



VOICE

# ACTIVITY REPORT 2014

BRUSSELS, MAY 2015

VOICE

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Cooperation in Emergencies**

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## ACRONYMS

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| BUDG    | European Parliament Budget Committee                                 |
| CHS     | Common Humanitarian Standard   |
| COHAFA  | Council Working Group on Humanitarian Affairs and Food Assistance    |
| CONCORD | The European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development            |
| DG ECHO | European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department |
| DEVE    | European Parliament Development Committee                            |
| DRR     | Disaster Risk Reduction  |
| EEAS    | European External Action Service                                     |
| EC      | European Commission  |
| EOG     | Europe and Others Group  |
| EP      | European Parliament  |
| EU      | European Union   |
| FPA     | Framework Partnership Agreement                                      |
| GA      | General Assembly   |
| HIPs    | Humanitarian Implementation Plans                                    |
| ICRC    | International Committee of the Red Cross                             |
| ICVA    | International Council of Voluntary Agencies                          |
| IFRC    | International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies     |
| LRRD    | Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development                        |
| MEPs    | Members of the European Parliament                                   |
| MS      | Member States  |
| NGO     | Non Governmental Organisations                                       |
| SCHR    | Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response                         |
| UN      | United Nations   |
| WG      | Working Group or Watch Group   |
| WHS     | World Humanitarian Summit  |

## INTRODUCTION



We are happy to have left a challenging year in 2014 behind us, and with a big success with respect to returning to a predictable EU humanitarian budget. The ECHO funding situation last year probably means that there are lessons to be had for us all; the EU institutions, Member States and NGOs regarding the relationships and understanding we build up on our work, especially with non-humanitarians. Ultimately, through the intensity of the work we have come out strengthened as the VOICE network. We are proud of the collective work of all our members, and as a Secretariat, humbled by the leadership we could provide in facilitating this.

For VOICE, the year saw strengthened cooperation among our members and more engaged exchange between all the layers of the network, from the field to national level and to Brussels. The advocacy priorities brought the VOICE Board and Secretariat much closer to many at national level; building relationships that we plan to carry forward with us. The extraordinary outreach to Member States was a particularly big achievement, resulting in a high level of visibility for humanitarian aid and the VOICE network across the European Union. We reinforced our links in the European Parliament and with humanitarian actors at Brussels level while maintaining active dialogue with ECHO throughout the year.

We also ended 2014 with new EU institutional leadership in place. VOICE has been establishing working relationships with the main interlocutors to continue to influence and shape future agendas, ensuring that we position ourselves as the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction, promoting the values of humanitarian NGOs. VOICE will remain in a position to advocate for principled humanitarian aid in a changing Europe and world.

There are many challenges ahead for the EU and Member States. Humanitarian aid is increasingly in demand with natural disasters and conflict on the rise, and the environment our members' work in is increasingly complex and insecure. The European Union and Member States are being called upon to respond to migration, security, human rights and climate change while overall budgets are stagnating. In this context, VOICE will be advocating and seeking for the EU to continue to support the humanitarian endeavour, maintaining the status and reputation it has built as a needs-based and principled global donor.

The global context this year will be the backdrop for the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 which will hopefully find the EU and the global humanitarian community affirming a global commitment to humanity first and foremost. Humanitarian professionals are constantly adapting, particularly in the field, to seek innovative solutions to the operational and funding challenges faced. NGOs' methodologies are adjusted, for instance, by improving the complementarities with development and other actors, by building alliances, by further improving needs assessments and by involving communities in planning for and dealing with risk. Our members are using this expertise and engagement to nourish and shape the preparations towards the Summit.

VOICE will work this year to ensure that the commitments the EU and Member States consider making at the Summit, are in line with the principles and concepts agreed to in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The Summit has the potential to leave us with a legacy that will shape our European and global humanitarian sector for years to come, and we remain ambitious that the views of European NGOs will be heard and included. Concerns regarding partnership in the sector, the challenges of working in conflict and many more are crucial. VOICE members are committed to humanitarian effectiveness, professional support to and solidarity with crisis affected people. The EU should be too.

**Kathrin Schick**  
Director VOICE

# 1. ENSURING POLICY, PRACTICE AND FUNDING ARE INCREASINGLY ADHERENT TO CORE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND GOOD PRACTICE

## 1.1 FINDING THE MONEY: EU HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN DOUBT ?

VOICE's core mandate is to influence EU humanitarian policy and practice, which includes looking at EU funding practices. How funding modalities function and ensuring timely and predictable funding for humanitarian actors are both crucial to ensuring quality humanitarian aid. Through a huge advocacy drive in 2012 and 2013, VOICE succeeded in ensuring that 10% of the EU's external relations chapter of the multi-annual budget (MFF) is reserved for humanitarian assistance.

Nonetheless, 2014 started with the consequences of the lower overall EU budget and the significantly accumulated gap between payments and commitments<sup>1</sup> being acutely felt in the humanitarian sector. For the membership of VOICE the prospect of EU funding in the field not being timely and predictable was very challenging, adding to a complex picture with increasing humanitarian needs on the ground in 2014, especially in CAR, Syria and South Sudan.

### *The situation :*

*In January DG ECHO informed its partners (NGOs, Red Cross and the UN) that with less than half its budget available in payments to fund new humanitarian operations, they could expect a cut of roughly 50% in their contracts until further funding could be mobilised. Nonetheless the commitment was expressed to implement the 2014 Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs) fully. In order to do this, €400mio additional payments in the EU's humanitarian aid budget needed to be mobilised in 2014. The European Parliament and the Council (Member States) have the power to approve changes to the EU budget on the basis of proposals by the European Commission.*

*NGOs sought to understand quickly why the situation had arisen and expected more information and predictability from DG ECHO, for many, one of their most important donors. VOICE members struggled to understand how to match the concrete funding cut with the message of the Commission's commitment to implement the 2014 HIPs fully. They had to adapt or put on hold projects, making this a serious funding crisis for many VOICE members.*

Through information sharing, awareness-raising activities, coordinated advocacy at Brussels and national level, as well as the engagement of the VOICE Board, membership, Secretariat and a dedicated task force, ultimately the ECHO funding situation was successfully resolved. On 17 December, the EU's Budgetary Authority (Council and European Parliament) adopted an amendment to the 2014 Budget, providing humanitarian assistance with €256 million more in payment credits, and increasing the payment credit level up to nearly the commitment level in 2015. This favourable outcome for humanitarian aid in the political agreement on the EU budget was the biggest achievement of a year's worth of outreach, liaison, advocacy and mobilisation of the VOICE network in 2014. VOICE's active collective advocacy with Member State officials, MEPs, DG ECHO, and the EEAS raised awareness on the importance and the value of EU humanitarian aid, and some Member States who had initially been reluctant did ultimately shift their position on the EU budget. The European Parliament also proved itself to be an important ally of humanitarians in achieving this outcome.

<sup>1</sup> See VOICE annual reports 2012 and 2013



## 1.11 - EU institutions

Throughout the year the VOICE Board and President took a leading role in ensuring that NGOs' needs and expectations through this crisis were communicated at the highest level in DG ECHO. Meetings were held with ECHO staff and the Commissioner's Cabinet. An early meeting between the VOICE President and the Director General of ECHO resulted in the agreement on the necessity to communicate with partners on the operational implications in order to support ongoing planning in the field. Early in the year VOICE also facilitated three high-level exchanges between NGOs and ECHO's Director for Operations. These focused on field planning, priorities for implementation of the HIPs and the approach to be taken to implement the 50% reduction, by taking into account the specific needs of each emergency and the situation of individual NGOs. A significant achievement, in our advocacy to DG ECHO, was the agreement there would be no reduction in the pre-financing rate for NGOs in the first phase of HIPs implementation.

Securing the whole Commission's support for the EU humanitarian assistance budget was an important step in resolving the crisis. VOICE advocacy towards the President of the European Commission and the Budget Commissioner, played its part in ensuring that the Commission, as a whole, supported DG ECHO's urgent need for additional payment credits, through the adoption of an amending budget, and a 2015 draft budget, proposing that payment credits go up to the level of commitment credits for humanitarian assistance. Members and the VOICE Secretariat made sure to mobilise the European Parliament to use its scrutiny and budgetary powers early in 2014, supporting both the Development (DEVE) and the Budget (BUDG) Committees to hold discussions and hearings on the impact of the payments crisis on the EU's humanitarian aid in February and April respectively.

Dialogue was maintained with DG ECHO throughout the year, in particular in late summer and autumn, to ensure information flow on the negotiations over the 2014 amending budget and the 2015 budget.

