Humanitarian aid and civil protection

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

‘European humanitarian aid makes a true difference for thousands and thousands of people who know that Europe is a force which stands for those universal values that are so essential to make the world a better place to live in.’

Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response
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 see online which ones are available and download them at: http://europa.eu/pol/index_en.htm

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The founding fathers of the EU

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Images of conflict and disaster fill our television screens and newspaper front pages every week. The EU helps those in need of help as quickly as possible. Through the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO), the EU provides assistance to victims of disasters and conflicts around the world and also works to prevent humanitarian crises. This endeavour is at the very heart of its action. In line with the Union’s founding values of solidarity, respect for human dignity, equality and tolerance, it acts to protect human lives, reduce and prevent suffering and protect the dignity of those affected.

The EU is present in crisis zones around the world including Syria, Afghanistan, the occupied Palestinian territory, the Sahel region and many other parts of Africa, central and South America and south-east Asia. It also runs relief operations in areas with long-running forgotten crises and post-conflict instability. Helping the world’s most vulnerable populations is a moral obligation for the international community, and the European Commission has a longstanding commitment to help the victims of such crises. Its humanitarian aid department provides relief assistance that goes directly to people in distress, irrespective of their nationality, religion, gender or ethnic origin.

The activities of the European Commission are not limited to dealing with the immediate consequences of disasters. They cover the full disaster cycle: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

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

- reduce disaster risk, for example through climate change mitigation strategies;
- improve preparedness for disasters, for instance by developing instruments such as early-warning systems;
- ensure a smooth transition when the emergency operation comes to an end, namely by mapping out suitable exit strategies;
- strengthen the overall resilience of populations, for example by linking emergency relief with longer-term recovery and development instruments.

To help countries avoid disasters, prepare for emergencies and pool resources that can be made available to disaster-hit countries, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has been set up. While the EU’s humanitarian aid targets non-EU countries, the Mechanism can be mobilised in case of emergencies inside and outside the EU. The EU Civil Protection mechanism is a tool that enhances European cooperation in civil protection. It supports Member States’ efforts at national, regional and local levels by providing effective tools for preventing, preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters.

Making a difference together

The European institutions and EU countries together account for more than half of official humanitarian aid, making the EU the biggest aid donor in the world. This contribution has a huge impact on the ground. In 2012 alone, the EU provided assistance to 122 million people in over 90 non-EU countries.
While representing only a fraction of EU spending — less than 1% of the annual budget — the amount of more than €1 billion in aid every year has proven instrumental in meeting needs in crisis situations, thanks to effective coordination at European level. From interventions in Haiti to stabilise the country in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, to the protection of civilians following the 2011 conflict in Libya, from helping millions in the Sahel facing hunger in 2012, to the ongoing efforts to assist hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing the gruesome conflict in their country, the assistance delivered has made a real difference to those in need.

In the face of evolving global threats, constant adaptations to the existing framework are needed if we are to rise to the new challenges.

To improve the effectiveness of its crisis response, the EU brought humanitarian aid and civil protection together under one roof in 2010. That same year, Kristalina Georgieva was appointed as the first dedicated European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response. This streamlined framework enables the EU to coordinate responses and use resources most efficiently.

United in solidarity

A survey carried out in 2012 revealed that nine out of ten EU citizens support the EU’s funding of humanitarian aid. Despite the impact of the economic crisis, this trend was on the rise, hinting to a strong commitment to European action in this field. Over 80% agree that coordinated EU action in the field of civil protection to deal with disasters is more effective than interventions by individual countries.

The responsibility to provide humanitarian aid is shared between the Union and its member countries, and the aid is delivered in cooperation with international and local actors. In the field of civil protection, the Union is responsible for supporting, coordinating and complementing the activities of the member countries. Its coordination role has enabled the EU to set its sights higher and to pool resources and know-how. This has helped to increase the positive impact of aid delivery and to ensure that all crisis interventions meet high quality standards. Thanks to this, the EU has been able to react efficiently to crises of unprecedented scale such as the Pakistan monsoon floods in 2010.

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.
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. In Africa alone, recent and recurrent crises since 2010 have affected 31 million people in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. We therefore need a sustained policy 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 be adapted to increase the resilience and reduce the vulnerability of people affected by disasters.

