

# ENVIRONMENT and EMERGENCIES FORUM

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## Executive summary

The Environment and Emergencies Forum (EEF) is a biennial inclusive global forum focused on the interface between the environment and humanitarian emergency response. It brings together stakeholders from around the world to showcase progress in environmental emergency preparedness and response and highlights current efforts and existing challenges as well as opportunities in integrating environmental risk in humanitarian action. The Forum offers environment, humanitarian aid and disaster management practitioners a unique opportunity to discuss global policy, share experiences and knowledge, forge new partnerships, and agree on key actions to make sure that our common response to emergencies is more efficient, local and sustainable.

The 2023 Environment and Emergencies Forum took place from Wednesday 22 to Thursday 23 March 2023 at the Albert Borschette Conference Centre, Brussels and was hosted by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). The Forum centred around four themes: 1) readiness for response; 2) response and recovery; 3) environment in humanitarian action; and 4) environment in protracted conflict settings.

The Forum brought together 170 participants from 54 countries, representing over 80 emergency response, humanitarian and sustainable development organizations. The continuing growth of the Environment and Emergencies Forum is proof not only of the increasing diversity of stakeholders involved and the growing interest from countries affected by these

issues, but also demonstrates that the challenges are real and concrete.

Amidst the changing landscape of humanitarian crises and the evolving global agendas, the humanitarian aid sector is witnessing a growing inclination towards exploring the interlinkages between relief efforts and sustainable development. The shifting paradigms of assistance have led to a surge of interest in the nexus of these two crucial domains.

The pressing issues of environmental degradation and humanitarian crises have garnered considerable attention in recent years. Amidst this growing concern, a consensus has emerged amongst stakeholders that collaboration between environmental and humanitarian actors is critical to achieving sustainable solutions. The notion that these two sectors must work in tandem has been widely acknowledged, with participants highlighting the need for greater integration and coordination. Indeed, the interdependent relationship between the environment and human wellbeing is undeniable, and the two cannot be viewed in isolation.

The discussions amongst participants also centred on the urgent need to shift the focus of these sectors from short-term solutions towards long-term goals. The recognition that short-term solutions, while necessary in emergency situations, are not sufficient for addressing the root causes of environmental degradation and humanitarian crises, has spurred a call for action. In this regard, there has been a push to prioritize long-term solutions that foster community





resilience and security. This approach seeks to tackle the underlying drivers of environmental degradation and humanitarian crises and build sustainable solutions that are inclusive, participatory, and equitable.

Moreover, the discussions highlighted the importance of engaging with communities, particularly those most affected by environmental degradation and humanitarian crises. A bottom-up approach that is community-led and participatory is crucial for building resilience and addressing the root causes of these issues. In this vein, there have been calls to incorporate local knowledge, practices, and perspectives into the design and implementation of environmental and humanitarian interventions. This approach recognizes that communities are not passive recipients of aid but rather active agents of change who can play a vital role in shaping their own futures.

In conclusion, the need for collaboration between environmental and humanitarian actors, the importance of shifting the emphasis from short-term solutions to long-term goals, and the recognition of the critical role of communities in building resilience and addressing the root causes of environmental degradation and humanitarian crises were key themes that emerged from the discussions. These themes represent a collective call for action that seeks to build sustainable solutions that are inclusive, participatory, and equitable.

Many new partnerships and connections were forged during the Forum, which will have fruitful outcomes in the near future. As a space where various experts and organisations meet, the Forum assisted in the

development of a common terminology between sectors, which will further streamline their efforts.

The Forum also featured readiness and response tools, such as the Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT) which was deployed successfully in Ukraine, and the Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+). It also examined the possibility of gamified training, which has been used in the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Indonesia, Ecuador, Peru and Kenya.

Localisation and regionalisation were repeatedly mentioned as essential in moving forward. Their implementation would reduce the dependence on emergency deployment from Europe, in turn increasing the number of available humanitarians and speed of response, as small organisations would be under less pressure and not so limited by travel and availability. As well as this, local communities have valuable experience and may have their own solutions to issues which are often low-cost and nature-based. The question for humanitarian organisations is how these solutions can be scaled up.

Waste management was a key concern during the Forum. Participants unanimously agreed that the first consideration is an improvement of existing waste management facilities and methods. With the right skills in place, systems will not be overwhelmed by sudden issues, as was the case with the Beirut explosion. There is also a need for better communication on the potential hazards involved, both with the public for their own safety and with decision-makers so that they understand the seriousness of the situation and do not underestimate the level of danger.



It was determined that emergency protocols must be put in place for each debris stream, and a roadmap on how to move forward with their management must be developed. This also requires a triangulation of agencies, so that approaches to waste management are coordinated and each team controls waste in the same way.

Sudan was cited as an example of the interconnection between conflict and climate change, as each has worsened and accelerated the other: drought has

development actors in their operations, professional cultures, mandates, and timelines. The key learning from the Forum was the need to counter the gap between these sectors by mainstreaming environmental considerations into humanitarian action.

Perhaps most importantly, a holistic perspective on climate change, risk and environmental sustainability is needed as part of a multi-risk approach. We must extend the perspective of traditional humanitarian thinking to make it more long-term. We cannot only



caused a water shortage, and remaining water sources have been poisoned and weaponised. Workers in Ukraine are beginning the process of reconstruction, and attempting to make this an opportunity to build back better, even while the conflict remains ongoing.

The ultimate message that emerged throughout the Forum was how crucial a role environmental issues play in humanitarian action. There is currently a disconnect between humanitarian, environmental, and

consider what is life-saving now but also in the future.

On the whole, the two days of intense discussions at the 2023 EEF provided an excellent opportunity for participants to share invaluable knowledge and experience, forge new connections, fertilise ideas, and develop creative methodologies. As these concepts become concrete, collective action in the coming months and years, a positive impact will be made on climate, lives, and livelihoods around the world.

**See more:**  
[environmentandemergenciesforum2023.com](https://environmentandemergenciesforum2023.com)

# Summary of discussions and key outcomes

## Opening ceremony



### Speakers

**Julia Stewart-David:** DG ECHO Director Disaster Preparedness and Prevention (Acting), European Commission

**Cécilia Aipira:** Chief, Disaster & Conflict Branch, UNEP

**Edem Wosornu:** Chief, Response Support Branch, OCHA.

Ms Stewart-David began by underlining humanitarian aid and civil protection as the two primary instruments which must come together when dealing with environmental emergencies. 330 million people are currently in need of basic humanitarian assistance and current systems in place are under pressure across the board. Her aim for the Forum was to increase attention, ideas, and momentum in the emergency cycle. She hoped that the Forum would allow participants to gain a greater understanding of secondary environmental risks from disasters, create strong partnerships between organisations, and set an example of how to build back better and greener.