After the European Parliament elections in May, VOICE had to build the awareness and understanding of humanitarian aid, with a whole new set of elected representatives. VOICE ensured that key new actors in the European Parliament's DEVE and BUDG Committees, such as the new Chair of the Budget Committee Mr. Arthuis MEP and various political group coordinators were briefed on the funding situation. The Task Force (see section 1.13) coordinated this outreach and awareness-raising, so, for example, the French VOICE members took responsibility for contacting Mr. Arthuis. Contact was also established with the overall 2015 Budget Rapporteur, Ms. Gardiazabal Rubial MEP, ensuring her follow-up of this issue throughout the months of budget negotiations.

The VOICE 2014 General Assembly Resolution 'Why is EU humanitarian aid important?' and the VOICE Out Loud 19 magazine 'A closer look at EU humanitarian aid', were both widely distributed to key European Parliament stakeholders prior to the adoption of the EP position and both included essential information to build the knowledge of new MEPs. Both of these incorporated our key asks in relation to the EU budget and our member, Save the Children, highlighted the impact on NGOs of the funding situation. A key success was that the DEVE coordinators (from all political groups) decided to write a joint letter to the budget negotiators conveying their concerns regarding the funding situation for the EU's aid.

### ***Commit to predictable and timely funding for humanitarian aid***

*Recent EU humanitarian funding shortfalls are having an impact on crisis-affected populations. The European Parliament and Council must vote for additional resources for humanitarian aid when the Commission presents its Draft Amending Budget later this year. This is necessary to implement all EU humanitarian operations in 2014 as planned.*

*To ensure predictable humanitarian funding and maintain a consistent level of assistance to crisis-affected population, the European Parliament and Council must agree to raise the payment credits for humanitarian aid to the level of commitment credits in the 2015 EC Budget.*

*VOICE General Assembly Resolution 2014*

VOICE Secretariat also collaborated with other Brussels based humanitarian actors, the UN and the Red Cross, to organise an event in the European Parliament, hosted by a DEVE Committee coordinator Mr. Goerens MEP (see section 2.2), which also conveyed key common concerns regarding the EU funding situation. These were stressed when the VOICE Director and a CONCORD representative briefed the S&D Group (centre left) of the European Parliament at a workshop on the EU's Development and Humanitarian assistance. The S&D Group coordinator thanked the VOICE Director: *'for your intervention on EU humanitarian action under pressure of increasing humanitarian crises as well as your insights into...the need for timely EU funding for humanitarian action...'*

#### Sequence of events:

- January:  
ECHO informs that €400 mio additional payments required in EU budget to fulfil 2014 Humanitarian Implementation Plans
- March:  
Commission requests, and is granted, €150 mio internal transfer to humanitarian aid budget line.  
8 Member States are not in favour.
- May-June:  
Commission adopts proposals for amending budget 2014 (including €250mio for humanitarian aid) and for 2015 budget.
- August-October:  
Member States and EP adopt respective positions on budget.  
EP is favourable. Many Member States are not.
- November-December:  
Negotiations on budget.
- 17 December:  
EP and Member States agree budget as proposed by the Commission. Main advocacy objectives are achieved.

### 1.12 - Members at national level

At the national level, VOICE members mobilised quickly in January to alert their national COHAFA representatives, and ensure that MS were fully informed of developments in relation to the EU's humanitarian assistance budget throughout the year. The ECHO funding situation became a regular agenda point of the COHAFA throughout the Greek and Italian Presidencies.

Almost the whole membership undertook advocacy at national level, sending letters collectively and individually to their foreign and finance ministries to ensure awareness of the situation and to galvanise support for the Commission's budget proposals as well as raising the situation in dialogue with officials wherever the opportunity arose. In countries where the network was not represented, the VOICE President addressed Finance and Foreign Ministries by letter.

As with the work with MEPs, members also specifically targeted some Member States because of their strategic positioning in the budget negotiations. So, in a number of MS, these initiatives were followed-up with bilateral meetings of NGOs with the relevant ministries, including with participation of the VOICE Secretariat or Board in the UK, Netherlands, Finland, France and Sweden. In addition, the VOICE Secretariat used its events at national level in Berlin and Rome (see section 3.32) to advocate for the EU humanitarian budget with the German foreign ministry and Italian EU Presidency respectively.

In the end, through this broad outreach, every single EU Member State had heard about humanitarian NGOs' concerns and was informed about what was at stake for humanitarians.



**Highlights of VOICE activities:**

- 17 exchanges with ECHO leadership (Commissioner, Cabinet, Director General, Directors).
- ECHO funding situation raised at over 16 public events with government officials or the European Parliament.
- 7 Board meetings, 6 members meetings (including Task Force)
- President, Board and/or VOICE Secretariat participate in meetings with government officials in Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, UK.
- All 28 EU Member States Foreign and Finance Ministries reached with VOICE network advocacy.
- Letter from VOICE President to members
- 16 ECHO funding updates to members
- 1 EU Budget briefing for members
- VOICE President addresses all Development and Budget Committee members and 3 Commissioners in writing
- VOICE members give input to 6 exchanges in the European Parliament with the Commission on the funding situation.
- VOICE network meets with EP Budget 2015 Rapporteur, Chair of Budget Committee, most Political Coordinators of BUDG and DEVE Committee and other relevant MEPs.
- 4 VOICE events, 1 General Assembly Policy resolution and 1 VOICE Out Loud magazine are used to raise awareness on this issue.

**1.13 - VOICE ECHO funding Task Force**

At the General Assembly in May, where the ECHO funding situation was a key point in the debate with ECHO's Director General, Mr. Sorensen, it was decided to launch a members' funding Task Force. It was instrumental in the success of the network's advocacy, supporting information sharing among members, division of labour on meetings with new and key MEPs, agreement on strategy and identification of opportunities for collaboration with other different civil society group activities on the EU international aid budget lines, especially CONCORD. The success of the collective engagement and the persistent commitment from members at national level to reiterate the need to find a short and long term solution to the funding shortage ensured a return to a more predictable funding situation in 2015, and strengthened the network. The leadership from the Board and the Secretariat, who gave this matter highest priority throughout the year, was very much welcomed by all members.

*'a big relief for us as for all ECHO partners and we would like to thank both the VOICE Board and Secretariat for your mobilization throughout this very long year 2014.'* (VOICE member in France)

*... 'Congratulations! ... thanks to VOICE for the advocacy push throughout the crisis.... this is really the result of a joint effort but definitely guided by a very strategic leadership.'* (VOICE member in Italy)

## 1.2 THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID PUT INTO PRACTICE

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*The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* ('the Consensus') is the main policy framework for EU humanitarian aid. It was signed in 2007 by the Member States (MS), the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP). It was complemented by an Action Plan which came to an end in 2013. VOICE has played an active role throughout the development and mid-term review of the Consensus and its Action Plan. VOICE continues to see it as the main policy framework for the EU's humanitarian assistance. Following on this, in 2013 the VOICE Consensus Task Force set an objective to advocate for a new, workable Action Plan in 2014.

## 1.21 - VOICE study: Capturing NGOs' perspectives on the Consensus

In late 2013, VOICE commissioned DARA consultancy to undertake a study on *'The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: an NGO perspective'*. This was successfully launched in Brussels in May 2014 on the eve of the VOICE General Assembly (see section 6.1). Representatives of DG ECHO and Irish Aid responded to the presentation of the study by representatives of DARA, who authored the report, and CAFOD representing the VOICE Board and the Consensus Task Force. 65 people participated in the meeting, with much of the discussion focused on how to ensure that the neglected areas of the Consensus, such as DRR and LRRD, are implemented better in future, and on ensuring Member States continued and intensified commitment to implementation through an Action Plan.

The study was also disseminated to over 1900 people, and presented to member states representatives in COHAFA in June and to ECHO leadership and the FPA partners at the ECHO Partners Conference in November. More than 500 further hard copies have been distributed through the network and at national level in many member states and it has proven to be a useful resource for members in their advocacy and to highlight good practices in different EU member states.

The first objective of the study was to provide a picture of Member States' humanitarian policy and practice from an NGO perspective, serving as a baseline against which progress can be assessed in a number of years. It also provided an overview of how Member States have integrated the principles and themes of the Consensus into their policy and practice. The study, with a focus on implementation of the Action Plan, picks up on VOICE members' policy priorities, including humanitarian principles, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), funding to humanitarian NGOs and the administrative burden of institutional donor requirements. The study successfully gives renewed visibility to the Consensus, confirms the relevance of an Action Plan, and serves as an advocacy tool for the network, to influence EU governments' humanitarian policies and practice. 62 NGOs and key stakeholders took part in meetings in seven member states exploring their views on the Consensus. A total of 80 NGOs and 17 humanitarian departments in EU governments participated in the online survey for the research. This is a significant achievement and underscores the relevance of the Consensus and the study's findings. The study makes recommendations on the key elements of the Consensus which require further attention in national and EU policy discussions.

