European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

EU response to Ebola

What is it?

The Ebola virus is a severe and often fatal illness in humans. The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads further through human-to-human transmission. Beyond the human suffering and loss of life, the disease has a devastating impact on the security, economies, and healthcare systems of the affected regions. The European Union appointed an Ebola Coordinator in 2014, at the height of the pandemic in West Africa, and has since mobilised all available political, financial, and scientific resources to help Ebola patients and contain the disease.

Why is this important?

When Ebola ravaged previously unaffected countries in West Africa between 2014 and 2016, leaving in its wake a huge death toll and paralysed economies, the world woke up to the potential global threat of the disease. Until then, Ebola had been mostly limited to East and Central Africa, with the number of reported cases never exceeding 500 at each outbreak. However, in 2014, the Ebola virus found a new conducive environment in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. It was only two years later that an end could be put to the outbreak, thanks to the combined efforts of the international community. In the meantime, nearly 30,000 cases were reported and over 11,000 lives were lost.

In 2018, Ebola returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where the first ever outbreak of the Ebola virus disease was reported back in 1976. The DRC declared its ninth outbreak in May 2018 in Equateur province, in the west of the country, and its tenth outbreak on 1 August, barely a week after the previous one had come to an end. Despite the intensive response that has been put into place since the outbreak was declared, the disease is still not under control.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the public health risk from Ebola is considered to be "very high" at a national and regional level, given the proximity of the affected area to the borders of South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) considers the risk of the virus reaching the EU to be low.

EU response to the tenth (and current) Ebola outbreak in the DRC: €17.83 million since 2018
**How are we helping?**

In response to the most recent Ebola virus outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), since May 2018, the European Union has provided considerable support for its humanitarian partners on the ground. The EU has provided €17.83 million in aid to the World Health Organization (WHO), UN agencies, the Red Cross movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). EU aid has been supporting different aspects of the response, such as access to health care, prevention and control of infections, epidemiological surveillance, safe burials, contact tracing, logistics, and coordination.

Throughout the latest outbreaks, the EU’s Humanitarian Air Service (ECHO flight) has transported personnel and equipment to various Ebola hotspots. On 1 August, when the ongoing outbreak was declared in the North Kivu province, the first of more than 80 flights took off to help organisations access the affected areas in this conflict-torn part of the DRC. A helicopter from the United Nations Humanitarian Air service (UNHAS) is also funded by the EU and allows to gain access to hard-to-reach areas and to proceed, if necessary, with medical evacuations.

EU humanitarian health experts have been sent to the hotspots of the outbreak, and are also actively working in Kinshasa and Goma. They are involved in the coordination of the response and are in daily contact with health authorities, the WHO and operational partners. Furthermore, an epidemiologist from the ECDC has been sent to Ebola-affected areas to provide further technical and specialised support.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism has been activated twice upon request of the WHO. This mechanism coordinates the assistance provided by participating states and extends solidarity outside Europe’s borders to people affected by disasters and disease outbreaks. As part of this coordinated assistance, a Norwegian team was dispatched to the DRC to give training health workers on the use of high-tech isolation units that can be used in specific cases for medical evacuation that Norway gave as support to the Ebola response. Upon a recent request by the WHO, Norway provided three additional isolation units for the medical transport of Ebola patients, and is offering further training sessions on the operation of the isolation units. The EU remains on standby to provide further assistance, such as by mobilising the European Medical Corps. Beyond the DRC, EU humanitarian funds have also been helping the International Federation of the Red Cross and other International NGOs to reinforce preparedness and prevention measures in neighbouring countries.

The financial contribution of the EU - European Commission and Member States - to contain the 2014-2016 pandemic in West Africa amounted to almost €2 billion. The European Commission allocated €870 million for emergency measures and longer-term support, including €70 million in humanitarian aid to address urgent needs through epidemic surveillance, contact tracing, medical supplies, and the sending and training of health workers, among others. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism facilitated the delivery of material support from Member States through the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC). EU Member States provided mobile laboratories, treatment centres, ambulances and field hospitals.