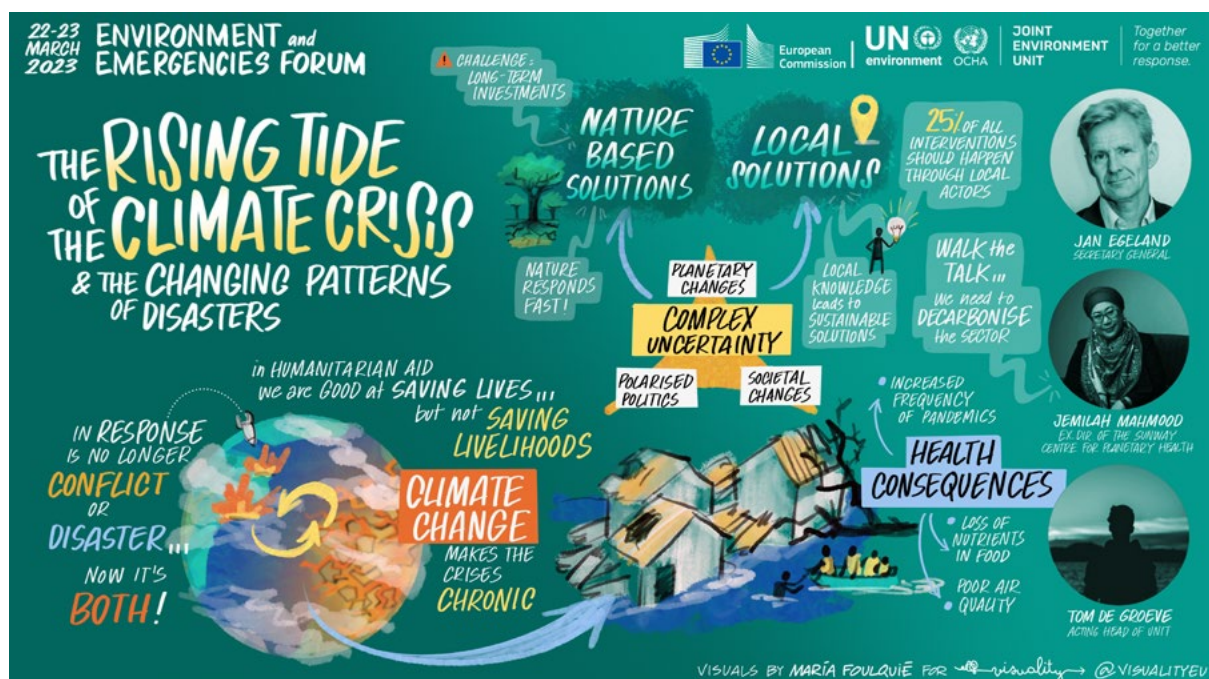
Ms Aipira emphasised the growing complexity of environmental issues, as disasters continue to compound each other. She cited figures showing that climate-related disasters have doubled in the last four decades and that environmental disasters and conflict now tend to go hand in hand, using the environmental impact of war in Ukraine as an example. She highlighted the necessity of environmental considerations in the rebuilding of lives affected by conflict and stressed that peace-building cannot be forced when environmental restoration is not in place. She noted the lack of continued discussion around Covid-19, despite its being the largest disaster on record, and stressed the need to understand the multiple facets of disasters. She expressed a hope that the discussions of the Forum would be guided by science, compassion, and community.

Ms Wosornu acknowledged the terrible toll of environmental disasters across the world, and that it is felt most deeply by the most vulnerable: women, children, indigenous communities, and people living below the poverty line. She cited that 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced in 2020 and that this number has doubled in the last decade. She stressed the need to work with grassroots movements and organisations in response to these growing crises, as a way to bring solutions to the fore. She expressed that her ultimate hope is that humanitarian actors will be able to adapt and understand these issues to the point that there are working on prevention rather than response, thus saving more lives.





## High-level panel: the rising tide of the climate crisis and the changing patterns of disasters



### Speakers

**Jan Egeland:** Secretary General, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

**Dr Jemilah Mahmood:** Executive Director of the Subway Centre for Planetary Health.

**Tom De Groeve:** Acting Head of Unit, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (Moderator).

Tom De Groeve began the discussion by emphasising the role of science in the discussion of the Forum, saying that science should be for policy and for people.

Dr Jemilah Mahmood noted that Covid-19 displayed the centrality of health in environmental and humanitarian endeavours, as these had to be put on hold for much of the pandemic.



She underlined the long-term nature of climate issues and solutions. Infectious diseases are on the rise, and pandemics will become more common; food quality is altered by climate change, with many staple crops having lower nutritional value. Yet politics works in five-year cycles, but the scope of solutions to these issues needs to be on a scale of fifty years.

She highlighted the difficult but essential task of translating science to the layperson, as the current communication vacuum leaves people uninformed of the urgency of the situation.



Dr Mahmood ended by emphasising the need for a multi-systems approach to the current challenges, and that we must disrupt our model of thought to find inventive solutions.

Jan Egeland underlined the overlap of conflicts and disasters. He also noted that from Somalia to Bangladesh, climate change is already hugely taking lives and livelihoods in humanitarian crises and forcing more people from their homes. He remarked that humanitarians are good at saving lives, but not livelihoods, which leads to an accumulation of people who are dependent on aid long-term. These people often suffer a loss of faith in humanitarian actors, due to their chronic insecurity, compounded by pre-existing issues.

Mr Egeland stressed the precarious nature of humanitarian funding, stating that most organisations are dependent on as few as ten main donors and that 80% of funding comes from the US and Europe. He emphasised the need to address this by expanding globally, on a local, regional, and national governmental level.

