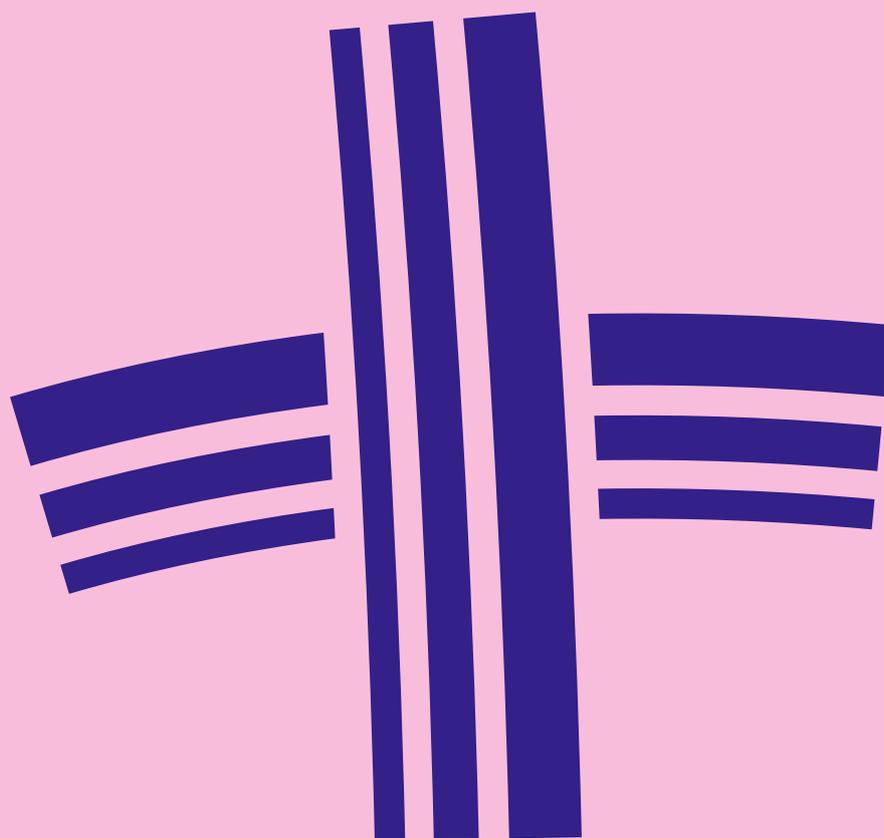


OPINION PAPER

Latvian humanitarian aid system



Context

Humanitarian aid activities are implemented in situations where there is a need to save lives, alleviate suffering and improve people's survival during and after crises by strengthening people's own capacity to respond to crises. It is driven by the principles of humanity.

European Union member states and European Union institutions are among the most important providers of humanitarian aid in the world. Humanitarian aid is received by people who have found themselves in a difficult situation as a result of human activity or natural disasters. They need shelter, food, water, medicine and healthcare. Support is provided to all who need it, regardless of ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender, age and political beliefs.

Latvia has not established a humanitarian aid system for helping in crisis situations that have occurred in foreign countries. Decisions are made politically, diverting finances from contingency funds. Our country has sent both material and financial aid in crisis situations, most often using various intermediary organisations that are already working in crisis-affected areas.

The association "Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation" (hereinafter – *LAPAS*) has focused on the issue of the creation of a humanitarian aid system since 2013 when the first discussions were held with representatives and experts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter – MFA). From 2013–2016, in cooperation with *LAPAS* member organisation ADRA, fund-raising campaigns were carried out for victims of earthquakes in the Philippines, Nepal and Italy, as well as for those injured in Euromaidan in Ukraine.

Civil society organisations (hereinafter – CSOs) play an important role in the first crisis response to provide immediate assistance where it is most needed. Further phase CSOs can also provide support to groups of society that "drop out" of aid systems.

In order to promote the involvement of Latvian CSOs in humanitarian aid projects, *LAPAS* carried out capacity-building measures in 2017–2018 by organising training on the certification process, implementing informational measures and other activities.

Since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, residents, companies and institutions of Latvia have become active aid providers to Ukraine.

The new draft Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2024–2027 includes a vision for the creation of a humanitarian aid system, directing a targeted share of development cooperation funding for it.

In order to consult with different parties on the vision of the humanitarian aid system, *LAPAS* held discussions where they discussed needs and challenges, experiences and opportunities.

This document summarises the results of the discussions and is a proposal for a further consultation process on the establishment of a humanitarian aid system.

