European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Humanitarian Action in Urban Crises

Why is this important?

Disasters can have dramatic consequences for cities and urban populations, the effects of which can be seen in the aftermath of the earthquakes (Croatia 2020), hurricanes (ETA/IOTA in Central America/Honduras in 2020) and floods (Bangladesh 2017).

Man-made crises have severely impacted urban environments leading to urgent humanitarian needs. Recent conflicts in the Middle East directly hit urban populations and led to devastation in cities such as Homs, Raqqa and Aleppo.

The majority of today’s refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are seeking refuge in cities or peri-urban areas. By 2050, 70% of the world population will be living in cities. Humanitarian actors need to adapt to this new urban reality: humanitarian action has moved beyond the traditional boundaries of refugee camps and remote rural areas.
How are we helping?

To meet the complexity of needs in urban settings, the European Commission promotes a multi-sectoral and collaborative approach to assessments and programming in urban settings, advocating for greater attention to humanitarian needs in urban environments.

The European Commission published in 2018 a report on Humanitarian Action in Urban Crises, "The Urban Amplifier: Adapting to Urban Specificities." This report collects vast evidence and good practices of EU humanitarian interventions in urban environments, providing practical examples of the challenges faced when engaging in towns and cities. The Commission also puts urban resilience among focus areas in its work on disaster preparedness.

In Central African Republic, multi-sectoral interventions supported by the European Commission focus on durable shelter construction alongside peaceful inter-community co-existence coupled with community mediation and dialogues.

In Haiti, partnerships with the private sector in urban areas included work with local water vendors to ensure delivery of chlorinated water in highly cholera-prone zones, and involvement of private companies in the development of risk-informed ‘business-continuity’ plans in the framework of urban disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions.

The EU plays an active role in the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, a platform set up at the World Humanitarian Summit, which works to address humanitarian and development needs in urban contexts. Through the Enhanced Response Capacity HIP, the Commission also funded:

- the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), to develop ‘Alternatives to Camps: Enhancing Evidence-Based Programming and Targeting in Outside of Camp Contexts’ (including urban areas),
- and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), to design, test and deliver guidance and tools to help humanitarian actors provide rapid and effective support to affected populations in urban crises.

Urban settings are linked to other important initiatives such as:

- the EU Urban Agenda and ongoing work on sustainable development,
- the follow-up to the Communication on Forced Displacement and Development,
- the Resilience and the Grand Bargain agendas,
- and the implementation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.