

STRENGTHENING EU DISASTER RESPONSE CAPACITY

The European Union's disaster response is not limited to humanitarian aid but also delivered through civil protection assets. **Civil protection** is able to provide specialised short-term in-kind assistance in key sectors in the very early stages of a disaster. Such assistance may include search and rescue teams, medical teams, water purification units and shelter.

For major emergencies within or outside Europe, the EU has a mechanism to coordinate civil protection assistance. All EU Member States and five other countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) participate in it. They pool resources that can be made available to disaster-hit countries. The Civil Protection Mechanism is operated by the **Emergency Response Centre (ERC)**, allowing for a better coordinated and faster response to natural and man-made disasters in Europe and beyond. The new Centre will further strengthen EU disaster response capacity.

For communities struck by disaster, emergency relief operations deal with immediate needs, but should also find ways to bolster resilience to future shocks by providing longer-term development benefits. This approach is called **Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)**. Ideally, the steps are to:

1. save lives
2. restore victims' self-sufficiency and
3. improve overall living standards (through economic development) to reduce the impact of future crises.



“ *There can be no job that is more important than providing help to people touched by emergencies. I am committed to making sure that this assistance is delivered as effectively as possible in the cause of saving lives and relieving suffering.* ”

Kristalina Georgieva,
European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response



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THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S HUMANITARIAN MANDATE IS TO:

- save and preserve life during emergencies and their immediate aftermath in man-made or natural disasters;
- provide assistance and relief to people affected by longer-lasting crises such as civil wars;
- finance the delivery of aid, working to ensure that aid is accessible to those for whom it is intended;
- assist refugees or displaced people wherever they find sanctuary and to help them resettle if they return home;
- support short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction work in order to help victims regain a minimum level of self-sufficiency, taking long-term development objectives into account where possible;
- ensure preparedness for natural disasters, in particular by setting up early-warning systems and financing disaster prevention projects in high-risk regions.

