European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Shelter and settlements

What is it?
Floods, earthquakes, cyclones or conflicts can destroy thousands of homes in an instant. Shelter is a basic human need crucial for survival in cases of natural disasters and when people are uprooted due to conflict. Shelter provides security, personal safety and protection from the weather, and prevents ill health and disease. Adequate housing provides people with dignity and the opportunity to lead a normal family and community life.

Why is this important?
Needs for humanitarian shelter and settlements are increasing. In 2017, 16.2 million people had to leave their home because of persecution, conflict or violence.

In addition, climate change - resulting in extreme weather and natural disasters, such as floods and storms – cost a further 18.8 million people their homes in 2017. Humanitarian organisations help affected communities using a variety of methods, including technical support and capacity building, financial assistance (including cash-based assistance and rental support), and the provision of building materials and tools.

Experience shows that basic and fragile transitional shelter often remains the only home for the world’s poorest people for many years. These structures often serve as a foundation for future housing, which are expanded and reinforced. It is therefore crucial that proper materials are provided and correct building methods used from the outset.

Reliable shelter enforces communities’ resilience and reduces their vulnerability to future disasters. People often consider shelter as their most important asset stressing its importance in securing livelihoods.
How are we helping?

Shelter and settlements assistance is one of the main humanitarian sectors supported by the European Union’s Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). In 2017, its humanitarian funding for shelter and settlements amounted to more than €150 million.

Building on best practices in the sector, the EU published a set of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Guidelines in 2017 to ensure that vulnerable people’s shelter needs are met in an optimal and efficient way.

The European Union provides humanitarian shelter and settlements support as an immediate response to, or in anticipation of, a disaster. Because of the importance of adequate housing, the EU may also decide to support shelter in the recovery phase, if the reconstruction or maintenance of shelter and settlements addresses the health, protection or livelihoods needs of the affected population.

To provide safe, secure, dignified, and appropriate shelter and settlements solutions, the European Union coordinates its humanitarian aid with assistance provided through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Civil protection assistance may take the form of in-kind help and deployment of specialised response teams and experts in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

The European Union plays an active role in the Global Shelter Cluster, a multi-agency initiative across the humanitarian shelter sector, which aims to strengthen cooperation of aid efforts and deliver faster, more suitable responses while improving the aid delivery in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.