

VOICE
Activity Report

2017

BRUSSELS, APRIL 2018



**Voluntary Organisations in
Cooperation in Emergencies**

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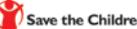
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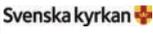
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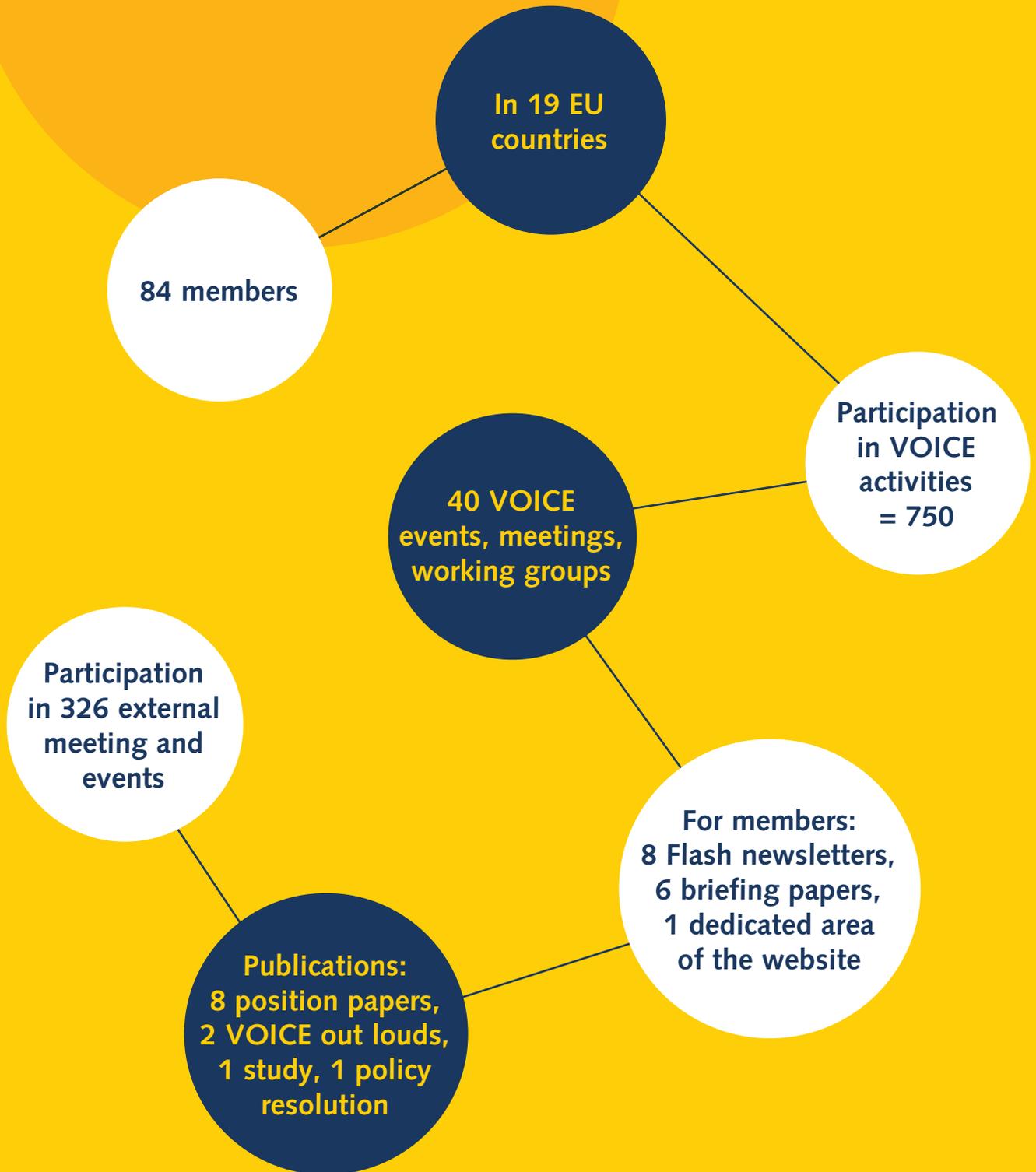
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VOICE 2017 Facts and Figures





In 2017 the big highlight for humanitarian actors in Brussels, and VOICE members in particular, was the outcome of the 10-years' celebration of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The continued relevance of this EU policy framework for humanitarian aid and the importance of the humanitarian principles were reconfirmed by its signatories: the EU member states, the European Parliament and the European Commission. The EU has reflected its priorities from the Consensus in its WHS commitments.

Operationalising the commitments from the international Summits in 2016 led to a number of policy initiatives from the European institutions: through members' pro-activity, the network brought the importance of community resilience to the table and contributed to the shaping of Council conclusions on resilience. As a follow up from Sendai, the Disaster Risk Reduction policies of a number of EU member states were examined and the outcome published.

Engaging NGOs in the implementation of the Grand Bargain and feeding recommendations to the Commission and the donor community, was another big achievement. Mobilising resources for raising awareness about the importance of the Grand Bargain for more effectiveness and efficiency of the investments in humanitarian assistance, was also successful. The Commission has very complex procedures and rules, so the simplification of financial and legal procedures remains one of the priorities of the network. As a consequence, influencing and making NGOs' voices heard in member states when the EU Financial Regulation was revised, was another priority. However, while members experience some minor improvements, the current focus on effectiveness has so far fallen short of creating predictable, timely and flexible funding for NGOs active in humanitarian assistance. This will also be one of the main challenges for DG ECHO and the Framework Partnership (FPA) Watch Group when they embark on developing a new FPA in 2018.

Under the committed leadership of the VOICE President Nicolas Borsinger over the last years, the network has seen its reputation, relevance and membership growing. It has become a vibrant community with a very diverse membership which each year engages more actively in the various working groups, and activities taking place in the various EU member states. Mobilising together for

the 2018 EU humanitarian aid budget is a good example of the collective strength the network represents. We would all like to thank Nicolas for his high-level engagement and his time invested for NGOs and in the humanitarian cause.

However, there are big challenges for humanitarian actors and the international community. We see many new policy initiatives and developments; on resilience, conflict prevention, the humanitarian-development nexus and protracted crises, yet the operational field reality becomes more complex. An ever increasing number of protracted crises and no end to ongoing conflicts result in increasing humanitarian needs; the plight of the Rohingyas, Syrian and Yemenite people are just some examples... However, each day many thousands of humanitarian workers all over the world continue to seek to gain access to vulnerable populations, often risking their own lives, and continue to mobilise resources and support for field operations and aid budgets. So it is crucial that the EU works with its partners towards implementation of these policies in the field.

Unfortunately, we all witness that civil society organisations are coming increasingly under pressure across the world, including in Europe. NGOs express the solidarity of EU citizens and are an integral part of democratic societies. VOICE continues to engage alongside other NGO networks and civil society alliances to put forward the added value of humanitarian NGOs. Last year we came together with the European Commission to counter political pressures in the European Parliament on the NGO community receiving funding from the EU institutions. Mr. Borsinger's invitation to speak on behalf of civil society during the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Rome Treaty is a great recognition that NGOs embody the solidarity and values of the European Union.

