

Global Alliance for Urban Crises

Adapting Global Crisis Response to an Urban World

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises is a global, multi-disciplinary and collaborative community of practice. It is a 'network of networks' working to prevent, prepare for and effectively respond to humanitarian crises in urban settings.

Context – Adapting to an Urbanising World

The humanitarian landscape is changing. Urbanization is defining our global reality and will shape our future. Displacement, conflict and natural disasters are increasingly urban phenomena. This new reality must be addressed in the 'vision for change' presented by the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). It must also be addressed as we move beyond the WHS and towards implementing the broader agenda for humanity.¹

The majority of the world's population now lives in urban areas. Rapid and often unplanned urbanization continues unabated, including in fragile settings, and is exacerbating the impacts of a range of natural and man-made disasters. Armed conflict and the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas cause death and injury amongst civilians; earthquakes inflict unique levels of devastation in cities, as do severe storms and floods. But urban areas can also offer sanctuary: the majority of internally displaced people and refugees are living in cities and towns around the world. This also generates new challenges: forced displacement is increasingly protracted, lasting an estimated 25 years on average.² Communities hosting displaced people face enormous pressures on, and competition for, scarce basic services, housing and jobs. Social tensions result.

Humanitarian agencies have traditionally responded to floods, famines and refugee movements in remote rural areas. Urbanization, and its intersection with climate change, conflict and displacement, challenges their usual ways of working. It is generating a fundamental shift in the nature, scale and impact of humanitarian crises. Towns and cities are characterized by high density and heterogeneous communities. In contrast to rural areas, urban inhabitants are more mobile and their social, political, economic and institutional environment is more complex, as is their built environment. Urban inhabitants are also reliant on a range of interconnected systems and infrastructure to support their daily lives and livelihoods, such as road networks, public transport, water, sanitation, and markets. Humanitarian actors have begun to realize that their traditional 'comprehensive' approach, where they are primarily responsible for the provision of most basic services (often in camps), is not appropriate in towns and cities. Humanitarians must work in support of and in collaboration with municipal authorities and ensure that local actors have a much stronger role in crisis response. They should also concentrate on restoring or bolstering existing city systems, rather than creating parallel services or providing short-term, unsustainable solutions to meet the needs of affected populations.

Urban areas may be increasingly at risk, but they also offer opportunities to work differently and to ensure crisis response provides immediate humanitarian relief while also strengthening urban

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2282agendaforhumanity.pdf>

The agenda for humanity encompasses a number of international processes, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The outcomes of the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) are also critical to achieving genuine change in the way humanitarian assistance is delivered, and risk and vulnerability reduced.

² Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

resilience. This will require new partnerships that go beyond the humanitarian sector to include national and local authorities, development agencies and urban professionals, such as planners and engineers.

Background

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (the Alliance) is an initiative that arose out of consultations for the WHS, during which a number of committed organisations led an urban expert group and developed a series of *Urban Recommendations* which are reflected in the Synthesis Report for the WHS. The Alliance is the vehicle through which these recommendations will be put into action. It is guided by a series of principles, also developed by the urban expert group, as laid out in the *Urban Crises Charter*. The Alliance builds on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) 'Strategy for Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas', and the decision of the IASC Principals in April 2015 to adopt area-based approaches and surge capacity through local authorities.

The Alliance will be formally launched during a Special Session at the WHS, where institutional and joint commitments will be made to operationalize the urban recommendations. The first milestone for progress made by the Alliance will be Habitat III in October 2016.

Vision

The Alliance promotes a vision of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and towns (as laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) in which urban communities, their leaders and members have the power, capacities and resources to address the risks and reality of humanitarian crises, to mitigate crisis impacts on the most vulnerable, including the displaced, and to enable affected people to determine, with dignity, the course of their lives and their futures.

Value of the Alliance

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises reflects a **new type of collaboration** – it joins a diverse group of stakeholders who do not systematically work together. The Alliance places affected communities and municipalities at the centre of its work and encourages a supportive and collaborative approach from member states, humanitarian, development and other relevant actors during urban humanitarian crises.

Members will provide knowledge, build capacities and develop data-informed and evidence-based approaches to in order to more effectively prevent, prepare for, and respond to humanitarian crises in urban environments, ultimately contributing to longer term, recovery, development and resilience building efforts.

