

WHY IS EU HUMANITARIAN AID IMPORTANT?

VOICE 2014 General Assembly Resolution

Disasters, natural and man-made, are increasing in frequency, severity and complexity. At a time when the world is again facing an increasing number of severe humanitarian crises that have serious impacts at national, regional and international levels, EU humanitarian aid is even more relevant than ever to save lives, alleviate suffering and prepare grounds for longer term development. In addition to effects of natural disasters, the humanitarian community is now witnessing spiralling needs of crisis-affected populations due to conflicts in Syria, Central African Republic and South Sudan and due to a combination of conflict and climate change in Somalia.

EU humanitarian aid is spent on lifesaving assistance such as food, nutrition, shelter, healthcare and medical support, water, sanitation, protection and disaster preparedness. The Commission's department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) assists around 120 million people every year focusing on the most vulnerable who are affected by disasters.

The EU including its Member States may be the leading donor of humanitarian aid worldwide but the amount spent through the Commission is less than 1% of the EU's annual budget (equivalent to €2 per EU citizen). 9 out of 10 EU citizens say it is important for the EU to fund humanitarian aid.¹ EU humanitarian aid is delivered by over 200 professional partners, primarily NGOs as well as the Red Cross movement and the UN. EU aid is guided by a policy framework, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, (hereafter 'Consensus') which commits the EU and its Member States to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Reaching out to people in need across the world, humanitarian aid is essential in demonstrating the solidarity of European citizens towards those affected by disasters.

The added value of European humanitarian NGOs

NGOs are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid to crisis affected populations worldwide, providing aid where it is most needed, in accordance with humanitarian principles. The members of the VOICE network have a wealth of professional, diverse and specialised expertise, and work in close partnership with affected communities and local civil society organisations. We are a direct expression of active European citizenship. We are constantly seeking to improve the quality of our work and are committed to mobilising rapidly and preserving our flexibility and cost-effectiveness. NGOs are supported by citizens in their own countries across the European Union, and are often strongly backed by private financial contributions as well as funding from their own governments.

What can you do to support European humanitarian aid?

The VOICE network calls upon the Commission, the European Parliament and the 28 Member States in the Council of the European Union to support the delivery of needs-based and principled humanitarian aid through the following actions:

1. Ensure continued EU humanitarian leadership and representation on the international stage

- A strong and visible European Commissioner for humanitarian aid brings EU humanitarian leadership to the world stage, as demonstrated over recent years.
- The Commissioner has an important role in promoting the values of principled needs-based humanitarian aid, and of working with professional humanitarian partners.
- The European Parliament should appoint a proactive standing Rapporteur on humanitarian aid.

2. Ensure respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the humanitarian principles

- The EU should continue to insist on the importance of humanitarian access to crisis-affected people as well as monitor and use its influence to address breaches of IHL.
- The Action Plan to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid expired in 2013. The Commission and Member States should develop and deliver on a follow-up Action Plan, to ensure continued joint implementation of the principles of the Consensus.
- Fragile States and conflict situations are the contexts where the majority of EU humanitarian aid is delivered. The recently set-up EU Comprehensive Approach seeks to develop integrated strategies for EU external action in such crises. However, the humanitarian community is concerned that the linking of humanitarian aid to political objectives in this sort of approach can threaten the security of aid workers and the affected populations they are assisting. Humanitarian aid should always be given in line with the European Consensus, which states that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool.

3. Commit to predictable and timely funding for humanitarian aid.

- Recent EU humanitarian funding shortfalls are having an impact on crisis-affected populations. The European Parliament and Council must vote for additional resources for humanitarian aid when the Commission presents its Draft Amending Budget later this year. This is necessary to implement all EU humanitarian operations in 2014 as planned.
- To ensure predictable humanitarian funding and maintain a consistent level of assistance to crisis-affected populations, the European Parliament and Council must agree to raise the payment credits for humanitarian aid to the level of commitment credits in the 2015 EC budget.

4. Support better linking of Relief and Development

- The EC and Member States must include Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in development and recovery programmes. This is necessary to reduce the impact of disasters on affected populations. Development of more flexible funding approaches between the EC institutions is crucial to build bridges between humanitarian and development work.
- Recently, the EU has placed increased emphasis on approaches that support community resilience. Improving accountability in following up the Commission Communication on Resilienceⁱⁱ is needed and will contribute to more coordinated and effective measures to bolster the EU's efforts in DRR and in linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD).

Why should you support European Humanitarian Aid and NGOs?

EU humanitarian aid saves lives and alleviates suffering, and is an expression of the shared European value of solidarity. It has strong citizen support and has demonstrated that it is taxpayers' money well spent. NGOs are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid to crisis-affected populations worldwide. Their added value includes flexibility, professionalism and cost-effectiveness.

ⁱ 2012 Special Eurobarometer 384: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_384_en.pdf

ⁱⁱ The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises (COM(2012) 586 final: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/resilience/com_2012_586_resilience_en.pdf & Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries SWD (2013) 227 final : http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/resilience/com_2013_227_ap_crisis_prone_countries_en.pdf