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## International Humanitarian City as a global logistics hub in 2018-2021 – a case study

### Międzynarodowe Miasto Humanitarne jako globalny hub logistyczny w latach 2018-2021 – studium przypadku

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**Abstract.** The subject of the article is the functioning of the International Humanitarian City (IHC) as a global logistics hub in the humanitarian supply chain management (HSCM) in selected years. The justification for the selected issue is its importance in the context of responding to the humanitarian needs of the population mostly of Asia and Africa. Providing international humanitarian aid requires the provision of logistic solutions determining the development of HSCM.

The research objective of this article is determining the role of the International Humanitarian City (IHC), a global logistics hub in the international humanitarian supply chain in 2018-2021.

The research hypothesis is that the health, logistics and shelter were key sectors in the cluster approach represented in the IHC humanitarian activities in 2018-2021. The importance of IHC as an international logistics hub has grown due to high humanitarian needs of the population affected by the humanitarian crises of 2018-2021.

Achieving the research goal and verifying the hypotheses was possible thanks to the use of research methods as case study, desk research (analysis of existing data), analysis of documents published by the IHC, as well as the method of critical analysis of scientific literature.

The research concluded that the health, logistics and shelter sectors were the three key areas in humanitarian supply chain management, based on IHC activities. HSCM on the example of IHC was characterized by specialization in key areas of support for civilian populations. The specialization was typical of humanitarian logistics, corresponding to the cluster approach.

**Keywords:** crisis, humanitarian logistics, logistics centre, supply chain, humanitarian aid

**Abstrakt.** Przedmiotem artykułu jest funkcjonowanie Międzynarodowego Miasteczka Humanitarnego (IHC) jako globalnego węzła logistycznego w zarządzaniu humanitarnym łańcuchem dostaw (HSCM) w wybranych latach. Uzasadnieniem wybranego zagadnienia jest jego znaczenie w kontekście reagowania na potrzeby humanitarne ludności głównie Azji i Afryki. Udzielanie międzynarodowej pomocy humanitarnej wymaga zapewnienia rozwiązań logistycznych determinujących rozwój HSCM.

Celem badawczym artykułu jest określenie roli International Humanitarian City (IHC), globalnego węzła logistycznego w międzynarodowym łańcuchu dostaw pomocy humanitarnej w latach 2018-2021.

Hipoteza badawcza zakłada, że zdrowie, logistyka i schronienie były kluczowymi sektorami w podejściu klastrowym reprezentowanym w działaniach humanitarnych IHC w latach 2018-2021. Znaczenie IHC jako międzynarodowego hubu logistycznego wzrosło ze względu na wysokie potrzeby humanitarne ludności dotkniętej kryzysami humanitarnymi w latach 2018-2021.

Osiągnięcie celu badawczego i weryfikacja hipotez były możliwe dzięki zastosowaniu metod badawczych jako studium przypadku, desk research (analiza danych zastanych), analiza dokumentów publikowanych przez IHC, a także metody krytycznej analizy literatury naukowej.

W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań stwierdzono, że sektor zdrowia, logistyki i schronienia to trzy kluczowe obszary w zarządzaniu humanitarnym łańcuchem dostaw, na podstawie działań IHC. HSCM na przykładzie IHC charakteryzował się specjalizacją w kluczowych obszarach wsparcia ludności cywilnej. Specjalizacja ta była typowa dla logistyki humanitarnej odpowiadająca podejściu klastrowemu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys, logistyka humanitarna, centrum logistyczne, łańcuch dostaw, pomoc humanitarna

## Introduction

The subject of the article is the functioning of the International Humanitarian City (IHC) as a global logistics hub in the supply chain management of humanitarian actions (HSCM) in 2018-2021. The rationale for the topic is the growing importance of international humanitarian aid based on the delivery of goods in response to the needs of the population affected by crises caused by armed conflicts and natural disasters [26]. The provision of international humanitarian aid requires the provision of solutions conditioning the development of HSCM [25]. Satisfying the humanitarian needs of the civilian population involves far-reaching cooperation within the HSCM, with a view to the participation of states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and private corporations, i.e. enterprises [7].

