

Humanitarian Aid

In a nutshell

The European Union's expenditure for humanitarian aid provides needs-based, emergency response to natural disasters and man-made crises outside the Union's borders, in order to preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering, and maintain the human dignity of those affected. The EU remains a leading global donor of humanitarian aid, as well as an example for a high standard of humanitarian aid delivery. Despite that, it still faces challenges in responding to the growing demand for humanitarian assistance worldwide.

EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) heading and policy area

Heading 4 (Global Europe)

Humanitarian Aid

2014-2020 financial envelope (in current prices and as % of total MFF)

Commitments: €6 621.70 million (0.61%)

2014 budget (in current prices and as % of total EU budget)

Commitments: €920.28 million (0.64%)

Payments: €1 041.83 million (0.75%)

2015 budget (in current prices and as % of total EU budget)

Commitments: €928.84 million (0.64%)

Payments: €974.58 million (0.69%)

Methods of implementation

Direct Management (European Commission), and *Indirect Management* (international organisations, including UN agencies).



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- Assessment of expenditure
- Other EU expenditures and action in the same field

EU role in the policy area: legal basis

[Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#) provides the legal basis for giving EU humanitarian aid, specifying that it is 'intended to provide ad hoc assistance, relief and protection for people in third countries who are victims of natural or man-made disasters'. It is granted according to the principles and objectives of the European Union's external action, as well as 'in compliance with the principles of international law and the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and non-discrimination'.

Article 4 TFEU stipulates that the provision of humanitarian aid is a **shared competence** between the EU and its Member States. The distribution of this competence and the EU's collaboration with other entities in delivering humanitarian aid is laid out in further detail in Article 214. The European Commission may take the initiative to ensure greater coordination between the EU and its Member States' humanitarian aid-related actions, with a view to enhancing their complementarity and efficiency. The European Parliament and the Council of the EU establish the framework within which EU humanitarian aid operations are implemented. Article 214 also says that the EU seeks to ensure that its humanitarian aid operations are coordinated and consistent with those of international organisations and bodies, in particular those within the United Nations system.

[Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1257/96](#) on humanitarian aid further defines the principal objectives; the implementation rules and procedures, in particular those regarding the allocation of funds; the types of activities eligible for funding; and the criteria applicable to organisations eligible for receiving funding and implementing humanitarian operations. The Regulation tasked the Commission with laying down the specific conditions for allocating, mobilising, and implementing aid, along with appraising, deciding upon, administering, monitoring, and assessing humanitarian aid operations. Accordingly, these tasks are managed by the Commission's [Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection \(DG ECHO\)](#), which is the successor of the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), initially set up in 1992. The Commission is also responsible for making the EU's voice heard on matters related to humanitarian aid in international fora.

In 2007, the Council, Parliament and Commission Presidents signed the [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#), in token of the EU's firm commitment to providing humanitarian aid as part of a common vision regarding its principles and objectives. The Consensus guarantees increased coordination and consistency in the way humanitarian aid is delivered, confirming the Commission's leading role in coordination. It also reinforces the link between humanitarian and development aid, facilitating a smooth transition between different types of support for people in need. The Consensus puts emphasis on the common principles of humanitarian aid – humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Objectives of the expenditure

The Consensus defines the objectives of EU Humanitarian Aid (HA) expenditure as focussed on providing needs-based emergency response to preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering, and maintain human dignity during crises in non-EU countries. Needs-based emergency response involves direct assistance to people in distress, without consideration of nationality, religion, gender, or ethnic origin. At the same time, the EU seeks to ensure a high level of protection against disasters on the

basis of a balanced approach covering disaster prevention, preparedness, and response.¹

The 2015 specific objectives of HA expenditure are outlined in [Commission Implementing Decision C\(2015\)4043](#) as follows:

1. To provide humanitarian and food assistance, relief and protection to vulnerable people affected by **man-made crises**;
2. To provide humanitarian and food assistance, relief and protection to vulnerable people affected by **natural disasters**;
3. To provide humanitarian assistance for **response and disaster preparedness** to populations affected by disasters;
4. To support strategies that enable local communities and institutions to better prepare for, mitigate and respond adequately to natural disasters by enhancing their **capacities to cope** and respond (South Asia, Pacific, the Caribbean and South America);
5. To improve the **delivery of aid** through complementary and thematic activities aiming at increasing the effectiveness, efficiency, quality, timeliness and visibility of humanitarian actions and transport.

