How to Apply the Checklist on Scaling Up Disaster Risk Reduction in Humanitarian Action

Context

The world is experiencing an unprecedented moment of fragility and uncertainty. We have no option but to change how we reduce risk and manage crises. In our increasingly connected world, where risks cascade, we are missing critical opportunities to improve how we reduce risk in humanitarian contexts. Response efforts have typically been focused on short-term needs. Few humanitarian planning documents fully analyse disaster-related risks and the impact of climate in humanitarian settings. Very few humanitarian appeals include disaster risk reduction (DRR) or climate adaptation efforts. With protracted crises typically making up 80% of the humanitarian portfolio it is important to address root causes of humanitarian needs. By bringing together humanitarian and development actors in protracted settings, we can address both needs and risks. To achieve this, more systematic approaches to risk analysis and planning are required.

Overview

The Checklist on Scaling Up Disaster Risk Reduction in Humanitarian Action developed by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), in collaboration with other partners, serves as a practical tool for humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actors/practitioners, offering comprehensive guidance, recommendations to help reduce emerging and existing risks, as well as make risk reduction considerations more integral to humanitarian planning and programming globally and at the country level.

The checklist aims to help operationalise collaboration between HDP efforts, ensuring a comprehensive, systems-based approach to risk analysis that takes into account all relevant factors. The identification and prioritization of DRR actions can be adapted to national contexts and should be based on and respond to a corresponding risk analysis. This way, the checklist can be used to jointly guide humanitarian actors involved in annual planning to identify entry points for strengthening risk reduction. This can be undertaken as a separate workshop or session, ensuring integration and alignment across sectors.

Application of the checklist results in:

Risk-informed planning:
- Supports operationalisation of risk-informed humanitarian action through specific risk reduction activities.
- Provides suggestions on how HDP actors might work jointly on collective outcomes to reduce risk, respond more effectively to needs, and engage with root causes.

Increased awareness:
- Raises awareness among government entities, donor organisations and partner organisations on the advantages of integrating DRR within humanitarian response efforts. Encourages actors to prioritise and invest in DRR measures to reduce future humanitarian needs.
Key points

The checklist is organised in key points to support more effective implementation by relevant actors. The different sections include:

Section 1 - Recommended actions for integrating risk within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC): Provides a comprehensive overview of each stage of the HPC process, including preparedness, needs assessment and analysis, humanitarian strategic planning, resource mobilisation, and response monitoring.

Section 2 - DRR actions falling outside the HPC: Promote collaboration between humanitarian and development efforts, adopt a human rights-based, gender-responsive, and conflict-sensitive approach, and implement risk reduction measures at the local level in humanitarian contexts.

Section 3 - DRR as part of humanitarian enablers: Provides several valuable recommendations for integrating DRR dialogue and activities within the various coordination mechanisms and information management products that HDP actors utilise at both the global and country levels.

Further related information & references

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), E-learning Course on Checklist on Scaling Up Disaster Risk Reduction in Humanitarian Action. This free training provides an in-depth look at the structure and application of the checklist and is available to all actors.

OCHA, Humanitarian Programme Cycle facilitation package. This document provides an overview of what information to present and how to do so in the development of the HPC.

UNDRR, Guidance Note on Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. This document suggests actions to take to ensure risk-informed development programming.


Examples of checklist application:

In Ethiopia:
- A risk analysis workshop, organised by UNDRR and OCHA in Ethiopia, in 2023, included a session on the checklist. Participants of the workshop, grouped into clusters, were invited to reflect on which of the proposed actions were considered a priority for their organisation/cluster. While the session highlighted gaps in continuous DRR training and private sector involvement, it also revealed common priorities amongst clusters such as engaging the development community and mapping local stakeholders’ capacities, which are jointly being moved forward.

In the Americas:
- In 2023, UNDRR collaborated with OCHA in Central America’s Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras) to conduct risk-informed training sessions, including a checklist application introduction, into broader humanitarian needs assessments. Over 120 humanitarian and development partners jointly analysed, through a scaled-up risk perspective, critical issues like climate change, migration impact, governmental services, economic crises, and protection from a risk perspective. In 2024, UNDRR continues to work with OCHA to systematically integrate risk perspectives into overall planning, using the checklist as a tool and advocating for risk-informed programming to reduce humanitarian needs and enhance sustainable resilience. Through dedicated capacity, UNDRR is supporting UN and national actors in checklist application and systematic risk-informed planning in Haiti and El Salvador.

Test the checklist tool: Use this tool to prioritize DRR in humanitarian contexts.

1 See UNDRR, Unpacking risks for humanitarian planning in Central America.