

VOICE OUT LOUD

#31

SPECIAL EDITION

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN
ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19



VOICE

European humanitarian NGOs.
Standing together.

VOICE OUT LOUD

#31

THIS ISSUE:

**THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN
ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19**

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Cover photo:
Plan International ensures girls,
young women, children and vul-
nerable groups are protected and
supported as the COVID-19 crisis
unfolds. © Fiorella Ramos
Plan International

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Editorial



Since March 2020, COVID-19 has changed the world and pushed humanitarian needs to record levels. As is too often the case at times of crisis, it is the world's most fragile contexts that are likely to be most impacted by the secondary effects of this on-going disaster. "COVID-19 has triggered the deepest global recession since the 1930s with 235 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2021 (*Global Humanitarian overview*)".

Over the last seventeen months, the expertise and professionalism of the NGO community – national and international – in responding to COVID-19 has stood out. This special edition of the VOICE out loud gathers examples from VOICE members' projects in response to the pandemic. It merges desk research with member interviews and highlights the relevance of NGOs in times of crisis, and the importance of the humanitarian principles for these NGOs in their responses.

The pandemic has brought exceptional challenges to the delivery of humanitarian aid, and in the movement of staff within and between countries. It has also disrupted 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 and confinement restrictions both at headquarter and local levels. Consequently, working in countries already affected by conflicts and natural disasters became even more challenging.

Despite all of these challenges, humanitarian NGOs, together with local and national partners, have been at the forefront of the pandemic response. They have continued to deliver life-saving aid in Europe and abroad while trying to ensure crisis-affected people, staff and partners' security and safety. They have demonstrated their ability to adapt themselves to serve their mission in highly effective ways. Guided by the imperative to reduce suffering and save lives among the most vulnerable and marginalised communities worldwide, they showed great innovation and creativity in continuing to operate, support partners and ensure access to those most in need. One of these initiatives, the Réseau Logistique Humanitaire (RHL), fostering joint procurement and co-management of the supply chain, was central to the setting up of the EU humanitarian air bridge that was financially supported by Member States and the EU Commission.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over and there is growing awareness of its contribution to a record level of need!

Despite its global impact, the poorest and most at-risk population are those most affected by COVID-19's consequences. The pandemic, combined with the climate crisis and the increased impact of armed conflicts, have exacerbated humanitarian needs, pushing them to a record level. Tragically for affected communities, the gap between these needs and the level of funding available to address them is now also at a record level.

The three recommendations of the High-Level Panel [report](#) on humanitarian financing - shrinking the level of humanitarian needs, strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of aid, and deepening and broadening the resource base for humanitarian action – are now more relevant than ever. Recognising the challenges that humanitarian NGOs were facing on the ground, in 2020 donors greatly increased the flexibility and simplified the rules around grant management, showing that such flexibility is possible when there is acceptance that the need to allow this exists.

At our General Assembly in May 2021, VOICE members approved a policy resolution calling on the EU and its Member States to make the revived global humanitarian initiative, "Grand Bargain 2.0", a real turning point in the humanitarian aid system by stepping up efforts towards harmonisation and simplification, localisation and quality funding.

The EU, collectively the biggest global humanitarian donor, plays a key role in supporting vulnerable people around the world and in addressing the systemic and growing shortfall in global humanitarian funding. We call on the EU to use this unique role to promote structural changes and innovative ways to address these increasing challenges and gaps, and ensure that the commitment in the SDGs to leave no one behind is met.

Without creative, concerted, and collective action, my fear is that the gap between humanitarian needs and the resources to address them will continue to grow, leaving an ever greater number of people in acute risk.

Dominic Crowley
VOICE President

Disclaimer

The idea for this VOICE Out Loud special edition emerged from our regular monitoring of VOICE members' activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and from a dedicated COVID-19 page on the VOICE website, which includes statements, news and other documents highlighting examples of our members' work related to the pandemic. Such a range of practical responses provided a good opportunity to demonstrate the high level of professionalism, flexibility and adaptability of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in dealing with sudden onset crisis, and we wanted to share these with a broader audience.

To offer a global overview, we tried to look at the whole VOICE membership. However, in this issue, we decided to focus on a selected collection from our (*English language*) NGO members' websites. Our aim was to illustrate the diversity and multitude of sectors and countries in which our members are engaged. This web-based review was carried out between August and October 2020; information and figures included in this report are taken from that period.

An extensive list of references to the literature reviewed is provided. Readers are also encouraged to consult [the VOICE members' website](#) to discover many more programmes and resources.

VOICE wishes to thank all of the members who have been interviewed for this report and who have participated indirectly to this VOICE Out Loud publication, as well as those who have contributed images of their work. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all members for their daily work supporting the most vulnerable.

(Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of VOICE member organisations).

STANDING UP FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE: A MORAL IMPERATIVE

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

“The pandemic affects us all. But, in this time of crisis, it is the poorest and most vulnerable who are at greatest risk. We must respond in solidarity!”

MALTESER INTERNATIONAL

Humanitarian NGOs strive to reduce suffering and save lives among the most marginalised communities in the world. These NGOs are present and active in most on-going crises – providing emergency relief to people in need during natural disasters, protracted crises and armed conflicts. Worldwide, NGOs implement the majority of humanitarian aid.

Humanitarians share an active belief in the value of human life. Aid workers are highly skilled professionals, guided by underpinning values that have been universally agreed upon and a common drive for health, safety, dignity and justice. NGOs, in particular, are not only at the forefront of distributing aid and offering technical solutions, such as food, clean water and shelter, but they are protecting vulnerable people with medical and psychological care, as well as providing education in emergencies, livelihood programmes, preparedness and other supporting services.

Humanitarian NGOs witness and dare to confront the complexity of human distress and essential needs, particularly those of the vulnerable groups who are mostly left behind in terms of social protections, rights and dignity. Through their engagement, humanitarians invite us to constantly think about what it means to be human and part of a shared humanity, and to rethink the notion of public good and well-being for all.

NGOs played a decisive role in contributing to a collective and timely acknowledgement of the threat posed to the most at-risk populations by alerting the world to the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis and its impacts. They played a very significant role in coming together and organising responses to tackle the pandemic. They quickly reacted and adapted to ensure a timely response to this complex and devastating new crisis. Thanks to NGOs' local knowledge and their proximity to the most adversely affected communities, they have proven invaluable in response to the pandemic.

Humanitarian NGOs often share their expertise and values with policy-makers. One of the first actions taken in response to the pandemic was to start strong and consistent advocacy, based on evidence and in-depth research. NGOs disseminated key policy recommendations to governments, donors and policy-makers, urgently calling for ambitious and massive political action to protect the most vulnerable people worldwide.

“It is our duty as humanitarians to alert public opinion and governments about the enormous potential impact of COVID-19 on the poorest and most fragile countries, where hundreds of millions of the most vulnerable already face humanitarian and sanitary crises.”

ACTED

KEY IN HUMANITARIAN NGOS' RESPONSIVENESS: **ADAPTABILITY**

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

In an already dire environment, with a record level of humanitarian needs generated by conflicts and natural disasters fuelled by climate change, NGOs have risen to the challenge to meet the new challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of operational challenges, they had to face unanticipated challenges with a significant impact on running programmes and coordinating staff, financial systems and planning, security and communication.

The global supply and transport chains moving humanitarian goods and personnel have been hugely disrupted because of border closures, drastic reductions in air traffic, restrictive measures on imports and exports and soaring costs. The pandemic has led to the evacuation of many humanitarian workers and to the confinement both at headquarters and local levels, making it much more difficult to work in countries already affected by conflicts and natural disasters.

The space for principled humanitarian action also became even more challenging, with many restrictions limiting freedom of movement and humanitarian access. In many places around the world, this has threatened NGOs' ability to ensure the protection of vulnerable people and has further restricted the beneficiaries' access to basic needs.

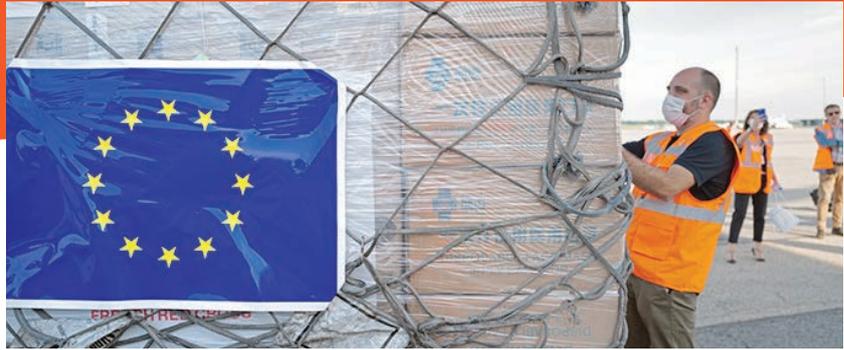
The COVID-19 pandemic has required existing humanitarian interventions to be adapted and interventions have often needed to be redesigned to prevent and reduce transmission of the virus while continuing the provision of essential services. Building on decades of experience and informed by both their local partners and rapid needs assessments among affected communities, many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have adapted their programming in response to the restrictions created by COVID-19. They have retrained staff and repurposed facilities to respond to the specific needs in each situation:

- DanChurchAid (DCA) teams, for example, were forced to change the way they work and shifted funds to upcoming emergency relief efforts related to victims of coronavirus. As stated in the report *How DCA reacts to the Global Crisis*, water, sanitation and hygiene as well as cash activities became standard responses to meet needs on the ground in Iraq. DanChurchAid was not carrying out any of these activities in Iraq before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In eastern Ukraine, where conflict has had a significant impact on the mental health of the population, Malteser International's psychosocial support services have been adapted to the lockdown measures. As mentioned in the Malteser International [webpage dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), several telephone helplines were opened to ensure service access and continuity for people with mental health conditions and new resources were developed for citizens and health professionals to help them better cope with the psychological stress caused by the pandemic.
- [INTERSOS's response to the pandemic](#) immediately moved in two directions: ensuring the continuity of ongoing humanitarian projects and identifying new specific interventions to support the COVID response. While the ongoing interventions in the areas of health, access to water and hygiene and protection were adapted to the new conditions, the new objectives were: to control the pandemic, through prevention and support to local health systems; and to respond to the secondary effects, through protection interventions and support for the living conditions of people affected by humanitarian crises.

