

# Special place for children in EU external action

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This Commission staff working document concerns the issue of children in emergency and crisis situations. It is presented under the framework of the EU strategy on the rights of the child. Its objective is not to attempt to cover the whole of the problem of children in crises but more modestly to:

- 1) present the general context of humanitarian actions in favour of children and to underline their special vulnerability in crises, the various forms of this vulnerability and the risks with which they are confronted in unsettled situations;
- 2) define a general framework for community humanitarian actions covering three major problems which particularly concern children in crisis situations and which are the subject of numerous debates and studies at international level: separated and non accompanied children, child soldiers and education in emergencies. This general framework, which sets out what can be done, will be implemented according to the specificities of each crisis situation taking into account the available resources and the presence of competent partners in the field. The document also stresses certain risks which must be taken into consideration and the issue of the transition towards stabilisation and longer term development instruments;
- 3) provide, through recommendations made, a basis for reflection and examples of good practice for Member States to use in their bilateral humanitarian actions.

This working document highlights in particular that since children are generally an important part of the victims of a crisis, each humanitarian action must take into consideration their specific needs, differentiated according to their age and situation. It is also important to analyse the specific risks which threaten each category of child in a particular context (epidemic, malnutrition, exploitation, abandonment, recruitment by armed groups etc) in order to better meet their needs and improve the protection of children in a crisis.

The Commission highlights 3 specific categories of vulnerable children: separated and unaccompanied children, child soldiers and education in emergencies. Since children are generally an important part of the victims of a crisis, each humanitarian action must take into consideration their specific needs, differentiated according to their age and situation.

These specific actions concern the 3 major problems, dealt with in the following sections:

- the taking care of **separated or unaccompanied children**. The experiences of the tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake and many conflict situations in Africa, have shown that much remains to be done here;
- **the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers**. This has just been the object of a strong international political commitment, especially with the adoption of the "Paris Principles" and new guidelines;
- **education in emergencies**, a subject more and more discussed and to which the humanitarian community attaches growing importance.

The Commission outlines the main actions implemented by DG ECHO:

**Separated, unaccompanied children:** the Commission, through DG ECHO, helps such children in several contexts, notably through the tracing and reunification of families in the framework of population

movements linked to the conflicts in Africa (West Africa, Burundi, Tanzania) or to the Tsunami in Asia (Aceh). As part of a project of capacity building in the area of child protection with UNICEF, DG ECHO supports the development and use of a standard data base common used in the framework of a regional child protection project funded by DG ECHO in West Africa (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone). It is helping children who are AIDS orphans, particularly in Zimbabwe which has 1.4 million orphans, 75% due to AIDS. These actions include the supply of basic necessities (including domestic utensils) as well as seeds and fertilisers, an education campaign about AIDS, the training and mobilisation of the community to look after AIDS orphans, the establishment of support groups for orphans in each district, etc.

**Child soldiers:** DG ECHO, is funding or has funded programmes for former child soldiers, particularly in West Africa and Uganda. In Ivory Coast and Liberia, DG ECHO provided psycho-social support aid, short-term professional training, catch up courses to return to school and awareness campaigns in the community to make the reintegration of the children easier and to prevent any re-recruitment. In Uganda, the Community's humanitarian funding supported the creation of reception centres offering different activities, including family reunification programmes and short professional training courses, to children who had been associated with the armed forces, including child mothers.

DG ECHO is also financing programmes of protection and prevention of recruitment of children, particularly in Colombia, with, inter alia, informal education activities (which allow young people who have missed several years of schooling to bring them back to their level and subsequently go back to the formal education system) and activities at community level.

**Education:** in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Commission, through DG ECHO, is funding psycho-social support programmes through schools. The proposed activities allow the children to express their experiences and feelings in the face of the violence which they meet, while at the same time helping them to develop ways of protecting themselves against it. The teachers also receive a basic training in this field and activities encouraging meetings with parents within the framework of the school are organised. In the Ivory Coast, DG ECHO, has supported recreational and educational activities in schools in order to make both the children and the community aware of the risks of enlistment. They have allowed the children to get back into the academic framework or into active life by providing training in basic trades: carpentry, building, fashion, hairdressing etc. As part of its disaster preparedness programmes in Asia and Latin America (DIPECHO), DG ECHO, is financing specific educational activities aimed at making teachers and/or pupils aware of how to prepare for and prevent natural disasters, notably with simulation exercises. It has supported education in various refugee camps, notably in Burundi and Tanzania, by constructing or refurbishing classrooms, supplying teaching material and furniture, making and distributing school uniforms and by training teachers. After the tsunami in South East Asia, the Commission, through DG ECHO, financed educational activities in Aceh, including a psycho-social and protection aspect.

**Conclusion:** even if they do not specifically target them, all humanitarian programmes must pay particular attention to the specific and differentiated needs of children. Some actions specifically for the benefit of children should be strengthened. The Commission will develop more operational recommendations for its humanitarian activities in the 3 areas discussed in this document. However, children who have been protected and helped by humanitarian programmes do not always receive such assistance afterwards, for instance once they have returned to their region of origin, which leaves them in a particularly vulnerable state. It is therefore necessary to ensure a follow up of programmes for vulnerable children affected by the crises in stabilisation, rehabilitation and development programmes. The action plan for children currently being prepared by the external relations services provides a good opportunity for this. Equally, the Commission services must seek out the opportunities offered by external relations' new financial instruments to better respond to the rights and needs of children in the long term, once the humanitarian intervention is over, thereby fulfilling its political commitments.