

The European year for development: Humanitarian aid



Within EU external relations, humanitarian aid has a distinctive nature: it is based solely on humanitarian principles, responding to needs, rather than political objectives.

In the last decade, the global humanitarian situation has deteriorated; more than 100 million people need assistance this year.

Despite growing humanitarian funds, the system is overstretched and many needs cannot be met.

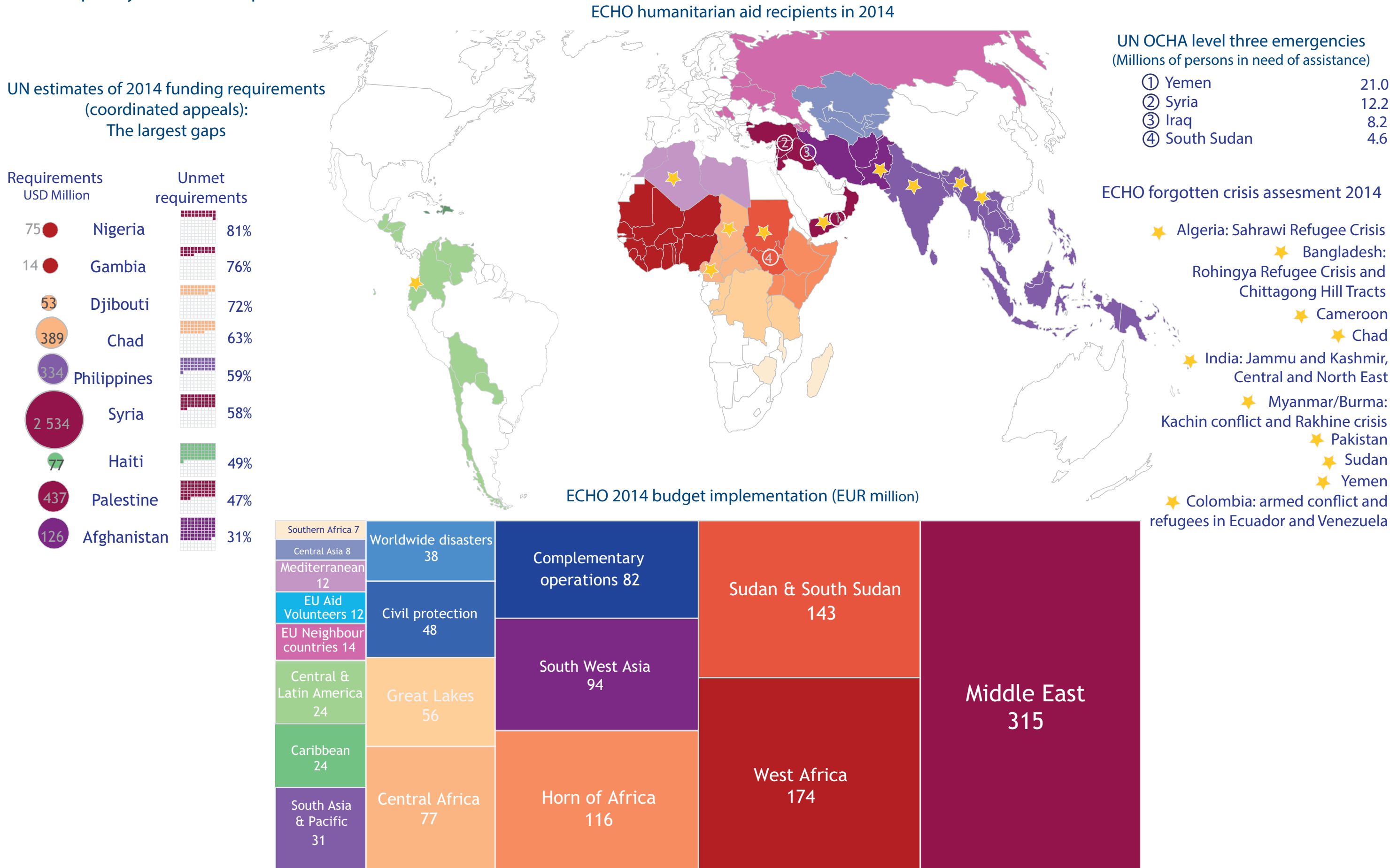
Within European external aid, humanitarian assistance to victims of natural or man-made disasters has a distinct nature; unlike development cooperation, which can be linked to broader political objectives, humanitarian aid is based solely on four principles – humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Those most in need should benefit from the EU's humanitarian aid, independent of any political, economic or military considerations. This principled approach is laid down in the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU, Art. 214) and in the 2007 [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#), a joint declaration signed by the European Commission, the Council, the European Parliament and the Member States. The Consensus, like its Action Plan (now up for revision), serves as a reference point for EU actors and an important tool for enhancing coordination between the Commission's and EU Member States' efforts.

