

Fair Distribution

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The humanitarian idea of equitable distribution of aid to all those who need it relies on the concept of fairness as an objective and measurable category and assumes a universal moral horizon for those who provide and those who receive aid. Anthropologically speaking, fairness is a subjective category because, although it is socially shaped, it largely depends on the moral attitudes of individuals, and in the case of humanitarian aid, on the providers' arbitrary judgments of who needs what and in what quantities. Barbara Harrell-Bond argues that we rely too much on 'fairness' as a distributive measure and calls for the language of fairness to be replaced with the language of dignity (2002). By this, Harrell-Bond means that it is more important to respect the dignity of refugees than the fair distribution of aid, which, in more concrete terms, means that the attitude of aid providers towards refugees must not be paternalistic and infantilizing, that they should not be treated as members of the community who do not deserve to be trusted, or, on the other hand, as people who should be happy with inadequate contents in food packages. The asymmetric power relationship between the recipient and the provider of humanitarian aid is further strengthened by equating the concepts of fairness and equality (Van Arsdale and Nockerts 2008). In practice, this means that a humanitarian organization, and quite often the humanitarian worker themselves, distributes aid with the assumption that all persons who seek aid or a group of such people are in the same position and have the same needs, so it distributes aid equally, even though, objectively, their positions to obtain aid and needs are different, so the distribution is unfair. Thus, for example, in the **camp in Slavonski Brod**, when the corridor through which refugees traveled through Croatia was first being established, everyone was given the same packages with food (a can of food, water, bread).

The concept of fairness is often associated with the humanitarian principle of impartiality, which the international Red Cross describes as one that is devoid of the burden of prejudices related to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political stance, as well as the concept of equity, which assumes that despite differences, everyone should receive the same aid. However, even when aid providers are aware that the needs of refugees differ, unfair situations still often occur, such as when blankets were distributed several times to elderly people and families during their passage through the **Balkan corridor**, while young males were continuously left without them.

Considering that the practice of fair distribution is often, in addition to the concepts of fairness and equality, influenced by the criteria of effectiveness, some scientists are developing mathematical models in order to measure fairness as fairly as possible – the so-called fairness metrics (cf., e.g., Anaya-Arenas et al. 2018).

15/3/2022

Literature

Anaya-Arenas, Ana María, Angel Ruiz i Jacques Renaud. 2018. "Importance of Fairness in Humanitarian Relief Distribution". *Production Planning & Control* 29/14: 1145-1157.

Harrell-Bond, Barbara. 2002. "Can Humanitarian Work with Refugees be Humane?". *Human Rights Quarterly* 24/1: 51-85.

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