## Research Methodology

The aim of this article is to define the role of the International Humanitarian City (IHC), a global logistics hub in the international humanitarian aid supply chain (HSCM) in 2018-2021.

In connection with the adopted goal, the article presents the following research problem: What was the role of IHC in the international humanitarian aid supply chain and the main clusters and regions of distributed aid in 2018-2021?

It was hypothesized that health, logistics and shelter were the key sectors in the cluster approach represented in IHC humanitarian efforts.

The second hypothesis was expressed in the statement that the importance of IHC increased due to the high humanitarian needs of the population affected by the 2018-2021 crises.

The article uses the research methods in the form of a case study, desk research, an analysis of documents published by the IHC. Reference was made to critical analysis of the scientific literature. It should be mentioned an appearance small literature on the subject covering selected issues. The basic data sources were the database launched by IHC in 2018 called The Humanitarian Logistics Databank, and annual reports published by IHC.

## **The Study of the Literature and the State of Knowledge**

International Humanitarian City (IHC) was established in 2003 in Dubai as a free-trade zone (FTZ), on the initiative of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Rashid Al Maktum [23]. The aim was to facilitate international humanitarian aid due to the possibility of taking advantage of the strategic location of Dubai (8 hours by plane allows to reach 2/3 of the world's population). It was equally important to use Dubai's advantage as a logistics hub on the intersecting trade routes between Asia, Africa and Europe. IHC is now the largest humanitarian logistics hub in the world. In the legal and organizational sense, it is an association of independent organizations, i.e. an entity not controlled by any state or international organization. It bases its activities on the principles of humanitarian aid recognized in international law and custom, which include humanitarianism, impartiality, independence and neutrality [22]. The IHC's experience in coordinating humanitarian aid deliveries has been revealed in numerous crises, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014-2016, the war in Syria since 2011 and originating in as a result, the refugee crisis or the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. The growing importance of IHC in HSCM was due to the fact that in the following years the United Arab Emirates maintained its position as a world leader in international development assistance provided through the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which is a forum of aid providers under the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [23]. They aspired to strengthen their role in international relations through participation in the development and humanitarian aid system in the MENA region, i.e. the Middle East and North Africa [14].

In an emergency response, all IHC organizations attempt to deliver supplies within the first 48-72 hours of disclosure of the source of a humanitarian crisis. One of the biggest challenges in operating IHC is forecasting the inventory needed. Partner organizations often see that they do not have adequate supplies to respond to a crisis on their own, even in close proximity. IHC performs coordination tasks

at HSCM, ensuring cooperation between various organizations and fulfilling the role of a logistics hub, with particular emphasis on the functions of procurement, warehousing, inventory management and transport [2].

The issue of IHC's functioning in the practice of providing international humanitarian aid at HSCM has not yet been elaborated on in the Polish scientific literature. Mentions about the organizational foundations and general nature of IHC's activities appeared in English-language literature [2], [3], [24]. However, they were not a case study, nor did they include a compilation of possibly new data that could be used to understand the results of IHC operations in humanitarian deliveries. Most often, they concerned not so much the analysis of the importance of IHC, but rather a broad view of the United Arab Emirates involvement in the system of international humanitarian aid and accompanying international development assistance [1], [11], [21], [23], [24].

It is worth mentioning that the development of activities carried out by the IHC was based on the improvement of specialization in narrowly defined areas, thanks to which it was possible to more effectively respond to humanitarian crises in various parts of the world. The functioning of the IHC meets the requirements for the development of the so-called the cluster approach of international humanitarian aid, as mentioned in the literature [24]. The cluster approach is based on the division and specialization of humanitarian tasks and activities according to several or a dozen or so domains (areas), referred to as clusters. In each one can indicate a leading humanitarian organization which has been assigned tasks in the field of directing and coordinating aid implemented in the conditions of international cooperation [22], [25], [27].

