



THE EUROPEAN  
UNION  
EXPLAINED

Helping victims  
of disasters  
and conflicts,  
and protecting  
those at risk

# Humanitarian aid and civil protection

European humanitarian aid makes a true difference for all those people suffering from disasters and conflicts in the world.



# THE EUROPEAN UNION EXPLAINED

*This publication is a part of a series that explains what the EU does in different policy areas, why the EU is involved and what the results are.*

*You can find the publications online:*

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### The EU explained:

#### Humanitarian aid and civil protection

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# Why we need an EU humanitarian aid and civil protection policy

## Saving lives and preventing human suffering

The images of conflicts and disasters which fill our television screens and newspapers are the backdrop to our world's increasingly complex and vulnerable environment. As the scale of natural disasters and conflicts increases, humanitarian needs grow. The EU responds by providing emergency assistance to victims of disasters and conflicts based on their needs around the world. It does this through the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO). ECHO's mission is to alleviate suffering, maintain the dignity of those affected and save lives. This is one of the most tangible expressions of the EU's core value of solidarity.

There has been a surge in crises in recent years. 2014 saw an unprecedented four 'Level 3' emergencies declared by the United Nations — the highest category on its scale. The EU is present in all four of these crisis zones: Syria, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Iraq. But it is also helping people who need aid in Afghanistan, the Sahel region and throughout Africa, central and south America and south-east Asia. The EU also runs relief operations in 'forgotten' crises that benefit from little international attention.

Helping the world's most vulnerable populations is a moral obligation of the international community and the European Commission has a longstanding commitment to help. ECHO provides relief assistance directly to people in distress, irrespective of their nationality, religion, gender or ethnic origin.

The work of the European Commission goes beyond the immediate consequences of disasters and the needs of people affected by them. Investing in risk-prevention and preparedness before a disaster strikes pays significant dividends compared with facing the costs of relief, recovery and reconstruction afterwards. In this way the EU ensures that its efforts cover the full disaster cycle: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

This involves combining disaster-response with a vast range of activities in order to:

- reduce disaster risks, for example through strategies to mitigate the consequences of climate change;

- improve preparedness for disasters, for instance by developing early-warning systems;
- ensure a smooth transition when the emergency operation comes to an end by linking up with development aid strategies;
- strengthen the overall resilience of populations, for example by investing in measures that help prepare populations for future shocks.

Constant adjustments are needed to rise to the new challenges caused by evolving global threats. To improve the effectiveness of its crisis response, in 2010 the EU brought humanitarian aid and civil protection together under one roof.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism helps the participating countries prevent disasters, prepare for emergencies and pool their resources which can then be made available for a coordinated and rapid response in disaster-hit countries. While the EU's humanitarian aid targets non-EU countries, the Mechanism can be mobilised in case of emergencies both inside and outside the EU. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism is a tool which enhances European cooperation. It supports Member States' own civil protection arrangements at the national, regional and local levels by providing



*The EU has been funding humanitarian aid in India since 1996.*

effective tools for preventing, preparing for, and responding to natural and man-made disasters. The result for the EU of this complementary and streamlined framework is an enhanced response and coordination capacity with better use of resources.

### Making a difference together

The European Union, together with its Member States, is the world's leading humanitarian aid donor. Every year, humanitarian funding from the EU budget provides assistance to more than 120 million people in more than 90 non-EU countries.

While representing only a fraction of EU spending — less than 1 % of the annual EU budget — the amount of more than €1 billion in aid every year goes a long way in meeting the needs of people in crisis situations. From aid to the Philippines to help stabilise the country in the aftermath of the typhoon Haiyan in 2013, to the protection of civilians following the 2014 floods which devastated parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, from coordinating airlifts to Ebola-affected Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia after the largest recorded outbreak of the virus in 2014, and helping millions in the Sahel facing hunger, to the ongoing efforts to assist the millions of Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict in their country, the assistance delivered has made a real difference to those in need.

### United in solidarity

A survey carried out in 2012 revealed that 9 out of 10 EU citizens support the EU's funding of humanitarian aid. Despite the impact of the economic crisis, this trend was on the rise, endorsing a strong European commitment to action in this field. An overwhelming majority also agreed that coordinated EU action in the field of civil protection to respond to disasters is more effective than individual countries taking on the task alone.