Since crises tend to be unpredictable, it is often necessary to amend the budgetary allocations for HA expenditure. Recent years have seen significant budgetary increases reflecting the higher frequency and intensity of crises. Table 1, which illustrates this trend, also reveals that in 2015 the allocations for objectives 1, 2 and 5 have been increased, in particular to: respond to the humanitarian needs in Cameroon, the Horn of Africa, Sudan and South Sudan, and Ukraine; fund operations of the Commission's aid air service, [ECHO Flight](#); provide support for countering the Ebola epidemic crisis; and support the [EU Children of Peace Initiative](#), launched in 2012 to help children around the world who are deprived of growing up in peace.²

Table 1 - Budgetary allocation by specific objective 2015

Objectives	Initially allocated funds (in million euros)	Amended allocated funds (in million euros)
(1) Man-made crises	477.6	573.6
(2) Natural disasters	138.6	174.3
(3) Response and disaster preparedness	9	9
(4) Capacity to cope (South Asia, Pacific, the Caribbean and South America)	37.3	37.3
(5) Aid delivery	36.9	43.3
TOTAL	699.4	837.5

Data source: [Commission Implementing Decision of 15.6.2015, Annex II](#)

Funded actions

The role of the EU as a leading donor of humanitarian aid³ is reflected in the wide geographical coverage of its HA expenditure. Table 2 shows the preliminary HA budgetary allocations for 2015 by country and/or region. The selection and execution of measures and the relevant budget allocations evolve in order to meet the increasing challenges.⁴ Humanitarian emergencies are on the rise in terms of numbers (from 78 incidents in 1975 to nearly 400 in 2010⁵) and complexity.⁶ Greater demands are put on the budget due to the combined effects of climate change, population growth (which puts pressure on natural resources), the rising number of fragile states at risk of

instability and civil conflicts, increased threat of terrorist attacks, and the high number of man-made crises resulting from armed and military conflicts.

The budget, allocated to HA expenditure (over €6 billion for 2014-2020), can be reinforced with funds from the [EU Emergency Aid Reserve](#), designed to respond to unforeseen events and major crises in non-EU countries. The Reserve is part of the EU's 'Flexibility and Special Instruments' and has a maximum allocation capacity of €280 million per year. It was mobilised in 2012 following the outbreak of the [Syrian conflict](#), the [conflicts in Mali](#) and the [drought in the Sahel](#).⁷

Funding procedures and budgetary allocations

The EU's HA expenditure includes actions that demand immediate response to sudden crisis outbreaks. Since responding to primary emergencies requires taking swift financial decisions, funding procedures have a three-day approval time, three months' implementation validity and a €3 million limit. Other emergencies related to new and existing humanitarian crises which do not require an extremely rapid reaction are covered by measures of six months' duration and no funding threshold. Decisions for global actions under HA expenditure are part of the annual operational priorities of DG ECHO. They cover 80% of the ECHO budget, are implemented over 24 months and are administered through country/regional Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIP).

The actions to be funded under the HA expenditure are selected with the help of the [Integrated Analysis Framework](#) (IAF) – a tool for humanitarian need and situation assessment developed by ECHO. As of 2015-2016, the IAF also incorporates the [Index for Risk Management](#) (InfoRM), which, according to the [General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid in 2015](#), aspires to be the first global, objective and transparent tool for understanding the risk of humanitarian crises and disasters.⁸ As of 2016, InfoRM will replace the [Global Vulnerability and Crisis Assessment \(GVCA\) tool](#), which is currently used in parallel with it. In addition, the Commission identifies and provides support for serious humanitarian crisis situations

