

# HUMANITARIAN AID

ESSENTIALS FOR  
AID VOLUNTEERS



Confederația  
Caritas  
România

**EU Aid Volunteers**  
We Care, We Act



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# FOREWORD

*You want to work as a volunteer in Humanitarian Aid – either in your own country or abroad? While you read these lines, there are thousands of people in the world who are affected by disaster(s) and are in urgent need of support to survive in dignity.*

*By working as a volunteer, you express your solidarity with these people and you become a member of the community of the people and organizations helping those most in need.*

*However, your will and enthusiasm to help will not be enough. To become a valuable volunteer, able to support the team of a humanitarian organization, certain knowledge and skills are necessary and expected.*

*This pocket guide introduces you to some basic issues of humanitarian aid. You will learn about disasters, general principles and standards in humanitarian aid and about how humanitarian aid programs are organized. You will also learn about the work of Caritas, one of the largest humanitarian networks in the world. Lastly, this pocket guide will focus on your own security and well-being during a humanitarian mission.*

*This pocket guide is a short introduction, providing the most important information in a compact format. The organization you will work for as a volunteer will further prepare you for your mission and will offer you guidance and training. If you are interested in specific subjects, you will find documents published by Caritas and other organizations either on the internet or at your organization.*

*We hope that this pocket guide will be helpful for you and enable you to better understand the humanitarian world. In case you will be working somewhere to support disaster affected people, the information in this guide will be useful to do your job as aid volunteer!*

# WHAT IS A DISASTER?

Disasters seem to have become an almost everyday phenomenon. Events connected to nature such as floods, storms, droughts and earthquakes bring destruction and suffering to growing numbers of people. Other disasters are directly caused by man: war and violence kill or injure people, others have to flee their homes.

Despite different reasons for disasters, they share several common characteristics: disasters affect a large group of people and/or communities causing human suffering and despair. There are massive material losses and damages and in most cases, there are also significant damages to the natural environment.

Disasters cause a serious disruption in the functioning of communities or societies who usually do not have sufficient resources to cope with the situation.



=

$$\frac{\text{HAZARD X VULNERABILITY}}{\text{CAPACITY}}$$



“Hazard” describes a potentially damaging physical event, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation independent of the influence of the affected community. In the case of natural disasters, hazards are events in nature such as an earthquake itself or strong rainfalls causing floods and landslides. A hazard alone does not result in a disaster; just imagine an earthquake that happens in a place where nobody lives.



“Vulnerability” is the human part of the disaster. It describes the communities’ and people’s level of vulnerability, their weak points when facing a disaster; for example, the fact that houses are built in the floodplain or are not built with earthquake-safe construction methods. People are vulnerable if they are not told in time that their village will be flooded and if they do not know what to do when the floods reach their houses. All these vulnerabilities have one point in common: they can be reduced. We can reduce vulnerabilities by building „capacities“, meaning knowledge, skills and resources which help communities and people to cope with a disaster and to reduce its impact.



“Disaster Risk” describes to what extent a community is threatened by disasters and depends on the scale of the hazard, people’s vulnerabilities and their capacities to cope with disasters. If the community is exposed to major hazards and there are many and serious vulnerabilities, the risk is high. If vulnerabilities are reduced and capacities strengthened, the risk is reduced.

# FREQUENT TYPES OF DISASTERS



## FLOODS



Onset



Duration



Extent

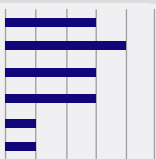
rapid

limited

local/regional

### Effects

Destruction of homes  
Major displacement  
Flood scarcity  
Communicable disease  
Severe injuries  
Death



## FLASH FLOODS



Onset



Duration



Extent

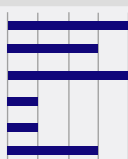
sudden/rapid

punctual

local

### Effects

Destruction of homes  
Major displacement  
Flood scarcity  
Communicable disease  
Severe injuries  
Death



