



VOICE

European humanitarian NGOs.
Standing together.

ACTIVITY REPORT 2019

85 VOICE MEMBERS IN 2019

VOICE is the network of 85 European NGOs promoting principled and people-centred humanitarian aid.



AUSTRIA			BELGIUM						
CARE Österreich	CARITAS Österreich	SOS Kinderdorf International	Caritas International Belgium	Médecins du Monde (MDM) Belgium	Oxfam Solidarité - Solidariteit	Plan Belgium			
CZECH REPUBLIC		DENMARK							
ADRA Czech Republic	People in Need (PIN)	ADRA Denmark Nødhjælp og udvikling	Dansk Folkehjælp Danish People's Aid	DanChurchAid (DCA)	Danish Refugee Council (DRC)	Mission East Mission Øst	Save the Children Denmark		
FINLAND		FRANCE							
Finn Church Aid	World Vision Finland	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		
GREECE		Secours Catholique - Réseau Mondial CARITAS	Secours Islamique France	Secours Populaire Français	Solidarités Internationales	Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF)			
GERMANY			IRELAND						
ADRA Deutschland	Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) Deutschland	CARE Deutschland-Luxemburg	Deutscher Caritasverband Caritas Germany	Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe	Concern Worldwide	Trócaire			
Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe	Malteser International	Medico International	Plan International Germany	Welthungerhilfe	World Vision Germany				
LUXEMBOURG						Caritas Luxembourg			
ITALY			NORWAY						
Caritas Italiana	CESVI - Cooperazione e Sviluppo	COOPI	INTERSOS Organizzazione Umanitaria Onlus	WeWorld-GVC Onlus	Norwegian Church Aid	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Save the Children - Redd Barna		
THE NETHERLANDS			POLAND		SLOVAKIA				
CARE Nederland	Cordaid	ICCO - Dutch Interchurch Aid	Oxfam Novib	Save the Children Netherlands	ZOA				
			Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)	Habitat for Humanity International					
SPAIN			SWEDEN			SWITZERLAND			
Acción Contra el Hambre	Caritas Española	EDUCO	Médicos del Mundo	Oxfam Intermón	Läkarmissionen/International Aid Services (IAS)	PMU Interlife	Svenska kyrkan - Church of Sweden	Lutheran World Federation	Medair
								Terre des Hommes Switzerland	
UNITED KINGDOM									
Action Against Hunger	CAFOD	CARE International UK	Christian Aid	HelpAge International	International Medical Corps UK	International Rescue Committee (IRC-UK)	Islamic Relief Worldwide		
ActionAid	Mercy Corps UK	OXFAM GB	Plan International UK	Save the Children UK	Tearfund	World Vision UK			

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Sitting at my desk and working from home, like much of Belgium and many of our main contacts in European NGOs this March 2020, I cannot help but be proud to serve the membership of this network.

Within days of it becoming clear that the COVID-19 outbreak is indeed a global pandemic with Europe currently at its epicentre, our members have been playing a role in raising the voice of the most vulnerable people around the world: the displaced and crisis affected, those who lack safe shelter and cannot stay at home, those for whom clean water to wash their hands is unavailable and adequate information to protect themselves is scarce. They have staff amidst crisis affected populations trying to find ways to continue delivering assistance and protection while nations close their borders and other members are scaling up preparedness activities and sharing their rich experience from cholera outbreaks in Haiti and Yemen, and Ebola epidemics in West Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to support responses in Europe and around the world.

Today, the WHO experts are asking the world to prepare for a 'third wave' of this pandemic; for it to indeed reach the most vulnerable globally. This crisis will roll on for some time to come, and like everyone else, the VOICE secretariat and Board is doing its best to keep working with our members and striving towards our main mission: supporting principled and people-centred humanitarian aid. This will be a small but crucial part of bringing this pandemic under control. Our members rely on the EU and its member states funding, as the world's key donors, as well as their good partnership with them, to be able to do the life-saving work that they do. As you will see in this Activity Report, in 2019 VOICE had significant achievements in our work on the future Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (including its humanitarian budget line). Other priorities included the Grand Bargain (a deal between donors and implementing agencies seeking effectiveness and efficiency in humanitarian aid) and the Framework Partnership Agreement between the European Commission and its NGO partners.

The network also continued to advocate for a people-centred approach to the 'humanitarian-development-peace nexus' and hopes to see real flexibility for operations to better link their humanitarian and development activities. The report published by VOICE towards the end of the year has already helped foster useful discussions at EU and at national level and we hope to continue doing this throughout 2020.

The practical impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian aid is becoming increasingly clear and VOICE stepped up its engagement in support of its members on this subject in late 2019 and through to 2020.

Lastly, 2019 was a big year for development of the tools and strategies to guide the network into the future: with a beautiful and refreshed visual identity on the one hand and a new Strategic Plan on the other hand, we have started 2020 well equipped to face the current and future challenges.