Table 2 - Budgetary allocation by region, 2015

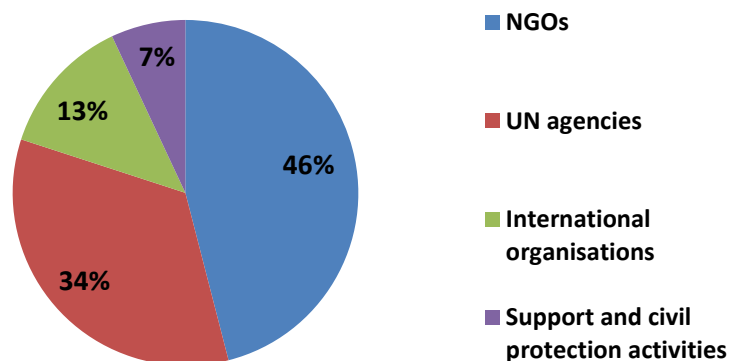
Regions	Allocated funds (in million euros)	% of regional or total budget
Central Africa, Sudan & South Sudan, Great Lakes	232.8	28
Sudan and South Sudan	120.0	51
Democratic Republic of Congo and Great Lakes region	49.0	21
Chad, Cameroon and Central African Republic	63.8	27
Central African Republic	2.0	1
East, west and southern Africa, Indian Ocean	211.6	25
Horn of Africa	89.0	42
West Africa	122.6	58
North Africa, European Neighbourhood, Central Asia and Middle East	201.5	24
Palestine	25.0	12
North Africa	10.0	5
Ukraine	30.0	15
Yemen	25.0	12
Syria crisis	100.0	50
Iraq crisis	11.5	6
South Asia and Pacific	95.8	11
South-west Asia	54.8	57
South Asia	23.0	24
South-east Asia and the Pacific	18.0	19
Central and South America, Caribbean	43.6	5
Central America and the Caribbean	20.6	47
South America	23.0	53
Worldwide operations	32.0	4
Complementary operations	20.1	3
TOTAL	837.5	100

Data source: [Commission Implementing Decision 15.6.2015 Annex II](#)

that have been overlooked by other donors. To identify the cases that are eligible for such support, it uses a different assessment tool, the [Forgotten Crisis Assessment \(FCA\)](#).

Operations under HA expenditure are not implemented through the relevant third country governments, but through over 200 partner relief organisations (specialised EU Member State agencies, UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs⁹), which collaborate on the basis of specific framework partnership agreements. Figure 3 presents the distribution of budgetary allocations for the different organisations involved in delivering humanitarian aid in 2014.

Figure 3 - Budgetary allocations for organisations delivering humanitarian aid in 2014



Data source: [Funding for humanitarian aid](#), DG ECHO, 16 June 2015.

Actions under Humanitarian Aid expenditure

HA expenditure pays special attention to the most severe cases of humanitarian emergencies. According to the UN's [Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation System](#), the current highest-level ('level 3') humanitarian emergency situations are present in Syria, South Sudan, Iraq and Yemen, based on their scale, complexity, urgency, national and international capacity requirements, and reputational risk.¹⁰ The ongoing military conflicts in Syria and Iraq continue to escalate their humanitarian needs. With 12.2 million people in Syria and 5.2 million people in Iraq in need, and given the rapidly increasing numbers of refugees, in March 2015 the EU adopted a comprehensive [strategy](#) for aid to Syria and its neighbouring countries, with €1 billion committed for 2015 and 2016, of which around €400 million is under HA expenditure. According to this strategy, additional funding would be sourced through redeploying and reprogramming the envelopes of the external relations instruments, which fall under Heading 4 of the MFF. In the meantime, the Commission has taken the appropriate steps to implement the strategy for both 2015 and 2016. In October, the Commission submitted a proposal, entitled '[Managing the refugee crisis: immediate operational, budgetary and legal measures under the European Agenda on Migration](#)', which includes both aid for Syria and its neighbouring countries, and that for Africa, as well as operational, budgetary and legal measures targeting Member States and other European countries exposed to increased migration.