The humanitarian community has numerous quality standards and initiatives to guide its work. VOICE members are submitted to robust scrutiny through their Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Union. However, as made evident by recent allegations of misconduct in the sector, like in all other sectors of society, it happens that we fail. We have to continuously seek to work to the highest standards and develop our practices for the benefit of the people we serve!

Kathrin Schick
VOICE Director

1. Promoting Humanitarian Principles

VOICE advocates for an EU needs-based and principled approach to humanitarian assistance which ensures that aid reaches the most vulnerable and that aid workers are secure

CELEBRATING THE CONSENSUS

"The European Consensus shows the EU's commitment to fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, creating a common and unbiased framework to deliver humanitarian aid."

The management and delivery of humanitarian aid needs to remain principled, unconditional and based on assessed needs. EU's strategies, policies and action plans need to fully respect the principled nature of humanitarian aid, and define clear actions to ensure upholding international law."

Ten years of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: A point of reference in a challenging world. UN, ICRC, EU Red Cross office and VOICE joint messages. October 2017

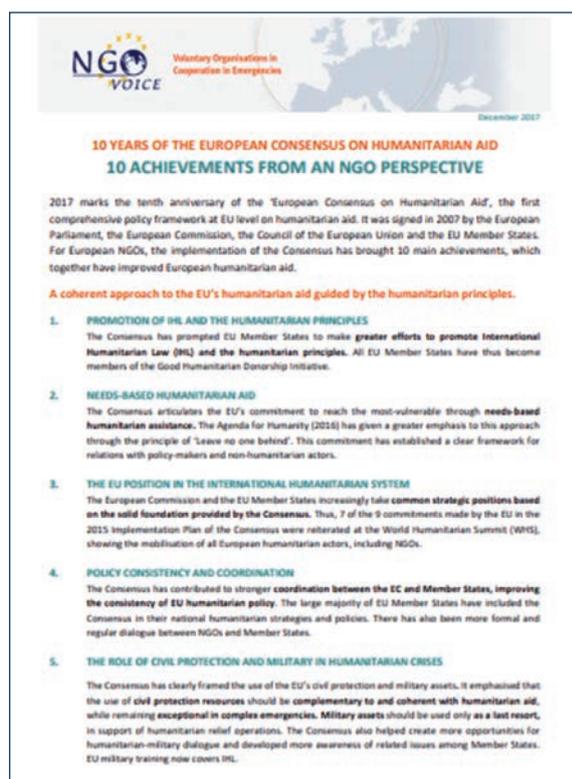


Joint event for the 10 years of the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, European Parliament, September 2017.

2017 marked 10 years since the signature of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Celebrating the anniversary of this landmark European document was an important part of the network's efforts to promote principled and needs based humanitarian aid and to highlight the important role of NGOs in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Together with the Red Cross family, the UN and MSF, VOICE organised a high-level event, "The Consensus, a point of reference in a challenging world", in the European Parliament. This conference was an occasion to recall the importance of partnership in humanitarian aid and the comparative advantages of different partners of the EU. It was a big success to have the European Commission, the EU member states and the European Parliament renew their commitment to the Consensus and its implementation. The event has since then been repeatedly used as a point of reference by the EU institutions.

VOICE has also highlighted the continued relevance of the Consensus through an advocacy paper called "10 years of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: 10 Achievements from an NGO perspective". This document is a useful tool to reach out to non-humanitarian actors and explain humanitarian aid and the role of NGOs.



DEMONSTRATING NGOs' EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EU HUMANITARIAN AID

The Comprehensive Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Aid actions between 2012-2016 was a priority which kept the network busy during the year. The evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, coherence, EU added value, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of EU humanitarian aid. It also took into account the commitments made by the EU at the World Humanitarian Summit and through the Grand Bargain.

VOICE ensured the evaluation featured NGOs' operational expertise and policy experience to help shape the future of EU humanitarian aid. Recommendations from VOICE were focused on the importance of the humanitarian principles, the needs-based approach, partnership, simplification of procedures and the complementarity of roles and mandates in the nexus.

This was done through outreach to members, to DG ECHO and to the evaluators, in order to ensure interviews of VOICE members in the field and at headquarters level. The network also contributed a consolidated assessment and recommendations answering the public consultation. VOICE also secured its participation in a multi-stakeholder validation workshop. This was another opportunity to promote common messages and demonstrate the added value of NGOs as partners of the EU in delivering humanitarian assistance to people in need.

The final report is expected in the first trimester of 2018 and VOICE will engage in the next steps stemming from this evaluation.

VOICE members work in all crisis affected countries worldwide, implementing operations worth more than €5 billion in the field (2016) and employing thousands of aid workers

VOICE is a unique network of European NGOs operational in humanitarian aid worldwide and is the main NGO interface with the EU on humanitarian assistance

ENSURING HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE EU'S INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CONFLICTS AND CRISES

VOICE has for many years been engaged in the development of the EU's approaches to conflicts and crises, such as the early development of EU crisis management structures and later when the EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises was shaped. In 2018, as part of the implementation of the EU Global Strategy, discussions started on an 'EU Integrated Approach' with the ambition to deepen the existing comprehensive approach.

VOICE, along with other humanitarian actors in Brussels, has been promoting a consistent set of key messages around humanitarian aid in conflict that are in line with the Consensus, most notably about the commitment to ensuring that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool. We ask that complementarity between EU instruments should be strengthened and integration of humanitarian assistance with other instruments should be avoided. In order to achieve this, roles and mandates of various actors engaged in humanitarian crisis settings need to be clearly spelled out and respected.

"The EU is firmly committed to upholding and promoting the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. This principled approach is essential to the acceptance and ability of the EU, and humanitarian actors in general, to operate on the ground in often complex political and security contexts. The perception of the EU and its commitment to these fundamental principles in humanitarian action are linked to behaviour and engagement on the ground of all EU actors. "

European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, paragraph 10

VOICE member Concern Worldwide raised the following messages during a discussion with the European External Action Service at the DG ECHO Partners' conference: humanitarian NGOs remain convinced that the implementation of the EU Integrated Approach has to be seen in a context-

specific way. However, there remain considerable risks that the perception of humanitarian NGOs as neutral, independent and impartial actors may be damaged and that the EU's humanitarian assistance may be instrumentalised for political purposes.

SAHEL

Spanning seven countries and complex needs ranging from malnutrition to protection, more than 13 VOICE members are present in the Sahel region. Erratic rainfall and an early lean season are expected to drive up food prices and put food and nutrition security further at risk in a region characterised by pastoral households. At the same time, local and regional conflicts drive further displacement in the area and severely limit humanitarian access. 4 million people are forcibly displaced and 9 million estimated to be in need of food assistance in the 2018 lean season. VOICE members are helping to address those needs.