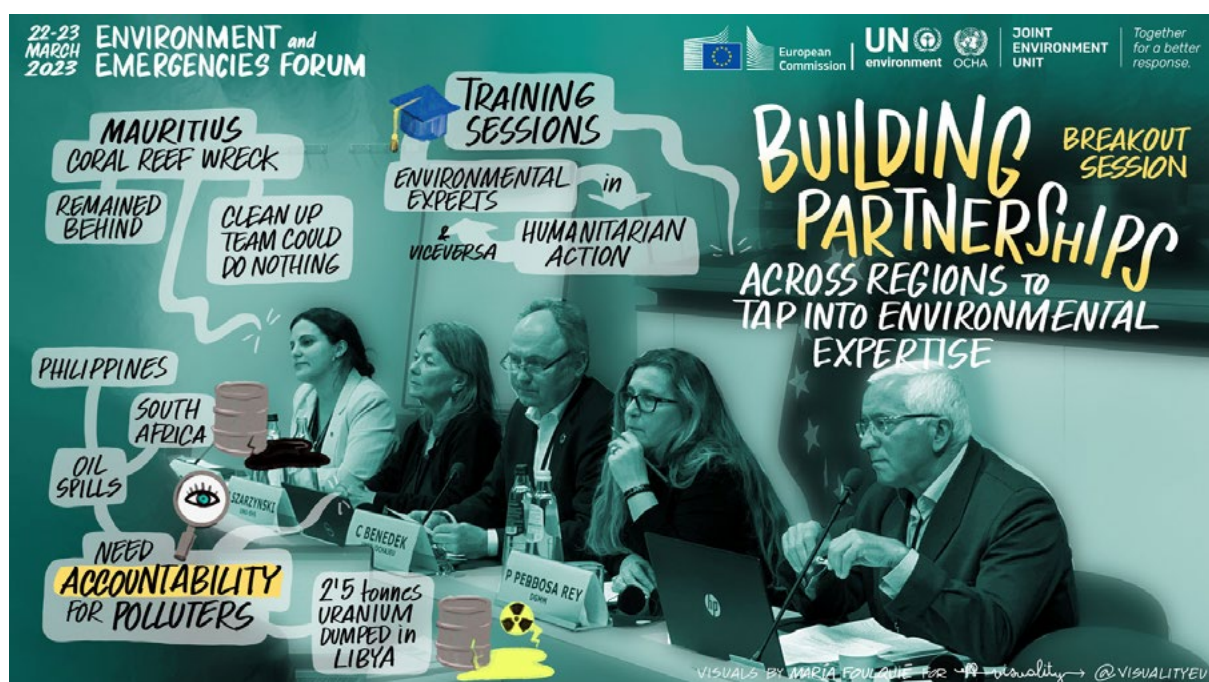
Mr Egeland ended on a positive note, expressing a hope that the Forum would provide an opportunity to spread stories of successful climate resilience.





## Theme 1: Readiness for response

Building partnerships across regions to tap into environmental expertise using the Environment and Emergencies Training (EET) to build capacity



### Speakers

**Pablo Pedrosa Rey:** Head of Pollution Response Unit, The General Directorate (DGMM).

**Esther El-Haddad:** Deputy Team Leader, Emergency Response Co-ordination Centre, DG ECHO (European Commission).

**Charlotta Benedek:** Head of the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit

**Eitan Charnoff:** Advisor, Secure Communities Forum.

**Joerg Szarzynski:** Academic Officer, Head of Division, United Nations University, Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) (Moderator).

**Florence Poncet:** Oil spill expert and senior engineer member of the Research Department, Cedre.

The gap between the expertise of humanitarian workers and environmentalists could often lead to misunderstandings and make cooperation more challenging. Greater overlap in the training of each sector would save time in real-world situations, saving more lives and causing fewer environmental problems. Localisation and regionalisation are essential in maximising efficiency. Working with local communities saves time spent on logistics and customs, whilst also allowing organisations to reach a maximum number of humanitarians.

Participants highlighted the need for a well-defined notion of what localisation and regionalisation look like in practice, as well as decision-maker involvement in training, so that knowledge can spread up the chain of command. The wealth of knowledge gained through the experience of different sectors must be made freely shared and available.



### Key recommendations

- Plug EET into existing local training programmes to reach a maximum number of humanitarians.
- Training and simulation exercises would allow those with scientific knowledge but little field experience not to become overwhelmed by a chaotic first experience on the field.
- Local expansion would reduce dependence on deployment from Europe, increasing the quantity and speed of reaction as organisations would be less limited by travel and availability. A well-defined notion of what localisation and regionalisation look like in practice is needed.
- Universal training using common terms, to open eyes to all angles of the situation. Lack of balance in training acts as an impediment to work, as scientists may not be trained in humanitarian action, and humanitarians may not have environmental knowledge.
- Decision-maker involvement in training, so that knowledge can spread up the chain of command
- Environmentalism must be part of the first response, in order to limit the creation of further problems. For this, a clear and enforceable path of accountability is needed.





## Identifying and assessing potential impacts of industrial hazards in high-risk countries as a key to a dynamic and rapid response



### Speakers

**Antoine Chandonnet:** Research manager, IMPACT Initiatives – REACH.

**Thomas Hofmann:** Scientific Officer, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Advisor for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

**Jemimah Ndugwa:** Consultant, UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit.

The FEAT tool is vital for preparedness, recovery and resilience. It helps to identify the actual or potential impact of industrial facilities and chemicals on humans, human health and the environment. FEAT focuses first on defining the hazard, the quantity and the exposure; then it requires the collection of information to determine the impact zones; and then moves to clarify impact reduction and mitigation measures.

The consequences of the war in Ukraine on the environment, both short-term and long-term, are profound and extensive. There is an abundance of openly available data regarding the war's impact on the environment: wildfires have destroyed forests; damaged dams have impacted ecosystems and negatively affected biodiversity; and air and soil



pollution from the bombing of industrial facilities, many of which are characterised by ageing infrastructure. In Ukraine, FEAT has been leveraged to document the environmental consequences of the war both before and after February 2022. Before, FEAT contributed to an area-based risk assessment of Mariupol, with a view to making it a more resilient city by strengthening environmental and social policies. This exercise, done at a low-intensity phase of the war (2021), had a strong focus on resilience and preparedness. Subsequently, rapid assessments during the intensive conflict phase, based on reported damage, have driven goals of immediate response and early recovery. FEAT contributes to a detailed data review through a multi-layered methodology by mapping the geographical distribution of hazardous substances. It fills information gaps quickly in a rapidly evolving situation, and is valuable in preparedness, response, and recovery. However, it cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the impact when deployed alone and must be integrated into a broader information and decision-making system. It is also more effective when accompanied by primary data collection in areas of significant contamination.

