

## EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# COMBINED EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA, 2016- 2020, AND DG ECHO'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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*September 2022*

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# **PART A: EVALUATION OF DG ECHO'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, 2016-2020**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Executive Summary of Part A of the Final report for the Combined evaluation of the European Union's humanitarian interventions in the Horn of Africa (HoA) in the 2016-2020 period, and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)' partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The evaluation was launched by DG ECHO in January 2021 and finalised in 2022. The work was undertaken by ICF with inputs from experts in the fields of humanitarian assistance and evaluation, and local researchers.

### *Objectives and scope of the evaluation*

The purpose of this assignment was twofold: to assess the EU's humanitarian interventions in the Horn of Africa over the period 2016-2020 (Part A); and to assess DG ECHO's partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) over the period 2016-2020 (Part B).

The aim of Part A of the evaluation was to provide a retrospective assessment of DG ECHO's funded activities in countries in the HoA region over the period 2016-2020 with a focus on two thematic areas, (i) cash as a modality and (ii) forced displacement. Cross-cutting issues such as coordination, resilience and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus were also covered. Special attention was given to the opportunities for cross-border approaches in the region to optimise cross-fertilisation between countries and complementary actions.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, this evaluation identified potential learning elements relevant for future interventions in the region, which led to three key strategic recommendations.

### *Methodological approach*

The evaluation was designed to respond to a specific set of evaluation questions, as articulated in the Terms of Reference (ToR). A variety of research tools and sources of information were used to build a rich and comprehensive evidence base for this evaluation covering a wide range of stakeholders. This included documentation review, data analysis, key informant interviews (KII), field missions and workshops. In total, the evaluation team reviewed approximately 85 documents and projects documentation (SingleForm and FichOps) for 70 actions. ICF also conducted a survey of DG ECHO framework partners operating in the HoA region (which received 121 responses), undertook 20 KIIs and carried out project site visits and field missions in Somalia and Uganda, while the field mission to Ethiopia was undertaken remotely.

### *Overview of the Context*

Climatic shocks, political dynamics, conflict and economic disruptions continued to drive the humanitarian needs in the HoA. Despite the region's strategic and geographical potential, a range of factors, with prevailing conflict as a key driver, continued to generate an unstable regional environment. In brief, the main contextual developments in the region over the period 2016-2020 were:

- Climatic shocks: the HoA has suffered from frequent natural disasters, including extreme weather events such as droughts and floods. Both the frequency and intensity of natural hazards have increased over the last decades, leaving little time between episodes for affected populations to recover. Epidemics have further impacted vulnerable populations.

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<sup>1</sup> The evaluation in part A therefore included DG ECHO's funded activities in countries in the HoA region over the period 2016-2020 that relate to (i) multi-purpose cash transfers (MPCT) (i.e. using cash and/or vouchers as a modality for part or all the activities); (ii) forced displacement (i.e. actions targeting IDPs, refugees, returnees and host communities); (iii) finding durable solutions to displacement crisis in line with the framework of the Resilience-Humanitarian Development-Peace Nexus

- Conflict and political dynamics: Political factors and the lack of good governance across the wider region played a crucial role in sustaining and aggravating the complex humanitarian crises in the HoA, contributing to increased forced displacements in the greater HoA region. Furthermore, the lack of strong regional governance structures in the HoA and sustainable collaboration between the countries did not benefit the region.
- Economic disruptions and weak social services: During the evaluation period, the HoA saw fast and sustained economic growth. However, variations existed between the countries and within, with an unequal distribution of benefits across the population. In 2020, COVID-19 led to the disruption of economically important service sectors (such as tourism), caused supply chain problems, and led to an increase of vulnerability to poverty. Due to economic challenges, poor governance and weak institutions, critical and basic infrastructure as well as basic services (such as health services) were either inexistent or poor in certain parts of the HoA, thereby undermining the coping capacity of vulnerable populations.

These factors led to an increase of the humanitarian needs in the HoA from high in 2016 to very high or extreme by 2020, according to the Integrated Analysis Framework (IAF).