They run a wide range of projects and programmes: assistance covering water, sanitation and health, child protection, prevention of nutrition crises with food assistance, the treatment of acute malnutrition, reduction of infant mortality, emergency education, rapid response to the needs of IDPs, returnees and refugees etc. They are also pioneering resilience programmes aiming to develop early warning and response systems.

In their activities, VOICE members are financially supported amongst others by the European Commission, working together with the UK's Department for International Development through a joint programme called 'PHASE'. The presence of a number of international military missions, the violent extremism in the region, the EU's political interests in reducing migration from and through the Sahel, contribute to the complexity of the political and security situation on the ground. Liaison with military forces becomes an important challenge amid security restrictions further reducing vulnerable populations' humanitarian access. In this context, humanitarian agencies work hard to preserve the perception of their work as impartial, independent and neutral actors to ensure they can continue their work and reach as many people as possible.



© Tackling undernutrition in the Sahel ©EC/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie

SHAPING THE NEW EU RESILIENCE APPROACH

In 2017 VOICE took a leading role in successfully influencing the EU's development of a new Resilience Communication in line with the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy.

The Communication was about broadening the EU concept of resilience to include 'state resilience' and reflect on the impact of external events on the EU's own resilience. Previously, the resilience concept was embraced by the humanitarian and development communities, particularly the focus on communities' resilience arising out of food and nutrition crises. It was an approach that looked at communities' capacities, vulnerabilities and risks to withstand and grow out of shocks. VOICE members' expertise on resilience and overall support for the 2012 resilience policy and action plan meant that members were keen to engage strongly to ensure that the best was kept, especially implementation of the 2013 action plan, and that in the current political climate, the major risk of an overarching focus on migration or security could be avoided.

February 2017: VOICE and the European Commission co-hosted a civil society consultation on the new Communication with DG ECHO and DG DEVCO.



March 2017: VOICE shared key recommendations from the network and its members widely with EU decision-makers and other stakeholders.



April 2017: VOICE was invited to speak in the European Parliament and think-tank discussions on the new resilience policy.



Linked to the EU's Global Strategy, in 2016 the EU announced a plan for a new Resilience Communication. In January VOICE actively approached ECHO and the EEAS seeking to ensure the experiences and expertise of NGOs would be heard.



May 2017: VOICE's messages were successfully picked up in the European Parliament resolution.

June 2017: EU Communication on a strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action reflects many of VOICE's messages, including:

- A people centred approach
- Contextualised, flexible and longer-term programming
- The importance of communities and the role of CSOs
- A reconfirmation of the continued relevance of the existing policy and action plan



November 2017, the Council adopted its Conclusions on A Strategic Approach to Resilience, taking on board a number of VOICE's concerns - including regarding humanitarian principles.



CONTRIBUTING TO THE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Following the World Humanitarian Summit, the humanitarian and development nexus came on the EU policy agenda. The nexus is an approach that brings together the humanitarian and development aid sectors, recognising that the majority of modern crises are protracted. It looks at how to respond to acute needs while also addressing longer term vulnerabilities, risks and needs. The humanitarian-development nexus answers to a genuine need for better synergies but also to an existing reality. The issue is not new to VOICE members who have long worked on linking relief, rehabilitation and development. Many NGOs are multi-mandated and do both humanitarian assistance and development projects and have experience and expertise to share. The nexus requires donor flexibility and support, and so far, is most successful when it addresses communities' needs.



Unpacking the Nexus

The complexity of today's crises, especially protracted crises, require both development and humanitarian assistance, together with more flexible funding mechanisms and programmatic approaches. The humanitarian-development nexus is now on the EU agenda and is seen as a key tool for addressing complex and protracted crises. The nexus calls for increased coordination, joint humanitarian-development approaches and collaborative implementation, monitoring and progress tracking. In the Council conclusions on operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus, the Council recommends that the Commission and the EU Member States reinforce the links between humanitarian and development actors. They also recommend that they take forward their work in a number of pilot countries, starting with joint analyses and implementing it through coherent multi-year programming while respecting their distinctive mandates



VOICE event, November 2017, 'The humanitarian-development nexus and the humanitarian principles: Complementary approaches?'

While the Commission was preparing its Resilience Communication, the Council developed conclusions on the humanitarian-development nexus. The Estonian EU Presidency invited the VOICE Director to a high-level informal meeting in Tallinn in July to comment on and flesh out the opportunities and challenges of a nexus approach. The network followed this up with a public event in Brussels and a dedicated edition of the VOICE out loud magazine. These both provided members the opportunity to share reflections on the potentials of adopting a nexus approach to humanitarian crises, but also on its limits or the risks this might imply.

VOICE is pleased to see that the European Commission's development and humanitarian services are working closer together to ensure complementarity. Another positive element is that member states as donors are now involved in the discussion. VOICE is working to ensure that the NGO perspective, as the operational and implementing partners of the EU, is taken on board throughout the process in the different pilot countries.

YEMEN

Yemen remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis resulting from a triple man-made tragedy: the brutal armed conflict since 2015, a looming famine and the world's largest ever single-year cholera outbreak. An estimated 22.2 million people - 80% of the population - are in need of humanitarian assistance or protection. This includes 11.3 million deemed to be in acute need; a number that has kept growing in 2017. The country's cholera outbreak recorded over one million suspected cases reported in 2017 and over 2 200 related deaths. Despite the massive scale of humanitarian needs, the country remains a neglected crisis, both financially and politically. Humanitarian actors have been struggling to meet the increasing needs of the population, in a context of restricted access of aid workers to people in need, violations of International Humanitarian Law and repeated blockades.

At least 9 VOICE members have worked in Yemen with EU funding, including with operations focusing on the cholera response, malnutrition, protection needs for displaced and vulnerable people as well as water, sanitation and hygiene needs. In 2017, DG ECHO funding in Yemen amounted to €76.7 million. In addition to this humanitarian funding, while many development projects have been suspended, three programmes were developed in close coordination between DG ECHO and DEVCO (EuropeAid) to complement and enhance the impact of the EU humanitarian assistance. €66 million was mobilised to support resilience and early recovery initiatives, including the provision of basic services and sustainable livelihoods.

NGOs, including VOICE members, have deployed considerable advocacy efforts to bring donors to address the collapse of public services and institutions, acknowledging that humanitarian aid alone cannot address all the suffering in Yemen. Through their presence in Yemen, experience and knowledge of the crisis, NGOs have participated in the identification of needs, gaps and risks in making development and humanitarian projects more complementary to better answer people's needs.



REACHING BEYOND BRUSSELS

Only a part of VOICE's work happens in Brussels. The decision-making processes of the European Union are shaped by member states' positions, and our members are very active at national level. VOICE aims to act as a bridge between national and European decision-making and often has the opportunity to mobilise its members at national level on specific issues, such as on the new resilience policy and the Financial Regulation.

In addition, VOICE is often called on to share its expertise at relevant conferences and events around Europe. A special moment in 2017 was the EU asking VOICE to contribute its perspective to the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty.

