

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What is the Nansen Initiative?

The Nansen Initiative is a state-led consultative process that strives to build consensus on a global protection agenda addressing the needs of people displaced across borders in the context of natural disasters including the effects of climate change. It is based on a pledge that Norway and Switzerland made at the Ministerial Conference of UNHCR in December 2011, and was officially launched in Geneva and New York in October 2012. The Initiative is a bottom-up, inclusive process taking place over two to three years with multi-stakeholder involvement from UN agencies, regional organizations, civil society, academia, and public and private sectors. The Initiative is supported by member states of its steering group (among others), namely Australia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Germany, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, and Switzerland.

2) Why is the Initiative dubbed the “Nansen” Initiative?”

Inspired by the outcomes of the Nansen Conference on climate change and displacement (Oslo, June 2011), the Initiative was named after the renowned Norwegian scientist, Arctic explorer, diplomat and first High Commissioner for Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen.

3) Why focus on disaster-induced cross-border displacement?

Every year, millions of people are forcibly displaced by floods, wind-storms, earthquakes, droughts and other natural disasters. Many find refuge within their own countries but some have to go abroad. In the context of climate change, such movements are likely to increase. Yet, national and international responses to this challenge are insufficient and protection for affected people remains inadequate.

While people displaced within their own country are covered by national laws, international human rights law, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and a few regional instruments, a serious legal gap exists with regard to disaster-induced cross-border movements. People who cross borders due to natural disasters and adverse effects of climate change are in most cases not refugees under international refugee law, and human rights law does not address critical issues such as their admission, stay and basic rights. Criteria to distinguish between forced and voluntary movements induced by natural disasters have not yet been elaborated. The situation is exacerbated by operational and institutional shortcomings, such as a lack of coherent institutional responses and effective inter-state as well as (sub-) regional cooperation.

4) How does the Nansen Initiative relate to international efforts/debates on climate change?

The topic of forced displacement due to natural disasters and the adverse effects of climate change is increasingly being debated in international fora such as the UNFCCC's annual climate negotiations. The international community explicitly recognizes the humanitarian consequences of climate change-related population movements. For example, since the adoption of paragraph 14 (f) of the Cancun Outcome Agreement in December 2010 (COP16), states recognize climate change-induced migration, displacement and relocation as an adaptation challenge, and agree to enhance their understanding and cooperation on the topic. While the Cancun Outcome Agreement foresees the incorporation of displacement issues within national adaptation plans, it also recognizes that efforts to address displacement need to be undertaken at regional and international levels, thus putting climate-related cross-border displacement—the focus of the Nansen Initiative—as well as internal displacement on the international agenda.

5) What is the Structure of the Nansen Initiative?

With states as its primary stakeholders, the Nansen Initiative is chaired by Norway and Switzerland and managed by a **Steering Group, a Consultative Committee, an Envoy and a small Secretariat** based in Geneva.

The Steering Group which is comprised of six to ten states with balanced representation from the Global South and North (Australia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Germany, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, and Switzerland) overviews and steers the process. The Consultative Committee will inform and support the implementation of the initiative through the experience of its members. It includes researchers and representatives from international organizations, think tanks and non-governmental organizations that address displacement and migration issues, climate change and development. Professor Walter Kaelin acts as the Envoy of the Chairmanship of the Nansen Initiative, representing it throughout the process and providing strategic guidance and input. The Geneva-based Secretariat supports these bodies and the process as a whole.

6) Who can participate in the Initiative?

The Initiative is designed as a participatory process and aims to include the views from a variety of actors (States, UN agencies and other international organizations, academic institutions, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector at local, regional, and global levels).

The Consultative Committee of the Nansen Initiative allows membership of civil society groups, academic institutions, international organizations/UN agencies, NGOs, and private sector actors at local, regional, and global levels.

Additionally, states that are not part of the Steering Group but are interested in supporting the work of the Initiative can sign up to be members of the “Group of friends of the Nansen Initiative”. Doing so will allow them to:

- Receive information on the activities of the Nansen Initiative on a regular basis
- Receive relevant Nansen Initiative documentation (reports, studies, etc.)
- Be invited to meetings, including the regional consultations
- Be called upon, when appropriate, to cooperate with the Nansen Initiative on specific issues
- Be invited to provide substantive input to the activities of the Initiative

7) What are the outcomes and outputs of the Nansen Initiative?

