



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

MEMO

Brussels, 19 August 2014

Europe's support for humanitarian action

Every year on 19 August, World Humanitarian Day is observed in memory of the victims of the attack on the United Nations' headquarters in Baghdad (Iraq) in 2003 which caused the death of 22 people including the UN Special Representative in Iraq Sergio Vieira de Mello.

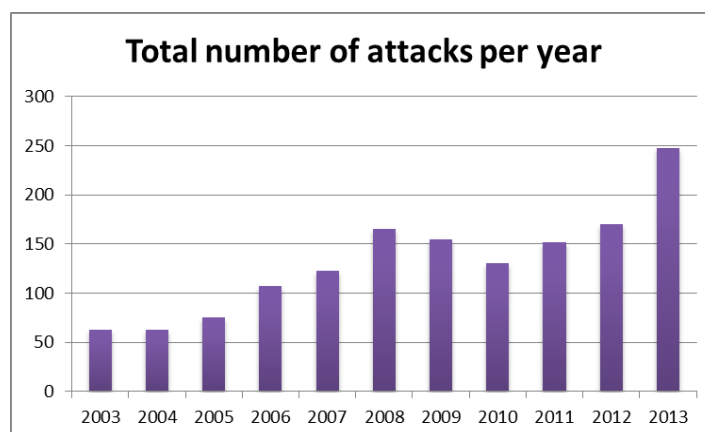
The European Union – the Commission and Member States - is the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid. EU work in this area has the overwhelming support of European citizens: nine out of ten say it's important that the EU funds humanitarian aid according to the most recent Eurobarometer survey.

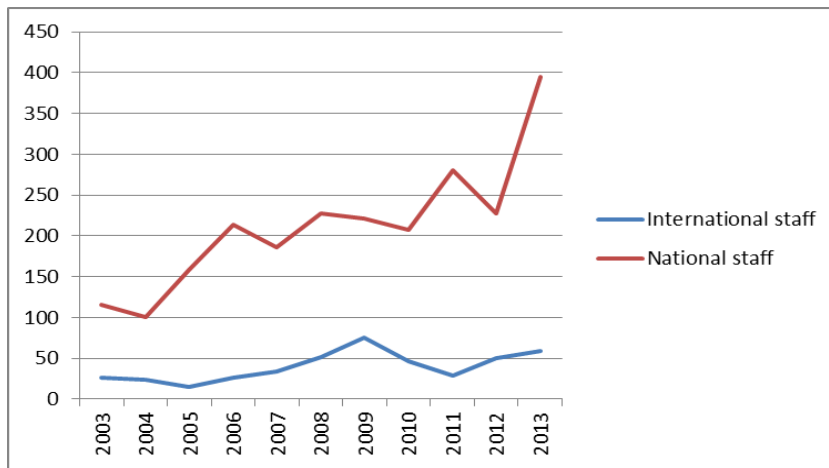
The European Commission helped 124 million people in more than 90 countries in 2013 and this year it continues to assist those in the greatest need, including the victims of the conflicts in Syria, Central African Republic and South Sudan, the survivors of natural disasters in Asia, those affected by food insecurity in the Sahel and vulnerable populations trapped in 'forgotten' crises such as the plight of Colombian refugees or the conflict in Kachin in Myanmar/Burma.

The Commission delivers its humanitarian assistance to those who need it the most in partnership with more than 200 humanitarian organisations, including non-governmental and international organizations, the United Nations and the Red Cross societies. Through the solidarity of European citizens, thousands of humanitarian workers bring assistance and hope to victims of conflicts and natural disasters. Unhindered and safe access to victims is essential to save the lives of those in need.

Attacks on the increase

Attacks on humanitarian workers are more frequent than ever. In 2013, 454 relief workers were assaulted in a record number of attacks. More than one third (155) of the victims were killed (date from aidworkersecurity.org as of 15 July 2014).

