



Humanitarian Food Assistance

ECHO FACTSHEET

Facts & Figures

Largest beneficiary areas of humanitarian food and nutrition assistance in 2013:

- Sahel
- Syria
- South Sudan

Since 2010, the Commission has supported over **100 million people** facing acute food insecurity.

EU funding

In 2013, the European Commission provided **€535 million** for humanitarian food assistance and nutrition (41% of total humanitarian budget) in **53 countries**.



Voucher exchange for food in the local market. EC/ECHO/Said Penda Mbombo, Ivory Coast, 2012

Key messages

- The European Union is one of the world's leading donors of humanitarian food assistance. In 2013, the European Commission alone provided €535 million in food assistance and nutrition.
- The European Commission's Humanitarian Food Assistance Policy aims at ensuring the availability of, access to, and consumption of, safe and nutritious food for the hungriest and most vulnerable people to avert excessive mortality, emergency rates of acute undernutrition, or detrimental coping mechanisms.
- The European Commission undertakes continued efforts to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its humanitarian food assistance, particularly as this is the single largest component of its humanitarian aid budget. When designing a food assistance response, the European Commission compares alternative activities and tools on the basis of their cost-effectiveness for meeting the defined needs.
- The European Union is committed to providing humanitarian food assistance and was among the first parties to ratify the new Food Assistance Convention, which entered into force on 1 January 2013.
- The Convention embraces an important shift in food assistance, from the use of in-kind commodity food aid as the default response, towards a broader set of humanitarian food assistance tools such as money or vouchers that allow affected people to buy food locally. This upholds their dignity and helps promote local markets, benefitting local farming and food supply systems.

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Humanitarian situation and needs

Across the world hunger and undernutrition affect more people than ever before. This is linked to population growth and the increasing frequency and intensity of natural and man-made disasters, which reduce the capacity of the most vulnerable populations to access safe and nutritious food. A total of "842 million people in 2011–13, or around one in eight people in the world, were estimated to be suffering from chronic hunger, regularly not getting enough food to conduct an active life" (Source: FAO - The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2013). Each day more than 8 000 children die of undernutrition (Source: The Lancet, 2013). In response to this unacceptable reality, the European Commission targets its humanitarian and food assistance on the most vulnerable populations, adhering to two of the key principles of the European Union: humanity and solidarity.

The European Union's Humanitarian Response

Funding

The European Commission is one of the world's largest donors of humanitarian food assistance. Since 2010, the European Commission has been rolling out its new Humanitarian Food Assistance Policy and has supported over 100 million people facing acute food insecurity. In 2013, the European Commission provided €535 million for humanitarian food assistance and [nutrition](#)* projects through its partner organizations in 53 countries.

Humanitarian food assistance seeks to meet the food and nutritional needs of victims of crises, tackling hunger and acute undernutrition. This not only requires action during a crisis, but also ahead of looming crises and often in the immediate recovery period following a crisis.

The **food assistance 'toolbox'** offers many ways of safeguarding availability, access and consumption of safe and nutritious food at every stage of an emergency:

Before - In the months before a crisis when markets are still well stocked and functioning, it can be more effective and cheaper to provide cash or vouchers, rather than food. Doing this allows beneficiaries to buy food according to their individual needs, support local farmers and boost the local economy.

During - Depending on the nature of the crisis, little food may be available in local markets during the crises themselves. In this case, it may be necessary to provide food commodities directly.

After - In other contexts, people can best be helped by protecting or supporting their existing livelihood activities (e.g. farming, livestock herding). This can be done, for instance, through providing seeds and tools, or through delivering veterinary care, which allows people to continue to feed themselves and their families.

Ongoing - In places where acute undernutrition is widespread, the priority is to treat acutely undernourished children, while at the same time acting to prevent other children from becoming acutely undernourished. However, to find real long-term solutions,



undernutrition needs to be addressed from different angles and through a wider approach, for instance by reducing public health risks by ensuring access to safe water or by improving mothers' knowledge and awareness about their children's health and nutritional needs.

In order to provide appropriate and adequate food and nutritional assistance to targeted vulnerable populations facing food and nutrition crises, the Commission funds projects that:

- provide food assistance in the form of food products, cash and vouchers to affected populations.
- assist nutritional recovery, including therapeutic and supplementary feeding.
- restore basic livelihoods and help improve [resilience](#)* to future shocks of vulnerable groups.

Outreach and coordination with humanitarian partners

The European Commission's funding is channelled through over 200 partner organisations including United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. These partners are selected on the basis of their geographic presence and their operational capacity.

On 27 June 2011, the European Commission, along with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) signed a Statement of Intent on Programmatic Cooperation on Food Security and Nutrition. The aim of this initiative, which is resulting in enhanced cooperation at field level, is to work together to address the needs of the most food-insecure populations in an efficient and effective way, including ensuring proper links between humanitarian and development actions. The linkage between humanitarian and development efforts is crucial to build vulnerable populations' **resilience for future food crises**.

The key aspects of the European Commission's Humanitarian Food Assistance Policy are reflected in the new Food Assistance Convention, which promotes an up to-date, modernised food assistance approach. The EU ratified the Food Assistance Convention in November 2012, thus becoming a founding member. The new Food Assistance Convention entered into force on 1 January 2013. The European Commission's commitment for 2014 is to provide €300 million for humanitarian food assistance.



Examples of the Humanitarian Food Assistance in Action



In Kenya, the European Commission finances an integrated nutrition, health and livelihood programme designed to help people affected by drought and to address their subsequent hunger. This is done by funding health care projects to prevent illnesses which worsen people's undernutrition. Veterinary services and animal fodder are also provided to prevent pastoralists from losing their herds which are vital for both their livelihoods and food security. Vouchers are another tool; they are distributed to people most at risk so that they can exchange them for food and milk in local markets.



In Darfur, the European Commission funds a project that provides milling vouchers to people displaced by conflict, alongside their general food rations. This prevents people from having to sell their grain in order to have the money to pay for the rest of it to be milled into consumable flour. This is a good example of understanding the full range of the beneficiaries' needs, of ensuring that the quantity and nutritional value of the food consumed is not compromised, and of flexibly using a combination of tools best adapted to the context.



In the Democratic Republic of Congo* (DRC), violence in the eastern part of the country has resulted in people being uprooted from their homes. The European Commission is providing cash through an NGO partner organisation to enable displaced households to meet the food needs of their families. The displaced families are scattered across an area and use their cash in different markets, thereby supporting local traders and stimulating local markets. Assistance in the form of cash allows people to manage the humanitarian assistance they receive according to their real needs as they decide where, how, and when to make purchases.



In the Philippines, Typhoon Haiyan* triggered storms, surges and flash floods after tearing through the islands on 8 November 2013. The European Commission immediately mobilized resources to World Food Programme and NGOs to assist its victims. At first food distribution was necessary to meet the immediate needs of families. Then, progressively, as local markets started to function normally, cash was provided instead of food commodities enabling families to cover expenses related to medicine, livelihood recovery, house reconstruction and education. This contributed to meeting beneficiary preferences, fostering dignity and positively contributing to the restoration of the local economy.

