European Commission

The Urban Amplifier

Adapting to Urban Specificities

Report on Humanitarian Action in Urban Crises

Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

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Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)

THE URBAN AMPLIFIER:

ADAPTING TO URBAN SPECIFICITIES

Report on Humanitarian Action in Urban Crises

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1. Executive Summary

Humanitarian crises of natural and man-made origin highlight the relevance of urban settings, at a time when 70% of the world population will live in cities by 2050[1].

Recent earthquakes in Nepal and Ecuador, hurricanes in Haiti and the Philippines, and floods in Bangladesh, the Balkans and West Africa, are examples in which the vulnerabilities of urban settings have been exposed to natural disasters. Urban warfare and violence are significantly on the rise, with over 50 million people affected globally by armed conflict in cities such as Aleppo, Homs, Luhansk, Donetsk, Bangui or Maiduguri[2]. Forced displacement in urban contexts is now the norm: over 60% of refugees and 80% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide have sought refuge in cities[3].

The characteristics of urban settings present a number of challenges impacting the delivery of humanitarian assistance. They are complex, populated and politicised environments, in which local capacities and non-traditional actors contribute to the effectiveness of humanitarian response.

The European Commission's Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) has taken stock of its funded interventions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its humanitarian response in urban environments. Based on an internal survey undertaken in 2017, this report highlights the wealth of experiences and good practices, and provides the basis on which to consolidate a leading role among actors engaged in urban settings.

Urban interventions address the full cycle from disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness to response and recovery; in a range of contexts, including conflict and other situations of violence, displacement, epidemics and natural disasters; and involve a wide range of actors. This report recognises that many humanitarian partners have gained expertise and capacity to operate in urban settings (e.g. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), International Rescue Committee (IRC), World Food Programme (WFP), etc.).

However, there remains a lack of information, evidence and consideration of the specificities of urban contexts in, and their impacts on, humanitarian operational responses and strategies. There is a need for better tracking of actions, use of the full scope of available tools, as well as developing a clear picture of existing resources, partners' institutional urban policies, tools and good practices.

Reinforcing our understanding of urban humanitarian needs, practices and policies will also contribute to the broader European Union (EU) and global policy urban landscapes, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

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[1] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Environmental Outlook to 2050: The Consequences of Inaction, Highlights*, 2012

[2] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Urban services during protracted armed conflict: A call for a better approach to assisting affected people*, 2015, p.5

[3] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Urban Refugees*, http://www.unhcr.org/urban-refugees.html ; see *UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas*, 2009

As an amplifier, urban settings create new challenges for humanitarian actors, test the relevance of existing operational practices and policies, and highlight the need for adapted tools and approaches. Meeting humanitarian needs and realities in urban settings therefore requires:

- A **facilitative, multi-sector approach**, addressing individual and community needs and vulnerabilities, supporting existing interconnected services, infrastructure, markets, livelihoods, governance structures and community support mechanisms. Such an approach requires investing in existing systems in terms of human capacities and infrastructures, and should be aligned with longer-term development efforts.
- **A bottom-up, inclusive approach**, in which all relevant beneficiaries and actors are involved in the intervention cycle, to ensure coherence, complementarity, local acceptance and ownership, and longer-term exit strategies. It requires a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism which capitalises on available capacity, including non-traditional humanitarian actors (e.g. local and national authorities, community-based organisations, development actors, private sector).
- **A set of appropriate tools and modalities meeting the needs and addressing the complexities of urban environments**: Cash-based assistance in urban settings helps meet the basic needs of individuals in complex, densely populated and economic active urban environments; Good contextualisation is necessary, notably through a detailed analysis and deep understanding of the context covered, including stakeholders, capacities and risks; Risk and vulnerability assessments adapted to the complexity of urban areas will inform the programming of interventions; Area-Based-Approaches may help better adapt response plans to the characteristics of urban settings.

The report proposes three avenues of action, on which to position the European Commission as a key actor on urban crises:

1) Contextualising an urban approach: A comprehensive and evidence-based approach to humanitarian actions is required to meet the complex characteristics of urban crises, through strengthening the knowledge base, addressing operational and policy gaps, and advocating the importance of addressing the urban dimensions of humanitarian crises.

2) Amplifying impacts: Urban settings provide testing environments for the effectiveness of strategies – on forced displacement, disaster preparedness, engagement with the private sector and development actors, protection, social protection, education and gender, to name a few – and the need for adapted tools and modalities (e.g. urban-specific needs assessments).

3) Urban as a proxy for integrated policy making and collaborative response: As a leading humanitarian donor and through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), the European Commission's Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations should engage further with civil protection communities in response to urban crises. Cities in crisis are environments in which humanitarian needs meet long term recovery and development needs, requiring appropriate engagement with development actors on the ground. Crises in urban settings also open the door for strengthened engagement with other non-traditional actors such as local authorities and the private sector.

2. Methodology

An internal survey was carried out to gather evidence and gain a better understanding of engagement by the European Commission's Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations in urban settings, as well as of the priorities, challenges, and best practices linked to its work in urban contexts.

The approach taken considers a broad definition of urban settings, which does not restrict and differentiate urban areas by size (e.g. megacities, secondary cities). The relevance of urban characteristics to humanitarian needs and interventions is cross-cutting to various forms of urban settings. Understanding urban settings should therefore take the following criteria into consideration[4]:

- High population density;
- Concentration of administrative structures, i.e. government, hospitals, schools;
- Presence of essential services and infrastructure;
- Cash-based economy;
- Higher proportion of built-up area;
- Diverse livelihoods and income opportunities (not only/mostly agriculture);
- Complex, interdependent social pressures;
- Defined municipal/administrative boundaries.

The report builds on evidence collected from funded actions and experiences of the European Commission's Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. Its scope is limited to humanitarian aid in third countries – it excludes civil protection operations, both internal and in third countries, as well as aid delivery within the EU through the Emergency Support Instrument. A recommendation of this report is to expand the scope incrementally in working towards a comprehensive and global picture of urban crises.

Respondents to the survey were given a four week window to react. Replies received reflected the comprehensive geographical coverage, the diversity and complexity of humanitarian crises worldwide; input was complemented by case-by-case input retrieved through direct consultation of relevant colleagues.

Preparation of this report highlighted varying interpretations of urban settings, as well as challenges in differentiating between 'urban areas' and what is commonly known as 'cities'. It also demonstrated a lack of clarity over the urban specificities of interventions, including in the priorities, challenges and best practices: a recurrent remark pointed to the difficulty of distinguishing non-context dependent interventions occurring in cities, from context-specific urban crises requiring appropriate urban expertise and action.

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[4] ALNAP, Responding to crises in complex, interconnected urban contexts, Urban Research Initiative, 2017, p.3

3. Urban Crises and the Humanitarian Mandate

Humanitarian interventions in urban settings address the full disaster cycle from disaster risk reduction/preparedness to response and recovery, and in a range of contexts, including conflict and other situations of violence, displacement, epidemics and natural disasters.