This proposal outlines 10 steps that include support for the design of national resilience strategies, disaster management plans and efficient early-warning systems in disaster-prone countries, as well as putting forward innovative approaches to risk management, in association with the insurance industry.

The policy will build on the promising results of 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. These initiatives (AGIR-Sahel and SHARE respectively) seek to break the vicious cycle of drought, hunger and poverty by identifying potential synergies and increasing coordination between humanitarian and development assistance. The Commission expects to spend €270 million in 2012 and 2013 on the SHARE initiative in the Horn of Africa. The AGIR-Sahel initiative has set the ambitious target of mobilising €750 million over the next 3 years.

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.

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. The number of natural disasters alone increased from 78 incidents in 1975 to nearly 400 in 2010. Climate change, population growth resulting in pressure on natural resources, together with urbanisation, industrial activities and environmental degradation, combine to form the major root causes of this phenomenon. Other challenges include a rising number of fragile states at risk of instability and civil conflicts and the looming threat of terrorist attacks.

In Vanuatu, children help to construct a model of the biggest threat to their lives, the volcano on Mount Gharat.
The EU is seeking to adapt the way it responds to risk situations. This is necessary because of the different levels of development in crisis-hit countries and because the financial crisis is squeezing its resources.

Since 1992, the EU has demonstrated its capacity to rise to new humanitarian challenges. Its intervention in war-torn former Yugoslavia in 1992 was the single largest humanitarian relief effort ever carried out by an international organisation in one country. The operation following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was the biggest since the creation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in 2001. As 2010 turned out to be the worst year for natural disasters in the past decades, the EU had to call upon some of its emergency reserves. This trend has continued in 2011 and 2012. Over the years, the EU’s humanitarian capacities have been constantly extended to keep pace with requirements and will be further adapted in the years to come.

Climate-related disaster mitigation: the case of Vanuatu

In the Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu, one of the world’s least developed countries, climate change has made the threat of natural disasters such as cyclones and flooding more acute.

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 it provided a total of €4.3 million to help with disaster preparedness and €2.3 million to assist communities affected by natural disasters in the western Pacific region.

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**TRENDS IN OCCURRENCE AND VICTIMS OF DISASTERS**

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How the EU goes about it

A needs-based approach

The EU has put effective strategies in place to match European taxpayers’ funding contributions to those people around the world with the most pressing humanitarian needs. To ensure that aid is deployed in all the right places at the right time, the EU carries out ‘needs assessments’ on a permanent basis before making funding decisions.

Different tools have been developed to do this efficiently. To assess the nature of humanitarian needs, criteria have been set to identify crisis situations and determine the scope of support necessary, according to the scale of disaster and the situation of the particular countries and regions concerned.

The EU pays particular attention to those crisis situations that might have moved outside the focus of international media and donor attention while needs continue to be high in those areas. Specific assessments are carried out to identify and provide relief in such ‘forgotten crises’.

Help where needed, when needed

Humanitarian aid and civil protection interventions are almost by definition carried out in extreme circumstances: help must reach beneficiaries in a very short time and be tailored to their specific needs, while logistical and security constraints often make access to disaster-stricken areas difficult.

The EU has put in place a number of monitoring and coordination structures to fulfil this complex task. It has created a worldwide network of specialised humanitarian field offices. 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. In 2012, 145 humanitarian experts and 293 local staff were deployed in 44 ECHO field offices worldwide.

Rather than intervening directly on the ground, the EU provides funding to around 200 partners 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. Funding is provided to these partners based on their proposals on how to cover the needs of disaster-affected populations. The EU has put different mechanisms in place to ensure that the funds it provides are coordinated with those made available directly by its member countries and other humanitarian actors.

As the need for humanitarian aid is increasing faster than the provision of resources, the EU aid volunteers initiative was launched to support and complement existing schemes.

Common core values

The EU’s humanitarian aid partners must endorse the fundamental humanitarian principles underpinning all its actions:

— **Humanity**: suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, particularly in the most vulnerable.

— **Neutrality**: aid must not favour any one section of the population.

— **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 political, economic or military objectives.
On the ground

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

Food assistance might include the provision of emergency food supplies for disaster-affected people, cash and vouchers, specific nutrition products for acutely malnourished children and seeds and fertilisers for vulnerable farmers.

Medical assistance involves, for instance, 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 basic health care, with a focus on vulnerable people such as pregnant women and children.

