

BRIEFING: EU HUMANITARIAN AID MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

The EU plays a major role as a guarantor of principled humanitarian aid

The European Union (EU) is the world's leading humanitarian aid donor, providing a major proportion of global funding for emergency relief to victims of man-made and natural disasters. The EU humanitarian policy is [the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#), signed by the three main EU institutions - the Commission, the Council and Parliament. [In October 2017](#), to mark 10 years of the Consensus' adoption, all interested parties renewed their commitment to it and to the fundamental principles of humanitarian aid – neutrality, humanity, independence, and impartiality – and to respect [International Humanitarian Law](#). Article 214 of the [Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU) is the legal basis for humanitarian aid, and the rules for the provision of humanitarian aid are set out in [Council Regulation](#) (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 on Humanitarian Aid.

THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

(source: [European Commission DG ECHO website](#))

The principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are grounded in International Humanitarian Law. All EU Member States have committed to them by ratifying the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

- **Humanity** means that human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable.
- **Neutrality** means that humanitarian aid must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute.
- **Impartiality** means that humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need without discrimination
- **Independence** means the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from political, economic, military or other objectives.

Humanitarian principles define what humanitarian aid is: delivering life-saving assistance to those in need, without any adverse distinction. They distinguish humanitarian aid from other activities, for examples those of political, religious, ideological or military nature. Adherence to the humanitarian principles facilitates access and acceptance, and helps humanitarian workers carry out their work.

NGOs active in humanitarian aid are in a unique position to respond to the most vulnerable

The Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) is responsible for EU humanitarian assistance and civil protection. It does not directly deliver aid but funds operations implemented by over 200 professional partners, namely non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement.

NGOs are crucial in the humanitarian aid community. They are present and active in most protracted and sudden onset crises all over the world. They implement the major part of operations in the field, including in partnership with the UN. Humanitarian NGOs provide lifesaving goods and services such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, medical care as well as education in emergencies and protection to crisis affected people. In addition, NGOs seek to empower crisis affected people and ensure their participation in relief and recovery, including by supporting partners' disaster preparedness and building bridges for sustainable poverty reduction and development.

The diversity of NGOs, from large and multipurpose organisations to smaller and specialised ones, reflects their agility and range of expertise and professionalism enabling them to intervene in the most challenging contexts, to save lives, reduce suffering and restore dignity for millions of people. The flexibility of NGOs, their ability to access the most vulnerable people, their in-depth understanding and adaptability to circumstances enable them to respond to the different needs of crisis-affected populations.

NGOs adhere to professional standards and are committed to transparency and accountability

As professional organisations aiming to ensure a sustainable impact on the lives of affected populations and the quality and effectiveness of aid, humanitarian NGOs have been at the forefront of developing and integrating international quality and accountability initiatives when responding to humanitarian crises.

Humanitarian NGOs are voluntarily created and supported by citizens. NGOs are cost-effective and highly accountable complying both with the different procedures of their diverse institutional donors – the EC being one of the most demanding donors – and vis-à-vis their citizens' support. They are the expression of Europeans' solidarity and aim to put their values into practice, particularly humanity.

QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN EU HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarian NGOs adhere to [the Red Cross Code of Conduct](#) and are committed to other initiatives such as the Sphere Standards and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). Specific sectors then have their own quality guidance, such as the Minimum Standards for Child Protection or on Market Analysis.

The European Commission's humanitarian NGO partners are carefully assessed to obtain their Framework Partnership Agreement and are regularly audited. Every donor, including the UN, has its own procedures, rules and reporting. NGOs engaged in advocacy are registered on the EU's Transparency Register.

Background: EU funding for growing humanitarian needs

According to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the humanitarian system is more effective and impactful than ever, with better identification of needs and vulnerabilities, faster responses and more inclusive, comprehensive, innovative and prioritised response plans. This is important given that since 2007, needs have increased more than five-fold. The Global Humanitarian Overview 2020 estimates that nearly 168 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection this year. Projections show that until climate change and the root causes of conflicts are better addressed, this upward trend will continue.

Humanitarian crises across the globe have been increasing in number. They now affect more people and last longer on average than ever before. Many countries face complex crisis situations experiencing a combination of conflict, forced displacement and/or disasters associated with natural hazards. Globally the number of forcibly displaced people across the world keeps increasing. By the beginning of 2019, 71 million were displaced - most of them within their own borders. Climate change could double this figure by 2050. After years of decline, the number of undernourished people is rising again, with 113 million suffering from acute hunger. Year after year needs have far outstripped resources so millions of people do not receive the assistance and protection they need – which is a massive violation of human rights.

Part of the EU funding comes directly from Member States, but a large share comes from the EU budget. Like the growth in global needs, assistance from governments and EU institutions has grown incrementally. However, and despite the Eurobarometer surveys showing a continuing and overwhelming level of support from EU citizens (88%) for the funding of EU action on humanitarian aid, the pace of growth in contributions has not kept pace with the dramatically growing requirements. EU funding for humanitarian aid represents less than 1% of the EU budget. The European Parliament has regularly highlighted the need to increase funding for humanitarian aid.

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