters in East Asia by disaster type (1980-2004)



Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Type (1980-2004)
www.em.net - Universite Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium

¹ EM-DAT: OFDA-CRED International Disaster Database.

² Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam.

³ EM-DAT: OFDA-CRED International Disaster Database, 11 Feb 2005

⁴ Affected people: people requiring immediate assistance during a period of emergency, including injured, homeless, displaced or evacuated people.

Table 5.3 Total number of affected people in East Asia by disaster type, 2004

	Drought	Earthquake	Epidemic	Extreme temperature	Flood	Slides	Volcano	Wave / surge	Wild fires	Wind storm	Total
China	620,000	345,724	0	0	47,149,479	453	0	0	0	9,331,096	57,446,752
DPR Korea	0	0	0	0	199,255	0	0	0	0	0	199,255
Indonesia	0	234,992	58,301	0	13,000	5,019	42,933	412,438	0	3,715	770,398
Japan	0	62,183	0	300	70,990	0	0	0	0	331,000	464,473
Malaysia	0	0	0	0	35,538	0	0	8,183	0	41,000	84,721
Myanmar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,600	0	18,000	21,600
Philippines	0	0	98	0	21,500	6	0	194	0	3,313,839	3,335,637
Republic of Korea	0	0	0	0	4,691	0	0	0	2,155	2,922	9,768
Thailand	0	0	13	0	507,000	110	0	82,129	0	9,050	58,302
Viet Nam	0	0	8	0	44	0	0	0	0	55,905	55,957
Total	620,000	642,899	58,420	300	48,001,497	5,588	42,933	506,544	2,155	13,106,527	62,986,863

Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database; www.em-dat.net - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium

Every so often, a very large-scale unexpected natural disaster occurs and surpasses normal patterns. In China, for example, a drought killed 500,000 people in 1920, and an earthquake killed 242,000 people in July 1976. These disasters can alter, for one or several years, the long-term trend for several years – nevertheless flood and drought have remained the main causes of death.

China has been host to four of the ten most deadly natural disasters of the 20th century. A drought killed 3 million people in 1928 and floods killed 3.7 million in 1931, 2 million in 1959, and 1.5 million in 1909 (table 5.4).

Table 5.4 The most deadly natural disasters of the 20th century

Country	Year	Disaster	Number of people killed
World	1917	Epidemic	20,000,000
Soviet Union	1932	Famine	5,000,000
China	1931	Flood	3,700,000
China	1928	Drought	3,000,000
Europe	1914	Epidemic	3,000,000
China	1959	Flood	3,000,000
Soviet Union	1917	Epidemic	2,500,000
India	1920	Epidemic	2,000,000
Bangladesh	1943	Famine	1,900,000
China	1909	Epidemic	1,500,000

Source: Asian Disaster Research Center
<http://www.disastercenter.com/disaster/TOP100K.html>

In 2004, despite the December tsunami that caused the highest death toll of the year, the largest number of people affected by disaster were those affected by floods in China (table 5.3).

Over the course of the 20th century, floods and droughts caused both the highest numbers of deaths and affected the largest numbers of people in East Asia. This toll remains the highest in China, because it occupies a vast land area and has a large population.

Impact of disasters and disparities

The human suffering caused by natural disasters is most profoundly felt in developing countries and especially poverty-stricken countries with small economies and small populations that do not have the capacity to cope with the consequences. Catastrophic disasters often result in enormous economic damage that can sometimes exceed the GDP of low income countries. A study from ADRC Japan clearly shows that mortality rates from disasters are higher in countries with a low Human Development Index.

The impact of disasters varies in accordance with levels of vulnerability. It is important to note that more fatalities occur amongst the most vulnerable people, and that people are differently affected by different forms of disasters according to their level of income. Low income populations tend to be more affected by drought, whereas medium income populations tend to be more affected by floods.⁵

⁵ Asian Disaster Research Center, "20th Century Asian Natural Disasters Data Book"

Among population groups affected by disasters, children and women tend to disproportionately suffer displacement, injuries, communicable diseases, malnutrition, sexual abuse and psycho-social trauma. Children and women also endure the social impact of disasters, such as the separation of families, the loss of livelihood opportunities, the disruption of education, as well as other social and economic reintegration difficulties.

Action points

The vulnerability of East Asia to natural disasters justifies the need to adopt comprehensive disaster risk reduction measures in the region, and, in this context, it is essential to promote disaster risk reduction awareness and preparedness. Specific actions required include:

- **Children have to be the first priority in risk reduction efforts.** Specific risks that exist for children and their caregivers, and the actions that might be taken to counter those risks, have to be determined in addition to risk-reduction strategies for the total population.
- **Risk-reduction initiatives** have to be designed in order that families, and their children, understand the simple and practical actions required to protect life and personal property in the case of natural disaster. Effective, risk-reduction awareness programmes in schools, homes and communities can create a culture of prevention and empower individual and community actions to protect life and property.
- To ensure effective, timely and dependable responses to reduce the impact of disasters on children, **emergency preparedness measures, oriented**

specifically to children and women, must be in place. Children, families, communities and basic service providers must be ready to meet health, nutrition, education, and protection needs when a disaster occurs.

- Because poverty often prevents people from taking protective measures, and given that it is not the disaster alone, but also vulnerability levels that determine the impact of any disaster, **the underlying problems of family vulnerability must be reduced through poverty reduction and other measures.**

As disasters have the greatest impact on the vulnerable, their needs must be specifically addressed by response strategies, and vulnerable people should participate in the preparation of these strategies to ensure their relevance

- **Protection of the needs and rights of children and their care-givers must be considered a priority** when addressing emergency requirements for health, education, nutrition, protection, and water and sanitation. During relief operations, child-friendly spaces that protect and heal should be created to allow children the opportunity for self-expression and to play and rest. In addition, the restoration of basic education activities deserves special emphasis in order to normalize children's situation and decrease distress. This would imply that special attention must be paid to teachers, who may also have been affected by the disaster.
- **Women can play a major role in post-disaster reconstruction.** Likewise, the participation of children also needs to be ensured, taking into consideration the unique contributions that both boys and girls can make.

PHOTO CREDIT

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