Water and sanitation are a priority in disaster zones as clean drinking water and sanitation facilities are needed to prevent diseases from spreading. Aid activities include the creation of wells, boreholes and latrines, water piping, sewage treatment and hygiene education, to name but a few.

People whose homes have been destroyed receive tents, plastic sheeting or other types of shelter. Emergency operations can also include repairs to infrastructure, demining actions, psychological 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.

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Strengthening disaster preparedness worldwide — the Dipecho programme

Where it is impossible to foresee hazards and prevent disasters, improving the preparedness of populations and putting appropriate response mechanisms in place 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, establishment or 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.

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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Source: European Commission.
Joining forces to tackle crises in and outside the EU

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism covers the entire disaster cycle from prevention and preparedness to response. It currently involves 32 countries, namely the 27 EU countries plus Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Any country inside or outside the EU whose capacities are overwhelmed by a disaster can request assistance through the Civil Protection Mechanism. Disaster situations can 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’s Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) communicates the specific needs of the disaster-stricken country to all countries that participate in the Civil Protection Mechanism. Thereupon, the participating states offer to deploy experts and in-kind assistance to support the emergency response on site. This may include search and rescue teams, medical posts, high capacity pumps, water purification units and other relief items. The MIC helps to coordinate 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 MIC is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism also strengthens disaster preparedness in the participating states, for instance through training programmes, exercises or the exchange of experts between different countries. All 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 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 policymaking so as to maximise its impact.

Preparation through simulation

The staging of a crash between a train transporting football fans and another one carrying hazardous substances was among a series of exercises organised in Poland in 2011. The so-called ‘Carpathex’ event prepared emergency teams for real-life situations: the train crash simulation tested response capabilities during events such as the UEFA European football championships in 2012.

Other scenarios included a forest fire caused by sparks coming from the brakes of a train or a village flooded by a broken reservoir system. Exercises of this type are organised every year with a financial contribution from the EU.

Volunteers in Tajikistan training as part of community emergency response teams within the Dipecho programme.
What the EU does

Delivering on commitments

Since 1992, the EU has helped millions of disaster victims throughout the world. It has mobilised more than €15 billion to provide disaster relief in over 140 countries. The EU now provides 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, contributing more than half of all official humanitarian aid.

In 2012 alone, the EU provided humanitarian aid to about 122 million people in 92 non-EU countries while the Civil Protection Mechanism was activated 21 times to help in crises 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 on all these fronts and to promote respect for, and adherence to, international humanitarian law. This accomplishment lays the groundwork for the prevention of more human suffering in the years to come.

Two decades of solidarity ... and counting

The European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Department (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 began life with around 40 staff and has since then grown into a large but lean organisation with 300 people working at its Brussels headquarters, in addition to over 400 humanitarian expert staff in its 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 up to ever-greater challenges.

In 2007, the EU’s institutions and the 27 member countries agreed on a key policy document entitled the
‘European consensus on humanitarian aid’. It stressed that EU humanitarian aid is not a political tool and reaffirmed the guiding principles of humanitarian aid (neutrality, humanity, independence and impartiality). 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 says that the EU should apply international humanitarian law including impartiality and non-discrimination.

There is still room for improvement. Plans to reinforce the way the EU manages its response to disasters are now being considered. They foresee a shift from ad hoc coordination to a more predictable system.

Swift and efficient responses

Over the years, 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 and vaccinations for children. Those returning to destroyed villages received resettlement kits.

- When Hurricane Mitch caused devastation across central America in 1998, EU support helped by providing drinking water and avoiding the spread of water-borne diseases.

- Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the EU has provided more than €483 million in aid to meet the basic needs of the Afghan people.

- In 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami killed over 230 000 people. The EU’s initial response focused on survival. Longer-term projects included the construction of camps for the homeless, funding for health workers and the purchase of fishing boats.

- During the record year of 2010, the largest aid operations took place in Sudan and Pakistan. In Sudan, the EU supported the delivery of humanitarian aid to 6 million people following 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 March 2011, the EU provided almost 400 tonnes of in-kind assistance and deployed a European civil protection team including experts in logistics and radiology. European financial aid targeted families in the worst-affected provinces.

- Protection and assistance was given to thousands of civilians during the 2011 conflict in Libya.

- In 2012, the EU helped millions in the Sahel facing hunger, and humanitarian assistance reached hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing conflict in their country.