### Highlights of key recommendations from the study

- Member States and NGOs should use the Consensus actively to inform both humanitarian policies and practice. Member States should use it as their core reference to ensure that their actions, funding and programming decisions are consistent with the principles contained in the Consensus. Member States should also continue developing national humanitarian strategies which reflect these principles.
- At EU level a follow-on Action Plan to the Consensus should be a key tool to support a coordinated and collective approach to a number of agreed priority areas. Member States and the Commission should commit to its joint implementation.
- Member States should use the Consensus to ensure respect for humanitarian concerns in all areas of their policy and action. A wider understanding and application of the principles of the Consensus and their legal basis is important to avoid the instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid for political purposes.
- Dialogue between humanitarian NGOs and the military is particularly important to ensure clarity in relation to respective mandates and roles, and respect for and adherence to humanitarian principles. Member States should create opportunities for such dialogue both at planning and pre-deployment stage, and during engagement in the field.
- Member States should consider re-balancing the distribution of funds between humanitarian actors to reflect the comparative advantages and the proportion of aid delivered by NGOs. They should undertake a more thorough analysis of the comparative advantages of each of the three main operational humanitarian families – the UN, International Organisations, and NGOs – especially at a time when they put such emphasis on 'value for money' and results-based management.

## 1.22 - Influencing the Commission's independent evaluation

In parallel in 2013-2014, the EC commissioned an independent evaluation of the implementation of the Consensus Action Plan. Building on the success of the Consensus Task Force in 2013 in shaping the terms of reference of the evaluation, 29 VOICE members continued to mobilise to share their experiences and expertise with the evaluators. Members and the VOICE Director took active part in the stakeholder workshop organised in February to give feedback on the initial findings. The evaluation was finally launched in June 2014 and in many instances the Consensus Task Force was successful in ensuring NGO perspectives and priorities were reflected.



Speakers at the launch of the VOICE Consensus Study

## 1.23 - Reviving implementation of the Consensus

VOICE Director was also invited to present the study and a response to the independent evaluation at the ECHO Partners Conference in November. Consensus Task Force members provided comparisons between the conclusions of the two reports. Both reports find that the Consensus is still relevant and valued by all stakeholders and that further implementation and ownership is especially required from the MS, focusing in particular on the value and need for an Action Plan. External opportunities, such as the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, continue to be relevant to promote the Consensus and its principled approach.

Throughout 2014 VOICE consistently integrated messages in its advocacy documents and outreach activities on the need for continued implementation of the Consensus, through a new Action Plan or other implementation framework. Therefore VOICE expects the Commission, Parliament and Member States to take the next steps and commit to further implementation.

*'The Commission and Members States should develop and deliver on a follow-up Action Plan, to ensure continued joint implementation of the principles of the Consensus'*

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2014

### 1.3 EU AID ARCHITECTURE – CONVEYING THE KEY PRINCIPLES, VALUES AND CONCERNS OF EU HUMANITARIAN NGOS

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#### **EU Institutional change**

Every five years there is a direct election of the Members of the European Parliament and a new European Commission is appointed. Civil society organisations which follow and work with the EU institutions are faced with the challenge of building and establishing relations with newly appointed and elected political figures who will shape EU policy and practice for the years to come.

In May 2014, 751 new MEPs were elected or re-elected and a new Commission, 28 Commissioners under the leadership of President Juncker, were appointed in October. The new Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management is Mr. Christos Stylianides from Cyprus. He took up office on 1 November 2014. A new High Representative/Vice President for Europe's external relations, Ms. Federica Mogherini was also appointed.

Monitoring and influencing the EU aid architecture remained an important component of VOICE's activities in 2014. The year was marked by institutional change in the form of elections to the new European Parliament in May and the appointment of a new European Commission in November. This meant that new relationships had to be established, and crucially, the capacity of the institutional interlocutors to understand and include humanitarian considerations in their work needed to be reinforced. With this in mind, two VOICE publications focused on awareness-raising and sensitization. The VOICE Out Loud 19 'A closer look at EU humanitarian Aid' and the 2014 General Assembly resolution 'Why is EU humanitarian aid important?' focussed on the key principles, values and concerns of EU humanitarian NGOs.

#### **1.31 - A new European Parliament**

VOICE Secretariat and the members' key focus in the months immediately after the election in May 2014 was to build the links with key figures regarding the EU budget (see section 1.1). In terms of other important processes that VOICE sought to influence in the EP, the hearing of the new Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid was key, as well as the re-appointment of a standing rapporteur on humanitarian aid by the DEVE Committee. The VOICE GA resolution had called clearly for the latter, and had asked that the new Commissioner be '*strong and visible [...] bringing EU humanitarian leadership to the world stage*'.

*'The European Parliament should appoint a proactive standing Rapporteur on humanitarian aid'*

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2014

The VOICE Out Loud magazine included a number of articles giving background information and NGO's key messages on the future role of ECHO and the Commissioner. Both the resolution and the VOICE Out Loud were disseminated to all new DEVE Committee members and substitute members in September ahead of these key decisions.

VOICE Secretariat influenced the EP hearing for the European Commissioner, through contact with relevant Parliament interlocutors. An important success was that VOICE's key concerns were particularly evident in the written questions from the Development Committee to the candidate Commissioner, Mr. Christos Stylianides, on issues such as the humanitarian principles. VOICE also ensured that members were aware of the opportunity to influence the hearings, and many of their key advocacy issues were raised during the live hearing in the DEVE, including on ECHO's 'In But

Out' position on the EU Comprehensive Approach (see section 1.4), on the key role of NGOs as implementing partners of the European Commission, and on the ECHO funding situation.

After several weeks of internal discussions regarding the appointment of the standing rapporteur for humanitarian aid, a senior figure from the European Parliament, a vice-President of the centre left S&D group, Mr. Enrique Guerrero Salom, from Spain, was appointed. This appointment reflects the importance this role has taken on and the value it is given by MEPs. Mr Guerrero Salom promptly participated in an event organised by VOICE, UN and the Red Cross (see section 2.2) in the EP, expressing his commitment to this role, and in particular to ensuring the ECHO funding situation would be resolved. The VOICE President met with the new rapporteur in October helping to ground the relationship the network hopes to build with him in the years to come. The VOICE Secretariat on their side followed up with his office and established a regular exchange.

### **1.32 - A new European Commissioner**

Regarding the EU aid architecture and the European Commission, in addition to the work on the funding for humanitarian assistance, the Consensus and the EU Comprehensive Approach (see section 1.4), another key issue was to establish a relationship with the new European Commissioner, Mr Christos Stylianides. VOICE President had a warm exchange with him, presenting the network, before he formally assumed his role. Subsequently, VOICE President had a bilateral exchange with him during the ECHO Partners Conference and used the opportunity to introduce him to key NGO figures.

Throughout 2014 VOICE kept its members informed regarding the processes for institutional change in the new European Commission. The growing role of ECHO's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) with regard to a number of high-profile crises and the increased use of the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism are two developments that Mr. Stylianides will be overseeing, developments which NGOs will follow as his mandate unfolds.

### **1.33 - A new leadership for the European Commission and the European External Action Service**

After ten years of President Barroso, the new President of the European Commission has set a different working structure for the Commission, mandating his Commissioners to work in thematic clusters under Vice-Presidents. Mr. Stylianides therefore is working in a thematic team led by Ms. Mogherini, the new High Representative of the European Union for External relations who is also a Vice President of the European Commission. She is head of the European External Action Service which is responsible for carrying out the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Many VOICE members appreciate that this approach can bring opportunities for coherence and complementarity in the EU's policy and tools, as well as the chance for the Commissioner to build support for his role, raising awareness with colleagues on the humanitarian principles and needs in humanitarian action. However, the closer integration of the EU external policy portfolios carries the potential risk that needs-based and principled humanitarian aid could be instrumentalised for foreign policy and security objectives. For instance, in 2013, the VOICE General Assembly outlined its position and recommendations on the EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises (see section 1.4)

*“The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid states that EU humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool. Indeed, humanitarian aid has its own objective (preserving lives, reducing human suffering and maintaining dignity). Where and how humanitarian aid is delivered should be decided solely on the needs of affected populations, independent of political and security concerns.”*

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2013



## 1.4 EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EXTERNAL CONFLICTS AND CRISES

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In December 2013 the European External Action Service and the European Commission released a Joint Communication on the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises. VOICE members and humanitarian NGOs have been involved in the discussions on this for several years.