#### Key recommendations

- The FEAT tool is most effective and has a greater impact when used with other disaster and emergency information tools that visualize the scope of damage.
- Engagement of the community and local authorities should be initiated at the beginning of the process.
- Response actors would benefit from a free and open source tool that allows for easy and fast identification, assessment and response to hazards. The ideal tool would make use of cutting-edge technology to provide useful information and visuals, offer triage methods, and enable collaboration.
- Develop clear and reliable procedures to foster exchange of information with authorities, and to accumulate long-term information for effective surveillance. Local governments and communities need more training and information exchange to help them comprehend the hazardous materials around and their possible effects on human health and the environment.



## The gamification of training: the future of capacity building?



### Speakers

**James Maltby:** Head of Digital Learning, Save the Children UK

**Stephanie Retfalvi:** Learning and Development Consultant, Pablo Media Ltd.

**Louie John Aguila:** E-Learning Specialist Adviser, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

**Major Hamad Khatir,** Director of the International Operations Department, Ministry of Interior, United Arab Emirates.

This breakout session focused on the potential of ‘gamification’ as a tool to increase engagement in training. ‘Serious games’ are used as learning tools and activities, and may be educational, experiential, or analytical. Examples include: the International Alliance’s virtual cybersecurity exercise ISALEX 2.0; the ‘In 90 Days’ app, where players must respond effectively to an unfolding humanitarian disaster; a coaching game for transition to employment in Jordan; a virtual leadership training game in Myanmar; and a disaster displacement e-learning course. Gamification gives people the opportunity to practice their skills in a safe environment, where they can evaluate trade-offs, see potential outcomes of decisions in the field, and fail safely. Using low-tech games, such as board and card games, as a simple yet effective alternative to



gamification. These games are scalable, sustainable, and can be easily adapted to multiple languages. For example, World Agroforestry has successfully used serious games in a research programme with Wageningen University to engage stakeholders in land management and develop resilient landscapes. These games were incredibly simple, sometimes requiring nothing more than pen and paper, yet proved to be highly effective in building understanding and collaboration among stakeholders.

Several methods are used to evaluate the impact of these games. Clear learning objectives must be set up, and target learners well defined. The Kirkpatrick Model for the evaluation of training examines reactions, knowledge retention, behaviour, and application. Pre- and post-game evaluation must also be implemented, and the results compared.

#### Key recommendations

- Connect training objectives to the KPIs of the organisation.
- Match the complexity and time and money involved in a given serious game to the capacity of the organisation
- Explore the possibility of utilizing serious games in environmental training – for instance the use of FEAT in different scenarios.





## Theme 2: Response and recovery

Bridging the subject-matter experts with the general coordination set-up: The necessity of a multisectoral assessment and analysis strategy in environmental emergencies: OSOCC/UNDAC Assessment and Analysis Cell (A&A)



### Speakers

**Esther El Haddad:** Deputy Team Leader, Emergency Response Coordination Centre, DG ECHO (European Commission).

**Rolf Bakken:** Senior Analyst, ACAPS James McArthur: Climate & Disasters Assessment Officer, IMPACT Initiatives.

**James McArthur:** Climate and Disaster Assessment Officer, IMPACT Initiatives

The session focused on the importance of mainstreaming environmental assessment and analysis (A&A) as part of an overall disaster management and response strategy. The session began with an explanation of the A&A cell concept and how it developed during the Nepal earthquake of 2015. The A&A Cell's aim is to develop a shared understanding of the humanitarian situation; current and forecasted needs; priority areas, groups and sectors; and gaps. Furthermore, to inform multi-sectoral strategic decision-making, help coordinate ongoing assessments and facilitate joint analysis (read more here).

A&A cells operate in country with a remote support capacity available 24/7 and standard operating procedures – every mission is different – the panellists listed the many disasters and emergencies since 2015 where the A&A concept had been applied. As a result, the concept's best practices are constantly being refined and enhanced. A&A cells are promoted on the OCHA homepage as a coordination tool, and A&A courses have further helped to develop the concept.

A&A cells are ordinarily deployed as part of an UNDAC mission. In the case of the Beirut port explosion in 2020, the cell together with the Environmental Emergency Cell, conducted a rapid damage and needs assessment and produced a disaster waste management plan that included the rehabilitation of damaged waste management infrastructure. The cell also identified lessons learned for ports elsewhere. Meanwhile, with regard to the Türkiye/Syria earthquakes of 2023, the A&A cell was able to identify issues related to the contamination of drinking water and damage to industrial facilities, subsequently liaising with relevant authorities.

The A&A cell builds on a network of partners, and is very much like an intelligence unit – small and efficient, flexible and nimble. The A&A concept has developed as more partners have come to understand it and work with it. A&A cells have specific environmental tools, whether the FEAT (Flash Environmental Assessment Tool) or Disaster Waste Management, at their disposal.

First responders are usually able to – and should – directly observe and pick up on the following elements to inform subsequent decision-making of environmental experts: damage to fuel sites and industrial facilities, waste and debris, water pollution, access restrictions to certain sites, damaged infrastructure, local reactions. This can be complemented by knowledgeable key informants from the affected communities who can report on the following in terms of environmental concerns: impact on protected areas, agriculture, livelihoods, damaged industrial facilities and affected sites with hazardous materials, pre-existing environmental concerns, impact on wildlife, livestock, new waste sites and informal waste management, changes in community behaviour, the gender perspective

## Key recommendations

- Include the environmental lens in non-environment-specific tools because initial on-the-ground assessments often do not include this aspect, and prior to, the input of environmental experts. This is because the size and access of immediate first-responder teams are limited in the first phase of emergencies, and areas can be hard to reach, so there is limited environmental input.
- Conducting an initial environmental assessment to gain valuable insights into potential environmental concerns across a large area. This assessment can help prioritize needs and identify key areas that require attention. In recent years, environmental assessment has become an essential component of disaster management and response, making it even more crucial to integrate it into an overall toolkit.





## Post-disaster environmental restoration and the importance of building links to (green) recovery



### Speakers

**Urs Bloesch:** Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

**Patrick Worms:** Senior Science Policy Advisor (CIFOR-ICRAF)

**Thierry Lucas:** Biodiversity coordinator – Europe, UNEP

**Verónica Ruiz:** Project Manager, Climate and Disaster Resilience, IUCN

**James Mwangi:** Environment Officer, UNHCR

**Cécilia Aipira:** Chief, Disaster and Conflict Branch UNEP (Moderator)

The panel discussed considerations to keep in mind while attempting restoration in protracted crises.

Working with forcibly displaced people and host communities is critical for making credible and durable interventions – to strengthen resilience and mitigate against climate change and environmental degradation, which increase vulnerability. Integrating a refugee crisis into national systems is effective, and can give ownership at the local and national level. A common language is needed so that humanitarians, environmental actors, scientists, policymakers and decision makers can set common and realistic objectives.

