



Mekong Region (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam)

ECHO FACTSHEET

Facts & Figures

EU humanitarian assistance

Cambodia:

€14.6 million to assist victims of natural disasters since 2009

Lao PDR:

Over €17 million in response to natural disasters since 1998

Vietnam:

€26.6 million in response to natural disasters since 1994

Disaster preparedness

€31.7 million for disaster preparedness in the three Mekong countries since 1995, including €1.6 million in 2016-2017



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Key messages

- Located in one of the world's most disaster-prone regions, the Mekong region - made up of Vietnam, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Cambodia - is frequently affected by natural disasters, especially by floods, droughts and typhoons.
- The European Commission has provided close to €58.3 million in humanitarian assistance to the three Mekong region countries since 1994, including over €2 million in response to a severe drought and saltwater intrusion that hit Vietnam in the first half of 2016.
- A well-prepared community saves lives and reduces the impact of natural hazards. Integrating [Disaster Risk Reduction](#)* (DRR) measures in humanitarian aid and strengthening local communities' resilience are key priorities for ECHO.
- The European Commission has invested €31.7 million in disaster preparedness initiatives in the region, to help communities better prepare for natural disasters and contribute to build up their resilience.

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Humanitarian situation and needs

Background

Located in one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world, **Cambodia**, **Lao PDR** and **Vietnam** are all very vulnerable to natural hazards. The fact that they remain primarily agricultural economies further increases their vulnerability. In **Cambodia**, for example, 90% of the country's poor live in rural areas, where the seasonal monsoon rains and the resulting floods can cause widespread destruction.

In neighbouring **Lao PDR**, vulnerability to natural hazards has been increasing as a result of illegal logging and deforestation. Disasters take place against the background of widespread poverty, especially in rural and inaccessible mountain areas, where ethnic minorities are concentrated. Most recently, in August 2016, a series of torrential downpours triggered floods in many parts of the country. The floods affected almost 20 000 people, damaged houses and left huge swathes of agricultural lands inundated.

With its long coastline, **Vietnam** is regularly affected by cyclones and tropical storms. While local capacity to withstand and respond to natural disasters has been substantially enhanced in the last decade, additional support is sometimes required when large-scale disasters strike.

Major challenges

With the resultant destruction of homes and livelihoods, storms, droughts and landslides often leave inhabitants in need of help. Outbreaks of tropical diseases such as dengue and malaria put an additional strain on local health services, and preventive action is required at community level. Access to the affected populations can sometimes represent an additional challenge in remote areas with inadequate and/or damaged infrastructure.

The European Union's humanitarian response

Funding

The European Commission regularly funds humanitarian assistance to address the needs arising from recurrent natural disasters in the Mekong Region, with total funding for the three countries amounting to almost €58.3 million since 1994. In 2016, over €2 million were released to provide assistance to people affected by drought and saltwater intrusion in Vietnam's Central Highlands and Mekong Delta. The funds are being used to support projects aiming to address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable families through the provision of safe water and unconditional cash transfers, as well as the promotion of good hygiene practices. Considering how prone the region is to natural hazards, the projects also incorporate disaster preparedness measures. Overall, more than 135 000 people in some of the hardest-hit areas benefit from these EU-funded interventions. Furthermore, in response to the 2016 floods in Lao PDR, the Commission released funding to support heavily-impacted families through the delivery of emergency food and non-food relief items such as blankets, mosquito nets and sanitary items.

In late 2013, a total of €4 million were provided following the devastation caused by cyclones Wutip and Nari in both Cambodia and Vietnam. In Cambodia, €2 million were allocated for emergency shelter, food aid, livelihoods, water, sanitation and hygiene, while another €1 million was used for early recovery such as rehabilitation of small-scale infrastructure and medium-term food assistance. In Vietnam, a €1 million envelope was released to meet the primary needs of the victims in terms of shelter, livelihood support, water, sanitation and hygiene.

Disaster Preparedness



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In a context where the vast majority of the population relies mainly on agriculture, the accumulation of irregular seasonal patterns or frequent meteorological shocks such as floods and drought recurrently damage people's livelihoods. Deforestation, erosion of the riverbanks and improper land use are other human-made causes augmenting the impact of natural hazards.

Under its Disaster Preparedness Programme, the European Commission seeks to reduce risks posed by natural hazards to the most vulnerable populations, as well as to improve local communities' resilience.