Wishing everyone best health – and hopefully a more stable outlook by the time you read this.

Kathrin Schick

VOICE Director, 20 March 2020

VOICE FACTS AND FIGURES 2019

85 MEMBERS IN 19 EU COUNTRIES
905 PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN VOICE ACTIVITIES
42 EVENTS, MEETINGS AND WORKING GROUPS ORGANISED BY VOICE

3 GRAND BARGAIN WORKSHOPS IN LEBANON, DRC, LONDON
1 LOCALISATION EVENT IN BRUSSELS
1 GB PROJECT REPORT

1 LAB DEBATE ON THE NEXUS WITH EPLO AND INTERSOS AT THE EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2019
1 BRUSSELS PRESENTATION OF THE NEW SPHERE HANDBOOK
1 WORKSHOP ON THE EFFECTS OF COUNTER-TERRORISM LEGISLATION ON HUMANITARIAN ACTION.

FOR MEMBERS:
6 FLASH NEWSLETTERS
1 IATI STANDARD TRAINING
1 DEDICATED AREA OF THE WEBSITE WITH EXCLUSIVE NEWS AND BRIEFINGS

VOICE PUBLICATIONS:
1 VOICE OUT LOUD ABOUT VALUES AND ACTION OF NGOs IN EMERGENCIES
1 REPORT ON THE NGOS PERSPECTIVES ON THE EU'S HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS
1 FPA BRIEFING
1 POLICY RESOLUTION ON EU HUMANITARIAN AID

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BREXIT
the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union

COHAFA
Council working group on humanitarian aid and food assistance

CONCORD
European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development

CSE
Civil Society Europe

DFID
United Kingdom's Department for International Development

DG
Director or Directorate General

DRR
Disaster Risk Reduction

EC
European Commission

ECHO
the European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Operations

EP
European Parliament

EPLO
European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

EU
European Union

FPA
Framework Partnership Agreement

GB
Grand Bargain

IATI
International Aid Transparency Initiative

ICRC
International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent

ICVA
International Council of Voluntary Agencies

INGO
International Non-Governmental Organisation

MEPs
Members of the European Parliament

MFF
EU's Multiannual Financial Framework – a multiannual framework budget

NGO(s)
Non-Governmental Organisation(s)

ODI
Overseas Development Institute

OECD
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

SNRA
Supra National Risk Assessment

UK
United Kingdom

UN
United Nations

1 Having the right tools for the network's future

VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2023

In 2019 the General Assembly adopted a new Strategic Plan for the network to last until 2023. The plan was developed through continuous dialogue with members, consultative workshops at the General Assembly in 2018, and on the basis of the mid-term review of the previous strategic plan by the Board and the Secretariat. The network used the opportunity to update its vision and mission.

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

Mission (Art. 4 VOICE Statutes)
VOICE's aim is to improve the general quality and effectiveness of humanitarian aid notably that of the European Union and its Member States as well as of the wider humanitarian community. The network also promotes the added value of NGOs given their key role as humanitarian deliverers and as an expression of EU public solidarity.

Strategic Plan Objectives

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

A REFRESHED VOICE LOOK

In October 2019 the network was proud to launch its new logo at a reception which saw the participation of the European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Operations (ECHO) Director-General Mrs. Pariat who used this moment of celebration to reaffirm the importance of cooperation and partnership between ECHO and the VOICE network. Since then the network has been refreshing its visual identity throughout its communication.

The new logo is dynamic, positive and colourful. It has an abstract shape giving the idea of connection and network. The strands form a circle that indicates completeness, movement, connectedness, and inclusion.



new VOICE logo

The strands represent the identity of our network made up of 85 diverse Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working every day incessantly to bring relief to affected populations. They vary in size from big families to individual organisations and in mandate and specialisation regarding the different sectors of humanitarian aid.

2

Ensuring support for a strong EU humanitarian aid architecture

Every five years European citizens directly elect new members of the European Parliament (EP). 2019 was such an election year. It also brought many other institutional changes: Member States had to agree on a new European Commission President, a new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and appoint Commissioners-designate for the next legislative period. The first task for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), in turn, is having to scrutinise each of these and approve the college of Commissioners as a whole.

value of NGOs as key humanitarian actors and bringing VOICE members' expertise forward in the quest for improving the quality and effectiveness of the European Union (EU) and Member States humanitarian aid is also crucial. VOICE members mobilised at national level to have sufficient funds for humanitarian aid. Advocacy work at Brussels level succeeded in ensuring the new European Commission has a dedicated Commissioner with responsibility for humanitarian aid and that the EP Committee on Development has nominated a Standing Rapporteur for Humanitarian Aid again.