Interventions in urban settings include both sectorial and multi-sectorial programming; they cover the full breath of sectors defining humanitarian interventions, including: health; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); shelter and settlements; protection; and others. Protection is a particularly relevant sector in urban interventions, notably the legal aspects of protection, such as documentation, Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights, closely associated to shelter, and legal assistance, including support for the recuperation of identification documents and mitigation of forced evictions.

Evidence gathered of funded interventions show that assistance targets urban areas of a full range of sizes and of differing levels of complexities and capacities: interventions were funded in smaller cities such as Burao (Somalia), as well as megacities such as Manila (Philippines) or Lima-Callao (Peru). Assistance has also been provided in urban informal settlements, notably in Metro Manila, Buenos Aires, Bangladesh, Asunción or Caracas.

*In Afghanistan, DG ECHO partners have provided emergency WASH and waste management in Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS), providing basic WASH facilities to people living in make-shift dwellings after leaving urban areas in conflict, and organising waste collection and implementation of water drainage systems to avoid flooding. (photo ECHO/Pierre Prakash)(**Good Practice #1**)*

However, extracting evidence of urban interventions requires in many cases distilling urban specificities of sectorial interventions. Challenges in pinpointing the full scale of interventions bearing urban characteristics highlighted the limitations in the current evidence base needed to inform operational and political actions.

Summary: Tracking of funding for actions implemented in urban settings was limited, notably for single actions implemented in more than one context (e.g. in both rural and urban settings). This was particularly the case for East and West Africa, where urban/rural boundaries are not easily distinguishable.

Tracking of humanitarian aid funding for actions in urban settings could be facilitated by improving the use of existing project repository tools (i.e. urban key words in relevant search engines), analysis frameworks and Single Forms.

Partners with an urban touch

A number of the European Commission's Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations humanitarian partners[5] have the expertise and capacity to operate in urban settings, owing to: mandate (e.g. United Nations Human Settlements Programme HABITAT); past experience operating in urban contexts; country-specific urban expertise (e.g. ActionAid in Myanmar) relevant sectorial expertise (e.g. the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) through its Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme); strong development approach focussed on supporting existing capacities, or; outreach capacity, ability to build relationships of trust with communities (e.g. Caritas-FR in Venezuela) and to engage with local authorities (e.g. UNHCR in Yemen).

The ability of partners to engage with local partners is in fact a strong criterion for project selection, recognising the importance of local partners in enhancing the quality of an intervention, owing to their strong local knowledge, and their acceptance by local communities.

Interventions led by United Nations (UN) partners, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) consortium and/or through UN-INGO concerted actions are particularly effective in addressing the often (greater) complexity and scale of operations in urban settings, as well as presenting opportunities for more comprehensive and multi-sectorial programming.

However, the political engagement and technical expertise of humanitarian actors need to be strengthened to guide the design and implementation of appropriate and coherent interventions in urban settings. Such observations were reflected in recent evaluations of EU humanitarian interventions in Pakistan (2010-2014)[6] and of its response to the Syrian Crisis (2012-2014): the Syria evaluation report notes that *"DG ECHO staff interviewed by the evaluation team argued that there is a clear need for an urban policy within DG ECHO. (…) The absence of a visible urban strategy looks to have hampered efforts to ensure common standards are met across the portfolio or to capitalise on lessons learned from previous programmes"[7].*

Summary: A number of partners were identified as having expertise and capacity to operate in urban settings. Certain partners have developed guidance and policy initiatives to contribute to a better understanding of urban crises and support operational interventions in urban contexts.

A clear mapping, pooling and analysis of existing resources, partners' institutional urban policies, guidance tools and good practices[8] could help support the work of humanitarian actors in urban settings.

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[5] Examples of partners operating in urban contexts include: UNHCR, Oxfam, NRC, UN HABITAT, World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF, ICRC, Plan International, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), CARE, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

[6] *Evaluation of DG ECHO's interventions in Pakistan 2010-2014, Final Report*, June 2016, p.7

[7] *Evaluation of DG ECHO response to the Syria crisis 2012-2014, Final Report*, June 2016, p.95

[8] Building on existing initiatives, such as the ALNAP/UN Habitat Urban Humanitarian Response Portal, http://www.urban-response.org/

4. Understanding the Challenges of Urban Crises

The characteristics of urban settings present a number of challenges impacting the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Urban settings are complex, populated and politicised environments, in which local capacities contribute to the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Engagement with all relevant actors is needed, including local authorities, development actors and the private sector.

4.1.   Urban Vulnerabilities: an all-hazards reality

As the impacts of natural and man-made disasters around the world have shown – from cyclones in the Caribbean (e.g. Irma), earthquakes in Nepal and Ecuador, cholera epidemics in Haiti to the Bhopal incident in India – the vulnerability of urban environments and its populations, in cases already vulnerable, can be particularly acute. When disasters hit densely populated urban areas, impacts on human life, the environment, socio-economic systems and built infrastructure can be dramatic. Main risk drivers include rapid and unplanned urbanisation, land degradation, inequality and socio-economic poverty, and climate-induced disasters.

Conflicts and violence can also have major impacts on urban communities and their urban environments: fighting and insecurity are located at the heart of densely populated urban areas. When armed clashes take place in cities, people's daily lives are directly affected, either as targets of violence or collaterally. Volatility caused by conflict in cities often leads to large fluctuation of population typology and challenges to effective targeting, with any urban intervention possibly becoming irrelevant or ill programmed in a very short period of time, thereby missing the initially targeted population (e.g. Yemen). Moreover, asymmetric urban warfare raises greater concerns for the protection of civilians in active conflict, with more challenging trauma management (evacuation, stabilisation and referrals) (e.g. Iraq).

Humanitarian response needs in urban settings can therefore be particularly acute and require rapid and efficient delivery, robust assessments and strong cooperation with traditional as well non-traditional (local authorities, private sector, development) actors. Moreover, the pertinence of disaster preparedness measures at community and city levels is vital in raising awareness and building capacities, including through trainings, support to the development of contingency plans for emergencies, long-term disaster risk reduction plans, and prevention and mitigation plans (e.g. Earthquake preparedness actions in Metro Manilla, Philippines). Finally, the notion of building-back-better is, in urban settings, a vital component of any recovery and reconstruction process to ensure the resilience of people, services and infrastructures.

4.2.   Urban Settings: Complex Environments

Urban settings are characterised by their greater complexity, both logistically and politically. Operationally, such contexts require humanitarian actors to increase their capacity to adapt.

4.2.1. Multiplicity of risks and challenges

Multiplicity of risks and challenges in densely populated environments (e.g. combination of conflict/urban violence, natural disasters, displacement, epidemics), with often high levels of vulnerability and complex infrastructure, require a comprehensive approach to humanitarian response (e.g. Niger, Chad, Nepal, South America, the Caribbean), and robust needs and risk assessments. This is often further compounded by rural-to-urban migration and lack of proper disaster risk management.

Humanitarian response to the Haitian 2010 earthquake and its aftermath exposed the sector's limited capacity and ability to respond to disasters in large, urban population settings[9]. The major challenges and factors identified to be at the origin of population vulnerability include: lack of urban planning, major spread of informal settlements and slums, lack of access to basic services, structural urban poverty, combined with high levels of exposure to all typology of threats, very few capacities to cope. (photo UNDP). ***(Example 1)***

In the case of "megacities" and informal urban settlements in areas exposed to hazards, the risk of disasters or conflicts may result in massive humanitarian needs, as these urban areas continue growing in numbers and size in the coming decades.