“COVID-19 has arrived at a time of unprecedented global need, with a record 168 million people already requiring humanitarian assistance at the beginning of this year.”

[CONCERN WORLDWIDE](#)

In addition to allocating their own funds, raised by members of the public and from the private sector, NGOs obtained more flexibility from many of their donors – by informing institutional donors about the impact of COVID-19 on their programmes – and managed to pivot activities and reallocate funds where they were most needed.



Humanitarian material being loaded onto an aircraft of the European Union Humanitarian Air Bridge bound for Bangui, Central African Republic © EU, 2020

> The EU Humanitarian Air Bridge – initiated by NGOs

To respond to the logistical constraints and the absence of commercial flights, the [EU Humanitarian Air Bridge](#) initiative, funded by the European Union, was set up at the beginning of May 2020 in close coordination with the Humanitarian Logistics Network (initiated by seven VOICE members – ACTED, Action Contre la Faim, Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion, Médecins du Monde, Oxfam Intermón, Plan International, Solidarités International – together with la Croix-Rouge Française and Première Urgence Internationale). NGOs were essential in the design and coordination of this initiative, mapping out the transport needs of more than 50 aid organisations.

Focusing on the most hard-to-reach areas, the Humanitarian Air Bridge was critical for the delivery of medical equipment needed for the coronavirus response, to sustain the flow of humanitarian supplies and to facilitate the movement of humanitarian staff to the most vulnerable countries.

The Air Bridge (which started in May and it is still ongoing) has organised around 70 flights and delivered more than 1,100 tonnes of vital medical and humanitarian equipment, ranging from nutritional support and flood response equipment to personal protection equipment and a fully-fledged field laboratory for COVID-19 testing. The flights also transported more than 1,700 medical and humanitarian staff and other passengers.

Flights went to 20 countries: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Nigeria, Peru, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Venezuela and Yemen, and also delivered 500,000 COVID-19 testing kits for the African Union.

To make the best use of the logistical resources available, the Air Bridge was implemented in coordination with and in a complementary manner to the UN Common Services managed by the World Food Programme (WFP). Altogether, these special flights transported more than 21,000 health and humanitarian personnel on behalf of 325 organisations into affected countries.

PROTECTING THOSE WHO ARE MOST AT RISK

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19



In Nigeria's Borno State, 1,400 adolescent school girls were provided with dignity kits to help them manage their periods during the lockdown.
© Nubwa Ibrahim (Plan staff), Plan International

“Ensuring protection of populations is a core objective of humanitarian action”

DG ECHO

International humanitarian NGOs are often the essential providers of humanitarian aid and social assistance in fragile contexts. Confronted with the critical threat to the health, safety, security, psychological well-being and dignity of the populations most at risk in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, INGOs are specifically addressing their fundamental protection needs.

While the overall mission of some of the VOICE members is focused on protecting and supporting specific groups of vulnerable people – such as refugees, internally displaced people and migrants, women, children, elderly people or people with disabilities – all humanitarian NGOs protect the most fragile people on the basis of the highest needs and levels of vulnerability. The response of humanitarian NGOs to COVID-19 highlights the importance of the values of solidarity and inclusion.

PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They have lost their jobs at a higher rate than men and many economic sectors dominated by women have been hit harder than male-dominated sectors. Women are also carrying out the majority of unpaid care work, working additional hours every day because of the pandemic, taking care of sick family members and looking after children. It is estimated that the fall out of the COVID-19 pandemic will be detrimental for women and girls around the globe for decades. The pandemic is also setting back social, economic and educational development for women and girls, threatening their health and heightening existing inequalities and all forms of gender-based violence due to the economic insecurity and lockdown measures linked to COVID-19. A sharp increase in potentially deadly unintended pregnancies, child marriages, sexual abuse and severely restricted access to vital sexual and reproductive health information and services have already been reported in multiple countries worldwide.

> EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

CARE Rapid Gender Analysis report – the first report recommending changes based on women’s voices

Through 37 Rapid Gender Analyses and 14 additional needs assessments, CARE asked more than 6,200 women and 4,000 men in 38 countries about the biggest impact COVID-19 has had on their lives, what they were doing to meet this global challenge themselves and what they needed during the pandemic.

This research compared global quantitative data about the priorities of men and women as well as providing rich details about each context, allowing a better understanding of the specific challenges different people were facing. It showed the power of listening to the voices of women and girls to design more effective responses.

Based on these important insights, CARE proposed a list of recommendations for all decision-makers, working on COVID-19 issues to inform not only new COVID-19 plans, but also the ways decision-makers are adapting their existing relief efforts and shaping their recovery strategies.

“A survey of Afghan health staff by German NGO Johanner International Assistance and its local partners found women have less access to healthcare and testing, while maternal care and vaccinations have fallen. The research found some clinics have closed or scaled back due to fear of the coronavirus, while special screening for women was only available in half of the surveyed health facilities” (*The New Humanitarian*, 11 June 2020).

Plan International highlighted the fact that health emergencies affect groups differently. Plan conducted an extensive study focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls from 14 countries including Brazil, Ghana, India, Spain and the USA. The report *Halting Lives: the impact of COVID-19 on girls* shows that women and girls face unique challenges because of their age and gender and the potentially devastating long-term consequences of the pandemic. In fact, 95% of respondents said the pandemic had had a negative impact on their lives.

In June 2020, ActionAid published the *COVID-19: A woman-led response* briefing paper on gender-based violence in seven countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that, whilst domestic violence has surged worldwide, services across the globe are being cut or closed, leaving women at risk.

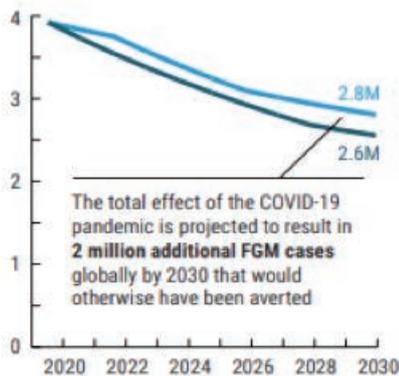
NGOs are putting a strong focus – through gender-nuanced, inclusive and effective impact analysis – on meeting the needs of women and girls and empowering them in all aspects of programming. The Norwegian Refugee Council, for instance, together with UN Women and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), has ensured that plans to combat gender-based violence are included in the response plan for refugees and migrants in Colombia and in the global COVID-19 humanitarian response plan¹. Overall, humanitarians are working with women of all ages to promote their rights to protection, access to health – including sexual and reproductive health – as well as to counter all forms of toxic unequal social norms, intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV).

1. <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/a-snapshot-of-our-covid-19-response/>

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN & GIRLS

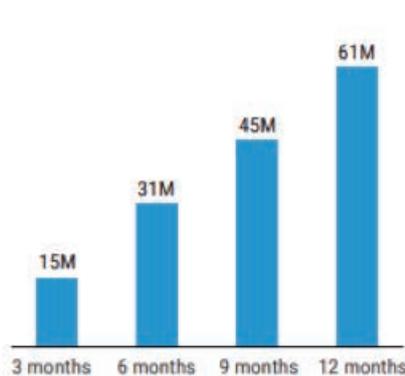
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ENDING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Projected number of global cases (million)



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ENDING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

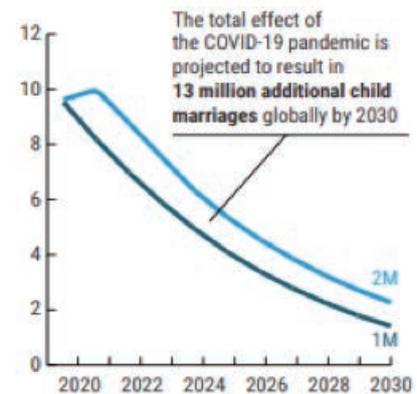
Projected cases of gender based violence for every 3 months of global lockdown



— With COVID-19 — Without COVID-19

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Projected number of global cases (million)



Source: UNFPA, with contributions from Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University (USA) and Victoria University (Australia)

In fact, the de-prioritisation and suspension of essential protection services for women and girls – compounded by restrictions on mobility, lack of information, increased isolation and fear – have resulted in amplified challenges for women and girls accessing life-saving GBV services. In response, many NGOs have integrated gender-based violence prevention and support to survivors throughout their COVID-19 responses. For example:

- Oxfam and CARE, together with UNICEF and UNFPA, are building and extending community networks to raise awareness of protection risks to women and girls, to identify cases of GBV and other violations, and to support responses².
- In Bangladesh, ActionAid is providing psychosocial support and GBV case management support in its COVID-19 awareness programme in designated Rohingya camps through trained Rohingya Women Volunteers and frontline women staff from ActionAid's Women Safe Spaces³.

Due to the pandemic and the increase in the rate of violence against women, organisations have integrated **women's mental health and psychosocial support** into their programmes. The humanitarian response in Gaza provides a concrete example of this:

- Before COVID-19 arrived in Gaza, people were already facing huge mental pressures. Christian Aid's local partner in Gaza, Women's Affairs Center, has been providing services such as emotional support and legal counselling to vulnerable women living in Gaza remotely via phone and WhatsApp, and is running an emergency hotline for survivors of sexual and physical violence⁴.

