

## Russia's humanitarian aid policy

Since the mid-2000s, Russia has emerged – or rather, re-emerged – as a donor of humanitarian aid. However, its contributions remain modest compared to those of more established donors, and some Russian aid appears to serve geopolitical rather than humanitarian objectives.

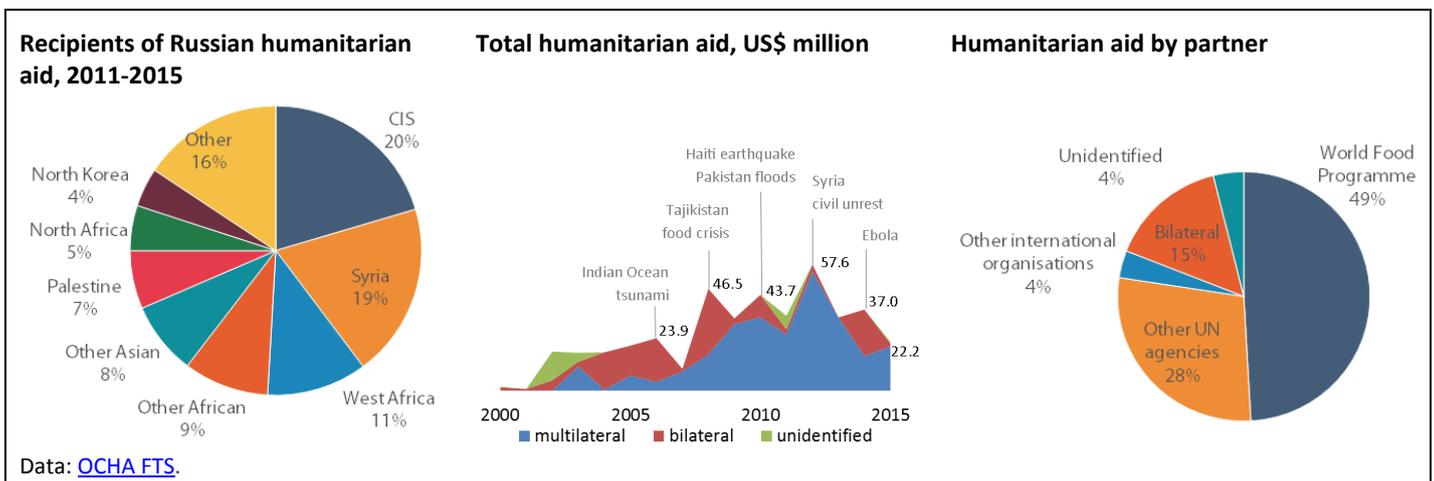
### How much humanitarian aid does Russia provide?

The Soviet Union was a [substantial donor](#) of aid, including humanitarian aid, but post-Soviet Russia became a [recipient](#), of [food aid to avert potential famine](#) and assistance to [victims of fighting in Chechnya](#), for instance. Benefiting from a resurgent economy and a more active international role, the country re-emerged as a donor in the mid-2000s.

According to data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Russia has donated an annual average of US\$35 million over the last 10 years, with peaks coinciding with major crises such as the Haiti earthquake and the West African Ebola epidemic. However, in 2015 humanitarian spending fell to its lowest level since 2007 (even though the country's total official development assistance increased to a record [US\\$1.1 billion](#)), and this trend continued in 2016 with just US\$7.5 million of contributions paid during the first quarter of the year.

Based on OCHA data, Russian humanitarian aid averages out around 0.002% of GDP – comparable to many other emerging donors such as China, but around 100 times less than [world leaders](#) Kuwait (0.24%), Luxembourg (0.17%) and Sweden (0.15%). It is also comparatively low as a percentage of total official development assistance – just 2% in 2015 ([Ireland: 23%; US: 19%](#)), although this reflects the fact that Russia has increased its development aid much faster than its humanitarian assistance over the past 10 years.

Admittedly, OCHA data are far from complete: for example, they do not include Russia's support for the Switzerland-based International Civil Defence Organisation, of which it is the largest sponsor, or the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre in Serbia.



### Which countries benefit most from Russian humanitarian aid?

The three largest recipients of Russian aid over the last five years were allied countries: Syria, since the outbreak of civil war in 2011, followed by Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which received substantial donations between 2011 and 2013 to help tackle humanitarian challenges including civil unrest and food shortages.