## EARTHQUAKES



Onset



Duration



Extent

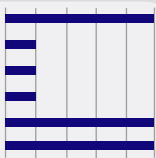
sudden

punctual

regional

### Effects

Destruction of homes  
Major displacement  
Flood scarcity  
Communicable disease  
Severe injuries  
Death



## LANDSLIDES



Onset



Duration



Extent

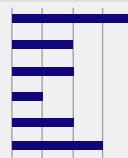
sudden

punctual

regional

### Effects

Destruction of homes  
Major displacement  
Flood scarcity  
Communicable disease  
Severe injuries  
Death



## TROPICAL STORMS



Onset



Duration



Extent

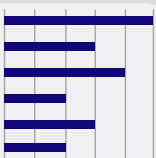
rapid

limited

regional

### Effects

Destruction of homes  
Major displacement  
Flood scarcity  
Communicable disease  
Severe injuries  
Death



## COMPLEX EMERGENCIES



Onset



Duration



Extent

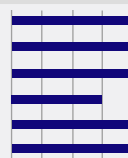
rapid

limited

regional

### Effects

Destruction of homes  
Major displacement  
Flood scarcity  
Communicable disease  
Severe injuries  
Death



# WHAT IS HUMANITARIAN AID?

Humanitarian aid is the organized response to the suffering of thousands of people affected by natural and man-made disasters. It has the purpose of saving lives, reducing suffering and respecting human dignity.

Humanitarian aid offered by organizations such as Caritas is based on the belief/principle that all people affected by disaster or conflict have the right to receive protection and assistance to ensure the fulfillment of basic living conditions and a life in dignity.

## Who are the main actors in case of a major humanitarian crisis?

There are many actors involved in the efforts to support disaster affected communities. And don't forget: one of the main actors is always the affected community itself. Disaster affected communities are never just passive recipients of aid, but important actors to improve their situation

The involvement of so many actors raises another important issue: coordination between all the actors involved in assisting those affected by a disaster.



## DISASTER

### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Safe constructions, information and preparedness, planning

### REHABILITATION

Reconstruction of homes, community institutions, infrastructure; livelihood programs

### FIRST INTERVENTION: SURVIVING, BASIC NEEDS

Food, water, shelter, medical services, psycho-social support

### EARLY RECOVERY

Shelter and basic needs, cleaning-up, community services (school, health), livelihoods

# HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES?

The four humanitarian principles are at the center of our humanitarian work and they unite us with other actors of the humanitarian community.

## HUMANITY

1

Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health, and ensure respect for human beings.

## IMPARTIALITY

2

Humanitarian action must be carried out based on need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress. It must make no adverse distinction because of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion.

## INDEPENDENCE

3

Humanitarian action must be autonomous. In other words, it must be independent from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may have in relation to areas where humanitarian action should be implemented.

## NEUTRALITY

4

Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## *Caritas and Humanitarian Principles*

As humanitarian organization of the Catholic Church, the response of Caritas to the needs of people affected by disasters is based on and driven by the Christian Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching, acknowledging the goal of the common good and each and everyone's rights and responsibilities in achieving it.

Caritas adheres to the humanitarian principles and standards defined by the humanitarian community. Caritas works with people of all faiths and those who have none. Aid is given regardless of race, creed or nationality of recipients and without discrimination of any kind.

# THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARDS

The international humanitarian community agrees to follow a common set of nine standards, which apply to all agencies, but also individuals working in humanitarian aid. These standards enable organizations and aid workers (including volunteers) to deliver their best work and to be accountable to the communities they serve.



