Introduction

According to information released by the United Nations, more than 70% of the total population (18 million people) are considered food insecure, have limited access to basic services, and are in need of humanitarian assistance. As humanitarian actors have not been able to conduct assessments in the country over the past few years, the current situation remains unclear. The country is also prone to extreme weather conditions, particularly droughts, floods, and storms.

What are the needs?

As a consequence of the international sanctions adopted against North Korea in early 2013, international bank transfers into the country are more difficult to carry out, which affect the functioning of humanitarian agencies.

The food and nutrition situation remains fragile and subject to deterioration in case of shocks. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), crop production in 2017 was severely affected by a prolonged dry spell, threatening food security for a large part of its populations. The overall chronic undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain worrying. Although child undernutrition has steadily declined over the past decade, additional efforts are required to improve children's condition. According to the latest nutrition survey in 2012, stunting (low height compared to age) prevalence was reported at 28%, which is considered a “medium” public health concern by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Recurrent natural disasters, ranging from extended droughts, severe flooding to occasional typhoons, compound the people's vulnerabilities and need for humanitarian assistance.
How are we helping?

The European Commission’s Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department has been responding to humanitarian needs in North Korea since 1995, providing €135.6 million in humanitarian aid funding to support over 130 projects. The aid focuses on providing food assistance, the improvement of health services and access to clean water and sanitation to the most vulnerable populations.

In response to devastating flooding in mid-2016, which hit large parts of the northernmost province of North Hamgyong in August 2016, the EU provided €300 000 to enable the Finnish Red Cross (FRC) to distribute emergency relief items, such as shelter tool kits, tents, hygiene parcels, quilts and jerry cans to the most-affected families.

Earlier in 2015, the Commission had released €200 000 in response to the summer floods, which affected various villages on the outskirts of the cities of south Hwanghae and north and south Hamgyong provinces. The funding supported the delivery of emergency shelter and household items whilst also ensuring good hygiene practices amongst the impacted communities. Similar assistance had also been provided in the wake of the floods in 2012 and 2013.

Continuing its support to the most vulnerable communities, the EU provided €300 000 in early 2016 for an initiative led by the Finnish Red Cross (FRC), focusing on enhancing the capacity of people in rural areas to respond to future floods and droughts, at both local and national levels. The programme, running until November 2017, will directly benefit over 7 000 individuals in targeted localities.

In the previous funding cycle (2014-2015), a total of €72 000 had been provided to North Korea as part of a multi-country initiative on disaster preparedness across Asia. This action, implemented by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), aimed at increasing capacities for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in agriculture, including the promotion of information sharing, the use of good farming practices and awareness raising on core technical and institutional requirements.