The responsibility to provide humanitarian aid is shared between the EU's Member States and our aid is delivered in cooperation with international and local humanitarian organisations. In the field of civil protection, the EU is responsible for supporting, coordinating and complementing the activities of its Member States. This coordination role has enabled the EU to set its goals higher by pooling European resources and expertise.

To manage the longer-term impact of disasters and step up prevention and preparedness, humanitarian aid and crisis response must go hand-in-hand with activities in other fields including development cooperation and environmental protection. This requirement makes coordination at EU level essential.



*This previously displaced Burundian family was able to return home thanks to EU resettlement support.*

## Why we need to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable people

Every year millions of people are affected by droughts, floods, landslides, cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires and other hazards. An estimated 97 % of natural disaster-related deaths occur in developing countries, and these countries bear the heaviest burden in terms of livelihoods lost. It is therefore crucial to increase the resilience of vulnerable people in the developing world so that they can better withstand and cope with disasters.

## How is the EU helping?

Strengthening resilience lies at the junction between humanitarian and development assistance. With this in mind, in 2012 the European Commission proposed a new policy to the European Parliament and the Council on how EU development and humanitarian aid should aim to increase national resilience capabilities and reduce the vulnerability of people affected by disasters through disaster management plans and early-warning systems.

The Commission's resilience-building initiatives in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, as part of its response to the drought crises in these regions, have shown promising results. These initiatives (AGIR-Sahel and SHARE respectively) seek to break the vicious cycle of drought, hunger and poverty by increasing coordination between humanitarian and development assistance. The SHARE initiative in the Horn of Africa has already mobilised €350 million since 2012 and will be followed up by projects under the 11th European Development Fund. The AGIR initiative aims to mobilise €1.5 billion for resilience building in the Sahel between 2014 and 2020.

The European Commission's focus on resilience will save more lives, be more cost-effective and contribute to reducing poverty — thus boosting the impact of aid and promoting sustainable development.



In Vanuatu, children help to construct a model of the biggest threat to their lives, the volcano on Mount Gharat.

## A joint response in the face of growing threats

The scale and frequency of humanitarian emergencies occurring around the globe every year is on the rise. Climate change, population growth and urbanisation, industrial activities and environmental degradation combined are a major root cause of this phenomenon.

Ever since its first intervention in war-torn former Yugoslavia in 1992, to the massive ongoing humanitarian disaster in Syria and the swiftly coordinated civil protection operations in the aftermath of the Haiyan typhoon in the Philippines and the floods in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014, the EU has demonstrated again and again its capacity to rise to new and growing humanitarian challenges.