The literature [10] indicates that the special importance of IHC is revealed in connection with the maintenance of the largest system of storage facilities in the MENA region for collecting material aid, then distributed to various regions of the world during humanitarian crises. The experiences created thanks to the functioning of the IHC allowed for the tightening of the relations of the United Arab Emirates with the United Nations and numerous non-governmental organizations and government agencies. They were a way to strengthen the rank of humanitarian logistics in the conditions of growing crises on most continents in the 21st century. Since 2013, Dubai has annually hosted the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference and Exhibition (DIHAD), a dedicated promotion of companies that have joined humanitarian efforts in collaboration with IHC. The initiative strengthens the importance of activities carried out under the IHC, with a view to using the potential of the private sector in the international humanitarian aid system [8], [10], [12], [21].

## IHC as a Logistics Hub and Cooperation Network for International Humanitarian Aid

One of the instrumental goals of the IHC is to create a network of cooperation among various organizations involved in delivering humanitarian aid. In 2018-2021, the number of organizations changed, as shown in Figure 1.

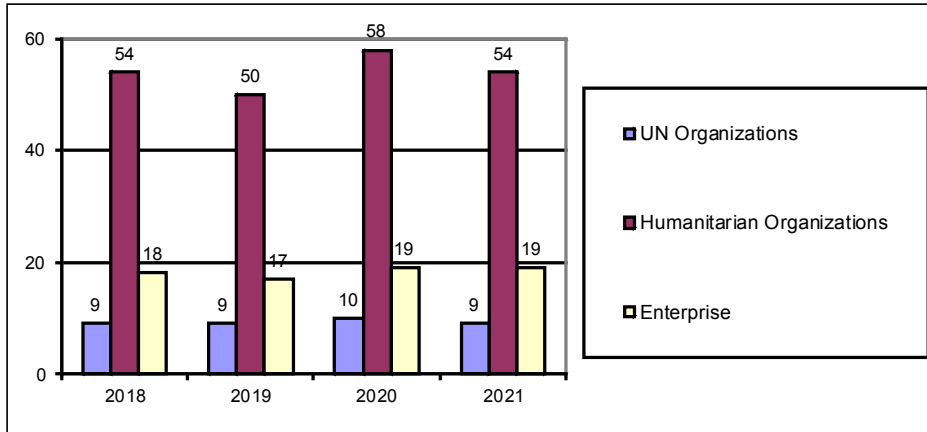


Fig. 1. Organizations participating in IHC 2019-2021

Source: Own study based on [15-18]

As shown in Figure 1, the number of organizations participating in IHC activities varied unevenly, ranging from 76 to 87 per year. On average, it was 81 organizations with different status. The largest share (at the level of 2/3) was constituted by entities with a diverse legal and organizational form, both globally (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC) and numerous non-governmental organizations. In 2018-2021 (over 1/5 of all organizations), the share of enterprises cooperating in the delivery of material aid and thus implementing activities included in corporate social responsibility (CSR) remained at a similar level. As indicated in the literature [4], [6], [20] corporate activity related to the concept of CSR was an important condition for the possibility of including economic entities in the international humanitarian aid supply chain.

Particularly high importance should be attached to the participation in the IHC of United Nations agencies (at the level of 9-10 agencies per year). These were the World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Postal Administration (UNPA), United Nations

Children’s Fund (UNICEF ), United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UN Women [15-18].

One of the IHC’s leading tasks was to stockpile as the dominant source of material aid for humanitarian purposes. The value of inventories fluctuated as shown in Figure 2 and Table 1.