In the evaluation period, DG ECHO responded to those needs with a total of €1bn of funding (10% of the total humanitarian aid funding in the HoA in the period) that reached approximately 133.5 million beneficiaries, making it the third biggest donor in the HoA after the US and the UK in 2016-2020. When looking at DG ECHO's funding by sector, most of the funding was allocated to the Food security and livelihoods (FSL) sector (37%) followed by water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) (10%), Protection<sup>2</sup> (9%), Nutrition (8%) and Health (8%). The multi-purpose cash transfer (MPCT) sector received up to 7% of the total funding. In-kind assistance continuously decreased over the evaluation period, while cash and vouchers became a more standard modality for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

#### *Key findings and conclusions*

The evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, added value, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of DG ECHO's interventions in the HoA region between 2016-2020.

#### **Relevance**

The funding prioritisation and allocation was informed by an assessment of the most acute humanitarian needs in the region by sector. At regional level, the main focus was on life-saving assistance, relating broadly to food security, forced displacement and healthcare. At the same time, DG ECHO continued to emphasise the need to support ongoing efforts to seek long-term solutions to recurrent issues in terms of forced displacement and food insecurity.

DG ECHO and its framework and implementing partners generally adequately assessed, identified and understood the differentiated needs of the most vulnerable in the design and implementation of EU-funded actions, including in their response to forced displacement, taking into account country-level specificities. A range of methods and strategies were used to identify and address needs, which were generally viewed to be appropriate, and tailored to the needs of beneficiaries. Some progress was made in implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)<sup>3</sup> in Uganda, but limited progress was made in Ethiopia. DG ECHO also

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<sup>2</sup> Centrality of protection was however ensured through mainstreaming.

<sup>3</sup> The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) was developed following the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants. The CRRF aims to increase support to refugees and their host countries, including by improving cooperation between humanitarian actors, development actors and host governments to develop more sustainable, durable solutions. DG ECHO prioritised actions that aligned with the Framework.

considered the needs of the most vulnerable refugee populations in its priorities and objectives as well as in its needs assessments throughout the evaluation period.

Despite the presence of regional Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs)<sup>4</sup> for the HoA throughout the evaluation period, evidence reviewed suggests that the approach taken to delivery of actions in the region was mostly country-based, with a few exceptions. DG ECHO's strategy and funded actions were context adapted and addressed relevant aspects in the region, however the need for a more joined-up approach was generally recognised. DG ECHO sought to enable framework and implementing partners to deliver timely and flexible responses, supporting them with solutions such as the crisis modifier<sup>5</sup>. Partners recognised DG ECHO's flexibility as a donor and made use of the tools offered to allow this, however several suggestions were made by partners for ways in which DG ECHO could improve in terms of timeliness and flexibility.

### **Coherence**

Overall, needs were identified and prioritised across the HoA in alignment with DG ECHO's mandate as provided by the Humanitarian Aid Regulation (HAR). Overall, DG ECHO's HIPs for the HoA were aligned with the framework set out in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Moreover, the DG ECHO-funded humanitarian responses in the HoA implemented by partners remained aligned with humanitarian principles, although a few challenges were encountered. DG ECHO also played a key role in promoting respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) through its advocacy efforts.

Overall, the DG ECHO response in the HoA was aligned with relevant thematic/sector priorities, and these priorities were taken into account when designing HIPs. However, in some cases it was difficult for framework partners to ensure alignment with DG ECHO's thematic/sectoral policies and priorities; especially in cash and protection. This was mostly due to contextual (e.g., association of malnutrition with cultural taboos), practical (e.g., difficult in terms of transport and distribution of in-kind assistance) and technical implementation (e.g., difficulties in monitoring ECHO's WASH indicators) issues.

In the context of the triple Nexus<sup>6</sup> and coordination instruments, DG ECHO took measures to contribute to the coordination with EU's resilience, development and peace actions. DG ECHO referred in its HIPs that activities supported would be required to demonstrate a clear bridging with ongoing resilience or development programmes that were in the spirit of the nexus. DG ECHO introduced internal changes and used markers alongside assessments of proposals to promote nexus opportunities and possible synergies/complementarities with programmes funded by development and peace actors. When selecting which actions to fund, DG ECHO verified complementarity with initiatives of other donors and continued monitoring this complementarity throughout the action duration.