Following concerted advocacy action in 2013 on the EU Comprehensive Approach, including the adoption of the 2013 General Assembly resolution with recommendations and concerns of humanitarian NGOs in this regard, on 20 January the Committee on Development of the European Parliament held a public hearing on 'The place of humanitarian aid in the EU's external action: the importance of respecting the humanitarian principles'.

The event, co-hosted by MEPs Striffler (EP humanitarian rapporteur until April 2014) and Neuser, brought together representatives from the European institutions, UN, humanitarian NGOs and other actors. The keynote speech was delivered by Commissioner Georgieva. Participants discussed the EU comprehensive approach, aiming to assess whether it brings an added value or poses a threat to principled humanitarian action and the risks for humanitarian space arising from perceived links between humanitarian, political and security objectives. The VOICE Director welcomed the Communication as a good starting point. For example, it is clear on respecting Lisbon Treaty roles and competencies, and references the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Nevertheless, she identified its implementation as a big challenge for the future. It is very easy to blur the lines between humanitarian aid and political action, which is why clear communication as well as coordination between all the actors involved are crucial. VOICE member CARE shared experiences from the field, stressing the importance of respect for actors' separate mandates and the humanitarian principles including to minimise risk to humanitarians, beneficiaries and communities. The perception of humanitarians by parties to conflict is importance for their acceptance. However, if the comprehensive approach is implemented carefully and in full respect of all actors involved, it can help to achieve shared objectives of establishing peace and security.

*'Fragile states and conflict situation are the contexts where the majority of EU humanitarian aid is delivered. The recently set-up EU Comprehensive Approach seeks to develop integrated strategies for EU external action in such crises. However, the humanitarian community is concerned that the linking of humanitarian aid to political objectives in this sort of approach can threaten the security of aid workers and the affected populations they are assisting. Humanitarian aid should always be given in line with the European Consensus, which states that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool.'*

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2014

In February, VOICE participated in the CARE/Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Roundtable on the Joint Communication which led to the adoption of a report. This report and the 2013 VOICE resolution were shared with MS in relevant working groups of the Council, ahead of the adoption of the Council Conclusions on the Communication. It is welcome that the Council Conclusions recognise some of the humanitarian concerns and re-affirm the Consensus and the humanitarian principles, and call for the EEAS and Commission to present an action plan in the first quarter of 2015. Later in the year, recommendations were also shared with new Parliamentarians.



## 2. TO INCREASE THE RECOGNITION OF NGOS AS KEY ACTORS IN THE DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

A key element in VOICE's work is gaining recognition for NGOs as the main implementers of humanitarian aid in the field, and to underline their role in protection and advocacy. In all VOICE's interaction with key stakeholders the role of NGOs in humanitarian aid and the professional expertise and diversity that they represent is underlined. Where VOICE is visible, the Secretariat has started systematically using the collective image of the whole memberships' logos to make clear what the network is made up of, 82 professional and highly respected and known NGOs from 19 European countries, with significant public support for their activities of solidarity and humanity with crisis affected people.

### 2.1 ENSURING A PRINCIPLED APPROACH IS PART OF HUMANITARIAN CERTIFICATION AND STANDARDS DEBATES

An important development in humanitarian quality and accountability in 2014 was the launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) in Copenhagen in December 2014. There the VOICE Secretariat had the opportunity to hear its members' different perspectives and intentions as regards use of the CHS and next steps in the process of roll-out and implementation. Throughout the year the Secretariat kept members informed on the CHS developments, and encouraged them to actively take part in the process.

The Board was focused on ensuring the proper reflection of all the humanitarian principles in the CHS. In the autumn, the VOICE President wrote to the CHS steering committee asking that neutrality be included alongside humanity, impartiality and independence as the core humanitarian principles. The CHS now includes all four humanitarian principles, a significant achievement for many members.

In addition to the CHS, following the joint advocacy between VOICE, InterAction and ICVA in 2013 as regards the content of the certification model project under development by SCHR, the Secretariat sought to ensure that the diverse NGOs in the network could contribute to the certification debate, keeping them informed of next steps in the project and highlighting opportunities for input including piloting the scheme. VOICE also participated in the Groupe URD workshop on quality and accountability in the humanitarian sector, held in France in September. Representatives from the CHS and SCHR initiatives presented latest developments while Groupe URD presented a 'quality label' for the sector.

VOICE will continue to monitor and promote the different approaches available to support the professionalization of NGOs and in particular, to ensure that our members are consulted when required in the development of such initiatives. NGOs deliver more than half the humanitarian aid worldwide and have much to contribute.

### 2.2 WORKING WITH OTHER ACTORS

Working with other relevant actors is important to the VOICE network. Our members do not operate in the field in a vacuum, they work alongside organisations of all sorts, in a diversity of contexts and partnerships and in many cases have mandates that extend beyond humanitarian assistance into development and other sectors. Humanitarian assistance cannot always be easily compartmentalised and can shift from development to crisis mode and back again. This is a challenge faced by many humanitarian actors, not just by NGOs.

In Brussels and at Member State level, VOICE and its members also maintain a dialogue with and work with a variety of actors who can multiply our messages, strengthen our work or who need to understand our work. We also have common concerns with other types of civil society organisations in Europe and through alliances we can strengthen both the content and the impact of our advocacy. In addition, to build recognition of NGOs as key actors in humanitarian assistance, working with academics who train the young aid workers and policy makers of tomorrow can be a useful strategy. VOICE is the network of European NGOs with a focus on the EU as a humanitarian donor and policy maker, but there are other networks of humanitarian NGOs who, for instance, work at UN, or other national and regional levels. Ensuring a common or coordinated voice in advocacy with them can sometimes be essential.

In 2014, VOICE continued the regular exchange between Brussels' humanitarian stakeholders: ICRC, IFRC, OCHA and MSF. At the quarterly meetings, which were of particular value in the context of the ECHO funding situation, VOICE gave an update of the state of play which contributed to align messages and common understanding. This cooperation led, for example, to the organisation of the common event on humanitarian aid in the European Parliament.

On 7 October, the Red Cross EU Office, the UN and VOICE joined forces and co-organised a lunch-time event at the EP, hosted by MEP Goerens with introductory remarks by ECHO Director General Sorensen. The aim was to present key elements of EU humanitarian response to MEPs and EP staff and to deliver common messages. The panellists spoke about the need for DRR and resilience to be included in development programming, the value of the diversity of humanitarian actors, the coordination between humanitarian actors, the importance of the humanitarian principles, and the necessity for the funding situation to be solved through the approval of both the 2014 amending budget and the 2015 budget. A DRR Working Group member highlighted NGOs' responses to Haiyan and the need for LRRD. A second panel looked at critical areas of cooperation with the EU in light of the increased complexity of conflicts and the greater frequency and intensity of natural disasters. VOICE Director spoke on the Comprehensive approach and the EU budget. Around 50 participants were present, including the newly appointed Humanitarian Rapporteur, EP staff of MEPs working in various Committees as well as assistants to the new Commissioner designate. The joint approach of humanitarian actors was much appreciated.



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VOICE's work towards the World Humanitarian Summit, has provided a number of good opportunities to bring VOICE to the global stage. VOICE has worked with InterAction, as the other INGO representative on the regional steering group, as well as ICVA and the Global Network for Disaster Reduction, to advocate for NGO priorities with the group of donors, private sector, the Red Cross, UN, INGOs, and affected people/local organisations also present there.

VOICE also participated in the ICVA conference on 'Show me the money' with the aim of sharing important achievements, good practices and discuss challenges and solutions in resourcing humanitarian action – which was particularly relevant during the ECHO funding situation. In response to concerns expressed by participants about the situation, the Director held a side-event to give further information.

Links were also reinforced with the participation of the VOICE Director in the ICVA Board meeting an opportunity to have more strategic discussions. Similarly, the Secretariat also participated in the Start Network Conference in the UK where nearly all Start members are also VOICE members – to learn about innovative approaches to funding and to ensure that the perspectives of other networks were also shared.

VOICE continued to accept opportunities to share members' perspective on the developments of EU humanitarian policy as well as to maintain a broad overview of global humanitarian trends with academics and others. VOICE Secretariat had several exchanges with NOHA, including related to the EUPRHA Project. Over the past few years, VOICE representatives have been participating in each NOHA Intensive Programme in Warsaw (September) and Fall School in Brussels (October). In this way, VOICE continues to participate in the professionalization of future humanitarians. Other organisations like Trialog, a project to strengthen CSOs in the enlarged EU, and IRIN, humanitarian news and analysis, contacted VOICE to discuss EU humanitarian aid policy. In all in 2014, among the many meetings and events that the VOICE Secretariat participated in, 60 were particularly important for exchange and outreach with other humanitarian actors.