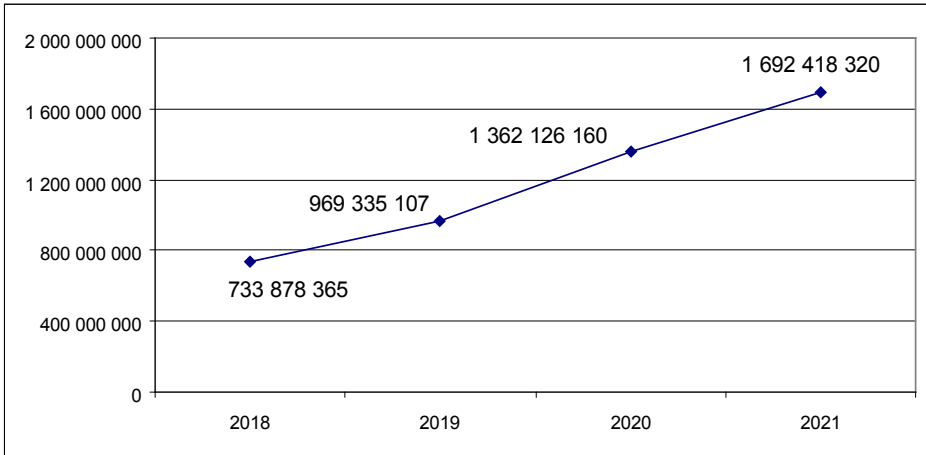


Fig. 2. Inventory value in the humanitarian supply chain in IHC in 2018-2021 (USD)  
Source: Own study based on [19]

Figure 2 shows that in 2018-2021, IHC organizations accumulated humanitarian supplies worth more than \$ 4.75 billion. The global trend was the systematic increase in the value of accumulated inventories, amounting to over 230% for the analysed years (an increase from USD 733.8 million to USD 1.69 billion). It should be assumed that the growing importance of humanitarian needs on a global scale and the accompanying acquisition of more and more valuable stocks were not unrelated to the emergence of threats caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Humanitarian aid implemented in response to the pandemic has gained particular importance since 2020. Support was distributed through the IHC in the health cluster at HSCM, with a view to cooperation in particular with WHO [9].

Table 1. The value of inventories in individual clusters of the humanitarian supply chain in IHCin 2018-2021 (USD)

No.	Cluster	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Food security	2 879 727	2 599 273	7 501 424	6 579 003
2	Health	170 179 275	249 091 709	543 928 360	785 920 287
3	Security	223 475 563	243 818 201	222 987 259	230 487 865
4	Education	6 786 422	4 241 003	9 580 754	12 395 705
5	Water and sanitation	42 753 861	71 878 487	85 135 289	73 920 503
6	Emergency telecommuni- cations	61 475 879	73 052 417	97 801 460	107 160 440
7	Logistics	196 283 511	244 766 916	292 824 893	389 026 053
8	Protection	30 044 127	79 887 101	102 366 721	86 928 464
Total		733 878 365	969 335 107	1 362 126 160	1 692 418 320

Source: Own study based on [19]

Referring to the data from Table 1, it can be determined that the value of stocks in different HSCM clusters in IHC was different. Material aid of the highest value was obtained in health (USD 1.74 billion), logistics (USD 1.12 billion) and shelter (USD 920.7 million) clusters. The highest dynamics was recorded in the case of the health cluster, as the value of the accumulated stocks increased more than 4.6 times. It can be assumed that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to raise the profile of the activities of organizations participating in IHC activities in the health sector. The value of stocks in the security cluster (security measures) increased almost 3 times, more than 2 times increase was recorded in the food security cluster, and less than 2 times in separate logistics and education clusters.

Figure 3 shows the role of individual organizations within the IHC in providing supplies for humanitarian purposes.

As shown in Figure 3, WPF is the leading UN agency responsible for providing approximately 50% of IHC inventory. The WHO came in second - with an increase in share from 27.7% in 2019 to 32.5% in 2020. It is possible to point to the domination of individual UN agencies in creating supplies of supplies for humanitarian purposes in the IHC. As indicated in the literature [26], the United Nations has assumed the role of a global leader in the distribution of humanitarian aid and preparation for crises in various regions. Among other organizations, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) stood out, whose share increased from 6.3% to 9.1%.

Figure 4 presents the value of flows in the humanitarian supply chain in the IHC in the analysed years, i.e. data on the actually distributed material aid.