The Alliance will operate on the assumption that working in partnership and collaborating towards common outcomes breaks down silos and improves effectiveness. The Alliance will initially work towards a three-year vision to deliver a number of priority initiatives. The need for the Alliance will be periodically revisited.

Functions of the Alliance

Supported by the Secretariat, the Alliance will have the following functions:

Advocacy and Influencing:

- Work to achieve an improved understanding of, and commitment to, effective humanitarian action in urban settings.

- Advocate for and mobilize appropriate financing mechanisms and funding windows to support such initiatives.
- Advocate for the inclusion of an urban crisis focus in other relevant communities of practice, for example those addressing the impacts of forced displacement and migration, climate change and global health risks.

Information sharing, evidence building and knowledge management

- Manage a repository of knowledge on current initiatives in agencies and organizations.
- Identify gaps in evidence, capacity, tools and approaches.
- Promote the up-take of urban specific tools and approaches to ensure stakeholders are better equipped to work effectively in towns and cities affected by crisis.

Capacities and skills

- Support members to contribute to shared goals of improved preparedness and response through their own individual or joint initiatives.
- Work to increase the availability and inclusion of urban and local government expertise in humanitarian response.

The Alliance has prioritised four key commitment areas. Partners will work jointly or collectively on specific activities to achieve results in these four areas:

- Tailor humanitarian response to the urban context by developing shared assessment and profiling tools, promoting joint analysis, and adapting coordination mechanisms.
- Develop or work with existing global, regional and national rosters to facilitate the deployment of urban leaders, managers and technical experts.
- Build the evidence base on the specific characteristics of protracted displacement in urban areas, and contribute to the design of appropriate and cost-effective responses, with particular regard to protection of vulnerable people, shelter, basic services and infrastructure.
- Ensure that initiatives focused on building urban resilience incorporate components on resilient response and recovery from crises, and that they leverage greatest impact in cities most at risk of humanitarian emergencies.

Membership

The Alliance is a multi-stakeholder initiative made up of a broad membership that includes actors not traditionally considered humanitarian responders. It includes development actors, urban professionals and local authority networks.

Membership numbers will not be capped. The Alliance will seek to build its membership, bringing in representatives from municipalities, countries and regions. The ultimate aim is to achieve a shift in mindset so as to ensure context specific and effective programming and interventions.

What is required of members and partners?

The Alliance will operate with a two-tier system of membership. In order to join the Alliance, members commit to the principles set out in the *Urban Crises Charter* (by becoming a signatory) and use them as a basis for both policy level and operational engagement.

Those who want to contribute more to the Alliance may become Partners. In addition to committing to the principles, Partners commit to the following:

- Strengthen their institutional set up, capacity and programming in order to contribute more effectively towards the goal of improved prevention, preparedness and response to urban humanitarian crises;
- Make specific commitments to work with other partners to develop new initiatives that will operationalize the urban recommendations developed for the WHS, under the four priority areas outlined above.
- Actively support the core functions of the Alliance

Commitments can be made through the online platform set up by the WHS Secretariat.

Governance

UN-Habitat and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) are currently convening members and preparing for the formal launch of the Alliance. Following the launch, it is anticipated that there will be a phased transition to the governance model outlined below. A plan for this transition will be developed and shared with Alliance members.

The Alliance will be supported by a small secretariat of two to four staff members. Certain functions of the Alliance (e.g. knowledge management) may be outsourced to Partners.

Partnership Council

A small group (six to ten partners), representing different constituencies and on a rotating basis, will meet regularly to:

- a) Monitor the effectiveness of the Alliance (measured by partnerships built, knowledge disseminated, growth in membership, etc);
- b) Decide on strategic direction and a collective work-plan for partners, including priority initiatives;
- c) Review and, where appropriate, endorse key initiatives submitted to the Partnership Council;
- d) Agree on advocacy strategy and messaging;
- e) Oversee functioning of the secretariat and fundraising to finance the secretariat and administrative costs.

During the first year, the Partnership Council will be convened on a quarterly or six-monthly basis, taking advantage of gatherings such as ECOSOC, UNGA, etc.