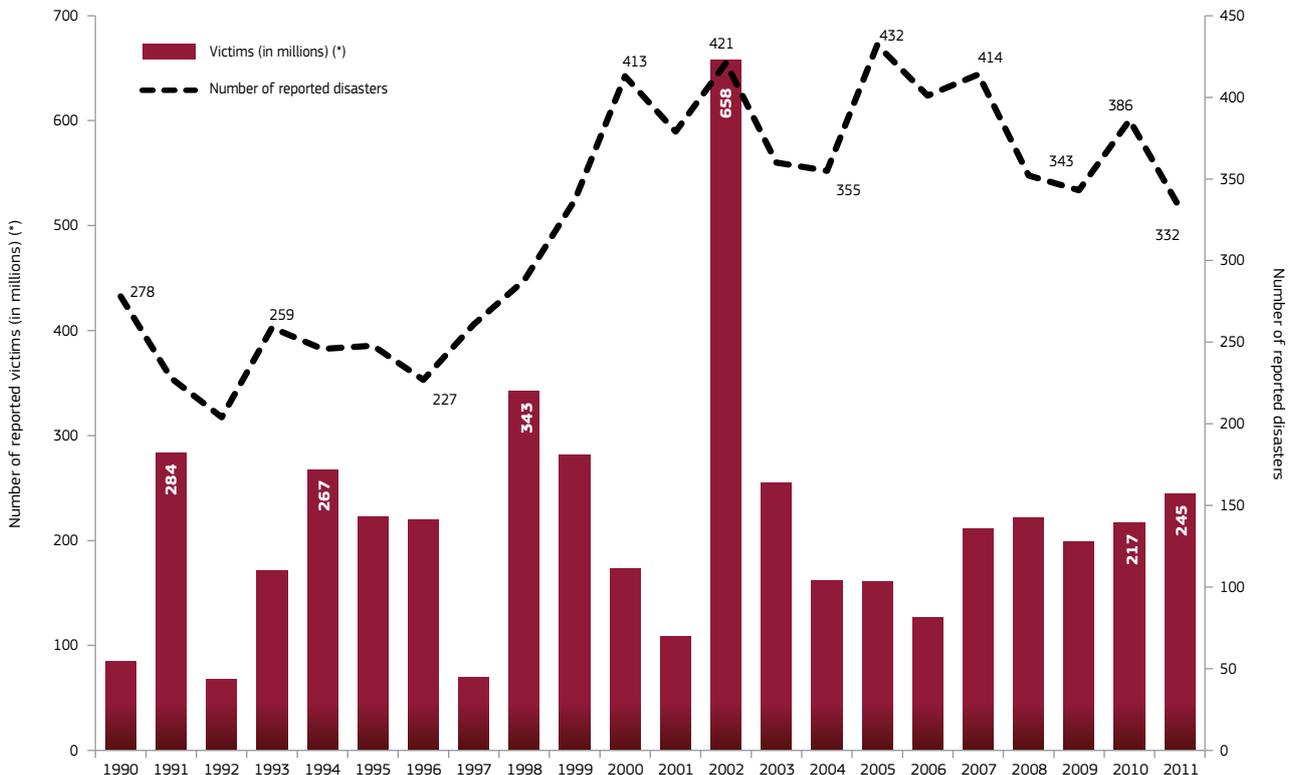
## Climate-related disaster mitigation: the case of Vanuatu

*The Pacific region is one of the most disaster-prone areas in the world in terms of the recurrence, severity and scope of hazards. It suffers from high exposure to cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, landslides, forest fires and volcanic eruptions, as well as epidemics.*

*In the Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu, one of the world's least developed countries, climate change has made the threat of natural disasters more severe.*

*The EU is helping local communities deal with the effects of disasters and improve their preparedness for such events, for instance, by means of threat assessments, planning for emergencies and the construction of cyclone shelters. Between 2007 and 2012 the EU gave €4.3 million to help with disaster-preparedness and €2.3 million to assist communities affected by natural disasters in the western Pacific region. A €3 million disaster preparedness programme is currently ongoing in the Pacific region.*

### TRENDS IN OCCURRENCE AND VICTIMS OF DISASTERS



(\*) Victims: sum of killed and total affected.

## How the EU goes about it

### A needs-based approach

The EU provides relief assistance based on the needs of the people affected and reaches out to those who need the help most, regardless of nationality, religion, gender, ethnic origin or political affiliation.

The EU's aid is carefully tailored to match the specific characteristics of each crisis, taking into account factors such as the gender and age of those affected. The EU carries out needs assessments before making funding decisions.

The EU concentrates on crisis situations which might have moved outside the focus of international media and donor attention while needs continue to be high. In such 'forgotten crises', the EU conducts specific assessments to identify the current needs on the ground and provide relief.

#### Help where needed, when needed

Humanitarian aid and civil protection interventions are often carried out in extreme circumstances: help must reach victims urgently and match their specific needs while logistic and security constraints often make access to disaster-stricken areas difficult.

In addition to the 347-strong workforce at headquarters, the EU has a worldwide network of 44 specialised humanitarian field offices present in 39 countries around the globe, along with 148 humanitarian experts in the field supported by 320 local staff members. In crisis situations, they provide technical support to EU-funded operations, monitor interventions and help locally with donor coordination. They also contribute to intervention strategies and policies.

The EU provides funding to around 200 humanitarian partner organisations, including specialised United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), EU countries' agencies and organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies. The funding provided to these partners is based on their proposals on how to cover the needs of disaster-affected people. The EU ensures that the funds it provides are coordinated with those made available directly by its Member States and other humanitarian organisations.