The panellists used the pilot restoration project in Chad as an illustrative example. The question of ownership of trees and land in restoration projects proved a challenge. The pilot addressed this by having a local agreement between refugees, local communities and

semi-nomadic herders, as well as generating income through existing trees whilst waiting for new trees to grow (e.g. gum arabic from *Acacia senegal*). However, these solutions presented further complications. The development of a market chain for gum arabic is complicated, and there is a need for additional activities or projects to support this. There is also the potential for conflict if access to and use of resources (e.g. water) is not managed. Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration promotes other tree-based value chains and therefore alternative sources of livelihood.

Applying nature-based solutions (NbS) creates many co-benefits, not only risk reduction. Some examples given were the return of giraffes to a restored area, the provision of livelihoods, and gender benefits as women depend more on nature. NbS can also help diffuse tension between displaced and host communities.

Working with forcibly displaced people and host communities is critical for making credible and durable interventions – to strengthen resilience and mitigate against climate change and environmental degradation, which increase vulnerability. Integrating a refugee crisis into national systems is effective, and can give ownership at the local and national level. A common

language is needed so that humanitarians, environmental actors, scientists, policymakers and decision makers can set common and realistic objectives.

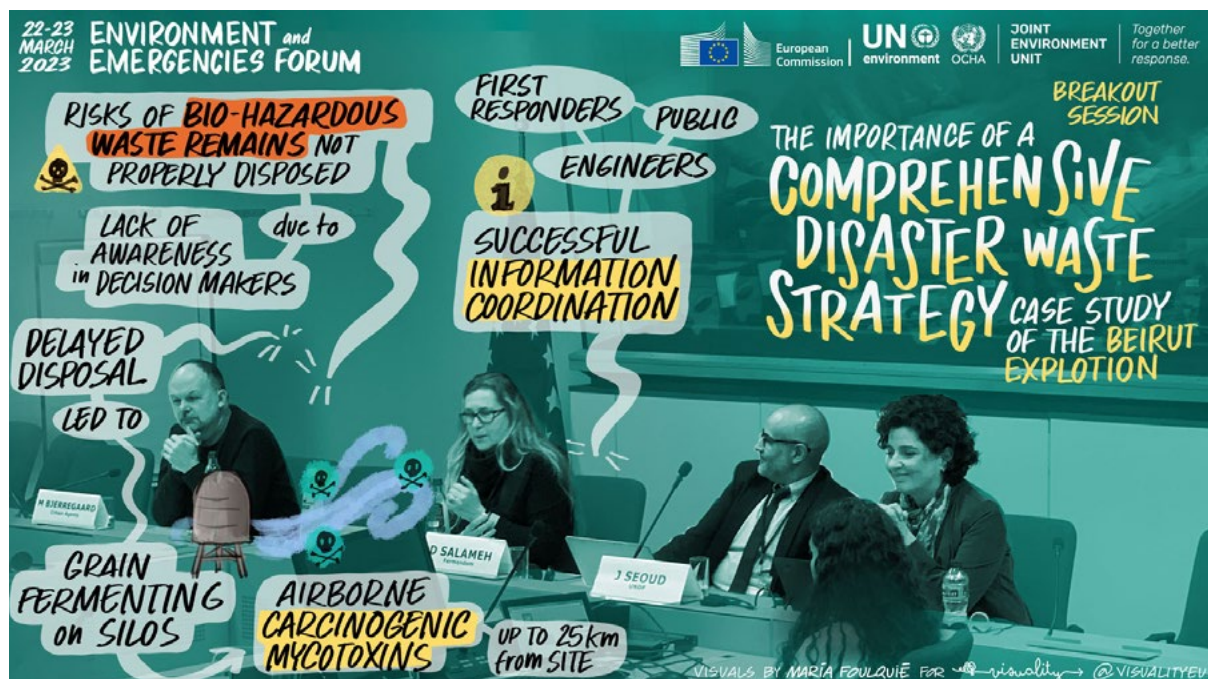
### Key recommendations

- Organisations must talk to the people affected. They know about the issues, challenges and opportunities from an environmental perspective.
- Nature can play a critical role in risk reduction and have astounding results. More investment in nature-based solutions is needed for response, recovery and bridging resilience as nature can play a critical role in risk reduction and have astounding results.
- The nexus idea needs to be supported by management – nexus-sensitive leadership is crucial for cultural change and to foster exchange and learning opportunities.
- Resources must be provided for investment in the nexus. This is also an incentive for actors to work together.





## The importance of a comprehensive disaster waste management strategy: a case study of the Beirut explosion



### Speakers

**Jihan Seoud:** Energy & Environment Programme Manager, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

**Martin Bjerregaard:** Debris & Waste Consultant, Crown Agents.

**Dominique Salamah:** Senior consultant/scholar, Fermendom.

**Charlotta Benedek:** Head of the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit.

This session examined the difficulties in the safe management of disaster waste after the explosion in the Port of Beirut in 2020. 40,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed, with the damage extending up to 2km from the blast site. This generated a complex challenge, as the waste was of many types: materials from old and new buildings, recyclable materials, and asbestos-contaminated waste. Each waste type had to be treated accordingly, which led to a complicated system of management.

As an initial step in the management of the disaster waste generated by the explosion, an app was set up that would assist volunteer engineers in assessing building damage, as well as the type and quantity of waste involved. The Lebanese government and associated partners were advised on how to dispose of

the main types of waste: hazardous, toxic, and inert. In terms of public communications, efforts were focussed on spreading safety information: how to tell if a building is unsafe to answer, what kind of masks and PPE best protect against asbestos while sweeping in the home, etc. Much energy was spent on tailoring the scope of the survey of the area, as it would not be possible to do any follow-up surveys and so experts had only one chance to obtain the essential information.



### Key recommendations

- Preemptive improvement of waste management facilities and methods, so that skills are in place and systems are not overwhelmed by sudden issues.
- Improved record-keeping in storage facilities, to facilitate tracking of hazardous materials.
- Better communication on hazards involved, both with the public for their own safety, and with decision-makers, so that they understand the seriousness of the situation and do not underestimate the level of danger.
- Emergency protocols to be put in place for each debris stream, and the development of a roadmap on how to move forward with their management.
- A triangulation of agencies, so that approaches to waste management are coordinated and each team controls waste in the same way.
- A cost-benefit analysis of dumping versus recycling material. Recycling costs are higher initially, but recycling creates more jobs and generates valuable material.