- War Child is working with its local partner organisations to uphold the social and emotional well-being of families across Gaza⁵. They are adapting psychosocial support and awareness-raising activities for delivery over radio and printed materials. War Child teams are actively working to support caregiver well-being – including through a series of video animations to support both parents and children to manage stress and difficult emotions. Parents can also access stress-reduction resources via mobile phones as part of the Caregiver Support Intervention.

“In recent years, the global community has made significant gains in protecting children from violence. We must not allow those gains to be lost during the current turmoil.”

TOGETHER TO #ENDVIOLENCE:
LEADERS' STATEMENT

- Six game-changing actions to End Violence Against Children

PROTECTING AND PROVIDING EDUCATION TO CHILDREN

The COVID-19 pandemic poses immediate and long-lasting threats to the rights and future of children. It is the most at-risk children who will be hit the hardest by this pandemic and who are of particular concern: refugees, migrants, internally displaced children and those who have been deprived of liberty, who are living on the street

2. <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Weekly%20GHRP%20Achievements%20-%202022%20February%202021.pdf>

3. https://actionaid.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/creating_lasting_impact-the_power_of_women-led_localised_responses_to_covid-19.pdf

4. https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-07/Keeping-Hope-Alive-Conflict-Peace-IOPT-case-study-Jul2019-J126045_0.pdf

5. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/war-child-covid-19-threatens-fresh-crisis-gaza>

or in conflict-affected areas, and children with disabilities. Humanitarian NGOs warn that the heightened risk of physical and psychological violence, exploitation and abuse – as well as the dramatic consequences for children's health protection and education – will have a far-reaching impact on their future. In the very short term, as food programmes have been drastically underfunded, it was estimated that an additional 10,000 children per month would die in 2020 from malnutrition as a consequence of the pandemic, and there was expected to be a 14% rise in cases of severe child malnutrition, bringing the number of children under five years old with acute malnutrition to 54 million⁶.

School closures have impacted more than 1.5 billion children around the globe. The situation for the most at-risk children is aggravated by their lack of access to the safe space and services that schools provide, such as nutritious food and health support schemes, as well as access to school friends, teachers and social workers. Schools are places that protect children, provide stability and offer a sense of routine, and where children can feel safe.



COVID-19 awareness campaign performed by community volunteers in September 2020. During the training PAH provided each volunteer with PPE (face mask, gloves and sanitizer). © Polish Humanitarian Action

> EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

Save the Children Report – *Protect a generation* the largest and most comprehensive survey of children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic

Save the Children launched a global survey reaching more than 8,000 children and 17,000 parents and caregivers in 37 different countries, to capture their experiences and understand how children's lives have been changed during the pandemic. It is the backbone of Save the Children's call for action aimed at global and national leaders to come together to take action to protect a generation of children and build back better for future generations.

They call on governments, donors, multilateral organisations and all other stakeholders to take action to ensure that all children:

- Have access to strong, resilient and equitable health and nutrition systems that continue to deliver routine services;
- Have access to learning whilst out of school, and are able to return to school when it is safe to do so;
- Have access to inclusive and resilient social protection schemes;
- Are protected from violence and have access to child protection services, including gender-based violence and mental health services;
- Are listened to and involved in decision-making processes, as enshrined under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Faced with supporting thousands of vulnerable children who were denied their fundamental right to an education, humanitarian NGOs found many ways to ensure access to education in some of the world's most challenging places. While providing alternative means for

remote learning – whether from homes, settlements or tents – they also supported an enabling environment for supporting parents, caregivers and teachers to provide proper care and protection.

6. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31648-2/fulltext?rss=yes](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31648-2/fulltext?rss=yes)

➤ In Jordan, War Child is working with Jordanian and refugee children and their families to ensure they can continue to learn safely. They have developed an early years home-school programme, and parents receive weekly WhatsApp exercises that teach them positive parenting strategies, how to deal with the stress, fear and insecurity that the crisis brings, and how to best communicate within their families⁷.

➤ In Uganda, FIDA is supporting families to afford to buy the newspaper that includes lessons from the government three times a week, as well as additional school materials⁸.

Humanitarians are also using innovative solutions to reach children in unique circumstances:

➤ In Ethiopia, Save the Children is operating a camel library, which means that children in remote locations can keep learning throughout the pandemic⁹. Each of the 21 camels can carry 200 storybooks at a time, and at the time of writing, they were supporting 22,000 children across 33 villages.

➤ In two Syrian refugee centres in Gaziantep, Turkey, Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) has developed a system based on the concept of distance education to allow 200 children to continue learning activities at home. Through WhatsApp and an online platform specifically developed by TSF technicians, children can continue learning about different subjects such as Arabic, Maths and Computer Science. TSF local staff regularly send resources, exercises and video tutorials to the children. Contact remains constant and feedback on the children's work is provided on a regular basis¹⁰.

PROTECTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THE ELDERLY

The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that a people-focused approach is imperative. Inclusion of people with disabilities in the COVID-19 response and recovery is a vital part of achieving the pledge to leave no one behind. People with disabilities are more likely to be poorer, socially excluded and have underlying health factors that increase the risks linked to the coronavirus. On top of that, they have reduced access to healthcare services and rehabilitation.

Caring for the elderly is equally important. For example:

➤ In Ukraine, approximately 23% of the population are aged 60 or above. Almost all of them have at least one chronic illness, making them extremely vulnerable to



Save the Children staff member Sauda, is posing for a portrait at Save the Children's mobile clinic in Mvepi refugee settlement. ©Save the children

COVID-19. To minimise social contacts for the elderly living near the frontline, Polish Humanitarian Action's assistance is delivered directly to the homes of those in need, while adhering to all safety measures¹¹. The seniors have been receiving food parcels and hygiene products, among other things.

➤ In Mexico, ADRA distributed thousands of antibacterial gel bottles to people over 65 with chronic diseases and other special needs¹². Volunteers also distributed information flyers and 5,000 specially marked hand sanitizers to older people, health professionals and patients in hospitals.

➤ In Georgia, ASB (Workers' Samaritan Federation) provided food and medicines to the elderly, so they could avoid shopping and minimise risks of infection¹³.

PROTECTING DISPLACED POPULATIONS

Worldwide, nearly 82.4 million people are currently forcibly displaced by war, violence, persecution and climate change (According to the UNHCR's latest annual [Global Trends report](#)). Refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and migrants – today making up more than 1% of the world's population – are among the most vulnerable people in the world and were already facing a massive and complex emergency before the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

In addition to health and protection challenges, forcibly displaced people in fragile contexts are disproportionately affected by the secondary impact of the pandemic, having lost their means of livelihoods and often also

“Ensuring children can continue to learn during the pandemic, no matter their access to technology, must be central to the COVID-19 response in fragile contexts.”

[INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE](#)

7. <https://www.warchildholland.org/stories-of-children/laith/>

8. <https://www.fida.info/en/news/news/education-during-the-time-of-covid-19-in-uganda/>

9. <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/covid-19-camel-library-takes-remote-learning-new-levels>

10. <https://www.tsfi.org/en/our-missions/disaster-response/covid-19/covid-19-distance-education-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-gaziantep>

11. <https://www.pah.org.pl/en/coronavirus/>

12. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/adra-launches-more-37-projects-worldwide-respond-pandemic-and-help-communities-recover>

13. <https://www.asb.de/en/relief-and-welfare/care-elderly>

➤ EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

Handicap International / Humanity & Inclusion (HI) report – COVID-19 in humanitarian context: no excuses to leave persons with disabilities behind!

This report is based on evidence, including testimonies, collected by Humanity and Inclusion programmes in 19 countries. It aims to illustrate how the COVID-19 crisis has triggered disproportionate risks and barriers for men, women, boys and girls living with disabilities in humanitarian settings. It highlights recommendations for humanitarian actors, to enhance inclusive action, aligned with existing guidance and learnings on disability inclusion.

lacking access to adequate living standards including housing, food, water and sanitation, education and health services.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, humanitarian organisations have raised concerns about people living in overcrowded refugee camps and in densely populated urban settings without adequate sanitation and with poor access to healthcare.

NGOs immediately pointed out the pressing need for international cooperation to respond to the myriad socio-economic impacts, including for host countries and communities. Among the many recommendations, NGOs strongly advocated for the inclusion of displaced populations in public health responses and social safety nets, underlining that their situation is not a temporary phenomenon.

- Danish Refugee Council (DRC) launched its first ever global appeal for a total of US\$ 75 million to respond to the immediate impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and support economic recovery for displacement-affected populations and host communities in 37 countries. Programmes included raising awareness of COVID-19 risks and prevention methods, sustaining adequate camp management and water and sanitation assistance, stepping up protection services, basic needs support and assistance to economic recovery.
- Since 2012, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has been working in Yemen, currently the largest man-made humanitarian crisis in the world. In a country in which 80% of the population need emergency relief and humanitarian assistance, IRC teams are delivering urgent healthcare and nutrition to those displaced by

the war and people living in remote, hard-to-reach areas. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, IRC has been supporting health facilities with essential drugs and medical supplies, training staff in cholera treatment, and providing reproductive healthcare to pregnant women and new mothers¹⁴. IRC is also providing educational opportunities for millions of out-of-school children. At the advocacy level, IRC is calling for improved humanitarian access and open air and seaports, for a country-wide ceasefire and is calling on the international community to help achieve a lasting peace in Yemen.

- Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa – approximately 1.4 million – who are primarily fleeing war and violence from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finn Church Aid (FCA) works in the education sector in the two largest settlements: Bidibidi in the north and Kyaka in the southwest of Uganda, which together are home to over 250,000 refugees¹⁵. Working together with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and with funding from the EU and Education Cannot Wait, FCA distributed 1,403 radios and 141,825 home learning packages to learners in refugee settlements in South-Western Uganda and the West Nile region.

➤ EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

Norwegian Refugee Council report – Downward Spiral: the economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees and displaced people

This report demonstrates the devastating economic impact of public health measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities affected by conflict and displacement.

It is based on a survey of 1,400 people affected by conflict and displacement in eight countries, and more detailed surveys and needs assessment in a total of 14 countries.

The report calls on political leaders, prioritising the lives and livelihoods of the world's conflict-affected people in international and national economic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. It makes recommendations to all stakeholders – including international financial institutions, national governments as well as aid organisations - for the inclusion of refugees, displaced people and other vulnerable groups in their programmes to fight against the pandemic and its consequences.

14. <https://www.rescue.org/country/yemen>

15. <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/finn-church-aid-innovative-approaches-bring-refugee-children-back-school-uganda>

HARNESSING EXISTING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HEALTH EMERGENCIES WORLDWIDE

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19



Interos COVID-19 Response in Rome. © Martina Martelloni/INTERSOS

“We have the benefit of decades of experience in containing epidemics, such as outbreaks in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and DR Congo during the Ebola crisis, as well as cholera epidemics in Haiti, Zimbabwe and other countries.”

WELTHUNGERHILFE

NGOs have longstanding operational experience in responding to public health emergencies and their expertise is informed by crucial lessons learned from past epidemics. This includes the importance of early community engagement, the implementation of measures that are sensitive to local contexts, and working in coalitions to improve information sharing and the ability to coordinate their work at a regional and country-level.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, NGOs drew on their knowledge from dealing with previous health crises – such as Ebola, Zika and cholera – to rapidly create an effective response to fight COVID-19 in affected countries in the global south as well as in Europe. In particular, Tearfund and World Vision scaled up structures that were already in place for the Ebola response. They collaborated with local partners and faith leaders to broadcast messages of protection and hope on radio stations.

> Humanitarian NGOs deploying their experience in EU countries

- Italy has been one of the countries that has been most adversely affected by the health crisis. Cesvi started immediately to deliver aid in Bergamo and Milan, two of the cities with the highest number of COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations. The Cesvi Emergency Team, a group of professionals working in emergency contexts worldwide, was deployed to coordinate local organisations and volunteers in monitoring and supporting those who were most in need. The organisation also donated protective equipment, ventilators and other medical equipment to hospitals and nursing homes in Bergamo¹⁶. In addition, Cesvi supported the elderly and other vulnerable people with social and healthcare assistance at home, and with basic services like food or medicines.

INTERSOS, also in Italy, activated an extraordinary COVID-19 preventive intervention to halt the spread of the virus within the most marginalised communities¹⁷. They strengthened their mobile medical units in areas of social exclusion such as settlements with no basic services, including electricity and running water in Rome, in the Province of Foggia and in Crotona. The organisation carried out medical visits to identify suspicious cases and conduct health information sessions on COVID-19 prevention measures.

- In Belgium, Médecins du Monde (MdM) supported extremely poor people who had no access to healthcare. For instance, MdM medical teams worked in eight centres for homeless people in Brussels and Antwerp and provided medical and psychological assistance in places that had been temporarily opened to homeless people as well as daycare centres¹⁸. In Antwerp, MdM opened a new host centre for sick homeless people. Furthermore, in May 2020, the Belgian Government asked MdM to provide COVID-19 testing for the most vulnerable people in Brussels.
- In the Czech Republic, People in Need (PIN) provided assistance to vulnerable communities. They first distributed more than 11,000 respirators to 60 local organisations in seven regions. Throughout the country, they distributed food aid packages to people without an adequate income to meet their basic needs as a result of the pandemic. PIN also provided counselling services to people who had lost their jobs, self-employed people, single mothers and others without access to funds, and they helped them with the processing of applications and documents. PIN field social workers were able to restore aid to socially disadvantaged families¹⁹.
- In Spain, Caritas strengthened its services to accompany older people who were both living at home or in a residential home²⁰. They addressed problems related to isolation, change in lifestyle, loneliness and fear of contagion through telephone monitoring, delivery of meals at home, facilitating the purchase of food and medicine, rubbish collection, disinfection of homes and they also helped to bridge the digital divide and overcome loneliness.

In the midst of all of this, NGOs also ensured the protection of aid workers against the backdrop of many operational and financial challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organisations implemented measures to protect their frontline staff and partners, helping them to adhere to social distancing and hygiene measures.

“Every country team is adapting to the challenges this crisis will demand, but we will make sure that local staff and aid teams on the ground put their safety first in order to continue delivering help where it is needed most.”

CAFOD

16. <https://www.cesvi.eu/news/cesvi-is-to-deliver-more-than-670000-individual-protective-devices-and-urgent-medical-equipment-for-bergamo/>

17. <https://www.intersos.org/en/covid-19-emergency/>

18. <https://medecinsdumonde.be/articles/covid-19-les-activites-de-medecins-du-monde-a-la-cote-belge>

19. <https://www.clovektivisni.cz/en/we-help-the-most-affected-of-economic-impacts-of-the-covid-19-epidemic-in-the-czech-republic-6556gp>

20. <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/europe/spain/>

MEETING THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY COVID-19 WORLDWIDE

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19



As the risk of COVID-19 continues threatening the most vulnerable communities in Iraq, NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council team keeps supporting people in hard to reach areas. © NRC

“Trócaire’s central approach to programming is our partnership approach which we have developed and honed over the last forty-six years. This delivery model uniquely positions us to deliver a rapid and coherent response to the COVID-19 crisis through working with our established networks of local partners, including women-centred organisations. Together we can implement a response in a context where international access is extremely limited.

TROCAIRE

Emergency responses to deal with the most pressing aspects of the pandemic has been critical in terms of saving lives and protecting the most vulnerable. This is even more essential for countries lacking the technical, financial and human resources to address such a pandemic.

NGOs’ operational experience combined with their range of professional expertise, from large and multipurpose organisations to smaller and more specialised ones, gives them the agility to act for the most vulnerable in the most challenging contexts.

In the fight against the pandemic, local partners have been essential in the COVID-19 response. For instance, with the disruption of flights, some INGOs were able to access some countries only through their local staff on the ground. Often it was only thanks to local partners’ assessments and expertise that NGOs were able to continue their life-saving work.

SPREADING INFORMATION AND HEALTH MESSAGING ADAPTED TO EACH CONTEXT

Raising awareness about the virus and how to prevent its spread is of utmost importance from the beginning of a pandemic. Clear and accurate communication is therefore key for any successful and effective prevention strategy. Hence, humanitarian NGOs have disseminated consistent messages through multiple channels of communication:

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Caritas produced adverts for radio and television, disseminated informative mobile phone messages and connected with people on social media. They put posters in parishes and at strategic points in the city, as well as distributing leaflets²¹.
- In Somalia, to maximise the impact and outreach, Action Against Hunger worked with the Ministry of Health to make sure that vital information on preventative measures, such as handwashing, was reaching vulnerable communities. This included radio announcements, educational leaflets, banners and text messages²².
- Welthungerhilfe has been supporting its local partner organisations in all countries to create, acquire and deploy educational materials in local languages²³. These materials include posters, radio broadcasts, loudspeaker announcements and commentary on social media. An educational comic was produced in over 20 languages and distributed in various countries. COVID-19 education is being integrated into ongoing hygiene training.

“Faith plays a role in the lives and behaviours of 84% of the world’s population.

Faith leaders can exercise considerable influence in many communities during the current COVID-19 crisis. They are trusted community leaders with vital social, access and spiritual capital. As learnt during the Ebola crisis, they can play an essential role in sharing accurate fact-based messages, combating myths, and engaging within their communities to address harmful or unhealthy practices.”

WORLD VISION

NGOs’ collaboration with trusted community members – such as teachers, traditional chiefs, religious and public figures – as well as their engagement with women leaders and youth groups is essential for efficient outreach to remote communities. The spread of COVID-related misinformation across the crisis-affected countries remained a significant concern for humanitarian NGOs at the end of 2020.



In Somalia, CESVI is distributing personal protective equipment to frontline staff and is working to raise awareness of the importance of hygiene and prevention. © CESVI

BUILDING HANDWASHING STATIONS, PROVIDING SOAP, SANITISER AND HYGIENE KITS

Regular handwashing is essential to slowing the spread of coronavirus. However, more than 40% of the world’s population do not have access to basic handwashing facilities. Millions of people globally lack adequate access to clean water and cannot afford to buy soap or cleaning agents to help protect themselves from the virus. Humanitarian NGOs are deploying their extensive expertise in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to target the most deprived areas and displaced populations. Their support has been key to providing the most vulnerable people the ability to access the means to practice good hygiene, particularly in densely populated places.

21. <https://www.caritas.org/2020/07/covid-19-in-democratic-republic-of-congo/>

22. <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/story/fighting-covid-19-around-world>

23. <https://www.welthungerhilfe.org/coronavirus/welthungerhilfe-covid-19-appeal/>



Lydia, NRC Hygiene Promoter showcases hand washing to IDP girl in camps in Nigeria. © Mathilde Vu/Norwegian Refugee Council

For example:

- In Afghanistan, Norwegian Refugee Council ensured that more than 10,000 people who have fled drought and hostilities had access to clean water²⁴. They also distributed soap and hygiene items to more than 6,000 families in Iran, which hosts thousands of Afghan refugees and, as a country, was severely affected by the pandemic.
- In Niger, ACTED has supported soap manufacturing. The first productions fed the stocks of the health centres and was systematically distributed to local communities during COVID-19 awareness sessions²⁵.
- In Burkina Faso, where 780,000 people are internally displaced, Oxfam worked in some of the largest IDP areas ensuring access to safe, clean water and built or repaired more than 100 water points²⁶.

“At the heart of our humanitarian action, access to water and hygiene remains a key issue in this crisis. Without access to water, hygiene and soap, barrier measures against the virus are impossible to apply. Our teams have been reorienting their activities, ensuring that water is available at the most at-risk sites, and integrating awareness campaigns and soap distribution into all their programs around the world.”

SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE

SETTING UP ISOLATION AND TREATMENT CENTRES IN FRAGILE SETTINGS AND MAINTAINING CRITICAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

Humanitarian NGOs are experienced in supporting people living in countries where conflict and crisis have weakened health systems, with chronic shortages of essential drugs and basic medical equipment. When medical facilities were at increased risk of shutting down due to COVID-19, humanitarian NGOs were crucial in terms of delivering critical healthcare in completely unprepared sites, keeping essential medical services running, including for non-COVID-19 needs, as well as supporting local partners and authorities to provide care to affected patients.

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Malteser International offered consulting services to healthcare professionals, provided training on COVID-19 and helped to procure essential medical materials such as masks and respiratory equipment. Isolation units used during the Ebola epidemic were used to treat suspected cases in isolation. Malteser International also conducted simulation exercises with health workers²⁷.
- In Palestine, Médecins du Monde France provided supplies and equipment, including vital medicines, personal protective equipment (PPE) and carried out simulation exercises with hospital primary healthcare staff in preparation for a large-scale COVID-19-outbreak. Médecins du Monde also continues to provide essential emergency medical support in Gaza, including support to help sustain regular primary care services at this critical time, such as mental health and maternal healthcare²⁸.

24. <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/a-snapshot-of-our-covid-19-response/>

25. <https://www.acted.org/en/access-to-water-economic-recovery-acted-acts-in-south-west-niger/>

26. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/water-crisis-burkina-faso-struggle-every-drop>

27. <https://www.malteser-international.org/en/about-us/current-topics/covid-19.html>

28. <https://www.medecinsdumonde.org/en/news/moyen-orient/2020/09/01/covid-19-potential-disaster-gaza>

- In Syria, in the Idlib area that has been subjected to sustained bombings, Telecoms Sans Frontières engaged in increasing the number of vital internet connections between medical centres in support of the medical teams on the ground²⁹.
- In Yemen, Polish Humanitarian Action has rebuilt and equipped a local clinic, which now has access to safe water, medicines, medical supplies and laboratory equipment³⁰.

NGOs are also leveraging their longstanding partnerships and collaborations, working with other organisations and national health authorities to share information about COVID-19, to fill the gaps in existing services as efficiently as possible and to activate preparedness activities across different countries.

- In Sudan, GOAL worked with the government to distribute information and training materials to more rural parts of the country and ensured that 40 healthcare facilities had their capacity increased to implement infection control procedures to benefit more than 340,000 people³¹.
- In Jordan, the Norwegian Refugee Council has been building quarantine housing for Syrian refugees in Azraq camp in cooperation with UNHCR³².
- Save the Children is leading a global consortium aimed at strengthening capacity for responses to major infectious disease outbreaks or pandemics called 'READY'. It builds potential response scenarios to COVID-19 and other major epidemics/pandemic-prone pathogens.



GOAL providing health care and nutritional services in the North Darfur State © GOAL

Today, more than ever, humanitarian NGOs emphasise on the need to continue supporting the networks of local health workers and community agents who are – and will remain – at the heart of prevention mechanisms and alert systems.

“Even in acute crises, international NGOs have to promote and expand existing structures, instead of simply replacing domestic actors. Our network of partners delivers just this kind of sustainable emergency aid. Its goal is to restore independence and autonomy as quickly as possible to people in emergencies.”

MEDICO INTERNATIONAL

29. <https://www.tsfi.org/en/our-missions/disaster-response/covid-19/internet-connections-to-protect-the-syrian-population-from-covid-19>

30. <https://www.pah.org.pl/en/coronavirus/>

31. <https://www.goalglobal.org/countries/sudan/>

32. <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2021/one-year-on-providing-aid-in-a-pandemic/>

TACKLING THE SECONDARY IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a dual set of challenges: a public health emergency resulting from the direct consequences of the virus and, at the same time, a socio-economic crisis resulting from the drastic measures governments have been forced to take to prevent the spread of the disease. COVID-19 is therefore a health, social and economic crisis all at the same time. It is driving many more people into poverty, vulnerability and displacement, creating major suffering. The economic consequences of the pandemic might be more devastating than the disease itself. Livelihoods have been destroyed at an unprecedented rate and COVID-19 is having a severe impact on global hunger levels.

In urban areas, day labour and small businesses are dominant and offer no economic protection to the population, nor do they provide social rights. People are therefore very vulnerable to economic shocks. Imposed closures of shops and markets, as well as restrictions on people's movement, immediately affect the ability of families to meet their basic needs, leading to food insecurity.

> A survey in Senegal by Christian Aid, for example, showed that 85% of households have seen their income fall, and a third are consuming less food ([How the Covid-19 pandemic threatens to push the world's poorest to the brink of survival](#))

> A [Mercy Corps report](#) from June 2020 found that, in the Somali region of Ethiopia, 75% of households had already reduced their food consumption as a result of COVID-19.

> [CARE's gender analysis](#) in Libya showed that women and their children face a greater risk of food insecurity and malnutrition since women are 12 times more likely than men to have lost employment due to the pandemic.

In September 2020, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a [resolution on the response to the COVID-19 crisis](#), which includes the nutritional impact of the pandemic as one of the priorities that needs to be addressed.

While it is the primary role of governments to ensure the right to adequate food for all people, in humanitarian contexts governments are often unable to provide sufficient relief packages or social safety nets. As the COVID-19 pandemic further aggravates this situation, humanitarian organisations have combined the distribution of food and cash assistance with other kinds of support for people to meet their essential needs.

> EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

Action Against Hunger – COVID-19 IMPACT: THE SEEDS OF A FUTURE HUNGER PANDEMIC?

This report is based on evidence collected from Action Against Hunger's programmes worldwide. It examines how COVID-19 exacerbates existing vulnerabilities in different emergency contexts, more specifically with regards to food and nutrition security as well as access to basic services, including water and sanitation.

Highlighting key impacts, trends, and issues that need to be addressed, Action Against Hunger has identified immediate actions and policy commitments that could help to avoid a major hunger crisis. These recommendations will support responses to COVID-19 and the resulting food crisis, and will also mitigate future food security risks from new global shocks (pandemic, climate change, or major conflict) and support long-term recovery.



“NGO partners enable us to deliver quickly and effectively and access areas we would be unable to reach alone. They are often in the unique position of having a long-term presence in, and a deep contextual understanding of, the communities we work with. They allow us to carry out increasingly innovative and multi-dimensional programmes”

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

- In Eastern DRC, CAFOD has provided emergency food, clean water and housing to families who have fled fighting and are vulnerable to coronavirus, as well as offering emergency cash assistance to vulnerable families in urban Kinshasa. While in Syria, they have distributed food, hygiene kits and cash to allow the most vulnerable families to survive lockdown measures³³.
- In Brazil, CESVI supported the operators of the Casa del Sorriso in the favela of Manguinhos in Rio de Janeiro. They activated a door-to-door food delivery service for families who had no opportunity to work due to the lockdown³⁴.
- Norwegian Refugee Council teams were going door-to-door in the city of Cali, Colombia, to help provide food and other essentials for the most vulnerable families, including refugees from neighbouring Venezuela³⁵.

Multipurpose cash transfers made by humanitarian agencies to the most vulnerable communities are a proven and cost-efficient tool in communities where there are no state social protection systems in place. Delivered directly to people in distress, cash transfers allow them to buy what they need while supporting local markets. Cash assistance can support people's basic needs and vital health costs and reduce the risks of spiralling debts and negative coping reactions.

33. <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Emergencies-news/Coronavirus-response>

34. <https://www.cesvi.org/notizie/il-covid-19-in-brasile-interventi-di-cesvi-per-le-famiglie-della-favela-di-manguinhos/>

35. <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2021/one-year-on-providing-aid-in-a-pandemic/>

ENHANCING COMMUNITIES' RESILIENCE

THE ISSUE

THE VALUE OF NGOS' HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

Humanitarian NGOs support communities to sustain themselves both during and beyond the crisis and to preserve and strengthen their resilience to help prevent a complete erosion of livelihoods, the deterioration of human assets and rights, to protect social cohesion and to mitigate the worst consequences of the crisis. NGOs have the deep reach, networks and knowledge to act in places where effective engagement with communities is essential. NGOs coherently address crisis, risk and poverty together.

> EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

World Vision Report – COVID-19 Affershocks: Deadly Waves

This report looks at the findings of surveys, historical trends of pandemics and provides recommendations to prevent or mitigate future waves.

For instance, World Vision surveyed nearly 24,000 men, women and children living in the Asia-Pacific region, and the findings were devastating. Almost 70% of people indicated that their livelihoods had been fully or severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with daily wage workers representing the hardest hit. One-quarter of respondents also had no food stocks left, putting them at risk of hunger.

- > COOPI launched a "Food security and livelihood impact assessment" in nine countries to understand the effects of COVID-19 on the communities in which it operates: DRC, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Iraq, Bolivia, Ecuador and Guatemala. It informed the context-based design of interventions, to preserve livelihoods whilst contributing to the recovery of communities and their long-term economic development.
- > In Bangladesh, ICCO have been supporting some 5,000 ultra-poor farmers and their households facing a severe food crisis as a result of the pandemic to enhance their food security and become more resilient to future shocks³⁶. Agri-inputs, such as vegetables seeds and fertilizers needed for the next cultivation season, have been provided in combination with a skill and awareness programme. Farmers are then able to cultivate their land, to produce their own food and earn some money by selling the products – offering a way to recover their livelihoods.
- > In Ethiopia, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe provided drought-resistant seeds for local communities to plant a vegetable garden and organised training courses on drought-adapted cultivation techniques and nutrition. In addition, local authorities and veterinarians have been supported to vaccinate farm animals³⁷.
- > The "Moving Urban Poor Communities Toward Resilience Project" (MOVE UP) – jointly implemented by Plan International, Action Against Hunger, CARE and ACCORD Inc. in four cities across the Philippines – aimed to enhance urban resilience by creating sustainable livelihoods. A mobile market has been organised for pandemic-affected communities in Cotabato City, supporting people to tap into alternative sources of livelihood and provide affordable, fresh, healthy food for locals self-isolating at home.