VOICE members work together to promote the added value of NGOs towards the EU

VOICE Director participated in the Estonian Presidency informal meeting in Tallinn with member states' humanitarian and development experts.



Roundtable meeting with members from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark in Stockholm.



The Italian TV channel RAI asked VOICE President Nicolas Borsinger to present a civil society perspective on the role of the EU in humanitarian aid. This was part of the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties founding the European Community.



For the 2017 EU Budget Campaign, VOICE mobilised members to send letters to their national MEPs and governments to increase the budget line for humanitarian aid and to use VOICE messages on Twitter targeting key MEPs and decision-makers.



VOICE presented its study on 'Disaster Risk Reduction' at COP23 in Bonn, Germany.



2. Shaping EU humanitarian financing and NGO funding

Globally, there is an increasing gap between humanitarian needs and funding for humanitarian aid. This can be the difference between life and death

MOBILISING NGOs FOR PREDICTABLE, TIMELY AND FLEXIBLE HUMANITARIAN FUNDING IN THE EU BUDGET

Predictability and flexibility of humanitarian funding are crucial for NGOs to ensure timely planning of field operations and adapt to ever changing realities on the ground. The VOICE network actively involved in working on the EU annual budget, calling for an increase in the humanitarian aid budget for 2018. On the positive side, the European Commission made a proposal higher than expected and higher than for 2017. Outreach to the European Parliament was successful, with clear support for a further increase of the humanitarian aid budget line above the Commission's proposal. Letters were sent to the Ministries of Finance or Budget in more than ten key EU countries by NGO platforms, calling for increased funding for humanitarian aid. The strong mobilisation of VOICE members on Twitter gave further visibility to VOICE's collective action. The member states (Council) sought and managed to get cuts to many parts of the Commission's proposal. VOICE actions at national level, combined with the European Parliament's support for an increase for humanitarian aid, contributed to avoiding any cut to the Commission's proposal in the final agreement between the member states and European Parliament.



WORKING FOR SIMPLIFICATION OF EU FUNDING PROCEDURES: THE NEW EU FINANCIAL REGULATION

The EU Financial Regulation sets the overall framework of rules for European Commission expenditure and is negotiated by the European Parliament and the Council on the basis of a proposal from the Commission. This regulation sets parameters for the rules in the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) that DG ECHO has with its NGO partners.

VOICE started monitoring the renewal of the EU Financial Regulation in 2016 as part of ongoing advocacy efforts to simplify the administrative procedures for EU humanitarian assistance. Key messages were shared at all EU levels, by members and the VOICE Secretariat. In 2017, VOICE worked closely with the Civil Society Europe network to align common messages while adding a more specific humanitarian perspective to the overall NGO advocacy.

VOICE's main request to maintain the special exemptions needed for humanitarian aid delivery was successful. The new Financial Regulation promotes harmonisation of reporting requirements (in line with the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid). Key items linked to efforts to simplify contracting and implementation, such as having cross-reliance of assessment and audit are also included. These are all important steps towards overall simplification and reduction of the administrative burden to help NGOs focus on delivery of assistance and protection.

Early in 2018, the new Financial Regulation is on its way to adoption and will provide a useful basis in light of the consultations for the next FPA.

The EU is one of the world's biggest humanitarian donors. The majority of humanitarian aid globally is implemented through NGOs

VOICE is registered
with the European
Union in the
Transparency Register

DEFENDING NGO ADDED VALUE FOR THE EU IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (EP)

One of the EP's key powers and roles is to scrutinise the use of the EU budget. It plays an important part in holding the European Commission accountable for its spending and as such strives for transparency in the EU's spending. In the EP's Budgetary Control Committee in 2017, one specific report questioned the legitimacy of direct funding to NGOs from the EU budget. VOICE joined other NGO networks listed on the Transparency Register of the European Union, to explain how direct funding to NGOs is monitored including the accountability and audit requirements. NGOs' added value as key implementing organisations and the values they share with European citizens were also stressed by many VOICE members from national level. The European Commission further stressed the scrutiny NGOs who receive EU funding are submitted to. It also underlined that as recipients of less than 1% of the EU budget they are proportionately more scrutinised compared with other major direct recipients of EU funding. VOICE welcomes that the report was put on hold pending the outcome of a report by the European Court of Auditors. VOICE continues to engage with the European Parliament where relevant to demonstrate the important role of NGOs in the implementation of EU humanitarian programmes and in advocacy.

MAKING THE TRUST FUNDS ACCESSIBLE FOR NGOs

Building on the work done in 2016, VOICE continued to raise the experiences and concerns of VOICE members in relation to the EU Trust Funds. These are about increasing transparency around access to funding for NGOs and about simplifying and shortening the contracts' negotiations phase to have more operational flexibility. The Trust Funds are not a humanitarian funding instrument and were developed against the backdrop of the need for additional funding and political flexibility for aid funding in the face of migration challenges. DG ECHO does however contribute some funding for resilience components. While Trust Funds present an opportunity for multi-year funding for resilience work and linking humanitarian and development programmes, they are not a substitute for humanitarian aid funding to respond to humanitarian needs.

VOICE monitored the implementation of the different Trust Funds and shared widely the network's key messages, collected through a members' survey. In January, the Secretariat organised a meeting with members to exchange with management of the Bêkou Trust Fund. It is the first to be evaluated since the launch of these new funding instruments.

VOICE also continued to regularly update its overview for members gathering key information about the first three Trust Funds (Africa, Madad and Bêkou) as well as on the Turkey Facility. This year VOICE also produced a first factsheet on the new EU Trust Fund for Colombia.

VOICE's expertise was recognised as it was approached by the Centre for European Policy (CEPS), a Brussels-based think-tank, to advise on a report for the European Parliament on the EU Trust Funds.

3. Developing VOICE ways of working

VOICE brings a collective EU NGO position to the table and works with other humanitarian actors to multiply the impact of its messages towards the EU and member states

Over the years VOICE has evolved in its ways of working. Geographically, since a number of international summits, the network has grown its involvement on the international stage beyond the European region and deepened its outreach at EU member state level. Further, VOICE does not just build alliances with humanitarian actors, since others, such as development and peacebuilding organisations, can also be key allies in our work. The VOICE network sees sharing its technical expertise on the specificity of humanitarian aid with others working on issues in foreign affairs as important. An ever-widening network of non-humanitarian contacts complements the regular exchange with technical experts for the impact of the network's advocacy.

The EU member states' role in European Union policy making is very important. The Secretariat aims to bridge between the Brussels and national levels through timely information, support and analysis to its members – it also organises and participates in events at national level such as the VOICE roundtables. VOICE members use their presence at national level to engage with their governments on the advocacy priorities of the network to influence EU policies. The EU Budget campaign, which in 2017 reached more than 11 countries, is a good example. VOICE use of social media with Twitter was an important step in extending that engagement. The network also engages more proactively to upcoming policy initiatives at EU level such as last year's resilience debate and the humanitarian-development nexus.