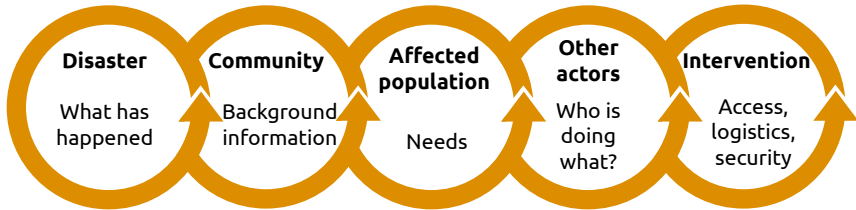
More information about the Core Humanitarian Standard can be found here:

<https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/>

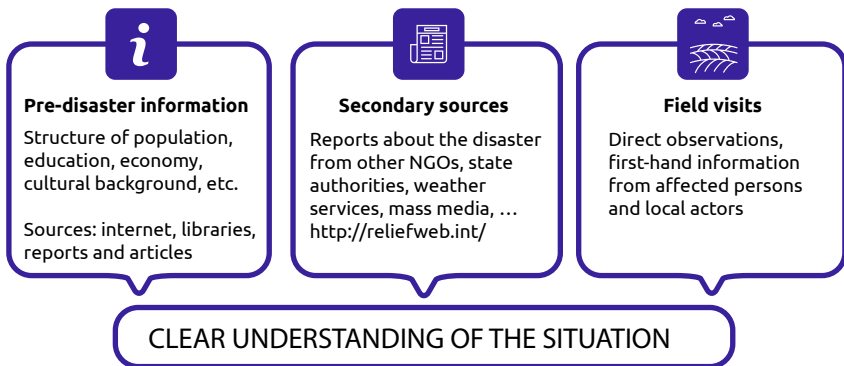
# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment provides all necessary information to plan and implement a humanitarian response. A sound needs assessment is the first step of a successful humanitarian intervention. As a volunteer, you might be a part of this process.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT



To collect this information fast and efficiently, the humanitarian organization will have to access different sources of information



## Some methods used during a field visit:


- ▶ **Direct observations:** A visit through a disaster-affected community (if possible) offers great opportunities to get a first impression about the impact of the disaster, the community's structure and helps to get in contact with community members.
- ▶ **Mapping:** Maps showing affected areas and other important information can be drawn either by hand or using software like google maps.
- ▶ **Interviews** with affected persons, representatives from local authorities and other local stakeholders
- ▶ **Local contacts** to other NGOs working in the community

## NEEDS OF DISASTER AFFECTED PEOPLE

What do people need to survive a disaster? There are several basic needs that have to be covered, so that people can live in dignity:

- ▶ **Water, sanitation and hygiene:** This includes water for drinking, cooking and hygiene; proper and safe sanitary facilities and the possibility to keep the places, where they stay, clean.
- ▶ **Food:** Access to sufficient, culturally accepted food covering all nutritious needs.
- ▶ **Shelter and non-food items (such as clothing, bedding and household items):** This includes a dry, warm and protected place to stay and basic items needed to organize life.
- ▶ **Access to health care** (including mental health)
- ▶ **Protection** (from violence, abuse and further harm)

The Sphere Handbook provides clear standards and indicators that help us to measure if all needs are covered.

 **Keep in mind:** Not all needs are necessarily uncovered after a disaster. Even after a disaster people might have their own resources and capacities to cover their needs. Offering assistance where people are able to provide for their needs by themselves, will reduce their capacity to cope with the situation and to recover later. Each form of assistance should be organized in a way to strengthen people's capacities to cover their needs by themselves.

Some other needs are, in most cases, covered by other actors – local organizations and religious groups, other NGOs, government institutions etc. A sound needs assessment helps to identify needs, which urgently must be covered by a humanitarian intervention.