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT HUMANITARIAN AID

Much of the success of a network like VOICE depends on its ability to establish good working relations, trust and interest for the humanitarian cause among policy-makers and other stakeholders. The VOICE network worked tirelessly to establish and reinforce relationships with new institutional actors and traditional allies in order to raise awareness of the nature of humanitarian aid and the importance of the humanitarian principles as enshrined in the European Consensus for Humanitarian Aid. Promoting the added



VOICE out loud n.29 'European NGOs in emergencies: values and actions'

The 29th edition of the VOICE out loud magazine 'European NGOs in Emergencies: Values and Action' was dedicated to the essential role of NGOs in delivering life-saving humanitarian assistance in the field. With articles spanning operational responses as different as Yemen, Mozambique, Jordan or Ukraine and covering issues such as access, accountability, funding and timely coordinated responses this magazine introduced new MEPs to the VOICE membership.

Members showed that NGOs' expertise and presence on the ground enables them to quickly respond to the different needs of crisis affected populations. NGOs deliver the majority of humanitarian aid worldwide and are directly faced by many of the challenges.

Due to the increasing number of protracted crises and severe impacts of climate change, more than 167 million were in dire need of humanitarian assistance in 2019. The European Union is one of the main donors globally. During this time of change VOICE wanted to give incoming MEPs and institutional actors a sense of VOICE members' expectations of the EU. Therefore, the VOICE General Assembly 2019 adopted the Policy Resolution 'EU humanitarian aid needs your support!'. It offered the European Commission (EC) and Member States key recommendations on how to address a number of challenges humanitarians face and strengthen EU support to crisis affected people. The policy resolution was very much welcomed by senior EC officials and widely shared with the incoming Commission and European Parliament.

"The specificity of NGOs is mainly their flexibility, adaptability to circumstances, their professionalism, the expertise they have gained in some of the areas they are in."

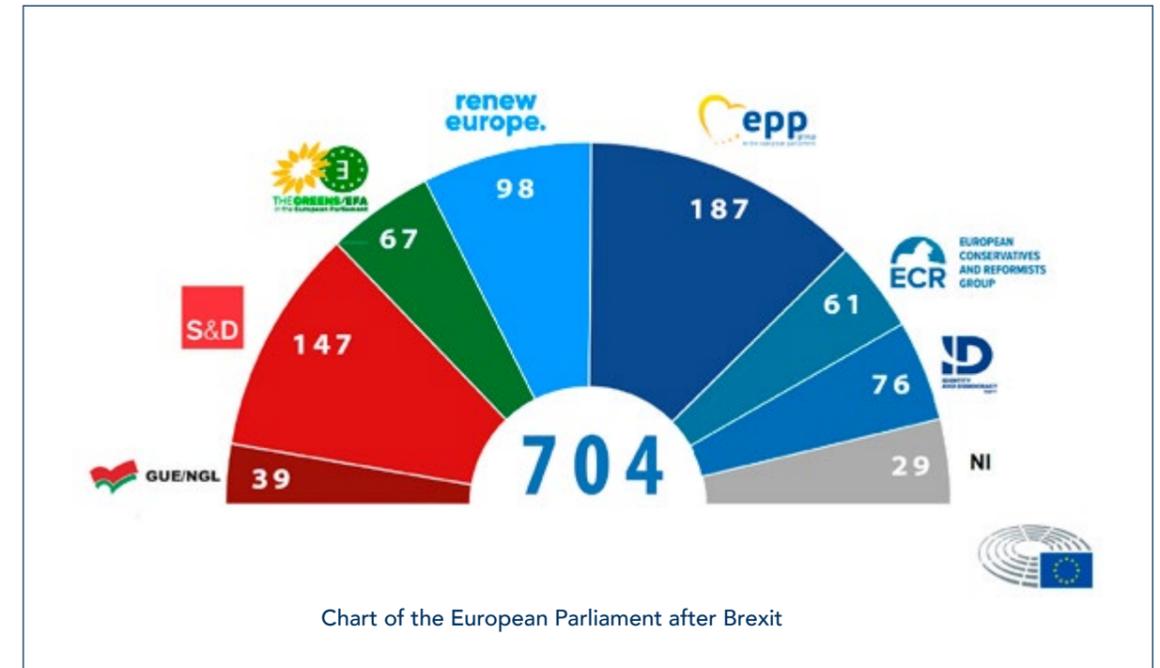
- Interview with Jean-Louis de Brouwer
Director for Europe, Eastern Neighbourhood
and Middle East in DG ECHO.
VOICE out loud 29

Key recommendations from VOICE 2019 policy resolution

VOICE calls on the European Parliament, the European Commission and the EU Member States to strengthen EU support to crisis affected people through the following:

- Ensure that the EU leads the world in a principled approach to humanitarian crises
- Safeguard the EU's global humanitarian leadership
- Ensure that sufficient funding is in the hands of frontline responders as quickly as possible
- Support a diversity of NGOs to best meet people's needs
- Ensure aid flexibility, reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen communities' resilience
- Address administrative and legal barriers to humanitarian action

WORKING WITH THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



The elections for the European Parliament saw much support from EU citizens. However, for many of them, the EU architecture and the Brussels policymaking are challenging to understand and to follow. VOICE has made it one of its priorities to build bridges between the EU and national humanitarian policy making. Through regular dialogue, the network works to strengthen partnership between NGOs and EU institutions. After the European elections, a webinar was organised for VOICE members to better understand the new political balance within the EU Parliament,

to share appropriate tools and information, and the latest developments regarding the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027. It was highlighted to VOICE members that building relationships with their national MEPs and Member State representatives is essential to raise awareness, influence and mobilise political support for a more effective and efficient EU humanitarian aid. Their work at national level is complemented by the network's advocacy towards the EU institutions in Brussels and our collective online mobilisation.