VOICE President Nicolas Borsinger and ECHO Director General Monique Pariat at the 2017 General Assembly



Joint event for the 10 years of the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, European Parliament, September 2017.
Left to Right: Denis Haveaux - Red Cross EU office, Enrique Guerrero Salom – European Parliament, Commissioner for Humanitarian Assistance Christos Stylianides, Inma Vasquez – Médecins Sans Frontières, Kathrin Schick – VOICE, Vincent Hubin – OCHA, Genevieve Vercruysse Toussaint – International Committee of the Red Cross, Minister Väino Reinart, Estonian EU Presidency of the Council

VOICE's role is also to bring forward the added-value of NGOs, as the main implementers of humanitarian assistance in the field, expressing European public solidarity with crisis-affected people. Part of that work involves ensuring that the funding and conditions for EU humanitarian assistance enable European NGOs, in their full diversity and each with their specificities and expertise, to continue to be able to operate. VOICE does this by working with members on issues as technical and diverse as EU funding policy and the Framework Partnership Agreement. Other parts of the work are linked for example to the operational reality which NGOs face, the NGO contribution to DRR and making NGO voices heard at international donor conferences.

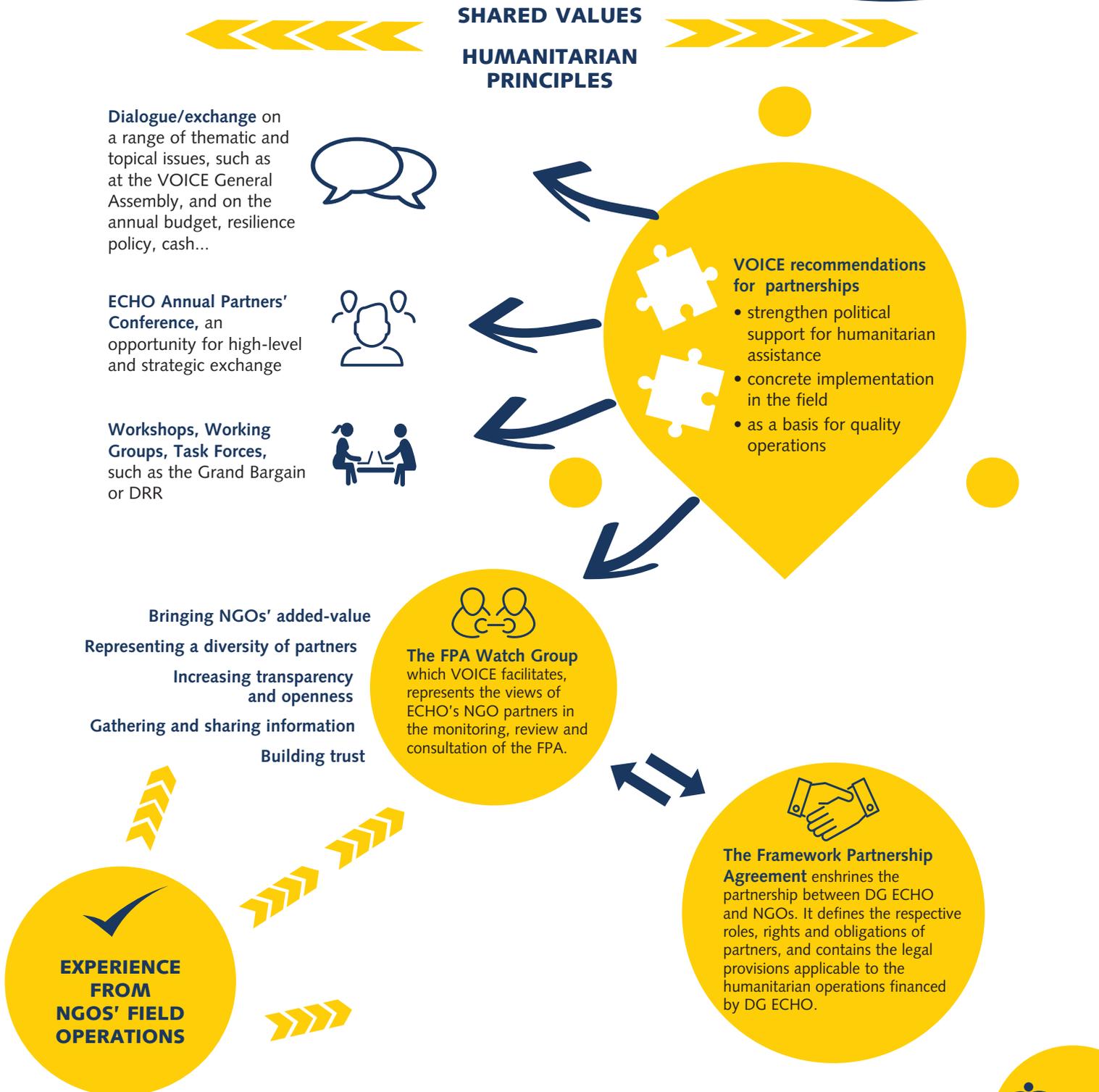
It is crucial to VOICE to work with like-minded organisations with common interests to broaden our influence. VOICE pools its resources with other humanitarian actors and NGO networks to raise awareness about humanitarian concerns towards the EU institutions and member states whenever relevant. Mostly this enables solid information sharing, strategic alignment of messaging where appropriate and complementarity in our work. Sometimes this work can even lead to jointly organised meetings such as the event celebrating the 10th anniversary of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. In 2017 our exchanges with like-minded Brussels based NGO networks such as CONCORD, EPLO (European Peace-building Liaison Office), Human Rights and Democracy Network and Civil Society Europe were more frequent. The regular contact with other global humanitarian NGO networks like ICVA, SCHR and InterAction was intensified to follow up on the World Humanitarian Summit and in particular as regards the work on the Grand Bargain. The Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction also continued to be an important counterpart network for the DRR working group. National NGO platforms in EU member states are also important interlocutors.

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH VOICE WORK

In the current international context, partnership has to be at the centre of the dialogue between the European Commission's humanitarian aid office DG ECHO and its NGO partners. More than ever, working in partnership, requires DG ECHO and its partners to develop new ways of working while demonstrating the importance of partners' diversity in order to cover the complexity of humanitarian needs in the field.

The Commission works in close partnership with the humanitarian organisations — in particular the UN relief agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent movement and NGOs that are best placed to implement humanitarian aid on the ground. A strong partnership approach is enshrined in the agreements governing the relations with these organisations.

The EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid



4. Collective action – VOICE working groups

VOICE members bring collective positions rooted in field operations and expertise with crisis affected people

STRENGTHENING NGOs' ENGAGEMENT AND ADDED VALUE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRAND BARGAIN

What is the Grand Bargain?