NGOs also see recovery as an opportunity to address inequality, exclusion, gaps in social protection systems, the climate crisis and the many other pre-existing fragilities and injustices that have been further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

36. <https://www.icco-cooperation.org/en/news/covid-19-icco-provides-extra-agri-inputs-for-5000-farmers/>

37. <https://www.diakonie-katastrophenhilfe.de/projekte/corona-virus>

- Welthungerhilfe's "Global COVID-19 Programme for Immediate Assistance and Long-Term Development" – in addition to providing emergency assistance – also helps people with reconstruction, following the principle of "building back better", so people are better equipped to deal with future crises. This includes investment in farming, water supply and sanitation, and support for local markets and value chains.

THE NEXUS APPROACH: MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

For a long time, in protracted crises, the divide between different kinds of assistance has been eroded. On the one hand, humanitarian NGOs have extended their activities to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods and to tackle the underlying risks, causes and consequences of a crisis. On the other hand, the multiplication of crises has led originally development-focused NGOs to increase their engagement in humanitarian responses. As a result, most of the VOICE NGO members are dual-mandated and COVID-19 has made the nexus approach more relevant and urgent than ever.

The VOICE report *NGOs' Perspectives on the EU's Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* identifies the current challenges and opportunities of working in a nexus approach from a humanitarian NGO perspective with the aim of supporting NGOs to engage with the EU on this approach.

Through a number of case studies, the evidence base from NGOs' own work demonstrates the advantages of a nexus approach, particularly with regard to retaining a people-centred approach and implementing community resilience. The report also looks at the obstacles of this approach. These include the different procedures, budgets and organisational cultures of humanitarian, development and peace actors.

THE COVID-19 RESPONSE IN THE CONTEXT OF RESILIENCE PROGRAMMES IN AFGHANISTAN

A CLOSER LOOK

> INTERVIEW:

Mission East, Joohee Haleem (Former) HQ Programme Manager Afghanistan / (Current) HQ Programme Manager Syria & Lebanon

COVID-19 has been spreading rapidly in Afghanistan, and communities that are already in a vulnerable situation due to conflict, internal displacement and extreme poverty are particularly at risk.

1. Could you give us an overview of your resilience programme in Afghanistan and the pre-COVID-19 objectives and actions?

Afghanistan is a fragile setting – a protracted crisis where Mission East has been working in since 2001. We were initially providing emergency relief, but now we have been simultaneously providing humanitarian aid and supporting recovery and resilience-building activities. In such a context, the resilience and nexus approaches are particularly well suited. Mission East's multi-sectoral and multi-donor programme in the remote regions of north-eastern Afghanistan is a resilience-building programme that aims to reduce the vulnerabilities of people affected by both recurring conflict and displacements and natural disasters. Mission East focuses on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security, livelihoods, preparedness and response capacity to disasters, as well as cross-cutting civil society capacity building. We are working with local governments, community-based organisations – in particular women-led ones – towards a collective multisector integrated approach. This approach has been intensified over the last 10 to 12 years, so it was already in place before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. How did you integrate the COVID-19 response? Did you experience a lack of funding?

For Afghanistan, Mission East has a multi-year Strategic Partnership Agreement with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DANIDA), which allows flexibility, so we were able to use practically all the emergency response budget for COVID-19 responses without additional approvals. We also had funding from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) country-based pooled funds (CBPF) and the German development agency GIZ, which is funding a multi-year

reforestation programme, and had agreed to provide additional COVID-19 funding. OCHA also allowed us to use some funds left on the winterisation programme. So, although we had to rewrite the applications, under the same grant contract we were able to launch the COVID-19 response in a timely way and respond to the needs. Thanks to the integrated nature of the programme, the same targeted IDPs received hygiene kits from DANIDA funding and cash for food from OCHA funding. It made the response more effective in terms of meeting the most urgent needs. On a more global level, it has not been easy to secure funding for COVID-19 responses as not all donors agreed to redirect earmarked funding and rather opted to wait until access was possible again.

3. Did it disrupt or suspend on-going activities?

We had to postpone some activities, such as specific training on hygiene promotion for children in schools or community-led activities in sanitation. Activities planned for earlier in the year got delayed but they are still happening and are on track.

4. Do you consider that, thanks to the pre-COVID resilience-building activities, Mission East responded better to the COVID-19 threat?

Yes, in the sense that we could pool different donors' funding and target the same groups of people. Also, the fact that IDPs returning to their place of origin could be reached through our mainstream WASH, food security and livelihood programmes was good. At a community level, we already had needs assessments, so we articulated the COVID-19 response to meet the new needs of the same people targeted in the ongoing mainstream programmes. Therefore, we could reach 100% of the

people previously targeted either under the OCHA/CBPF, GIZ or the DANIDA-funded programmes. Thanks to the additional GIZ funds, we were able to plan, for example, the distribution of COVID-19 kits in schools that was not initially planned. We also supported the efforts of the provincial ministries to develop awareness raising materials, printing leaflets and banners, and to respond to their request by providing hand sanitisers, handwashing vessels and essential prevention equipment.

5. Do you consider that the impact of the pandemic might endanger the resilience building approach?

In Afghanistan, people are so often and repeatedly displaced, each time losing their homes, their livelihoods as well as their social networks, and most of IDPs are living in or close to the urban centres. Their daily wage labour was badly affected; with the closure of shops, markets and businesses, they lost their daily income and cannot afford food and have no way to meet their essential needs. COVID-19 definitely adds further vulnerabilities for this conflict-affected displaced population.

6. Do you have programmes specifically supporting women?

Gender is both a cross-cutting issue in Mission East programmes and a specific activity. Women and girls are definitely among the most vulnerable people in the Afghan context. So as a cross-cutting issue – for example, in WASH activities, when building latrines – we care for a dignified and private access for women; in Disaster Risk Reduction we aim to have 20% women in each local CBDRM (Community-Based Disaster Risk Management) Committee. As specific women-focused activities, in food security, we develop kitchen gardening, food processing and nutrition training for women; in livelihood programmes, we target women with no access to banking services or credit facilities and support them in pooling their savings under the Self-Help Group programme. Mission East aims to improve the role of women in production, to make them stronger market actors and to strengthen their decision-making roles. At the household level, men's acceptance grows when incomes are coming in and they may then become more supportive of women in their households.

7. In your opinion, will the COVID-19 response enforce localisation?

In the short term, there is not much change in our programme as we went from suspension during lockdown and then resumed activities as before. On a more fundamental level, it changes things in terms of access and capacity to reach the most vulnerable: we were able to reach the most vulnerable because we have an extensive network of staff with access to communities on the ground. On the whole, access has become more difficult for INGOs working in Afghanistan, both due to growing insecurity and due to the pandemic. Engagement with local partners needs to be looked at in a more structured, strategic manner. The issue also remains whether INGOs and donors are ready to make the transfer of financial responsibility – that would deserve further local capacity building. In anticipation of another crisis like this one, there are definitely lessons to be learned if we want localisation to be taken seriously and if we want to improve the adaptability and flexibility of the humanitarian sector as a whole.

Interviewed by Cecile Muller and Roberta Fadda

November 2020

DIALOGUE WITH INSTITUTIONAL DONORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A CLOSER LOOK

> INTERVIEW:

La Chaîne de l'Espoir (France), Elvira Rodriguez Escudeiro,
Institutional Funding Manager

1. When the COVID-19 crisis hit, did you have to repurpose your on-going humanitarian programmes?

We did not repurpose our on-going programmes, but we had to adapt and adjust them in line with movement restrictions and to include all protective measures for staff, beneficiaries and partners.

Some activities were suspended during the lockdown, some postponed: we had to reschedule our programmes providing surgery, training of surgeons and capacity-building of local medical staff, as the medical team from Europe could not travel. This was extremely difficult.

Other activities could go on while adapting them to the circumstances and to the reduced access: for example, we reorganised our sensitisation sessions to respect distancing, doing them in bigger spaces or with more sessions and fewer people at a time, and we have been including COVID-19-specific items. We also increased distant learning and the use of technologies to make consultation or support to medical practitioners in-country.

2. Did you initiate new COVID-19-specific responses?

Yes, we launched new actions or programmes to respond to the pandemic, both in France and abroad. In partner hospitals and health facilities, we provided trainings, awareness raising, personal protective equipment, drugs, medical devices and also food kits. We developed a specific partnership with Première Urgence Internationale (PUI) to launch mobile clinics in the Paris region, going to the most vulnerable populations that were particularly exposed to COVID-19 – including people living in slums, temporary settlements, squats and homeless people – providing free consultations, essential prevention information, hygiene kits and masks, and orienting them to screening centres when they had symptoms. La Chaîne de l'Espoir (CDE) also provided masks and materials to other international NGOs.

3. What kind of contacts did you have with institutional donors regarding the needs brought by the pandemic? Did you get the required flexibility?

We were in contact with donors since the beginning of the pandemic, both at their request and, as good practice, on our own initiative, to inform them about what was happening with the planned activities, what would be suspended, which activities could be kept going and our adjustments. Donors were flexible as we were all lacking visibility on how the situation was going to develop in the following weeks and months. Donors were quite supportive; they trusted us and gave us time to analyse the situation, adapt and come back to them with further information. They stated that we could reach them on any development, requirement or difficulty we might face. They showed reactivity and also some temporary flexibility on contractual and administrative requirements.

