DIALOGUE
ADDRESSING URBAN COMPLEX CRISIS AND CONFLICT

Key words

2030 Agenda; Complex Crisis; Conflict; Displacement; New Urban Agenda; Protracted Crisis; Reconstruction; Recovery; Refugees; Resilience; Sustainable Development Goals

Objectives of the session

The session aims to:

- Deepen a shared understanding of key characteristics of complex urban crisis and conflict to inform a better crisis response and recovery;
- Explore how the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in countries and cities affected by complex emergencies and conflict can contribute to a more resilient recovery, accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including leaving no one behind;
- Review practices to manage urban displacement and returns, contributing to sustainable urbanization;
- Rethink the role of actors and capacities needed to respond better to urban crisis and conflict, with a focus on the role of local authorities;
- Review on how the transition from urban crisis response to urban recovery can be better organized.

Introduction of the topic

As the world's population is urbanizing, the nature of crises is also urbanizing. Recent crises, from the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, to the armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, illustrate this development. More people are affected in densely populated areas. Current classic top-down sectoral crisis response and recovery mechanisms increasingly fail to deal with the complexities of cities and miss key opportunities to reduce humanitarian need and fast track a more resilient recovery. Apart from destruction, the biggest shock often comes from acute and protracted displacement, accelerating urban informal growth, fueling social segregation, and putting pressure on existing social and physical infrastructure. Decisions during a crisis response, such as temporary settlement, can have long lasting unsustainable consequences.

The New Urban Agenda recognizes the full potential of quality and well managed urbanization to prevent, prepare for and respond better to urban crises, and to result in more inclusive, sustainable and resilient cities. There is a particular opportunity in crisis moments to put cities and countries back on a more sustainable urbanization, and thus, development trajectory, towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This requires further discussion on how to tailor the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in these situations.

As the Global Alliance for Urban Crises has set out to do in its Urban Crisis Charter, this requires a rethinking of the roles of national and local governments, built environment professionals, academics and humanitarian and development organizations, and international financial institutions, to drive an agenda of systemic change. It requires new ways of assessing and analyzing cities in crisis creating a common basis for a combined humanitarian, recovery and development response. It requires appropriate urban recovery frameworks to move beyond the crisis to a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future.

Guiding questions

Q1: What are the scale, nature and impacts of the 'urbanization' of crisis?

Q2: How can we rethink the roles of the different actors, both national and local governments, private sector, urban professionals and civil society organizations to ensure a more resilient response and recovery? What capacities are needed?

Q3: Displacement and returns are increasing urban phenomena, with families moving from rural to urban areas, from neighborhood to neighborhood, between cities and across borders. How can we better manage acute and protracted urban displacements and returns while developing self-reliance, social cohesion and access to basic services, infrastructure and housing, taking into account also the needs of host communities?

Q4: In what ways can we fast track resilience and overcome drivers of conflict addressed during urban crisis response and recovery? What would be key ingredients of an urban recovery framework?