The overall goal of the Nansen Initiative is to build a consensus on key principles and elements regarding the protection of persons displaced across borders in the context of natural disasters. It is hoped that this consensus will set the agenda for future action at domestic, regional and international levels. The envisaged **outcome** is an **agenda** for the protection of people displaced across international borders in the context of natural disasters. It is envisioned that the agenda will consist of three core pillars:

- 1) International cooperation and solidarity among states;
- 2) Standards for the treatment of affected people regarding admission, stay, and status; and
- 3) Operational responses, including funding mechanisms and delineated responsibilities of international humanitarian and development actors

Outputs include:

- 1) Five (sub)-regional consultations on the topic;
- 2) Establishment of a consolidated knowledge base;
- 3) Global dialogue on the three elements of the protection agenda; and
- 4) Follow-up process and dissemination of results

8) Would the Initiative’s outcomes lead to a soft law document similar to the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”?

No. Such a project would be premature. Presently, there is not sufficient knowledge available to support a soft law instrument that would adequately reflect realities. Furthermore, it would be difficult to ensure agreement at the international level on the idea of producing a normative framework right away. What is proposed instead is a global protection agenda that can serve as a point of departure for further action that may include standard-setting exercises at domestic, (sub-) regional and global levels. (See bullet point 7.)

9) How does Nansen Initiative's work relate to the topic of "internal displacement"?

The Nansen Initiative acknowledges that forced displacement has many different causes and that there are strong inter-linkages between internal displacement and cross-border movements in the context of natural disasters. To this end, the research and knowledge gathering aspect of the Initiative's activities will focus on analyzing and better understanding such inter-linkages and integrating the ultimate findings within its work.

10) Why does the Initiative employ the terminology "disaster-induced" cross-border displacement and NOT "climate-induced" cross-border displacement?

The reason for using the term "natural disasters" rather than "climate change" is to cover not only climate-related disasters but also geophysical hazards such as earthquakes that may also displace people and create protection needs. In addition, the present state of knowledge does not scientifically establish a direct causality between specific disasters, such as floods or windstorms, and the general dynamics of climate change.

11) To what extent will the Nansen Initiative's work draw on academic research as opposed to operational experience?

The Nansen Initiative is not a research programme, so its outcomes are action-oriented. The idea is to use research to better understand the existing gaps and challenges with regard to protection in the context of natural disasters. This will: 1) allow for a better understanding of what works and what does not, 2) ensure a holistic analysis, 3) create a solid knowledge base for the envisaged consultations, and 4) assist with the elaboration of the global protection agenda. To ensure inputs reflect practical and local concerns, special attention will be given to views, findings, and recommendations put forward at the field level by various stakeholders and partners. Case studies, pragmatic and locally-made solutions will be integrated.

12) Will the Initiative ensure input and ownership at local level?

Yes. Since the Initiative is a bottom-up consultative process, special priority and attention will be given to the inclusion of views and inputs at local level. To this end, the five planned regional consultations will focus on identifying good practices and lessons learned at the local level, thereby ensuring that context-specific, local solutions are identified, analyzed and fed into the process.

13) What does the Initiative's timeline/work plan look like?

The estimated timeframe for the Nansen Initiative is two to three years. The Initiative will start with five regional or sub-regional consultation meetings in regions particularly affected by actual or expected disaster-induced cross-border displacement (South Pacific, Central America, and Horn of Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia), bringing together governments and local stakeholders from concerned states. On the basis of sound knowledge provided by research, these consultations will attempt to close gaps in knowledge and understanding, as well as identify areas of agreement or disagreement with regard to protection measures. Outcomes from the regional meetings will provide input for planned consultations at the global level in 2015.

14) How is the Nansen Initiative funded?

The Nansen Initiative is primarily funded through generous contributions from Norway and Switzerland, which cover the costs of the Secretariat. The Initiative also benefits from funding from the European Commission. The European Commission's money will be spent over a two year timeline. The funds are earmarked for: 1) commissioning research studies on the topic of disaster-induced cross-border displacement, 2) convening regional and global consultations, 3) running costs, and 4) the final dissemination of the work done by the Nansen Initiative.