

UNIVERSITIES AS CRISIS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COMMUNITIES



SCAN CARD · 04

DESCRIPTION

During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, refugee flows, climate-related disasters and social unrest, universities have provided physical space, expertise, coordination and logistical support — hosting vaccination centres, offering housing and education for displaced people, and coordinating local response networks. In many cases these actions were rapid and improvised, driven by necessity rather than prior planning.

As crises become more frequent and overlapping, universities risk entering a permanent 'reaction mode'. Expectations from governments and communities are rising, even though crisis engagement often falls outside formal institutional mandates and funding structures.

RELEVANCE

This trend expands the societal role of universities far beyond education and research — universities function as anchors of local resilience.

At the same time, unplanned crisis engagement can strain resources, staff capacity and institutional focus. Without clear boundaries, crisis response may undermine long-term strategic goals.

NEED

Universities need clearer frameworks defining their role in crisis situations, including realistic scope and limits. Coordination with public authorities, long-term funding mechanisms and internal preparedness structures are essential.

Without such clarification, universities risk institutionalising reactive crisis responses that undermine long-term strategic focus and resilience.

CATEGORY

Social · Political

SIGNAL STRENGTH

Strong



SCANNING METHOD

Case analysis · Policy review

SOURCES

UNESCO (2020) COVID-19 & Higher Ed · EC (2022) European Strategy for Universities · UNESCO (2021) Reimagining Futures · EUA (2021) Universities without Walls