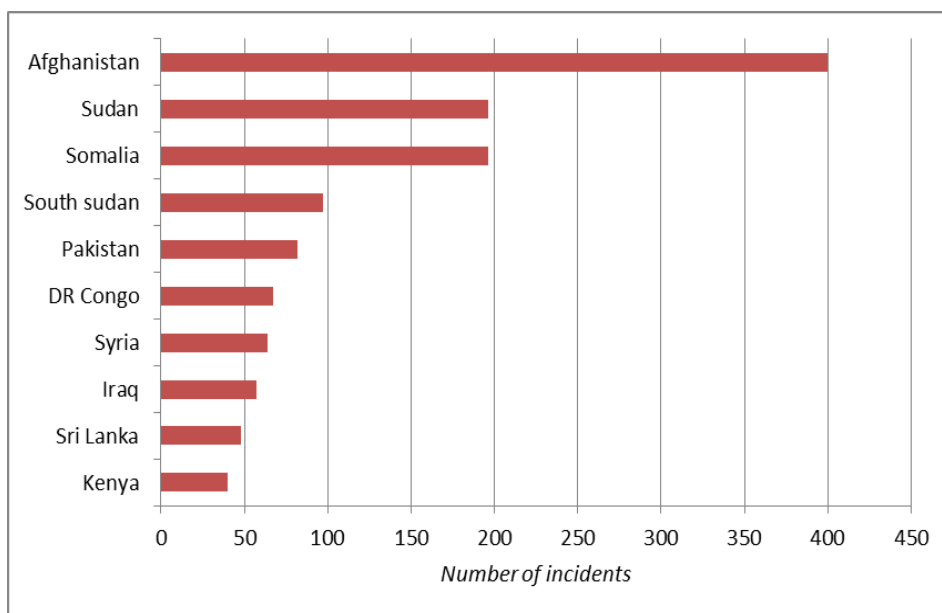




National staff are the main target with only one in six victims classified as international humanitarian workers (2013 data).

More and more workers find themselves in precarious situations and at risk of violent attack. The job of humanitarian workers has become more dangerous and as a result men, women and children in need are at risk of receiving less or no assistance. Thousands of vulnerable people can be left without life-saving support if insecurity forces aid organisations to suspend operations or withdraw from dangerous regions.

Afghanistan leads the table with 400 incidents between 1997 and 2013 – twice the number of the second country on the list, Sudan (196).



Recent examples of attacks on humanitarian workers

Since mid-2010 every month without exception humanitarian workers have been assaulted in **Afghanistan**. In June this year, eight NGO deminers were killed and three others were injured while working on neutralising a minefield.

In **Somalia** in December 2013, four doctors (three Syrian and one Somali) were killed by armed gunmen while travelling to a clinic. Two bodyguards were killed and a Syrian doctor and a Somali doctor were wounded in the same attack.

In Jonglei State in **South Sudan** in January three national aid workers were killed by an armed group which looted UN and NGO premises.

Although not included among the top ten countries in the table above, the **Central African Republic** has in recent times become one of the most dangerous countries to operate in for humanitarians. The security situation has deteriorated since mid-2013. In April this year, three humanitarians were killed by armed ex-Seleka members during a meeting with community leaders to discuss medical care and access. Fifteen other people, all local chiefs, were killed as well.

Assaults on humanitarian workers continue in **Syria**. Nearly 60 humanitarian workers have been killed since 2011. Concerns about the safety of humanitarian personnel and operations remain as high as ever in all parts of Syria, with attacks on ambulances and UN vehicles and kidnappings of humanitarian workers.

According to reports, eleven UNRWA aid workers have lost their lives in one month of conflict in **Gaza**. There have been attacks on humanitarian facilities causing the death of also many civilians. Lack of security hampers the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

International Humanitarian Law

Humanitarian workers do not take sides – they help those who need help regardless of their nationality, religion, gender, ethnic origin or political affiliation.

Attacks against humanitarian personnel are a violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which spells out the responsibilities of states and non-state parties during armed conflict regarding fundamental issues, including the right to receive humanitarian assistance, the protection of civilians including medical and humanitarian workers and the protection of refugees, women and children. IHL is binding on all states and non-state actors in a conflict yet it is increasingly broken.

The European Union vigorously promotes compliance with International Humanitarian Law. The European Commission funds training in IHL to civilian and military personnel engaged in EU crisis management operations. For example, in 2013 for the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM).

Europe's humanitarian record

Europe has a long and proud tradition of humanitarian service and is the birthplace of many of the world's renowned relief organisations.

EU Member States have always engaged and donated generously to support the victims of emergencies.

The European Union as a whole has provided humanitarian aid for more than 40 years. In 1992 it created the European Community's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) "to ensure a swifter and more effective intervention". In February 2010, ECHO became a Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and Kristalina Georgieva was appointed the first Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response.

In the course of its current mandate the European Commission has assisted more than 120 million victims of man-made and natural disasters every year. This has been achieved with less than 1% of the total EU annual budget – just over €2 per EU citizen.

For further information

Solidarity in Action:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/core_achievements/solidarity_in_action/index_en.htm?#intro

Factsheet on International Humanitarian Law:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/ihl_en.pdf

Website of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO):

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

Website of the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/georgieva/index_en.htm