



Global Alliance for Urban Crises

Update on Progress since the World Humanitarian Summit

Executive Summary:

This paper was prepared by:¹



The Global Alliance for Urban Crises aims to adapt humanitarian response to an urban world, recognizing the trend of rapid urbanization and the need for the humanitarian system to respond accordingly. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises was launched during a Special Session for the World Humanitarian Summit on 24 May, 2017. To date, over 65 organizations have committed to the Urban Crises Charter – the Alliance’s flagship document which outlines its priorities in dealing with urban crises. Over 50 organizations have joined hands to deliver on catalytic initiatives that can help drive change and impact humanitarian urban response in the next 3-5 years.

United Nations agencies, International Non-Governmental Organizations, Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, academic institutions, research and knowledge centers, networks of built environment professionals and local government associations have set up a governance structure and agreed on a road map around common priorities.

Alliance members have reported through the established community of practice on individual achievements against their commitments to the Alliance, which includes developing shared assessment and profiling tools, developing coordination mechanisms that fit the complexity of cities, developing urban crises response rosters with deployable capacity of urban professionals and strengthening the evidence base on characteristics of protracted urban displacement and resilience.

Over 13 stakeholders from the groups mentioned above have self-reported on their progress on commitments, citing the Alliance as a means to address issues in humanitarian urban response, as well as their involvements and contribution to the formation of the Alliance.

Highlights of achievements

Establishing the Governance Structure of the Alliance

The first step was to put in place a basic organizational set-up and working arrangements, allowing each constituency (see paragraph on constituency representation below) an equal voice to ensure a strong

¹ This paper was authored by the Global Alliance for Urban Crises Secretariat. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat.

focus on a small set of initiatives requiring collective efforts. The Steering Group frequently discusses progress and takes the necessary decisions. A face-to-face meeting of all members takes place on an annual basis to galvanize commitments and maintain momentum. The most recent meeting of all members was hosted by the European Commission for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) in Brussels (30-31 March 2017), during which working groups were established to bring together key actors to deliver on specific initiatives. A small secretariat supports the work and focuses on outreach and advocacy.

The Steering Group is comprised of a balanced representation of the four established Alliance Constituencies – United Nations/International Non-Governmental Organizations/Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, Academia/Knowledge Management, Network of Professionals and Local Governments. The Steering Group hosts calls twice every quarter, in addition to a face-to-face meeting twice a year. Steering Group members such as UN-Habitat, United Nations Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), United Kingdom Built Environment Advisory Groups (UKBEAG) and IMPACT Initiatives have reported their representation and participation in the Alliance Steering Group, the entity that guides Alliance programming and serves as the main decision-making body for the Alliance.

“The Global Alliance for Urban Crises is a turning point and needs to establish a sustainable capacity and gain momentum in bringing in its members together around joint initiatives.”

**United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees**

The Alliance Secretariat has been established in Barcelona, Spain, co-hosted by UCLG and UN-Habitat as part of their commitments to resource the Alliance. The Secretariat currently has two full time staff members reporting to the Steering Group and supporting Working Groups as well as support staff, resourced by UN-Habitat, UCLG, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

On 30-31 March, over 40 Alliance member organizations met in Brussels to: develop and establish work plans for the Working Groups; discuss the overall strategy of the Alliance; and next steps to implement Alliance goals to impact the next three to five years.

The meeting also provided an opportunity for members to discuss individual organizational initiatives, which will feed into the larger strategy of implementing the Strategic Priorities,² share best practices and advocate for their programs as relevant to the Alliance. The different constituencies also discussed how to bring more organizations on board, strengthen awareness and ensure produced knowledge is shared. Local Governments, United Nations agencies and INGOs recognized the need for a structured dialogue to overcome some of the mutual negative perceptions, creating better grounds for concrete collaboration during urban crisis response.

One of the priorities has been to develop alternative coordination mechanisms for urban crises responses that would be area-based, rather than structured along sectors. This should facilitate a more integrated response that takes into account the complexity of cities.