The VOICE Secretariat also took part in several meetings as a way to stay in touch with civil society's initiatives including exchanges with CONCORD. Before and after the EP elections of May 2014, the Secretariat exchanged with CONCORD and other networks active at EU level. Participating in the CONCORD European Task Force Workshop on Post-2015 in order to contribute with DRR insights (see section 3.2) was very much welcomed. The Secretariat continued to monitor the CSO Group for International Development to develop synergies and identify opportunities for collaboration. Closer contacts were also engaged with other relevant actors like Crisis Action and USAID. The Socialist and Democrats group of MEPs organised a civil society dialogue on 'EU Development and humanitarian aid policies in the 2014-2019 legislature'. VOICE and CONCORD were both invited to participate in the panels on 'humanitarian action under pressure of increasing humanitarian crises' and on 'the future of the EU development policy in the post-2015 framework'. This was a great opportunity to deepen NGOs' dialogue with a group in the Parliament and ensure complementary between the work of CONCORD and VOICE. It was also a chance to share VOICE's main messages with relevant MEPs and to increase the visibility of the network in the EP.

## 2.3 INCREASING RECOGNITION OF OUR MEMBERS

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VOICE's engagement with the World Humanitarian Summit consultation processes has been with a view to ensuring NGOs' voices and experience and expertise in humanitarian aid are heard and taken into account. To facilitate members' engagement and identify opportunities for their influence, VOICE produced briefings and organised an event (see section 4.2). VOICE members' participation in the online consultation was subsequently visible and increased as the Budapest conference in February 2015 grew closer.

Through the ECHO funding crisis (see section 1.1), VOICE Secretariat encouraged members at national level to join together in their advocacy to increase their recognition as key European and national humanitarian stakeholders and in several cases facilitated joint meetings. In addition, the information used and shared through the network enhances the recognition of members as credible and informed stakeholders regarding EU humanitarian policies and procedures.

In the joint event with UN and Red Cross at the European Parliament (see section 2.2), VOICE ensured that a member of the DRR working group, presented reflections on the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 from the perspective of an NGO.

One of the key messages that VOICE has shared with the Humanitarian Rapporteur and with the new Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, has been to meet with NGOs in the field and at their headquarters as often as the opportunity arises. They are a key partner whose long standing expertise and experience should be heard and taken into account.

### 3. COLLECTIVE ACTION IN PURSUIT OF QUALITY HUMANITARIAN AID

#### 3.1 MEMBERS ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING THE FPA

VOICE continues to be a key interlocutor, in particular for the European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) in policy and procedural development. Its long-standing role facilitating the FPA Watch Group on behalf of ECHO partners is well recognized and the Group provides a forum for dialogue and collaboration on the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with ECHO.

In 2014, the FPA Watch Group continued to be an important space to discuss and influence FPA related issues. The group met three times during the year, gathering together 67 participants from 31 different NGOs. They also met directly with DG ECHO, in order to share their concerns and suggestions on the implementation of the FPA in 2014. The Task Force of the Watch Group held eight meetings, delivering substantial work when preparing meetings to coordinate NGO feedback and concerns.

This year, the group was kept busy. It continued to actively review and comment on the annexes of the new FPA. It gave consolidated feedback to the general guidelines, the Single Form guidelines and the Visibility and Communication Manual. In total the group sent four sets of consolidated recommendations and remarks to ECHO, leading to important and constructive discussions. This collaboration is essential for a smooth implementation of the FPA, and builds the partnership further.

The FPA Watch Group also became another important forum for information sharing and exchange on the impact and management of the ECHO funding situation, both between NGOs and with DG ECHO. FPA Watch Group appreciated the VOICE Board and Secretariat's leadership on this issue and that the operational meetings on the HIPs pushed for by VOICE (see section 1.1) were opened to other FPA holders than VOICE members.

##### ***FPA Watch Group***

- 37 organisations from 17 countries make up the FPA WG, which represents the ECHO NGO partner community
- Led by a Task Force consisting of Médecins du Monde, Action Contre la Faim, Handicap International, CARE, COOPI, Oxfam, Save the Children and Cordaid
- 3 Watch Group meetings and 8 Task Force meetings in 2014

The good relation between VOICE and ECHO also translated into the ECHO Partners Conference and its preparation. Initially foreseen for a day, the Partners Conference was extended for a day and a half after NGOs asked for more time for exchange. This was much appreciated by partners and provided the opportunity to exchange on a range of operational tools and challenges.

VOICE Secretariat continues to be invited to deliver an induction session on partnership for new ECHO staff members twice a year. This provides a unique opportunity to share an NGO perspective on the relationship between partner and donor and represents another example of the partnership approach ECHO pursues.

Overall, VOICE continued to be the main NGO interlocutor with ECHO on EU humanitarian policies. Interaction throughout the year, and across ECHO's policy, operational and partner support/legal pillars, reinforced the collaboration between the two. This interaction included the many meetings related to the ECHO funding situation (see section 1.1), but also for example on the Consensus and DRR with the policy side and with the FPA WG on the partner support side.

### 3.2 BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AID AND DEVELOPMENT

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#### *Support better linking of Relief and Development*

- *The EC and Member States must include Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in development and recovery programmes. This is necessary to reduce the impact of disasters on affected populations. Development of more flexible funding approaches between the EC institutions is crucial to build bridges between humanitarian and development work.*
- *Recently, the EU has placed increased emphasis on approaches that support community resilience. Improving accountability in following up the Commission Communication on Resilience is needed and will contribute to more coordinated and effective measures to bolster the EU's efforts in DRR and in linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD).'*

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2014

In 2014, the DRR Working Group met three times, gathering together 29 participants representing 17 different NGOs from five major EU Member States and EU offices. In addition to these meetings, VOICE Secretariat facilitated intensive information exchange between the members. Through closer links with CONCORD, input was given to their papers on the Post 2015 Development framework in order to try to keep mainstreaming DRR on the agenda of the development community. Influencing international processes was a key element of the work of the DRR Working Group in 2014, not only influencing the post-2015 Development framework but also supporting each other and partners to influence the post-Hyogo DRR framework due for final negotiation in Sendai in 2015.

The expertise VOICE has developed in this area is frequently sought. In this context in December, the Secretariat exchanged with CADRE consultancy carrying out research on DRR for UNISDR<sup>2</sup>. The study focused on the link between DRR and reconstruction. In addition, VOICE was interviewed for a background paper being authored by DARA for the October meeting of the Disaster Response Dialogue about the role of local/national authorities in interaction with humanitarian actors. The input focused on the work with national authorities and raised the importance of linking the Dialogue with other debates in the sector and the work on the WHS themes.

After an intense period of work on resilience policy at EU level, 2014 was a year focussed on the EU beginning its implementation of the corresponding action plan. VOICE members participated in the first EU annual Resilience Forum in April, monitoring developments in relation to the first steps in the Action Plan. Later in the year, with support from the Secretariat, the FPA Watchgroup and VOICE DRR working group prepared the ground to work together on monitoring and influencing the implementation of the new resilience marker in the FPA in 2015. In December, the Secretariat – and a representative of the DRR Working Group – met ECHO to discuss the use of the resilience marker. ECHO presented the process and agreed to a timeline for NGO contributions.

*'The Consensus should be used as a tool to further work on LRRD and DRR by Member States, NGOs and other relevant actors. More effort is needed to raise awareness of the importance of investing in DRR measures, especially at local level, and to secure active integration of DRR into development policy and practice. Member States need to grant greater priority to LRRD by improving coordination between governments' humanitarian and development agencies, and providing more flexible LRRD funding to allow partners to respond in a way that reflects evolving needs.'*

Recommendation from 2014 VOICE study on NGO perspectives on the Consensus

Messages on resilience and LRRD have been included in all the policy work aimed at building the knowledge of newer members of the European Parliament on key issues in relation to humanitarian

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations office for Disaster Risk Reduction



aid, and also through VOICE participation in the online discussions preparing the Europe and Others Group consultation for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS).

The preparation towards the World Humanitarian Summit was also a big opportunity to collaborate closely with ICVA, Interaction and the Global Network for Disaster Reduction to successfully prepare input for the thematic discussion papers especially regarding the second theme of the Summit, reducing vulnerability and managing risk. This was an opportunity to ensure that the NGO and community perspectives on risk, vulnerability and resilience could be heard.

### 3.3 SUPPORTING A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE IN NATIONAL LEVEL ADVOCACY

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VOICE continued to link with the Council, specifically the COHAFA and its Presidency, and with Member States at national level. The WHS process has also proven to be an opportunity to exchange with a number of EU Member States.