## Theme 3: Environment in humanitarian action

The importance of technology and innovation in environmental emergency preparedness and recovery: a case study of the use of the NEAT +



### Speakers

**Julie Gassien:** Global Lead Climate and Environment, Norwegian Refugee Council.

**Nadia Ortega:** Americas Regional Coordinator, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

**Kanika Thakar:** Advisor, Swedish Red Cross.

**Jeremy Wetterwald:** Head of New Initiatives and Development, IMPACT Initiatives.

**Karolina Kalinowska:** Policy Officer, DG ECHO, European Commission.



This session focused on the Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+) tool as a rapid and simple project-level environmental screening tool, developed by practitioners, that allows humanitarian actors to quickly identify issues of environmental concern before designing longer-term emergency or recovery interventions.

The Swedish Red Cross illustrated how they do environmental screenings of projects using the NEAT+, which they typically do in three stages. Stage One consists of a checklist of questions: will the activities cause changes to the surroundings, will they use a significant amount of resources, and will they use materials that will harm the environment? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, an

environmental assessment is required, which is Stage Two. The tool's risk matrix is helpful for Stage Three, which is project design. The session discussed the fact that first responders often receive information about environmental hazards in addition to basic humanitarian needs, and therefore need to be able to address these environmental concerns to allow for a more effective overall response. In IFRC projects in the Americas, NEAT+ has been integrated into socioeconomic Covid-19 recovery projects, including more effective climate-aware approaches to build resilience against floods in Venezuela. In the Dominican Republic in 2022, the use of NEAT+ helped lead towards the development of environmentally sensitive micro-projects.





The NEAT+ provides an opportunity to train volunteers in affected communities to do their environmental assessments directly, and it helps them to reprioritise activities within the response. The tool is most effective when deployed with other inputs – there is a need for more effective partnership, to work together and talk together to find out what work is being done by others and also to gain information from local authorities and organisations other than humanitarian (e.g. environmental organisations). Participants further discussed the importance of harnessing data to make better decisions that enable people to recover more successfully. The pace at which crisis-affected cities must adapt – especially to population influxes – is astonishing, and that pace of change poses significant risks to the environment. A common understanding of the risks, based on real-time, reliable data, is essential.

Scaling up solutions such as NEAT+ to address the environmental impact of humanitarian aid is essential. But technology is not the only solution to environmental problems – low-tech, established solutions should also be considered as impact-mitigating measures. Analysing the success of environmental interventions is essential, and remote sensing can be used to support it so that humanitarian interventions not only avoid causing harm but that they have positive outcomes on the environment. DG ECHO provides project implementers with sufficient flexibility to adapt project activities in the light of environmental screenings (e.g. using the NEAT+).

### Key recommendations

- An area that still needs further work and research is how to address supply-chain issues concerning the environmental sustainability of goods, packaging and means of production.
- DG ECHO provides project implementers with sufficient flexibility to adapt project activities in the light of environmental screenings (e.g. using the NEAT+). The tool is most effective when deployed with other inputs – there is a need for more effective partnership, to work together and talk together to find out what work is being done by others and also to gain information from local authorities and organisations other than humanitarian (e.g. environmental organisations).
- A common understanding of the risks, based on real-time, reliable data, is essential.
- The tools used in assessment are less important than effective communication in areas most exposed to vulnerability.
- It would be an added value to integrate climate risk into the tool, and to pool information from modelling to give a picture of how a climate change-affected community will look in the long term.

## The Joint Initiative on Sustainable Humanitarian Assistance Packaging Waste Management



### Speakers

**Samantha Brangeon:** Consultant, Joint Initiative

**Fiona Cook:** Consultant, Joint Initiative.

This session looked at the significant effect that humanitarian action-related packaging waste has on the environment as well as solutions for how to tackle this environmental problem.

The largest portions of the carbon footprint of humanitarian organisations comes from their supply chain than from their staff travel. As it is a humanitarian duty to do no harm, it is essential that actors understand their current role in the global waste crises, and learn how best to mitigate it. Packaging has an essential role, as it protects life-saving products. Therefore the emphasis must not be on simply stripping packaging down, but on fulfilling its role in a more sustainable way. At the same time, we cannot recycle our way out of the plastics problem as currently, only 9% of plastic is currently recycled.

The panellists listed the main areas in which humanitarian organisations are currently improving. Items in support kits for refugees had been individually wrapped in plastic: this has been removed, and in cases where some packaging is needed to provide shock absorption, paper and cardboard have been substituted. For items which absolutely require plastic packaging, alternative plastics, such as bio- and recycled plastic, are being considered. A map of recycling sites and companies is being developed for humanitarian contexts, which would provide information in one central location and encourage the pooling of resources among humanitarian organisations. A donor-mapping is also continuously updated, to track how various donors are taking these environmental considerations on board.

Finally, storage of waste has a significant role to play, as large quantities of pre-sorted goods stored in dry places are more appealing to recycling companies.

Ultimately, the best kind of waste is the waste that is never created. Collective learning is essential in



