

Key Messages

ON AVERTING, MINIMIZING AND ADDRESSING LOSS AND DAMAGE FROM A HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

IASC Climate Crisis Sub-Group

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Endorsed by IASC Deputies Group

Background¹

Countries and communities are already experiencing loss and damage from climate change, which will increase with every increment of global warming. Humanitarians see the devastating impacts of more frequent and intense weather events, including floods, droughts, storms, and heatwaves, and are increasingly concerned by the impacts of slow onset events such as sea level rise, desertification and ocean acidification on people, their homes, their livelihoods, and ecosystems.

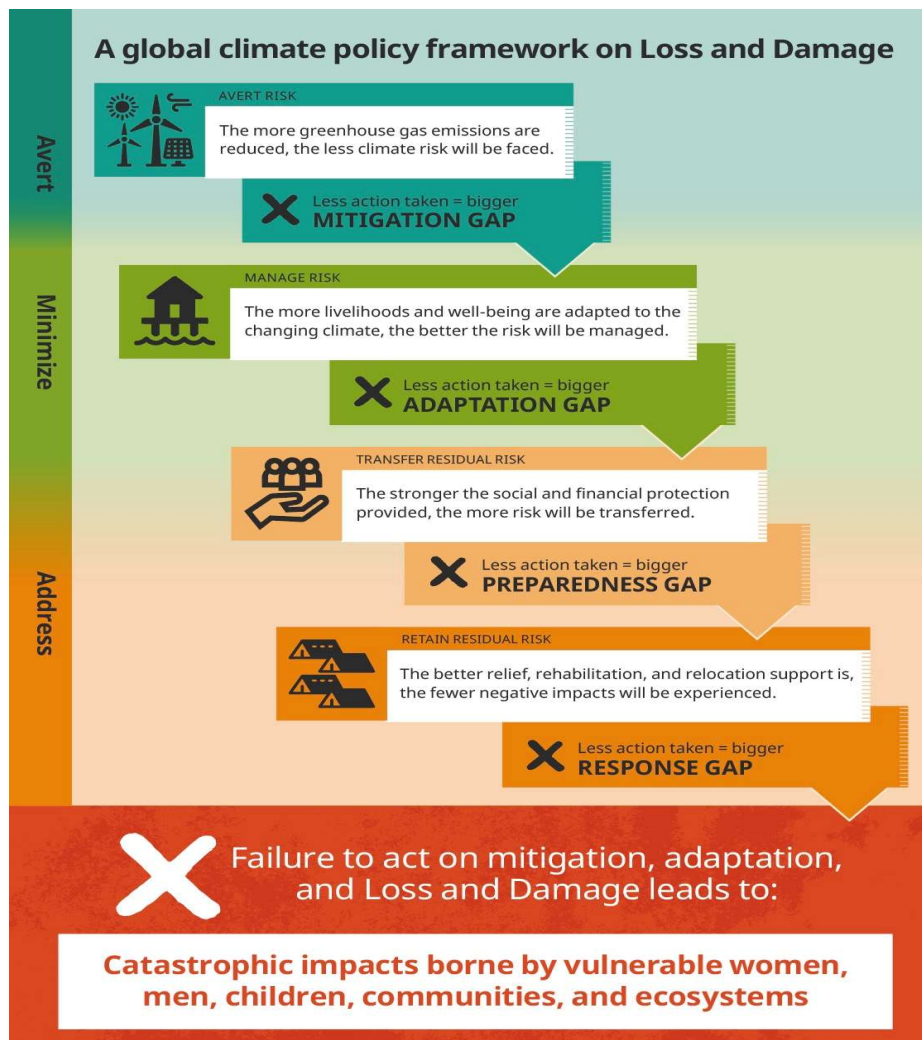
Failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and invest in adequate preparedness, disaster risk reduction and adaptation measures at the pace and scale required has led to increasing losses and damages from climate change. Loss and damage include impacts that can be measured in economic terms, such as damages to homes, infrastructure, food systems and livelihoods, and others that are non-economic, including loss of life, biodiversity, ecosystems, cultural heritage, territory, and Indigenous knowledge, as well as displacement and adverse effects on health. The impacts of loss and damage are worsened by the intersections of climate change with other drivers of risk which increase vulnerability such as pandemics, conflict, political instability, and economic shocks.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) synthesis report (IPCC, 2023) reaffirms that “climate change has caused widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people that are unequally distributed across systems, regions, and sectors... Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected.” Individual livelihoods have been affected through, for example, destruction of homes and infrastructure, and loss of property and income, human health, and food security, with adverse effects on protection and social equity, with differing impacts based on gender, age, disability, marginalization, and other factors. This has included specific impacts on, among others, children, women and girls, those discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientations, gender identities and expression (SOGIE), Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, displaced people, and those who experience intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination and inequality.

