

VOICE POSITION PAPER

Humanitarian aid in European Commission external action funding (Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020)

In June 2011, the European Commission (EC) launched its proposal for the future European budget. The proposal looks into the challenges of the changing global environment and sets priorities for action both inside and outside of the EU to address them. In accordance with the Lisbon Treaty- which clearly seeks to enable the EU to play a greater role in the world-, the EC proposal attributes additional funding to external action, including humanitarian aid. EU humanitarian aid as an instrument will not solve all challenges faced across the world by itself, but acting in solidarity with those in need is a core European value. Quality humanitarian action also provides a solid foundation for reconstruction and rehabilitation which prepares the way for sustainable development.

Strong evidence of rising humanitarian needs across the globe is given by the United Nations having launched the biggest funding appeal ever (€ 5.7 billion) for 2011. Over the coming years, humanitarian needs and the related costs will continue to increase due to external factors such as climate change, population growth and pressure on scarce resources, leading to more devastating natural disasters and conflicts. While both the EC- in its Communication^[i]- and the European Parliament^[ii] explicitly recognise this trend, it is not reflected in the EC financial proposal in which the amount of funding for humanitarian aid decreases over time. This is a clear inconsistency between analysis and resources, which will have a direct bearing on the lives of millions of people.

VOICE recommendations:

- 1. A separate budget line for EU humanitarian aid in the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) is crucial.**
- 2. The EC humanitarian aid budget line requires a *minimum* of 7 billion€ in the MFF period.**
- 3. The European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps needs to add value to humanitarian action.**
- 4. A predictable proportion of funding from development instruments should be dedicated to Disaster Risk Reduction.**
- 5. The EU has to make tangible adaptations to its financial instruments, making them more flexible to ensure the effective transition from relief to recovery and development.**

Humanitarian aid is a common European goal

Reaching out to people in need across the world, humanitarian aid is essential in implementing European values and demonstrating the solidarity of European citizens towards those affected by disaster. Therefore, it is not surprising that EU citizens widely support EU humanitarian aid- a significant 79% expressed support in the 2010 Eurobarometer^[iii].

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In addition, providing rapid, needs-based support to vulnerable populations following man-made and natural disasters is a strategic objective of the EU, in line with the EU 2020 strategy. This is confirmed in the Lisbon Treaty, which contains a specific legal basis for EU Humanitarian Aid. Moreover, in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid^[iv], the member states, the European Parliament and the EC have agreed upon common values, principles and objectives of EU humanitarian aid. They reiterated that humanitarian aid is a shared competence between them, which builds upon a long tradition.

The added value of European Commission humanitarian aid

European Commission (EC) humanitarian aid money is efficiently spent, as confirmed in the assessment by the European Court of Auditors, and accountably spent through direct funding to a diversity of professional humanitarian civilian actors (NGOs, Red Cross, United Nations). These humanitarian actors manage to reach a wide variety of affected populations in conflict situations and natural disasters. Their long term involvement is crucial for ensuring a professional, far-reaching response to humanitarian crises.

The solid field expertise of the EC's humanitarian and civil protection aid department (DG ECHO) (112 experts and 315 local staff in the field) combined with the professional implementation by the partners mentioned above, contribute to quality delivery of aid and better targeting of disaster affected populations. Recent independent evaluations confirm that the EC is a quality donor. DARA (Development Assistance Research Associates) ranks ECHO 6th of 23 OECD donors, while the UK Department for International Development states that "*Programming, peer reviews, planning, procurement, independent implementation monitoring and evaluation are standard across the EC and allow the EC to make efficiency savings*".^[v]

In 2010, 140 million people have benefited directly and indirectly from EC humanitarian aid^[vi]. The EC structures for humanitarian aid enable the EC to respond in a timely and effective way to sudden disasters, showing flexibility in allocations and means of response. Moreover, EC humanitarian aid maintains a unique balance between addressing sudden emergencies and forgotten, long term crises. The reason is that EC humanitarian aid is based on professional humanitarian needs assessments, looking solely at needs of affected populations with the aim of saving lives and reducing suffering. Due to its special focus and way of working, ECHO funding is essential to complement member states' funding. This coordinated EU approach enables implementing partners to reach a far greater number of disaster affected populations, covering forgotten crises as well as those in the media spotlight.