The Grand Bargain (GB) on humanitarian financing was endorsed at the World Humanitarian Summit by major aid organisations and humanitarian donors. It commits signatories to 51 commitments grouped around 10 workstreams to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of humanitarian action

From November 2016, VOICE established a Grand Bargain Task Force (GBTF) in order to formalise its engagement on this humanitarian financing agenda. The group has been growing and represents around 48 NGOs. One year on from its establishment, the group's high level of activity and success are visible:

- Eleven meetings
- Two public events (VOICE roundtable in Stockholm and high level discussion at the European Development Days)
- Three position papers (a contribution to the one year implementation report, a paper on multiyear funding and planning and one on localisation)
- VOICE Grand Bargain project.



VOICE event at the European Development Days in June with DG ECHO, Germany, World Vision and Caritas Myanmar in the panel and ACF moderating.

Building on these achievements, in 2017 VOICE got further involved in the Grand Bargain implementation process. The Secretariat developed a project which responds to gaps identified around the initiative, such as the need to provide timely and accessible information on the implementation of the GB, the lack of involvement of front line responders and a potential lack of contextualization at field level.

The VOICE Grand Bargain project is funded by the Government of Belgium – Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD). It started in December 2017 and will be implemented over 12 months. It has three main strands:

1. Maintaining the work of the GB TF and the involvement of VOICE members in promoting the added value of NGOs in the GB process at EU level
2. Aiming to increase involvement of front line responders through partnership with Southern NGO networks
3. Mainstreaming communication activities in order to support all the other strands. One of the main tools will be a project website that will gather information on relevant GB initiatives to foster NGOs engagement.

The vast majority of VOICE members are DG ECHO partners and accountable and transparent through the FPA as well as through EU audits

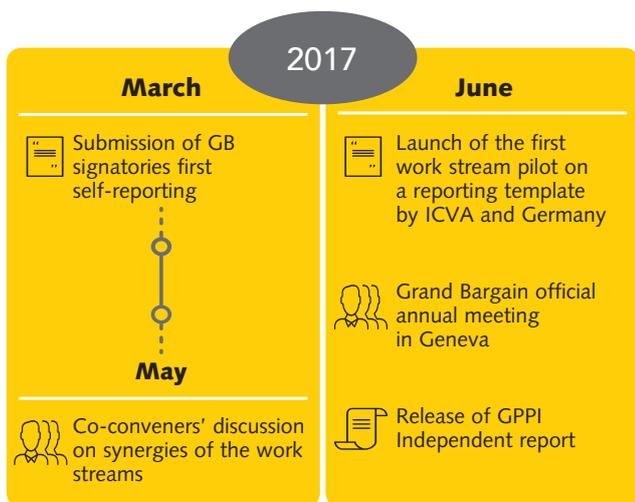
THE FPA WATCH GROUP: DG ECHO - NGO PARTNERSHIP

The FPA Watch Group works towards a common interpretation and consistent application of the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). It offers a unique space for cooperation and exchange for DG ECHO and its NGO partners. Over the years it has worked for simplification of procedures, for a greater recognition of the added value of NGOs in the partnership, for timely and predictable funding and for better coordination among donors and NGOs.

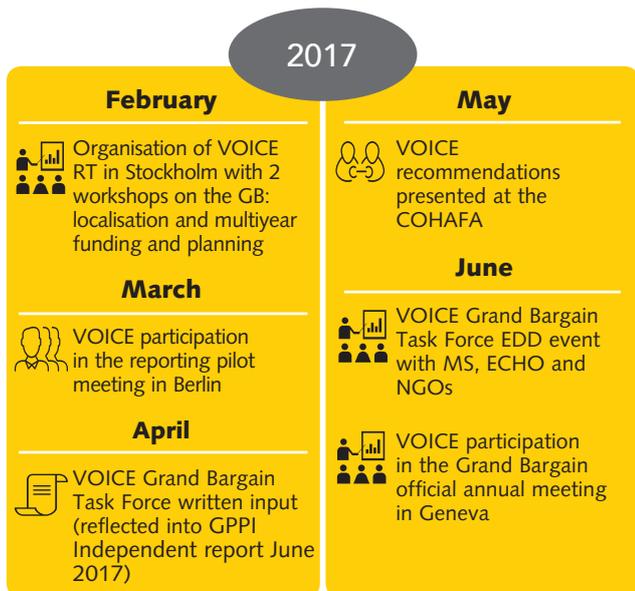
The exchanges are crucial as they shape the contractual framework that can speed up or slow down the signature of contracts, transfers of funds and conditions around the implementation of EU humanitarian assistance. This is also one of the areas where the NGOs' expertise from the field is crucial in order to define working priorities and practices.

In 2017 the 31 NGOs of the FPA Watch Group had three formal exchanges with DG ECHO on priorities and ongoing issues. In between each meeting the Task Force pursued its in-depth work producing analytical documents for the Watch Group.

Highlights of the Grand Bargain process



VOICE contribution



VOICE regular exchanges & input with ICVA, InterAction and SCHR



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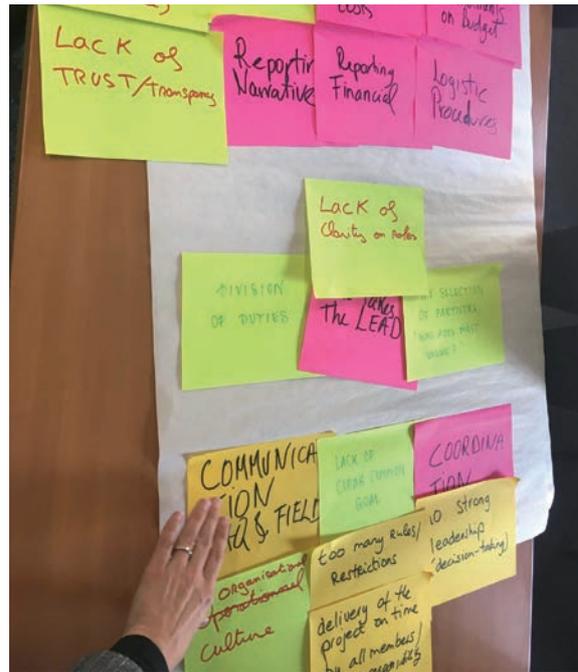
Partnership for transition: EU/ECHO in Arua, Uganda

Among this year's achievements:

- Over the last two years the group has strived for improvements to the process around the development, release and response to Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs). Humanitarian Implementation Plans are annual, regional or country plans that guide the EU's strategy and funding choices. 2017 was seen as a big success as more timely release of information meant partners could start working on their proposals earlier in the year. Changes in the management of deadlines for different HIPs and improvements in the initial consultations were also acknowledged by NGOs. This helped ensure that NGOs can inform the strategy and thus the EU's funding priorities, and put forward more relevant proposals in a timely way.
- Evidence from 200 projects was brought into the dialogue with the Commission on improving the liquidation of projects.
- The FPA Task Force, on behalf of the Watch Group, met with DG ECHO and their new auditors for a constructive exchange on good practices and challenges. The meeting itself is an important achievement as the group had asked repeatedly to meet with the auditors. Another technical dialogue is foreseen for 2018.

