



VOICE

European humanitarian NGOs.
Standing together.

ACTIVITY REPORT

2020



**ACTIVITY
REPORT**
2020

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OVERALL VISION:

A collective voice of European NGOs promoting principled and people-centred humanitarian aid.



MISSION (Art 4 VOICE Statutes)

VOICE's aim is to improve the general quality and effectiveness of humanitarian aid notably that of the European Union and its Member States as well as of the wider humanitarian community. The network also promotes the added value of NGOs given their key role as humanitarian deliverers and as an expression of EU public solidarity.



STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES 2019-2023

1. Shape EU policies and practices affecting the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance worldwide, building on NGOs' operational expertise
2. Build on effective partnerships to advocate for predictable, timely and increased resourcing at EU level for quality and accountable humanitarian aid
3. Promote an enabling environment in which European NGOs are able to advocate for and deliver effective humanitarian aid
4. Enhance the effectiveness and recognition of VOICE as the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian aid.



2020 has been a very special year for all of us. Little did we know how long the extraordinary measures taken by governments in Europe and all over the world would last. Protracted crises such as in Yemen, Syria and the Horn of Africa were already marked by conflicts and the impacts of climate change. By the end of the year there was an overall increase of humanitarian needs of 40%. On the one hand, it is very encouraging that European citizens, despite of the pandemic, continue to strongly support EU humanitarian aid provided to the most vulnerable. On the other hand, it is obviously disappointing to see how little solidarity is left between the North and the Global South when it comes to the distribution and handling of vaccines. While many NGOs are working to address this, it seems that there is little recognition or support for this work in the public response. Civil society organisations, and in particular NGOs, are more than ever playing a key role as frontline responders in humanitarian crises all over the world. They have taken on a crucial role in the prevention of the transmission of the virus and in addressing the immediate and long-term needs of crises-affected people.

Many crises also provide opportunities. After one year, there are already some interesting lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic: many donors, including the European Commission, showed that there was room for flexibility and less bureaucracy regarding the conditions governing their funding, to ensure a timely and adaptable humanitarian response when the pandemic started. NGOs, on their side, demonstrated their flexibility and creativity when adapting programmes together with partners while standing by local communities and harnessing existing knowledge on health emergencies. NGOs also were at the forefront of innovation. When the global transport system suddenly had to shut down, they took the initiative to create the so-called 'humanitarian air bridge' which resulted in more than 60 humanitarian flights transporting goods, protection material and staff. This initiative was strongly supported by the European Union both politically and financially.

Already thinking ahead regarding the secondary and long-term consequences of the global lockdown for vulnerable people, the EU Commission shared the concerns of the humanitarian community, including VOICE, and proposed to allocate an additional €5 billion from the 'Next Generation EU' Recovery Fund to humanitarian aid. From our point of view this was the right approach and we regret very much the decision of the Council not to take that proposal forward. However, there were also some significant achievements at EU level in 2020: finally, an agreement was reached regarding the Multiannual Financial Framework. The EU institutions agreed to maintain a separate, and importantly increased, humanitarian budget line for the coming seven years. Additionally, in the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve there is now a ring-fenced envelope for crises outside the EU to be used for unforeseen emergencies.

The new certification process to become an NGO partner of ECHO proved that the vast majority of previous NGO partners have a very solid and professional financial and organisational model in place. They were able to renew their partnership with ECHO, having shown that they could satisfy the ever increasing administrative demands that the EU is developing in its quest for transparency and accountability. The long and intensive consultation process towards the new Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (PA) was also concluded by the end of the year. It defines the legal and financial modalities to receive humanitarian funding. It also reconfirmed VOICE leading role in shaping and bringing the operational perspective to the discussions on the new PA with ECHO. A big thank you goes to all members who invested their time and expertise, and tirelessly advocated at national and Brussels level for increased humanitarian funding and the best contractual conditions for humanitarian NGO partners of the European Commission for the next years.

Looking ahead, in March this year, the EU launched its important Communication on humanitarian aid. It is an important document since it defines the framework and priorities for EU humanitarian aid, with a short- and medium-term view. Therefore, the VOICE network made a significant contribution to the consultation last December, stressing, among others, the importance of partnership between ECHO and its NGO partners. In 2020, the Grand Bargain (GB) remained the most important initiative collectively developed to strengthen humanitarian aid efficiency. In June 2021, the GB initiative will come to an end. Discussions around the future of the initiative took place throughout 2020 and will continue into 2021. Hence, in 2021 VOICE will keep stressing the importance of reviving the GB and narrow down the future commitments to the four priorities agreed by members: quality funding, simplification, localisation and risk sharing.

Wishing everyone good health and that 2021 will bring better perspectives for all of us around the world, especially for the most vulnerable!

Kathrin Schick
VOICE Director

VOICE FACTS AND FIGURES 2020

88 members in 19 EU countries

1153 people participating in VOICE activities:

29 working group meetings and

15 webinars organised by VOICE, including a meeting between members and Director General of DG ECHO Mrs. Michou

FOR MEMBERS:

9 Flash newsletters

A dedicated area of the website with exclusive advocacy news and briefings

VOICE workshop - EU Restrictive Measures and Humanitarian Aid: Between a principled view for exemptions and a pragmatic approach for an effective derogation process

VOICE webinar - the Grand Bargain and the drive for efficiency in the humanitarian sector: Where do we stand?

VOICE-ACT Alliance webinar - Approaches to survivor and community response Local2Global Protection

A dedicated webpage with reports and news on members' COVID-19 related work

VOICE PUBLICATIONS:

VOICE out loud: Humanitarian Action in the Era of Climate Change

Workshop report: the impact of EU sanctions and restrictive measures on humanitarian action

Briefing: EU humanitarian aid matters more than ever

Policy Resolution: Post COVID-19: EU humanitarian aid in the next Multiannual Financial Framework'

Grand Bargain Task Force Position Paper - an NGO perspective on the drive for efficiency in the humanitarian sector