#### **3.31 - Through the rotating presidencies of the Council of the EU**

VOICE Secretariat continued to maintain regular contact with Presidency representatives to share EU humanitarian policy priorities and NGO positions. VOICE ensured that the COHAFA chairs were aware of the impact of the ECHO funding situation on ECHO's NGO partners and used the opportunities for exchange also to highlight, in particular, the views of humanitarian NGOs with regard to the Comprehensive Approach and the need for a new Consensus Action Plan.

In April, VOICE met with the Greek COHAFA Chair and in May with the incoming Italian Presidency. The first resulted in the VOICE Consensus Study being presented by the VOICE Secretariat to COHAFA members under the Greek Presidency in June. The latter paved the way for the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Pistelli as well as high-level Italian officials, participating in the VOICE roundtable in Rome in October.

Building on work that VOICE established during the Hungarian EU presidency, as the co-host of the Europe and Others Regional Consultation of the WHS, Hungary was a main interlocutor for VOICE in 2014. Dialogue with Hungary on the WHS started in April and this resulted in a fruitful collaboration: on the one hand, VOICE Director was invited to participate in the Regional Steering Group; and, on the other hand, the Hungarian Humanitarian Representative spoke at the VOICE event on the WHS in November (see section 4.2).

In June, the Secretariat also started the exchange with the future 2015 Latvian Presidency. VOICE systematically encourages all the Presidencies to engage with NGOs in the development of their agenda and assisted the Italian Presidency in identifying members that could provide expertise in relation to Gender and emergencies as well as disability and emergencies.

#### **3.32 - VOICE Roundtables**

VOICE roundtables are key opportunities for the VOICE Board and Secretariat to meet members and the wider humanitarian community including governmental officials in Europe, allowing for discussion on how to bring EU and national humanitarian policies closer together. Often the roundtables are held in the country which holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU. In 2014 roundtables were therefore held in Rome but also in Berlin. All participants appreciate the opportunity to share good practice and learn from the exchange.

In Berlin, the roundtable was co-organised with VENRO (the German NGO platform) in March and



had 41 participants, from NGOs, ECHO, government and the military. Discussion in the morning, with participation from ECHO and the German foreign ministry, focused on the EU aid architecture, the ECHO funding situation and the EU Comprehensive Approach. In the afternoon, VOICE Board members from Handicap International and Action Against Hunger UK made presentations on two approaches regarding innovation in funding for humanitarian assistance while the VOICE Programme Coordinator facilitated a discussion on the SCHR certification and CHS initiatives.

In October in Rome, VOICE and LINK 2007 (an Italian humanitarian NGO alliance) with the specific support of Italian member INTERSOS, organized a roundtable. 95 people participated in the event which was hosted by the Italian Foreign Ministry. ECHO's Director General, Mr Sorensen, and the Italian Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Pistelli participated in the discussion, both underlining the intensity and complexity of the crises faced by humanitarians in 2014, the importance of political solutions in this context, and the role of humanitarians in communicating on the urgency and importance of humanitarian assistance. VOICE members INTERSOS and CONCERN debated with a representative of the Italian civil protection on the roles of different actors in humanitarian settings and the challenges for NGO cooperation with civil protection. In the second panel, VOICE board members Save the Children and, People in Need, and Italian members GVC and CESVI spoke about the challenges, at European and national levels, of resourcing humanitarian assistance and different strategies used to mobilise funding. A LINK 2007 representative, the VOICE Director and the Director of Italian international cooperation shared 2014/2015 priorities for VOICE, and for Italian and European humanitarian policy.



Berlin Roundtable



Marco Rotelli (INTERSOS) speaks at Rome Roundtable

### 3.33 - VOICE visibility at national level

The vast majority of advocacy at national level on European issues is carried out directly by VOICE members. Increasingly the VOICE Board and/or the Secretariat is also invited to support or contribute a European perspective to events at national level. In addition, the meetings regarding the ECHO funding situation that were held in MS were all excellent opportunities for a broader dialogue on the EU and MS humanitarian priorities with exchanges taking place on the Consensus Action Plan, WHS, and the Comprehensive Approach in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Germany and Italy. In January the VOICE Secretariat also met the Belgian Foreign Ministry's EU humanitarian department and exchanged on a number of priorities with respect to EU humanitarian issues including resilience.

In 2014 VOICE continued to participate in a series of meetings and events at national level. To name a few, in March, the VOICE President and Director were invited to the French Annual National Conference on Humanitarian Aid. NGOs included many VOICE messages in their preparation for the Conference. The President intervened underlining that predictability in aid funding was necessary and that short, medium and long-term solutions were required for ECHO funding. In September, the VOICE Director spoke at the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe in Germany on empowerment in local communities. She spoke on the panel on quality and certification processes. In November, VOICE Secretariat participated in a DRR meeting with Belgian NGOs, including many members. It was an opportunity to share presentations on several themes, including post-2015 frameworks and ECHO strategy. In December, VOICE Director took part in the national consultation for the WHS for German humanitarian actors, giving a speech focusing on the process from the VOICE perspective. All German VOICE members, as well as the Foreign ministry, OCHA, the Red Cross, and ICVA were represented.

## 4. LINKING OPERATIONS AND GLOBAL ADVOCACY

While the ECHO funding situation was without a doubt VOICE's number one priority, it happened against a backdrop of increasingly complex and severe humanitarian crises and VOICE continued to be active on the key European humanitarian priorities and crises. In 2014 the VOICE Secretariat attended 50 meetings, with representatives from EU institutions and Member States to contribute to their discussions, positions, reports and so on.

*'Disasters, natural and man-made, are increasing in frequency, severity and complexity. At a time when the world is again facing an increasing number of severe humanitarian crises that have serious impacts at national, regional and international levels, EU humanitarian aid is even more relevant than ever to save lives, alleviate suffering and prepare grounds for longer term development. In addition to effects of natural disasters, the humanitarian community is now witnessing spiraling needs of crisis-affected populations due to conflicts in Syria, Central African Republic and South Sudan and due to a combination of conflict and climate change in Somalia'*

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2014

### 4.1 MEMBERS ADVOCACY WORK ON COUNTRY SITUATIONS

VOICE is also recognised by the Commission as a key stakeholder in terms of the response to specific crises, because the network can channel messages from the field and can multiply information and messages. VOICE is regularly invited to participate in Commission hosted high-level meetings. In January, Commissioner Georgieva with UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Amos, chaired a high-level pledging conference in Brussels to recap the humanitarian challenges in Central African Republic (CAR). Representatives of 47 countries, UN, Red Cross and NGOs attended. VOICE was visible, as members engaged in discussions and the Director made an intervention. Ten VOICE members, already ECHO partners in CAR before the crisis hit, participated and shared their key messages and concerns from the field.

In December, VOICE was also invited to the Ebola High Level Meeting where VOICE members and Director participated in the discussions. Four VOICE members spoke at the conference, highlighting their activities and the urgent need to work with and within communities, on both medical and non-medical issues related to Ebola. VOICE is also included in the information sharing on the EU Coordination meetings on the Ebola epidemic which enables the Secretariat to maintain its members informed via the Extranet.

The Secretariat also continued to organise thematic meetings for members. For example, in March it arranged a NGO exchange with the UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, Mr. Piper. Representatives of 12 NGOs were present and commented on the Sahel Regional Response Strategy, and the EU's contribution.

Throughout the year, VOICE members were particularly active in advocacy, organising events and producing reports inter alia, on the Syria crisis, the situation in South Sudan, the future for Afghanistan, a worsening situation in Somalia, Colombia, food security and hunger, financing for humanitarian aid, humanitarian principles in conflict situations and the aftermath of the typhoon that hit the Philippines in late 2013.

#### 4.2 LOOKING AHEAD TO THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

A key upcoming priority issue for humanitarians, including at EU level, are the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit. VOICE Director was invited by Hungary to participate in the steering group preparing the Europe and Other regional consultation. This was a key opportunity to work with US based NGO network InterAction, for the recognition of NGOs as main implementers in the field and shape the format of the Budapest meeting. One of the key objectives for both networks was to secure at least 30 seats for INGOs at the conference in Budapest in February 2015. By the end of the year, the objective was achieved, as there were, in principle, 30 seats allocated for INGOs.

To support members' engagement in the process and participation in online, thematic and national consultations feeding into the global consultations, the Secretariat took a number of initiatives; an event on the World Humanitarian Summit for members, two briefings outlining next steps in the process, and a section on the extranet for members' policy submissions to be shared.

In December in Brussels, on the eve of the ECHO Partner conference, VOICE organized an interactive panel discussion on the 'World Humanitarian Summit: what's in it for NGOs?'. This was one of VOICE's most successful events with 120 people participating and listening to the Executive Director of ICVA, the Operational Director of ACF, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry humanitarian representative, and the Humanitarian Director of CARE International debate this key question. While many doubts

were expressed about many aspects of the process, NGOs were urged to engage and contribute their ideas and expertise, lest the process pass them by. The VOICE event was followed, the next day, by a high-level panel on the WHS at the ECHO Partner Conference, providing a complementary perspective on the challenges and opportunities of the Summit.