4.2.2. Socio-economic, cultural and religious diversity

In the case of the Central African Republic, the dimension of religious diversity in the capital city Bangui exposes vulnerable groups to religious and cultural exploitation. In turn, the ghettoization of communities is a particular acute risk in urban areas. (Photo UNDP) ***(Example 2)***

Diversity of socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds located in close proximity to each other in densely populated urbanised areas reinforce the complexities of intervening in humanitarian settings. In particular, communitarian and/or religious based tensions and violence in densely populated areas may exacerbate instability and the 'ghettoization' of vulnerable communities.

Moreover, exposure to risks is also usually higher for poorer groups, especially in urban areas and access to basic services limited/ or inexistent – often due to informal nature of settlements. It is worth noting that displaced groups often make up the most socio-economically vulnerable groups, and therefore tend to settle in less affluent neighbourhoods where cost of living is lower.

4.2.3. Engagement with urban communities and local authorities

Difficulty to define, identify, and engage with urban communities, may be due to demographic diversity and lack of cohesion, to complex strata of socio-economic vulnerabilities (e.g. Niger), to mobility and more complex structures of community organizations (e.g. Pakistan, Bangladesh), and to more limited communication with

In Niger, acute malnutrition facilities integrated in hospital wards in urban areas witnessed a surge of local vulnerable individuals, alongside the initially targeted groups of vulnerable displaced groups. (photo EU/ECHO). ***(Example 3)***

people in cities (e.g. Nepal). These circumstances make their mobilisation and commitment, as well community work more difficult, and lead to a greater lack of

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[9] Humanitarian Response Index 2011, *Focus on Haiti: Building Back Better?*, 2011, p.4

ownership from communities, key for successful and sustainable programming. In densely populated areas, there is a greater risk of isolation and increased protection risks for vulnerable individuals and communities. Demographic density and diversity also translate into a broader – possibly hidden – range of needs, capacities and vulnerabilities, making targeting more difficult.

Engagement with local authorities may prove more challenging. Urban local governments tend to be under greater pressure with multiple priorities (e.g. the Caribbean). Legal and administrative environments with unclear roles and responsibilities of authorities (e.g. municipalities not assuming responsibilities for the development of peri-urban areas); and a lack, or overlap, of administrative and legal boundaries, make it difficult to identify key interlocutors to engage with for programming and exit strategies, as well as requiring multi-layered engagement with local authorities. Moreover, compared to rural areas, local urban environments may be more prone to politicisation (e.g. Syria; Iraq).

4.2.4. Greater diversity of stakeholders and interests groups

Greater diversity of stakeholders and multi-interests groups, such as diversified private sectors and informal economy (e.g. Myanmar, Bangladesh), with a lack of practical guidance on how best to support local urban actors (public/private), and on how to engage with the private sector and civil society.

4.2.5. Integrated and interdependent systems and services

In densely populated urban areas, the preservation of basic services is particularly essential. The concentration of resources and services available in urban settings is generally high. As witnessed in the Middle East, the complexity of working in middle income countries with relatively well developed infrastructure does indeed create a particular challenge for humanitarian programming.

The interdependence of services in urban settings makes their implementation and recovery post-crisis more complex (electricity, water, waste management, etc.). Their concentration in urban settings may also prove a positive contribution to interventions (e.g. proximity to health and transport infrastructures, local service providers, etc.). Addressing the full scale of urban services and systems challenges traditional humanitarian programming, such as in assessing and monitoring the quality of services for end-users particularly in the case of city-wide infrastructures.

4.3.   Urban displacement now the norm

Over 60% of the world's refugees currently live in urban areas, while 80% of IDPs live in cities. Today, over 50 million people are affected by armed conflict in urban areas. Over 70% of EU humanitarian aid goes to help forcibly displaced persons.

Cities are at the centre of displacements, either as safe havens (e.g. Amman, Jordan) or as areas of departure due to insecurity (e.g. Homs) or following natural disasters (e.g. Port-au-Prince, Haiti).

Building on the realities of displacements worldwide, it is central for humanitarian interventions responding to protracted displacement in urban areas to be appropriate, hence tailored and context specific.

Displacement in urban areas is also and foremost a development concern, where the needs of refugees and IDPs should be balanced with the needs of host communities. Contexts where the host communities may be more vulnerable than

the displaced themselves raise challenges to status-based approaches in favour of a needs-based approach, with targeting as a key assessment tool[10].

4.4. Lack of Integrated Humanitarian-Development Approaches

Programming of humanitarian interventions requires collaborative engagement of multiple sectors, institutions, partners, and funding instruments, notably development aid. These need to be strategically aligned, as the complexity and magnitude of urban challenges cannot be addressed solely in the frame of humanitarian interventions characterised by short-term, 'silo' programming.

There remains a lack of integrated humanitarian-development response crucial for humanitarian exit strategies. Strategic approaches to urban interventions by humanitarian and development actors remain largely disconnected. An integrated approach would require greater leveraging of long-term development partners. Resilience bridges these disparities, and provides a common space for work, as do 'crisis modifiers' embedded in multi-year programming.

Moreover, a lack of, or inadequate, development cooperation investments in urban planning, in the case of fragile countries particularly (e.g. Afghanistan), may lead to poor management of urbanisation, as well as the limited involvement/commitment of development actors with urban expertise in the early phase of an emergency.

4.5. Limited Local Capacities

Local actors, both local authorities and local NGOs, are at the frontlines of most humanitarian crises. They are often the closest to the concerned individuals, and formidable sources for needs analysis and to adapt the humanitarian response to the local specificities needs and ways. Often, they also lack the structure, the resources and sometime absorption capacity to fully fulfil their role.

Despite the existence of resourced preparedness strategies and frameworks, a lack of institutional capacity, combined with complex environments, may hamper their implementation and use (e.g. Pakistan, Philippines). The potentially limited capacity of municipalities to understand and implement projects should be taken into consideration.

Moreover, urban settings in fragile contexts are often characterised by poor infrastructure and limited, overstretched service provision owing to limited government investments, and leading to a relative inability to cope with stresses and shocks (e.g. Palestine, Syria, Pakistan) such as a large influx of displaced people. There can be greater dependency on private services (e.g. private clinic, schools). Lack of appropriate and sufficient shelter for urban poor, including displaced communities, may lead to informal settlement in high risk areas with limited government support (e.g. Philippines). There can also be limitations in the implementation of building codes in place by the urban population, therefore reinforcing their vulnerability (e.g. vulnerability to earthquakes in Nepal).

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[10] Through its Enhanced Response Capacity instrument (ERC), DG ECHO is supporting work by UNHCR on the development of targeting guidance to strengthen data access and evidence base to inform programming and support the delivery of cash-based assistance and livelihood-support interventions. DG ECHO is also funding work by the Joint IDP Profiling Service, through Danish Refugee Council, to develop capacities on urban profiling.

