

HUMANITARIAN AID FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY



Europe
on the move



Dominique Maes

The European Community has provided humanitarian aid since 1970, initially in a modest way, recently on a much increased scale: in the first two turbulent years of the new decade, it made major contributions to international relief efforts in Africa (20% of all humanitarian aid), the Middle East (over 10% of all Gulf crisis relief) and for refugees in every continent.

The Community's humanitarian assistance includes emergency aid for victims of natural disasters or conflict, longer-term aid for refugees and food aid for the very vulnerable. It usually takes the form of first essentials (tents, blankets, clothing, medicines, food), immediate repairs or, for long-term refugees, basic requirements such as seeds, tools and training. It is given impartially, regardless of race, religion or political tendency. In 1991 the Community responded to appeals for help in 40 countries.

In normal years the Community's humanitarian aid, although substantial, represents no more than one-fifth of its total assistance to the poorer countries. The remainder is devoted to their long-term development, to help eliminate poverty which more than any other factor leaves the poor particularly vulnerable to disasters.

*'He who gives quickly
gives twice'*

*Publilius Cyrus,
Sententiae,
first century BC*

THE COMMUNITY'S RESOURCES

Since the early 1970s, when it first set up a small emergency fund, the Community has greatly increased the scale and scope of its humanitarian aid. Twenty years later it can draw on the following resources:

(i) emergency funds for victims of natural disasters or conflict (at least ECU 110 million in 1992);

(ii) an emergency food aid budget (in normal years up to 10% of the Community's annual food aid programme of about 1.5 million tonnes);

(iii) large amounts of food (well over 500 000 tonnes a year) for free distribution to vulnerable groups such as refugees;

(iv) special funds to cover the needs of longer-term refugees and displaced people (about ECU 100 million a year);

(v) a fund for humanitarian assistance to Central and Eastern Europe (up to ECU 90 million in 1992).

In addition, other funds are available to finance post-disaster reconstruction or measures to reduce the impact of future disasters. The Community is for instance currently financing 200 new cyclone shelters in Bangladesh, where insufficient protection caused very heavy loss of life in the 1991 cyclone.

The Community's total humanitarian aid came to over ECU 500 million in 1990 and almost ECU 800 million in 1991 (more than double the total for the previous four years).

The Community's contribution to the Kurdish relief operation, 1991

The suppression of the Kurdish uprising in Northern Iraq after the Gulf war led to a mass exodus of Kurdish Iraqis in late March 1991. Some 1.5 million men, women and children fled to the mountainous Turkish and Iranian border areas. The Community was one of the first donors to send help. Its contribution of ECU 105 million financed 337 humanitarian flights which transported huge quantities of tents, blankets, shoes, food and medical supplies.

*Temporary water supply
for 60 000 Kurdish
refugees, Kurdish-Iraqi
border, 1991*



J. M. Russell

Iranian earthquake of 1990: the Community's response

20/21 June (night): Severe earthquake, northern Iran

21 June, 10 a.m.: Commission alerted by UN

21 June, 4 p.m.: Commission decision ECU 1 million

21/22 June: Funds allocated to NGOs and Red Cross societies in nine European countries

22 June: Second Commission decision ECU 1 million

23 to 27 June: Eight more relief flights leave Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy and the Netherlands

Ten years of EC humanitarian aid: major emergencies, 1982-92

1982/83: Poland, acute food/medical shortages; South-East Asia, Pakistan, Horn of Africa, Central America, mass refugee influxes

1984/85: Africa, severe drought

1986/87: Ethiopia, Sudan, drought

1987/88: India, drought; Africa, desert locust invasion

1988: Central America, hurricane Joan;

Armenia, earthquake

1989: Caribbean, hurricane Hugo; Sudan, civil war

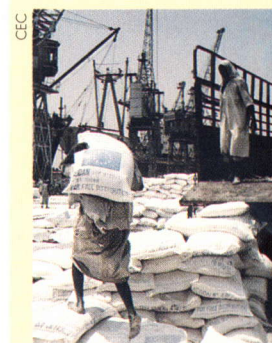
1990/91: Eastern Europe, civil unrest; Liberia, civil war;

Middle East, Gulf crisis;

Horn of Africa, drought/civil war;

Bangladesh, cyclone/floods

1991/92: Ex-USSR, acute food shortages.



Unloading EC food aid, Port Sudan, 1991



T. Christensen

The Community's emergency humanitarian aid (1991)

Disaster	Number of cases/ countries concerned	Community response
Floods	10	Total contributions 392 million ECU made up of:
Earthquake	4	
Volcanic eruption	1	Emergency aid (cash grants) for 77 operations in 40 countries totalling ECU 189 million
Cyclone/hurricane/typhoon	1	
Epidemics (cholera, meningitis, etc.)	4	Emergency food aid totalling 627 000 tonnes for operations in 16 countries, total cost ECU 203 million
Drought/famine	7	
Conflict (civil unrest, civil strife, war)	17	

Emergency medical aid after the Armenian earthquake of 1988

Istituto Cooperazione
Universitaria

Earthquake damage, Armenia, 1988

German Red Cross/
C. Brauner

EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN AID

The Community recognizes that in emergencies speed is often essential. Emergency aid decisions can be taken very quickly, if necessary within a matter of hours.

