



Donor Greening Working Group

Common Donor Priority Actions for Greening Humanitarian Assistance

The current global climate and environmental crisis contributes to an increase in humanitarian needs and affects how organisations respond to these. In addition to supporting communities to better adapt to the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, humanitarian organisations have a critical role in mitigating their climate and environmental impact; this is central to the “Do No Harm” principle.









In recent years, many humanitarian organisations have demonstrated strong leadership and efforts in greeningⁱ their operations. As of April 2025, 471 organisations have signed the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#), thereby committing to increasing their sustainability and reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Thirteen donors also formally support the Charter and their partners’ endeavours in this sense. Furthermore, 28 donors have signed the [Humanitarian Aid Donors’ Declaration on Climate and Environment](#) - the “donor equivalent” of the Charter - agreeing to undertake similar efforts and be held accountable to fellow signatories.

Building on this momentum, a group of like-minded humanitarian donors came together to establish the Donor Greening Working Group. This initiative was created to enhance coordination and drive collective action toward accelerating the greening of humanitarian assistance.

United by a shared ambition and vision, five Working Group members - namely AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation); CDCS (Crisis and Support Centre, French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs); DG ECHO (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission), GFFO (German Federal Foreign Office) and SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) - **have endorsed the ten “Common Donor Priority Actions for Greening Humanitarian Assistance” below.**

Through these Priority Actions, these five donors aim to demonstrate to the entire humanitarian sector that **greening is of paramount importance to them**. These collective actions will improve their coordination on greening and help prevent contradictions in the various guidelines, policies, or requirements that they ask partners to follow. Finally, the Priority Actions will support humanitarian organisations by offering clear guidance on where donors' priorities lie, and where to target their efforts.

These abovementioned donors encourage their partners and subgrantees to incorporate the following Priority Actions into their humanitarian response - including through joint efforts - and aim to do the same in their direct humanitarian interventions, where applicable:

-  **Priority Action 1:** Conduct environmental assessments of planned interventions and integrate mitigation measures.
-  **Priority Action 2:** Prioritise products and services with a proven lower climate and environmental footprint.
-  **Priority Action 3:** Implement measures to significantly minimise greenhouse gas emissions from travel and transport.
-  **Priority Action 4:** Incorporate environmentally sustainable waste management.
-  **Priority Action 5:** Phase out single-use plastics except where this would compromise the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
-  **Priority Action 6:** Avoid overexploitation and pollution of water resources and support proper waste- water management.
-  **Priority Action 7:** Avoid water trucking except as a last resort. If used, include a strategy to phase it out.
-  **Priority Action 8:** Phase out the use of fossil fuel generators where possible, reduce energy consumption and transition to renewable energy.
-  **Priority Action 9:** Facilitate access to sustainable and clean cooking solutions and services.
-  **Priority Action 10:** Support access to sustainably produced food, preferably locally produced.

Key Considerations

The list of Greening Priority Actions is not intended to be exhaustive. Recognising that humanitarian responses are context-specific, the implementation of these activities may not be possible in all circumstances and should not come at the expense of responding to humanitarian needs. Rather, the Greening Priority Actions highlight crucial ways of working that donors agree on and have chosen to prioritise, due to their potential climate and environmental impact – which is outlined below. Donors recognise that substantial efforts are already underway within many humanitarian organisations to change the way they deliver humanitarian assistance. This list builds on existing efforts, incorporating both "low-hanging fruit" and more ambitious initiatives.

Conduct environmental assessments of planned interventions and integrate mitigation measures: Conducting environmental assessments using tools and approaches can help humanitarian actors to identify unforeseen climate and environmental risks associated with planned interventions. They can therefore find ways to mitigate these risks, whilst also identifying opportunities for positive environmental outcomes, such as the promotion of nature-based solutions. Results of these assessments should shape project development, and mitigation measures for the most significant environmental impacts should be analysed, budgeted, and implemented at the field level.

Prioritise products and services with a proven lower climate and environmental footprint:

Procurement emissions represent on average between 40 and 60% of humanitarian organisations' GHG footprintⁱⁱⁱ. Measuring the climate and environmental footprint of humanitarian items throughout their life cycle, identifying the most frequently purchased items or those with the highest footprints and replacing them with sustainable alternatives are some of the actions that organisations can undertake. Purchasing items with sustainability certifications, engaging in joint procurement with other organisations, and encouraging suppliers to "go green" have also proven successful.

Implement measures to significantly minimise greenhouse gas emissions from travel and transport:

Reducing emissions from air travel is a low-hanging fruit, given that organisations and donor agencies have direct control over their travel policies and associated emissions. The benefits are significant, in terms both of reducing emissions and cost^{iv}. The most effective travel policies should focus on limiting international air travel to essential trips, reducing the use of business and first-class flights^v, promoting online participation in meetings and events, and increasing the use of local and regional expertise and staff. Additionally, reducing emissions by prioritising low carbon means to transport goods and encouraging pooled transportation are key.

Incorporate environmentally sustainable waste management:

Waste management is a critical issue that particularly affects countries receiving humanitarian assistance, as infrastructure and services may be lacking, or have been disrupted by the crisis. Responsible and sustainable management of humanitarian waste can help prevent pollution of air, soil, and water, and protect biodiversity in the countries we work in. Conducting accurate needs assessments to "right-size" procurement and reduce over-procurement; purchasing higher-quality, more durable items with longer life spans are some examples which can help actors reduce waste at source. Downstream, actors are encouraged to systematically collect packaging waste at designated sites, facilitate the reuse and repair of items, separate waste to identify opportunities for recycling, and implement appropriate disposal measures (e.g. for medical or vehicle workshop waste)^{vi}.