Towards the new FPA

The current FPA 2014 was prolonged for one year. The new FPA will be launched in January 2020. The FPA Watch Group has started working on the FPA renewal process. The group agreed that both the Grand Bargain and the revised Financial Regulation which promote simplification can provide substantial bases for developing a simpler FPA. NGO partners' priorities were shared with DG ECHO and both parties agreed a number of brainstorming sessions ahead of drafting the new FPA in 2018.



Snapshot of the consortia workshops 2017

Two consortia workshops: strengthening NGOs' understanding of partnership

VOICE organized two consortia workshops in 2017, one in April focusing on the main theories around consortia and partnership looking at the different steps of the partnership cycle and the key principles of successful partnerships. Following the high interest of VOICE members, a second workshop was organized in June to provide space for NGOs to share their concerns and good practices on working with DG ECHO funds in consortia.



Snapshot of the consortia workshops 2017



INFLUENCING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DRR) POLICY – VOICE REPORT

Throughout 2017, VOICE's Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group continued to contribute to and improve EU policy and practice on DRR. In March, the group published a study, “EU Member States’ Policies and Practice: Disaster Risk Reduction in humanitarian assistance and development cooperation”, comparing the DRR policies and practices of eight EU member states. The study was based on a questionnaire completed by members of VOICE DRR Working Group concerning their member states’ DRR approaches. It was presented to various high-level stakeholders, including in October at an event organised by UNISDR, UNESCO, the European Commission, and Wetlands International to mark the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, and again in November at the international ministerial climate conference, COP23, in Bonn.

The study was widely read within and beyond the VOICE network. There is a strong appetite for the added-value that this kind of analysis across the EU and member states can bring.

The group also gave substantial contributions to the network’s papers on resilience and engaged in global and European advocacy on implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR. Ending the year, the group’s terms of reference were adjusted to reflect the widening complexity of related EU policies, including EU resilience and the humanitarian-development nexus.



Snapshots of VOICE study on Disaster Risk Reduction, March 2017

5. Strengthening VOICE visibility for more impact

VOICE provides timely and accessible information and analysis for members and for EU institutions and member states

A NEW COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

In 2017 VOICE's Communication Strategy was finalised. Over the next three years it aims to: increase external visibility through outreach to the relevant stakeholders to create more awareness of our work and support the implementation of our recommendations; and bring forward NGOs' added value such as high quality standards of professionalism, expertise, field presence and flexibility.

In this way, the communication work will support the implementation of the VOICE Strategic Plan and its objectives through more effective external and internal communication.

GROWING TWITTER

In 2017 VOICE started to actively use Twitter to communicate, engage with, and listen to people to strengthen its outreach to members, the humanitarian community and EU decision-makers.

So far VOICE has run several campaigns, like on the EU Budget 2017, that have mobilised members' engagement across the EU.

In just four months the Twitter account has gained:

- More than 470 followers
- More than 15.000 impressions in only one campaign
- Relevant stakeholders' engagement like DG ECHO, DG DEVCO, the EU Parliament, the EU Council, the Estonian Presidency, and DG CLIMA.



SHOWCASING THROUGH THE WEBSITE

VOICE's new website was launched in February 2017 to further strengthen VOICE visibility, be more user-friendly and ease public access to VOICE's materials and positions.

With an updated and modern layout the website showcases VOICE publications and news on the network's advocacy work.

It reaches more than 1000 unique visitors per month and is consulted more than 3500 times per month.

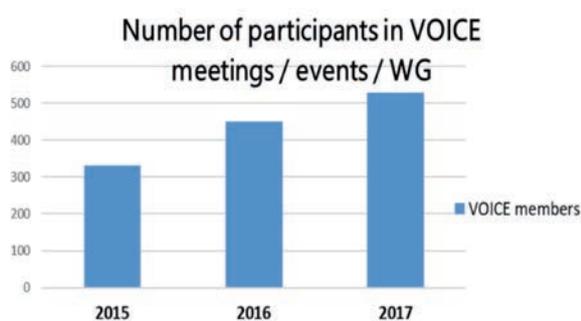


6. Growing the network

VOICE has 84 members from 19 countries representing 80% of NGOs receiving EU funding for humanitarian aid

MEMBERS' ENGAGEMENT

The VOICE Board and Secretariat were pleased to see members' engagement in VOICE activities grow in 2017 – highlighting the relevance of the strategic objectives and the priorities of the work programme to members' operational and advocacy work. The achievements of the network are built on much activity and participation at member state and Brussels levels, while relying on contributions from both management and technical experts to ensure humanitarian NGO expertise is well represented in European Union decision-making.



SOLIDIFYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE – THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 2017 General Assembly (GA) saw a rich exchange with DG ECHO Director General Ms. Monique Pariat. Together with 55 representatives from VOICE member organisations a wide range of issues were discussed; the EU budget 2018, the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, the ECHO evaluation and ECHO funding allocation methods.



VOICE Board members

The General Assembly provided a great opportunity for the network to further consolidate itself.

The General Assembly approved a new membership fee structure

The Board together with the Secretariat started an in-depth review of the VOICE membership fee structure in 2016/2017. A new fee structure was then developed and consulted with members through a webinar organised early in the year before being approved at the 2017 General Assembly. The new VOICE fee structure is based on:

- the same assessment for all members: fees are based on international turnover,
- a balanced redistribution of all members between the new fee bands to reflect the actual distribution of turnovers,
- the offer of a gradual reduction in the discount rate for families according to the number of their members in VOICE.

VOICE members expressed their appreciation of having a fairer system which takes into account the diversity among them and is based on their size while also providing a bonus for several members of the same family in the network.

Refreshed VOICE Statutes placing emphasis on members

Developments in the Belgian regulation for non-profit associations ('asbl') made it necessary to revise VOICE Statutes in order to remain compliant. Therefore, the Board of Directors used the opportunity to strengthen further the sections clarifying members' rights and obligations and to make the VOICE Statutes more user-friendly. The General Assembly approved all proposed changes to the Statutes.

Brexit

The VOICE Board continues to monitor the discussions around Brexit and the Secretariat regularly informs members on new developments. Following VOICE UK members request, VOICE used its brokering role to organize a much welcomed exchange between DG ECHO and UK members on the state of play for UK ECHO partners regarding humanitarian funding. VOICE has also been liaising with other NGO platforms with common concerns and provided useful insight to several relevant reports on the matter.

A new member and the VOICE policy resolution 2017!

The GA welcomed a new member, COOPI from Italy, which brings significant operational and technical expertise to the network. COOPI was established in 1965, has an FPA since 1993 and has 74% of its activities in humanitarian assistance. During 2015, COOPI ran 207 projects and reached nearly 2.3 million people in emergency situations worldwide. Working closely with vulnerable communities, COOPI promotes the humanitarian principles and aims at empowering its local partners by transferring knowledge. COOPI is also involved in advocacy in close relationships with the various Italian and international networks it belongs to.



The General Assembly further adopted a Policy Resolution stressing the importance of partnership between NGOs, EU institutions and member states:

Below are a number of extracts from the 2017 VOICE policy resolution.

