European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Democratic Republic of Congo

Introduction

Between conflict, poverty, malnutrition and frequent disease outbreaks, humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are among the highest in the world. Such is their scale that the UN’s Humanitarian Response Plan for the DRC is the second largest appeal worldwide. While the DRC is still battling Ebola, the coronavirus pandemic reached the country in March 2020. It threatens an already weak health system that is battling the largest measles outbreak ever recorded, in addition to cholera and malaria.

What are the needs?

For decades, people in the DRC have had to escape violence. Leaving behind their home, vulnerable people are forced to look for safety in overcrowded family homes, makeshift camps, schools or churches, and to restart their lives repeatedly. There are currently around 5 million displaced people within the DRC and more than 910,000 Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries. Given the instability in the region, the DRC itself hosts more than 526,000 refugees mainly from Rwanda, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Burundi.

Ongoing violence and conflict also prevent people from accessing their fields and markets, generating even more poverty. An estimated 15.8 million people face severe food shortages and 4.3 million children under 5 years of age are malnourished, out of whom 1.3 million suffer from severe acute malnutrition, a life-threatening condition.

The DRC currently faces several epidemics. Its weak health system and lack of basic infrastructure and social services, including in the health care sector, are a challenge to any response. The coronavirus pandemic has reached the DRC in March 2020. At the same time, just as the 10th Ebola outbreak was about to be declared over, a few new cases have been reported since 10 April 2020. On 01 June 2020, a new Ebola outbreak was found in the northwestern Équateur Province. Since 2018, the DRC has been grappling with a serious measles outbreak that has so far resulted in more than 360,000 cases and 6,600 deaths – the majority among children.
How are we helping?

EU humanitarian funding in the DRC is helping people affected by violence and displacement, acute malnutrition, and epidemics. The priority is to address the pressing, widespread humanitarian needs; provide protection and life-saving assistance to victims of violence and insecurity; and help curb disease outbreaks.

Most of the humanitarian projects funded by the EU are helping vulnerable people in the east of the country where conflict is still ongoing. The EU works with partner humanitarian organisations to provide food assistance, shelter protection; emergency healthcare, including care for survivors of sexual violence; improve water, sanitation and hygiene conditions; and ensure that children caught in humanitarian crises can go to school. The EU’s support also allows humanitarian organisations with specific expertise in nutrition to work in areas that have alarming malnutrition levels, saving the lives of thousands of children.

In response to the Ebola outbreaks that started in 2018 and to the measles outbreak, the EU mobilised considerable support for humanitarian action on the ground. Since 2018, the EU has provided almost €50 million in humanitarian support to the international Ebola response led by the national authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO). This support is complemented by in-kind assistance, funding for Ebola research and vaccines, and financial support spread over a number of years to strengthen the health sector in the DRC. The EU continues to monitor the situation, given the fresh outbreak, and is in constant contact with WHO and the EU’s health experts on the ground.

In face of the additional challenges brought about the coronavirus pandemic, EU-funded humanitarian projects in the DRC continue to provide live-saving humanitarian assistance for the people in need, while helping beneficiaries and staff stay safe. They are also supporting the coronavirus response in terms of infection prevention and control measures, and access to quality health care, water, sanitation and hygiene. The EU also contributed funding in support the WHO’s actions in the country on early detection and response, and on having adequate expertise on the ground.

In early June 2020, three EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flights are being operated to the DRC. Their purpose is to mitigate the consequences on the international transport of humanitarian staff and material that resulted from the coronavirus restriction measures.

The EU also provides, on a regular basis, logistical support to the humanitarian community in the DRC through its humanitarian air service. These flights are often the only way to reach people in need in remote areas, deliver life-saving supplies and transport aid workers. Every year since 2017, the EU has allocated more than €7 million to the operation of humanitarian air flights in the DRC.