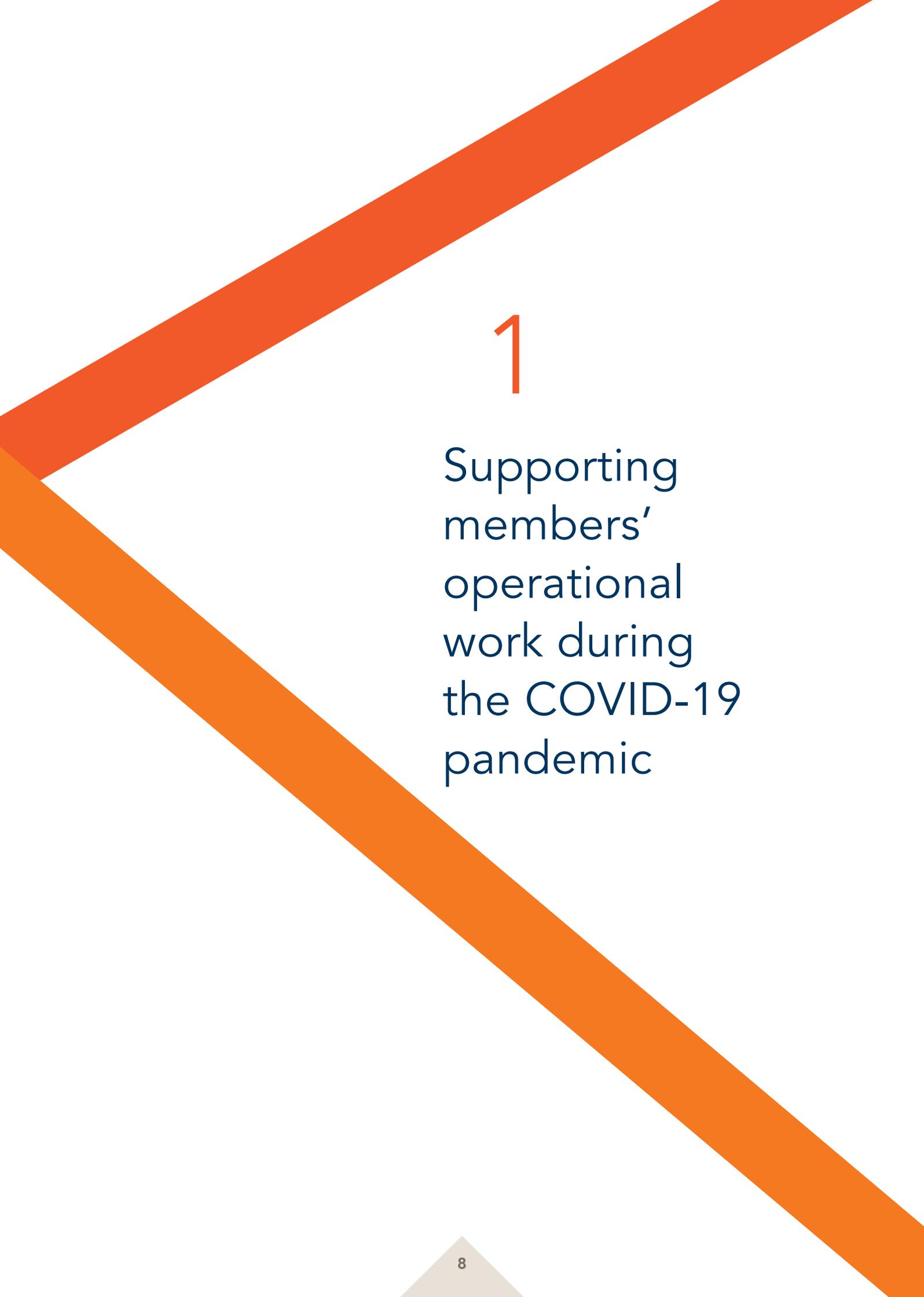


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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BREXIT the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union	ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent
CHA German Centre for Humanitarian Action	ICVA International Council of Voluntary Agencies
COHAFA Council working group on humanitarian aid and food assistance	INGO International Non-Governmental Organisation
CONCORD European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development	INTPA the European Commission's Department DG for International Partnerships
CT Counter-terrorism	MEPs Members of the European Parliament
DG Director or Directorate General	MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DP Disaster Preparedness	MFF EU's Multiannual Financial Framework – EU long-term budget
DRR Disaster Risk Reduction	NGO(s) Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
ECHO the European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Operations	ODI Overseas Development Institute
EP European Parliament	SCHR Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
EPLO European Peacebuilding Liaison Office	SEAR Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve
EU European Union	UK United Kingdom
FPA Framework Partnership Agreement	UN United Nations
GB Grand Bargain	

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1

Supporting
members'
operational
work during
the COVID-19
pandemic



Save the Children in Brindisi, Italy, supporting vulnerable families. © Save the children

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COVID IN HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 forced the European Union (EU) and the rest of the world to confront an unprecedented crisis, pushing humanitarian needs to a record level especially in the most fragile areas. Humanitarian international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), together with local and national partners and NGOs, were at the forefront of the pandemic response. They continued to deliver life-saving aid in Europe and abroad while trying to ensure crisis-affected people, staff and partners' security and safety. Nevertheless, the pandemic brought exceptional new challenges in delivering humanitarian aid and in being able to move within and between countries. Among others, the disruption of global supply and transport chains due to border closures, drastic reductions in air traffic, restrictive measures on imports and exports, and soaring costs. The pandemic led to the evacuation of many humanitarian workers from operations and confinement restrictions both at headquarter and local levels. Consequently, working in countries already affected by conflicts and natural disasters became even more challenging.

The VOICE Secretariat immediately reacted, by raising awareness with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of the impact of the pandemic on field operations and asking for more flexible and adapted funding. This call aimed to address the additional health-care needs brought by the pandemic. Moreover, it also wanted to ensure the continuity of ongoing projects and basic services for affected people in previously existing crises. The VOICE network, through its members and the Board of Directors, was able to establish and maintain a regular dialogue with ECHO and other relevant EU stakeholders to ensure donors' support in this delicate situation. Following up on a VOICE letter, it was very much welcomed when ECHO declared "force majeure" and highly increased its flexibility regarding projects. ECHO also published the much appreciated [COVID-19 guidelines](#). This document addressed many NGO members' concerns regarding the different measures ECHO was taking to support humanitarian operations. It also reassured NGO partners on ECHO's intent to be as flexible as possible. In parallel, VOICE also contacted the Humanitarian Standing Rapporteur of the Development Committee of the European Parliament (EP) to draw his attention to the impact of COVID-19 on humanitarian operations on the ground. The Secretariat particularly stressed

the challenges VOICE members were facing in carrying out their planned and existing activities while having to adapt themselves to the new context. As a consequence, in March, the EP's Development Committee together with the Foreign Affairs and the Budgets Committees sent a letter to four Commissioners, including the Commissioner for Crisis Management Mr. Lenarčič, and the Commission Vice-President/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mr. Borrell. The letter strongly supported the work humanitarian actors were doing and called for a strong action-orientated response from the EU. More specifically, Members of the EP (MEPs) requested the EU to allocate as many resources as possible to fight COVID-19 and emphasised the importance of showing solidarity with affected third countries.

VOICE MEMBERS ON THE FRONTLINE AGAINST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Many VOICE members were also among the NGOs seeking to find innovative and creative solutions to be able to continue to operate, support partners and those most in need. One of these initiatives, the Réseau Logistique Humanitaire (RHL), fostering joint procurement and co-management of the supply chain, became instrumental in setting up the EU humanitarian air bridge financially supported by Member States and the EU Commission. It gave visibility to the humanitarian cause and it became an effective service for European humanitarian actors to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

In March, a dedicated webpage was created on the VOICE website to gather key statements, news and reports from VOICE members related to the pandemic. The aim is to give substantial evidence on the impact COVID-19 is having on vulnerable people and groups as well as to showcase many examples of members' work in addressing the pandemic. The impressive work done by humanitarian NGOs in dealing with the pandemic shows their dedication and commitment. It also reflects their professionalism and ability to adapt and react in sudden crisis abroad but also in Europe.

In fact, humanitarian NGOs were strongly engaged alongside traditional actors in the fight against the pandemic in many European countries. Often, they were the ones reaching the most vulnerable and those left behind by the current pandemic. In 2020, to pay tribute to the resilience and perseverance of VOICE members to continue delivering aid despite the context, the VOICE Secretariat gathered examples from members' projects in response to the pandemic. The outcome of this exercise will be published in 2021, promoting the added value of NGOs in responding to COVID-19.

In April VOICE published "COVID-19 and humanitarian action: VOICE key messages" on the importance of humanitarian aid donors to support their NGO partners in playing an active role in addressing this crisis. The key recommendations to donors were to:

- Provide additional funding for humanitarian aid in order to respond to the additional needs brought by the pandemic.
- Support and maintain a functioning global supply chain for the delivery of essential drugs, medical equipment, food assistance, hygiene kits etc.
- Reduce the administrative burden linked to implementation and adaptation of grants.



