

# Humanitarian aid



*at a glance*







*"Humanitarian aid policy provides one of the clearest examples of the European Union in action. More importantly, it is a flagship for our fundamental values: solidarity, respect for human dignity, equality, tolerance and personal commitment."*

Louis Michel, European Commissioner responsible for Development and Humanitarian Aid

## Solidarity at the heart of Europe

The European Commission is one of the world largest humanitarian aid donors.

Every year, events such as conflicts, droughts, earthquakes trigger humanitarian crises in different parts of the world. Every year, millions of people, be they in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Sudan or elsewhere, find themselves without shelter, food, water or medical care.

Helping the world's most vulnerable populations is a moral imperative for the international community. Wherever the crisis may occur and whatever the type of intervention required, human and physical resources need to be rapidly mobilised to meet the victims' vital needs while preserving their dignity.

The causes of humanitarian crises are many and varied. They are often the tragic by-products of conflict, as warring factions fight over land or scarce resources, destroying people's livelihoods and forcing them to flee their homes. They may be the result of extreme weather conditions — too much or too little rain, high winds or heavy snows — or a devastating earthquake or volcanic eruption. Sometimes national economic mismanagement makes the poor destitute and turns hunger into famine.

Whether their causes are natural or man-made, such crises invariably bring great human suffering.

Since it was set up in 1992, the European Commission has financed and coordinated humanitarian operations in more than 100 countries outside the EU.

The European Commission has a longstanding commitment to help the victims of such crises. Its humanitarian aid department (ECHO) provides relief assistance that goes directly to people in distress, irrespective of their nationality, religion, gender or ethnic origin. Working with its partners in the field, ECHO acts swiftly to supply aid when disaster strikes and continues to help stricken regions even after the media spotlight and political interest has shifted elsewhere.

For the Commission, the best news is always when it can report the phasing out of its humanitarian operations in a particular country or region, since this is an indication that the crisis is over. But as long as there are needs to be met, the Commission is ready to respond, giving concrete expression to the EU's solidarity with the world's most vulnerable populations.

## The different types of decision

Each year, the Commission draws up strategic objectives for the delivery of its humanitarian aid. The objectives are based on a thorough assessment of existing and foreseeable future needs, using information provided by its own field experts and other humanitarian operators. In the case of a significant and unforeseen emergency, the Commission can request extra funding from the budgetary reserve.

*Financing decisions* are adopted throughout the year on the basis of needs assessments and specific proposals made by partners. The Commission has a wide range of instruments that enable an adapted and flexible approach to different types of humanitarian crisis.

► A **global plan** is an overall strategic framework for action in a particular country or region. The Commission uses this proactive instrument when the need for humanitarian assistance persists over a lengthy period. This is often the case during a long-running conflict. Coordination with the programmes of Member States and other donors and agencies is an important part of the planning process. Once a global plan has been drawn up, and before the Commission's final decision, it is submitted to the Humanitarian Aid Committee of Member State representatives for an opinion.

► **Individual decisions** are used for new emergencies and additional needs not covered by global plans.

► A **primary emergency decision** is the tool used to respond at very short notice (within 72 hours) to sudden crises. In the event of a hurricane or an earthquake, it is vital that assistance such as food, shelter materials, blankets, warm clothes and medicines be provided within hours.



## Partners

The humanitarian programmes funded by the Commission are implemented through partner organisations: United Nations relief agencies, members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and around 200 non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Having a diverse range of partners with very different specialisations is important for the Commission, enabling it to meet the growing needs of people facing increasingly complex crises in different parts of the world. The Commission has developed close working relationships with its partners, both at the level of policy issues and of specific humanitarian operations.



## The European Commission's humanitarian mandate is to:

- ▶ save and preserve life during emergencies and their immediate aftermath in man-made or natural disasters;
- ▶ provide assistance and relief to people affected by longer-lasting crises such as civil wars;
- ▶ finance the delivery of aid, working to ensure that aid is accessible to those for whom it is intended;
- ▶ assist refugees or displaced people wherever they find sanctuary and to help them re-settle if they return home;
- ▶ support short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction work in order to help victims regain a minimum level of self-sufficiency, taking long-term development objectives into account where possible;
- ▶ ensure preparedness for natural disasters, in particular by setting up early-warning systems and financing disaster prevention projects in high-risk regions.

## In the humanitarian field, the Commission does more than just fund relief activities.

### It also:

- ▶ regularly monitors humanitarian projects and promotes coordination arrangements between its partners;
- ▶ promotes and coordinates disaster preparedness measures by trained specialists, strengthens local institutions and supports pilot micro-projects;
- ▶ supports training programmes in the humanitarian field and gives its partners technical assistance;
- ▶ raises public awareness about humanitarian issues, in Europe and elsewhere;
- ▶ constantly evaluates the impact and effectiveness of its operations to make the best possible use of European taxpayers' money.



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