Situation and challenges

Having assessed the current situation, it can be established that different ways of providing humanitarian aid exist in Latvia:

- immediate collection and dispatch of humanitarian aid in a crisis situation – performed by any organisation, including municipalities, and companies;
- continued collection and delivery of humanitarian aid to longer-term crises – carried out by charitable organisations, and fragmentarily, also by municipalities and companies;
- state contributions to international organisations for the diversion of resources to crisis situations;
- the civil protection mechanism of the European Union and the diversion of Latvia's material reserves through it (in some cases also the property of private individuals);
- volunteers who go to work;
- military assistance.

It should be emphasised that humanitarian aid and social support providers cannot be completely separated, even in crisis situations in Latvia, such as floods. Humanitarian aid providers can be involved in the prevention of crises both in Latvia and abroad; very often they are the same organisations. Thus, by strengthening Latvian humanitarian aid providers, the resilience of Latvia is also developed.

The challenges of Latvian organisations in the provision of humanitarian aid can be mostly evaluated in the context of Ukraine, as it is the first experience of providing direct aid from its donation/procurement to delivery to the final recipient.

During the discussions and gathering of experiences, it can be concluded that there are mainly the following challenges:

- organisations have learnt how to provide humanitarian aid through experience (with some exceptions); there are no investments available for increasing the efficiency of infrastructure;
- a special challenge – situations on the borders, solving problems on them, lack of information about current events;
- there is an increase in corruption visible on the Ukrainian side, and at the same time higher control on the Ukrainian side, which affects Latvian humanitarian aid providers;

- organisations compete for public resources and the favour of state institutions;
- organisations lack administrative resources – there is practically no capacity for project tenders, and no skills to obtain them;
- organisations are not provided with safety equipment/local support is self-developed;
- several organisations do not see themselves in this field of activity from a long-term perspective - there is no motivation to improve the activity;
- aid to the army limits the possibilities of obtaining humanitarian aid from other funders;
- international humanitarian aid providers are a closed circle;
- Humanitarian and military aid are strictly separated at the EU and global levels, which is a challenge for Latvian organisations to attract international funding.

Necessity and opportunities

Strengthening of the Latvian CSOs for the provision of humanitarian aid is essential not only for strengthening internal resilience and civic responsibility as well as for showing international solidarity, but the Latvian CSOs are able to carry out activities, which is a specific advantage, and respond to needs better than formal organisations:

- Latvian CSOs are able to supply needs that other humanitarian aid providers are not able to provide, including to the front and military;
- Latvian humanitarian aid providers have established direct contacts with partners, which gives confidence regarding the effective use of donations;
- The Ukrainian side sees and appreciates the support provided by Latvia; the embassy in Latvia provides support within the limits of its possibilities.

There is also funding for assistance to Ukraine at the European level; therefore, Latvian organisations would also have access to resources for development in this area.

Undoubtedly, the active diplomatic work of Latvia in Ukraine and Poland, providing support for the sending of humanitarian aid cargoes and solving problem situations, and the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia in general should be highlighted.

Action proposals for LAPAS work for the year 2024

Based on the consultation process, *LAPAS* has prepared a series of proposals for further action and discussion. They will also be assessed in the context of the new *LAPAS* operational strategy and further developed.

1. Information flows/cooperation

- organise regular meetings for representatives of the MFA/embassies with humanitarian aid senders on current events, as well as for more effective information flows of humanitarian aid providers themselves on problem situations;
- for humanitarian aid providers to create effective direct communication with the embassies in Ukraine and Poland for solving problem situations;
- to continue cooperation with the Embassy of Ukraine both in support of sending and informing humanitarian aid cargoes, and in solving problem situations.

2. Training

- to organise training/practical workshops on the opportunities to attract international funding, certification process for humanitarian aid providers and CSO experience of other countries (Baltics, Eastern Europe);
- to increase the knowledge of humanitarian aid providers about the principles of humanitarian aid provision and the effective experience of other organisations, thereby improving the quality of the process and compliance with needs (good practices, recommendations, terminology, algorithms for volunteer drivers, etc.);
- to organise project writing training for new organisations.

3. Resource attraction/capacity

- to jointly advance a proposal for covering administrative costs (including storage costs) and fuel for those organisations that continue to actively provide humanitarian aid;
- when possible, consider the possibility of coordinating cargoes with each other by sending trucks; in such cases, state co-financing is especially supported.

4. Informing society

- to develop a humanitarian aid accounting methodology, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Chancellery;
- to popularise humanitarian aid providers, thus attracting volunteers and donations, as well as helping to sell various products for additional income.

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The association “Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation” is a network of national-level civil society organisations founded in 2004, which unites 39 organisations and operates in the field of sustainable and fair development, development cooperation, global education, community resilience and humanitarian aid.

More detailed information www.lapas.lv



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