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Helping when
needed most



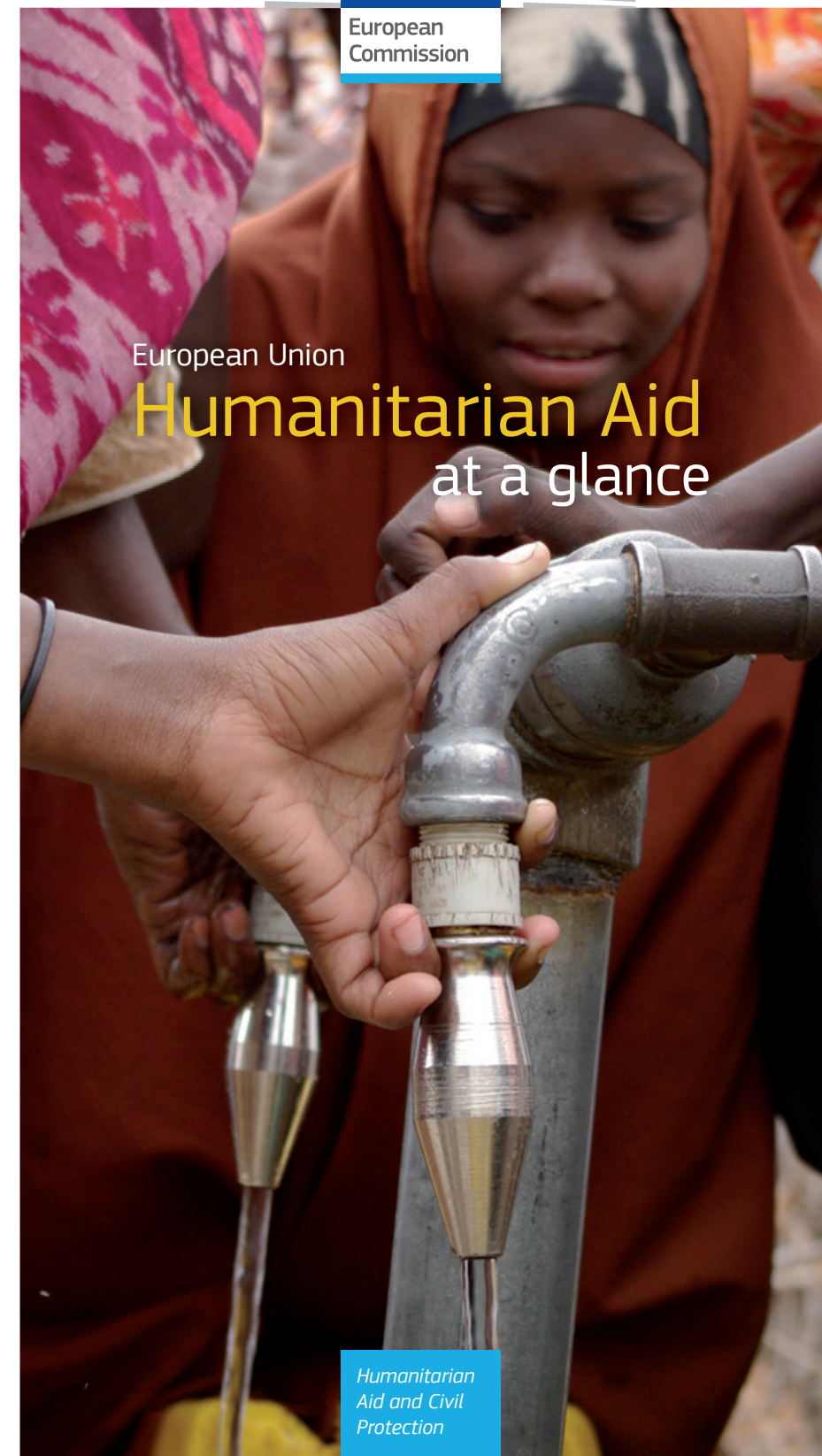
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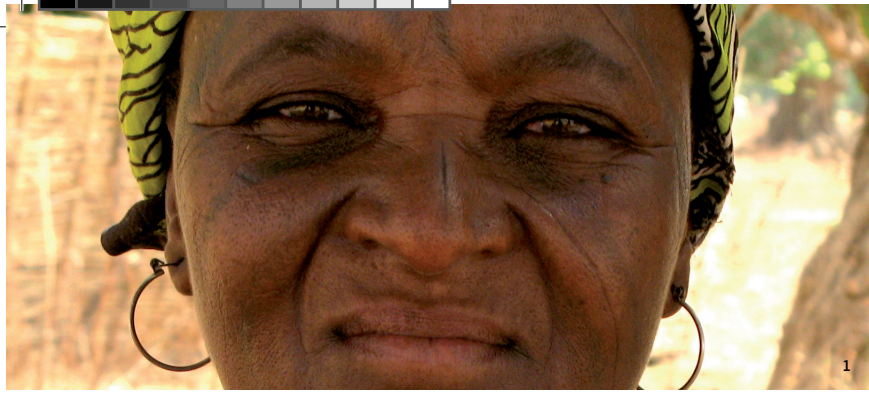
European
Commission



European Union
Humanitarian Aid
at a glance

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WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

When the floods came, Soudré Yampoutin first thought she was lucky. Nobody got hurt. The house of the family was not destroyed like those of many neighbours. Then the real size of the disaster became apparent: all farmland was flooded and the harvest lost. The livelihood of the family with seven children had disappeared over night.

Every year, millions of people in different parts of the world share a similar plight as Soudré Yampoutin, finding themselves without food, water, shelter or medical care.

The causes of such humanitarian crises are many and varied. They may be the result of extreme weather conditions — too much or too little rain, high winds or heavy snows — or a devastating earthquake or volcanic eruption. Often they are the tragic by-products of conflict, as warring factions fight over land or scarce resources, destroying people's livelihoods and forcing them to flee their homes. Sometimes national economic mismanagement makes the poor destitute and turns hunger into famine. Whether their causes are natural or man-made, such crises invariably bring great human suffering.