Screenshot of one of our Twitter campaigns targeting MEPs

During the hearing of the European Commissioner-designate for Crisis Management, the European Parliament reflected many of the issues and concerns raised by the network, such as access and security in the field, the implementation of the Grand Bargain commitments, the importance of the nexus approach and humanitarian funding. The nomination and hearing process were a considerable step in

ensuring principled humanitarian aid is a core part of the Commissioner's mandate. One of VOICE's objectives is also to ensure that EU humanitarian aid is predictable, timely and has increased resources to respond to increasing needs of crisis affected people. With the tools the Secretariat provided, on the latter, VOICE members mobilised at national level to secure the 2020 humanitarian aid budget, with support from the European Parliament.

A CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT WITH EU PRESIDENCIES

Member States remain the main decision-makers in the EU, hence the importance of advocacy efforts both at national and EU level. In Brussels, it is particularly relevant to establish a good relationship with the Member State holding the six-months Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Throughout 2019, the network continued its engagement with the EU Presidencies. On the invitation of the Romanian Presidency, VOICE participated in an exchange with the Council Working Party on

Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) on the EU position for Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. In the second semester, VOICE President Dominic Crowley addressed a letter to the Finnish Presidency raising the network's concern about the next MFF and proposals to merge the Emergency Aid Reserve with another EU fund. Very quickly, the Finnish Presidency decided to have an exchange on the subject at a COHAFA meeting.

NGO ALLIANCES TO STRENGTHEN OUR MESSAGES

Building alliances with like-minded NGO networks is important to ensure that messages are complementary and more broadly shared. In 2019, VOICE strengthened further ties with many NGO networks, particularly the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) and the European Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD) by participating in joint events and actions especially around the MFF. Some of the highlights included: a joint letter with 6 NGO networks to EU

Heads of States and Government with key recommendations for the EU external action in the next MFF; and participating in a podcast discussion organised by CONCORD with other NGO networks. The podcast on the MFF and what is at stake for European NGOs, made civil society views on the external funding chapter of the MFF more visible and had a wide coverage. The VOICE network was proud to promote and disseminate it further through social media.



VOICE Director and other NGO Networks on a CONCORD podcast

Thanks to our members for their strong engagement in common actions to influence the European Parliament and Member States and to our allies in NGO networks and across the humanitarian sector at Brussels level: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Red Cross EU Office, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), CONCORD, EPLO, Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad), European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP), Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and Civil Society Europe (CSE).

THANKS

3

Linking the Grand Bargain, NGOs and the field



Participants in the Grand Bargain workshop in Somalia

2019 was a busy and productive year for the network in its efforts to strengthen the engagement of frontline responders and NGOs in the Grand Bargain (GB) process. Making sure that NGO experiences are reflected in the GB remained one of the network's priorities.

LINKING THE GRAND BARGAIN WITH THE FIELD REALITY

Driven by the Grand Bargain Task Force, and supported by Belgian government funding, VOICE was able to continue bringing the Grand Bargain process to the field with three more workshops; in Somalia and Lebanon, to follow up on the 2018 workshops by deepening the discussion between NGOs and donors, and then a 2-day workshop in Kinshasa; the first one to be held in French. The workshops confirmed that many relevant initiatives are happening at field level, for instance on the use of cash or empowering local actors but are not yet captured as 'Grand Bargain' initiatives. They

The Grand Bargain is an initiative between donors and implementing agencies that has prioritised a number of commitments between donors and aid organisations to address inefficiencies in the humanitarian aid system and be more effective. These commitments are divided into ten workstreams.

also demonstrated that the multi-stakeholder format of the GB is relevant for NGOs in the field. However, how the workstreams are prioritised from one country to another is highly context specific. NGOs called for the possibility to be better connected and engaged in the GB debates at global level. For NGOs operating in countries, bringing the field perspective to the international discussions is a necessity to ensure the GB meets its overarching objective.

THE GRAND BARGAIN AND RISK

An emerging and recurring theme in the workshops were concerns around how risk is dealt with in the relationship between implementing organisations, partners and donors in the humanitarian system. In March VOICE organised a workshop together with Bond, the United Kingdom (UK) network for organisations working in international development in London, to delve into this question. The workshop also drew on the experience of the American network InterAction's work on [NGOs and risk](#) and conversations successfully fed into the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) two years' implementation report. The London workshop was also the chance to explore the risks associated with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, with participants expressing concern about no clear definition of the peace part and stressing that the relevant GB workstream should be revived in order to have a space to discuss risks associated with the nexus.