Phase out single-use plastics except where this would compromise the delivery of humanitarian assistance:

Plastic – as single-use items and packaging – is prevalent in humanitarian operations^{vii} and can generate significant pollution in the local communities where we work. Reducing unnecessary single-use plastics and replacing it with sustainable alternatives is key, and this course of action should be prioritised over recycling, given that global plastic recycling rates are low - estimated to be around 9%^{viii}. Humanitarian actors are encouraged to comply with evolving global and national legislation and regulatory frameworks^{ix} on the use of plastics in the countries where they operate.

Avoid overexploitation and pollution of water resources and support proper waste-water management:

Preserving the quantity and the quality of water resources in humanitarian contexts is essential, particularly in countries suffering from chronic water scarcity. When providing water, humanitarian organisations should be mindful to protect water sources and to monitor groundwater levels so as not to impact the natural recharge capacity of water resources. Waste-water generated by humanitarian activities should also be properly managed to avoid polluting local soil and water.

Avoid water trucking except as a last resort. If used, include a strategy to phase this out:

In addition to the costly nature of this practice, water trucks are usually diesel powered and generate emissions and air pollution. Furthermore, water trucking is often associated with low traceability of water sources

and/or the unsustainable extraction of water^x. Distribution of water through water trucking should be a temporary measure and one of last resort, while more permanent solutions are developed (rehabilitation of existing water infrastructures, construction of boreholes etc.)

Phase out the use of fossil fuel generators where possible, reduce energy consumption and transition to renewable energy: The humanitarian sector is highly dependent on the use of diesel generators to operate premises, vehicles and programmes. It is estimated that over 11,000 diesel generators are operating globally costing the sector over 100 million dollars a year in fuel and maintenance costs and emitting close to 200 000 tCO₂ yearly^{xi} (equivalent to 70000 Geneva-Nairobi return flights). Coupled with efforts to reduce energy consumption, transitioning to low emission and renewable sources of energy, when possible, can help reduce emissions, save costs and strengthen organisational resilience^{xii}.

Facilitate access to sustainable and clean cooking solutions and services: In humanitarian settings where food assistance is provided, a lack of clean cooking energy solutions and services often contributes to local deforestation and soil erosion^{xiii}. Promoting access to these as an integral part of the humanitarian response can bring multiple benefits such as environmental protection and improved health due to reduced exposure to unhealthy pollutants. It also brings improved protection outcomes^{xiv}, by decreasing the risks faced by women and children associated with satisfying increased demand for firewood, as well as the time they spend on cooking and collecting fuel.

Support access to sustainably produced food - preferably that which is locally produced: Food security and agricultural projects and programmes represent the largest proportion (50%) of the humanitarian sector's emissions^{xv}. While we must continue providing this essential assistance to people in need, by encouraging and supporting the production and purchase of sustainable food is pivotal to the environmental transformation of the sector. By prioritising low carbon food produce when possible^{xvi}, purchasing certified organic food items and working with international and local farmers and producers to improve their agriculture practices, humanitarian organisations can help to make food assistance greener.

ⁱ "Greening" refers to the integration of climate and environmental considerations into humanitarian response by identifying, assessing, and mitigating their impacts on our work. This involves minimising or avoiding negative environmental effects and leveraging opportunities for positive outcomes.

ⁱⁱ AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation); CDCS (Crisis and Support Centre, French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs); DG ECHO (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations), GFFO (German Federal Foreign Office) and SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation).

ⁱⁱⁱ Climate Action Accelerator, *Operational Playbook for Humanitarian Organisations*, 2024

^{iv} Climate Action Accelerator has estimated that choosing flights with lower emissions represents on average 0.4% savings on the overall yearly budget.

Climate Action Accelerator, *Operational Playbook for Humanitarian Organisations*, 2024

^v [Climate Action Accelerator](#) estimates that flying business class produces 3 times more CO₂ emissions per passenger than flying on economy class. 9 times more when flying first class.

^{vi} See resources from the Joint Initiative, the ICRC/Fleet Forum and WREC, for example

^{vii} Joint Initiative "Packaging Baseline Assessment based on Humanitarian Responses in 2021", March 2022

^{viii} OECD, *Global Plastics Outlook*, 2022

^{ix} Global plastic legislation database <https://www.globalplasticlaws.org/>

^x Virtual Environmental Humanitarian Advisor (VEHA) tool <https://ehaconnect.org/guidance/water-trucking/>

^{xi} See Global Platform for Action and UNITAR "[Estimating the use of diesel generators in displacement settings](#)" Glada Lahn & Owen Grafham "The Cost of Fuelling Humanitarian Aid" Chatham House, updated in 2020

^{xii} See [IOM in South Sudan](#), the [Red Cross in Puerto Rico](#) and [Save the Children in Sierra Leone](#). See, also [how humanitarian actors are working to solarize existing diesel-based energy systems in five countries in the Sahel](#)

^{xiii} DG ECHO *Environmental Footprint of Humanitarian Assistance* 2020

^{xiv} UNITAR & Global Platform for Action, *State of the Humanitarian Energy Sector*, 2022

^{xv} See page 4 and 18 of Climate Action Accelerator's *Roadmap for Halving GHG Emissions in the Humanitarian Sector by 2030*.

^{xvi} See page 18 of Climate Action Accelerator's *Roadmap for Halving GHG Emissions in the Humanitarian Sector by 2030*.