The EU has launched the EU Aid Volunteers initiative enabling Europeans to support and contribute to humanitarian projects in countries where assistance is most needed (see the chapter entitled 'Where we go from here' for more details on this initiative).

#### Common core values

*The EU's humanitarian aid partners must endorse fundamental humanitarian principles.*

- **Humanity:** suffering must be addressed wherever it is found.
- **Neutrality:** aid must not favour any one group over others.
- **Impartiality:** aid must be provided solely on the basis of needs without discrimination.
- **Independence:** the sole purpose of humanitarian aid is to relieve human suffering; it cannot serve any other objectives.

#### On the ground

To cover the basic needs of victims in a particular disaster and to help protect their livelihoods, EU-funded humanitarian aid can take various forms, depending on the particular circumstances of the crisis.

Food and nutrition assistance might include emergency rations for displaced people, including special nutritional products for acutely malnourished children in drought-affected areas and seeds and fertilisers for farmers. Cash and voucher schemes and food assistance improve livelihoods and address nutritional issues.

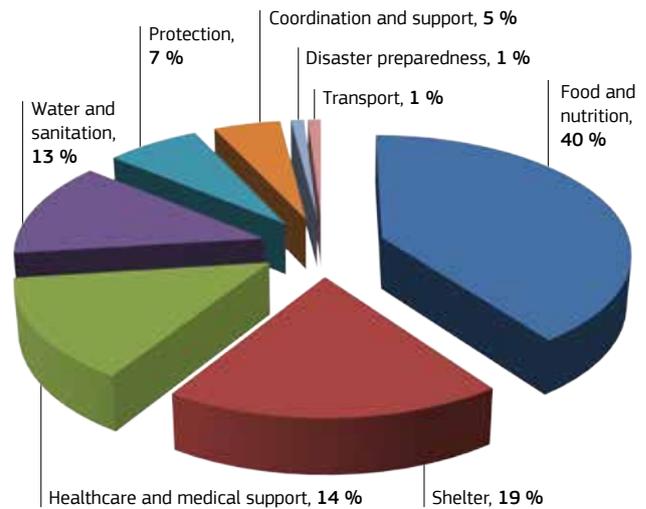
Medical assistance includes vaccination campaigns to prevent epidemics, the treatment of injuries and the establishment of primary health clinics. Other aid services include the provision of drugs, hospital equipment, staff training and access to basic health care, with a focus on vulnerable people such as pregnant women and children.

Access to clean water and sanitation is a priority in disaster zones to promote hygiene and proper sanitation and to prevent diseases from spreading. Aid activities include the creation of wells, boreholes and latrines, water piping, sewage treatment and hygiene education.

Shelter is essential for survival and is a basic form of security for people whose homes have been destroyed following a disaster. Affected people receive tents, plastic sheeting or other types of shelter. Emergency operations can also include repairs to infrastructure, demining actions, psycho-social support and education.

Many operations also prepare local residents to cope with disasters and to lessen the impact of possible future disasters on their communities.

#### ALLOCATION OF BUDGET PER POLICY SECTOR (2013 DATA)



Source: European Commission.

### Strengthening disaster preparedness worldwide — the Dipecho programme

*Where it is impossible to foresee hazards and prevent disasters, improving the preparedness of populations can often reduce their toll. This is what the EU's disaster preparedness programme 'Dipecho' aims to achieve.*

*Dipecho projects focus on training, capacity-building, awareness-raising, the establishment and improvement of local early-warning systems and contingency planning. They include simple preparatory measures which can often be implemented by the locals themselves. In most cases, they actively contribute to Dipecho activities.*

*The projects are carried out by European-based aid agencies and UN agencies in cooperation with local NGOs and authorities. Dipecho covers eight disaster-prone regions: the Caribbean, central America, south America, central Asia, south Asia, south-east Asia, south-east Africa and the south-west Indian Ocean and Pacific region.*

### Joining forces to tackle crises globally

**The EU Civil Protection Mechanism** covers the entire disaster cycle from prevention and preparedness to response. It currently brings together 32 countries, namely the 28 EU Member States plus the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro and Norway. By pooling the civil protection resources of the participating states, the mechanism ensures better protection of people, the environment and property. The primary responsibility for responding to the immediate effects of a disaster lies with the country where the disaster has occurred. However, when the scale of an emergency overwhelms national response capabilities, any EU or non-EU disaster-stricken country can request assistance through the Civil Protection Mechanism. Disaster situations include floods, forest fires, earthquakes, storms or tsunamis as well as acts of terrorism, technological or radiological accidents and environmental disasters such as marine pollution.