5. Adapting Practices to Meet Urban Needs

What are appropriate approaches to crises in urban contexts? Are traditional humanitarian practices, embodied by the sector-based cluster system developed based on rural and camp-based context, adapted to the complexities of urban environments?

Tools, approaches, models, skills sets and expertise needed to ensure effective aid delivery in urban environments should be better identified and integrated in operational and policy actions. A number of urban considerations should be reflected in adapting humanitarian approaches to improve effectiveness and amplify their impacts.

5.1. A Facilitative, Multi-Sector Approach

Supporting existing services, infrastructure and systems through an integrated, multi-sectorial approach, rather than seeking to replicate them with parallel systems of service-delivery is particularly relevant in urban settings, which tend to have advanced capacities and systems of governance.

Facilitative approaches are vital to support the preparedness, strengthened capacity and self-recovery of authorities and communities at a local level, requiring adapted ways of carrying monitoring and evaluations.

A number of sectors are looked at in detail below to illustrate the relevance of multi-sector approaches, not excluding the broader and more complex sectorial architecture of humanitarian response.

5.1.1. Shelter

Shelter and settlements assistance is critical in many urban crises. The density of urban populations and limited safe land for building housing and shelter can reduce the number of available solutions. Urban density also means a crisis can damage large numbers of buildings; and displacement towards urban areas can overwhelm the stock of available housing (in most intervention settings, there are no well-developed housing policies, making it difficult to work at a more strategic level when it comes to increasing safe and adequate housing). Securing adequate and sustainable accommodation should be considered equally important as ensuring access to health systems, education systems.

*In Lebanon, over 80% of Syrian refugees have settled in urban and peri-urban areas. A big challenge faced is securing adequate accommodation for families. In 2013, NRC supported property owners to bring unfinished houses and apartments to a basic habitable condition in exchange for hosting Syrian families rent-free for 12 months. This in turn helped stimulate local economic activity and increased the value of property assets – a win-win approach.(photo EU/ECHO) (**Good Practice #2**)*

Innovative solutions are required to facilitate access to the existing housing market through, for example, incentives to the host community, the provision of legal aid and translation of rental contracts. Promoting market systems analysis will be relevant in this regard[11].

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[11] See for more information the IRC/Oxfam co-facilitated 'Markets in Crisis' community of practice, https://dgroups.org/dfid/mic

5.1.2. Protection

Urban residents are generally at greater risks of exploitation and abuse, with more "opportunities" for surviving on dangerous coping mechanisms. The density and complexity of urban settings often make the identification of those in need of protection more challenging, requiring greater outreach. Capacity to address urban protection challenges, as well as the need for clear referral mechanisms and proper case management should be strengthened (e.g. Haiti, Turkey).

Legal aspects of protection, such as legality of stay and personal documentation have greater importance where social ties are looser, creating greater risks of harassment, extortion and arbitrary arrest and detention if one cannot document who they are. These concerns are particularly exacerbated in urban displacement contexts. Humanitarian actors should envisage reinforcing capacities in legal aspects of protection.

Due the limited efficiency of traditional community-based protection projects (based around community protection committees), DG ECHO has been supporting community centres that function as 'one-stop-shops' for legal aid, psycho-social support, recreational activities, informal education, and linking those affected by the crisis with formal authorities. It is being implemented widely in the context of the Syrian crisis, and in Ukraine.

(Photo EU/ECHO) **(Good Practice #3)**

Legality of stay and legal protection frameworks are particular concerns in the contexts of urban displacement, where refugees may be more exposed to security controls, resulting in detention/abuses in case of irregular residency documentation. Legal protection may be inexistent (e.g. Thailand) or legal status/registration may be a pre-condition for access to services (e.g. Turkey, Jordan). Furthermore, policies of forced encampment (e.g. Jordan), such as cases were refugees are physically relocated from cities to refugee camps (e.g. Kenya), present additional protection risks.

Closely linked to shelter needs, Housing, Land and Property (HLP) may be exacerbated in urban contexts due to: risks of frequent and larger scale forced evictions; the complexity of security of tenure, and; the fact that those hardest hit by a natural disaster in a city will often be the most vulnerable communities with the weakest levels of security of tenure.

Key to the protection debate, including in contexts of complex and populated urban settings, the gender dimension of humanitarian aid is a central component of a needs-based approach to humanitarian aid[12]. Different gender groups face differentiated needs and risks (e.g. in the case of Turkey, refugees move to urban centres where informal work is available and, due to lack of income, usually boys (sometimes girls) find work in often irregular and exploitative conditions). They also suffer from different vulnerabilities, service access; and may cope with shocks in different ways. More attention is required to better understand and target potential needs related to gender in urban settings.

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[12] European Commission, *Gender: Different Needs, Adapted Assistance*, DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document N°6, 2013

5.1.3. Education in Urban Emergencies

Whether in the contexts of emergencies affecting densely populated areas or facing the integration of displaced communities in urban settings, ensuring access to education to affected children is paramount and highly pertinent.

A number of humanitarian interventions around education in emergencies take into consideration the situations of displaced children located in urban settings (e.g. the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme in Turkey, which aims to support the integration of refugee children into the existing national education programme). While the Education in Emergencies approach does not specifically target urban environments, funded interventions point to the pertinence of such settings and may call for further work in this regard.

Education for out-of-camp IDPs and refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has not been a focus in funding strategies so far despite many IDPs and refugee children living in urban settings out of school.
The project run by Triangle aims to provide conflict-affected children living in urban settings of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with an access to education, psychosocial services and recreational activities. (Photo EU/ECHO) **(Good Practice #4)**

5.1.4. Social Protection

At a time when a majority of forcibly displaced persons are located in urban areas, the provision of social protection may overburden existing systems and call for adequate social safety nets to meet the basic social needs of displaced communities. The needs and challenges generated by forced displacement pre-suppose the development of social protection systems suited to the demographic and socio-economic pressures in receiving countries.

Beyond the immediate needs, addressing social protection needs in situations of displacement and fragility offers a pertinent bridge to reinforced engagement with development actors to address medium to longer term social protection.

> **Summary:** A **facilitative, multi-sector** approach is required, supporting/strengthening existing, interconnected services, infrastructure, markets, livelihoods, governance structures and community support mechanisms. Such an approach is particularly efficient where well established governments exist, and requires investing in existing systems in terms of human capacities and infrastructures, with efficient referral mechanisms and social safety nets in place.

5.2. An inclusive, bottom-up approach

The number and diversity of stakeholders active in urban settings require, more than in any other setting, multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms and partnerships between humanitarian actors and non-traditional stakeholders – i.e. local actors, the private sector, development actors and urban planners, amongst others. An integrated approach with development actors is particularly important in ensuring complementarity of medium term needs, such as rehabilitation and economic integration (e.g. Niger, Sudan).