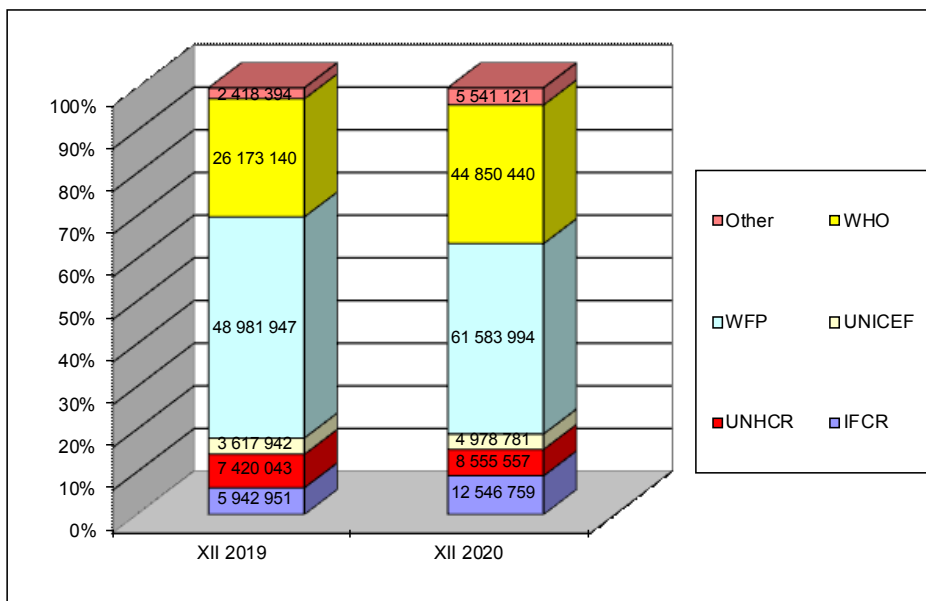


Fig. 3. Value and share of supplies provided by the largest humanitarian organizations participating in the humanitarian supply chain in IHC – comparison of the situation from the exemplary months of 2019 and 2020 (in USD and %) Source: Own study based on [19]

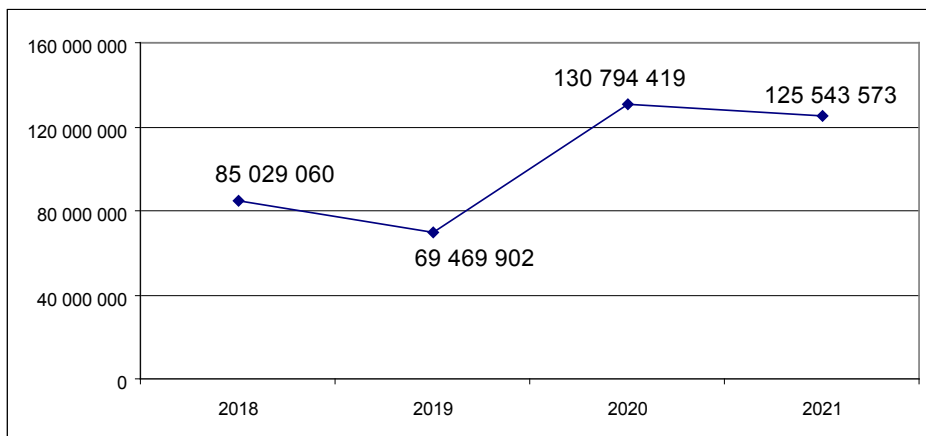


Fig. 4. Value of flows in the humanitarian supply chain at IHC in the context of aid delivered in 2018-2021 (in USD) Source: Own study based on [19]



With reference to Picture 4, it can be determined that the value of flows in HSCM increased significantly, although the changes were uneven (an increase for 2019-2020 and a decrease for 2018-2019 and 2020-2021). The growth dynamics was generally 47.6%, and the value of provided aid amounted to PLN 410.8 million.

The share of aid provided to the needy population in relation to the total value of accumulated stocks in the IHC was in the analysed years, respectively, at the level of 11.58%, 7.16%, 9.6% and 7.41%. There has been a downward trend, which is primarily evidence of a rapid increase in stocks intended to meet the needs of the population affected by humanitarian crises. Difficulties in the distribution of aid in the time of limitations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the redefinition of the goals of the donor countries in favouring domestic actions over activities in the field of international humanitarian aid may have been of some importance. Through the IHC flows were organized, amounting to an average of about 1/10 of the total stocks held.