Collectively, the EU (EC and member states) accounts for about 40% of the world's humanitarian aid^[vii]. Due to its scale and composition, the EU can mobilise an adequate amount of money and respond to disasters in a coordinated and comprehensive way. In addition, as the biggest humanitarian donor, the EU can influence the international humanitarian agenda and multiply good donorship practices.

FUTURE FUNDING FOR EU HUMANITARIAN AID: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A separate budget line for EU humanitarian aid in the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) is crucial in order to enable humanitarian decision making at EC level to remain independent from security and geopolitical interests. This is necessary to uphold the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, which were agreed upon in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid as the fundamental basis for EU humanitarian aid. "*This principled approach is essential to the acceptance and ability of the EU, and humanitarian actors in general, to operate on the ground in often complex political and security contexts*" (art.10 Consensus). It is fundamental for the security of implementing partners and affected populations that humanitarian aid is perceived as independent in the field.

2. The EC humanitarian aid budget line requires a *minimum of 7 billion€ in the MFF period.* In 2010, 1.1 billion€ was needed and efficiently spent by the EC through its partners. However, for the last few years DG ECHO consistently had to use budgetary reinforcements (the Emergency Aid Reserve, EAR) to be able to meet humanitarian needs, demonstrating a consistent funding shortage- also recognised by the European Parliament. Also the transfer of funding from the European Development Fund (on average 30 million€ per year) proved to be important. In addition to an overall increase in funding, given that humanitarian needs are expected to increase, the level of funding should go up during the MFF period and priority access for humanitarian aid to the EAR has to be ensured.

3. The European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps needs to add value to humanitarian action. As humanitarian needs continue to rise and financial times are difficult, VOICE underlines the need for regular evaluation of the Corps as it develops, making sure it really represents the best use of scarce resources to provide EU assistance to crisis-affected populations.

4. A predictable proportion of funding from development instruments should be dedicated to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This proportion has to be linked to the level of risk. The EU should support preparedness of disaster prone populations, including building up their institutional capacity. Moreover, development instruments should be able to directly fund DRR initiatives, especially those which address vulnerabilities at a grassroots level. Close coordination between humanitarian and development funding instruments is essential to ensure that the DRR experience of the humanitarian community is effectively carried through into development programmes. This will not only lead to a better sustainability of DRR activities undertaken by humanitarian actors and to poverty reduction, but it will also save money by mitigating future crises. The disasters in the Horn of Africa, Haiti and Pakistan painfully demonstrated the need for investment in DRR and widespread DRR mainstreaming. DRR measures are needed before the event, not after, when the humanitarian crisis strikes and humanitarian funding becomes available.

5. The EU has to make tangible adaptations to its financial instruments, making them more flexible to ensure the effective transition from relief to recovery and development phases. In order to enhance the impact of the EU's action in the humanitarian field, the link between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) should be ensured. However, under current instruments, EU financial support to LRRD is insufficient and ineffective. There is a lack of follow-up of short-term funding cycles and a lack of flexibility in longer-term instruments. The next MFF must foresee reliable and flexible funding for LRRD in order to ensure that aid is more sustainable and adapted to local needs. A certain percentage of development funding (country strategy papers) should be reserved for LRRD (depending on the needs of the country concerned). In addition, the upcoming revision of the Financial Regulation provides an opportunity to simplify the financial rules for the administration and implementation of EU funding. This could facilitate the allocation of LRRD funding and diminish the administrative burden which EU regulations impose on implementing partners.

[i] EC Communication, 29 June 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/biblio/documents/fin_fw1420/MFF_COM-2011-500_Part_I_en.pdf

[ii] European Parliament Resolution on the MFF, 8 June 2011, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/FindByProcnum.do?lang=2&procnum=INI/2010/2211>.

[iii] http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_343_en.pdf, p.38.

[iv] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:025:0001:0012:EN:PDF>

[v] http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/mar/multilateral_aid_review.pdf, p.179.

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Speech Commissioner Georgieva at Order of Malta conference, 27-28 January 2011.