



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing 85 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs. [www.ngovoice.org](http://www.ngovoice.org)

## COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HUMANITARIAN AID 2012-2016

### OPEN PUBLIC CONSULTATION

#### Background elements to VOICE answers

*This document represents a compilation of the VOICE network's positions during the period covered by the evaluation (2012-2016), to complement the collective answers provided in the Open Public Consultation questionnaire.*

#### Needs-based allocation of funding and principled humanitarian action

The EU has been widely recognised as a donor allocating funding based on needs, more so than other donors, making it a donor with key added value and comparative advantage. ECHO has regularly improved its instruments for needs assessment and paid particular attention to forgotten crises. Moreover, ECHO has a strong potential to influence other donors: ECHO's standards and expertise, including assessments of partners and its field experts, are trusted.

Over the period under evaluation, ECHO has tried to make improvements in terms of timely decision making, especially in terms of responding to new emergencies, and has become more flexible thanks to Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs). In several cases (e.g. Niger and Chad), ECHO has reacted well to early warning, resulting in quick and decisive funding decisions which helped partners to deliver timely interventions and to mitigate the potential extent of the crisis. However, in some cases the initial amounts available for primary emergencies are insufficient to cover the needs in the first weeks of the disaster, while committing additional funds seems to be complicated and takes a long time. Delays have also been observed when adapting and/or increasing funding for pre-existing HIPs.

- ➔ Timely, predictable and flexible funding must be allocated to the EU's humanitarian aid to ensure quality delivery of assistance to people in need.
- ➔ We recognise ECHO's efforts to overcome the 2014 liquidity crisis. In the next MFF, ECHO will have to make sure that the level of commitments, appropriations and payments appropriations will be systematically equal. The next MFF should also include the challenge of multi-year planning and funding whilst ensuring operational flexibility. An increase in the humanitarian aid allocation, consistent with realistic projections and with commitments taken, must be ensured.

The VOICE network also acknowledges the role played by ECHO in promoting respect for International Humanitarian Law and the humanitarian principles at the international level, in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. In particular, notable efforts have been invested in the understanding of humanitarian aid by EU military and civilian missions and in humanitarian-civil/military coordination.

- ➔ ECHO must ensure that the humanitarian principles remain at the heart of the EU's humanitarian action and that humanitarian assistance is not instrumentalised for political purposes in response to crises. ECHO should maintain its needs-based approach in all its activities to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches crisis-affected populations and the most vulnerable. Greater transparency in humanitarian decision-making, in particular towards implementing agencies, is part of the solution.

In the context of the Global Strategy for the Union's Foreign and Security Policy and a solidarity crisis within the EU to respond to migration and security challenges, growing concerns are rising that the EU's humanitarian action is shifting from a global needs-based approach towards a neighbourhood focus.

Preserving independent humanitarian decision-making is necessary for implementing the EU's humanitarian objectives.

- ➔ When strengthening coordination and crisis management, the EU must ensure respect for the distinct mandate and priorities of DG ECHO.
- ➔ The EU should ensure that coordination between institutions and services does not lead to a degree of integration (be it in policy, in practice or in perceptions) that negatively affects humanitarian organisations as they seek to address the needs of crisis-affected populations.

## Partnership with NGOs

ECHO has been strongly appreciated for its commitment to work with a diversity of humanitarian partners and for undertaking structured dialogue with NGOs through the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) Watch Group which the VOICE Secretariat is facilitating. The VOICE network is committed to helping ECHO make this partnership even more effective, including at the field level.

It is unfortunate that the question of partnership is not tackled in this open public consultation considering that it also shapes the performance, effectiveness, and efficiency of ECHO's activities, not to mention its added value.

In a unique way, the FPA acknowledges the competence of NGOs which represent a large pool of professional humanitarian workers, field expertise and a high-level of specialisation, and without whom the delivery of aid to crises-affected populations would not be possible. NGOs are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid to crisis-affected populations worldwide, providing aid where it is most needed, in accordance with the humanitarian principles. Reaching out to people in need across the world, humanitarian aid is essential in demonstrating the solidarity of European citizens towards those affected by disasters and constitutes a direct expression of active citizenship.

