

## NEWS



## **Governance with empathy, leadership and gender perspective: the emergency response of metropolitan areas**

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In June 2020, Metropolis, in partnership with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the London School of Economics (LSE), launched the “Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions” (EGI). The aim of this project is to open up a space for reflection and research into the aspects necessary to make metropolitan governance a tool to respond to the enormous challenges sparked by both natural and human-made emergencies. One of these in particular is the unavoidable focus: the current pandemic.

This project is based on research, surveys and interviews with people in charge of managing emergencies in local and regional governments. Four policy briefs have been published, suggesting starting points for actions that mitigate the impact of emergencies on people's quality of life and accelerate the process of post-emergency recovery.

For example, the pandemic has accelerated the need to broaden our understanding of **what local public services should be in today's times**. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that some services must now be considered as new public services that are essential to recover from the current crisis, and increase our resilience to future ones, which experts warn will be more frequent. This will be the focus point for the next EGI issue paper, which is due to be published soon.

One of the differentiating factors of this project is that it focuses on **complex emergencies**—those that by their nature have a simultaneous impact, to varying degrees, on the cultural, civil, environmental and economic stability of societies. They are characterised by a high level of uncertainty and are difficult to limit in terms of both cause and consequences. Some such emergencies include obesity, malnutrition, shortage of affordable housing, inter-ethnic conflict and violence against women.

Beyond the conceptual ideas we are detailing here, some elements are particularly useful in the context of the metropolitan phenomenon. All of them arise from strategies that are being implemented by local and metropolitan governments to respond to the current health and social emergency as a result of Covid-19, that have been shown to have positive effects to mitigate the impact of this emergency.

## **Incorporating empathy in the design and communication of emergency responses**

In this context, empathy refers to active and constant listening to different stakeholders in the metropolitan space, in order to take on board their expectations, needs and suggestions and respond to the challenges brought about by emergencies in the best possible way. In terms of operations, this idea translates into **strengthening participatory processes for co-creating public policy**, for example. It also extends to communicating the results of participatory processes with empathy, and taking a similar approach to communications on the successes and mistakes made when managing singular or complex emergencies.

## **Designing a governance structure that exercises leadership and can coordinate emergency responses—through empathy**

This translates to all the stakeholders in any given area recognising that “emergency management is governments’ role par excellence” <sup>[1]</sup>. However, this is a very real need both during moments of crisis and non-crisis, and is only achieved when the government is based on a foundation of public legitimacy that has been built in times of non-emergency, and that guarantees **transparency and access to the data and information** produced by city management.

## **Integrating a gender perspective and factoring care into the**

## emergency response

This involves recognising that women experience crises and emergency response measures in a different way and may need policies that ensure they are not negatively and disproportionately affected. It also requires **the recognition and integration of care work as a key feature when designing emergency responses**.

These three lines of action (**empathy, leadership and gender**) are just some of the proposals made within the framework of this project, which, due to their relevance and applicability, may be particularly useful for metropolitan governments in charge of responding to different emergencies over the short and medium term. Their implementation must be prioritised depending on the characteristics of each metropolitan space. At Metropolis, we want to help our members find the necessary tools to do so.

*[1] Waugh, William L., Jr., Living with hazards, dealing with disasters: an introduction to emergency management 2000, Armonk, NY: Sharpe Publishers. Cited in the EGI.*

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For more information on the initiative, please [click here](#).

If you have any suggestions or would like further information, please contact Oscar Chamat-Nuñez, Research and Policy Officer at the Secretariat General Team.