Table 2 shows the value of flows in individual HSCM clusters in IHC in 2018-2021.

Table 2. The value of flows in individual clusters of the humanitarian supply chain in IHC in the context of aid delivered in 2018-2021 (in USD)

No.	Cluster	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Food security	565 429	1 267 797	434 459	710 569
2	Health	16 634 493	9 309 996	80 386 833	67 431 004
3	Security	13 228 028	15 625 150	11 964 626	22 512 591
4	Education	1 839 080	367 313	1 226 336	1 197 945
5	Water and sanitation	3 054 960	3 552 622	3 657 024	1 884 913
6	Emergency telecommunications	4 808 384	7 564 399	8 692 284	5 955 106
7	Logistics	39 936 081	28 525 151	19 399 472	23 221 338
8	Protection	4 962 605	3 257 474	5 033 385	2 630 107
	total	85 029 060	69 469 902	130 794 419	125 543 573

Source: Own study based on [19]

Based on the data in Table 2, it can be concluded that, as in the case of the overall value of the material aid collected, the special importance of three clusters in HSCM, i.e. health (USD 173.7 million), logistics and (\$ 111 million) and shelters (\$ 63.3 million). However, while in the case of health and shelter, high growth dynamics was recorded (405.3% and 171.1%, respectively), the value of aid under the logistics cluster was systematically decreasing (a decrease by 41.9%). The literature [5] indicates the special importance of activities in the refugee cluster, with a view to the deepening of the refugee crisis in the Middle East.

In the further part of the considerations, it is necessary to refer to the beneficiaries of the aid provided to HSCM via the IHC in the analysed years (Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7).

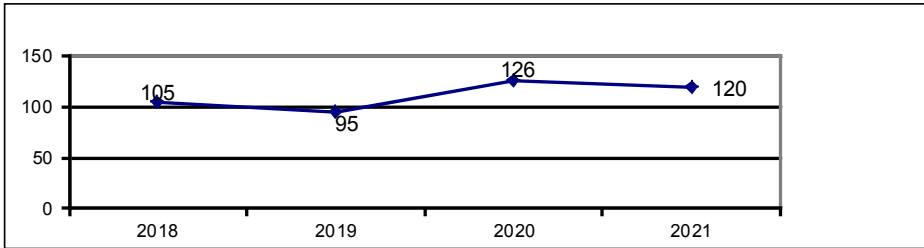


Fig. 5. Number of recipient countries of the aid provided by IHC in 2018-2021  
Source: Own study based on [19]

As shown in Figure 5, the largest number of countries (126) was reached in 2020, while the smallest one a year earlier (95). On average, each year the number of beneficiaries of aid provided through the IHC was 112 countries.

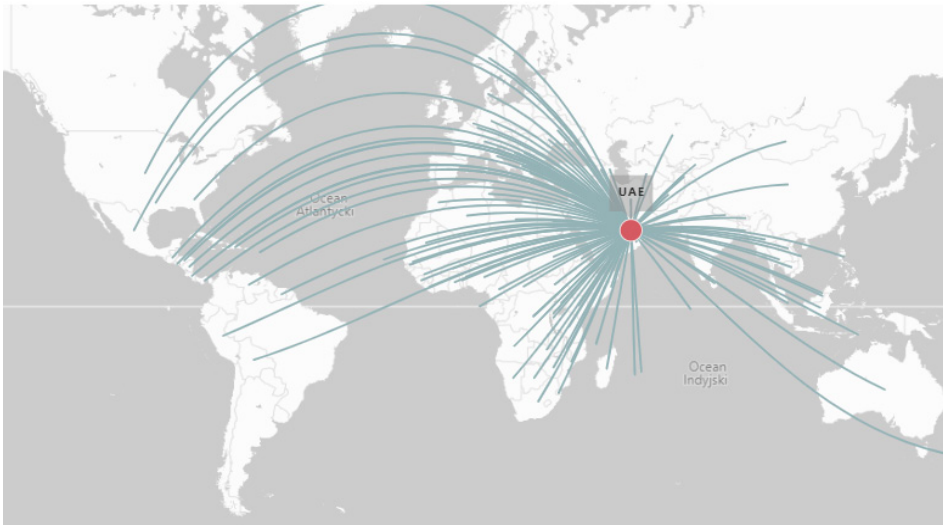


Fig. 6. Geographic coverage of humanitarian aid delivered through the IHC - example for 2020  
Source: [19]