The need for coordination and engagement with non-traditional humanitarian stakeholders in urban settings is relevant to meet:

- high levels of instability affecting local infrastructure (e.g. Syria);
- administrative and/or legal impediments preventing co-ordination with local authorities (e.g. Gaza, with the no-contact policy) or preventing partners from co-ordinating enough with urban structures, programmes and initiatives (e.g. Turkey);
- limited local capacity, either due to a limited understanding from local actors (i.e. private sector, authorities, civil society) of what urban needs/response entails (e.g. Ukraine), and/or a lack of local coordination structures with capacity for short term engagement, transition and exit strategy (e.g. Iraq).
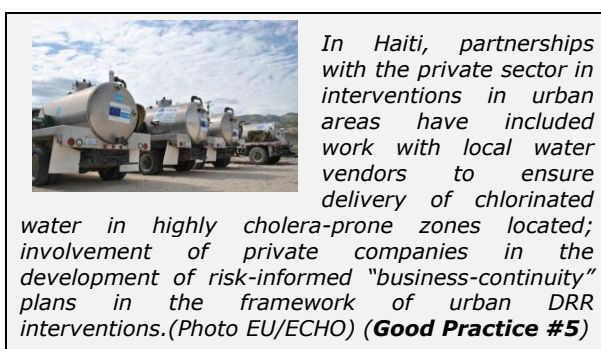
5.2.1. Inclusive: multi-stakeholder engagement

A number of good humanitarian intervention examples exist relating to multi-stakeholder coordination, with partners establishing coordination mechanisms or reinforcing existing ones (e.g. Gaza, the Caribbean).

Engagement with the private sector can prove very relevant in urban settings, where the diversity of local private sector actors, both formal and informal, and the level of economic activity are particularly high. The role of private sector actors in relief operations, through procurement-based assistance support of goods and services for example, is particularly vital in contexts of densely-populated urban settings.

Working with the private sector

People in situations of crisis will be dependent on access to available services, as well as businesses and markets to purchase food and rebuild their livelihoods. Local private sector actors may contribute local expertise and an established local network of provision and distribution. Some examples include: the work undertaken under the WHO Consortia with private hospitals in Nepal; engagement with business forums and factory owners in Bangladesh; and agreements established by humanitarian partners with local businesses to recruit IDPs in Colombia following the provision of training for jobs required in the local urban economy.

*In Haiti, partnerships with the private sector in interventions in urban areas have included work with local water vendors to ensure delivery of chlorinated water in highly cholera-prone zones located; involvement of private companies in the development of risk-informed "business-continuity" plans in the framework of urban DRR interventions.(Photo EU/ECHO) (**Good Practice #5**)*

Effective cooperation with urban utilities services, in many cases involving private entities, is critical to ensure the provision of basic services – i.e. the cascading effects of damage to one part of the system disrupting other service systems (e.g. disruption of power supply may lead to disruptions to all services and infrastructures dependent of the power supply, potentially affecting many key services such as hospitals, water supply, waste collection and treatment, transport, schools and communication channels)[13]. In some contexts, efforts to facilitate capacity-recovery may need to take place alongside service-delivery approaches (e.g. emergency healthcare) in order to address the most urgent, life-saving needs.

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[13] ICRC, *When War Moves to Cities: Protection of Civilians in Urban Areas*, Outcome Report, May 2017

Moreover, private sector actors may play a central role through philanthropic contributions of specialised businesses to the preparedness and response processes. Through cooperate social responsibilities, established private organisations may choose to contribute to the relief process.

Expertise of private sector actors may also provide channels through which innovative tools and approaches may be applied to operational contexts, thus potentially strengthening the efficiency of humanitarian interventions.

> *In the Philippines, the 'Move Up' consortium approached private factory owners for large spaces to be used as alternative transitional sites in the aftermath of an emergency; and liaised with insurance companies to explore the feasibility of cities securing micro-insurance schemes for the urban poor, using some of their unused DRR funds. (**Good Practices #6**)*
>
> *In Honduras and Guatemala, humanitarian partners engage with the private sector to raise awareness on urban risks to integrate DRR in company practices and policies, and to link the private sector with the National systems and civil society. (**Good Practices #7**)*
>
> *In Yemen, ICRC has been supporting water authorities with the provision of generators, spare parts, fuel and financial support for running costs to provide water to urban populations in Sanaa, Aden and Taiz. (Photo EU/ECHO) (**Good Practice #8**)*

Market System Analysis as a needs assessment tool may prove particularly relevant to identify critical actors and allow interventions to intervene both in the supply and demand. A market system approach can also support the identification and framing of different private sector typology in a given context.

Overall, however, a gap remains in making full use of the potential of partnerships with relevant private sector actors, who can contribute expertise and capacities in a win-win approach for both the private institution and the humanitarian actor.

Engaging with development actors

While there is significant scope for improvement, working more closely with development actors appears to be crucial in urban settings where longer-term solutions for many urban-specific challenges often long term measures and considerations (e.g. Niger, Sudan).

In some urban responses, partners were selected for their development approach (e.g. UNICEF in Yemen)

> *In Thailand, urban asylum seekers and refugees lack legal protection and status, subjecting them to detention under national law. As a result of humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy efforts towards national authorities, the government is expected to issue a new decree aimed to screen asylum seekers (or persons in need of international protection). (Photo EU/COERR) (**Good Practice #9**)*

focused on support to national and local authorities and institution-building; with many interventions designed and implemented in line with longer-term urban development goals (e.g. Action Contre la Faim (ACF) Consortium 'Move Up' in the Philippines).

However, implementing response in urban contexts requires structural adjustments that go beyond the mandates of humanitarian actors, but are not as yet prioritised by development actors: joint programming from the onset of the response action could be further considered. In fact, urban crises could figure more prominently in humanitarian-development nexus initiatives, and be further pushed in the context

of nexus pilot countries. Urban crises should also be given greater consideration in the overall context of EU development cooperation with cities and local authorities.

A role for national authorities

In Yemen, UNHCR established a network of local authorities, such as the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, as well as INGOs and NGOs to provide services to urban refugees. This network allows for coordination between various stakeholders and service providers, as well as referral between services. (Photo ECHO/Bertouille) (**Good Practice #10**)

Government ministries are often actively involved in urban interventions, not only in the design, delivery and coordination, but also in receiving direct support (e.g. Yemen). Relevant ministries may include, but not restricted to: Social Affairs, Labour, Health, Housing, Public Works, Infrastructure, Education, Energy, Water and Sanitation.

In particular, the role of civil protection/civil defence actors in preparedness, prevention and response in urban areas is central, and should be reflected in the implementation of humanitarian interventions. Engagement with the national civil protection system (e.g. Bangladesh, Haiti) or the need to strengthen the role of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism for urban-specific risk assessments should be further explored in this regard.

5.2.2. Bottom-up: Working with local levels

EU humanitarian responses aim to complement and strengthen local resources and capacities to optimise effectiveness of response and to do no harm in all types of intervention contexts. Interventions by humanitarian partners regularly seek the engagement and expertise of local stakeholders where needed, in line with the EU's humanitarian principles.

Local authorities on the frontline of crises

Strengthening local capacities at all stages of the crisis management cycle is crucial for a successful bottom-up, facilitative approach and the design of appropriate exit strategies, with a number of relevant examples across humanitarian interventions. Outside situations of conflict, in which local authorities may be party, coordination and engagement with the local level (both legally recognised and de facto) can prove strategic partners in the response, to natural disasters or protracted displacement settings for example.