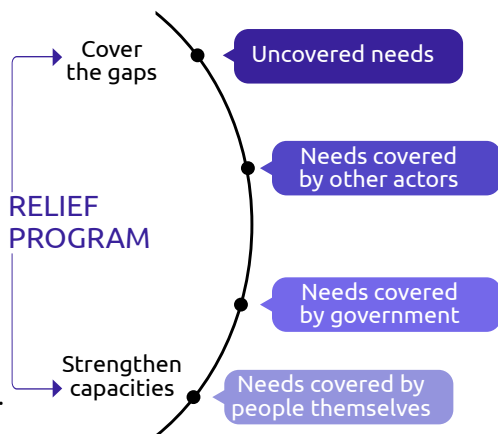


The Sphere Handbook can be found online at:

<http://www.spherehandbook.org/>

Additional information:

<http://www.sphereproject.org/>

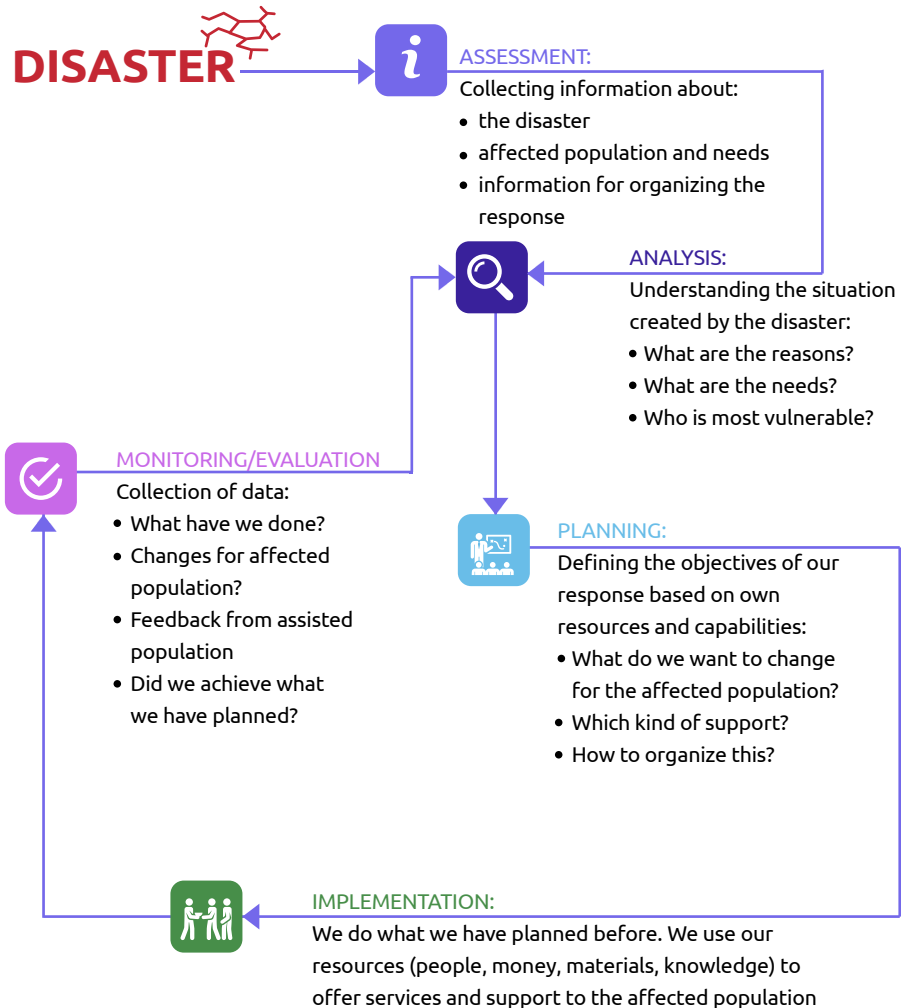


Be aware that with the time passing, needs might change, and new uncovered needs might appear (for example after many organizations have left the area). While in the first days and weeks after a disaster, surviving in dignity is everyone's priority; later, additional issues emerge: access to education for children, rehabilitation of livelihoods, reconstruction of homes and infrastructure.

# ORGANIZING HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarian aid projects are organized following the same principles as other projects. One important difference is speed: there is much less time for doing the assessment, analyzing the information and planning the intervention.