Distribution Centre, Mirriah, Niger © Goal International

In May 2020, VOICE members approved the Policy Resolution “COVID-19: EU humanitarian aid in the next Multiannual Financial Framework” (MFF), urging the EU to increase the humanitarian aid allocation in the next MFF considerably due to COVID-19. Members also called for ensuring flexibility and complementarity between the different aid instruments to guarantee a people-centred approach that addresses both the acute needs and the longer-term and secondary impacts of this multi-dimensional crisis. It was therefore much welcomed when the EU Commission proposed that €5 billion from the ‘Next Generation EU’ Recovery Fund should go towards humanitarian assistance. Despite the final decision to withdraw the proposal, it was a clear recognition from the EU Commission of the global effects of this pandemic, especially on the already most vulnerable communities around the world.



2

Promoting
humanitarian
principles and
the added value
of NGOs
at EU level



VOICE President Dominic Crowley meeting with Mr. Lenarčič, EU Commissioner for Crisis Management.

BUILDING DIALOGUE WITH KEY EU DECISION-MAKERS

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak and the challenges to engage with key stakeholders, the VOICE Secretariat was quite successful in shifting towards a new way of working and deepening its working relationships with crucial actors in the EU humanitarian landscape further.

In the first half of the year, VOICE President Dominic Crowley had the opportunity to meet both with the new ECHO Director General (DG), Ms. Michou and with the Director of the ECHO Directorate E on General Affairs, Ms. Gariazzo. The EU long-term budget and the COVID-19 response were among the topics addressed in those occasions. The VOICE President also met with Commissioner Lenarčič. Throughout their constructive and positive exchange, they focused on the need for additional funds to address the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable and on the potential relevance of the Recovery Fund. They also agreed on the importance of the nexus approach, especially in the context of the pandemic.

In December, the Secretariat was glad to organise a first exchange between VOICE members and ECHO DG, Ms. Michou. The meeting was very timely, given the ongoing final negotiations of the EU's long-term budget and the urgency for ECHO to finalise the new Humanitarian Partnership Agreement for partner NGOs. With over 100 participants, this virtual meeting was very well attended. It proved the importance of building trust, establishing the dialogue and strengthening the partnership on both sides.

ENGAGEMENT WITH EU PRESIDENCIES: CROATIA AND GERMANY

Experience has shown that engaging early with upcoming EU Presidencies can be very useful in order to discuss their respective programmes. In 2020, the network's collective messages regarding EU humanitarian funding, the so-called 'triple nexus' and the impact of counter-terrorism measures and sanctions on humanitarian aid were brought forward. On the invitation of the Croatian EU Presidency, VOICE presented its nexus report to Member States' representatives during a meeting of the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). With the German Presi-

gency in mind, the Secretariat visited Berlin in spring and met with the German NGO Platform VENRO, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Centre for Humanitarian Action (CHA). These meetings helped lay down the basis for a good collaboration under the German Presidency. Hence, in the second semester, when VOICE workshop report on “The impact of EU sanctions and restrictive measures on humanitarian action” was launched, COHAFA and the Working Party on Terrorism (COTER) invited VOICE to take part in their joint meeting. This gave VOICE the opportunity to share some of its main recommendations with Member States’ representatives.



Croatia and German Presidency logos.

BRINGING THE HUMANITARIAN NGOs’ PERSPECTIVE TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In February 2020, the Secretariat published the briefing: “EU humanitarian aid matters more than ever”. It highlighted the added value of NGOs as key actors in humanitarian aid, especially in protracted and sudden onset crises all over the world. The briefing had been developed for a high-level meeting foreseen between main humanitarian actors and members of the EP (MEPs). Unfortunately, the meeting had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak.



VOICE briefing: EU humanitarian aid matters more than ever.

In February, the EP experienced a slight shift in its balance of power due to Brexit, the departure of UK MEPs and the arrival of new MEPs. However, VOICE continued its active engagement with the EP on humanitarian related topics. More specifically, the Secretariat exchanged with the Humanitarian Standing Rapporteur, making a substantial contribution to the Development (DEVE) Committee’s report “The role of the EU’s development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Towards this aim, the VOICE Director Kathrin Schick spoke at a roundtable organised by the two co-rapporteurs together with other Civil Society actors. She stressed the added value of humanitarian NGOs and local partners as key frontline responders in the pandemic. The need to ensure funding flexibility and complementarity between different aid instruments, were also at the heart of VOICE's contribution as key tools to the fight against the pandemic.

Following up on the DEVE Committee initiative to draft a report on "The impact of climate change on vulnerable populations in developing countries", the VOICE Secretariat established fruitful contacts with the rapporteur Ms. González. Key amendments were successfully submitted. These mainly underlined the growing number of people in need worldwide, the importance of disaster risk reduction and a nexus approach as a way of building communities' resilience and preventing negative impacts of climate change.

It also urged the EU to ensure that in the ring-fenced envelope within the new Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve for crises outside the Union humanitarian aid is prioritised. Furthermore, the network highlighted the importance of operationalising the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach and the need to continue investing in disaster risk reduction at community level to build resilience. Overall, VOICE advocated for a strong reconfirmation of the humanitarian principles, the reiteration of the commitment to the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the need for the EU to use its global influence to promote International Humanitarian Law.

SHAPING THE FORTHCOMING EUROPEAN COMMISSION COMMUNICATION ON HUMANITARIAN AID

In the autumn, the EU Commission announced its decision to release a communication on EU humanitarian aid in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic by spring 2021. The document is supposed to lead the work of the EU humanitarian aid for the upcoming years. Given its strategic importance, the VOICE network, being a major stakeholder, actively took part in a targeted consultation launched by ECHO in December.

Despite the tight deadline, the network successfully managed to submit a substantial contribution. The importance to further strengthen the partnership between ECHO and its humanitarian NGO partners to address the unprecedented humanitarian needs was pointed out. VOICE particularly called the EU to continue investing in the Grand Bargain to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

3

Ensuring more
and better EU
funding for
humanitarian
assistance

VOICE MEMBERS' MOBILISATION FOR MORE, PREDICTABLE, TIMELY AND FLEXIBLE EU HUMANITARIAN FUNDING

2020 was the last year of negotiations for the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027. VOICE members, supported by the Secretariat, strongly mobilised at national level asking for additional, predictable, timely and flexible EU humanitarian funding. Members in the Netherlands, Poland, Belgium, Germany and Italy, to name a few, actively engaged and exchanged with their governments. The strong advocacy carried out at national level was essential to complement the effective work done at Brussels level. The VOICE Secretariat supported members in their national advocacy by providing them with briefings and other tools to facilitate their engagement with their governments. Especially in a time of pandemic with reduced face-to-face meetings, virtual mobilisation on the MFF became crucial. Throughout the process, VOICE conducted a lively social media campaign, engaging members, stakeholders and other NGO networks and widely sharing its key messages.

With the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating the already difficult humanitarian situation worldwide, VOICE adopted a Policy Resolution "Post COVID-19: EU humanitarian aid in the next Multiannual Financial Framework" during its General Assembly. It called on the EU to support people affected by humanitarian crises around the world by stressing the need for additional and flexible humanitarian funding. Moreover, the network strongly advocated for a ring-fenced envelope within the new Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (SEAR) for crises outside the Union. This new instrument created under the MFF merged the pre-existing Emergency Aid Reserve with the Solidarity Fund. While the former was designed to address sudden and unforeseen crises in non-EU countries, the latter was created to support EU Member States after a major disaster. Considering the different purpose and functioning, VOICE and other humanitarian actors were concerned that the merge of these two instruments could result in unnecessary competition for funds to help people in need within or outside the EU. The VOICE Policy Resolution was much welcomed and widely shared with the EU Commission and the EP.