Recently, HA expenditure funds worth €12 million have been allocated to mitigate the effects of a 7.8-magnitude earthquake that hit Nepal earlier in 2015. The needs-based focus of the humanitarian aid included provision of shelter, livelihood, emergency healthcare, and logistics. Within hours after the earthquake, the Commission deployed humanitarian aid and civil protection experts on the ground. The simultaneous activation of the [EU Civil Protection Mechanism \(CPM\)](#) helped to coordinate the assistance provided via these two types of expenditure, which included deploying appropriate technical equipment and search and rescue teams.¹¹

The EU and its Member States have provided €242 million in humanitarian and early recovery aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the crisis there. DG ECHO has been present in Ukraine since February 2014, playing an important role in facilitating coordination and information-sharing with other donors. In parallel, material assistance has been mobilised through the CPM. Thanks to a joint humanitarian operation launched in 2015, by June 2015, 85 tonnes of blankets, sleeping bags, water containers, heaters, hygiene kits, and warm clothing had been delivered to people in need.¹²

HA expenditure provides needs-based assistance in various locations. The major types of assistance include food;¹³ water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH);¹⁴ health;¹⁵ emergency shelter;¹⁶ and protection-centred humanitarian assistance, reducing the risk of, and mitigating the impact of violence, coercion, deprivation, and abuse in the context of humanitarian crises.¹⁷

Assessment of expenditure

Together, the EU and its Member States remain a leader in the area of humanitarian aid,¹⁸ not only in terms of providing funds, but also in maintaining international humanitarian aid standards.¹⁹ The EU's needs-based approach to HA expenditure²⁰ reflects the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination, enshrined in the TFEU, which provide a sound basis for conducting humanitarian assistance operations even in areas with very complex conflicts and politically sensitive contexts. While some critics have claimed that the EU tends to employ its HA expenditure as an instrument of its foreign policy,²¹ there has been consistent evidence that this expenditure is kept independent from the rest of expenditure under the MFF's 'Global Europe' heading (all of the EU's external action).

In 2013 the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) launched the Integrated Financial Accountability Framework (IFAF) initiative, with support and cooperation from the European Court of Auditors (ECA). Under IFAF, providers and recipients of humanitarian aid are to report financial and in-kind transfers of aid in standardised tables, available to the general public. DG ECHO endorsed the initiative, stating that if IFAF tables became a standard financial reporting tool, the Commission could significantly reduce the burden of its financial reporting requirements towards its over 200 partner NGOs.²²

The ECA issues reports on particular actions under HA expenditure, reflecting the specific character of each case. One of the most recent reports covers the support in the aftermath of the [2010 earthquake in Haiti](#). Support to Haiti was evaluated as 'well designed', but its implementation faced challenges due to weaknesses of the national authorities.

According to a 2014 document²³ evaluating the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid between 2008 and 2012, the Consensus has promoted the common principles for humanitarian aid, improved information-sharing, boosted actors' capacity for drawing on the existing active network and technical expertise, and helped in making a wider contribution to the international humanitarian aid system. With regard to the challenges facing HA expenditure, the evaluators pointed out that many of those responsible for implementing this expenditure are unaware of the Consensus; that commitment to promoting humanitarian principles varies among actors; that there is weak operational coordination in the field; and that the budget does not reflect the growing gap in humanitarian needs.

The [2015 Commission Staff Working Document](#) for operational priorities in HA expenditure addressed the lack of sufficient budgetary provisions, stating that the inability to increase funding (apart from occasional ad hoc budgetary amendments as mentioned above) means that Commission operations will need to be even more effective and well distributed. This led to the development of the InfoRM index for risk management in order to further optimise the way funding is allocated to humanitarian priorities. Additionally, the Commission decided to have further discussions with the Member States about how to ensure a genuine impact on the ground, and make greater use of evaluation as a key tool for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of initiatives, and hence the way the Consensus is applied.²⁴

An important recent concern related to the implementation of HA expenditure is the EU budget's backlog of payments²⁵ – a problem shared with other EU programmes and expenditure. However, the nature of measures under HA expenditure is such that any delay in fund allocation can result in loss of lives. Unlike other programmes and expenditure, DG ECHO needs to provide 50% or 80% pre-financing (50% in general, to which another 30% is added if a country is classified as being at risk) immediately after reaching agreement with a partner to implement particular measures. Any backlog or delay in the allocation of funds prevents the expenditure from functioning properly, making it impossible for the pre-financing to be allocated and for humanitarian aid to be delivered in emergency situations. The short cycle of actions under HA expenditure makes this problem even more acute.²⁶ The Commission has stressed that payments for humanitarian aid must match commitments, and backlogs should be avoided in order to reflect the exceptional nature of humanitarian assistance.²⁷ There have been efforts to tackle the HA expenditure backlog, for example by reinforcing payment appropriations in 2013 and 2014.²⁸