VOICE members and the Secretariat were subsequently visible in online discussions contributing to the consultation, underlining the experience and humanitarian expertise of NGOs in Europe and the positive example the Consensus shows of regional and inter-institutional cooperation on matters of humanitarian aid. Early on, the revival of the Principles of Partnership, the role of local actors, and key concerns around humanitarian assistance in conflict situations emerged as some of the main issues being raised by NGOs. It is key that the European Union receives NGO positions as it prepares for the Summit in 2016.



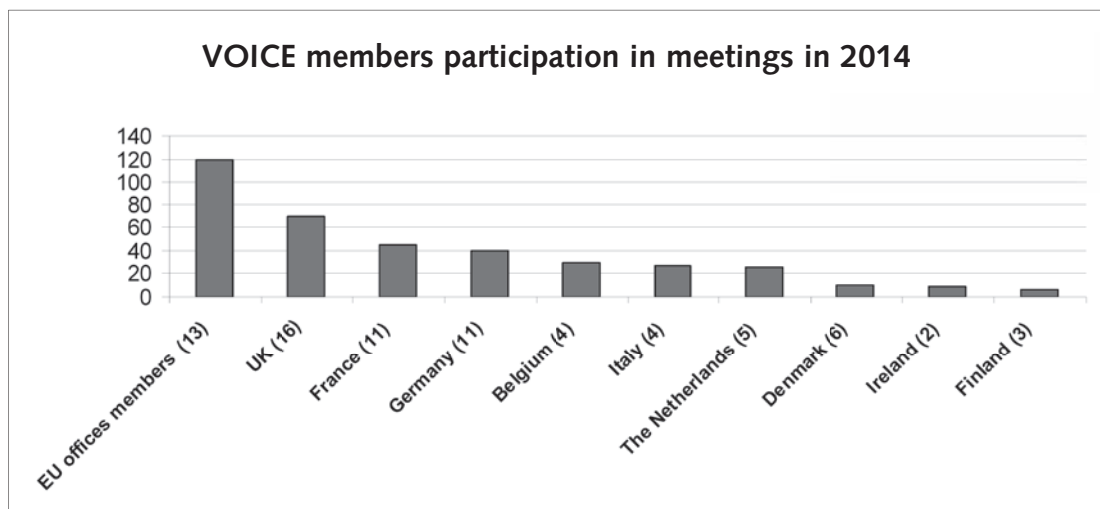
## 5. A VIBRANT NETWORK

### **VOICE in figures**

- 373 people participated in 4 VOICE events, of which 106 from NGOs including 54 members, and 58 people from EU institutions and Member States.
- 117 people from 69 NGOs participated in 18 Working Groups/Task Force Meetings
- The VOICE Secretariat attended 50 meetings, with representatives from EU institutions and Members States to give input to their positions, reports, etc.
- 2 VOICE Out Loud magazines were published, reaching over 1900 readers each
- 6 issues of Flash bulletin for members were published, with about 500 readers each
- 16 special updates on the funding situation were sent to VOICE members
- The VOICE Secretariat participated in 58 meetings and events with other humanitarian stakeholders

### 5.1 VOICE INITIATIVES FOR MEMBERS

VOICE aims to become an even more vibrant network, further enhancing members' ownership, common positioning and engagement. The ECHO funding campaign throughout 2014 brought together all our members around one objective at an unprecedented level. The outreach at national level by Board members and the Secretariat was also more extensive than ever before. Both these dynamics also brought VOICE new levels of visibility at Brussels and national level, both with our members and other stakeholders. A number of other activities are also central to the network activity, such as the working groups where members meet to share information, develop common positions and advocacy strategies. In 2014 there were VOICE working groups on the FPA and DRR as well as Task Forces on the Consensus and the ECHO funding situation.



These figures are counted as participations in meetings of working groups, task forces, and events. (The figures in brackets reflect the number of VOICE members per each country).

The VOICE Secretariat supported members' capacity in relation to the ECHO funding situation through the production of an Infosheet on the EU budget and 16 dedicated updates including analysis and updates on the whole network's campaigning to resolve the situation. Members' engagement in the World Humanitarian Summit consultations was encouraged, including through the production of two briefings for members on the preparation process.

Other means of bringing members together for discussion is through events and roundtables in Member States as well as the annual General Assembly. In addition, following the success of the 2013 session, a second very successful training on EU advocacy was organised, which brought together 17 VOICE members who very much appreciated the opportunity. VOICE Secretariat also briefed member organisations' General Assemblies and/or staff meetings, e.g. EU Cord and Caritas Germany. Lastly, links are obviously also built through bilateral meetings and informal contacts. The Secretariat regularly gives targeted advice and support to member organisations in their dealings with EU institutions. In 2014 the Secretariat held 25 bilateral meetings with member organisations, additional to those mentioned above.



## 5.2 VOICE REACHING OUT THROUGH THE VOICE OUT LOUD, WEBSITE, AND MEDIA

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The main objective of VOICE is to influence EU humanitarian policy, and to achieve that aim VOICE engages in outreach establishing contacts, attending meetings and networking in order to build trust and gather and share information.

Twice a year VOICE publishes a public magazine, VOICE Out Loud, showcasing members' work and analysis to stakeholders in EU institutions and any interested public worldwide. It is the most widely disseminated publication of the network, reaching over 1900 people and is freely downloadable on the website. Subscription has grown steadily over the last few years (see graph below). The first VOICE Out Loud in 2014, no 19, took '*A closer look at EU humanitarian aid*' and was launched for the European Parliament's first substantive committee sessions in September. It showcased different aspects of the EU's role as a donor and policy maker, and gave an historical overview of the development of this sector at EU level. VOICE Out Loud no 20, '*Towards the World Humanitarian Summit: an inclusive process?*' launched in October, had members writing about their expectations, concerns and priorities regarding the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.



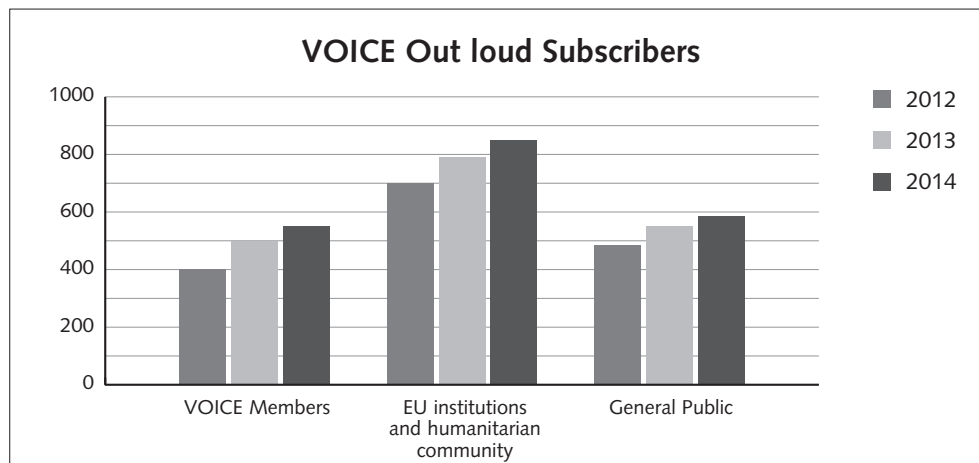
### Members who wrote in the VOICE Out Loud in 2014

**VOL 19:** Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (with contribution from Oxfam GB and Oxfam Solidarité), CARE Deutschland-Luxembourg, Save the Children, Medair, ICCO Cooperation, Plan UK

**VOL 20:** World Vision International, CARE International, Oxfam Novib, Action Contre la Faim (France), International Medical Corps, Médicos del Mundo Spain, Welthungerhilfe Sierra Leone

VOICE also has a website which continues to serve as a platform for knowledge sharing to a wide number of stakeholders seeking to better understand the role, realities and advocacy work of NGOs in European humanitarian aid. Readers were informed about diverse issues, such as, NGO perspectives on CAR, International DRR day, activities advocating for humanitarian access in Syria, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and advocacy for EU humanitarian funding.

The network also made itself visible through events and roundtables and via briefings to the wider public (for example to students of the NOHA network). Media also covered the VOICE/Link event in Rome (see section 3.32) and VOICE comment on the ECHO funding situation. VOICE publications were also multiplied through online fora. For example, the VOICE study on *NGO perspectives on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* was further disseminated by ALNAP, DARA, Groupe URD, Grotius, Trialog and Reliefweb.