VOICE RECOMMENDATIONS:

THE MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2021-2027

The EU's financial forecasts must take the likely severe increase in humanitarian need into consideration. COVID-19 has exacerbated a very difficult humanitarian situation worldwide and its impact is expected to last for years. For humanitarian NGOs, it is fundamental that the next EU aid budget goes well beyond being a COVID-19 response. If policies and an operational toolbox are in place, the next MFF must provide the funds to allow them to be effective. To support the people affected by humanitarian crises around the world, we recommend that the EU should:

- Agree on an ambitious external action heading, and approve the MFF before 2021
- Increase the humanitarian aid allocation through the next MFF
- Keep a ring-fenced envelope within the new Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve for crises outside the Union, and maintain the existing capacity to rapidly mobilise additional funds in the case of emerging, escalating or sudden onset emergencies
- Ensure the necessary flexibility and complementarity between the different aid instruments when addressing the changing needs on the ground
- Commit to funding a diversity of humanitarian actors, recognising the crucial role of international, national and local NGOs as frontline responders

Key recommendations of the VOICE 2020 Policy Resolution.

In February, the EP experienced a slight shift in its balance of power due to Brexit, the departure of UK MEPs and the arrival of new MEPs. However, VOICE continued its active engagement with the EP on humanitarian

As a successful outcome of members' strong mobilisation and advocacy activities, the EU Commission proposed to allocate €5 billion from the Next Generation EU Recovery Fund to humanitarian assistance. The VOICE President Dominic Crowley, on behalf of the membership, was a strong advocate of the network's main recommendations on the MFF. In July 2020, he wrote a letter to key EU decision-makers, including the European institutions, also shared with the EU Heads of States and Government, calling on them to acknowledge the depth of the COVID-19 crisis, the additional suffering brought upon already vulnerable communities around the world and the need to increase the funding allocation to humanitarian aid in the MFF. The letter was received with appreciation.



Twitter campaign calling for additional humanitarian funding.

NGO ALLIANCES TO STRENGTHEN VOICE MESSAGES

In 2020, VOICE continued its cooperation with other NGO Networks, particularly European NGO confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD) and European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) to strengthen the overall impact of NGO advocacy regarding the MFF.

VOICE, together with eight NGO networks, sent a joint letter to Heads of State and Government with key recommendations on the external heading of the MFF and the Recovery Fund. Another joint statement called on EU leaders to reverse cuts in the EU budget for partner countries and reinforce solidarity with crisis-affected people. The joint messages were also promoted widely through social media channels.

THE 2021-2027 MFF AGREEMENT AND THE ANNUAL BUDGET 2021

Right before Christmas, the long negotiations on the MFF were finally concluded. VOICE was pleased to see its main recommendations implemented in the final agreement. To ensure EU humanitarian aid remains needs-based and respects the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, the humanitarian aid budget line was kept as a separate instrument. Its budget was also increased by 30% compared to the previous MFF (total of €10.3 billion for the 7 years). Furthermore, the SEAR was ring-fenced and 35% of this reserve were allocated to emergency crises outside the Union. This was the successful outcome of the longstanding advocacy campaign that the network carried out over the past years.

The overall MFF negotiations process was very long and cumbersome. Despite the unfortunate decision to withdraw the additional €5 billion from the Recovery Fund for humanitarian aid, the VOICE network could gladly count on the valid and solid support of the EP. As key ally, the EP always defended during negotiations with the Council an increase to the humanitarian aid budget and managed to secured such increase in the final MFF agreement.

With the new MFF adopted, the EU annual budget for 2021 was also agreed and voted by the Council and the European Parliament. VOICE was happy to have contributed to this outcome, having strongly advocated for a timely robust humanitarian budget to ensure predictable funding as of the start of the year.

2019



2020

VOICE engagement on the MFF 2021-2027

VOICE Policy Resolution: Post COVID-19: EU humanitarian aid in the next Multiannual Financial Framework



VOICE Members' engagement at national level



VOICE President letter to key EU decision-makers



Joint letter and statement to key national and EU decision-makers with NGO networks

MFF outcome



Separated and Increased EU Humanitarian aid budget line of 10,3 Billion €



Solidarity and Emergency aid Reserve ring-fenced for crises outside the EU

VOICE engagement in the MFF in 2020

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4

On the road to the new Humanitarian Partnership Agreement

STEERING THE DISCUSSIONS ON THE NEW HUMANITARIAN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The last Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) between DG ECHO and its humanitarian NGO partners came to an end in 2020. Initiated three years ago, 2020 marked an intensification in the consultation process between the FPA Watch Group, its Task Force and ECHO. VOICE, on behalf of all ECHO NGO partners, facilitates and supports the FPA Watch Group which, through its Task Force, invested heavily in influencing that process. Throughout the year, ECHO sought to develop a new Partnership Agreement in the framework of the new corporative approach of the EU Commission while seeking to take into account the specificities of humanitarian aid. The aim of the FPA Watch Group was to stress the importance of maintaining a strong partnership with NGOs in the new agreement. Moreover, it aimed at making its modalities such as the new Model Grant Agreement and the new e-Single Form suitable for the operational reality. Ensuring the new agreement would not further increase the overall administrative burden for humanitarian actors was another important priority.

BRINGING EVIDENCE TO DG ECHO ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EX-ANTE ASSESSMENT

To be certified as ECHO partners under the new Humanitarian Partnership Agreement, NGOs now have to undergo a new exercise called the ex-ante assessment. In order to best prepare respective auditors for this exercise, the VOICE Secretariat and ECHO's legal and audit teams organised a joint webinar in February. The webinar generated a great level of interest in the NGO community, who was glad to have more clarity on the process. Together, the Task Force and the VOICE Secretariat were able to support members and to collect and share the questions and concerns of NGO partners with ECHO in a coordinated way.

In July, when many NGOs already had finalised the ex-ante assessment, the VOICE Secretariat conducted a survey among its members to collect their experiences regarding this costly and time-consuming process. 57 members replied, and the consolidated results were shared with the FPA Watch Group and ECHO in October. ECHO very much appreciated the evidence provided on the implementation of this new exercise.

The Humanitarian Partnership Agreement was finally adopted in December 2020. A big thank you goes to the FPA Watch Group and its Task Force. Together with the VOICE Board of Directors, they greatly managed to raise important issues on the new agreement with ECHO staff, who also contributed to secure certain achievements.



The FPA consultation process.



5

Securing an
enabling
environment
for
humanitarian
action

GATHERING EVIDENCE ON THE IMPACT OF EU RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ON HUMANITARIAN ACTION

In 2020 VOICE launched the report: “The impact of EU sanctions and restrictive measures on principled humanitarian aid”, summarising the outcome of a two-day workshop organised in November 2019. Representatives from NGOs, EU Member States, EU institutions and experts had come together to discuss the evolving approach in the EU to sanctions and counter-terrorism (CT) restrictive measures, its impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid and how to mitigate negative effects. Several recommendations were formulated offering useful suggestions for the community to move forward.



Workshop Report: The impact of EU sanctions and restrictive measures on humanitarian action.

The report was very much welcomed by the NGOs, explaining the technicalities of the sanctions' regime and supporting them in better navigating it. Throughout the discussions, especially with non-humanitarian stakeholders, it became clear that there is little evidence on how the sanctions regime and CT restrictive measures actually impact humanitarian operations and how prepared NGOs are in that regard. Therefore, VOICE members decided to allocate extra resources to go more in-depth on these issues. To this aim, in the second part of the year, a survey was launched among VOICE members. It aimed at assessing how NGOs have moved forward on some of the main recommendations developed in the 2019 workshop, and what remains to be advanced.

