

Urban Competency Framework for Humanitarian Action

Introduction

As part of work being undertaken by the Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC), RedR UK is developing a competency framework for those engaged in humanitarian action in urban crises. A draft document has been created which is now being circulated for consultation.

What is the UCF?

The Urban Competency Framework for Humanitarian Action (UCF) defines the competencies (the behaviours and skill sets) which are required by people who are operating in a humanitarian capacity in urban crises. It is applicable to those who consider their role to be humanitarian and who are guided by humanitarian principles. The UCF is applicable to employees and volunteers working for or with a wide range of organisations operational in urban settings.

By describing the competencies required in urban crises, the UCF:

- Enables individuals to assess their own suitability for working in urban crises, identify competencies which they need to further develop and provide a common language for describing their abilities as they enter and progress through their humanitarian careers;
- Supports organisations to recruit, deploy and manage professionals who are suitable for working in a humanitarian capacity in urban settings and to support their further professional development;
- Provides a basis on which Educational and Adult Learning Institutions can build courses and materials that are relevant to the needs of learners entering or operating in urban crises.

What is an urban crisis?

There are significant differences within and between cities and other urban areas. However, despite these differences, urban areas share certain defining characteristics that shape, and at times exacerbate, the humanitarian impact of disasters for urban populations and which can of themselves lead to crises.

While acknowledging the differences within and between cities, and the sometimes blurred distinctions between rural and urban, ALNAP list the following as characteristics that urban settings share¹: defined municipal/ administrative

¹ Campbell, L. (2016) Stepping back: understanding cities and their systems. ALNAP Working Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI.



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boundaries; complex, interdependent social pressures; diverse livelihoods and income opportunities; higher proportion of built-up area; cash-based economy; presence of essential services and infrastructure; concentration of administrative structures such as government and hospitals; high population density.

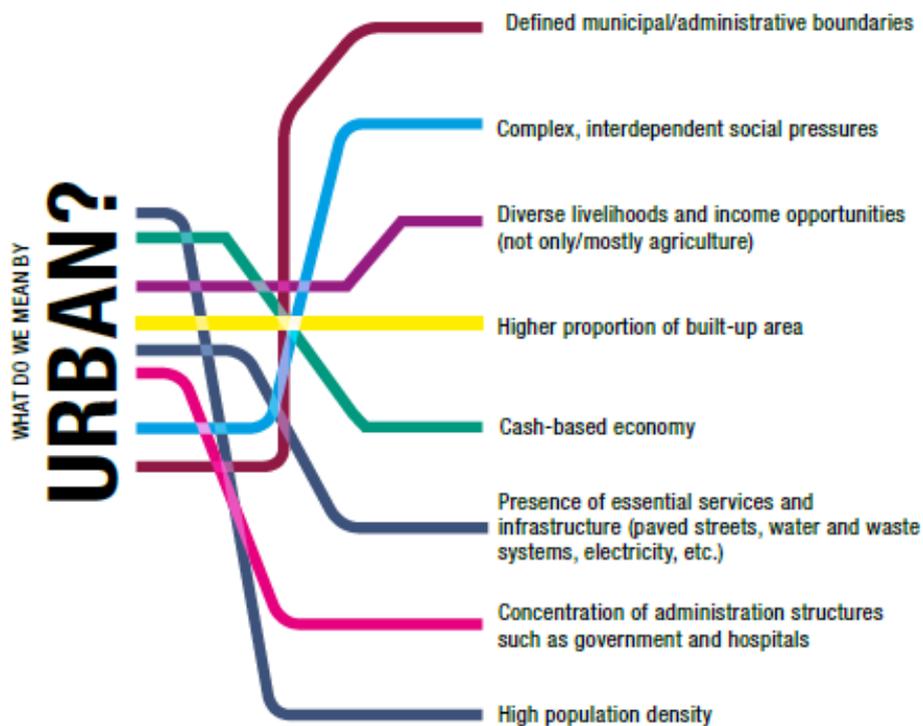


Figure 1: Characteristics of Urban Areas²

These characteristics can exacerbate, shape and catalyse acute and chronic crises, determine the nature of vulnerability and risk impacting urban populations, and provide opportunities for communities, and those supporting them, to cope with, adapt to and recover from shocks.