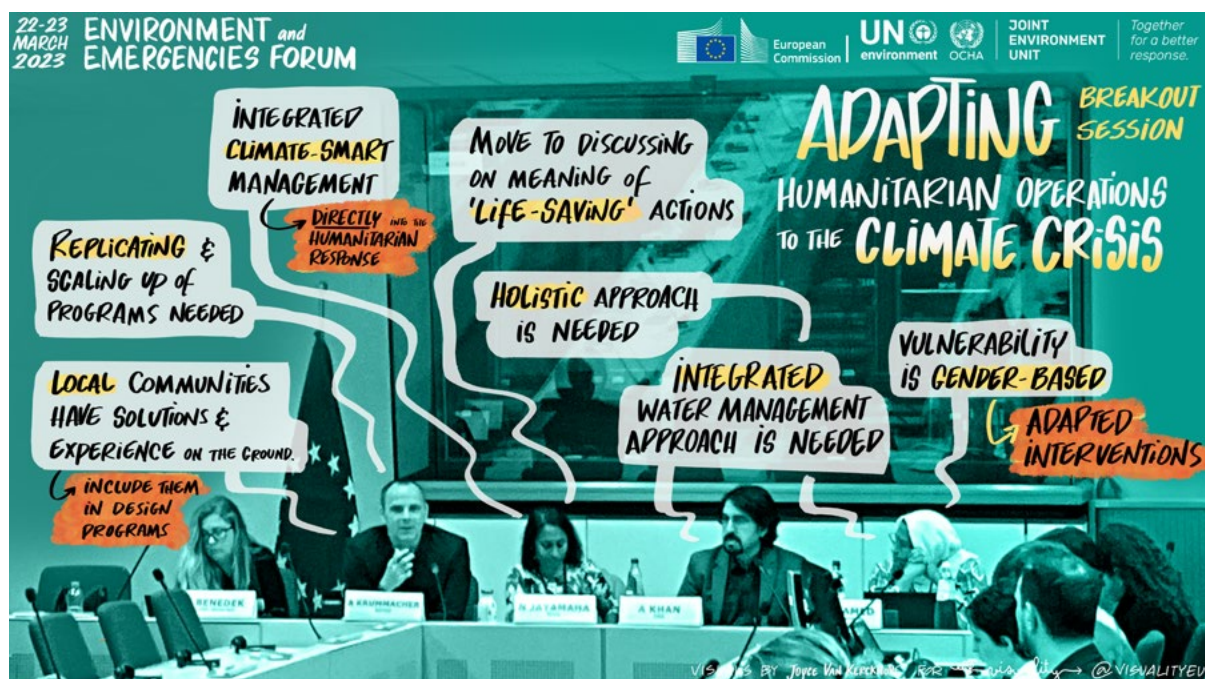
minimising waste, and sectors must map their experience and knowledge to avoid others repeating preventable mistakes. Emphasis must also be placed on changing mindsets – sustainability is not always more expensive, but it requires thought, time, and different methods.

### Key recommendations

- Much waste is preventable, if clear methodology were put in place for refusing unnecessary items once an aid request has been issued.
- Packing goods in a bag instead of a box, as it is a more useful and long-life item.
- Up-to-date quality control of items distributed, so that useless, damaged, or expired items are not handed out.
- Improve warehousing as poor warehousing increases waste, as goods may be damaged and rendered unusable by leaking roofs, etc.
- Emphasise the reuse value of distributed goods (e.g. a washbasin made from tin cans).
- Maximise transport volume to minimise trips.
- Print logos in greyscale, using bio-inks, to reduce emissions and improve biodegradability of packaging.
- Speak directly with the heads of procurement, to allow them to make better informed decisions.
- Work upstream to develop packaging criteria and guidance notes on alternative plastics.



## Adapting humanitarian operations to the climate crisis



### Speakers

**Asia Mohamed:** Lecturer/Researcher, University of Khartoum.

**Azmat Khan:** Chief Executive Officer, Foundation for Rural Development (FRD).

**André Krummacker:** Vice CEO of Programmes, ACTED.

**Nishanie Jayamaha:** Learning and Climate Change Programme Coordinator, International Council of Voluntary Agencies.

**Charlotta Benedek:** Head of the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit

A humanitarian response should not be considered separately from the environment. A move away from traditional humanitarian programming is needed: going beyond immediate life-saving assistance to also ensure a livelihood for future generations. Currently, sectors work in silos. A change of mindset is needed to improve this.

Amid the climate and biodiversity crises, nature-based solutions are increasingly seen as important to reduce the impacts of climate change as well as to protect

ecosystems and biodiversity. Nature-based solutions to conserve, restore, and modify natural and modified ecosystems to increase carbon storage or avoid greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are increasingly regarded as important pathways for climate change mitigation and adaptation, while contributing to our global conservation efforts, overall planetary resilience, and sustainable development goals. Pakistan's FRD's





Livelihood program focuses on conditional cash grants and involves returnee IDPs and indigenous communities.

At the decision-maker level, artificial divide between the humanitarian, development, and climate spheres is entrenched by how some donors structure funding pots. There are issues with getting funding to the grassroots level for local and low-cost interventions. Conditions attached to funding are passed on to intermediaries at the local level.

On the frontlines, it is essential to work with people on the ground. Local communities have experience and often have their own solutions to issues (e.g. locals building check dams in Pakistan to slow waters from flash floods). These solutions are often low-cost and nature-based. The question is how these solutions can be scaled up.



### Key recommendations

- It is vital to work with the local communities that have solutions and experience on the ground.
- Climate-smart management should be directly integrated into the humanitarian response.
- Extend the perspective of traditional humanitarian thinking to make it more long-term. Do not only consider what is life-saving now but also in the future.
- A holistic perspective on climate change, risk and environmental sustainability is needed as part of a multi-risk approach.
- For water interventions, an integrated water management approach is needed, which can be upscaled and empower local communities that rely on scarce water resources.
- Programmes should also be geared to the different vulnerabilities of the people affected. Women, children, the elderly and disabled people are all vulnerable in different ways which can be exacerbated because of the context. Vulnerability is gender-based, therefore adaptation interventions must be gender-based and risk-informed.
- Programmes must be geared to the impacts of climate change (e.g. increased unusual weather patterns, greater frequency of droughts and floods).



## Environment in protracted conflict settings



### Speakers

**Anna Ackermann:** Policy analyst, Green reconstruction of Ukraine, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

**Carl Bruch:** Director of International Programs, Environmental Law Institute.

**Tim Grieve:** Senior Policy Expert, Water, Sanitation, and Public Health.

**Mouna Zein:** Programme Analyst, UNEP.

**Wim Zwijnenburg:** Project Leader Humanitarian Disarmament, PAX.

In the first post-Covid Forum, the compounding of issues was stark: social, climate, and health disasters go hand in hand, and it is no longer the exception but the rule that disasters are multifaceted. Thus, solutions are more complex than ever, and many of the proposed solutions involve better communication and cooperation across organisations, sectors, and governments.

**Carl Bruch** noted that the Forum's sessions had tackled heavy questions: how can we convince already overstretched humanitarian organisations to give their energy to environmental emergencies; how can we bring decision-making away from far-off desks and into the frontlines; and how can we disseminate lessons learned amongst humanitarian actors?

Mr Bruch highlighted the skilled and nuanced ways in which these and similar questions had been dealt with during the Forum.

He emphasised the role that new and emerging digital tools have to play in environmental action. The sharing of these tools and platforms is essential in the spread of information, understanding, and skills amongst humanitarian actors.

Mr Bruch concluded by remarking on the connections and partnerships that had emerged during meetings, and the hope and potential that they suggest for the near future. He stressed the importance of pursuing and strengthening these connections, to build trust and capabilities.