Workshop report:
Risk Sharing to reach the Grand Bargain

WORKSTREAM 2: MORE SUPPORT AND FUNDING TO LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESPONDERS

To close the Belgian project, VOICE hosted a public event on localisation in Brussels. Speakers from the ICRC, Save the Children, Support to Life/NEAR and DG ECHO shared their frank reflections on how the localisation commitments within the Grand Bargain process had accelerated and deepened processes for shifting power to local actors in humanitarian action. Albeit many participants expressed regret that this has not gone even further, they highlighted certain barriers and trends like counter-terrorism measures or national administrative and legislative restrictions which make localisation difficult.



Grand Bargain
final project report



Grand Bargain event on localisation in Brussels
Anita Bay Bundegaard (Save the Children), Walter Fuellemann (ICRC),
Sema Genel Karaosmanoglu (Support to Life/NEAR), Kim Eling (DG ECHO)

TOWARDS MORE INCLUSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRAND BARGAIN

The VOICE Grand Bargain [Task Force statement](#) for the Grand Bargain annual meeting in June underlined a number of priority messages; the need of keeping the GB alive, the importance of bringing the Grand Bargain to actors in crises, and a request to further unpack the issues around legal constraints and risk management.

VOICE was pleased that the closing evaluation of the Belgian project was very positive about its relevance and impact, and included recommendations on follow-up, including

strengthening the field aspects and linkage with the process at global level. The leadership of the GB has transferred to the Netherlands and the European Commission for this year. VOICE members are keen to see some of its promise to simplify and streamline funding and contractual arrangements reflected in the forthcoming new Framework Partnership Agreement with NGO partners. VOICE hopes to continue supporting NGO voices to be heard in the Grand Bargain process and to shape the European implementation of this important process.

Thanks to the members of the Grand Bargain Task Force, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the Somalia INGO forum, Lebanon Humanitarian INGO forum (LHIF), and Lebanese Humanitarian and Development Forum (LHDF) and Caritas Lebanon, le Forum des ONGI RDC, Bond; and the Belgium Ministry of Foreign Affairs and DG ECHO for their funding.

THANKS

4

The EU's humanitarian-development-peace nexus

In 2019 VOICE continued to work to get NGO experience, expertise and concerns taken into account in the EU discussions and implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

With an acceleration of the EU's Integrated Approach, another ambition is to ensure that NGOs' experience in responding to people's needs, and the root causes of crises, are primary drivers in the nexus approach. Bringing the operational experience from members from the field into the policy work has really been accelerated through the VOICE work preparing a report on NGOs perspectives on the EU nexus approach.

VOICE REPORT IDENTIFIES ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO A NEXUS APPROACH

Throughout the year much effort from members of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)-Resilience Working Group and the Secretariat was invested into a new VOICE report.

The outcomes of a workshop in Myanmar and 20 case studies collected from the VOICE DRR-Resilience Working Group members fed into the report which was published in late 2019

['NGO perspectives on the EU's humanitarian-development-peace nexus: challenges and opportunities'](#) The report highlights nine case studies and the findings show both that there are positive examples of nexus happening in the field all over and document a positive momentum, but that there are also many older challenges and new trends to be addressed to work in this way. By end of 2019 the report was presented at a Belgian roundtable and to various NGOs. The group is working to use the report to foster discussion with the EU institutions and Member States and follow-up on its recommendations.

Key recommendations from VOICE report on the EU's nexus approach

1. Ensure a nexus approach, in line with humanitarian principles
2. Build on NGOs' experiences and learn lessons
3. Adapt financial frameworks and tools to a nexus approach
4. All relevant actors need to work towards a culture shift



NGO/EU Workshop on the nexus in Myanmar

NGOs AND THE EU'S NEXUS PILOT IN MYANMAR

VOICE was pleased to work with the International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) Forum in Myanmar to bring the EU delegation, DG ECHO and NGOs together in Yangon for a 1.5 day workshop on the nexus in Myanmar; a nexus pilot country for the EU. The constructive atmosphere and goodwill of all participants confirmed the relevance of the subject in this context. NGOs shared their good practices, enablers and barriers that they had faced in trying to keep a people-centred approach to meeting needs and addressing root causes of crises. Barriers ranged from 'simple' barriers like juggling different donors' exchange rate rules to more complex problems of understandings of the nexus and what it is for. Enablers identified included ways to keep people at the centre of aid responses by, for example, using 'theories of change' to guide programmes rather than log frames, or having flexible multi-year funding to respond to both short and long-term needs of affected communities. These experiences were shared with the EU representatives and they jointly agreed an action plan to address some of them.

COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE 'P' IN H-D-P NEXUS

In addition, the policy discussion on the 'peace' part of the nexus, as well as the relevance of the nexus to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals continued to be relevant. VOICE organised a top-rated event with EPLO and INTERSOS at the European Development Days to bring these questions to the relevant audience and was pleased to have the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission to participate in the discussion. VOICE Secretariat and a number of members also contributed to a workshop convened by EPLO on the 'peace' part of the nexus, which brought together a number of speakers from the European institutions. At the Vienna Humanitarian Congress, the VOICE Director shared NGOs perspectives on the matter. Other speakers on the panel included representatives from the ICRC, DG ECHO and United Nations (UN) missions. While members see many opportunities in the EU's nexus approach to improve the linkages between humanitarian and development aid, concerns from NGOs about the impact of a security focused approach to the nexus and about the potential instrumentalisation of aid for foreign policy purposes remain high. Many members took active part in the debate at the DG ECHO Annual Partners Conference on this subject to voice their different views.



Panelists at the European Development Days 2019: Alda Cappelletti, INTERSOS; Hugh MacLeman, OECD; Kathrin Schick, VOICE; Sonya Reines-Djivanides, EPLO; Pedro Campos Llopis, EU Delegation to Myanmar

“As the NGO community we are ready and willing... to discuss the nexus further in a concrete and context specific way, but our experience with integrated approaches also requires us to constantly evaluate when the risks of such approaches outweigh the benefits and opportunities. When the benefits of better alignment, coordination and complementarity are outweighed by the impact of other actors' actions – or the perception of these actions – and result in challenges to the security of humanitarian staff or to the level of access that can be achieved to crisis affected populations.”

VOICE President Dominic Crowley, 3 December, DG ECHO Annual Partners Conference 2019.

Many thanks to the Myanmar INGO forum, EPLO, the EU delegation and ECHO in Myanmar, the OECD-DAC Secretariat and the DRR-Resilience Working Group members for helping ensure that the field relevance and experience of the nexus approach continues to shape discussions and bring the EU closer to a people-centred approach.

THANKS

5

Securing an enabling environment for humanitarian action by NGOs

As a network of humanitarian NGOs, a key objective for VOICE is to promote an enabling environment for NGOs to provide quality humanitarian aid. Access to crisis affected populations has always been a challenge for the humanitarian community and is becoming ever more challenging.

The growing body of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures is further exacerbating the situation. NGOs also witness increasing demands from donors related to compliance and transparency which result in an increasing administrative burden when receiving funds. This shaped the diverse activities in which VOICE was very engaged in 2019. Through the promotion of quality standards, and through dialogue, exchange, advocacy and learning on different topics affecting the sector, VOICE contributes to an enabling environment for NGOs to advocate for and deliver effective humanitarian aid worldwide.

TOWARDS A NEW FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

DG ECHO has a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with its NGO partners which is renewed and revised periodically. Year after year the VOICE FPA Watch Group, facilitated by VOICE on behalf of all NGO partners, invests considerable time and effort into monitoring and influencing the FPA.

For more information on the FPA, you can see the VOICE Briefing released in 2019: [Partners in Humanitarian Aid: The development of the ECHO-NGO relationship as governed by the Framework Partnership Agreement](#).

Following advocacy by the VOICE Board in 2018, the 2014 FPA was extended in January 2019 to allow for further preparation and development of the next FPA starting in 2021. Based on the lessons learned from the current FPA, the Watch Group provided DG ECHO with many recommendations to improve the next FPA so that it works better for NGO partners implementing in the field. As part of the preparations for signing the next FPA, NGO partners will have to be assessed by an external auditor – until now this has been done by DG ECHO. NGOs had many questions around the costs of this process, and serious concerns about external auditors' ability to understand the challenging contexts in which humanitarian organisations work and to judge whether an organisation has adequate humanitarian standards in place. The FPA Watch Group through its Task Force, spent much of the year discussing these concerns with ECHO, helping to shape the assessment and ensuring that the VOICE membership was adequately informed and prepared for this ex ante [keep cursive] assessment.



The FPA Watch Group at work



VOICE President at the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview 2020

HIGH-LEVEL RECOGNITION OF EUROPEAN NGOs IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

On two occasions last year, the VOICE President Dominic Crowley was honoured to represent European NGOs active in humanitarian action and bring an NGO perspective to important discussions among donors and humanitarian actors. The first was in his address at the closure of the 2019 DG ECHO Partners' Conference and the second was at the Brussels launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview hosted by the UN and EU. In terms of the enabling environment, he talked about crucial operational issues of access and funding to meet humanitarian needs and the EU's role, but also about administrative and legal elements that are creating further barriers to humanitarian action like compliance and the impact of the growing body of restrictive measures on humanitarian aid delivery.



VOICE workshop on the impacts of counter-terrorism measures on humanitarian aid

RESTRICTIVE MEASURES HAMPERING PRINCIPLED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

A growing thread in VOICE's activities throughout 2019 was the impact of restrictive measures and the counter-terrorism environment on principled humanitarian action.

