VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network of 84 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. As a network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

October 2012

VOICE STATEMENT

2013 EU budget for humanitarian aid

KEY MESSAGES

1. Member States should reconsider the proposal to cut the EU external action budget heading

2. If cuts are needed, they should be more proportionate across headings

3. Member States must maintain payments for the Emergency Aid Reserve, as it is not a question of whether it will be needed, but when

Why the EU should engage beyond its borders

The EU is currently discussing its budget for 2013. During the summer the Member States decided to cut the budget for external action by almost 10% compared to 2012, the biggest cut of all major headings. This decision stands in stark contrast to the Lisbon Treaty, in which the EU Member States have strongly committed to strengthen EU external action, in line with the EU's global agenda.

The EU is one of the strongest economic and political blocs in the world and a leading global donor for humanitarian aid and development - as witnessed in 2011, during which 117 million crisis-affected people received EU humanitarian assistance in 90 non-EU countries. The EU has a strong record of responding to major disasters, forgotten emergencies and small-scale crises that erode people's productive capacity. In a world of increasing disasters, to make humanitarian aid more sustainable the EU's investment in disaster risk reduction, development, conflict prevention, human rights and support to civil society is essential to building resilience to future crises. All these policies are financed from the external action budget. There is a strong interlinkage between social and economic wellbeing in third countries and political and financial developments inside the European Union.

If these proposed cuts are implemented, what will be the consequences for vulnerable populations who are supported through EU aid? Member States should also ask themselves what the implications of this decision would be - at home, within the EU and for the EU's standing as a global player in the world.

- **Member States should reconsider the proposal to cut the EU external action budget heading**

  When deciding on such large cuts for external action, Member States are not in line with the majority of European citizens. 88% of European citizens strongly support EU humanitarian aid in spite of the current economic crisis[i], while another 85% are in favour of the EU continuing its engagement in development aid[ii]. Aid is essential in implementing European values and demonstrating the solidarity of European citizens towards those affected by disaster and extreme poverty.

- **If cuts are needed, they should be more proportionate across headings**

  As a European network, VOICE fully grasps that the economic climate is particularly difficult, which explains our Member States' stance. However, if the Member States choose to cut the

Commission's budget proposal, then these cuts need to be better divided across budget headings. In the current Council proposal, the suggested reduction to external action is disproportionate, as it is the *only* heading which will receive less funding than in 2012. This is all the more surprising given that it is a very small heading in absolute amounts (€7 billion compared to €62 billion for Heading 1 and €58 billion for Heading 2).

The EU response to more frequent natural disasters and conflicts

Concerning the humanitarian aid budget line, the Council plans to cut the Commission's proposal by €41 million. Decision makers should at least be aware that this apparently modest cut is equal to (for example) all humanitarian aid which was allocated by the Commission in 2012 to the Occupied Palestinian Territories or to Somalia[iii]. Of even greater concern is the Member States' proposal to eliminate payments to the Emergency Aid Reserve in 2013, from the proposed €110 million to zero. In practice the Reserve has been consistently used over the last few years by the Commission to address humanitarian needs in major unforeseen disasters such as Haiti and Pakistan in 2010, Libya in 2011 and most recently Syria. As these crises are impossible to predict, the flexibility provided by the Reserve is crucial. MEPs have stated they "*strongly defend(s) the need to maintain the Emergency Aid Reserve, which has shown to work particularly well in its present form, as an unprogrammed reserve outside the MFF 2014-2020 ceilings and to provide it with a significant, realistic financial allocation, enabling the Union to respond quickly to unforeseen needs and unexpected crises via an ad-hoc mobilisation whenever necessary*"[iv].

- **Member States must maintain payments for the Emergency Aid Reserve, as it is not a question of whether it will be needed, but when**

Over the coming years, humanitarian needs and the related costs will continue to increase due to factors such as climate change, population growth, and pressure on scarce resources, which together lead to more devastating natural disasters and conflicts. The EU has a moral duty to respond to these needs and help populations unable to make themselves heard in these budgetary debates. This requires maintaining the Emergency Aid Reserve in addition to the Commission's humanitarian aid budget line.

[i] Eurobarometer on humanitarian aid (June 2012)
[ii] Eurobarometer on development aid (October 2012)
[iii] ECHO operational perspectives for 2012 (October 2011)
[iv] Opinion Development Committee European parliament on Multi-annual Financial Framework (September 2012)