The main barriers/ challenges to progress

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), organizations under the UKBEAG (an Alliance Steering Group member) specified the challenge of the lack of built environment professionals engaged in urban crisis response and the absence

² <http://urbancrises.org/about-us>

of an arrangement to facilitate deployment to a humanitarian crises situation. UNHCR, World Vision International (WVI) and others point to the lack of specific expertise and experience to respond effectively to urban crises. IMPACT Initiatives, WVI and others have stressed the challenges to arrive at efficient coordination to ensure joint assessment and programming.

There is still a lack of appropriate financing mechanisms to incentivize joint action. Members of the Alliance also recognize local governments, academics, built environment professionals and humanitarian and development organizations do not necessarily speak the same ‘language’ and more needs to be done to forge a common understanding of each other’s roles.

UNHCR, WVI and the IRC have noted that the Alliance is an opportunity to address the aforementioned gaps in urban humanitarian response.

Measuring progress

The workplans adopted by the Alliance will allow for the measurement and discussion of progress. Different members, such as UNHCR, UKBEAG (RTPI, RIBA), IRC, UN-Habitat, and WVI, have also made their own specific commitments in line with the principles of the Urban Crises Charter, to integrate the Alliance work plans on an organizational level. UN-Habitat has sought and received support from its Governing Council, constituted of 58 member states, to update its own policy on work in urban crises settings and ensure that all its agency wide substantive expertise is better mobilized and tailored to crises settings.

ALNAP’s annual State of the Humanitarian System report evaluates humanitarian system performance on a yearly basis, with a specific focus on urban crises³. World Vision International has also committed to guide the revision of The Sphere Handbook to urban crises response⁴.

Highlights of good practices

- A review of needs assessment tools, response analysis frameworks and targeting guidance for urban humanitarian response by IRC, DFID, ECHO, International Institute for the Environment and Development (IIED), Norwegian Refugee Council and WVI, will be discussed and launched during the Urban Humanitarian Response Symposium). The multilateral and cooperative approach demonstrates a peer review of information and ensures a cohesive and non-duplicative product.
- Committing to make data and evidence base accessible (i.e., ALNAP Urban Community of Practice, HOTOSM Open Source platform) demonstrates transparency and easy access to research, evidence base, and the sharing of best practices, information and knowledge.
- Continued joint efforts on piloting evidence base (ECHO/IMPACT Initiatives) programmes demonstrate a multilateral and cooperative approach in measuring urban crises response, effectiveness and impact. The data and information gathered are peer-reviewed and resourced adequately.

³ <http://www.alnap.org/resource/21036.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/revision-sphere-handbook/>

Recommendations

Stakeholders such as the UNHCR, IRC and UN-Habitat have agreed that the Global Alliance for Urban Crises is crucial in addressing the aforementioned gaps in urban humanitarian crises. Thus, a few recommendations are below, which need to be actioned urgently:

1. The Alliance Secretariat should be resourced and supported by members for sustainable capacity.
2. Membership should be increased to ensure Working Group actors and profiles have a diverse, relevant and robust composition, in order to address urban humanitarian crises in a comprehensive manner.
3. The Alliance work plans should be adopted on an organizational level, with the full support of institutions, bringing resources into the Strategic Priorities and Working Groups as needed.

About this paper

All stakeholders who made commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in support of advancing the Agenda for Humanity were invited to self-report on their progress in 2016 through the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformation (PACT) (agendaforhumanity.org). The information provided through the self-reporting is publicly available and forms the basis, along with other relevant analysis, of the annual synthesis report. The annual synthesis report will be prepared by OCHA and will highlight trends in progress, achievements and gaps that need more attention as stakeholders collectively work toward advancing the 24 transformations in the Agenda for Humanity. In keeping with the multi-stakeholder spirit of the WHS, OCHA invited partners to prepare short analytical papers that analyze and assess self-reporting in the PACT, or provide an update on progress on initiatives launched at the World Humanitarian Summit. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat.