

# Is Australia a humanitarian scrooge?

by Ashlee Betteridge

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Syrian internally displaced people walk in the Atme camp, along the Turkish border in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib, on March 19, 2013. The conflict in Syria between rebel forces and pro-government troops has killed at least 70,000 people, and forced more than one million Syrians to seek refuge abroad. AFP PHOTO/BULENT KILIC (Photo credit should read BULENT KILIC/AFP/Getty Images)

The need for humanitarian funding has **only been increasing**. We are currently in the midst of numerous global crises, most notably those affecting Syria and Iraq.

Many of the international appeals to support these crises are coming up short—humanitarian appeals for 2015 were only 53% funded, **according to the Financial Tracking Service**.

As part of our new **Australian Aid Tracker website**, we've taken a look at how Australia is performing on its commitments to international humanitarian appeals and how its humanitarian aid contributions stack up.

Humanitarian funding received a three per cent cut in this year's budget. In the context of a 30 per cent overall cut to aid, that placed it in the 'non-loser' category in our **budget analysis**. It actually grew very slightly as a percentage of the overall aid budget.

It is good that its priority wasn't reduced. But is eight per cent of our aid enough?

One way to answer this is to look at what other countries give. The **2015 Global Humanitarian Assistance report** has data comparing the humanitarian assistance effort of countries around the world, including new and emerging donors.

In the chart below, you can see a time series showing Australia's position among OECD DAC members from 1990 up to the end of 2014, based on volume of

humanitarian assistance. We've moved around a lot, but have never been a particularly large humanitarian donor. The US and UK stand out. We're the 8<sup>th</sup> biggest OECD economy, but only the 12<sup>th</sup> largest OECD provider of humanitarian assistance. Our GNI is half the size of the UK's, but we give one-sixth the amount of crisis aid.

The next chart shows us where that eight per cent of overseas development assistance (ODA) spent on humanitarian assistance places us globally. As you can see, other OECD DAC donors spend a much larger proportion of their total ODA on humanitarian assistance. Australia's share has hovered roughly around 10 per cent over the past decade, but other donors are spending much more.

Below, we can see our performance on humanitarian assistance per capita for 2014, in US dollars. We are 13<sup>th</sup> among the OECD DAC countries, but it's worth remembering that beyond the DAC, new, low-population but wealthy non-DAC donors, such as the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, really stand out on this measure.

And when we look at humanitarian assistance as a percentage of Gross National Income, things are also grim for Australia. The chart below shows the top 20 on this measure, including DAC and non-DAC countries. We come in at equal 18<sup>th</sup> with New Zealand, the US and Germany. In recent years, Arab countries and those affected by an influx of refugees, such as Turkey, have been steadily moving up the charts and further lowering Australia's ranking.

It's worth remembering that if other countries maintain their effort at the same level or increase it, our three per cent cut to humanitarian funding means that Australia is likely to slide further down these tables when they are compiled again next year.

So, while we may not have slashed humanitarian assistance during this year's aid budget as brutally as we cut other areas, we're still not keeping up. And we're not giving nearly enough.

In the table below, which draws on data from the [Financial Tracking Service](#), you can see how Australia's humanitarian assistance has been split across major international appeals for the past year.

Our contribution to Syria might look impressive, but with an [estimated](#) 13.5 million people displaced or in need as of 2016, it is about \$3 per person, and less than 1%

of the **total** [pdf] raised for Syria last year, which itself was less than half of the total funds **required**.

Given Australia's aspirations to take on more leadership roles on the global stage, and our repeated **claim** to be a generous people, our effort on humanitarian aid needs to step up.

*Ashlee Betteridge is a Research Officer at the **Development Policy Centre**. Read more about Australian aid, our commitments and trends on the newly-launched **Australian Aid Tracker website**. Data for this post was drawn from **Aid Tracker analysis**.*

### **Author/s:**

#### **Ashlee Betteridge**

Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/is-australia-a-humanitarian-scrooge-20160128/>