Supply and demand of humanitarian aid globally

A host of big humanitarian aid donors such as Turkey, the BRICs and the Gulf countries have recently emerged on the global scene. For instance, Turkey was the world's fourth largest humanitarian donor in 2012 and 2013, having provided more than US\$1 billion in humanitarian aid.²⁹ Yet, despite the increase in global humanitarian aid provision, UN estimates point to a 66% humanitarian funding gap at present.³⁰ Challenges related to humanitarian aid funding and delivery worldwide will be discussed at the first [World Humanitarian Summit in 2016](#). At this forum, Commission Vice-President Kristalina Georgieva will co-chair a UN High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing.³¹

Other EU expenditure and action in the same field

The EU and its Member States implement a number of initiatives, programmes and instruments in the field of international assistance. One such example is the [European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps \(EVHAC\)](#), which is provided for in Article 214 TFEU. After having been funded under pilot projects and preparatory actions between 2011 and 2014, it was officially [established](#) in April 2014. This initiative brings together volunteers and organisations, from the EU and third countries, who aspire to lend practical support to the provision of humanitarian aid.³² EVHAC seeks to assert the EU's humanitarian values when dealing with people in need, and to make humanitarian actions more effective and visible by encouraging young Europeans to contribute to EU humanitarian aid operations.³³ Under the 2014-2020 MFF, the Corps has a budget of [€147.9 million](#) which is separate from HA expenditure, but belongs to the same heading – 'Global Europe'.

The EU's [Civil Protection Mechanism \(CPM\)](#) is the instrument which coordinates humanitarian aid between Member States and international partners in response to countries requesting assistance for coping with natural and man-made disasters. Funds released under the MFF fall under the 'Security and Citizenship' heading of the EU budget whenever the CPM is activated within the EU, and under the 'Global Europe' heading whenever the CPM is activated outside the Union.³⁴ Under the 2014-2020 MFF, the CPM has a budget of €368.43 million.

The EU's [Solidarity Fund](#) (EUSF) provides financial aid in the event of major natural or man-made disasters occurring on EU territory, although the affected Member States remain responsible for overall crisis management.³⁵ The Fund focuses on major disasters inflicting damages in excess of €3 billion (2011 prices), or 0.6% of the affected country's gross national income. Up to €500 million can be made available each year to supplement public expenditure on emergency operations.³⁶

Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development

Humanitarian aid expenditure has an important connection to the objective of **[Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development \(LRRD\)](#)**. The EU endorses the LRRD concept in its approach towards aid delivery and implements it where appropriate and feasible. The philosophy behind LRRD is that whenever humanitarian aid funding is extended to address life-saving needs and protect millions of vulnerable people, it should be complemented by measures ensuring development, stabilisation, and state-building actions. This agenda prepares conditions for a proper transition from short-term humanitarian aid to longer-term interventions and development aid.³⁷ The LRRD plays a special role in the EU's approach to facilitating resilience-building in cases of recurring crises.³⁸

Endnotes

¹ See: European Commission, [Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection Management Plan, 2014](#).

² See: European Commission, [Commission Implementing Decision of 05.01.2015 \(amended on 15.06.2015\)](#)

³ See: [Humanitarian Aid. Fact Sheets on the European Union](#), J. Barna, European Parliament, 2014.

⁴ See: [Humanitarian aid and civil protection](#), *European Union explained*, K. Georgieva, European Commission, Luxembourg, 2014.

⁵ See: [Humanitarian aid and civil protection](#), *European Union explained*, K. Georgieva, European Commission, Luxembourg, 2014.