As shown in Figure 6, Dubai’s strategic location as IHC’s headquarters was of great importance in terms of being able to distribute material aid to almost all continents. Deliveries to the African and Asian continents played a special role.

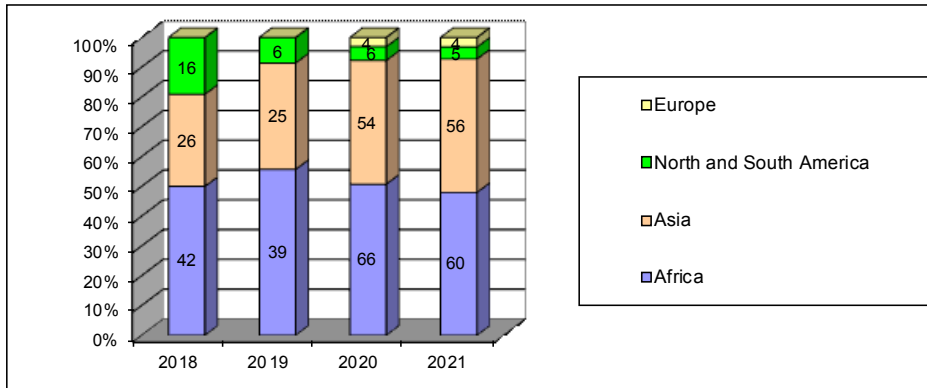


Fig. 7. Importance of humanitarian production through IHC for specific parts IHC in 2018-2021 (million USD and %)

Source: [15-18]

Referring to Figure 7, African countries benefited from half of the material aid provided through the IHC in 2018-2021 (over \$ 207 million, corresponding to 50% in 2018 and 48% of all aid in 2021). The aid provided to Asian countries was of great importance (USD 161 million, which translated into 31% in 2018 and 44.8% in 2021). The countries of the Americas received aid worth US \$ 33 million, and the continent's share in HSCM decreased from 19% to 4%. Deliveries worth over USD 8 million (3.2% of shares in 2021) were transferred to European countries for humanitarian purposes.

Table 3 selects the most valuable product categories for each HSCM cluster in the context of the aid provided by IHC.

As shown in Table 3, comparing the data from the end year with the data from the base year, it can be established that the health cluster recorded an over 60-fold increase in the value of medical equipment provided (from USD 5 million to USD 46 million) and an over 9-fold increase in the value of donated medical items (from USD 117.1 thousand to USD 9.2 million), with the growing value of the donated drugs (from USD 6.7 million to USD 9.2 million). The distribution of material aid for humanitarian purposes in the health cluster showed a special growth potential.

In the food security cluster, only two categories of goods were classified separately, i.e. food and ready-to-eat products, taking into account the dominance of the latter in the structure of aid provided (increase in value from USD 483 thousand to USD 719.5 thousand).

The shelter cluster included two categories of goods, i.e. equipment in refugee camps (an increase in value from USD 12.8 million to USD 22.1 million) and tools (a decrease in value from USD 412.1 thousand to USD 355 thousand).

Another one was the education cluster, in which the value of aid provided in the form of educational materials decreased from USD 1.8 million to USD 1.1 million.

In the cluster of water and sanitation, the three dominant types of goods were water supply services (a decrease in value from USD 1.8 million to USD 1.2 million), broader health products (a decrease in value from USD 1.1 million to PLN 484.6 thousand). USD) and sanitary equipment (down from USD 125.7 thousand to USD 114.2 thousand).