At project level, DG ECHO encouraged framework partners to participate in the various cluster coordination meetings of relevant sectors. DG ECHO also played a key role in developing and sharing best practices with relevant actors as part of its leading role in few clusters. At donor level, DG ECHO regularly met with other donors and was able to provide strategic coordination with other donors. This included information sharing and discussions on common issues such as protection, cash, access via the various Humanitarian Donor Coordination fora.

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<sup>4</sup> DG ECHO prepares and publishes 'Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs)', which provide more detailed information on the operational priorities identified within each country/region of operation.

<sup>5</sup> "Crisis Modifiers refer to the integration of a flexible, early action component within a DG ECHO-funded action, to address, in a timely manner, immediate and lifesaving needs resulting from a rapid-onset crisis or a deteriorated situation. Please see DG ECHO Guidance Note - Disaster Preparedness, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Triple Nexus refers to the promotion of interlinkages between the humanitarian, development and peace sectors



### Added value

The added value of DG ECHO's intervention in the HoA was significant and wide-ranging. Firstly, it was one of the largest humanitarian donors in the region, with its funding during the evaluation period representing 10% of the total humanitarian flows to the region. Secondly, DG ECHO funding was highly additional. For the vast majority of framework partners (94%), the lack of DG ECHO funding would have either resulted in the project not going ahead at all or in the reduction of the project's scope, scale or timeline. Finally, DG ECHO added considerable value to the existing humanitarian aid architecture in the HoA via its (i) technical expertise and field presence; (ii) comprehensive geographical and sectoral coverage (and particularly by filling gaps not covered by other actors); (iii) extensive partnership network; and (iv) flexibility and rapid response tools such as crisis modifiers. Moreover, DG ECHO was actively engaged in promoting a coordinated humanitarian response in the region and was widely acknowledged by partners as a leading actor on forced displacement and cash transfers.

### Effectiveness

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on the effectiveness of DG ECHO's funded interventions in the region due to (i) data constraints, (ii) the inherent time lag in reporting of results and outcomes and (iii) the lack of time and resources to evaluate impact using theory based or quasi-experimental approaches. A mixed picture emerges on the basis of available evidence:

- While DG ECHO funded actions contributed to saving lives and alleviating suffering, many of the funded actions partially achieved their expected results. 36% of the DG ECHO funded actions achieved all their targets for Key Result Indicators (KRIs), while another 36% achieved some (but not all) KRI's targets. However, the level of achievement of Key Objective Indicators (KOIs) was rather high – the KOI targets were generally achieved or exceeded for the projects selected for in-depth review.<sup>7</sup>
- Overall, the achievement of results and outcomes was hampered by several constraints, such as partner's lack of preparedness, security issues, partner's lack of capacity and expertise, delays in procurement, lack of basic infrastructure in affected areas, covid-19 restrictions etc.
- DG ECHO drove the use of cash as a modality in the region. Cash helped meet beneficiaries' priority needs (e.g., food, education), but transfers were not always sufficient either in terms of fully meeting their needs (shelter, healthcare) or in terms of the number of beneficiaries covered.
- DG ECHO played a role in establishing shock responsive social safety nets in Somalia. DG ECHO worked with the EU Delegation's SAGAL programme<sup>8</sup> as well as the World Bank's Baxnaano safety net programme<sup>9</sup>, which covered 1.2 million people or 200,000 households who receive USD20/ month, on developing a shock responsiveness component within these programmes. .

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<sup>7</sup> Results are immediate outputs of the actions, while outcomes are the consequences of achieving those results. DG ECHO funded interventions have one specific objective and several expected results. The expected achievements in terms of specific objective are set by defining target values for one or more Key Objective Indicators. Similarly, the expected achievements in terms of results are set by defining target values for one or more Key Result Indicators.

<sup>8</sup> A Social Transfer programme implemented in coordination with Federal Government of Somalia, which provided regular cash-based Social Transfers to beneficiaries of the programme and built government systems for sustainable delivery of social protection.

<sup>9</sup>The main objective of the project is to provide cash transfers to targeted poor and vulnerable households and establish the main elements of a national shock-responsive safety net system. See more information at: <https://baxnaano.so/about-baxnaano/>

- Finally, DG ECHO made a contribution to promoting durable solutions for forced displacement in the region, although a lot remains to be done and with progress, rather naturally, varying by country.