In December, the preliminary findings of the survey were presented during a VOICE webinar entitled “EU Restrictive Measures and Humanitarian Aid: between a principled view for exemptions and a pragmatic approach for an effective derogation process”. The webinar was very well attended, with participants from NGOs, relevant services from the EU Commission, Member States' representatives and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) among the audience. It focused on the importance of introducing humanitarian exemptions to EU sanctions regimes and having a discussion on an EU-wide derogation process. The findings of the survey and the webinar are at the heart of a report to be published in 2021.

During the German EU presidency in the autumn, joint meetings between COHAFA and COTER Working Groups were held to discuss the unintended impacts of CT measures on principled humanitarian aid. In order to further raise awareness on the importance of these critical issues, VOICE was invited to one of these meetings, see also Chapter 2.

VOICE urged representative from EU Member States to:

- ensure consistent and harmonised implementation of the EU sanctions directive;
- have a dialogue at national level with humanitarian actors;
- address the issue of bank de-risking with banks and financial institutions.



6 Bringing the humanitarian NGO perspective to the EU approach on resilience, disaster preparedness and humanitarian-development-peace nexus



Celia Cranfield, former VOICE Senior Advocacy Officer at the CHA meeting on the Nexus. March 2020. (The meeting was held before the COVID-19 lockdown and related measures)

FOSTERING NGOs' KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN IMPLEMENTING THE NEXUS APPROACH

In 2020 the VOICE Secretariat continued to influence the EU discussions regarding the implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus through sharing NGO experiences and concerns as highlighted in the 2019 VOICE report "[NGOs Perspectives on the EU's Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#)". This report, developed with the support of the VOICE DRR-Resilience Working Group, highlights nine case studies. They present different approaches to show what nexus programming may look like in practice, which barriers are encountered and which enablers are needed in the field.

With an acceleration of the EU's desire to operationalise the nexus, the VOICE Secretariat advocated for a nexus approach in line with humanitarian principles, able to build on NGOs' experiences in the field and more flexible financial frameworks and tools. More specifically, the EU's nexus approach should ensure complementarity and respect of the different mandates and principles of the actors involved.

While the nexus approach offers unique opportunities to develop prevention measures at community level and to enhance response capacity and support early recovery, the risk of potential instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid for foreign policy purposes still remains high.

During the year, the Secretariat continued to bring members' operational experiences to the policy work. As mentioned in chapter 2, the VOICE Secretariat presented the nexus report at a COHAFA meeting, with many Member States expressing interest in taking the discussions to the national level. One such example was Germany. VOICE was invited to a nexus discussion with the German NGO Platform VENRO, exchanged with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and spoke at an event about the enablers and barriers of the nexus approach organised by the German Centre for Humanitarian Action (CHA).

It was considered an achievement that the VOICE Secretariat was invited to present the nexus from a humanitarian angle at a workshop for EU delegations and interested staff organised by DG for International Partnerships (INTPA - former DEVCO). Together with several members and the NGO networks CONCORD and EPLO, the Secretariat shared key messages from the report. The feedback from participants was very positive.

Given the recognised added value of the report, VOICE received regular requests for presentations both from VOICE members and EU Commission consultants and fed into a report on the EU Trust Funds and the nexus approach. Lastly, VOICE was a speaker on a webinar organised by VOICE member Plan International to launch their report on Girls in Sahel with a focus on the nexus, which also saw the participation of EU Commissioner Lenarčič who strongly supported the need for protecting girls from risky behaviour and investing in their resilience.

INFORMING DG ECHO'S NEW GUIDANCE ON DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Throughout 2020, the VOICE network actively took part in a number of consultation processes, underlining the solid recognition of VOICE members as key stakeholders regarding humanitarian topics at EU level. Following ECHO's decision to move from a broader Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) approach to focus more on Disaster Preparedness (DP), a timely consultation was organised by DG ECHO. Members of the VOICE DRR-Resilience Working Group were solicited to provide feedback on a new guidance note under development. The VOICE Secretariat consolidated members' contributions. Among the issues raised were the need for better complementarity with DG INTPA and DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) to keep the broader concept of DRR on their agenda, the need to better address gender and localisation and further invest in anticipatory action. The need for community-based actions and a bottom-up approach to ensure people's needs are put at the centre were also highly recommended.

Later in the year, the Working Group welcomed the second version of the DP guidance, which addressed some of the group's concerns, and made additional remarks during a webinar organised by DG ECHO. The final version of the DP guidance note should be published in early 2021.

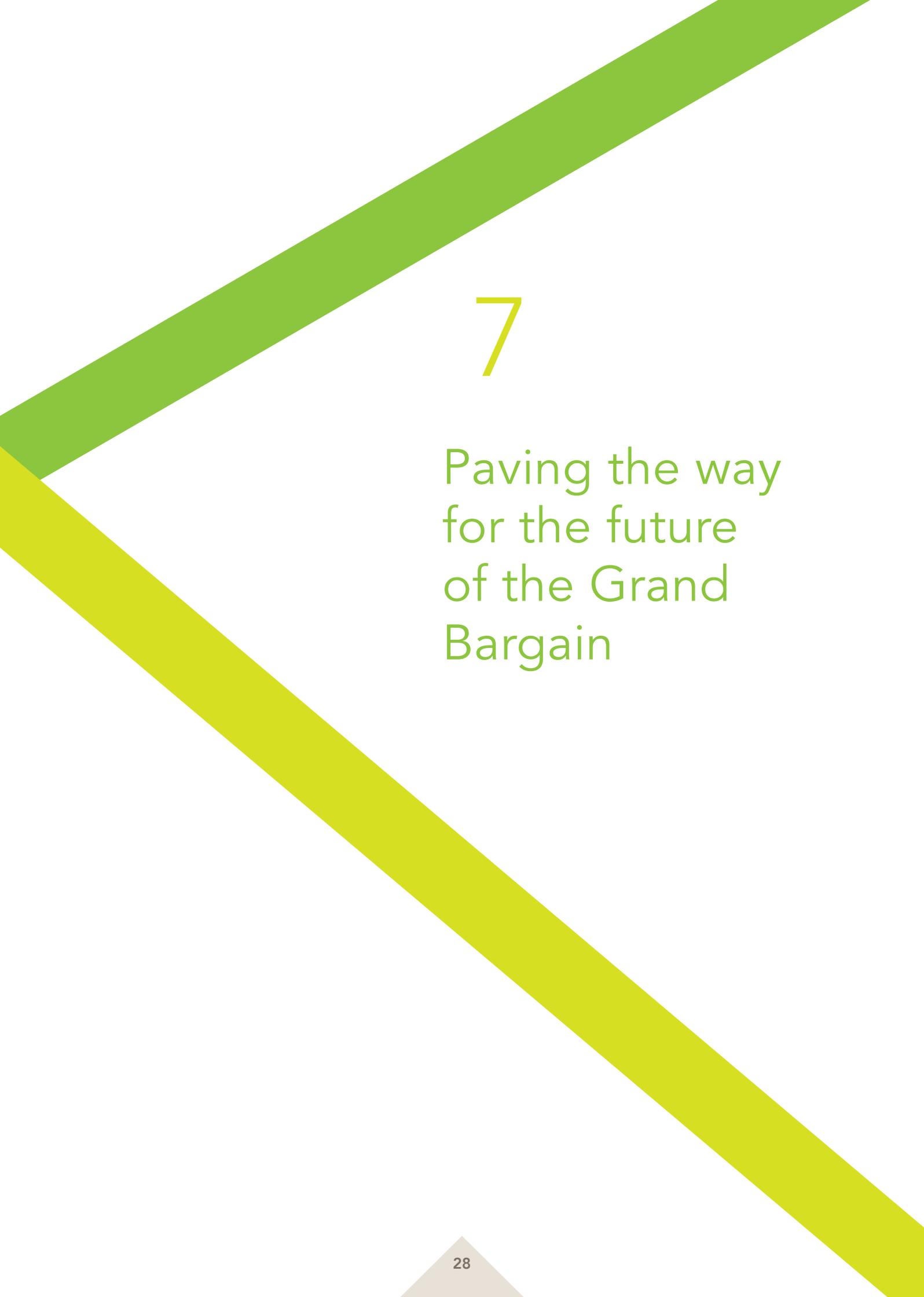
PROMOTING MEMBERS' EXPERTISE IN DEALING WITH THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE FIELD

