

Gender and Humanitarian Assistance

1. Introduction

1.1 The aim of this paper is to set out the views of *Eurostep* member agencies on current practice in humanitarian responses, and recommendations for future policy priorities. The paper has been put together in preparation for the meeting of the Development Council in May 1996, at which the issue of gender and emergencies is to be debated.

1.2 The overall view of the *Eurostep* agencies is that, while some emergency responses carried out by the international community have achieved improvements in responsiveness, targeting and social awareness, the majority of emergency responses ignore the special needs of women, miss opportunities to strengthen their position (and sometimes weaken it), ignore women's own resources and characteristics, and disregard the long-term social rehabilitation needs of the communities they serve. The structure of the emergency response profession, which the European Community has helped to shape, needs to be reformed in order to encourage longer-term thinking and to ensure that the emergency responses are geared to the differentiated needs of the affected populations, in order to strengthen long-term recovery .

1.3 The term 'emergency situations' here includes situations where natural or other disaster threatens the capacity of a community to withstand crisis, leading to large-scale loss - or impending loss - of life and livelihoods. The incidence and gravity of emergency situations has been swelled since the end of the cold war by the increasing frequency of man-made crises brought on by armed conflict, as well as the increasingly destructive impact of wars on civilians. Since conflict emergencies currently make up the greatest part of emergency relief requirements, inevitably much of the discussion concerns conflict-related situations and the international response to them. Women's role in conflict prevention and peace-building is too broad an issue to be addressed fully in this paper although reference is made to it.