

Humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid is intended to save human lives and mitigate human suffering in crisis situations. The most important actors are UN organisations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs. About 15 billion US dollars is spent on international humanitarian aid activities annually. In recent years Finland has provided 70-90 million euros a year in humanitarian aid. In this year's budget the appropriation is 83.5 million euros, which is slightly less than 10 per cent of appropriations for development cooperation. About three-fourths of Finland's aid is channeled through the UN system. In addition aid is provided through the Finnish Red Cross to the International Red Cross and two other Finnish NGOs. The administration of aid at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is the responsibility of the Department for Development Policy's Unit for Humanitarian Assistance.

The objective of the audit was to examine the administration of humanitarian aid at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland's activities and influence in the international humanitarian aid system, the results and impacts of humanitarian aid, and the connection between humanitarian aid and other development cooperation.

The administration of Finland's humanitarian aid has been arranged properly for the most part. There is room for improvement, however, in the ministry's internal processes, aid guidelines, agreements regulating the use of aid and the monitoring of the use of aid.

In influencing international humanitarian aid Finland's priorities in recent years have included drawing attention to humanitarian issues on the agendas of UN organisations' boards, strengthening the connection between humanitarian aid and development, and strengthening humanitarian architecture following humanitarian reform. These objectives have been partly achieved. Finland's activities have been competent and energetic. Aid organisations and the donor community mainly have a positive picture of Finland as a donor and humanitarian actor. Maintaining this situation requires

ensuring the Unit for Humanitarian Assistance's current personnel resources and expertise, however.

Finland's aid is an integral part of the humanitarian aid system and can be effective only if the whole system works efficiently and effectively. There is sufficient information on the direct results of aid programmes. The monitoring of the impacts of programmes is less regular and comprehensive, however. Aid organisations have recognised the importance of monitoring impacts and are paying more attention to its development.

There are weaknesses in evaluating humanitarian aid, but the same also applies to utilising evaluation results. UN organisations participate in system-wide evaluations, for example, but their results are not discussed in organisations' boards. Since the recommendations made in evaluations are important both for the entire international humanitarian system and for developing individual organisations' activities, boards should have a mechanism so that they can systematically promote and monitor the implementation of recommendations. Generally speaking the focus of evaluations should be shifted to the impacts of activities and more attention should be paid to the end recipients of aid.

The development of the humanitarian aid system has not proceeded in the desired manner in all respects. To improve the situation aid organisations decided in spring 2011 on means to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

As part of the audit in March 2011 the National Audit Office published an evaluation synthesis of international humanitarian aid. This gives a cross-cutting picture of the strengths, weaknesses and development needs of the humanitarian aid system and thus produces information on the efficiency and impacts of aid.

Major humanitarian crises in recent years have shown how important it is to strengthen connections between prevention, catastrophe aid and crisis recovery. Aid focuses should be shifted to preventing crises rather than mitigating crises that have already erupted. It has been estimated that each euro invested in prevention would save four euros in emergency aid. As part of the implementation of the continuum principle the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has decided that minimising risks of natural disasters will be integrated into Finland's development cooperation. Supporting the post-conflict transition stage is not yet as systematic. Promoting the co-

ordination of humanitarian aid and other development cooperation will improve the effectiveness of aid and the achievement of sustainable development.