To ensure speed of execution as well as decision the Community's operational partners (UN agencies, Red Cross societies, NGOs) are expected to spend emergency aid funds within six months — long enough to ensure survival, finance temporary repairs and restore basic services.

Where famine seriously threatens health or even life, the Community can

decide to grant food aid on an emergency basis: free distribution, rapid procurement and delivery, all transport costs paid to final destination, however remote.

REFUGEE AID

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw mass movements of people fleeing war or persecution in South-East Asia, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan and Central America. The refugees' immediate needs — installation in camps, shelter, food and medical care — absorbed over half of all Community emergency funds during this period.

Because no permanent solution was in sight for the majority of these refugees, new funds were set up in the mid-1980s to provide longer-term assistance and training. Millions of exiles have benefited from the Community's financial support — ECU 500 million by the end of 1991 — as well as from its food aid.

Recent political developments in some regions, (notably Central America, South-East Asia and parts of Africa) mean that increasing numbers of refugees can now envisage a return to their homeland. The Community has already helped to finance the return of well over half a million refugees and is currently supporting the repatriation and resettlement in Vietnam of former boat people prepared to go back.

Humanitarian food aid: two recent operations

1990/91 Africa For millions of Africans seriously threatened by famine as a result of drought, civil war, or a combination of both, the Community provided 1 430 000 tonnes of food in the space of 12 months. This quantity, which would fill 40 000 35-tonne trucks, is enough to provide 16 million people with daily survival rations for four months

1991/92 Russia and other former Soviet republics To lessen the impact of acute economic difficulties in the former Soviet Union, the Community is providing 250 000 tonnes of food, chiefly meat and butter, partly for free distribution to the very needy in Moscow and St Petersburg



Homes for the elderly, like this one in St Petersburg, are among the recipients of EC food aid



Food aid for the vulnerable

Every year the Community provides substantial quantities of food — well over half a million tonnes of cereals, milkpowder, vegetable oil and other products — for free distribution to vulnerable groups in poor countries who have little or no income to buy food: refugees, sick or handicapped people, the elderly, mothers, infants and schoolchildren. Refugees form the biggest group.

Preparing EC-donated flour at a women's training centre, Bangladesh

Over the years the Community has consistently supported the work of the United Nations' specialized refugee agencies. Since 1971 it has channelled ECU 450 million of aid to Palestine refugees through UNRWA. In 1991 it contributed USD 120 million to UNHCR — only the USA gave more.

HUMANITARIAN AID TO CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In the course of 1990 it became apparent that sudden and profound economic changes in this region (were causing or) could lead to severe distress in some countries.

The Community, which had established a fund for long-term economic aid to Central and Eastern Europe, decided that up to 10% of this fund could be used for humanitarian aid, to relieve acute hardship.

With the funds available — almost ECU 100 million for 1990 and 1991 — the Community has concentrated on three serious problems:

Sudanese evacuees from the Gulf board an EC-financed flight from Amman to Khartoum, 1990



- disadvantaged children and orphans in Romania;
- the acute lack of basic drugs and medical equipment in Albania, Bulgaria and Romania;
- the situation in Yugoslavia.

The Community has also helped the food supply situation in some countries, particularly Poland and Albania, although it has tended to provide food or grain for sale rather than for free distribution, to avoid disrupting local markets.

THE COMMUNITY'S RELIEF SYSTEM

Relief operations financed by the Community are usually carried out by specialized humanitarian organizations. Although the Commission and its overseas delegations have intervened directly on occasions, to purchase supplies, for instance, or arrange emergency transport, most of the Community's humanitarian aid is provided through United Nations agencies, the Red Cross or NGOs.

Coordination of the Community's and individual Member States' aid — essential to avoid duplication — is the responsibility of the Commission, which collects and circulates information on donations and needs, and where possible organizes combined operations such as emergency airlifts, where a Member State might provide aircraft to transport Community-financed supplies or personnel.

After two years of exceptional demands on its resources, the Commission decided to set up a special office in 1992 to deal with all aspects of the Community's emergency aid. This move should make for a stronger and

Emergency aid (million ECU)

	1990	1991
Community	115	189
EC Member States ¹	203	697
All donors ²	575	1 510

¹ As reported to the Commission.

² As reported to the United Nations.

European Emergency Humanitarian Aid Office

The Office, a new Commission service, will be set up in 1992

- to bring under single management all Community emergency aid, emergency food aid and emergency refugee aid, for all non-EC countries
- to work in genuine partnership with specialized humanitarian organizations
- to improve practical cooperation with the Member States
- to acquire, over time, an authentic operational capacity.

more visible Community presence on the ground while contributing to collective efforts to strengthen the international relief system.



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