When a disaster-affected country requests assistance, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism's operational hub, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), communicates the specific needs of the disaster-stricken country to all participating countries. Participating states offer in-kind assistance to deploy experts and to support the emergency response on site. This may include search and rescue teams or field hospitals, relief supplies, water purification plants or high capacity pumping modules, as well as specialised equipment for decontamination in cases of chemical or biological incidents. The ERCC coordinates the European response by putting requests

and offers of assistance together, by facilitating and often co-funding the transport of the assistance and by sending out teams to monitor the situation if needed. The ERCC is a 24/7 service.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism also strengthens disaster preparedness in the participating states with training programmes and exercises as well as the exchange of experts between different countries. These initiatives provide learning opportunities for the civil protection personnel in the participating states. They help to improve the speed and coordination of civil protection assistance and to promote the transfer of knowledge and the creation of networks.

Funding is also provided for prevention and preparedness projects. This may include encouraging research on disaster-related topics, strengthening early warning tools, or supporting awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the general public. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism focuses on areas where a common European approach can bring the most added value and also links civil protection to other areas of EU policy-making so as to maximise its impact.

### Preparation through simulation

*EU Prometheus, a major simulation exercise, took place in Greece in 2014. It was designed to test the cooperation and response capacities of Member States through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Teams from Greece, Croatia, Italy and Cyprus participated, alongside the ERCC. The decision-making process and the role of the ERCC were also tested.*

*The exercise staged a twin disaster on the ground: a vast wildfire near populated areas had affected an industrial zone, resulting in an explosion. Fire-fighting and rescue operations were carried out simultaneously and the populated areas were evacuated.*

*Past exercises have included a forest fire caused by sparks coming from the brakes of a train and a village flooded by a broken reservoir system. Exercises of this type are organised every year with a financial contribution from the EU.*



*An EU civil protection exercise, Prometheus 2014, tested the cooperation and response capacities of Member States.*

## What the EU does

### Delivering on commitments

Since 1992 the EU has helped millions of disaster victims throughout the world. In humanitarian funding, the EU institutions now provide an average of more than €1 billion every year to support the world's most vulnerable people. Together with funding provided by EU countries individually, this makes the EU the leading humanitarian donor worldwide. Annually the EU provides humanitarian aid to more than 120 million people in 92 non-EU countries.

Since its establishment in 2001 the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has monitored more than 300 disasters and has received more than 180 requests for assistance. Between 2010 and 2014, the mechanism was activated for more than 80 emergencies inside and outside the EU.

Achievements cannot be measured solely in terms of response statistics: the less visible impact of disaster preparedness and prevention plays an equally important role in the EU's approach to humanitarian aid and civil protection. The existing framework allows EU countries to work together efficiently and to promote respect for, and adherence to, international humanitarian law.

### Over two decades of solidarity

ECHO celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2012. It has come a long way since its creation. The decision to launch ECHO was taken by the EU's then 12 member countries, as the scale and diversity of humanitarian crises affecting the world in 1991 made the limitations of Europe's response capacity apparent. Large-scale disasters such as the conflict in former Yugoslavia, a cyclone in Bangladesh and a famine in Somalia called for more coordination at EU level to allow for a faster and more efficient response.

ECHO was launched with around 40 staff and has since then grown into a large but lean organisation with more than 300 people working at its Brussels headquarters, alongside over 400 humanitarian expert staff in 44 field offices, located in those countries most severely affected by crises in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Along with its human and financial resources, its framework for action has been constantly adapted to allow the EU to face ever-greater challenges.