- ➔ VOICE welcomes the fact that ECHO has maintained a partnership approach, especially with the FPA and through established dialogue with the FPA Watch Group. The EU's commitment to uphold and promote the Principles of Partnership should be kept alive.
- ➔ ECHO must continue to maximise this partnership via systematic and fruitful consultation. There are many examples of fruitful dialogue in the field which have guided the design of next year's interventions (such as in West Africa and in Syria in 2016) and should be promoted as good practice and replicated.
- ➔ Thanks to the latest FPA consultations a degree of simplification was achieved concerning financial reporting and procurement. In light of the preparation of the next Framework Partnership Agreement, DG ECHO and its FPA partners should agree where further simplification and increased flexibility are needed.

Humanitarian organisations, in particular NGOs, have also experienced an increased administrative burden from donors in recent years.

- ➔ Indicators and the measurement of results must be simplified, made more feasible and focused on the most important issues so as not to overload implementing organisations.
- ➔ The EU should join and/or support existing international initiatives on indicators and reporting, rather than reinventing the wheel and setting up new indicators. This would save resources, contribute to harmonisation, and reduce the administrative burden.

We welcome ECHO's commitment to diversity over the period of the evaluation and hope the new FPA will reconfirm this approach. ECHO must continue to work with a wide and diverse range of NGO partners and avoid concentrating its effective collaboration around a few.

- ➔ When exploring new ways of collaboration, based on positive experiences, NGOs recommend that ECHO favours the coordinated system approach. We urge ECHO to engage in dialogue with its NGO partners on the real costs and implications of these new kinds of collaboration, including on risk management and risk sharing, especially in the framework of consortia.

## Effectiveness and efficiency for crises affected populations

Concerning ECHO's effectiveness and efficiency, the VOICE network praises the work done by ECHO in partnership with NGOs which contributed effectively to saving lives, alleviating suffering and, to a certain extent, to maintaining the ability of populations to live in dignity in many crises-affected regions. ECHO, together with its partners, should seek a joint understanding of what efficiency and effectiveness mean. It should also take into account the perspective of crisis-affected populations.

- ➔ In recent years there has been a welcome recognition of the risks taken by humanitarian aid workers. ECHO should continue to promote the better understanding of humanitarian aid, in particular of the risks related to its delivery.

The OPC does not explore the obstacles impeding the effectiveness of humanitarian aid which ECHO, and more generally the EU, could address more firmly. Notable factors include a lack of humanitarian access, the hostile political environment that exists in some cases, the presence of counter-terrorism measures at times, and the lack of flexibility for financing capacity-building and preparedness activities at local level.

NGOs greatly appreciate ECHO's field network and expertise and recognise these assets as key elements of the EU's added value. However, lately, VOICE members have also noticed the cuts made to ECHO's staff, affecting levels of dialogue and expertise.

- ➔ While ECHO has been successful in increasing the EU's humanitarian aid budget in recent years, this should be followed by an adequate level of human resources so as to ensure efficient and high-quality operations.

## International commitments

### ***World Humanitarian Summit commitments:***

The VOICE network acknowledges the EU's common position on the WHS, built on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and extensive consultations with stakeholders.

- ➔ The progress made by the EU on the WHS commitments, thanks also to the efforts of ECHO, was demonstrated in the first-year report. We encourage ECHO to ensure a significant level of engagement in the years to come, working in a balanced way on the different priorities.
- ➔ ECHO's continued engagement in DRR, including representing the EU at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction which led to the adoption of the Sendai Framework, is widely recognised. ECHO should advocate that development actors prioritise Disaster Risk Reduction and make sure that enough funding will be dedicated to DRR under the development instruments.