Table 3. Most valuable products in individual humanitarian supply chain clusters in IHC in terms of aid delivered in 2018-2021 (in USD)

No.	Cluster	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	<b>Health</b>				
	I. Medical Items	5 057 951	7 462 737	56 732 534	46 055 086
	II. Medications	6 719 192	448 473	10 445 001	9 298 633
	III. Medical equipment	117 191	140 606	5 940 573	7 100 023
2	<b>Food safety</b>				
	I. Ready-to-eat products	483 061	1 238 928	404 548	719 569
3	<b>Refugee</b>				
	I. Equipment in refugee camps	12 815 911	15 305 088	11 611 799	22 157 532
	II. Tools	412 116	320 062	352 827	355 058
4	<b>Education</b>				
	I. Education materials	1 839 080	367 313	1 226 336	1 197 945
5	<b>Water and sanitary conditions</b>				
	I. Water delivery	1 803 081	919 942	1 224 743	1 284 609
	II. Health products	1 124 843	2 516 677	2 283 669	484 689
	III. Sanitary equipment	125 713	112 081	145 532	114 299
6	<b>Emergency telecommunications</b>				
	I. IT equipment	1 596 895	1 773 845	2 702 567	2 238 121
	II. Telecommunications equipment	1 548 282	3 863 650	3 146 499	1 866 602
	III. IT Accessories	223 279	427 034	2 702 567	695 857
7	<b>Logistics</b>				
	I. Vehicles	28 881 907	22 623 359	12 109 572	14 578 354
	II. Buildings and structures	7 492 989	3 079 860	1 836 083	3 663 074
	III. Handling and storage	482 364	148 138	1 836 083	2 517 100
8	<b>Security (security measures)</b>				
	I. Protective equipment and safety equipment	4 962 605	3 257 474	5 033 385	2 630 107

Source: Own study based on [19]

Organizations operating in IHC have increased the value of deliveries of three main categories of goods in the emergency telecommunications cluster. These were, respectively, deliveries of IT equipment (from USD 1.5 million to USD 2.2 million), telecommunications equipment (from USD 1.5 million to USD 1.8 million) and accessories for IT equipment (from USD 223.2 thousand to USD 695.8 thousand).

In the logistics cluster, the most valuable economic goods included vehicles (decrease from USD 28.8 million to USD 14.5 million), buildings (decrease from USD 7.4 million to USD 3.6 million) and services in the field of handling and storage (increase from USD 482.3 thousand to USD 2.5 million).

In the cluster of hedging activities, only one type of goods was classified, i.e. protective and safety equipment, the value of which decreased significantly in the context of aid provided through the IHC (a decrease from USD 4.9 million to USD 2.6 million).

## Summary

Based on the presented arguments, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Government agencies and NGOs accounted for the largest share of the IHC entity structure.
2. Among the international organizations participating in the activities of the IHC, the special role of UN agencies has become apparent, bearing in mind the leading position of the World Food Program (WFP).
3. In 2018-2021, the value of accumulated stocks for humanitarian purposes increased significantly. This was especially true of stocks in health, security, food security, logistics and education clusters, while maintaining a high value of stocks in the shelter cluster.
4. IHC HSCM flows increased significantly in 2018-2021, representing on average 1/10 of the IHC's total humanitarian stocks.
5. The distribution of material aid through the IHC reached an average of 112 countries per year, given the dominance of African and Asian countries.
6. The most valuable categories of material assistance were medical items, medicines, equipment in refugee camps, as well as vehicles, i.e. goods classified under the health, shelter and logistics cluster.

The article describes that managing the supply chain of humanitarian operations on the example of the IHC was characterized by specialization in key areas of support for the civilian population. This specialization was characteristic of humanitarian logistics, being part of the so-called cluster approach. The hypothesis that health, logistics and shelter clusters are the three key areas of HSCM based on IHC activities in 2018-2021 has been confirmed. Moreover, the hypothesis that the importance of IHC grew due to the high humanitarian needs of the population affected by the 2018-2021 crises proved to be true.

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