In 2007, the EU's institutions and the then 27 Member States agreed on a key policy document entitled the



*Afghans receive tools as part of an ECHO-funded response to a drought that caused hunger and displacement.*

‘European consensus on humanitarian aid’. It stressed that EU humanitarian aid is not a political tool and reaffirmed the guiding principles of humanitarian aid: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It also clearly defined the roles of different humanitarian actors in crisis zones to strengthen the EU’s capacity to help.

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, introduced a legal basis for EU humanitarian aid as well as for civil protection policies. It defines the EU’s role in improving disaster protection and prevention and states that the EU should apply international humanitarian law including impartiality and non-discrimination.

Plans to reinforce and continue to improve the way the EU manages its response to disasters are being considered.

### Swift and efficient response

The EU has provided help to victims in the aftermath of numerous disasters around the globe. The following presents a short selection of key interventions.

- The war in former Yugoslavia left hundreds of thousands of people displaced, hungry and traumatised in 1992. The EU delivered aid including 300 000 tonnes of food, blankets, mattresses and toiletries.
- Victims fleeing their homes after the 1994 Rwandan genocide received EU aid that included medical care such as rehydration kits and vaccinations for children. Those returning to destroyed villages received resettlement kits.
- Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the EU has provided more than €584 million in aid to meet the urgent needs of the Afghan people.
- In 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami killed over 230 000 people. The EU’s initial response focused on ensuring the survival of its victims. Longer-term projects included the construction of camps for the homeless, funding for health workers and the purchase of fishing boats to rebuild livelihoods.
- In 2010, large-scale aid operations took place in Sudan and Pakistan. In Sudan, the EU supported the delivery of humanitarian aid to six million people who were victims of conflict and seasonal flooding. In Pakistan, 12.5 million people received shelter, food, drinking water, healthcare and sanitation facilities after the country was hit by flooding.
- When a devastating earthquake and tsunami hit Japan in 2011, the EU provided 400 tonnes of in-kind assistance and deployed a European Civil Protection team including experts in logistics and radiology. European financial aid assisted families in the worst affected provinces.
- In 2012, the EU helped millions of people in the Sahel facing hunger. Humanitarian assistance reached hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing conflict in their country.
- Since the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013, more than 1.7 million people have fled their homes, including 450 000 who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The EU has reached 2.4 million people with food assistance, nutrition, health, water and sanitation, shelter and protection.
- Following catastrophic floods in the Balkans in 2014, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated, with 23 Member States deploying relief workers, rescue and evacuation helicopters, motor boats, generators, sandbags, tents, blankets and humanitarian aid kits.

### Stepping up prevention to save lives

The EU’s efforts have covered actions both inside and outside our Member States, with achievements ranging from efficient coordination at European level to the successful training of local experts in other parts of the world.

- The EU has developed various early-warning systems including the online alert platform ‘Meteoalarm’ and the ‘Global Disaster Alerts and Coordination System’, a round-the-clock data-gathering and alert system. It has also invested in warning and detection systems for specific hazards such as earthquakes, floods, forest fires and tsunamis.
- EU investment in disaster prevention and mitigation technologies and close cooperation with other partners has resulted in the development of the European Forest Fire Information System and the European Flood Alert System.

## CASE STUDY

### Syria: a multifaceted humanitarian and security disaster

*Since the violent crackdown on protests in Syria in March 2011, the conflict has evolved towards a fully-fledged civil war with severe humanitarian consequences in Syria and its neighbouring countries.*

*Tens of thousands of people have lost their lives due to the fighting and half of the population has been forced to flee in order to seek protection in safer areas. More than three million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries while others have been under siege in areas where fighting is taking place.*

*The humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate, causing what is the largest humanitarian and security crisis in the world. An entire generation of children has been exposed to*

*war, violence and death, and is being deprived of basic freedoms, protection and education.*

*While security conditions limit access to besieged areas, the EU has made nearly €3 billion available since the beginning of the crisis, making it the world's largest donor to the Syrian conflict. This assistance addresses the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable people in Syria and neighbouring countries, most notably the expansion of healthcare and water supply services.*