In the last decade, the global humanitarian situation has clearly deteriorated. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled since 2004, reaching over 100 million in 2015. By the end of 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a record 59.5 million forcibly displaced people, mainly fleeing from intrastate conflicts. Four concurrent conflicts (Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen) are classified as 'level 3 crises', the UN designation for the most severe and largest emergencies. There has also been an upward trend of direct losses from natural disasters, and [research](#) shows that climate change is likely to further increase disaster risk, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Many crises persist over time, requiring aid flows to help people survive year after year. In 2013, two thirds of all humanitarian assistance from the members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee went to 'protracted crises'. Despite a sharp rise in global humanitarian assistance (global funding for which reached USD 24.5 billion, including USD 12 billion for UN-coordinated appeals, in 2014) and increased engagement from new donors such as the Gulf States, the globe's exploding needs cannot be met. For the UN, 2014 ended with a humanitarian funding gap of 38 %. This has led to calls for new approaches: tapping new funding sources, such as development aid in protracted crises; enhancing effectiveness and efficiency; and emphasising risk management and prevention.

A disrespect for international humanitarian law is a feature of many current intrastate conflicts: humanitarian aid workers do not have access to those in need, and civilians are exposed to violence. In addition to providing shelter, food, and basic services, it has become essential to protect people.

All these challenges are currently being discussed by the humanitarian community in preparation for the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), to

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Data source: UN-OCHA Financial Tracking Service, EU Aid explorer and European Commission Humanitarian Office

The World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in 2016, will be an occasion to reflect on new challenges and discuss new funding solutions.

The EU and its Member States together constitute the world's leading humanitarian donor. EU aid reaches more than 120 million people, ensures 'forgotten crises' are not completely left behind, and mainstreams disaster prevention and resilience building.

The European Parliament is strong supporter of principled humanitarian aid, and has supported setting aside adequate sums.

Parliament's report on the WHS will feed into the European debate on how to achieve more effective humanitarian action.

take place in Turkey in 2016. A UN High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, co-chaired by Vice-President of the European Commission Kristalina Georgieva, will also provide input to the WHS. However, real progress in reducing the number and scale of disasters cannot come from within the humanitarian system; it is a function of peaceful and sustainable development, as well as more effective conflict prevention and resolution. Implementing the [international framework on Disaster Risk Reduction](#), adopted in March 2015 in Japan, and adopting the Sustainable Development Goals and an ambitious climate change agreement later in 2015 are essential for the future of the humanitarian system.

The EU and its Member States jointly constitute the world's leading humanitarian donor. The Commission alone contributed nearly 10 % to global humanitarian funding tracked by the UN in 2014. This money reached more than 120 million people. The budget of DG ECHO, the main Commission department managing humanitarian assistance and civil protection, increased from EUR 851 million in 2005 to 1 276 billion in 2014. Top aid recipients are victims of the Syrian crisis, followed by people in Sudan, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Aid has also been devoted to 'forgotten crises', which receive little media attention and funding, such as those in Bangladesh, Chad and Colombia. Focusing on preventing, rather than alleviating, is a key element of the EU's approach: besides special programmes on disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction activities are included in 60 % of humanitarian projects, and the [EU's resilience building policy](#) provides communities in disaster-prone regions, such as the Sahel and East Africa, with coping strategies.

The main piece of legislation shaping the EU's humanitarian policy, the [Humanitarian Aid regulation](#), entered into force in 1996, before the European Parliament gained its co-decision powers in the area, and has since not been substantially revised. Today, however, the EU's humanitarian policy is subject to ordinary legislature procedure (co-decision), making the European Parliament a key actor in the field. In 2014, Parliament and Council jointly agreed on the new [EU Aid Volunteers initiative](#), involving EU citizens in international solidarity efforts by deploying volunteers abroad and creating training opportunities. Parliament has generally staunchly defended budgeting adequate means for humanitarian assistance and has supported better coordinating development and humanitarian aid – as in its recent resolution on the humanitarian situation in Syria and Iraq. Parliament strongly supports a principled approach to humanitarian aid, and has [underscored](#) that humanitarian action should under no circumstances serve political ends or be considered a crisis management tool. In view of the WHS, Parliament is contributing its 'own initiative report', to be drafted by the Committee on Development's Standing Rapporteur on Humanitarian Aid, Enrique Guerrero Salom.

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