World Urban Crisis Forum

The Alliance will convene a World Urban Crisis Forum, as part of the World Urban Forum (held every two years) to provide an opportunity for all members to share good practices and organize dialogues to contribute to and refine the overall priorities of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises.

Contact urban.session@whsummit.org



ADAPTING TO AN URBANIZING WORLD

This Charter outlines guiding principles for members of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises (the Alliance). They are to be used as a basis for both policy and operational level engagement, in order to be more effective in preventing, preparing for, and responding to humanitarian crises in urban environments.

By 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas. Accelerating urbanization is defining our global reality and will shape our future. Urbanization intersects with climate change, natural disasters, conflict and displacement. It is a critical lens through which to review national and international efforts to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises, conflict and disasters.

- Over 80% of the world's GDP is produced in cities. As cities also constitute a central part of the global risk landscape, their vulnerability presents significant risk to national and global economic output.
- The urban population in lower-income and fragile countries has increased by 326% in the last 40 years. Urban poverty is concentrated in fast-growing, at-risk, and mostly unplanned informal settlements.
- The displaced are increasingly seeking refuge in urban areas, with approximately half of the world's 38 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and more than half of its 19.5 million refugees living in towns and cities. Displacement is also becoming increasingly protracted and is now averaging 25 years.

The increasing frequency of natural and man-made emergencies in urban areas requires new efforts to address risk, prepare for unavoidable events and mitigate the impact of crises. The provision of immediate humanitarian relief should be aligned with efforts to strengthen urban resilience and to build on the opportunities for self-recovery present in towns and cities.

Urban areas and their exposure to a range of natural and man-made hazards are central to a number of recent international processes and events, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Urban crises are of critical relevance to the design and implementation of the New Urban Agenda (outcome of the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development – Habitat III).



OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

We, the signatories, commit ourselves to work together to enable urban communities, in particular those most at risk, to prepare for, cope with and recover more quickly from the effects of humanitarian crises, including forced displacement, natural disasters and/or armed conflicts.

We recognize that urban settings have specific characteristics which require effective, context-specific approaches to addressing vulnerability and risk reduction, preparedness and crisis response.

Our commitment is underscored by the urban-specific tenets set out below, embedded in human rights-based approaches and based on principles of gender equality, inclusive participation, accountability to affected populations, non-discrimination and the right to remedy of violations. We commit to ensure that gender disparities are addressed to ensure equality of access and outcomes in crisis preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery activities.

WE FURTHERMORE COMMIT TO:

- 1 Prioritize local municipal leadership in determining response to urban crisis that is aligned with development trajectories and promotes the active participation of affected people – with special attention to the participation of women – and other key urban stakeholders. We recognize that the complexity of cities requires:

 - Building on the local knowledge of local government and urban communities;
 - A bottom-up approach mobilizing all local resources and capacities through broad partnerships, including the private sector, local professionals and community-based organizations;
 - Strengthening existing urban governance mechanisms, transparency and accountability, respect for the rule of law and for the rights of citizens, and protection of the most vulnerable.
 - 2 Adopt urban resilience as a common framework to align human rights, humanitarian and development goals, which requires:

 - Building interventions on existing urban service delivery systems, people's own recovery mechanisms, and the strength of the urban economy, acknowledging the key role of women;
 - Aligning immediate life-saving and protection priorities, reducing the number of individuals, families and neighborhoods in need of humanitarian assistance as soon as possible, addressing climate adaptation, and putting cities and towns on a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient post-crisis urban development track;
 - Innovative strategic and flexible approaches tailored to the city specific context.
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How the Alliance will achieve this vision:

Alliance Members have committed to Working Groups, each working towards impacting response in urban humanitarian crises for an initial period of 3-5 years. The Alliance Working Groups operations are underway for the following strategic priorities:

- **Tailoring humanitarian response to the urban context by developing shared assessment and profiling tools, promoting joint analysis, and adapting coordination mechanisms.**

Led by UN-Habitat, IMPACT Initiatives, and United Nations Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), the Working Group delivers continued urban profiling analysis of impact, interventions and innovation in data collection, as well as urban crisis coordination and support in decision-making.

- **Developing or working with existing global, regional and national rosters to facilitate the deployment of urban leaders, managers and technical experts.**

Led by CANADEM and NORCAP, the Working Group maps existing roster capacities for field deployment of urban experts, develop regional rosters, as well as advancing capacity-building and curriculum development.