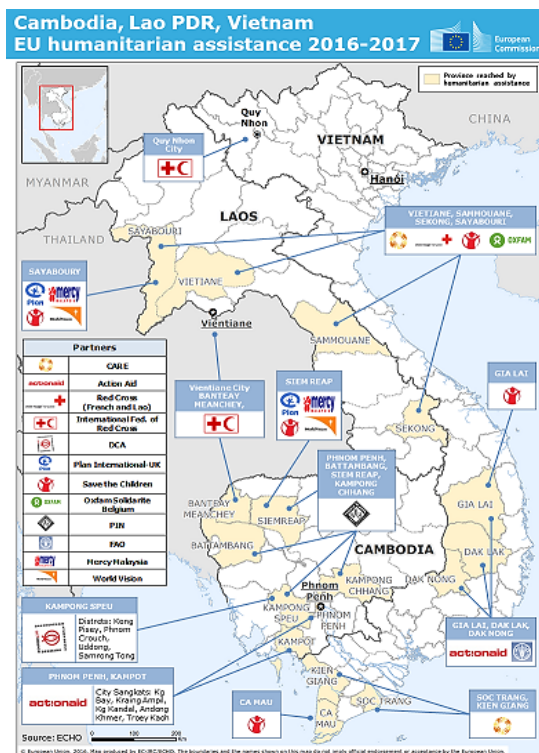
Since 1995, the European Commission has committed more than €31.7 million for disaster preparedness projects focusing on the most disaster-prone areas across the Mekong region: €13 million in **Cambodia**, €6 million in **Lao PDR**, and €12.7 million in **Vietnam**. The programme has strengthened disaster preparedness capacities through training of disaster management committees at the local level, integration of disaster risk reduction into local planning, implementation of small-scale mitigation measures such as reinforcing of school buildings, latrines and wells against floods, raising walkways and small dykes, as well as setting up early warning systems. The programme also prioritises education, public awareness campaigns and epidemic surveillance in high risk areas.

In 2014-2015, €2 million each were allocated to **Cambodia** and **Lao PDR**, through projects seeking to reduce risks posed by natural hazards to the most vulnerable populations, develop joint advocacy strategies on DRR related issues, enhance DRR and management capacity in schools, increase emergency response capacity, and train journalists on disaster reporting.

As a follow up to these actions, in 2016 -2017 the European Commission has committed €800 000 for a disaster preparedness initiative in **Cambodia**, which is being implemented by the same consortium of NGOs led by Action Aid, who will be introducing urban preparedness initiatives for the first time. A further €800 000 have been allocated to a consortium led by Save The Children in **Lao PDR** with a focus on improving communities' resilience by scaling up Community-Based DRR capacities.

In **Vietnam**, significant achievements have been made through the disaster preparedness programme, leading to the closure of traditional community-based DRR support in December 2015. In 2014-2015, €1.2 million were provided to enable partners to implement a series of DRR programmes in the country. It included the training of over 700 DRR practitioners on the Community Based Disaster Risk Management regulation, to strengthen the government's capacity in promoting safe housing policies in coastal areas, or the provision of technical support to the Ministry of Education's National Community Based Disaster Risk Management action plan in regions populated by ethnic minorities.

ECHO also funds several **regional initiatives** which directly benefit the Mekong countries, such as the regional urban resilience action currently implemented by the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), which aims to improve DRR capacities and increase awareness and safer behavior in selected 12 high-risk urban areas of four countries in SEA, including Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.



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EU-funded projects in the Mekong region



In 2016, Vietnam witnessed its worst drought in 90 years, with the El Niño-induced dry spell affecting 39 of the country's 63 provinces. This triggered widespread water shortage and severe saline intrusion in the southern Mekong delta, causing significant impact on livelihoods, food security and water supply. The European Commission committed relief assistance worth over €2 million to help the affected communities, addressing the most urgent needs, which include food assistance, livelihood recovery, access to safe water and good hygiene practices as well as preparedness measures for possible impact of *La Niña*, which usually follows *El Niño*. ©CARE

In the Saravan, Champasak, Sekong and Attapeu provinces of Lao PDR, a major outbreak of dengue was registered in 2013. ECHO joined the international efforts to save lives. Local clinics were stocked with the necessary items to diagnose and treat people affected by the disease. Communities have been mobilized for vector control activities in villages and temples. The project was implemented in nine provinces by Health Poverty Action with a grant of some €250 000 from ECHO. © Health Poverty Action



In 2013, more than a million people were affected by heavy rain and flash floods across 20 Cambodian provinces. Many families were completely unprepared, which resulted in huge economic losses. After providing much needed assistance to the affected communities, some of the EU's humanitarian partners decided to move beyond emergency response and started activities on resilience building. In 2014, this new approach gave birth to the country's first voice-based 'early warning system', which can now disseminate life-saving information to over 65 000 people in real time, allowing them to better prepare for impending natural hazards. © Action Aid

To further promote disaster preparedness, ECHO supports projects like the one that had been rolled out in six southern provinces of Vietnam to train teachers in primary and secondary schools on how to involve their pupils in drafting child-friendly safe-school plans. The children themselves enthusiastically took part in designing such plans, as they often had first-hand experience from natural catastrophes. This initiative was implemented by a consortium of NGOs, including CARE, Save the Children, and Plan International. © EU/ECHO



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