Stepping up prevention to save lives

The Union’s action aimed at preventing disasters, and minimising their impact where they are unavoidable, has made a crucial contribution to preventing suffering and saving lives. Efforts have covered actions both inside and outside the EU, with achievements ranging from efficient coordination at European level, to the successful training of local experts in other parts of the world.

- Since the launch of the Dipecho programme in 1996, the EU has invested over €255 million in disaster preparedness worldwide. The projects funded by the programme have been instrumental in limiting damage and enabling communities at risk to save lives and livelihoods.

- Since 2007, the EU has been involved in the launch of various early-warning initiatives including the Internet-based ‘Meteoalarm’ platform and the ‘Global disaster alerts and coordination system’, a round-the-clock data-gathering and alert system. It has also invested in warning systems for specific hazards such as 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.

- In 2010 alone, 873 people took part in training courses offered by selected civil protection organisations, and four exercises focusing on flood, earthquake, hazardous material and terrorist attack scenarios were successfully carried out.
CASE STUDY
Haiti: transition from relief to recovery

The massive earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010 left 222,750 people dead and almost 1.7 million homeless. The EU continues to assist Haiti during all stages of its recovery.

In the early aftermath of the disaster, it allocated over €100 million for response measures, and 25 EU countries channelled in-kind assistance to Haiti through the Civil Protection Mechanism. Around 5 million people benefited from EU support at this stage. The assistance was used to provide hundreds of thousands of victims with shelter, latrines and showers, safe drinking water, food and items such as blankets, kitchen utensils and hygiene articles. It also helped to finance measures to support displaced people who sought refuge in other parts of the country.

As a result of a weak health system and poor access to clean water, a cholera epidemic broke out later in 2010. The EU subsequently provided €22 million for cholera treatment facilities and for measures preventing the disease from spreading. About 3 million people benefited from this support.

Over the following 2 years, the EU has gradually phased in measures to help the country get back on its feet. The longer-term emergency response complements structural measures aimed at rebuilding social services and infrastructure while improving disaster risk reduction, linking relief and development.

The EU is the top donor to Haiti, having pledged a total of €1.235 billion, pooling funding from the European Commission, EU countries and the European Investment Bank. It will continue to provide comprehensive assistance to support the country’s recovery and development in the years to come.

In Haiti, the EU has supported the repair of basic services, such as running water and sewerage, in small towns like Petit Goave.
CASE STUDY

Pakistan: a multifaceted crisis — and response

In 2010, Pakistan was hit by one of the worst monsoon floods in 80 years. It killed more than 1,800 people and affected 18 million more, and was followed by another flood the following year. This situation was made worse by the armed conflict in 2009 which left almost 3 million people displaced. European relief efforts combining humanitarian aid and civil protection proved effective in dealing with a disaster of unprecedented scale and complexity.

The EU provided €150 million in humanitarian aid to address the immediate needs of the population. An additional €70 million was provided to help displaced people living in camps or with host families. Local conditions made the delivery of aid difficult. However, the EU was able to react quickly and efficiently thanks to the early deployment of humanitarian experts, swiftly followed by an EU civil protection team. This team of experts was sent to Pakistan to facilitate the coordination of the incoming assistance and liaise with national authorities and UN teams.

The Pakistani authorities requested help through the Monitoring and Information Centre. Countries participating in the Civil Protection Mechanism provided assistance with a total value of €271 million. In-kind contributions included water purification units, tablets and liquid, shelter and medical kits. The EU also co-financed the transport of aid to the country.

As Pakistan is highly prone to natural disasters, this recent crisis highlighted the need for disaster risk reduction to be included in humanitarian aid policy. The EU continues to work to reduce the vulnerability of the population and to increase its capacity to cope with such disasters.
CASE STUDY

Sahel: alerting the world to a forgotten crisis

The Sahel belt that stretches from west to east across northern Africa is among the poorest regions in the world. Drought, underdevelopment and the resulting food insecurity are putting tens of millions of people at the risk of hunger. As the magnitude of this humanitarian crisis grows, so does the EU’s support. Since the beginning of 2012, the Union has increased its aid contribution in this area to €337 million. Its intervention relies on a phased approach combining resilience building with emergency response during the lean season and recovery in its aftermath.

The humanitarian response to the crisis succeeded in saving many lives and reducing its impact on household economies. The EU was instrumental in bringing this crisis back into the focus of international media attention. 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.