“The 2007 Principles of Partnership (PoP) are framed around five key concepts of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. For NGOs these remain the gold-standard for humanitarian partnerships”

A DEDICATED VOICE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In 2017, the Board came together five times. In spring Board members very much contributed to the success of the VOICE Scandinavian Roundtable in Stockholm through their active participation in the panel discussions.

At the General Assembly in May 2017, Michael Mosselmans (Christian Aid/ACT Alliance) and Vincent Stehli (Fundacion Acción Contra El Hambre), were elected to the Board. They joined Nicolas Borsinger (President), Florence Daunis (Fédération Handicap International, Treasurer), Marek Štys (People in Need, Secretary), Ester Asin (Save the Children), Rikke Friis (Danish Refugee Council), Anne Street (CAFOD) and Daniel Zetterlund (International Aid Services).

In October, the Board welcomed its new members and discussed the network's priorities at the annual retreat, which also included an exchange with Ms. Chiara Gariazzo, Director in DG ECHO. The Board also contributed to the annual ECHO Partners' Conference in November, where the President delivered a well-received speech emphasising the importance of partnership between NGOs and DG ECHO.

VOICE thanks Jean-Michel Grand (Action Against Hunger UK) for his contribution to the Board over the years, especially in his role as Treasurer, and Floris Faber (Act Alliance EU office) for his support to the Board following the departure of Marco Rotelli (Intersos).

RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM POLICY TO IMPLEMENTATION

1. Partnerships strengthening political support for humanitarian aid

We call on the EU and its member states to continue to support their partners by reinforcing political backing for needs-based and principled humanitarian operations.

The EU and member states should ensure that the right legal frameworks and budgets are in place to lead to timely, predictable and flexible assistance.

We urge the EU and member states to strengthen the dialogue with humanitarian NGOs. Good policy development must be rooted in field reality. It requires systematic and meaningful consultations with NGOs, who are key implementing partners with essential operational knowledge and expertise.

2. Partnerships as a basis for quality operations

In light of the preparation of the next Framework Partnership Agreement, DG ECHO and its FPA partners should agree on a number of objectives for the new FPA. They should seek a joint understanding of what efficiency and effectiveness mean, based on concrete field evidence and include how risks are to be shared between ECHO and its partners.

Dialogue should be encouraged at member state level with the aim of reinforcing existing partnerships between member states and NGOs.

3. Towards concrete implementation of partnerships in the field

In the context of the Grand Bargain and the localisation agenda, donors should ensure that the trust and mutual accountability stemming from partnership are translated into acceptance of calculated risks. This will allow for timely, principled and needs-based responses.

Simplification of the administrative management and increased flexibility of expenditure are also needed for humanitarian partners to operate in often unpredictable contexts where intended results cannot always be guaranteed.

We urge donors to engage in dialogue with their NGO partners, on the real costs of new ways of working in different kinds of partnerships, including consortia, and work towards providing multi-year funding for them.

A GROWING SECRETARIAT

The VOICE Secretariat is responsible for the implementation of all the activities related to the VOICE Annual Work Programme in line with the Strategic Objectives. It is also in charge of the financial management of the association, under supervision of the VOICE Board of Directors. In 2017 the network has seen a year of growth both in the staff in the Secretariat and through ensuring additional external funding and an increased number of activities.



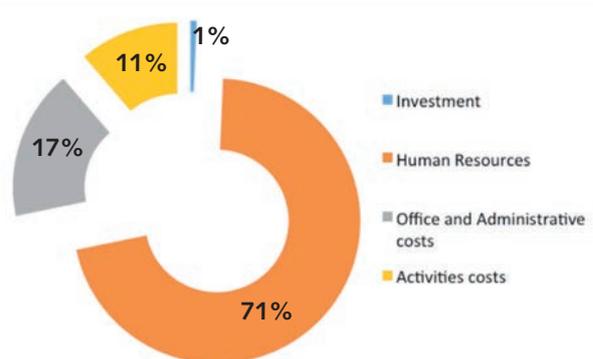
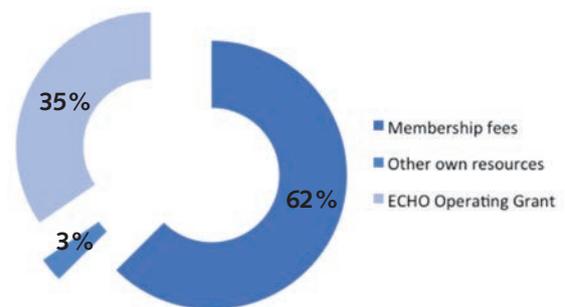
In 2017, three new staff members joined the VOICE Secretariat, Julie Changivy (Advocacy Officer), Roberta Fadda (Communication Officer), and Lawrence Holmes (Stagiaire), adding to the existing team composed of Kathrin Schick (Director), Magali Murlon (Programme Coordinator), Celia Cranfield (Senior Advocacy Officer), Marjorie Tonnelier (Junior Funding and Policy Officer), and Cécile Muller (Administrative and Finance Officer). VOICE thanks Livia Bottoni for her work as Communication Assistant in 2016-17.

FINANCES

In 2017, the turnover of the VOICE network as administered by the Secretariat totalled € 582 892,14. As in previous years, the majority (61%) was made up of membership fees.

VOICE implemented an ECHO operating grant under the project "Enhancing cooperation between European NGOs and strengthening NGOs' collective influence towards the European Union and Member States in relation to policies, programmes and funding affecting the delivery of humanitarian aid". This provided resources for additional activities and services to members and ECHO partners, and enabled the network to further increase its outreach through support to collective advocacy.

In December, VOICE commenced the implementation of a Grand Bargain project funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation.



84 MEMBERS IN 2017

AUSTRIA

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

BELGIUM

Caritas Secours International
Belgium
Médecins du Monde Belgium
Oxfam Solidarité – Solidariteit
Plan Belgique - België

CZECH REPUBLIC

ADRA Czech Republic
People in Need (PIN)

DENMARK

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

FINLAND

Finn Church Aid
World Vision Finland

FRANCE

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

GERMANY

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

GREECE

Médecins du Monde – Greece

IRELAND

Concern Worldwide
Trócaire

ITALY

Caritas Italiana
CESVI - Cooperazione e Sviluppo
COOPI
GVC - Gruppo Volontariato Civile
INTERMOS – Organizzazione Umanitaria Onlus

LUXEMBOURG

Caritas Luxembourg

THE NETHERLANDS

CARE Nederland
Cordaid
ICCO (Dutch Interchurch Aid)
Oxfam Novib
Save the Children Netherlands
ZOA

NORWAY

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
Norwegian Church Aid

POLAND

Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)

SLOVAKIA

Habitat for Humanity International

SPAIN

Acción Contra el Hambre
Caritas Española
Oxfam Intermón
Médicos del Mundo

SWEDEN

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

SWITZERLAND

Medair
Terre des Hommes
The Lutheran World Federation

UNITED KINGDOM

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



Funded by
European Union
Humanitarian Aid

VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 84 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

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