## 6. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE NETWORK

### 6.1 VOICE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The VOICE General Assembly (GA) took place on 20 May in Brussels. Through individual and family representations a total of 65 VOICE members took part, representing 80% of the total membership. ICRC and IFRC also participated in the GA as observers.

Two new Board members were elected: Anne Street (CAFOD, UK) and Ester Asin Martinez (Save the Children International). Jean-Michel Grand (Action Against Hunger UK) and Youri Saadallah (Norwegian Refugee Council Europe) were re-elected for a second term.

Habitat for Humanity Slovakia was voted in as the newest member of the network. Members had a broad exchange with ECHO Director General Claus Sorensen and the GA adopted VOICE General Policy resolution (2014) on 'Why is EU Humanitarian Aid Important?'. Members also appreciate the valuable networking opportunity of the General Assembly.



## 6.2 VOICE NETWORK MEMBERS IN 2014

VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid and DRR and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs. In 2014, the network was composed of 82 operational European NGO active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE members are based in 19 European countries and the network's Secretariat is based in Brussels. VOICE, unlike its members is not operational in emergencies.

VOICE members are on the forefront of humanitarian emergencies, dedicated to saving lives, preventing suffering, and bringing humanitarian relief to the most vulnerable groups. They base their work on humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality and are committed to following relevant codes of conduct including the 'Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in disaster relief'. They seek to work based on a participatory approach and to link relief rehabilitation and development in order to ensure the sustainability of their interventions. The great majority of VOICE members (92% in 2014) hold a Framework Partnership Agreement with DG ECHO.

## 6.3 VOICE BOARD

The role of the VOICE Board of Directors is to ensure that VOICE adheres to its purpose and statutes. It decides on strategic directions and policies, provides governance and accountability and ensures proper management of the network. The Board agrees the annual work programme and the budget and meets with applicant member organisations. The Board members contribute their professional experience on a voluntary basis and represent the broader membership of the VOICE network.

The Board met 5 times in 2014. Its attention was focussed on the developments regarding the EU humanitarian aid budget, the EU institutional changes, the preparations of the World Humanitarian Summit, and the network's development. In 2014 the VOICE Board launched a 'learning review' for the VOICE network to help prepare the mid-term review of the strategic plan in 2015.



In 2014 the VOICE Board was composed of the following members: Youri Saadallah (Norwegian Refugee Council Europe), Jean-Michel Grand (Action Against Hunger UK), Nicolas Borsinger (VOICE President), Dominic Crowley (Concern Worldwide, Ireland), Florence Daunis (Handicap International), Marek Stys (People in Need, Czech Republic), and (not pictured) Peter Runge (CARE Deutschland-Luxemburg), Anne Street (CAFOD, UK) and Ester Asin Martinez (Save the Children, International).

The VOICE network would like to thank Nick Martlew (Save the Children, UK) for his longstanding commitment to the Board.

The Executive Committee (ExCom) is the executive body of the Board which oversees the functioning of the Secretariat and guarantees the financial and legal accountability of VOICE. The ExCom is elected among the members of the VOICE Board. The 2014 ExCom consisted of the President (Nicolas Borsinger), the Treasurer (Jean-Michel Grand), the Secretary (Youri Saadallah) and the Director of the VOICE Secretariat (Kathrin Schick), who is part of the ExCom without a vote. The ExCom met 3 times in 2014.

## 6.4 VOICE SECRETARIAT

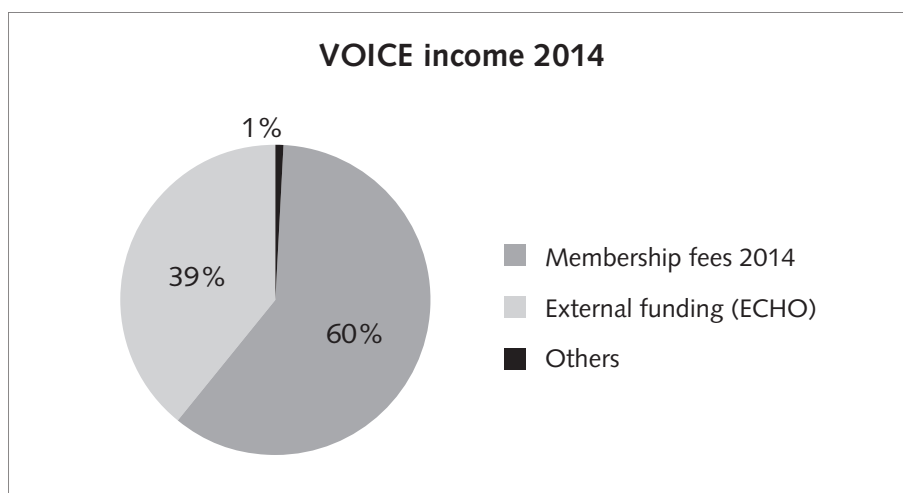
The VOICE Secretariat is responsible for implementing the activities indicated in the Annual Work Programme and Strategic Plan. It is also in charge of the financial management of the organisation under the supervision and general control of the VOICE Board.



The staff of the VOICE Secretariat in 2014 included the Director (Kathrin Schick), Programme Coordinator (Mags Bird until September, then Magali Mourlon), Advocacy and Communication Officer (Inge Brees until February, then Celia Cranfield), Policy and Communication Assistant (Carolina Morgado), and Office Administrator (Guillaume Brouillet). The work of the VOICE Secretariat was also supported throughout the year by two interns (Michał Józwiak and Fiona Arnone).

## 6.5 FINANCES

In 2014, the turnover of the VOICE network as administered by the Secretariat totalled € 527.735. As in previous years, the majority of this (60.13%) was made up of membership fees. VOICE implemented the second year of a two-year ECHO operating grant under the project '*Reinforcing networking between humanitarian NGOs via the VOICE network*'. This provided resources for additional activities and services to members and DG ECHO partners, and enabled the network to increase its outreach and support to collective advocacy.





## 82 VOICE MEMBERS IN 2014

### AUSTRIA

CARE Österreich  
Caritas Österreich  
Hilfswerk Österreich  
SOS Kinderdorf International  
World Vision Österreich

### BELGIUM

Caritas Secours International Belgium  
Handicap International Belgium  
Médecins du Monde Belgium  
Oxfam Solidarité - Solidariteit

### CZECH REPUBLIC

ADRA Czech Republic  
People in Need (PIN)

### DENMARK

ADRA Denmark - Nødhjælp og udvikling  
ASF Dansk Folkehjælp  
DanChurchAid (DCA)  
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)  
Mission East - Mission Øst  
Save the Children Denmark

### FINLAND

FIDA International  
Finn Church Aid  
World Vision Finland

### FRANCE

Action Contre la Faim  
ACTED - Agence d'Aide à la Coopération  
Technique et au Développement  
CARE France  
Handicap International France  
Médecins du Monde France  
Secours Catholique - Réseau Mondial  
Caritas  
Secours Islamique France  
Secours Populaire Français  
Solidarités International  
Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF)  
Triangle Génération Humanitaire

### GERMANY

ADRA Deutschland e.V.  
Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB)  
Deutschland  
CARE Deutschland - Luxemburg e.V.  
Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e.V.  
Deutscher Caritasverband e.V (Caritas  
Germany)  
Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe  
Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V.  
Malteser International  
Medico International  
Plan International Germany  
World Vision Germany

### GREECE

Médecins du Monde - Greece

### IRELAND

Concern Worldwide  
Trócaire

### ITALY

Caritas Italiana  
CESVI - Cooperazione e Sviluppo  
GVC - Gruppo Volontariato Civile  
INTERSOS - Organizzazione Umanitaria  
Onlus

### LUXEMBOURG

Caritas Luxembourg

### THE NETHERLANDS

CARE Nederland  
Cordaid  
ICCO (Dutch Interchurch Aid)  
Oxfam Novib  
ZOA

### NORWAY

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

### PORTUGAL

Medicos do Mundo

### SLOVAKIA

Habitat for Humanity International

### SPAIN

Acción Contra el Hambre  
Caritas Española  
Oxfam Intermón  
Médicos del Mundo

### SWEDEN

Church of Sweden — Svenska kyrkan  
International Aid Services (IAS)  
PMU Interlife

### SWITZERLAND

Medair

### UNITED KINGDOM

Action Against Hunger  
ActionAid  
ADRA UK - Adventist Development and  
Relief Agency  
CAFOD  
CARE International UK  
Christian Aid  
HelpAge International  
International Medical Corps UK  
International Rescue Committee (IRC UK)  
Islamic Relief Worldwide  
Mercy Corps  
Oxfam GB  
Plan International UK  
Save the Children UK  
Tearfund  
World Vision UK



## VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 82 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.