A concrete success of globally coordinated advocacy on this issue was the prevention of Al Shabab being listed twice as a terrorist organisation: on both the Somalia and 1267 UN Security Council sanctions regimes. There was an initiative to have the organisation also listed under the latter regime even though it was already on the Somalia list. Humanitarians, including NGOs were keen to avoid this outcome as the Somalia sanctions regime has an explicit humanitarian exemption which the 1267 regime does not. The impact of further listing would have created legal uncertainty for organisations operating in Somalia and potentially a chilling effect on aid operations supporting crisis-affected people in the country. NGOs reached out to the UN Security Council

members around the world and were pleased to learn that most of the EU Member States present, jointly with the United States and Kuwait, blocked the initiative.

In 2019 the European Union also conducted its 2nd Supra National Risk Assessment (SNRA) on terrorist financing and money laundering. It included a focus on the private sector and non-profit organisations. In another advocacy success and thanks in part to coordinated action between the VOICE network and allied networks led by Civil Society Europe and the European Foundation Centre, the risk rating for the non-profit sector was the only one to be reduced. The SNRA also further recognised that being an organisation in receipt of EU or Member State public funding means that checks and controls were of a high standard and therefore potential risks in the sector were being addressed and thus lower.

Different measures taken in the fight against terrorism increasingly hamper the transfer of funds, and are used as a reason to restrict access, create more stringent administrative checks and create an atmosphere of distrust in local actors.

The impact of sanctions and restrictive measures on humanitarian aid counts among the key issues and sources of concern for VOICE members. The issue has multiple facets and impacts, and was raised in the course of work on the nexus, the Grand Bargain and the FPA. As this is a highly complex and technical issue, the network identified that there was a significant demand for more understanding among NGOs of how to navigate the current body of counter-terrorism and sanctions legislation. On the side of government and EU institutions, there is a need to understand better the specificity of humanitarian operations. As a consequence, VOICE decided to run a 2-day workshop on the subject with NGOs, representatives of the European Commission, and Member States in attendance. The workshop helped build NGOs' understanding of the layers of sanctions regimes (UN, autonomous EU measures and national implementation) and helped advance discussions between NGOs, the European Commission and Member States on possible ways to better balance the imperatives of international humanitarian law and the fight against terrorism.

DIRECT FUNDING TO NGOs SCRUTINISED BY THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

The European Court of Auditors released a report on direct funding from the EU budget to NGOs in 2019. Back in 2018 VOICE engaged with this process considering the critical importance of this report for VOICE members – DG ECHO was under particular scrutiny as it is the DG channelling proportionately the most funds directly through NGOs. Throughout the year, VOICE focused on raising awareness on the role and added value of NGOs. VOICE briefed the Romanian EU Presidency and Member States and prepared members for an exchange with the European Parliament. The report, which issued recommendations for the European Commission, largely took on board comments from humanitarian NGOs and the Council conclusions further echoed many of them, such as the essential role that NGOs play in humanitarian and development aid.



Panellists at the Launch of the new Sphere Handbook in Brussels: Gabriela Luz-Meillet, Oxfam; Nora Loozen, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Kathrin Schick, VOICE; Mags Bird, Mission East; Aninia Nadig, Sphere

SUPPORTING LEARNING FOR HUMANITARIAN NGOs

With the network's potential to spread humanitarian quality initiatives widely, VOICE was delighted to partner with the Sphere Standards and the UK NGO platform Bond to disseminate the latest in quality standards. In Brussels, VOICE worked with Belgian NGOs to bring the new and updated Sphere Handbook

to a launch event and debate on quality in humanitarian aid. Later in the year, VOICE offered members training on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), an open data standard for reporting where funding goes, thus contributing to transparency in the humanitarian system.

Many thanks to the members of the FPA Watch Group and particularly its dynamic Task Force with whom the partnership between ECHO and NGOs is strengthened. VOICE is also grateful to ECHO for its continued support to the network, and to the different organisations supporting different initiatives in 2019: Sphere, Bond, InterAction, Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) and CSE in particular.

THANKS

6

Life of the network

VOICE BOARD MEMBERS 2019

In 2019 the Board welcomed a number of fresh faces and said farewell to some cherished long-standing and committed members.

Continued their first mandate:

Dominic Crowley (Concern Worldwide)

Michael Mosselmans (Christian Aid)

Vincent Stehli (Acción Contra el Hambre -Spain)

Was re-elected:

Daniel Zetterlund (Läkarmissionen/IAS) but left the board at the end of the year.

Joined the Board:

Stéphane Heymans (Médecins Du Monde Belgium),

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

Michael Kühn (Welthungerhilfe),

Fie Lauritzen (DanChurchAid),

Silvia Sinibaldi (Caritas Europa),

Left the board:

Marek Stys (People In Need),

Florence Daunis (Fédération Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion),

Ester Asin (Save the Children),

Rikke Friis (Danish Refugee Council),

Anne Street (CAFOD)

VOICE President Dominic Crowley thanked them for their engagement, dedication and commitment to the network.