⁶ See: [Humanitarian aid: crises, trends, challenges](#), J. Barna, In-Depth Analysis, Directorate-General External Policies, European Parliament, 2014

⁷ See: the European Commission web page on the [Multiannual Financial Framework](#).

⁸ See: European Commission, [Commission Staff Working Document: General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid in 2015](#)

⁹ See: the European Commission web page on [Humanitarian partners](#).

¹⁰ See: [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#)

¹¹ See: European Commission, [Nepal Earthquake Factsheet](#), June 2015.

¹² See: European Commission, [Ukraine Factsheet](#), October 2015.

¹³ See: European Commission, [Food Assistance Factsheet](#), 2015.

¹⁴ See: European Commission, [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\) Factsheet](#), 2015.

¹⁵ See: European Commission, [Thematic Policy Document 7: Health General Guidelines](#), February 2014.

¹⁶ See: the European Commission web page on [Emergency shelter](#).

¹⁷ See: the European Commission web page on [Protection](#).

¹⁸ See: [Humanitarian aid: crises, trends, challenges](#), J. Barna, In-Depth Analysis, Directorate-General External Policies, European Parliament, 2014

- ¹⁹ See: [Towards more effective global humanitarian action: How the EU can contribute](#), C. Churrua Muguruza, In-Depth Analysis, Directorate-General External Policies, European Parliament, 2015.
- ²⁰ See: European Commission, [Commission Implementing Decision of 15.6.2015 amending Commission Implementing Decision C\(2014\) 10012 of 5.1.2015 on the financing of humanitarian aid operational priorities from the 2015 general budget of the European Union](#), 15 June 2015.
- ²¹ See: J. Orbie, P. Van Elsuwege, and F. Bossuyt, Humanitarian Aid as an Integral Part of the European Union's External Action: The Challenge of Reconciling Coherence and Independence, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, Vol. 22, No. 3, September 2014, pp. 158-165.
- ²² See: International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions, [The Integrated Financial Accountability Framework](#), 2013.
- ²³ See: Analysis for Economic Decisions and King's College London, [Evaluation of the Implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#), June 2014.
- ²⁴ See: [Commission Staff Working Document: General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid in 2015](#), European Commission, 4 December 2014.
- ²⁵ See some examples: [European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2014 on the Council position on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015 \(12608/2014 – C8-0144/2014 – 2014/2040\(BUD\)\)](#), Heading 4/56; [European Parliament resolution of 19 May 2015 on Financing for Development \(2015/2044\(INI\)\)](#), article 14; [Opinion of the Committee on Budgets for the Committee on Development on financing for development \(2015/2044\(INI\)\)](#).
- ²⁶ See: [Payments backlog in recent EU budgets. Lessons learnt and outlook](#), M. Sapala and A. D'Alfonso, EPRS, European Parliament, 2015.
- ²⁷ See: [Commission Staff Working Document: General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid in 2015](#), European Commission, 4 December 2014.
- ²⁸ See: European Commission, [Elements for a payment plan to bring the EU budget back onto a sustainable track](#)
- ²⁹ See: [Humanitarian aid: crises, trends, challenges](#), J. Barna, In-Depth Analysis, Directorate-General External Policies, European Parliament, 2014
- ³⁰ See: OCHA Financial Tracking Service, [Humanitarian Response Plan\(s\)](#): 2015
- ³¹ See: [The European year for development: Humanitarian aid](#), M. Lerch, DG External Policies, European Parliament, 2015
- ³² See: the European Commission webpage on [EU Aid Volunteers](#), DG ECHO, 18 June 2015.
- ³³ See: [European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps](#), J. Lecarte, Briefing, EPRS, European Parliament, 2014.
- ³⁴ See: [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#), M. Parry, EPRS, European Parliament, 2015.
- ³⁵ See: [European Union Solidarity Fund](#), A. D'Alfonso, EPRS, European Parliament, 2012.
- ³⁶ See: [The Solidarity Fund Factsheet](#), D. Haase, June 2015.
- ³⁷ See: European Commission, [Commission Implementing Decision of 5.1.2015 financing humanitarian aid operational priorities from the 2015 general budget of the European Union](#), 2015.
- ³⁸ See: European Commission, [Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2020](#), 2013.

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