Numerous examples of successful engagement with local authorities exist, such as in Port au Prince (Haiti), Quito (Ecuador), Buenos Aires (Argentina); as well as with the Municipalities of La Paz (Bolivia); of San Martin/Buenos Aires (Argentina), and of Teresopolis (Brazil), to name a few. Partnerships also exist with local universities (e.g. Bangladesh, San Martin University (Argentina)), as well as community-based organisations (e.g. Jordan; community civil defence groups in Brazil; workers associations in Bangladesh). Engagement may cover different aspects of disaster management, including: capacity building for disaster preparedness and DRR (e.g. Philippines, Bangladesh); as well as integral actors in the intervention process, including as implementing partners and longer-term solutions (e.g. ensuring the transformation of refugee camps).

Engagement with local authorities from the start may in fact allow for greater acceptance, ownership, and sustainability of response interventions. Municipalities may in certain cases take over the management of projects and related expenses, or ensured the durable maintenance of outputs such as contingency plans, contributing to exit strategies (e.g. Colombia, Peru). Successful actions may also be subsequently replicated by the municipality concerned, either to other areas of a city or to other cities, as experienced in Brazil, La Paz (Bolivia), Quito (Ecuador), or Lima-Callao (Peru).

In Quito, Ecuador, the methodologies elaborated as part of a project implemented by Plan to prepare 6 schools to landslides and earthquakes, were adopted by the Municipality. The success of the project led the number of benefitting schools to increase from 6 to 1200 with funds from the Municipality. (photo EU/ECHO/J. Lance) (**Good Practice #11**)

The Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, has benefited since 2011 from a number of initiatives to strengthen the health sector crisis preparedness in the event of mass casualty incidents, more prevalent in high-density urban areas that also tend to have more developed health services. The project was implemented by a consortium between WHO, Handicap International and Save the Children, and worked closely with government authorities, and public and private hospitals from the initial stage of the projects. Good practices resulting from the project enabled the health authorities and hospitals to respond effectively to the mass casualties during the 2015 earthquake. (photo EU/ECHO) (**Good Practice #12**)

Several channels exist to further strengthen local and national capacities from a humanitarian dimension: Grand Bargain Localisation Agenda and Enhanced Response Capacity funding; humanitarian aid funding, including disaster preparedness; advisory missions from the UCPM; the EU Aid Volunteers programme; and linking better with the European Commission's *'2014-2020 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs)' Thematic Programme.* This Thematic Programme, with a budget of over EUR 1.907 billion and allocations increasingly in fragile countries, focuses on strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations and local authorities for improved local governance, the promotion of inclusive and sustainable growth, and the provision of welfare and public basic services[14].

In Metro Manila, Philippines, over 4 million individuals (37% of population) live in urban slums, with high exposure to multiple risks. Local governments (LGUs) rarely invest in coping strategies/risk transfer mechanisms for the urban poor, despite the existence of dedicated DRR and Management legislation.

The MOVE UP project[15] is critical to leverage local governments' resources to build the resilience of the urban poor in targeted cities of Metro Manila. It aims to fill-in the DRR gaps in urban poor areas through i.e. strengthened disaster resilient livelihood strategies; advocacy with LGUs on urban poor-oriented DRR plans; engaging private sector in creating demand for risk transfer modalities, and; piloting Alternative Temporary Shelter models for increased evacuation capacity. (Photo EU/ECHO) (**Good Practice #13**)

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[14] In 2014-2017, the following EU Delegations received an envelope for allocation: Chad, Central African Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, amongst others.

[15] Moving Urban Poor Communities Towards Resilience project, run by an ACF-led consortium

*In the Gaza strip, Palestine, ICRC has reinforced the crisis preparedness capacities of local entities (i.e. Coastal Municipal Water Utility, municipalities, Gaza Electricity Distribution Company, Palestinian Water Authority), based on lessons learned and good practices from previous conflicts. It includes: maintaining critical WASH and electricity items in decentralized warehouses for the provision of critical urban services; Provision to public hospitals of solar panels, contingency stocks and de-salinization units to enable emergency rooms to function in situations of conflicts. (Photo ECHO/Caroline Gluck) (**Good Practice #14**)*

*In 2011, landslides destroyed thousands of houses and affected more than 70,000 people vulnerable slums of Caracas, Venezuela, following an extremely harsh rainy season. Caritas was able to respond in affected urban communities. The key of the success was the involvement of the existing community councils, which had the capacity to identify vulnerable families and channel the assistance. (Photo mseguias) (**Good Practice #15**)*

Strengthening local capacities is therefore crucial for a successful bottom-up, facilitative approach. It should be carried out in partnership with development actors, and include promoting good urban planning and governance, to ensure the longer-term viability of humanitarian and development interventions.

Host Communities and Social Cohesion

In contexts of displacement, humanitarian response should be inclusive of the displaced and host communities to promote social cohesion by mitigating tensions among communities. This is particularly relevant in high density, urban contexts where existing resources are often already overstretched and unable to cope with additional pressures resulting from displacement.

Vulnerability-based assistance should prevail over status when designing interventions, particularly in urban settings: even if targeted at the most vulnerable (displaced or host communities), secondary benefits will reach the whole community, factoring in the needs of indirectly-affected populations to help reduce social exclusion, discrimination and tensions.

*In Jordan, the one-refugee approach entails supporting not only the Syrian refugees in urban settings, but also the Iraqis, Somalis, Sudanese, Yemenis and other needy refugee minorities. The one refugee approach and the support to the hosting communities (i.e. vulnerable Jordanians) are de-facto lessening the tensions among vulnerable individuals living in the same area/district (**Good Practice #16**)*

*In Central African Republic, multi-sectorial interventions target the needs of populations affected by displacement: Interventions run by ACTED in districts of Bangui focused on durable shelter construction alongside pacific inter-community co-existence coupled with community mediation and dialogues. (photo OCHA/Illemassene) (**Good Practice #17**)*

This approach is in line with the European Commission Communication on Forced Displacement and Development[16], the policy on Humanitarian Protection[17], and is mainstreamed throughout funded humanitarian actions.

Targeting both the displaced and hosting communities is often not enough, and more needs to be done to promote social cohesion in situations of urban displacement, with dedicated, targeted interventions, together with development actors. Greater focus on the urban characteristics of inclusive approaches to displaced and host communities is important in building the evidence base and placing urban crises as central components of the Commission work on strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus.

> **Summary:** A **bottom-up, inclusive approach** relies on beneficiaries and national/local institutions to be involved throughout the programme cycle for acceptance, ownership and longer-term exit strategies. It requires multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, which capitalises on available capacity, and is articulated with relevant humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors (e.g. local authorities, community-based organisations, line ministry, private sector), as well as existing mechanisms and platforms (e.g. cluster system). In the context of forced displacement, humanitarian responses should be inclusive of both displaced and host communities to mitigate tensions and promote social cohesion.

