



## Civil-military relations in humanitarian crises

ECHO FACTSHEET

### Facts & Figures

The Commission promotes humanitarian civil-military coordination (UN-CMCoord) in emergencies.

Coordination between civilian and military actors is necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimise inconsistency, and when appropriate, pursue common goals.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is mandated as the focal point in the UN system for CMCoord.

The Commission plays a key role in ensuring that EU and UN crisis management safeguards the humanitarian space.

Upholding humanitarian principles and maintaining a clear distinction between civilian and military actors ensures the safety of humanitarian workers.

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EU humanitarian aid being unloaded from a plane. © EU/ECHO

### What are civil-military relations?

- The changing nature of modern conflicts, natural disasters and crisis situations has gradually called for various forms of civil-military coordination for humanitarian operations.
- United Nations humanitarian civil-military coordination (UN-CMCoord) is the essential dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors in humanitarian emergency necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimise inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursue common goals.
- Coordination can be challenging and depends on context. Each crisis is different and a case-by-case evaluation is necessary to safeguard the humanitarian space and ensure that humanitarian aid remains independent and neutral.
- Basic coordination strategies range from co-existence to cooperation. The former, focused on de-confliction and minimising inconsistency, is typical of conflict settings with military involved in active combat. The latter is focused on harmonising a combined response and could be adopted in natural disasters.

### Why are they important?

Certain humanitarian emergencies and disaster situations may require capabilities only available to the military community. These include communication support, airport repairs, operation support, fuel management, and road and bridge repairs.

In certain emergencies where there are compelling humanitarian needs, the humanitarian community might request the military for specific assistance such as assets or expertise (i.e. strategic airlift and medical evacuations).

Thanks to specific administrative arrangements with the EU Military Staff (EUMS), the European Commission's European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO) is able to mobilise military transport or other assets if civilian or commercial means cannot meet the needs in crisis situations. The department also ensures coordination with EU Member States, in particular through the EU Military Committee.

EU military assets mobilised in support of humanitarian operations are always in accordance with the relevant UN civil-military guidelines. Concrete examples of the civil-military coordination role played by the Commission are the use of a Dutch navy vessel to ship aid in the response to the 2016 Haiti earthquake, the use of the Dutch vessel Karel Doorman as part of a coordinated European response to Ebola in 2014, the use of military assets in response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake and 2010 Pakistan floods.

## Shaping internationally recognised civil-military guidelines

At global level, the Commission supports the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in leading civil-military coordination (CMCoord). The Commission funds OCHA on CMCoord including for the direct deployment of CMCoord officers in crisis situations, such as in Mali, Sudan, Nigeria, and Iraq.

The Commission also contributes to shaping internationally recognised guidelines elaborated by OCHA in collaboration with all relevant actors. The four main documents guiding civil-military coordination, to which the Commission contributed, are:

1. The Oslo Guidelines (applicable in natural disasters)
2. The guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in complex emergencies
3. The guidelines on the use of armed escorts
4. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee reference paper on civil-military relationship in complex emergencies.

The Commission actively promotes the respect of these guidelines within the EU.

## Liaising with Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) actors

At EU level, the Commission has established excellent working relations with the European External Action Service crisis management structures, including with the EU Military Staff.

This gives the Commission preferential entry points with the EU military and opportunities to bring in the humanitarian perspective from the planning to execution phases of EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

Training is another essential element of the Commission's outreach; by delivering presentations as part of the European Security and Defence College pre-deployment trainings, the Commission raises awareness of personnel deployed in CSDP missions towards humanitarian civil-military coordination and humanitarian principles.