*Aid has been provided in support of an estimated 10.8 million people affected by the crisis and in need of humanitarian assistance via medical emergency relief including food-nutritional items, protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter and logistics services. The EU continues to lead the international response to the Syria crisis through its sustained humanitarian presence on the ground, increased international coordination and advocacy efforts.*

## CASE STUDY

### Sahel: alerting the world to a forgotten crisis

*One in eight people in the world suffered from chronic hunger between 2011 and 2013 and this figure continues to rise. This is due to population growth and the increasing frequency and intensity of natural and man-made disasters, reducing the capacity of the most vulnerable communities to feed themselves.*

*The Sahel belt that stretches from west to east across sub-Saharan Africa is among the poorest regions in the world. Consecutive food and nutrition crises, drought and underdevelopment are putting tens of millions of people at risk of not getting enough to eat. As the magnitude of this humanitarian crisis grows, so too does the EU's support. Since the beginning of 2012, the EU has increased its humanitarian aid contribution in this area to more than €507 million. Its intervention relies on a phased approach combining resilience-*

*building through the AGIR initiative with emergency response during the annual lean seasons and recovery in their aftermath.*

*The humanitarian response to this crisis has succeeded in saving many lives and reducing its impact on families. The EU has been instrumental in shining a spotlight on the Sahel crisis. Beyond the emergency help provided, it also works to promote the recognition of food insecurity as a structural issue by stressing its key role in the fight against poverty.*

*In the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa, repeated drought resulted in acute food insecurity for millions of people. However, vulnerable populations in other countries, including Pakistan and Yemen, are also facing food and nutrition insecurity. More than one third of the EU annual humanitarian aid budget is used to provide emergency food and nutrition assistance, making it one of the world's major donors of humanitarian food assistance. Since 2010, ECHO has supported more than 100 million people facing acute food insecurity.*

## CASE STUDY

### Balkans floods: from complex operation to European cooperation

*In May 2014 Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were hit by devastating floods, the worst in over a century. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their livelihoods and were evacuated from their homes.*

*The situation was complex. Cities were left without electricity or running water and with shortages of bottled water, food, medication and blankets. Key infrastructure across the region, including bridges and roads as well as health and educational facilities, were damaged in many affected areas. It is estimated that more than three million people in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia were affected by the floods, mudslides and landslides.*

*The EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated, resulting in offers from 23 Member States. In-kind assistance included rescue and evacuation*

*helicopters, motor boats, generators, sandbags, tents, blankets and humanitarian aid kits, along with more than 800 relief workers deployed to the two countries. In addition, two EU Civil Protection teams were sent to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to help with the coordination of relief efforts and assist rescue operations. More than 1700 people were rescued in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone. The European Commission also co-financed the transportation of relief material and personnel. In addition, more than 80 satellite maps were produced to support both the affected countries and those providing assistance.*

*On top of the in-kind assistance provided by the EU Member States via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU also released €3 million in humanitarian aid to help the most vulnerable people in the two affected countries. This allocation provided humanitarian assistance to half a million people. But extensive recovery and reconstruction needs remain in both countries.*



*Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, a Slovenian helicopter provides emergency relief to the people affected by the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

## CASE STUDY

### Ebola in West Africa: EU response to the worst outbreak ever recorded

West Africa is facing the worst epidemic of the Ebola virus disease on record. This is the first time Ebola has spread in this region since the discovery of the virus in 1976. After the first case was discovered in Guinea in March 2014 the virus quickly spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone, infecting and killing thousands. With no vaccine or specific treatment available, Ebola has a 60 to 90 % mortality rate, making it one of the deadliest diseases.

The EU was one of the first responders to address the epidemic and the critical needs on the ground. The European Commission and Member States have given over €1 billion and contributed to the strengthening of national healthcare systems, provided urgent humanitarian and development aid to the affected people, medical research and mobile laboratories, as well as equipment and personnel.

While the affected countries and humanitarian organisations are working to control the spread of the disease, they are facing challenging circumstances including limited transport capabilities, the infection and death of health workers, a lack of medical equipment and growing food insecurity and limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

In response, the European Commission has deployed humanitarian experts and equipment, including air transport for goods and emergency evacuation for personnel.