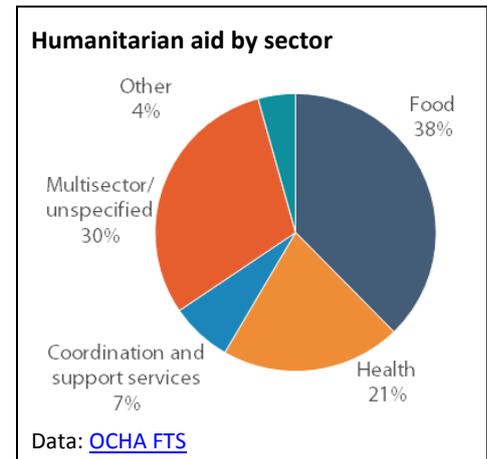
The bulk of the remaining aid goes to Palestine and North Korea, as well as to African countries – for example, to Libya and its neighbours during the Arab Spring, and to West Africa during the Ebola outbreak.



## What kind of aid does Russia provide?

Food shortages are the number one focus of Russian humanitarian aid (38% of total funding), followed by health crises (21%). A large part of humanitarian aid to famine-stricken areas comes in the form of food rather than cash – for example, in 2011 Russia delivered wheat and wheat flour to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and more recently to Syria. In-kind food aid is often preferred by donors that are also major agricultural producers – not only Russia, but also countries such as the United States and Brazil – as a more cost-effective option. However, Oxfam [criticises](#) such aid, arguing that cash donations are usually more beneficial.

Russia has provided experts, equipment and training to help clear landmines in [nine countries](#), including Afghanistan, Lebanon and Serbia. Russian [search and rescue teams](#) were sent to [Nepal](#) after the 2015 earthquake, and to Serbia after the 2014 floods. In 2015 it sent [tents and generators](#) to be used in camps for migrants transiting Serbia.



## How does Russia distribute its aid?

Reflecting the weakness of the country's [civil society](#), Russian NGOs play only a marginal role. The response to humanitarian crises both at home and abroad is managed by the Ministry of Emergencies, except in conflict areas (Syria) where the Ministry of Defence takes the lead. Russia tends to operate in partnership with international organisations – usually UN agencies (not surprisingly, given the emphasis on food aid, the World Food Programme accounts for nearly half of aid), but in Syria and Ecuador it has also cooperated with the International Committee of the Red Cross, while for demining operations its main partner is the International Civil Defence Organisation. It also has a [cooperation agreement](#) with the EU's ECHO, but collaboration has been limited to participation of Russian personnel in joint training and field exercises.

Russia operates a [Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre](#) jointly with Serbia, for which it provides funding, equipment and staff for operations in Balkan countries.

## What are the aims of Russian humanitarian aid?

In 2003, 17 of the main donor countries agreed on the Principles of [Good Humanitarian Donorship](#), including humanity (saving lives and alleviating suffering), impartiality, neutrality and independence (i.e. humanitarian aid should not be influenced by geopolitical and other goals). Like most other 'new' donors, Russia has not signed up to these principles, and the motivation for its humanitarian aid has often been questioned.

For example, although the bias towards ex-Soviet allies such as Kyrgyzstan was less strong in 2011-2015 than during the previous five-year period (20% of total aid compared to 31%), Russia's relative generosity to CIS countries could reflect a desire to maintain its influence in the region.

In Syria, Russia supplies most of its humanitarian aid to areas under the control of its ally, Bashar al-Assad, while [criticising](#) other donors for providing aid to regions under terrorist control. Such aid cannot be described as neutral, and given that much of it is delivered to areas where government troops are fighting rebels (such as [Deir Ezzor](#)), is arguably intended to boost the Russia-backed military campaign.

Worse, Russian humanitarian aid has apparently been used to conceal arms deliveries to pro-Russian rebels in Georgia and Ukraine. In 1993, weapons were [allegedly](#) supplied in this way to help Abkhazian rebels withstand a siege by Georgian troops. In eastern Ukraine, [51 Russian convoys](#) have delivered 60 000 tonnes of food, medical supplies and construction materials to separatists; according to [some observers](#), they have also been used to bring weapons and fuel to rebels, and [remove the bodies](#) of Russian soldiers killed in battle. Evidence for these claims included the fact that trucks in the convoy resembled repainted military vehicles, and that [inspections](#) of their contents by Ukrainian authorities were not allowed.

## Russia's contribution to the World Humanitarian Summit

Russia contributed little to the consultation process to prepare the summit (only four of the 1 201 participants at the [October 2015 Global Consultation meeting](#) were from Russia); it also claims its position (which has not been published) [was not taken into account](#). Vladimir Putin will not therefore attend the summit in person and Russia will not feel bound by the summit's conclusions.