European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Health

What is it?

Health is a core sector of humanitarian assistance and a reliable measurement of its impact. The European Commission aims to provide high-quality humanitarian health assistance in fragile contexts. This includes emergency medical assistance, outbreak preparedness and response, vaccination, hygiene promotion, and screening for malnutrition.

Health is interconnected with other humanitarian sectors, such as water and sanitation, nutrition, food, and forced displacement.

Why is this important?

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), more than 70% of the world’s poorest are estimated to be living in fragile contexts.

Violence, conflicts, human-induced crises, and natural hazards restrict people’s access to healthcare services. Climate change, population growth, mass migration, and antimicrobial resistance are hampering the achievement of Universal Health Coverage.

Despite the progress, nearly 50% of the world’s population still lacks access to essential health services and primary health care. Additionally, some countries recurrently face epidemic outbreaks, with a stronger impact on the most vulnerable populations.

The most frequent medical needs arise from:

- acute respiratory diseases
- diarrhoea
- complications during pregnancy and delivery
- injuries (including from sexual and gender-based violence)
- undernutrition
- malaria
- other communicable diseases.

Mental health and psychosocial support services are increasingly needed to help crisis-affected people cope with high distress and trauma.

Weakened or disrupted health systems aggravate the problem. They often cannot provide prevention and treatment for non-communicable diseases, basic health services, and medical supplies.

Prolonged conflicts severely impact healthcare provision, mainly when facilities and workers come under attack.
How are we helping?

The European Commission provides around €270 million annually to support humanitarian health programmes worldwide.

The EU’s humanitarian health funding is governed by its Consolidated Humanitarian Health Guidelines, which help ensure coherence between the departments of the European Commission, EU Member States, other donors, stakeholders and partners providing health assistance in the field.

Recent examples of humanitarian health interventions we fund are:

- improving access to primary health care in Sudan and Bangladesh during COVID-19 to ensure continued lifesaving services and a comprehensive response to the outbreak
- providing sexual and reproductive health services to women and girls in Iraq and Syria
- preventing and responding to disease outbreaks (such as Cholera, Measles, and Ebola) in Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- providing mental health and psychosocial support in Afghanistan, Libya, and Ukraine
- supporting adapted and culturally sensitive healthcare services to refugees and migrants in Türkiye.

In addition, EU humanitarian aid also ensures the treatment of severe malnutrition and access to safe water.

To mobilise medical and public health teams and equipment for rapid response to emergencies, the European Commission and countries joining the EU Civil Protection Mechanism launched the European Medical Corps. Countries can offer specialised health units to support populations hit by disasters inside or outside the EU.

In addition, the European Humanitarian Response Capacity is a new set of operational tools designed to fill gaps in the humanitarian response to sudden-onset natural hazards and human-induced disasters. This includes providing expertise, mainly in the health and logistical sectors.

At European level, medical capacities (staff and resources) are developed and deployed as part of rescEU. This is the European reserve of capacities to protect citizens from disasters and manage emerging risks, such as medical emergencies and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents.

Currently, rescEU offers:

- areal medical evacuation for highly infectious disease patients and disaster victims
- emergency medical teams
- a stockpiling reserve of medical equipment and therapeutics.

The European Commission is also actively involved in the Global Health Cluster, the main international forum for coordinating humanitarian health assistance led by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Collaboration is also being strengthened with the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) effectively inform policy directions and strategies to tackle health emergencies.

Facts & figures

Almost 50% of the world lacks access to healthcare (WHO)

Over 70% of epidemics occur in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable settings, where COVID-19 has posed an additional challenge

Malaria kills over 600,000 people yearly – mainly children under 5 in Africa

Largest EU-funded humanitarian health funding interventions in 2022:

- Ukraine
- Syria
- Afghanistan
- Yemen

Yearly EU humanitarian health funding: €270 million