The EU's efforts are being continuously scaled up in order to contain the unremitting spread of the virus. At the request of the World Health Organisation, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was also activated to provide a comprehensive and coordinated response to the region through the deployment of in-kind assistance and further expertise.



The biggest Ebola outbreak ever recorded in West Africa requires an intensification of efforts to prevent it from spreading further and claiming many more lives.

## Where we go from here

### Meeting the needs

The EU has been at the forefront when responding to humanitarian needs worldwide, not only as a major donor but also by setting standards for the respect of international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. It is vital that the mechanisms put in place to deal with emergencies keep pace with the challenges posed by an increasingly fragile world and the growing variety of new needs. In order to achieve this, the EU continuously seeks to adapt and improve its efforts to respond to disasters in a more effective and efficient manner.

The EU believes disaster response is best served by having the right resources available at the local level. It is focusing on strengthening the resilience of local communities to better withstand future shocks.

The EU will be an active participant in the discussions relating to the World Humanitarian Summit to improve the effectiveness of the international humanitarian system.

Civil protection coordination is also expanding its responsibilities and scope with a new legal basis, a number of innovative instruments such as the voluntary pool of European assets, a fully effective operational hub — our Emergency Response Coordination Centre — as well as an enlarged scope of action promoting the solidarity clause and strategic outreach to international partners and cooperation among Commission services.

#### EU aid volunteers

The EU has established a European voluntary humanitarian aid corps to give citizens the opportunity to be involved in humanitarian action. As envisaged by the Treaty of Lisbon, in September 2012, the European Commission tabled plans which will create opportunities for 18 000 people to volunteer in humanitarian operations worldwide between 2014 and 2020.

The volunteer programme is open to young people who plan to take up a career in emergency aid work and humanitarian aid experts who already have experience.



*Diana Tonea from Romania, deployed in Haiti as a member of the voluntary corps, describes her experience as 'challenging and fulfilling'.*

The EU will ensure that participants are sent where their skills are most needed and ensure that they contribute to strengthening local capacities and local volunteering. The security of the volunteers is a priority.

In the first series of pilot projects, more than 250 Europeans have been sent to 40 countries including Haiti, Indonesia, Mozambique and Tajikistan. To prepare them for field work, they receive a mix of classroom-based and practical training prior to their deployment. As the pilot phase of the programme ends, the first deployment of EU Aid Volunteers will take place in 2015.

The EU Aid Volunteers programme will strengthen the Union's capacity to provide needs-based humanitarian aid and train the humanitarian leaders of tomorrow while giving young Europeans an opportunity to show solidarity with people in need.

## The EU Children of Peace initiative, a Nobel Peace Prize legacy

On 10 December 2012, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Inspired by the prize, the EU Children of Peace initiative was created to fund humanitarian projects ensuring education for children affected by conflict. Since 2012 it has continued to scale up its funding for the EU Children of Peace initiative to help the youngest victims of conflict.

Children are the most vulnerable victims of conflict. Ninety percent of the victims of conflicts are civilians and half of them are children. Seven million children are refugees and over 13 million children have been displaced within their own countries because of conflict. More than 28 million have been prevented from receiving an education. One of the priorities in helping and protecting children affected by conflict is to invest in access to schools, safe learning environments and psycho-social support to address their traumatic war experiences.

Through projects funded by the European Union and implemented by partner humanitarian organisations, the EU Children of Peace initiative has so far reached more than 108 000 girls and boys in 12 countries around the world. So far, children from Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Syrian refugees in Iraq, South Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Colombia and Ecuador have benefited from the initiative.



Education helps children in conflict to remain children.

EU Children of Peace (<http://ec.europa.eu/echo/en/what/humanitarian-aid/children-of-peace>)

## Find out more

- ▶ **EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection:** <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>
- ▶ **EU Aid Volunteers:** <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/en/what/humanitarian-aid/eu-aid-volunteers>
- ▶ **EU Children of Peace:** <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/en/what/humanitarian-aid/children-of-peace>
- ▶ **Questions about the European Union? Europe Direct can help:** 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11  
<http://europedirect.europa.eu>