We could use and redirect funding, upon agreement, to include the COVID-19 response. In our case, we mostly included COVID-19-related expenditures in planned budget as other expenses could not be made. And some activities did not generate extra costs such as the inclusion of protection and prevention messages in our existing awareness raising programmes.

To be concrete, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) asked us to keep them informed and we shared our specific contingency plan with them. The French government was also offering support and flexibility. On a case by case basis, they were open to bilateral discussions, which was the most flexible solution to the given circumstances. They were open to discussing options and even possibilities of additional funding.

4. In your opinion, how are and will humanitarian programmes be affected in the near future by the current pandemic?

We are all taking into consideration the new constraints and the consequences driven by the pandemic. Donors also encourage us to think about the situation, its immediate and longer-term impact. They ask us to show how it is being taken into consideration in our ongoing programmes as we are facing further constraints, to make proposals and share with them. Some donors have also changed their rules for the coming year in order to adapt to the pandemic – that will last.

I think COVID-19 will affect the future of humanitarian aid and it is also an opportunity to move forward. Firstly, needs are greater due to both the pandemic itself and to its economic effects on the most vulnerable people. Then it has shown how health systems are key for the well-being of everyone, everywhere. There is also the funding issue: resources are needed even more now than before and we may lack funds to face the situation. In addition, there is the risk of moving resources from external assistance to be used for the economic crisis, meaning a competition between needs.

On a more positive note, it will help to move forward localisation, in particular as regards the role of national staff in responses. Also, in terms of partnerships: it might bring a more diverse, inclusive and balanced partnership between diverse kinds of organisations. And as it has been the case for us, technologies can help to support better international cooperation. Last but not least, in terms of positive change: COVID-19 has shown that we need flexibility both at operational level and from donors, and we need the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.

Interviewed by Cecile Muller and Roberta Fadda

November 2020

THE PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT TO COVID-19 FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

A CLOSER LOOK

> **INTERVIEW:** Médicos del Mundo (Spain), Susana Atienza Borge (Marketing & Fundraising Director)

1. Did Médicos del Mundo (MdM) launch a specific COVID-19 fundraising campaign?

We launched a specific fundraising campaign based on the three pillars of our pandemic response in order to show to the general public MdM's activities.

The first pillar was our work with the main hospitals in the city of Madrid, which was one of the most seriously affected. In the first month, we saw a complete saturation of the health system in Spain as the country had one of the highest rates of infection and more than 15,000 health workers were sick. It was one of the main issues we had to face. Strengthening Infection, Protection and Control (IPC) was essential to avoid the spread of the virus, with a specific focus on the health workers and on setting COVID-19 dedicated areas in the hospitals to allow the rest of the health services to function.

The second pillar was the direct intervention in support of vulnerable communities in 14 Spanish regions where we already worked with migrant populations, women who are victims of gender-based violence, people living in settlements and homeless people who could not adopt protective measures as they have no access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.

The third pillar, developed at a later stage, was based on the international response in the countries where MdM has programmes, with the goal to limit the spread of COVID-19, especially in Latin America.

2. How successful was this fundraising campaign? Was it more successful compared to other campaigns?

We based the campaign on a multi-channel strategy focusing both on the general public and private companies. It has definitely been a great success, with no comparison with any other emergency fundraising campaigns we had launched before. Our regular donors gave as much as they could and we have gained thousands of

new donors, almost 16,000, who saw our work directly on the ground, in the hospitals and with the vulnerable population in Spain. The intervention was perceived as so relevant that we had incredible media coverage: during the first month, we were on the media nearly every day, under the spotlight for being on the ground. That was essential to the impact of the fundraising campaign, not only with the general public but also, for the first time, in reaching both national and international companies that wanted to help the Spanish population, from Germany or the USA, for instance. We are very grateful.

We did not modify our usual communication messages. The only difference was that this time the crisis was happening in Spain. We have always promoted public health systems and universal access to health and our messages were more relevant than ever.

3. Do you feel your donors prioritise solidarity in their home country or equally care for people in the global south?

We were experiencing an unprecedented event that made all of us vulnerable and we all wanted to get out of it through collaboration and mutual aid. Citizens wanted to contribute. They felt powerless for not being able to do anything useful and for this reason, the donations to NGOs have been extraordinary. The fact that MdM mainly works with volunteers as medical personnel and that we engaged in Spain was crucial. Even though Spanish citizens have always been very supportive whenever a catastrophe around the world happened, this time they prioritised their own country because the pandemic has been extremely harmful here. Regarding international support, we underlined the figures to show how COVID-19 was affecting countries where MdM was working; we used many audio and video materials and documentaries to show the realities of people's lives. In the media there was no room for what was happening outside Spain while, for example, the situation in Bolivia, among many other countries, was extremely difficult.

4. What kind of programmes were you able to implement thanks to your campaign?

We had to both adapt our ongoing programmes, especially those with vulnerable populations in order to respond to the new needs, as well as to develop new programmes: we advised the managing team in 10 hospitals in the Madrid area on IPC and on setting up new COVID-19 isolation and test devices. MdM was dealing with emergencies around the world and had never before responded to an emergency in Spain. Our interventions focused on the health of the elder population, as they are more affected, helping in nursing homes.

We had to completely readapt the way we were doing things. For example we had to move people who were working in international emergencies to Spain because they were experts in pandemics. We also trained volunteers through online courses. We really reviewed all available skills to help in the best possible way.

5. Do you inform your donors about what you are doing?

We informed them before, when launching our appeal; we showed that we wanted to respond immediately in Spain based on our experience in health crises in other countries. We sent emails to donors very regularly and published updates on traditional and social media. We are still informing donors at least every two weeks on how the response is going.

6. Did you get other demonstrations of public opinion support in the context of this pandemic?

This is the most beautiful part – citizens' solidarity has been extraordinary, everyone wanted to help. Companies donated sanitary and hygiene materials and food: it was the first time MdM distributed food and water in Spain. We have many other examples of solidarity: music groups have given their copyright, artists gave the money from the sale of paintings, video game competitions were organised in support of MdM. We had many volunteers distributing food and answering the thousands of emergency request calls. It has been fantastic to feel such a sense of solidarity, and all the gratitude and messages of encouragement that we are still receiving. For colleagues on the frontline, facing such a challenging situation, seeing all these gestures really helps.



“NGOs are the expression of Europeans' solidarity as demonstrated by the continuing and overwhelming level of support for humanitarian aid recorded through the Eurobarometer.”

7. Is it thanks to this successful campaign that you managed to be so reactive and responsive?

We knew from the very beginning that we had to intervene but yes, thanks to the additional funds, we were able to do much more. For the fundraising team, it was a real challenge but a very rewarding process as every euro that we received meant more help for people in need. We started with one hospital and back then we had no idea how much we would be able to help! The support we received really helped us to upgrade the intervention and the impact. Now our next goal is to keep supporting the most vulnerable population, both in Spain and abroad. That is why the fundraising campaign is still on-going. Universal access to health is more relevant than ever.

Interviewed by Cecile Muller and Roberta Fadda

November 2020

LOOKING AHEAD

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed fundamental weaknesses in global preparedness, including substantial under-investment in public services and goods, and widespread deficiencies in anticipating and preparing for the incredibly damaging secondary socio-economic impacts.



“COVID-19 is a pandemic that has highlighted global inequality as never before.”

CONCERN WORLDWIDE

> EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

International Rescue Committee – COVID-19 and *Fragile Contexts: Reviving Multilateralism’s Promise to “Leave No One Behind”*

This report, written by the Economist Intelligence Unit, investigates the critical failures of the multilateral system in protecting fragile populations from the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It evaluates fundamental shortcomings of the system across three pivotal areas: (1) an absence of global leadership; (2) insufficient funding; and (3) a lack of co-ordination with regard to information-sharing, public health messaging, supply chain management and humanitarian access.

The report documents how the lack of a co-ordinated global approach to the pandemic has had dire consequences for millions of vulnerable people around the world. Lastly, the paper outlines seven recommendations for both immediate actions to safeguard fragile populations more effectively and to improve long-term crisis preparedness for and resilience to future global crises.

Despite the proliferation of funding appeals – and related difficulties in tracking responses – so far it is clear that COVID-19 emergency funding has been slow to reach people in need and has not yet come close to the scale that the deepening crisis requires. For instance, at the end of 2020, the UN COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan only achieved about 40% of the funding appeal, and in mid-July, the 2021 appeal had been just 25% funded. This significantly lags behind funds raised during previous crises and, as reported by the [Global Humanitarian Overview](#) in December 2020, the gap between requirements and funding is larger than ever.

Overall, donors’ responses have been nationally focused and have prioritised the health response over programmes to address the socio-economic impact. Governments are being squeezed between falling rev-

enues, rising debts and spiralling social needs. It will be extremely hard, particularly for low-income countries, to recover sustainably, and to adopt more ambitious policies on resilience through health and social protection.

There are still many unknowns surrounding COVID-19, but the concerns around increasing hunger and rates of acute poverty are clear. 2020 saw an unprecedented jump in the number of people experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity, an increase of 20 million compared to 2019, bringing the number to 155 million, warns the [Global Report on Food Crisis](#).

According to the World Bank Report [Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020](#): “in 2020, between 88 million and 115 million people could fall back into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic, with an additional increase of between 23 million and 35 million in 2021, potentially bringing the total number of new people living in extreme poverty to between 110 million and 150 million.”

The COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrates that we should be prepared for a new order of crises, and an era in which large-scale systemic risks, shocks and vulnerabilities may overlay and aggravate existing risks and significant long-standing humanitarian needs.