Over the past decades, humanitarian crises have become more complex and protracted. Factors such as climate change, environmental degradation, rapid urbanisation and the overlapping between disaster, conflict and fragile situations have increased the risk of having entire communities struggling with vulnerable living conditions. Hence, the impacts of climate change have worsened and keep creating new humanitarian needs worldwide. The humanitarian community has been increasingly working on DRR because of the increasing likelihood of natural disasters due to climate change. In 2020, members of the Working Group were invited to contribute with articles to the 30th edition of the [VOICE out loud: Humanitarian aid in the era of climate change](#). This issue explored the devastating effects of climate change on humanitarian needs and how humanitarian NGOs are working to address them. The magazine was well received by relevant EU stakeholders as it was considered very timely, due to the parallel presentation of ECHO's new ambitious approach to reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid in the framework of the European Green Deal.



VOICE out loud 30, 'Enhancing resilience in fragile & conflict affected contexts', Camel Caravan 2018 © Cordaid

Later in 2020, this 'greening of humanitarian aid' approach was presented to the DRR-Resilience Working Group by ECHO. This was an opportunity for the group to share practical experiences on how humanitarian organisations are already tackling this issue, both at headquarter and operational levels. Furthermore, upon a request from ECHO, members of the Working Group came together for a consultation on the EU's response to climate induced displacement and migration. On this occasion, participants shared best practices, the challenges they face, and some interesting suggestions on what the EU could be doing better in this area.



7

Paving the way
for the future
of the Grand
Bargain

IMPROVING AID EFFICIENCY: THE THEMATIC FOCUS OF THE GRAND BARGAIN TASK FORCE

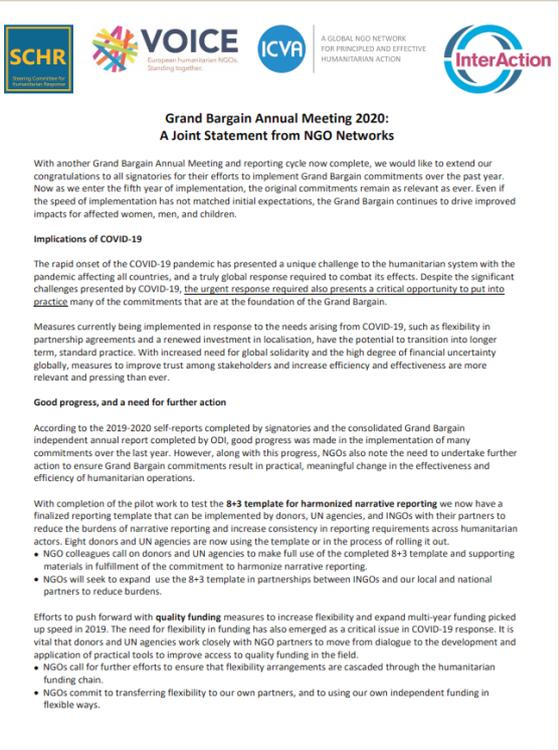
In 2020, the Grand Bargain (GB) remained the most important initiative collectively developed to strengthen humanitarian aid efficiency. The humanitarian community showed a great degree of engagement throughout the implementation process and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) annual report highlighted some key progress made over the last years. However, there was a large consensus, particularly among NGOs, that more should have been done. According to the [United Nations](#), the COVID-19 pandemic so far has increased the number of people in need of humanitarian aid compared to the previous year by 40%. Therefore, the humanitarian response needs to be even more efficient and effective. As a consequence, in November 2020 the GB Task Force published a [position paper](#), stressing the important efforts and initiatives developed by NGOs to strengthen the efficiency of the humanitarian sector and calling on European actors to revive the dialogue on efficiency.

In the same month, the VOICE Secretariat successfully organised a webinar on the drive for efficiency in the humanitarian sector to launch the above-mentioned position paper. The International Rescue Committee (IRC), CARE Jordan and Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion presented NGO-led initiatives: the SCAN initiative and the Réseau Logistique Humanitaire. Donor representatives from Belgium, The Netherlands and ECHO made contributions to collectively unpack the concept of aid efficiency.



VOICE Position Paper: An NGO perspective on the drive for efficiency in the humanitarian sector.

Throughout the year, the network's engagement on the GB resulted in a number of activities: as in previous years, VOICE provided input to the ODI GB Annual Report. Following the 2020 GB Annual Meeting, VOICE, together with the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and InterAction, issued a Joint Statement. It called for renewed political commitment to the initiative and for building a strong vision for its future. Moreover, the VOICE Secretariat also provided input to the Geneva-based research institute HERE regarding risk. The importance of addressing risk transfer and risk sharing as well as the need for reducing an ever-increasing administrative burden through simplification and harmonisation were other key messages stressed by VOICE regarding the Grand Bargain initiative. More specifically on localisation, in 2020, VOICE continued to call on all EU donors to develop a localisation policy, to support the development of local capacities, to build on their partnership with NGOs, to scale up their investment in local civil society organisations and to ensure local partners have access to decision making processes.



Grand Bargain Annual meeting: a joint statement from NGO networks.