RAPID RESPONSE

Human and physical resources need to be rapidly mobilized to meet the victims' vital needs while preserving their dignity. Helping the world's most vulnerable populations in such crisis situations is a moral imperative for the international community.

In the case of Soudré Yampoutin and her neighbours in the village of Bouroum, the humanitarian assistance of the European Union (EU) made all the difference and helped them and the other flood-affected communities in Burkina Faso to get on their feet again. Now there is even a new well which allows Soudré and her family to cultivate their farmland also in the dry season.

EUROPEAN UNION WORLD'S LARGEST HUMANITARIAN DONOR

There are many millions of people in the world like Soudré Yampoutin who have benefited from the humanitarian assistance of the EU. In fact, the EU as a whole – European Commission and Member States – is the world's largest source of humanitarian aid. In 2012, the Commission alone spent more than 1.3 billion euros on humanitarian assistance. Since 1992, it has financed and coordinated humanitarian operations in more than 100 countries outside the EU. Its relief assistance goes directly to people in distress, irrespective of their nationality, religion, gender, ethnic origin or political affiliation. The main mission is to save lives and relieve the suffering of people caught up crises.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

The humanitarian operations funded by the European Commission are implemented through partner organisations: Specialised United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and non-governmental relief organisations (NGOs). The Commission and in particular its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department, ECHO, has developed close working relationships with its partners, both at the level of policy issues and of specific humanitarian operations.

ECHO also has an unrivalled permanent **network of humanitarian field experts** working in the various crisis zones around the globe. They carry out needs assessments, liaise with partners and other actors on the ground and monitor the way EU-funded aid operations are implemented.

MEETING NEEDS

Humanitarian aid takes many forms, depending on the nature of the crisis. It includes:

- **Food and nutrition.** Examples include emergency rations for people displaced in a conflict, and special feeding for malnourished children in drought-affected areas. The Commission's humanitarian food assistance also aims at boosting livelihoods in regions of food insecurity and tackling nutrition-related health problems.
- **Health.** Basic health care is provided to crisis victims with an emphasis on people particularly at risk such as pregnant women and infants. In earthquakes and war zones, the emergency medical teams are deployed to treat injuries. In epidemics, vaccination campaigns save many lives.
- **Shelter.** Tents and other types of shelter are supplied for people whose homes have been destroyed in a conflict or natural disaster.
- **Water and sanitation.** Very soon after a disaster strikes, people need access to clean drinking water to prevent the spread of disease. The same objective lies behind the provision of hygiene and proper sanitation.



HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Humanity – Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable in the population. The dignity of all victims must be respected and protected.

Impartiality – Humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations.

Independence – Humanitarian objectives are autonomous of political, economic, military or other objectives: the sole purpose is to relieve and prevent the suffering of crisis victims.

Neutrality – Humanitarian aid must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute.



DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND PREPAREDNESS

Beyond the immediate relief activities in direct response to a humanitarian crisis, the European Commission emphasizes the important role of disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness.

Most natural catastrophes are impossible to prevent. However, their negative impact can be reduced or averted, for example by establishing effective early-warning systems and evacuation plans, and by providing training in earthquake-resistant building techniques, water quality control (after floods) and cholera preparedness. Developing countries often lack the resources needed to minimize the impact of natural disasters. By including disaster preparedness in its funding, the EU is at the centre of the global effort to strengthen disaster risk reduction efforts and help the most vulnerable communities in disaster-prone regions.

Experts point to Bangladesh, where in recent years many disaster risk reduction projects such as early warning systems and more cyclone shelters have been put into place – and where Cyclone Sidr killed around 3,400 people in 2007 while a comparable cyclone in 1991 killed more than 138,000 people.

Preparing for disaster saves lives – but it also saves money: one euro spent in disaster preparedness saves up to four euro in relief efforts after a natural disaster.