One thing that the pandemic outbreak has also shown is that, as NGOs have been warning for decades, the pre-COVID-19 levels of poverty, inequality and damage to the planet are socially, politically and environmentally unaffordable, and ethically unjustifiable.

The 2020 [Commitment to Reducing Inequality \(CRI\) Index report](#) published by Oxfam and Development Finance International (DFI) demonstrates how countries failed to choose policies to fight inequality. The pandemic has further exposed the scale of inequality across the world, magnified and increased inequalities and is likely to leave most countries far more vulnerable to both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Today, major global organisations (International Monetary Fund – IMF, United Nations, World Health Organisation – WHO, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD, International Labour Organisation – ILO, International Trade Union Confederation – ITUC) are suggesting that the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on the poor shows the need to accelerate measures to fight inequality, both globally and nationally.

> EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

Christian Aid report – *Building back with justice: Dismantling inequalities after COVID-19*

This report highlights the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, on health systems, people's jobs and incomes, exacerbating poverty, hunger and inequalities – impacts that have been multiplied for the world's poorest people.

Christian Aid has used its strength in expert analysis to ask the important questions and challenges us all to think about the role we have in building a better future. This report is a timely contribution to the essential discussion about how we can recover from the biggest global social and economic shock the world has seen for generations and aims to steer strategic and policy direction change.

Christian Aid is calling on governments and multilateral institutions to take action now and proposes a global response package to deal with the immediate impacts of the crisis to build social and economic resilience to future crises, tackle poverty and inequality, and set the world on a trajectory to meet the Paris climate commitments.

Initiatives like the Grand Bargain, launched in 2016 between donors and humanitarian agencies and renewed in June 2021 are crucial. Since the gap between the needs and available funding is steadily growing, the Grand Bargain 2.0 commitments to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivery are more important than ever. Harmonised and simplified rules and requirements from donors would bring efficiency gains and offer NGOs the possibility to shift resources and capacities from just compliance to real humanitarian actions.

As the pandemic has imposed travel restrictions and further hampered access to the communities in need, the role and the knowledge of local actors has been essential in continuing the delivery of aid. In line with this, more support should be given to local actors in terms of capacity building and risk management.

Overall, the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis and the multiple needs arising from it require the EU and other donors to seek complementarity and flexibility between aid instruments to ensure a people-centred approach that addresses both acute needs and the longer-term impacts of this multi-dimensional crisis and move towards structural changes.

The EU, as the biggest global humanitarian donor should continue to play its part in addressing these increasing challenges and the growing shortfall in global humanitarian funding, ensuring that no one is left behind.

An effective social and economic recovery from the pandemic that tackles poverty and inequality, and is environmentally sustainable, is needed urgently and requires a mobilisation of resources on a scale never seen before. In the immediate future, demand for humanitarian assistance is likely to increase as the pandemic's secondary impacts drive up needs.

As this publication shows, European, local and national humanitarian NGOs and their partners hugely contribute to the global response to these current and future needs, and they must be supported over the medium and longer term.

To do this, donors should step up their efforts to prevent, contain and mitigate the spread of the pandemic around the world in a substantial, additional and sustainable way. They must allow the flexibility required to allow humanitarian workers to adapt their programmes to a constantly changing environment and to support those who are most in need.

Grand Bargain 2.0: three priorities for an effective humanitarian aid delivery

The VOICE network maintained its engagement on the Grand Bargain and on the future of this initiative. Discussions took place throughout 2020 and continued into 2021 on the following themes: quality funding, simplification and harmonisation, localisation. In 2021, VOICE Policy Resolution *Grand Bargain 2.0: let's make it a turning point in the global humanitarian aid system* was launched ahead of the Grand Bargain Annual meeting in June 2021. In addition to the two enabling priorities approved at the meeting - the need for further engagement for localisation and the importance of better quality, flexible and predictable funding - the VOICE network called on the EU and Member States to make significant progress in the area of harmonisation and simplification.

The GB 2.0 should be a key moment for donors to strategically address the funding gap, further increased by the COVID-19 pandemic and to move towards a more efficient, effective and inclusive global humanitarian aid system.

The network's contribution to the European Commission (EC) Communication on humanitarian aid

In December 2020, the VOICE network made a significant contribution to the consultation on the EC Communication on humanitarian action, emphasising the importance of partnership between ECHO and its NGO partners. On 10 March 2021, the EC released its comprehensive *Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles*. It designs a very ambitious plan for the EU, setting out several key objectives to address growing humanitarian needs and to support a more enabling environment for the delivery of principled humanitarian aid.

VOICE was pleased to see some of the main points raised in its contribution reflected in this Communication. In particular, this included the reiteration of the strong commitment to principled EU humanitarian aid, the need to increase global humanitarian funds, the importance of NGOs as one of the EC's key partners and the central role of the Grand Bargain.

Afterwards, the Commission invited the European Parliament (EP) and the Council to endorse the adopted Communication and to work together on the proposed key actions. The *Council Conclusions* were adopted on 20 May. The Secretariat is now working closely with other humanitarian actors at the Brussels level to influence the upcoming EP report on the Communication.

Increased humanitarian aid budget in the Multiannual Financial Framework agreement

The Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (MFF) agreement was finally reached in December 2020. The

network was strongly mobilised during this process and was glad to see its main MFF advocacy demands implemented in the final agreement.

The EU institutions agreed to maintain a separate humanitarian budget line for the next seven years, with an increased amount of funding. Moreover, the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve was ring-fenced for crises outside the EU.

The network has engaged at EU and national level over the past years and, even if not approved, it was important to see the Commission proposals for an additional €5 billion from the 'Next Generation EU' to deal with the upcoming secondary effects of the pandemic.

On 8 June 2021, the Commission published the *draft EU budget for 2022*. The Commission proposed €1.6 billion for humanitarian aid and €1.3 billion for the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve, amounts that are in line with the MFF. The network will maintain its engagement as the Parliament negotiates it with the Council to continue to ensure a robust budget for humanitarian aid in 2022. A higher allocation for humanitarian aid in 2022 would signal a will to narrow the gap between increasing needs and resources allocated to crises-affected people, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gathering evidence on the impact of sanctions and restrictive measures

VOICE has raised awareness about the impacts of EU sanctions and counter-terrorism restrictive measures over the past years, as these have increasingly been felt by its 86 humanitarian NGO members. The challenges faced by NGOs are myriad and include: difficulties accessing financial services; the risks of criminal and civil liability; the increased financial and administrative burden linked to mitigation measures; procurement and logistics difficulties; and reduced flexibility in programming.

In its most *recent report*, VOICE captured the findings of an online survey on the impacts of sanctions and counter-terrorism restrictive measures on VOICE members, as well as the main outcome of the VOICE Webinar on EU Restrictive Measures and Humanitarian Aid: Between a principled view for exemptions and a pragmatic approach for an effective derogation process (December 2020). This report complements the VOICE 2019 *workshop report*.

All the network engagement has paid off. In April 2021, VOICE welcomed the European Commission's decision to establish a counter-terrorism contact point. It is an important step to assist NGOs, donors, banks and others involved in the provision of humanitarian aid in environments subject to EU sanctions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional disruption to the delivery of humanitarian aid, sanction regimes and Counter Terrorism measures are burdens that need to be further addressed.

VOICE MEMBERS 2021

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
-  Caritas Czech Republic
-  People in Need (PIN)

DENMARK

-  ADRA Denmark Nødhjælp og udvikling
-  CARE Denmark
-  Dansk Folkehjælp Danish People's Aid
-  DanChurchAid (DCA)
-  Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
-  Mission East Mission Øst
-  Save the Children Denmark

ITALY

-  Caritas Italiana
-  CESVI - Cooperazione e Sviluppo
-  COOPi COOPERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE
-  INTERSOS Organizzazione Umanitaria Onlus
-  Jesuit Refugee Service
-  Oxfam Italia
-  WeWorld-GVC Onlus

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
-  FCA 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
-  DIE JOHANNITER. Aus Liebe zum Leben
-  Malteser International
-  m) Medico International
-  PLAN INTERNATIONAL
-  welt hunger hilfe
-  World Vision Germany

GREECE

-  Médecins du Monde Greece

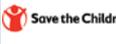
IRELAND

-  CONCERN worldwide Concern Worldwide
-  GOAL Global
-  trócaire Trócaire

LUXEMBOURG

-  caritas LUXEMBOURG Caritas Luxembourg

THE NETHERLANDS

-  CARE Nederland
-  Cordaid
-  icco ICCO - Dutch Interchurch Aid
-  OXFAM Novib Oxfam Novib
-  Save the Children Netherlands
-  WAR child War Child
-  ZOA

NORWAY

-  CARE Denmark
-  Norwegian Church Aid
-  NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
-  Redd Barna Save the Children - Redd Barna

SPAIN

-  ACCIÓN CONTRA EL HAMBRE Acción Contra el Hambre
-  Caritas Española
-  educO
-  Médicos del Mundo
-  OXFAM Intermón

POLAND

-  pah Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)

SLOVAKIA

-  Habitat for Humanity International

SWEDEN

-  IAS Läkarmissionen/International Aid Services (IAS)
-  PMU Interlife
-  Svenska kyrkan - Church of Sweden

SWITZERLAND

-  MEDAIR Medair
-  Terre des Hommes Switzerland

UNITED KINGDOM

-  ACTION AGAINST HUNGER Action Against Hunger
-  actionaid ActionAid
-  CAFOD just one world
-  christian aid Christian Aid
-  International Medical Corps UK
-  RESCUE International Rescue Committee (IRC-UK)
-  PLAN INTERNATIONAL Plan International UK
-  Save the Children UK
-  World Vision World Vision UK

86 members
19 countries



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VOICE is the network of 86 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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VOICE

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Standing together.