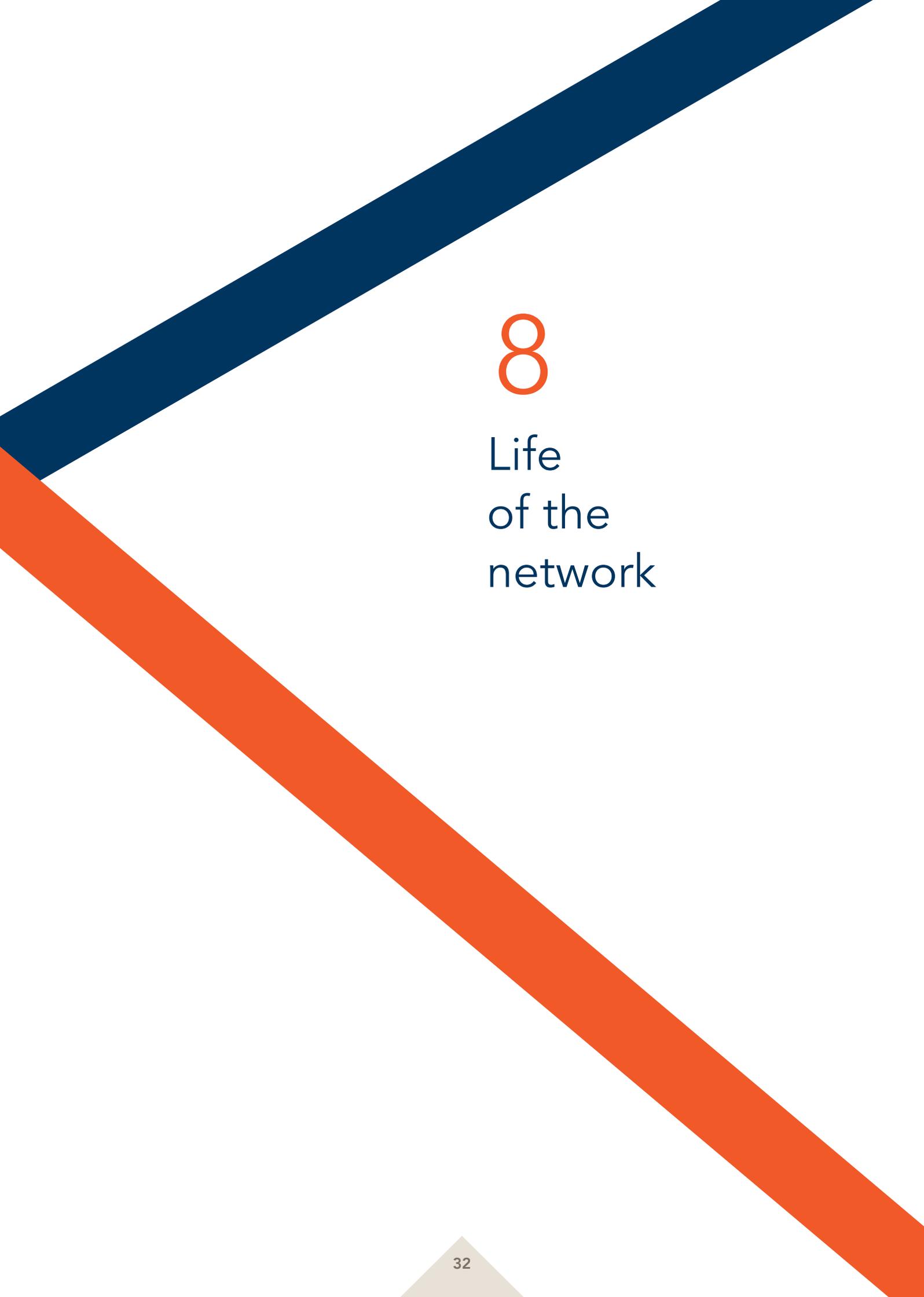
THE FUTURE OF THE GRAND BARGAIN

In June 2021, the GB initiative will come to an end. Discussions around the future of the Grand Bargain took place throughout 2020 and will continue into 2021. More specifically, the GB Facilitation Group circulated a survey on the future of the GB initiative, among both GB signatories and other stakeholders. Therefore, the VOICE GB Taskforce met to identify priority areas for the future of the initiative: localisation, quality funding, simplification and risk sharing. These four areas then became the network’s contribution to the survey. Hence, in 2021 the VOICE Secretariat will keep its active participation in the NGO constituency group to stress the importance of reviving the GB and narrow down the future commitments to the four priorities agreed.



A learning exchange: approaches for supporting survivor and community-led response

Later in 2020, VOICE Secretariat together with ACT Alliance EU organised a workshop inviting Local to Global Protection facilitators, practitioners and members of the Oxfam community-based protection initiatives to share their approaches. The virtual event was an exchange exclusively between NGOs in order for them to share good practices on locally-led responses from all over the world.



8

Life of the network

VOICE NEW MEMBERS

The VOICE General Assembly welcomed four new members in 2020: FIDA from Sweden, International Rescue Committee (IRC) - Germany, War Child from The Netherlands and GOAL from Ireland.

When the UK member HelpAge left the network, it brought the VOICE membership to 88 European NGOs in 2020.

Though the richness of their operational and advocacy expertise and experience, new members increase the diversity, representativeness and credibility of the network. This was particularly welcomed in a time when the real impact of Brexit on the VOICE membership was not yet known. However, by the end of the year, Brexit resulted in some first dismissals for the following year, while many other NGOs showed interest in joining the network.



VOICE new members in 2020.

THE VOICE SECRETARIAT: A VIRTUALLY COMMITTED TEAM

The VOICE Secretariat is in charge of implementing the activities of the network as indicated in the Annual Work Programme and the VOICE Strategic Plan, supervised by the VOICE Board of Directors.

The outbreak of COVID-19 at the beginning of the year had a strong impact on the working life of the Secretariat. The team had to work from home most of the year and the planned activities and events had to be adapted to the virtual world. In spite of this, the VOICE Secretariat adapted very quickly and maintained a high level of activity throughout the year.

VOICE was able to organise its first ever virtual annual General Assembly (GA). Although lasting only half a day instead of a full day, the GA agenda included not only the statutory issues in compliance with Belgian Law but also key issues related to the governance and the membership of the network.

The VOICE Board of Directors and the Secretariat did an incredible work ensuring that VOICE members could follow the GA directly and simultaneously, engage actively in an effective and interactive debate, and fully exercise their voting rights anonymously, in line with the VOICE Statutes. Therefore, the first ever virtual GA was a big success with a level of attendance of about 90% of the membership. A remarkable sign of the trust and the great spirit of collaboration and exchange within the network.

In 2020, the Secretariat was composed of:

Kathrin Schick, Director

Magali Mourlon, Programme Coordinator

Celia Cranfield, Senior Advocacy Officer *until October*,

Francesca Giubilo, Advocacy Officer *from October onward*

Cécile Muller, Administrative and Finance Officer

Roberta Fadda, Communication Officer

Tarita Baldan, Advocacy Assistant

Julia Foulon, Funding and Advocacy Assistant

On behalf of the whole VOICE membership, the Secretariat would like to thank Celia Cranfield and Magali Mourlon, who left the team later in the year, for their long-standing commitment and solid contributions to the network and wishes them all the success in their new careers. Many thanks go also to the former Stagiaire Job Verest for his great support to the team.

A warm welcome to Francesca Giubilo who joined the team in October as the new Advocacy Officer. In December the VOICE Secretariat recruited Maria Groenewald as the new Programme Coordinator.



Kathrin Schick
Director



Magali Mourlon
Programme
Coordinator



Celia Cranfield
Senior Advocacy
Officer



Francesca Giubilo
Advocacy Officer



Cécile Muller
Administration &
Finance Officer



Roberta Fadda
Communication
Officer



Tarita Baldan
Advocacy Assistant



Julia Foulon
Funding and
Advocacy Assistant

AN ENGAGED BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Continued their first mandate:

Dominic Crowley, Concern Worldwide

Jean-Pierre Delomier, Fédération Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion

Stéphane Heymans, Médecins du Monde Belgium

Michael Kühn, Welthungerhilfe

Fie Lauritzen, DanChurchAid

Silvia Sinibaldi, Caritas Europa

Were re-elected:

Michael Mosselmans, Christian Aid UK

Vincent Stehli, Acción Contra el Hambre Spain

Joined the Board:

Edouard Rodier, Norwegian Refugee Council Europe.

VOICE President Dominic Crowley thanked all of them for their essential commitment to the network, their reiterated dedication throughout this specific year marked by working exclusively virtually and their engagement to always promote the added value of humanitarian NGOs and obtain the best conditions for the implementation of humanitarian programmes.

Board meetings in 2020: All virtual but numerous

- > The Board held five meetings throughout the year and met for three extraordinary meetings dedicated to the future ECHO Humanitarian Partnership Agreement.



