

ECHO

**EUROPEAN
HUMANITARIAN AID**
values and principles

Introduction

Chaotic distribution of aid supplies to conflict victims by soldiers, humanitarian organisations targeted by terrorists, humanitarian workers kidnapped... Today, European citizens are bombarded with conflicting images of "humanitarian aid".

What is humanitarian aid? What exactly does the European Union do in this area?

Over the last few years, the number of conflicts in the world has increased. Many new conflicts are characterised by worrying trends. International humanitarian law is often flouted, and sometimes even ignored. Civilians have become not only the indirect victims of fighting, but also targets.

At the same time, the number of natural disasters is increasing, with around 608 million people affected in 2002. Most of these live in developing countries. In December 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami showed the extent of human vulnerability.

These crises have brought suffering to millions of people in the form of deprivation, illness, starvation, displacement, injury and death. For many, international solidarity provides the only hope for survival.

The European Union has a longstanding commitment to helping third countries through a range of aid programmes. It focuses particularly on the poorest regions, and in crisis zones, it provides needs-based relief assistance. Humanitarian aid features in the EU's draft constitutional treaty*. The Union also supports the principles of international humanitarian law and implements a solid human rights policy.

* (Competencies of the Union, paragraph 4 of article 13.)

Humanity and **solidarity** are among the core values of the European Union, which is why the bloc is one of the largest humanitarian donors in the world. But giving is not enough. The humanitarian aid Directorate General of the European Commission (ECHO) is committed to providing quality, efficient and fast aid, that benefits the most vulnerable.

Humanitarian aid is a difficult and serious business that must be carefully constructed, not improvised. Crises are more numerous and complex nowadays, and choices that are made about aid delivery have a direct impact on the lives of millions. Effective humanitarian aid is built on fundamental principles: **impartiality, non-discrimination, independence, neutrality.**

If these principles are forgotten, then humanitarian aid, and the survival of millions is put in question. The purpose of this brochure is to explain why it is so important for European humanitarian aid to stick by its value and principles.





European **humanitarian aid** at a glance

In addition to the programmes managed by individual EU Member States, humanitarian aid is also provided at European level.

In the European Commission, the Directorate General for humanitarian aid (ECHO) manages humanitarian aid financed by the Community budget.

The main objective of this aid is to **save and preserve** lives in emergency and immediate post emergency situations and during natural catastrophes and conflict.

As a donor, the European Commission does not implement projects directly in the field but gives support to partner organisations specialised in humanitarian aid. These operational partners include: United Nations humanitarian agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and non-governmental organisations that have signed a partnership agreement with the Commission.

The European Commission's role is also to increase coordination between Member States, third party donors, international humanitarian institutions and organisations and non-governmental organisations.

ECHO is one of the world's leading humanitarian donors. Since it was set up in 1992, it has financed and co-ordinated humanitarian operations in more than 100 countries outside the EU. In 2004, ECHO committed €570 million to humanitarian operations helping more than 60 million people.

***More information on ECHO's activities can be found at the following web address:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo>***



Values and principles

European humanitarian aid is based on the essential values of humanity and solidarity. Its implementation rests on fundamental principles of impartiality, non-discrimination, independence and neutrality.

The European Commission's humanitarian aid is distributed impartially, without discrimination, regardless of race, ethnic group, sex, age, nationality or political beliefs. **The only criterion is need.**

The approach is based solely on an objective analysis of people's needs and of realistic response possibilities. The Commission provides support whenever necessary and as long as there are needs, regardless of the political context and of relations between the EU and the affected country.

European humanitarian aid is therefore **"non political"** in character, and this gives added value to the overall European humanitarian effort.

The European Commission's humanitarian department attaches importance to the principle of **neutrality** in its own work and in those of its partners. This neutrality is essential to safeguard access to humanitarian aid for the victims and to reinforce the safety of humanitarian workers.

Finally, because human beings are the primary objective of humanitarian aid, the Commission gives priority to maintaining or restoring the dignity of humanitarian crisis victims.

AN IMPARTIAL APPROACH

During the 1990s, The European Commission managed a large aid programme for the victims of war in the Balkans. Following the different phases of this complex conflict, vulnerable population groups in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, all received emergency support. Between 1991 and 2003, ECHO distributed €2.3 billion in aid for the victims of the crisis.

The border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia which ended in June 2000 created vast humanitarian needs on both sides. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, and many of these were forced to live in camps in difficult conditions. In 2000 and 2001, ECHO gave aid to both countries involved in the conflict according to needs: €15 million to Eritrea and €23.7 million to help victims of conflict and drought in Ethiopia.

These examples show that Commission's humanitarian aid is allocated in an impartial manner, with the sole objective of reducing human suffering.



Protecting the “humanitarian space”

Why is the humanitarian space at risk?

Today's conflicts are more complex than ever. Instead of “traditional” wars between states, most current conflicts are a result of armed groups fighting for power or for natural resources. In other cases, the motive is mainly ethnic, tribal or religious.

The warring parties are often irregular armed groups, militias and foreign mercenaries, who have little knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL) and in particular the fundamental requirement to distinguish between fighters and civilians. They have always been the indirect victims of conflict, but today they are often the targets.

The humanitarian space, which is supposed to be guaranteed by the “rules of war” is also at risk. In breach of international humanitarian law, humanitarian workers have frequently become the target of attacks or hostage taking. The attacks against the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Iraq, and the assassination of humanitarian workers in Afghanistan and elsewhere are just a few tragic examples of this trend.