Dominic Crowley
President



Jean-Pierre Delomier
Treasurer



Michael Mosselmans
Secretary



Fie Lauritzen



Michael Kühn



Daniel Zetterlund



Silvia Sinibaldi



Vincent Stehli



Stéphane Heymans

A NEW MEMBER

VOICE was delighted to welcome Spanish NGO EDUCO to the membership at the General Assembly. This brought the membership of the VOICE network to 85 European NGOs in 2019. EDUCO works to defend children and their rights, supporting them in achieving a life of dignity. With operations and activities in various countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and in Spain, EDUCO's humanitarian mandate is to protect, help and assist the most vulnerable people, especially children, in their right to life and security, with dignity and comprehensive coverage of rights and needs in the face of risk

situations and of humanitarian crises. EDUCO also acts to prevent and reduce risk through management plans for natural disasters. EDUCO's sectorial expertise is as follows:

- Education in emergencies - Child protection in emergencies - Child-centred Disaster Risk Reduction and collective resilience, and - Nexus approach to link DRR.



SUPPORTING UK AND SWISS MEMBERS IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Some members were faced with considerable challenges due to changes in relations between the EU and Switzerland and the UK respectively. Throughout the year, the VOICE Secretariat did its utmost to support affected members to understand the implications and adapt to the circumstances and was delighted that most affected members still saw an added value of their VOICE membership for their organisation.

While Brexit (the UK's decision to leave the EU) is an issue for which UK based members have

had time to prepare and dialogue with both the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and ECHO, it has still been a very challenging year for VOICE UK members, with the future for possible EC partnerships largely uncertain as the Brexit negotiations develops. Unexpectedly, VOICE's Swiss members were only informed at the very end of 2018 that upon review by the Commission's legal services that the legal basis for their FPA (many have been partners for more than 10 years) was no longer valid as of 2019.

PARTICIPANTS IN VOICE ACTIVITIES



THE VOICE SECRETARIAT: EXCELLENCE AND STRENGTHENED TEAM SPIRIT



The VOICE Secretariat is proud to support the membership of the network in their work for principled and people-centred humanitarian aid. It is in charge of implementing the activities of the network as indicated in the annual work programme and in the VOICE Strategic Plan, supervised by the VOICE Board.

In 2019 the Secretariat was composed of:

- Kathrin Schick (Director)
- Magali Mourlon (Programme Coordinator)
- Celia Cranfield (Senior Advocacy Officer)
- Cécile Muller (Administration and Finance Officer)
- Roberta Fadda (Communication Officer)
- Tarita Baldan (Advocacy Assistant)
- Job Verest (stagiaire)

And many thanks for the wonderful support of our committed stagiaire Julia Foulon.

In 2019 the Secretariat invested in and welcomed a successful team building process supported by an external coach.

VOICE FINANCES

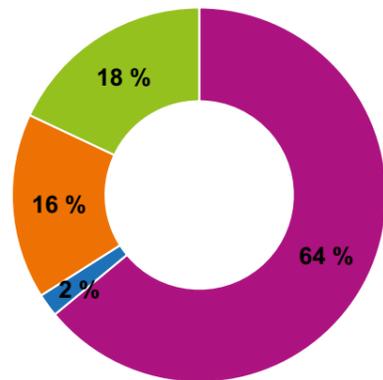
In 2019 the turnover administered by the VOICE Secretariat totalled €708.559; that is a comparable amount to the previous year.

VOICE income components remained similar to previous years. The majority (57%) was made up of membership fees. The network is also grateful to have received an operating grant from the European Commission/DG ECHO.

The grant from the Belgian Foreign Ministry dedicated to the Grand Bargain received in

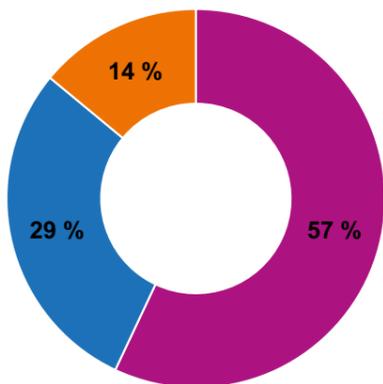
2018 was extended for six months in 2019 and the whole project successfully implemented through numerous workshops both in the field and in Europe.

VOICE was proud to successfully complete two audits in addition to the Belgian statutory audit in 2019: an external audit from ECHO and an audit of the Grand Bargain project financed by the Belgian Foreign Ministry.



EXPENSES

- Human resources
- Governance costs
- Activities
- Office & administration



INCOME

- Membership fees
- ECHO Grant
- Belgian Gov Grant



ACTIVITY REPORT 2019

Published by VOICE
Brussels May 2020

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This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union through its Humanitarian and Civil Protection department. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Union, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

VOICE is the network of 85 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.

