European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Democratic Republic of Congo

Introduction

Between conflict, poverty, malnutrition and an Ebola outbreak, humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are among the highest in the world. Such is the scale of humanitarian needs that the UN's Humanitarian Response Plan for the DRC is the second largest appeal worldwide. The ongoing epidemic of the Ebola virus disease in the east of the DRC is still a serious concern and has become the second largest outbreak in history.

What are the needs?

For decades, violence in the DRC have caused people to flee for their safety. There are currently at least 3 million people who are displaced within the DRC and more than 870,000 Congolese are refugees in neighbouring countries. Given the instability in the region, the DRC itself hosts more than 537,000 refugees mainly from Rwanda, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Burundi.

Conflict keeps people from accessing their fields and markets. An estimated 15.8 million people in the DRC face severe food shortages and 4.3 million children under 5 years of age are malnourished, out of whom 1.3 million among them suffer from severe acute malnutrition, a life-threatening condition.

The country currently faces several disease epidemics, including an ongoing Ebola outbreak declared in August 2018. The death toll to date stands at more than 2,000. Conflict and community resistance are major challenges in the response teams' efforts in the DRC. The risk of the virus spreading to neighbouring countries remains very high. On 17 July 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Ebola outbreak in the DRC as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). WHO recommended travel and trade restrictions as measure to attempt to control the spread of Ebola.
How are we helping?

In 2019, EU support to humanitarian actions in the DRC amounts to more than €64 million. This funding is helping people affected by violence, acute malnutrition, and epidemics. The priority for 2019 is to address the pressing, widespread humanitarian needs; provide protection and life-saving assistance to victims of violence; and to help curb the Ebola outbreak.

The majority of the EU’s humanitarian funding in the DRC goes to actions in the east of the country where conflict is still ongoing. The EU works with partner humanitarian organisations to provide food assistance and protection; emergency healthcare, including care for survivors of sexual violence; improve water, sanitation and hygiene conditions; and ensure that children caught in humanitarian crises can go to school. The EU’s support also allows humanitarian organisations with specific expertise in nutrition to work in areas that have alarming malnutrition levels, saving the lives of thousands of children.

In response to 2 Ebola outbreaks that started in 2018, the EU mobilised considerable support for humanitarian action on the ground. The EU has provided around €47 million in humanitarian aid in support of the international Ebola response led by the national authorities and the World Health Organisation (WHO). EU aid is helping with the Ebola medical response, access to healthcare, infection prevention and control measures, support to recovered patients and their families, safe and dignified burials and coordination activities. EU medical and logistic experts have been deployed to Beni, Butembo, and Goma to provide assistance and advice to the response teams and humanitarian organisations that the EU works with. The EU also provides financial support for the reinforcement of Ebola preparedness and prevention measures in neighbouring Uganda, South Sudan, Burundi, and Rwanda.

In addition to the humanitarian funding provided, as part of its response to the Ebola outbreak in the DRC, the EU’s Civil Protection Mechanism has been activated. Through the Mechanism, the EU has conducted a series of training sessions, provided by Norwegian teams, on the use of high-tech isolation units for the medical evacuation of Ebola patients. The EU remains on standby to provide further assistance.

The EU also provides logistical support in the DRC through the humanitarian air service known as ECHO Flight. Humanitarian air services are often the only way to reach people in need in remote areas, deliver life-saving supplies and transport aid workers. ECHO flights are also used for medical or security evacuations. The service is free of charge for humanitarian partners and aid organisations. Every year since 2017, the EU has allocated more than €7 million to the operation of such flight services in the Democratic Republic of Congo.