Another worrying development is the difficulty increasingly faced by aid workers in actually reaching the people who need relief assistance. Access is inevitably hindered when battles are raging but all too often, the denial of access is also a deliberate policy by one or other of the combatants, in violation of basic humanitarian principles.

The issue is complicated by the increasing involvement of non-humanitarian actors in the strict sense of the term - such as the military, civil defence personnel, or “commercial” agencies - in distributing humanitarian aid. This confusion is exacerbated by the misuse of the term “humanitarian” in political or journalistic language.

Any mixing of roles between the different actors in conflict situations is dangerous, both for the local populations and for aid workers. That is why the European Commission supports organisations advocating and promoting fundamental humanitarian principles.

CODE OF CONDUCT ON PRINCIPLES AND GOOD PRACTICES FOR HUMANITARIAN DONORS

The representatives of governments and other donors such as the European Commission, the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, as well as other organisations involved in humanitarian aid, met in Stockholm in June 2003. Their objective was to highlight the basic principles that should govern humanitarian law, identify good practices and agree on the best way to implement and follow up. The 18 donors present signed up to a “Code of Conduct on principles and good practices for humanitarian donors”. This commitment was reiterated at a second conference in Ottawa in October 2004.

The code states clearly that, to implement humanitarian aid, priority must be given to civil organisations, especially in conflict zones. If military assets are used to support humanitarian aid programmes, the code recommends that it should be in accordance with IHL and humanitarian principles, and stresses that leadership should stay with humanitarian organisations.

See the full text at <http://www.reliefweb.int/ghd>

The European Commission believes that the best way as a donor to preserve the humanitarian space is to advocate and support the “Principles and good practices for humanitarian donors”, and in particular the need to provide aid according to needs, regardless of political objectives.

The experience of recent crises in Afghanistan and the Middle East has shown that these principles are essential for effective humanitarian aid, to ensure access to victims, and to protect humanitarian workers. While it is important to develop information exchange mechanisms for the effective management of a crisis, political and military activities should stay distinct and separate from humanitarian operations.

Respect for the humanitarian space is essential for the delivery of humanitarian aid - the only hope for survival for millions of crisis victims around the world.

GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF MILITARY AND CIVIL DEFENCE ASSETS (MCDA) TO SUPPORT UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES IN COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

The European Commission supported the drafting of these Guidelines which were launched in Brussels jointly by ECHO and the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2003.

With the aim of ensuring that fundamental humanitarian principles are respected during and after conflicts, the guidelines provide a framework for co-operation between humanitarian organisations and political/military actors. For example:

- “MCDA should be employed by humanitarian agencies as a last resort, i.e. only in the absence of any other available civilian alternative to support urgent humanitarian needs in the time required.”
- “A humanitarian operation using military assets must retain its civilian nature and character. While military assets will remain under military control, the operation as a whole must remain under the overall authority and control of the responsible humanitarian organisation.”

See the full text at:

<http://ochaonline.un.org/DocView.asp?DocID=426>

Analysis of needs and priorities

If aid is allocated according to need, how does ECHO evaluate where the needs are greatest. How are priorities identified?

ECHO has adopted a systematic approach for measuring humanitarian needs in the world:

- ▣ An evaluation of needs is carried out in the crisis zone by ECHO field experts. ECHO partners also provide information on needs.
- ▣ At the same time, ECHO maintains a global evaluation of needs (Global Needs Assessment) covering all countries affected by humanitarian crises, classed according to nine indicators. This analysis completes ECHO's detailed analysis, and enables the comparison of needs in different countries.

The nine needs indicators are: the global level of development, poverty levels, the risk of natural catastrophes, conflicts, the refugee population, numbers of displaced people, malnutrition rates, child mortality, and the contributions of other donors.

The statistics are taken from international organisations such as the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for refugee numbers, and the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) for figures on conflict.

- ▣ These detailed analyses enable ECHO to ensure that aid is allocated to the most vulnerable groups, in **those areas and sectors where the needs are greatest**. This feeds into an annual strategy in which the Commission defines the thematic and geographic priorities for the coming year. The priorities take account of the global situation, the financial resources available, the availability of specialised partners, security and access to populations in need.

The humanitarian aid Directorate General's 2005 strategy highlights certain "thematic" priorities, such as:

- ❑ **children** because they are often the most vulnerable during a crisis,
- ❑ **water** which is essential for the survival of populations during a humanitarian crisis, but also at the root of many natural disasters.

Darfur in Sudan, with its enormous and continuing humanitarian needs, was also identified as a **geographical area** requiring priority treatment.

On the basis of this strategy the Commission can take various types of decision: comprehensive action plans for countries or regions affected by protracted conflict, ad hoc decisions for emerging and other crisis situations, and fast track "primary emergency" decisions (within 72 hours of sudden onset disasters) for the immediate mobilisation of relief assistance.

The complete methodology of the "global needs assessment", the results of the annual evaluation, ECHO's annual strategy, humanitarian decisions, and other data can be found on the ECHO web site at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/information/strategy/index_en.htm



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In the framework of this brochure, ECHO has published a series of 5 posters that illustrate the values and principles of European humanitarian aid.

To obtain these posters, contact: echo-info@cec.eu.int