5.3.   Tools and Modalities in Urban Crises

Although understanding of the urban dimensions of crises is increasing among humanitarian actors, many approaches, tools and modalities used have not necessarily been adapted to the changing environment of humanitarian crises from rural to more urban settings. By focusing on household needs rather than needs of individuals or communities, a critical gap may be created in delivering effective assistance in urban settings[18].

### 5.3.1. Cash-based Assistance: a well-fitted Urban-Fitted Modality

Cash-based programming, notably in the Middle East, has proven a particularly appropriate modality in urban contexts in ensuring dignified economic access to basic needs such as food, shelter, water, electricity, education, health, etc. Successful examples include conditional cash grants and multi-purpose case assistance provided in recent responses.

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[16] European Commission, *Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, COM(2016) 234 final, 26.4.2016

[17] European Commission, *Humanitarian Protection: Improving protection outcomes to reduce risks for people in humanitarian crises*, DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document N°8, 2016

[18] ALNAP, *Working with people and communities in urban humanitarian crises*, Working Paper, 2017

*In Gaza, Palestine, NRC responded to the need for shelter repair and reconstruction following the 2014 conflict, through a self-help approach using conditional cash, enabling people to take ownership of their repairs whilst injecting cash into the local economy. NRC led comprehensive household needs assessments to identify the most vulnerable households in marginalised areas. Funds were then transferred through pre-paid bankcards to support the completion of the agreed-upon repairs. (Photo NRC/Christian Jepsen) (**Good Practice #18**)*
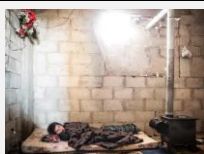
*A number of IDP relocation projects have been funded, such as in Port au Prince, Haiti, based on Rental Subsidies Cash Grants (RSCG) covering the rental costs for alternative safe housing solutions outside IDP camps. In the last 5 years (2012-2016), 19 interventions have been supported, aiming to provide durable housing solutions for displaced population severely affected by the 2010 earthquake (**Good practice #19**)*

The use of cash for shelter in urban areas can, for example, contribute to supporting hosting, covering rental expenses, helping households construct transitional shelter, or fostering early recovery and reconstruction (e.g. multi-purpose cash in Turkey is being used to pay for rent and cover utility bills).

While there have been a number of good practices linked to conditional cash grants, cash programming in urban settings has increasingly shifted towards multipurpose cash grants, such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) in Turkey[19], but also in Ukraine, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon. Multi-purpose cash assistance is considered highly appropriate in urban settings due to the enabling context, with usually a strong and more advanced banking sector, monetised economies with increased reliance on cash for meeting basic needs, functioning markets, and the availability of services and commodities.

While focused primarily on access, ensuring greater focus on quality should be further explored: multi-purpose cash assistance can be an efficient and effective delivery modality considering that the delivery of service-driven sectors can vary in quality and quantity being much more complex commodities than in kind items or goods. It can provide greater benefit to the local economy[20] as well as to recipients allowing them to prioritise spending in a dignified manner.

Effective cash transfer assistance will rely also on the capacity of local markets to provide basic needs of crisis-affected populations; as such, the assessment of needs and the programming of response should be conditional upon appropriate market analysis. Market system analysis should be reinforced in this regard.

*In Jordan, the transition from supporting refugees with non-food items (NFIs) for different sectors (WASH, Winterization, shelter upgrade kits, etc.) as well as cash for rent (to landlords) to monthly unconditional multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA) for the most vulnerable refugees proved particularly effective. (Photo WFP/Ozan Toptas) (**Good practice #20**)*

*In Ukraine, the use of multi-purpose cash programmes enabled people to switch the use of the received cash from NFI or food products to the payment of rental fees, as pressure from flat owners gradually grew and people exhausted their coping mechanisms. (**Good practice #21**)*

*Through the ESSN in Turkey, refugees were able to prioritize expenditure to overcome barriers (e.g. public transportation) to seek opportunities in urban settings. (**Good practice #22**)*

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[19] While the ESSN is a nationwide programming covering urban and rural settings, its caseload is primarily urban

[20] Evidence suggests that each dollar of cash assistance spent by refugees has a multiplier effect and generates $2.13 of GDP for the Lebanese economy.

5.3.2. Context Analysis Tools

A detailed analysis and deep understanding of a given context is crucial in designing and implementing appropriate humanitarian interventions. Good contextualisation is particularly relevant in urban contexts given their greater complexity, and associated risks of inadequate programming and of not respecting the 'do no harm' principle. However, there does not seem to be a conscious and purposeful urban strategy articulated by implementing partners despite any funded interventions taking place in urban settings (e.g. this is particularly apparent in Turkey, where a major of funding is programmed and spent in urban areas).

Building on available evidence, the impacts of national political and legal frameworks' on humanitarian needs, and the importance of conducting an actual analysis of these frameworks in the design phase of programmes and projects, should be better recognised.

Further strengthening the efficiency of innovative tools and methods to support the contextualisation exercise may help overcome certain challenges such as the narrow timeframe of humanitarian interventions or the limited financial envelopes of humanitarian projects.

> *Work carried out by the International Rescue Committee on Improving Humanitarian Actors' Capacity to Respond to Urban Crises explore the relevance of context analysis approaches in helping humanitarian actors have a better understanding of the dynamics of specific environments, by unpacking the various political, socio-economic, service provision and spatial factors key to informing effective crisis response. A dedicated urban context analysis toolkit has been created[21].* **(Good Practice #23)**

5.3.3. Risk and Vulnerability Assessments

Multi-risk assessments adapted to urban contexts are needed. These should cover natural disasters, situations of conflict and displacement, and should be carried out periodically based on reliable information, and translate into realistic contingency plans and optimal response strategies (e.g. Lake Chad region) as well as sectorial advocacy (e.g. the impact on water and environment of unplanned urbanisation). Risk assessments in urban settings in situations of conflict and other forms of violence may help assess impact on civilians and infrastructure.

The vulnerabilities and the exposure to disasters in urban settings are often related to deficient construction and urbanization, lack of sewage, exposure to technological disasters, etc. The range of threats and the complexity of the vulnerabilities are high and difficult to map, with the frequent need of micro-zoning studies in order to assess accurately the risks.

Typical main risks include: rapid urbanisation; environmental decline in/around urban centres impacting availability of fertile land; access to energy as well as water and waste management.

While appropriate tools for disaster preparedness had been developed (e.g. contingency plans, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA), local capacity building, early warning systems), response mechanisms for urban-specific contexts need to be further developed and commonly agreed between all relevant stakeholders for a coordinated efficient response.

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[21] International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), *Urban Context Analysis Toolkit: Guidance note for humanitarian practitioners*, Stronger Cities Consortium, 2017

5.3.4. The Settlement-Based Approach (SBA)

*In responding to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, multi-sectorial area-based approaches were used, starting with emergency measures including debris removal, provision of emergency shelter materials, rehabilitation of water and sanitation and support to those displaced in spontaneous makeshift camps. The transition to recovery involved participatory planning and implementation processes to identify priorities and to optimise capacity building, ownership and sustainability. Shelter activities included training on hazard-resistant construction, support for repair and retrofitting, water and sanitation, and financial and livelihood assistance for displaced families. Settlement activities were implemented as targeted DRR interventions. (Photo ECHO/V.Raimundo) (**Good Practice #24**)*

Addressing shelter needs should take into consideration the physical contexts, pre-crisis conditions, and the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of populations affected[22]. Such an approach should aim to adapt a shelter response to the settlement characteristics: in urban settings, responses should strive to strengthen the functionality of urban systems in place. The central role of local authorities, the variety of stakeholders involved (household, neighbourhood, city levels) and specific protection issues need to be considered. By combining a targeted, participatory and multi-sectorial approach, these approaches are particularly well fitted to address the challenges of operating in urban settings.