Advocacy was a key element of the HIPs during the evaluation period. However, only a limited number of DG ECHO funded actions were found to undertake advocacy activities. Overall, advocacy work was limited by budgets available and the short time span of DG ECHO's actions. Nonetheless, some examples of success could be found in relation to advocacy on respect for humanitarian principles, IHL as well as promotion of humanitarian space. Advocacy was also directly implemented by DG ECHO depending on the country context, although much of it occurred behind the scenes and was not documented. The evaluation was only able to form a somewhat fragmented and incomplete picture of DG ECHO's activities as well as accomplishments in this area (based primarily on key informant interviews). As such, it was hard to conclude whether DG ECHO's advocacy efforts were effective or not, in spite of some examples of successes.

### **Efficiency**

Cost effectiveness was considered by DG ECHO and its partners in the design of objectives, funding priorities and actions, and both took steps to ensure this would be achieved by funded actions. Whilst overall, cost effectiveness was achieved in DG ECHO's response throughout the evaluation period, several areas for improvement were identified regarding the cost effectiveness of funded actions, such as increasing harmonisation across DG ECHO's framework and implementing partners, for example through joint needs analysis and joint strategies; reducing the bureaucratic and administrative burdens associated with programming, contract variations (or 'top-up' funding) and proposal format; and returning to the Grand Bargain principles of common reporting and multi-year financing. There is wide consensus that the total funding provided by donors is insufficient to meet the collective humanitarian needs in the region, though it was recognised that DG ECHO's contribution was important. Nonetheless, the evidence regarding the extent to which budget allocations provided by DG ECHO were sufficient to enable actions to achieve their objectives was inconclusive.

### **Sustainability**

DG ECHO promoted sustainability of interventions in its HoA strategy by supporting self-reliance of programme beneficiaries, finding innovative and durable solutions to protracted situations and emphasising the importance and opportunities of linking humanitarian interventions to other interventions and cooperating with development stakeholders in the region. On a country level, DG ECHO's approach to sustainability in HoA was mostly ensured through working with other actors and, when possible by, sharing expertise as well as promoting exit strategies. DG ECHO encouraged designing and implementing cash responses as part of DG ECHO's shock responsiveness approach and to create links with longer term interventions, and considered sustainability from project inception.

### *Recommendations*

Three key strategic recommendations have emerged from this evaluation.

#### **1. DG ECHO should consider adopting a multi-annual regional 'umbrella' framework / strategy with national and regional HIPs where appropriate**

A regional, multi-country 'umbrella' framework could accommodate different approaches, depending on what, based on needs assessments, would make most sense. Regional approaches would be based on the pooling of resources from different countries to address

cross-cutting issues. The regional 'umbrella' framework would allow DG ECHO to address both cross-cutting issues affecting multiple countries, as well as country-specific needs.

Moreover, a multi-annual regional framework could also accommodate responses that do not fit within the 'annual' programming approach of the HIPs and the typical project cycles of 12-18 months, for example certain elements of multi-country or country specific responses to protracted crises, where relevant.

A multi-annual regional framework would also allow to develop and implement a more consistent and long-term approach to the nexus with development, and to elaborate a feasible exit strategy for DG ECHO.

## 2. DG ECHO should invest further efforts to focus the use of cash on where it can be most effective

It is recommended that DG ECHO:

- Continues its efforts to examine and identify, through studies and expert involvement, those contexts in which the use of cash would be most appropriate (also considering the practical limitations) and effective, including with a view of establishing the nexus with development and, where relevant, an exit strategy.
- As part of the above, be more realistic around the sector outcomes that can be achieved through MPCT, especially when the amount and duration of the assistance is limited, which is often the case due to funding or other constraints. This also calls for giving greater consideration to how cash can best be combined with sectoral programming in the different contexts, to maximise the complementarity and synergies between the different actions, and further increase effectiveness.

## 3. DG ECHO should consider adopting advocacy strategies

It is recommended that DG ECHO develops an overall advocacy strategy as part of its HIPs, which although potentially part of a regional approach (see Recommendation 1 above) should include a tailored advocacy plan for each country (or sub-country areas where relevant), based on the needs assessments as well as considerations on the feasibility of undertaking advocacy in each context.