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Urban areas may be increasingly at risk, but they also offer opportunities to work differently and ensure crisis response provides immediate humanitarian relief while strengthening urban resilience.

The Alliance provides the framework to build partnerships and work towards common goals to improve how we prepare for, and react on the ground when faced with an urban humanitarian crisis.

For more information including a list of our members, please visit, urbancrises.org.

- **Building the evidence base on the specific characteristics of protracted displacement in urban areas, and contributing to the design of appropriate and cost-effective responses, with particular regard to protection of vulnerable people, shelter, basic services and infrastructure.**

Led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), UNHCR and the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Operations (EU-ECHO), the Working Group scopes dimensions of urban displacement, cost and benefits to areas hosting displaced populations, inform practice of organization engagement in crisis response from emergency to development phases, and develop tools for urban mapping and planning.

- **Ensuring that initiatives focused on building urban resilience incorporate components on resilient response and recovery from crises, and that they leverage greatest impact in cities most at risk of humanitarian emergencies.**

Led by UN-Habitat, IRC and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the Working Group is developing a Resilience Framework Approach, piloting Resilience Projects in at-risk and fragile urban contexts, and leveraging the use of cash towards resilience.

GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR URBAN CRISES



ADAPTING HUMANITARIAN ACTION TO AN URBAN WORLD

BACKGROUND

The humanitarian landscape is changing. Urbanization is defining our global reality and will shape our future. Displacement, conflict and natural disasters are increasingly urban phenomena. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises was established to bring together the different actors who can help to improve crisis preparedness and response in our increasingly urban world.

Over 65 organizations have joined the Alliance, in working towards this vision, promoting the principles outlined in the Urban Crises Charter. Organizations are working together to pilot innovative initiatives, share lessons learned and best practices, promote joint advocacy, assessments and profiling and roster systems on the local, national, and international scale, among other 'game-changing' collaborative initiatives.

Alliance members have committed to four Working Groups, with the goal of adapting humanitarian action to an urban world.

Vision

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises promotes a vision of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and towns in which urban communities, their leaders and members have the power, capacities and resources to address the risks and reality of humanitarian crises, to mitigate crisis impacts on the most vulnerable, including the displaced, and to enable affected people to determine, with dignity, the course of their lives and their futures.

Governance structure

The Alliance governance structure is comprised of three main bodies; the Steering Group, Secretariat and Working Groups.

Steering Group

The Steering Group is the main decision-making body of the Alliance, featuring a balanced group of representatives from four constituencies – the United Nations System/International Non-Governmental Organizations/Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, academia and knowledge brokers, networks of urban professionals, and local governments.

Secretariat

The Alliance Secretariat supports the Steering Group and the Working Groups, with the role of carrying out advocacy, outreach, communications and coordination. Based in Barcelona, Spain, the Alliance Secretariat is co-hosted by UN-Habitat's City Resilience Profiling Programme (CRPP) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the Secretariat is comprised of an Advocacy, Outreach and Communications Officer and a Coordination Officer who work closely with the Steering Group and coordinates and supports the four Working Groups, realizing priorities and goals of the Alliance.

- 3 Manage urban displacement as a combined human rights, development and humanitarian concern, which requires:
 - Ensuring that towns and cities impacted by displacement resulting from violence, armed conflict and disasters are welcoming, inclusive and safe environments;
 - Balancing the needs of refugees and IDPs with the needs of the host community, and in particular those with chronic vulnerabilities and protection needs.

- 4 Build partnerships between city, national, regional and global levels, across disciplines and professions and ensure involvement of local government and professional associations in order to:
 - Mobilize social, economic, institutional and financial resources to better address immediate humanitarian needs during urban crisis and to sustain longer-term resilience;
 - Prioritize reinforcement of local, regional and national capacities, in particular urban and local government expertise, to support urban crisis preparedness and response in cities at risk;
 - Facilitate knowledge development, exchange of experiences and learning.

We commit to advocating for these principles and transforming them into concrete action.

In particular, we will advocate for their inclusion in the humanitarian reform agenda, as well as in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

For further information and to express interest in joining the Alliance please contact gaurbancrises@gmail.com or visit www.urbancrises.org