Roles of humanitarian action in averting, minimizing, and addressing loss and damage

Across the range of solutions to avert, minimize and address loss and damage from climate change, there are gaps in mitigation and adaptation, as well as disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, anticipatory action, response, and recovery, including, and overall risk and impact management across and within systems. While there are limits to the typical scope of humanitarian action, it covers an important part of what is required to respond to aspects of loss and damage by contributing to closing some gaps.

¹ This document is for use by IASC members as the basis of their external advocacy and communications efforts around loss and damage from climate change.



Note: This updated diagram with a 'preparedness gap' is adapted from the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (ZFRA)

- Mitigation Gap:** There is a brief and rapidly closing window to reduce global GHG emissions and accelerate and scale the transformative action required to keep global warming within the 1.5°C degree limit of the Paris Agreement. With increased mitigation ambition, there will be less climate impacts and less climate risks- the core of Loss and Damage prevention work. In turn, fewer adaptation interventions will be necessary and further losses and damages can be avoided. Humanitarian organizations are committed to doing their part by reducing the carbon and environmental footprints of their operations and by advocating for urgent and greater climate mitigation action.
- Adaptation Gap:** The absence of timely, quality, and targeted risk management, including preparedness, disaster risk reduction and adaptation planning and investment is worsening the risks and impacts of climate hazards for people in vulnerable situations and resulting in avoidable losses and damages. Several humanitarian organizations support communities to build resilience to climate shocks and stresses, including through risk governance, policies, and planning, nature-based and/or infrastructure-based solutions, risk-informed social protection, and insurance schemes and by scaling up locally led adaptation approaches and resilience good practices. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts where social protection systems and finance for adaptation measures are limited, humanitarian action supports countries and communities to better manage climate risks.

- **Preparedness Gap²:** To reduce humanitarian needs following a climate-related disaster, preventative action must be strengthened in circumstances where loss and damage from climate change can be avoided. Humanitarian interventions can include emergency preparedness, climate risk and vulnerability analyses, climate early warning systems linked to anticipatory actions, shock-responsive social protection, protection system strengthening and climate and disaster risk financing and insurance for the most vulnerable.
- **Response:** Humanitarian organizations support communities to respond to aspects of loss and damage ahead of and in the immediate aftermath of climate-related disasters through climate risk-sensitive humanitarian response – including evacuation, food and agriculture livelihoods and cash assistance, temporary shelter, protection, healthcare and water and sanitation services – and early recovery and efforts to build back better.

Underpinning each of these gaps is a critical element of knowledge and capacity. Countries most vulnerable to climate change need the technical expertise and resources to strengthen sub-national level data collection and analysis to better understand losses and damages due to impacts of climate change, as well as investment in capacities that will enable action in all of the above areas.

Humanitarian organizations have relevant expertise and frontline experience to share on understanding and responding to loss and damage from climate change. The humanitarian community is engaging in intergovernmental policy processes on loss and damage to provide knowledge from the humanitarian sector, including the official workstreams of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), such as the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts (WIM) and its technical expert groups and the Santiago Network, ensuring coherence with wider initiatives, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Scope of humanitarian action in averting, minimizing, and addressing loss and damage

Action to avert, minimize and address loss and damage must be a global and multi-sectoral effort. Recognizing that governments are central in responding to loss and damage, a comprehensive approach must be integrated across local, regional, and national levels. The approach should be provided through partnerships and sequenced financing across humanitarian, development, peace, and climate action actors, as well as the public and private sector. While humanitarian actors play a crucial role, there are limits to the scope of humanitarian interventions in preparing for, anticipating, and responding to and recovering from full range of losses and damages experienced by people, communities, and Countries. The scope of humanitarian action is defined by:

- **Mandate:** Humanitarian action is based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence to ensure access and targeted support where

² This has also been referred to as the “protection gap” in some documents. The use of the term ‘protection’ in this context refers to social and financial protection for affected people to manage disaster risks, and not to the concept of protection in humanitarian action covered by the [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

there is the greatest need and highest vulnerability across different types of crises, including and beyond those that are related to climate impacts. As climate-related hazards become more frequent and intense, it is important to recognize the existing mandate and presence of the humanitarian sector is to provide humanitarian assistance, save lives and livelihoods alleviate suffering ahead of and in the immediate aftermath of disasters at the request of governments.