The advocacy plans should set out:

- Advocacy objectives and priorities for the country
- The type of messaging, activities, etc., that are planned by DG ECHO (in as far as these can be publicly communicated) and those DG ECHO would like framework partners to implement as part of their DG ECHO funded actions
- Guidance for speaking on specific issues with one voice.

Partners could be requested to set out their advocacy strategy and/or planned advocacy activities in their proposals and describe how these align with DG ECHO's strategy and specific national plan. Overall, DG ECHO should promote advocacy, where this is feasible, as a valid and concrete component of the overall humanitarian response, to which funding can be allocated.

The advocacy strategy and national plans should be drafted in close consultation with other relevant stakeholders, including other Commission services such as Directorate-General for

International Partnerships (DG INTPA), and DG ECHO partners to ensure that there is overall consensus on the objectives, priorities and messaging. A share of the financial resources available could be earmarked for advocacy activities within the funded actions.

The development of the overall advocacy strategy could be supported by a thematic evaluation of DG ECHO's advocacy efforts over the past 4-5 years, with a forward-looking element to provide the basis for a strategy.

# **PART B: EVALUATION OF DG ECHO'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, 2016-2020**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Executive Summary of Part B of the *Combined evaluation of the European Union's humanitarian interventions in the Horn of Africa, 2016-2020, and DG ECHO's partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)*. The evaluation was undertaken over 2021 and the start of 2022. The work was undertaken by ICF with inputs from experts in the fields of humanitarian assistance and evaluation.

### *Objectives and scope of the evaluation*

The evaluation assessed DG ECHO's partnership with the ICRC over the period 2016-2020. This report therefore presents an analysis of the operationalisation of the partnership, with a particular focus on its relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness.

### *Overview of the partnership*

The ICRC is a neutral and independent organisation established in 1863 with the objective of ensuring protection and assistance to victims of armed conflict and situations of violence and promoting respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Since its establishment in 1992, DG ECHO has been cooperating with the ICRC and contributing to funding its operations. Over the evaluation period, DG ECHO was among the top five ICRC's donors contributing to funding over 120 humanitarian actions implemented by the ICRC in more than 40 countries.

DG ECHO's partnership with ICRC is regulated by an open-ended Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) signed in 2014 and its accompanying annexes. The FPA and its annexes set out, inter alia, the general rights and obligations of both parties as well as the conditions applicable to all ICRC's humanitarian actions funded by DG ECHO. In 2018, DG ECHO launched its first multi-year Grand Bargain Programmatic Partnership Pilot (hereafter Grand Bargain PPP) with the ICRC, focussing on six countries in the Middle East region.

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) (43%) and Africa (35%) received the highest share of funding for ICRC actions commissioned under the FPA. All funding provided by DG ECHO to the ICRC under the Grand Bargain PPP was delivered to countries in the Middle East. Therefore, at an aggregate level, almost two-thirds (59%) of DG ECHO funds to the ICRC were directed towards actions in the MENA region. Under the Grand Bargain PPP, Syria was the largest beneficiary country of ICRC's actions, receiving €93 million in funding, followed by Yemen and Palestine who received €27 million and €24 million respectively.

### *Methodology*

The methodological approach was informed by research tools specifically developed and tailored for the purpose of this evaluation to build a rich and comprehensive evidence base and respond to a specific set of evaluation issues and questions, as articulated in the Terms of Reference (ToR). Overall, for Part B of the evaluation, ICF carried out:

- **Desk research of existing documentation, literature and data** (52 documents);
- A **mapping of 31 projects**, with analysis of all Single Forms and FichOps (62 in total);
- A **portfolio analysis** based on data contained in HOPE/EVA databases;
- **Two multi-modal surveys** targeting DG ECHO and ICRC staff;
- A total of **47 interviews** semi structured interviews with DG ECHO Headquarters staff, DG ECHO Field staff and Thematic experts, ICRC Staff at HQ and field level, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement members, DG INTPA, EEAS, FPI and DG HOME officials, as well as other ICRC donors;
- Two **case studies** through remote fieldwork in Colombia and in the Middle East region.