Dominic Crowley
Concern Worldwide



Jean-Pierre Delomier
Fédération Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion



Stéphane Heymans
Médecins du Monde Belgium



Michael Kühn
Welthungerhilfe



Fie Lauritzen
DanChurchAid



Silvia Sinibaldi
Caritas Europa



Michael Mosselmans
Christian Aid UK



Vincent Stehli
Acción Contra el Hambre Spain

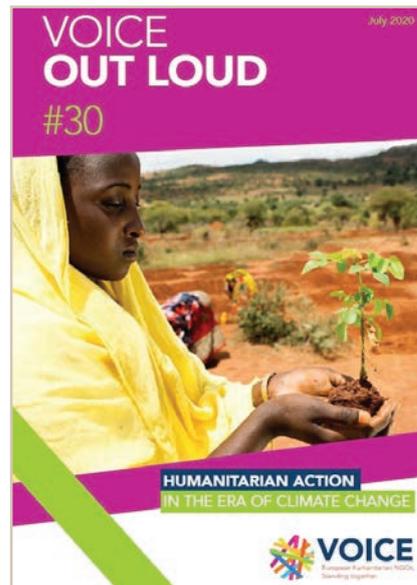


Edouard Rodier
Norwegian Refugee Council Europe

VOICE COMMUNICATION

The new visual line for the VOICE network, created in 2019, was implemented throughout all our communication products and tools over the year. The graphic designer Siv Lakou who developed the templates and graphic guidelines to make the production process more efficient and streamlined over time, invested considerable extra pro bono hours. She sought to take into account the specific needs, target groups and identity of the network. VOICE would like to thank her for all her efforts and is very pleased with the final products.

Regarding the social media, 2020 saw the number of followers on Twitter steadily grow as well as the creation of the new VOICE LinkedIn page, aimed at increasing the network's visibility even further by sharing its positions with a wider audience. The VOICE out loud magazine on the effects of the climate crisis on humanitarian action informed EU institutions and policy-makers on the work of humanitarian NGOs to address the environmental challenges. Throughout the year, increased attention was given to evidence-based advocacy in the network's policy and communication activities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a webpage was dedicated to member's work all over the world and in Europe to support the most vulnerable communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to the numerous activities and events of the VOICE network, the number of website visitors increased by 35%.



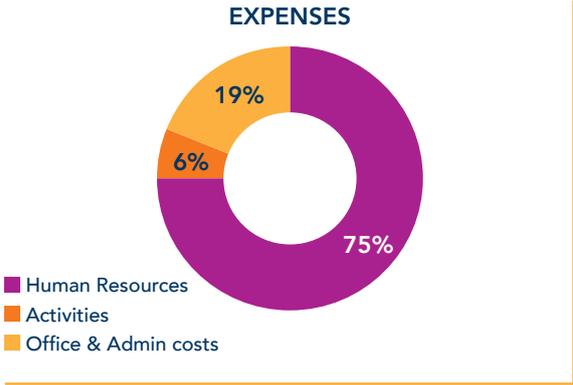
The new visual layout of the VOICE out loud.

VOICE FINANCES

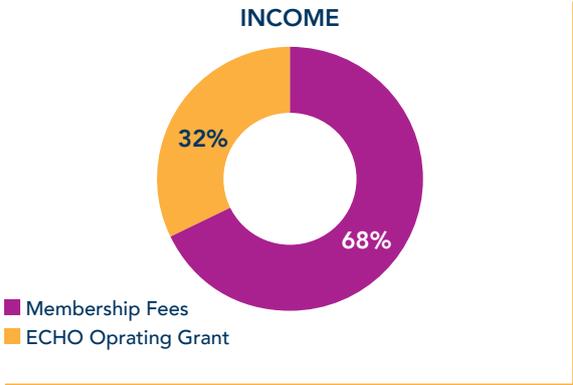
The turnover administered by VOICE in 2020 totalled €589.973. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 95% of the planned budget was spent.

On the expenses side, due to the COVID-19 restrictive measures started mid-March, most of the face-to-face meetings and travels had to be cancelled. This had a strong impact on the distribution of expenses. The amount spent on activities represents 31% compared to the previous year. With regard to the share of human resources, in 2020 this looks high in percentage whereas the real amount was only 8% higher than in 2019, partially due to some teleworking costs and staff turnover. Office and administrative costs were similar to 2019.

In terms of income, with the ECHO operating grant in 2020 and the impact of Brexit on the UK members not yet reflected, in 2020 the share of membership fees represented more than two thirds of VOICE income. Some members presented a higher turnover and new members joined the network, resulting in the membership fees being 9% higher than in 2019.



VOICE Expenses 2020.



VOICE Income 2020.

VOICE MEMBERS 2020

List of VOICE members 2020

AUSTRIA

 CARE Österreich

 CARITAS Österreich

 SOS Kinderdorf International

BELGIUM

 Caritas International Belgium

 Médecins du Monde (MDM) Belgium

 Oxfam Solidarité - Solidariteit

 Plan Belgium

CZECH REPUBLIC

 ADRA Czech Republic

 People in Need (PIN)

DENMARK

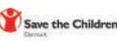
 ADRA Denmark Nødhjælp og udvikling

 Dansk Folkehjælp Danish People's Aid

 DanChurchAid (DCA)

 Danish Refugee Council (DRC)

 Mission East Mission Øst

 Save the Children Denmark

FRANCE

 Action Contre la Faim

 ACTED - Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement

 CARE France

 Handicap International Humanity and Inclusion

 La Chaîne de l'Espoir

 Médecins du Monde (MDM) France

 Secours Catholique - Réseau Mondial CARITAS

 Secours Islamique France

 Secours Populaire Français

 Solidarités International

 Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF)

FINLAND

 Fida International

 Finn Church Aid

 World Vision Finland

GERMANY

 ADRA Deutschland

 Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) Deutschland

 CARE Deutschland-Luxemburg

 Deutscher Caritasverband Caritas Germany

 Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe

 International Rescue Committee Germany

 Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe

 Malteser International

 Medico International

 Plan International Germany

 Welthungerhilfe

 World Vision Germany

GREECE

 Médecins du Monde Greece

IRELAND

 Concern Worldwide

 GOAL Global

 Trócaire

ITALY

 Caritas Italiana

 CESVI - Cooperazione e Sviluppo

 COOPI

 INTERSOS Organizzazione Umanitaria Onlus

 WeWorld-GVC Onlus

LUXEMBOURG

 Caritas Luxembourg

THE NETHERLANDS

 CARE Nederland

 Cordaid

 ICCO - Dutch Interchurch Aid

 Oxfam Novib

 Save the Children Netherlands

 War Child

 ZOA

NORWAY

 Norwegian Church Aid

 Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

 Save the Children - Redd Barna

POLAND

 Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)

SLOVAKIA

 Habitat for Humanity International

SPAIN

 Acción Contra el Hambre

 Caritas Española

 EDUCO

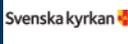
 Médicos del Mundo

 Oxfam Intermón

SWEDEN

 Läkarmissionen/International Aid Services (IAS)

 PMU Interlife

 Svenska kyrkan - Church of Sweden

SWITZERLAND

 Lutheran World Federation

 Medair

 Terre des Hommes Switzerland

UNITED KINGDOM

 Action Against Hunger

 ActionAid

 CAFOD

 CARE International UK

 Christian Aid

 International Medical Corps UK

 International Rescue Committee (IRC-UK)

 Islamic Relief Worldwide

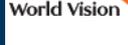
 Mercy Corps UK

 OXFAM GB

 Plan International UK

 Save the Children UK

 Tearfund

 World Vision UK

88 members
19 countries



VOICE is the network of 88 European NGOs promoting principled and people-centred humanitarian aid. Collectively, VOICE aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of the European Union and its Member States' humanitarian aid. The network promotes the added value of NGOs as key humanitarian actors.

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