



## FACT SHEET

### Official Austrian Humanitarian Aid: Under-funded and over-bureaucratic

The international community and humanitarian organisations are challenged by an ever increasing demand placed on humanitarian aid. In today’s fast changing world various trends pose huge challenges to people in need. The number and severity of disasters, armed conflicts and violence have increased. Complex emergencies - the coincidence of multiple conflicts and disasters - are no longer the exception. The interrelated consequences are progressing environmental degradation, competition over vital resources like food and water, and forced migration. These factors hit poor people and societies hardest and increase their vulnerability.

#### Chronic underfunding

Contrary to its international commitments in the framework of the United Nations and the European Union, Austria’s engagement in development cooperation and humanitarian aid lags far behind. Budget cuts dwarfed the spending on humanitarian aid to 1.2 EUR per capita per year. Switzerland, a country of similar size and wealth, spends twenty times more.

2011	Official Humanitarian Aid in millions Euro	Population in millions	Humanitarian aid per inhabitant
Austria	10	8,2	1,2
Germany	206	81,3	2,5
Irland	62	4,7	13,3
Switzerland	188	7,9	23,8
Norway	271	4,7	57,7

Source: CIA World Factbook; DAC Statistics 2011; Date of conversion (CHF, NOK) 31.12.2011

#### Many state actors, but no clear responsibilities

There are seven different Austrian ministries engaged in development cooperation. The fragmentation of humanitarian aid concerning decision making, political responsibility and organisational structures is similarly complicated. Although several Austrian ministries - and also provincial governments - are involved, none of these actors has the formal mandate to coordinate and to steer humanitarian policy and action. This leads to a lack of coordination and coherence of official humanitarian aid.

#### Slow reaction time

The allocation by the Foreign Disaster Relief Fund (Auslandskatastrophenfonds), which amounts to a meagre 5 million EUR per year, is dependent on a decision by the Austrian Council of Ministers. This procedure is slow and inefficient leading to potentially delayed governmental response to emergencies and precious time lost to save lives.

## **Some steps in the right direction have been taken:**

### **Coordination platform**

A coordination platform between the Austrian Foreign Ministry and humanitarian organisations has been established 2011. Its aim is to facilitate regular information exchange between Austrian state and non-state actors in the field of humanitarian aid, and to strengthen the significance of humanitarian aid.

### **Allocation of 8.5 Million EUR to Eastern Africa in 2011**

An exception of Austria's chronic underfunding of humanitarian aid – which hopefully will not remain a stand-alone example – is the allocation of emergency funds amounting to 8.5 million EUR for famine relief in Eastern Africa in 2011.

## **Five Ways to strengthen the significance and impact of Austria's humanitarian aid**

### **1. Adoption of humanitarian principles as the highest bench-mark**

The humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, humanity and impartiality are the leading guidelines in all aspects of humanitarian aid. The distribution of funds for humanitarian aid must not be influenced by political interests or media visibility.

### **2. Introduction of clear structures**

In order to achieve maximum efficiency and impact this area must be subject to radical reform. It is paramount to establish one Austrian governmental focal point for humanitarian aid with decision making power and a separate and secured budget. The entire decision-making process, the co-ordination and the distribution of funds of the Austrian humanitarian aid should be administered by this body.

### **3. Development of a coherent strategy**

Effective humanitarian aid must have clear objectives, procedures, and responsibilities. A comprehensive evaluation system needs to be established to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of allocated Austrian state funds. Furthermore, a concept needs to be developed to link disaster preparedness, relief, rehabilitation and development cooperation.

### **4. Investment in disaster-prevention**

The Austrian government needs to take effective measures for conflict resolution and peace building, and to enhance the response capacity of local communities, specifically in the key regions and priority countries of the Austrian development cooperation. The support to capacity building ought to strengthen the resilience of communities, and equip them as first responders on the ground to react swiftly in emergency situations.

### **5. Raise the funds for official humanitarian aid**

Austria's humanitarian aid must be equipped with appropriate financial means. The Foreign Disaster Relief Fund (Auslandskatastrophenfonds) should have an annual allocation of 20 Mio EUR. The funds ought to be used specifically in areas of severe disaster, in so-called "silent disasters" and also for the above mentioned disaster prevention measures.

*To strengthen the political and societal significance of humanitarian aid in Austria, it needs to be taken seriously: Humanitarian aid is not an act of charity. It is a human right. A reform of the system of Austrian humanitarian aid and its adequate funding are urgently needed.*