### ***Implementation of the Grand Bargain:***

VOICE welcomes the efforts deployed by ECHO in the development and implementation of the Grand Bargain. ECHO has a crucial role to play thanks to its lengthy experience with the FPA and its position as one of the world's largest donors of humanitarian aid.

The VOICE network underlines that the Grand Bargain represents only one of the three recommendations from the High Level Panel's Humanitarian Financing report. It will be critical for ECHO to ensure that the EU is also at the forefront of global efforts to "Shrink the needs" and "Deepen and broaden the resource base for humanitarian action".

On the occasion of the first Annual meeting of the Grand Bargain signatories and the presentation of the GPPI independent report, several challenges were already highlighted, and ECHO should follow these up in a consistent manner across all its activities:

- ➔ ECHO should play a leading role in encouraging more synergies among workstreams in order to avoid contradictory approaches and any duplication in its work. This not only applies at the Grand Bargain level but also in terms of the way ECHO takes the Grand Bargain commitments forward in its partnership with NGOs and other humanitarian actors.
- ➔ In all activities related to the Grand Bargain, the focus should be on improving the delivery of aid on the ground. Therefore, a better inclusion of frontline responders in the implementation process is essential, in line with the localisation work stream.
- ➔ In terms of multi-year planning and funding, VOICE is convinced that the EU has the means to make progress thanks to the established partnership with humanitarian actors. Multi-year planning and funding is an opportunity for more coordinated and harmonised approaches, leading to greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

## **Sustainability, the humanitarian–development nexus and the scope of humanitarian aid**

VOICE’s members acknowledge the decisive role of ECHO in putting resilience on the EU’s agenda and on the development actors’ agenda, and for contributing towards positive improvements in the fields of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). These improvements and the leadership of ECHO have been heavily reflected in the response to protracted forced displacements situations.

The OPC seeks to assess the sustainability of ECHO’s policies and funded actions. While recalling that humanitarian aid does not *per se* aim at sustainable results, VOICE recognises the importance of the humanitarian-development nexus, including being one of the workstreams of the Grand Bargain in light of the increasing number of protracted crises. VOICE is convinced that more has to be done to make sure that humanitarian and development actors work together to reduce needs and vulnerabilities.

- ➔ Welcoming the Communication on Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance - Forced Displacement and Development and the Council Conclusions on the operationalisation of the humanitarian-development nexus, VOICE emphasises that ECHO should actively collaborate with other relevant actors to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities. The articulation of different funding instruments is also a crucial element in operationalising the nexus. Careful attention must be maintained to ensure that closer cooperation and coordination between humanitarian and development policies does not undermine timely humanitarian response.

## ***VOICE Policy documents and position papers:***

[VOICE 2017 policy resolution on partnership between NGOs, EU institutions and member states](#)

[VOICE 2016 policy resolution - Humanitarian NGOs call for a better EU response to refugees and migrants](#)

[VOICE 2015 policy resolution - EU humanitarian aid in the new institutional setting: recommendations](#)

[VOICE 2014 policy resolution: Why is EU Humanitarian Aid Important?](#)

[VOICE 2013 policy resolution on humanitarian aid and the EU comprehensive approach](#)

[VOICE 2012 General Assembly Resolution - What humanitarian NGOs are all about](#)

[VOICE consolidated reply to ECHO questionnaire EU humanitarian aid fit for purpose \(2013\)](#)

[VOICE Study - EU Member States' policies and practice: Disaster Risk Reduction in humanitarian assistance and development cooperation \(2017\)](#)

[VOICE Study - Exploring EU Humanitarian donors' funding and conditions for working with NGOs, Building evidence for Simplification \(2016\)](#)

[VOICE Study - The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: An NGO Perspective \(2014\)](#)

[VOICE response to civil society consultation on the EU's Strategic Approach to Resilience \(2017\)](#)

[VOICE contribution to the new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy \(2016\)](#)

[VOICE DRR WG Input to the European Commission Staff Working Paper following the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction \(2016\)](#)

[VOICE reaction to HLP report on humanitarian financing \(2016\)](#)