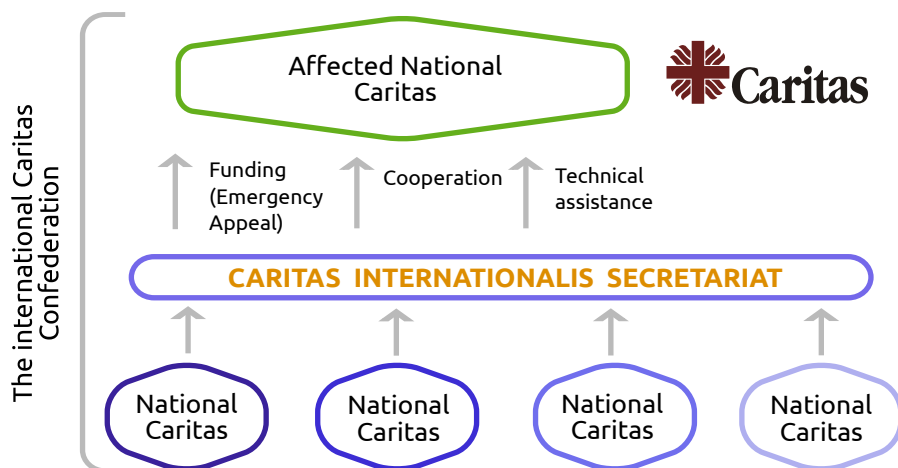
The project cycle describes the necessary steps for organizing a humanitarian aid program. Since the situation in a crisis changes rapidly, there will be several phases of assessment, analysis and planning, implementation, monitoring and re-assessment leading to redefining the response program and adapting it to the changing needs.



## HOW DOES CARITAS WORK IN EMERGENCIES?

Caritas is one of the largest networks of humanitarian organizations in the world with independent member organizations in more than 160 countries. All these organizations are united by common values and principles, a coordination structure (the Caritas Internationalis Secretariat General in Rome) and their affiliation to the Catholic Church.

In case of an emergency, the national Caritas organization of the affected country is the key actor, hence Caritas is often already present, when a disaster happens. If the resources of the national organization are insufficient to respond to the disaster, the worldwide network offers its solidarity, coordinated by the Caritas International Secretariat



The mechanisms of support, provided by Caritas Internationalis are described in the CI Toolkit and its annexes. The CI Toolkit is a manual supporting Caritas staff in emergencies which outlines project proposal, budget and reporting formats and informs about the procedures how to reach out to the global Caritas network.

### Most important support mechanisms:



**Funding support:** The affected national Caritas organization has the possibility to request financial support from the network by submitting an "Emergency Appeal". All procedures for requesting this support, implementation, monitoring and reporting are described in the CI Toolkit Manual.



**Technical assistance:** The affected organization can request either a support team (called ERST – Emergency Response Support Team) or experts in a specific field to support them in assessment, planning and implementing a humanitarian aid program.



**Coordination:** Caritas Internationalis coordinates the efforts of member organizations of the network for the affected Caritas organization, but also with other international actors.

## TALKING WITH DISASTER AFFECTED PEOPLE

When working as a volunteer in the field, you will be in direct contact with people affected by the disaster at different moments: whilst conducting interviews and field visits for the needs assessment, during distributions of relief items, information meetings and discussions with individuals and groups or during other activities with people from the affected community.

Whenever you are in direct contact with disaster affected people, be aware that they went through a crisis and might be traumatized. They might have lost somebody or something important for them, or maybe they are suffering for other reasons. These people have the right to be treated in dignity. The way we communicate and interact with them can help them to cope with their situation or can make them feel worse (worthless, depended, not respected) which will reduce their capacity to cope with their situation.

### *Some suggestions when communicating with affected persons:*

**1** Listening can be more important than talking. Focus all your attention on the communication and do not do anything else at the same time. But also, do not force people to speak.

**4** Adapt your language to the language and level of education of the people you are talking to. Speak clearly and understandably.

**2** Be aware of local cultures, religions and traditions, especially when working in an environment that is unknown to you. For example, it might be inappropriate for a man to talk to a woman. Remember to wear appropriate clothes.