Mouna Zein used Sudan as an illustrative example of the interconnection between climate change and conflict. Climate change has acted as a multiplier of conflict in Sudan, often by limiting resources, as with drought. Ms Zein noted that not only does climate change drive conflict, but conflict may worsen climate change, as natural water sources may be weaponised and laced with poison.

The key learning that she highlighted from the Forum was the need to counter the gap between the humanitarian, environmental, and development sectors. She suggested the best way to handle this



would be by mainstreaming environmental considerations into humanitarian action.

Tim Grieve stressed the looming threat of water security and water-related ecosystem degradation. He estimated that 40% of the global population will be water-stressed by 2040, and pointed out that water is one of the top five risks to social, economic, and political stability.

He underlined the disconnect between humanitarian and development actors in terms of their operations, professional cultures, mandates, and timelines. He noted that there was a need to establish trust and increase levels of coordination, so sectors can move towards information sharing and joint planning.

Mr Grieve ended by emphasising the current effort to break down the structural divisions which take decision-making power away from workers on the frontlines.

Anna Ackermann outlined the difficulties of environmental restoration in Ukraine. There have been very few historical examples of environmentally-friendly post-war reconstruction which experts can look to for guidance.

She stressed that there is as yet no clear line of accountability as to who must pay for the extensive damages Russia has made in Ukraine. There is also currently no prevention mechanism in place against nuclear terrorism, and Ms Ackermann emphasised that this is a real possibility, especially since Russia maintains occupation of a Ukrainian power plant.

Ms Ackermann remarked that despite these issues, Ukraine has a unique opportunity to use the media attention it receives to progress an eco-reconstruction agenda.

She concluded by emphasising the need to begin reconstruction immediately, without waiting for the emergency situation to subside. Large plots of Ukrainian soil, which is some of the most fertile in the world, are contaminated beyond rehabilitation, and so immediate reconstruction is essential if the security and resilience of local communities are to be restored.

Wim Zwijnenburg emphasised how crucial a role environmental issues play in humanitarian action. He cited the 2022 Port of Aden oil spill as a clear example of this, as it was a climate disaster which blocked humanitarian access to Yemen. He stressed that protecting citizens means protecting the environment.

Mr Zwijnenburg noted that areas of protracted conflict often have a lack of access to energy infrastructure. Many people who previously used electricity must resort to diesel for power, thus increasing their impact on the environment. He underlined the importance of pushing advocacy for improved mechanisms in this regard.

Mr Zwijnenburg ended by celebrating the insight created in recent years by the wealth of open-source information that has become available. He remarks that these tools are invaluable in our environmental journey, as they show us not only where to go, but what we can already do.



## Keynote speech



**Major Hamad Khatir**, Director of the International Operations Department, Ministry of Interior, United Arab Emirates.

In his address, Major Hamad Khatir underscored the pressing need for concerted efforts towards mitigating the impact of climate change, which he deemed the defining emergency of our times. He also acknowledged the importance of the Environment and Emergencies Forum which served as an opportunity to discuss global policy, share experiences and knowledge, and foster new partnerships to tackle the nexus of environmental risk, disasters, humanitarian crises, and routine emergencies.

Major Hamad highlighted that the United Arab Emirates, a nation that has ratified the historic Paris Agreement and is committed to advancing global cooperation on environmental causes, is poised to play an active role in addressing the environmental fallout.

Major Khatir also announced the launch of the International Initiative of Law Enforcement for Climate (I2LEC) to coordinate the global law enforcement community's response to the environmental fallout.

In addition, he highlighted the importance of preparedness of first responders and announced the development of a universal training programme on climate change tailored to law enforcement and first responders. The training programme has already commenced development in partnership with the Joint Environment Unit of the United Nations Environment Program and the United Nations





## Closing ceremony



### *Speakers*

**Michael Köhler:** Deputy Director General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, DG ECHO, European Commission, Brussels.

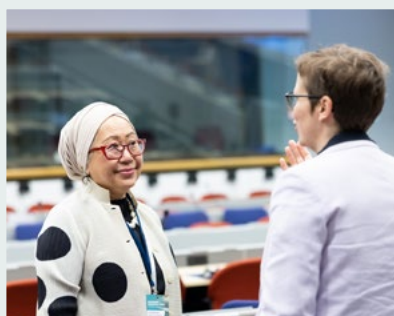
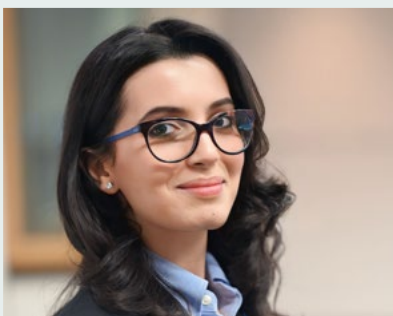
**Cécilia Aipira:** Chief, Disaster and Conflict branch, UNEP.

Michael Köhler celebrated the power of the Forum in furthering alliances, and the ability of contributors to break silos and become fertilisers of ideas.

Cécilia Aipira stated that disaster is an interface between natural hazards and human-environmental interaction. Our role in causing these problems means that we also hold the solutions to them.

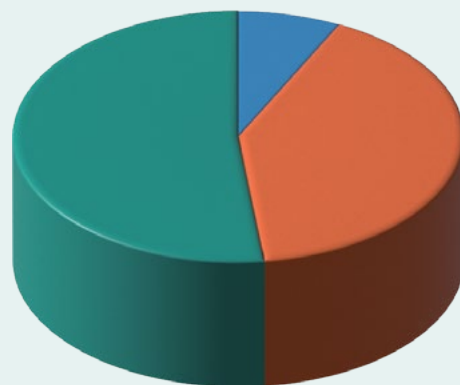


## Faces of the EEF 2023



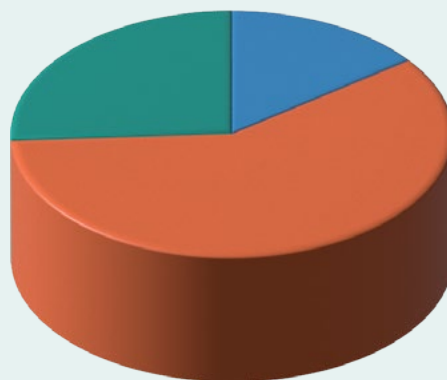
## Participants' feedback

**How useful was this conference for your work?**



Very Satisfied Satisfied Partially Satisfied

**How satisfied were you with the content, discussions and conclusions?**



Very Satisfied Satisfied Partially Satisfied



## **ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCIES FORUM**

<https://www.environmentandemergenciesforum2023.com>

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