*Key findings and conclusions*

*Relevance*

**The partnership was mutually beneficial and brought added value to DG ECHO and the ICRC's responses to humanitarian crises.** For example, through the partnership, DG ECHO benefited from ICRC's access to hard-to-reach areas and their reliability and experience in delivering humanitarian aid. ICRC for its part, benefited from greater funding predictability and flexibility, as well as from DG ECHO's technical expertise and knowledge of humanitarian issues. Moreover, **the partners' mandates, competences and resources were highly complementary, which benefited both partners in addressing humanitarian needs.** This was particularly true with regard to the promotion of IHL – identified as a key area of cooperation between ICRC and DG ECHO – as well as when it came to the financial and human resources that both partners brought to address humanitarian needs. On the other hand, **the evaluation also evidenced some differences in the way DG ECHO and the ICRC interpret the moment when humanitarian action ends and longer-term development interventions start,** which in some contexts led to discrepancies between the partners' approaches to a few protracted crises and the operationalisation of the Nexus.

**The partnership remained relevant in the face of evolving humanitarian needs and changes in the humanitarian architecture both at global and country level** (e.g. shrinking humanitarian space, climate change, increase number of non-state armed groups, Covid-19 pandemic etc.). At country level, the partnership was able to adapt to changes in needs on the ground, including new challenges and constraints posed by the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. through budget reallocations, increased funding, changes to the types of activities funded etc.).

*Coherence*

**The objectives of the partnership were generally well-understood by DG ECHO and ICRC staff, although with somewhat different levels of understanding within both organisations.** Additionally, the evaluation found that, overall, ICRC and DG ECHO staff were **well-aware of and respected each other roles and mandates and were committed to the partnership.**

**There was a good degree of alignment and complementarity between ICRC and DG ECHO's strategic priorities and objectives. At operational level, the partnership was also generally well-aligned with each partner's objectives and priorities at sectoral, regional and country level.** A few minor differences in terms of strategic and operational priorities (mostly at country level) were also identified, which however were considered as "natural" given the specific mandate of each organisation, and not considered to have had a negative impact on the partnership overall.

**The partnership was also generally coherent with DG ECHO and ICRC internal corporate policies and instruments** (e.g. Humanitarian Aid Regulation, European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, Seville Agreement, both partners' approaches to needs assessments etc.). However, some minor inconsistencies were also identified regarding DG ECHO's visibility guidelines and its monitoring and reporting requirements, as well as with the European Commission's Financial Regulation.

*Efficiency*

There was **regular, open and honest dialogue between DG ECHO and ICRC at different levels.** Strategic level communication and coordination were facilitated by regular meetings and events organised by the two partners. At field level, exchanges between DG ECHO and ICRC officers mostly happened informally, and to a limited extent through participation in Humanitarian Country Teams meetings and other platforms. Improvements in communication and coordination could be brought through **more regular bilateral dialogue** between DG ECHO and ICRC, particularly in headquarters, and through more **structured communication between DG ECHO and ICRC's equivalent desks.**

While **there was room to collectively reflect on actions that enabled or impeded the partnership**, more should be done at strategic level to create opportunities for stocktaking exercises and collection/discussion of strategic lessons learned.

**The partnership provided ICRC with greater funding flexibility and predictability, particularly in the context of the Grand bargain PPP.** The Grand Bargain PPP also provided flexibility in the operations at regional level through the possibility of funds transfer between countries, particularly through the ICRC's request to support underfunded operations, which is perfectly in line with the commitments to the Grand Bargain. However, the partnership only **partially produced a reduction in administrative costs during the evaluation period.**

Although the **quality of the actions implemented by ICRC using DG ECHO funding was high**, the limited availability of disaggregated data related to the demographics of the targeted beneficiaries in ICRC's proposal and reports did not allow to generate any meaningful conclusions on whether the partnership ensured accountability to affected populations and on how European aid funds were spent. However, it is important to note that limited reporting requirements on disaggregated numbers of beneficiaries and DG ECHO quality markers are foreseen in the partnership's contractual agreements.

#### *Effectiveness*

The **advocacy priorities of DG ECHO and ICRC were aligned and complementary at both global and country level**, particularly on IHL and protection. While mechanisms to identify opportunities for joint advocacy existed both at strategic level and at field level, DG ECHO and ICRC did not exploit such opportunities in a systematic way. **Joint advocacy efforts (e.g. through "mobilisation/ sensitisation") were carried out during the evaluation period through different means** (e.g. roundtables, high-level missions, awareness raising campaigns, etc.), and **contributed to improving the protection of civilians and compliance with IHL** in several countries (e.g. Mali, Palestine, Ukraine, Ethiopia, etc.).