Football stars including Raúl González and Patrick Vieira joined the fight against hunger in the Sahel region as goodwill ambassadors of the ‘Football against hunger’ campaign, which calls for more political will to eliminate hunger.

Hunger and malnutrition are on the rise again across the globe. Over 1 billion people worldwide were considered to be ‘food insecure’ in 2010. In the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa, drought has 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.

Food assistance is the largest sector in the EU’s humanitarian aid budget. In 2011, the EU made a total of €509 million available for humanitarian food assistance and nutrition.
It is vital that the mechanisms put in place to deal with emergencies keep up with the challenges posed by an increasingly fragile world. The EU is currently working on creating a system that would allow for more predictability and reliability. The planned ‘European response capacity’ would increase the efficiency and coherence of EU responses by means of advance planning. Disaster prevention and risk management are also to be stepped up.

In practice, a voluntary pool of specialised teams and equipment would be made available for immediate deployment in the event of a crisis. The initiative also aims to streamline transport provisions to enable a faster deployment of EU assistance. Planning for disaster response is to be improved by developing reference scenarios, mapping EU countries’ assets and drawing up contingency plans. Other steps in the pipeline include increased investment in joint training and cross-border exercises, as well as the development of an EU-wide disaster risk overview.

To manage the new system, the Union is setting up an emergency response centre to make EU coordination in case of emergencies more effective. The centre will provide a round-the-clock service to achieve an enhanced flow of information.

In the framework of the debate on the future financing of the Union, the EU is seeking ways to integrate preparedness and the transition from humanitarian to development aid more consistently in its development policy. The EU budget for the 2014–20 period will support actions to speed up responses to disasters, anticipate them better and achieve a smoother transition to development actions in the longer-term aftermath of a disaster.

**EU aid volunteers**

To give Europeans who would like to contribute to the EU’s humanitarian operations the opportunity to get involved, the Union is setting up a European voluntary humanitarian aid corps. Introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, the ‘EU aid volunteers’ initiative will add real value to the delivery of EU humanitarian aid and complement existing schemes. In September 2012, the European Commission tabled plans which will create opportunities for some 10 000 people to volunteer in humanitarian operations worldwide between 2014 and 2020.

Participants in the programme can be either young people who plan to take up a career in emergency aid work, or humanitarian aid experts. The Voluntary Corps will ensure that volunteers are sent where their skills are most needed and that they contribute to strengthening local capacities and local volunteering. The security of the volunteers is a top priority. In the first series of pilot projects, more than 200 Europeans have already been sent to over 30 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.

The programme, which will be further developed in the years to come, has the potential to train the humanitarian leaders of tomorrow while giving young Europeans the opportunity to show solidarity with people in need.
The EU donates its 2012 Nobel Peace Prize money to help the youngest victims of conflict

On 10 December 2012, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The prize came with a material award of 8 million Swedish kronor, or some €930 000. With additional EU funding, the total amount was topped up to €2 million. The Nobel Peace Prize stands for reconciliation throughout the world. The prize money should not only benefit future victims of conflict, but also the victims of past and present conflicts: those children who have been prevented from growing up in peace and reaching their full potential as a result of conflict and wars.

In 2012, 90 % of the victims of conflict are civilians and half of them are children. Seven million children are refugees and 12.4 million children have been displaced within their own country due to conflict. One of the best ways to help and protect children when they suffer from violent conflict is to give them the opportunity to learn again and be educated — otherwise their future will be even more difficult. Of the approximately 75 million children, including 20 million girls, who are out of school worldwide, more than half live in conflict-affected areas.

With this in mind, the European Commission invited its humanitarian partner organisations and agencies to propose suitable projects to fund. As a result, it was decided that the Nobel Peace Prize money should go to four projects under the ‘EU children of peace’ initiative. Together, these projects reach out to over 23 000 children in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Iraq and Pakistan, providing access to basic education and child-friendly spaces, giving them protection, education and the chance of a brighter future.

Education helps children in conflict to remain children.

The EU for Children in Conflict (http://ec.europa.eu/echo/EU4children/index_en.htm)

Find out more

- EU humanitarian aid and civil protection: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm
- EU aid volunteers: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/euaidvolunteers/index_en.htm
- The EU for Children in Conflict: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/EU4children/index_en.htm
- Questions about the European Union? Europe Direct can help: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 http://europedirect.europa.eu