Analysing 39 major emergencies affecting urban areas from the 1990s to the present, UCL's Development Planning Unit in a paper commissioned to inform DfID's humanitarian work in urban areas, identified six types of urban crises:

- **Urban areas shaped by poorly planned and managed urban population growth** where there is a resultant increased risk of crises such as disease epidemics, violence and internal displacement;
- **Urban areas affected by forced displacement** with an influx of people into urban areas who largely move into informal settlements with poor living conditions and limited access to services or economic opportunities;
- **Urban areas affected by disasters and climate change** where risks from natural and technological hazards and climate change exacerbate endemic poverty, limited access to services and inadequate governance systems causing people and built stock to be more vulnerable to shocks;

² Ibid, pg 3



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- **Urban areas affected by conflict and violence** caused by war as well as by state failures to adequately plan growth, provide welfare and ensure the security of the population causing a high level of civic violence;
- **Urban areas affected by complex emergencies** with multiple types of crises simultaneously impacting the urban population;
- **Urban areas affected by chronic poverty, risk and insecurity** where an acute crisis exacerbates existing vulnerabilities³.

Those operating in a humanitarian capacity need to understand the characteristics of urban settings and urban crises, and the risks and opportunities they entail, both as broadly applicable concepts and as specific features of the urban context in which they are working. In order to maximise humanitarian and protection outcomes for affected urban populations and subpopulations, humanitarians need to work in ways that are appropriate to these contexts and demonstrate the competencies that will allow them to do this effectively.

What competencies are included in the UCF?

The UCF outlines competencies that those engaged in humanitarian action in urban crises need to demonstrate in order to work effectively in these contexts. Although the competencies have value in other contexts also, they are considered to be particularly important for all those working in urban settings.

Humanitarians in this context need to:

- Work with a wide diversity of stakeholders with complex and competing interests and needs;
- Operate within complex, multi-layered governance structures, navigating the gaps between policy and practice;
- Work in a built environment understanding the potential risks arising from and within that environment as well as the interplay between people and the physical space;
- Promote social cohesion between multiple, disparate groups;
- Prioritise at-risk and marginalised populations, ensuring equitable access to assistance;
- Adopt a holistic people-centred approach that addresses interconnected needs with both short- and long-term solutions that seek to build resilience;
- Facilitate equitable access to services and infrastructure taking into account areas which may have been under-served or unserved before the crisis;
- Promote livelihoods and a sustainable economy in a predominantly cash based economy;
- Manage programmes in a dynamic environment, monitoring, anticipating and adapting to change appropriately;
- Maintain professionalism amongst complexity and change and amongst competing pressures which may impact on one's personal integrity;

³ Brown, D. et al (2015) Urban Crises and Humanitarian Response: A Literature Review. London: The Bartlett Development Planning Unit UCL/ DFID



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- Apply the humanitarian principles consistently and appropriately despite pressures and challenges posed by the urban context;
- Operate safely and securely understanding the manifestations of risk in the urban setting.

Does the UCF replace the Core Humanitarian Competency Framework?

The UCF incorporates the core humanitarian competencies that are articulated in the CHCF and applies these specifically to the urban context. The UCF articulates behaviours within those competencies that are particularly relevant for the urban context. The UCF does not replace the CHCF but builds on it, and it is recommended that all those working in humanitarian action in urban context should be familiar with the CHCF. The following chart demonstrates where the CHCF competencies have been incorporated into the UCF.

Core Humanitarian Competency Framework	Urban Competency Framework for Humanitarian Action
Understanding humanitarian contexts and applying humanitarian principles and standards	Applying humanitarian principles in urban contexts
Demonstrating leadership	Managing programmes in a dynamic urban environment
Achieving results	Maintaining professionalism amongst complexity and change
Managing in a pressured and changing environment	
Operating safely and securely	Operating safely and securely
Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships	Working with diverse stakeholders

The CHCF can be accessed at: <https://www.chsalliance.org/what-we-do/chcf>



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How does the UCF apply to specific roles?

The UCF outlines the competencies that are applicable to all those working in a humanitarian capacity in urban crises but it does not include competencies that are specific to particular roles.

A specific role or organisation may require employees or volunteers to demonstrate additional competencies or have specific skills, values, qualifications or experience. These may include:

- Competencies related to a specialisation that may not be required by all humanitarians to the same degree such as the competencies required by a structural engineer, a MEAL coordinator or a finance manager;
- Skills that may relate to linguistic, IT or driving abilities;
- Values related to the belief systems or faith of the organisation;
- Qualifications granted by academic or professional bodies as a pre-requisite or license for working in a specific field;
- Experience of working for a period in a similar context or in a similar role.

The Urban Competency Framework is produced through funding provided to the International Rescue Committee from EU Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). It is part of a wider project for the Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC) entitled 'Developing the skills to meet the needs of urban populations in crises through the alliance of urban responders'.



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