Further research is required to better understand the implications of wide-scale adoption of settlement-based approaches by the humanitarian community[23].

> **Summary:** **Cash-based assistance** stands out as a relevant modality to deliver assistance to individuals in complex, densely populated and economic active urban environments.
>
> Good **contextualisation** is needed notably through robust analysis, including of market systems, and deep understanding of the context and the area covered, including stakeholders, capacities and risks. This requires understanding how to better link with development partners to ensure an integrated, joined-up approach for longer-term solutions.
>
> **Risk and vulnerability assessments**, alongside early-warning systems and DRR plans, need to be adapted to reflect the complexity of urban areas to inform humanitarian programming.
>
> Finally, more contextualised, consultative and multi-sectorial **Area-Based-Approaches** assist humanitarian actors in better adapting planning to the characteristics of urban environments.

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[22] European Commission, *Shelter and Settlements*, DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document, 2016

[23] The area based/settlement approach is being tested through DG ECHO's Enhanced Response Capacity instrument: the project run by IMPACT focuses on strengthening humanitarian action in urban areas by promoting settlement approaches and effective engagement with local stakeholders.

6. An Urban Crises Approach

A stock-taking exercise was carried out by the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (internal survey, 2017) to gather evidence of the urban dimensions, characteristics and challenges across its interventions worldwide.

The evidence collected confirms that humanitarian assistance and disaster risk management are increasingly linked to urban environments. Urban settings are in fact an amplifier: they amplify the impacts of crises and the challenges faced in humanitarian contexts; they amplify the potential effectiveness of our operational strategies, practices and innovation; and they amplify the scope of actors engaged in these complex environments.

As amplifiers of humanitarian challenges, of the need for adapted approaches, and of the range of actors they bring together, urban crises are central to the work of humanitarian actors. The Urban Amplifier requires more purposeful and robust approaches across the humanitarian community.

As such, this report constitutes the first step of a evidence-based approach to adapt the work and vision of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations to the realities of urban crises.

Contextualising an urban approach

A comprehensive and multi-sectorial approach to our humanitarian action is required to meet the complex characteristics of urban humanitarian crises: rising concentrations of vulnerable groups in densely populated areas, complex and interconnected urban systems, exposure to multiple risks, growing severity of climate extreme events, and increasing occurrence of conflict and forced displacement in cities.

A number of concrete actions will contribute to addressing specific gaps in the knowledge base on urban settings and allowing for better information on urban dimensions of humanitarian crises:

- Reinforcing the dissemination of lessons learnt, best practices, outcomes of Enhanced Response Capacity projects and relevant studies, as well as the delivery of communication material and technical trainings to build understanding and capacity for appropriate urban interventions.
- Promoting research and evidence building on the relevance of urban issues to humanitarian operations and policies, such as the impact of deterioration/disruption in basic services; humanitarian protection responses (urban collective centres, urban host solutions, massive rental support projects, optimization of existing housing urban stock and to social housing programmes); market-based emergency response interventions; and more.[24]
- Exploring methods and tools allowing a detailed analysis and deep understanding of urban contexts through good contextualisation, to design and implement appropriate humanitarian interventions. Innovative approaches and tools will include:
  - Contribute to further developing area-based approaches in out-of-camp settings: In a context of complex and interconnected services,

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[24] To be defined in close coordination with technical experts and geographical colleagues.

infrastructure and systems, an integrated and multi-sectorial approach is required to avoid replicating actions through parallel cluster-based systems of service-delivery;

o Promote systematic comprehensive multi-sectorial urban risk assessments in responses to natural disasters, situations of conflict and displacement. Urban specific vulnerability criteria, thresholds and response modalities should be further developed, identified and commonly agreed between all relevant stakeholders for a coordinated efficient response.

- Reinforcing the contribution of urban expertise, including through urban planners, urban market experts and cash-based livelihoods experts: Urban planning skills and expertise are too often either unavailable or not considered in the early stages of a humanitarian response (e.g. settlement planning expertise is rarely available in humanitarian aid and civil protection, unless it concerns the siting and planning of planned camps). This could be achieved either through upskilling humanitarians in these areas, or through improved coordination to integrate specialists more fully from the very beginning.

Amplifying impacts

Urban settings amplify the potential and effectiveness of existing policies and approaches to protection, disaster preparedness, cash assistance, social protection, to name a few. Such settings seem well fitted to meet the needs and opportunities of densely populated and socio-economically active urban environments.

The wealth of humanitarian interventions in urban settings includes both sectorial and multi-sectorial programming, covering the traditional sectors of humanitarian aid. As an amplifier of impacts, urban crises will provide a lens to the various practices and policies confronted to challenges characteristic of urban environments.

Reinforcing the evidence-base, adapting to tools to multi-sectorial programming, and advocating for more attention to urban crises and their specificities will be necessary going forward.

Urban as a proxy for integrated policy making and collaborative response

The nature of the response to disasters impacting urban areas is proof of how civil protection and humanitarian response dimensions can be closely connected: earthquakes in Nepal and Ecuador, hurricanes in Haiti and the Philippines, and floods in Bangladesh, the Balkans and West Africa, have exposed the vulnerabilities of urban settings to disasters.

As a leading humanitarian donor and through the Union Civil Protection mechanism, the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations should engage further with civil protection communities, in particular to strengthen disaster risk assessments in urban contexts, to build on the expertise and interventions of ground search and rescue capacities (e.g. through activations of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism), and other relevant prevention, preparedness and response actions undertaken under the UCPM.

Cities in crisis are also settings in which humanitarian needs meet long term recovery and development needs, requiring appropriate engagement with development actors on the ground. Consolidating an approach to humanitarian crises in urban settings will be a proxy for reinforcing such integrations, contributing to more coherence and integration of EU response instruments both in terms of advocacy and programming.

EU financial instruments, for example, could be better aligned through reinforced urban considerations in multi-sectorial strategic frameworks. Humanitarian and development actors may also make better use of joint context, risk and vulnerability analysis tools and processes. In line with the Grand Bargain agenda, multi-year funding and programming may contribute positively to the complex and structural needs in urban settings.

Finally, in the context of reinforcing engagement with non-traditional actors, cooperation with local capacities at all stages of the crisis management cycle should also be considered, and in line with humanitarian principles. This could help ensure a successful bottom-up, facilitative approach and the design of appropriate exit strategies. The role of the private sector in urban environments, and the potential for engagement in these contexts, will also be further explored.

This report will be regularly enriched and updated through further evidence gathered, and will shed light and attention on the channels through which to reinforce the role of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations as a key humanitarian actor engaged in urban crises.

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