- **Capacity:** Humanitarian actors are responding to multiple, overlapping, and protracted crises in an underfunded and overstretched humanitarian system, where the impacts of the climate crisis are compounded by other risks, such as conflict, fragility, displacement, and economic shocks. The rising scale of humanitarian needs and increasing complexity of response poses a major challenge to the international community's collective ability to prevent, anticipate, absorb (or respond), adapt, and respond to crises due to the growing gap between needs and funding.
- **Duration:** Humanitarian interventions mainly focus on limiting the scope of impact of a climate hazard, including through preparedness, early warning systems, anticipatory action, responding to immediate needs and supporting resilience building, including response and early recovery (rehabilitation). Only in specific circumstances, such as in protracted crises, or by local actors working across the nexus, does humanitarian action contribute to and complement the work of development and peace building actors in long-term recovery, (rehabilitation and reconstruction), and planned relocation including where linked to climate related disasters. When these are climate risk-informed, such humanitarian actions are part of the suite of climate actions urgently needed.

Principles for solutions and funding to avert, minimize and address loss and damage

Considering the roles and limits of humanitarian action, the following principles should be considered as part of a comprehensive framework of solutions and funding to address to loss and damage from climate change:

- **Humanity:** First and foremost, it is important to remember that at the core of this issue are people experiencing the devastating consequences of a crisis they have done the least to cause it. Solutions and funding to address loss and damage must put people's human rights, dignity and agency at the centre of the approach.
- **Leave no one behind:** Solutions and funding for loss and damage must reach people in vulnerable situations and prioritize those most in need and at-risk, including refugees, other displaced and hosting communities. Countries and people that experience loss and damage are often in contexts that are not only highly exposed to climate hazards but may also face underlying vulnerabilities linked to wider contexts of fragility, conflict, poverty, marginalization and a lack of capacity and resources to prevent, prepare, absorb, and adapt to climate risks and impacts.
- **Localization:** Funding should be accessible at the local level to ensure locally led action for communities to implement their own context-based solutions to avert, minimize and

address loss and damage. As the nature of loss and damage, including who it affects and how, is context specific, solutions must respect local ecosystems and livelihoods, and include communities in planning and decision-making, respecting their human rights, dignity, and agency to tackle the climate crisis.

- **Urgent:** Mechanisms and modalities for loss and damage financing must be capable of dispersing rapidly at different scales, as well as be flexible and responsive to changing and escalating needs. Solutions to respond to loss and damage must not delay the delivery of support to affected populations. Decision makers should consider existing institutional systems and processes and mechanisms at the national level to avoid duplication and advocate for simple and accessible and efficient financial structures on the basis of subsidiarity.
- **Integrated response:** An integrated and principled approach across humanitarian development and peace actors is required to address the range of losses and damages, both economic and non-economic, addressing gaps from response to resilient recovery, to ensure solutions and funding respond to the needs of impacted communities based on their values and priorities.
- **Balanced response:** A comprehensive approach to reduce, anticipate, minimize, and respond to the range of losses and damages, both economic and non-economic, which are sector and system specific, is required to ensure solutions and funding respond to impacted communities' values and prioritization of needs.
- **Additionality:** While increased investment in mitigation and adaptation finance is urgently required to prevent avoidable losses and damages, funding to address loss and damage should be new, additional, predictable, sufficient and grant-based. Loss and damage solutions and finance need to be aligned with adaptation and comprehensive disaster risk management solutions.
- **Inclusive approach:** Countries and communities that are vulnerable to climate change and are already disproportionately suffering from losses and damages will need to have access to funds. The process for arriving at the right financing structures for loss and damages should be inclusive, ensuring that the voices of those most impacted and vulnerable are heard.