**5** Do not promise anything that you or your organization will not be able to honor. This is especially important during the needs assessment phase.

**3** Whenever possible, introduce yourself and explain your intentions.

**6** If you do not have a common language: In some situations, non-verbal communication might be sufficient (for example during a distribution). But whenever it is essential to transmit precise information (in both directions!) look for the help of somebody who is able to translate.

#### **X** Do not say this

I know how you feel.

It could have been worse.

Life must be resumed where it was left off.

You can always have another animal, another car, another house.

#### **But you can say that** ✓

It is normal to feel these things.

It was not your fault, you did what you could.

These reactions are normal for a person who passed through this kind of traumatic experiences.

You can always have another animal, another car, another house.

## DEALING WITH STRESS

Humanitarian aid workers often witness human tragedies, serious physical injury, death and violence. Long working days, difficult working conditions and working in an insecure environment may also aggravate a stressful working situation.

In order to reduce stress, which will affect you during your humanitarian mission, consider the following points:

### *Before you start your field work:*

Being well prepared for your mission reduces the feeling of uncertainty leading to stress:

- ▶ Inform yourself about the local situation and what you can expect
- ▶ Make yourself familiar with your tasks during your mission

### *During your work in the field:*

When working in a disaster affected area, you are likely to feel a fair amount of pressure, especially in terms of huge workloads, being in contact with suffering people, frustrations that you are not able to help and fast changing situations

- 1** Take your time to have a rest and have breaks to eat and to drink.
- 2** Try to have a reasonable work program.
- 3** Do not drink alcohol, large amounts of coffee and do not take medicines to reduce your stress.
- 4** Find time to talk to your colleagues, superiors or other trusted people about your experience; you will hopefully find support in your team. At the same time, you can also be supportive to other team members.
- 5** When talking about your experience, try to focus on the positive aspects, on what you are doing and how you succeed in improving the situation of affected people instead of talking about losses, suffering and the general, often hopeless situation.
- 6** Accept what you did well, what did not work well and the limits of what you could do in these circumstances.

### *After you finish your work:*

Witnessing a disaster and its consequences will affect you for a long time and will become a part of your experience. Try to have a final discussion with your superiors and team colleagues to reflect about what has happened, your experiences and what is bothering you. Take some rest.

The security of people working in humanitarian aid programs is a top priority and it must also be a priority for volunteers. Be aware that when working in a disaster affected area, assisting the people will become your paramount interest and there is a high risk that you will not care for your own security any more.



**Remember:** Rescue teams and other aid workers are there to assist the communities affected by the disaster, not to use their resources to rescue and care for aid workers who became victims by themselves!

Your security during working in a humanitarian crisis always has two aspects: your own behavior and the responsibility of your organization for your and the other team members' security.

- ▶ Use your common sense to understand what might be dangerous.
- ▶ Never do anything you are not prepared for. For example, if you are not trained in rescue, it is not your task to save people from collapsed buildings or from the water.
- ▶ Inform yourself and be aware of possible risks. These risks include health hazards caused by the disaster, but also human threats, especially in situations of conflict, violence and social unrest
- ▶ The organization you are working for should have its own security plans and procedures. If nobody informed you, look for the person responsible for security and ask to be introduced to the organization's security policy, plans, procedures and the situation in the area where you will work.
- ▶ Always follow security instructions of your superiors and all security regulations.
- ▶ Make sure that you have insurance (commonly your organization provides insurance) to cover accidents and illness.
- ▶ Make sure that you are protected against health risks and that you have received all vaccinations necessary for the area.

### *Some examples of dangers during and after natural disasters:*

Moving water is extremely dangerous. Already 20 cm of fast moving water has the power to flush you away. Crossing moving water by car is also highly dangerous.

Flood water might be contaminated by dangerous substances. Avoid getting in direct contact with flood water

Buildings affected by earthquake or landslides may collapse at any time, especially if there are aftershocks. Do not enter damaged buildings if you don't know that they are safe.



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#### **Legal disclaimer:**

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