**The DG ECHO-ICRC partnership contributed to improved effectiveness of their humanitarian response, particularly in terms of impacts on target beneficiaries.** The peculiarity of each partner's role, mandate and operational capacity ensured that the same results would not have been achieved in absence of the partnership. Both partners benefited from each other's strengths and unique features (e.g. ICRC's mandate and ability to deliver humanitarian assistance in certain areas/ contexts on one side, and DG ECHO's funding flexibility and predictability on the other) to enhance the effectiveness of their activities.

**The joint DG ECHO-ICRC communication and visibility actions achieved notable results in Europe, while limited efforts were done to ensure visibility in the field (as foreseen in DG ECHO-ICRC contractual agreements).** Collaboration between the communication offices of both partners was excellent, and opportunities for joint communication actions were proactively identified and acted upon, resulting in a **series of successful communication campaigns in Europe to promote the work funded by DG ECHO in third countries.** More should be done by both partners in terms of analysis of the impact and outreach of the visibility and communication activities.

#### *Strategic recommendations*

##### **Strategic recommendations**

- 1. In future multi-annual agreements (such as the Grand Bargain Programmatic Partnership Pilot), DG ECHO should promote the adoption of a more inclusive and efficiency-driven programmatic approach**



- DG ECHO should promote the adoption of an inclusive programming approach which integrates the perspectives of all the relevant DG ECHO and ICRC headquarter and field units when designing and outlining the strategic elements, operational objectives and mechanisms (including, for example, monitoring and reporting) of the project, thus creating a horizontal design process rather than adopting a top-down approach. DG ECHO should also ensure that relevant field officers are consulted in the case of shifts in funding (e.g. between countries), which might guarantee a higher level of alignment with the priorities and budget allocations in all countries involved;
- DG ECHO should ensure that the flexibility brought by a multi-annual funding approach and simplified grant management (i.e. one regional contract) is translated into operational efficiency. Ideally, DG ECHO should promote the adoption of a similar structure at regional level – i.e. through the introduction of regional management or coordination positions with specific responsibilities over the implementation of the regional programme. Also, DG ECHO could consider adapting its reporting requirements to the multi-annual nature of the project, particularly by reducing intermediate reporting requirements. Lastly, DG ECHO should engage with ICRC to discuss the introduction of general objectives indicators, which could be partially measured at intermediate stage and constitute the main focus of the final report (thus reporting on the impacts of the project).

**2. DG ECHO should engage with the ICRC to develop more opportunities to increase mutual learning at strategic level and improve information sharing, particularly in order to:**

- Introduce at least one stocktaking meeting every two years, during which the lessons learned both at strategic (headquarters) and operational (field) level should be captured and discussed in an objective and unbiased way;
- Improve the level of detail of information provided in proposals and reports by ICRC, particularly to meet DG ECHO's requirements and ensure that impacts of actions (e.g. on target population) are properly recorded and communicated. For example, DG ECHO could encourage ICRC to better and more consistently present the outputs of their actions, as well as the achieved outcomes and impacts on beneficiaries, and consistently populate relevant indicators. Furthermore, ICRC could be encouraged to consistently report on DG ECHO's gender and age quality markers;
- Jointly collect and analyse data on the outcomes and, when possible, impacts of joint communication activities. The ICRC could be encouraged by DG ECHO to collect data on outcomes and impacts of the communication activities, as they directly implement them and collect related monitoring data. This could happen, for example through the use of qualitative data collection methods, which can be used to gather feedback from participants in the different types of events organised. Furthermore, DG ECHO could make use of the regular evaluations of its communication and visibility (e.g. the ones carried out in 2007 and 2015<sup>10</sup>) to assess the outcomes and impacts of the joint communication activities carried out with the ICRC;
- Better align, at planning stage, the joint communication activities with the requirements outlined in the FPA, particularly by including additional information on the general content of the activity (aside for the title of the event/ activity and the geographical

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<sup>10</sup> The Evaluation Partnership Limited, Evaluation of Communication, Information and Visibility Actions in Humanitarian Aid, 2007. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2007/communication.pdf> and Transtec, EY, Evaluation of DG ECHO's Approach to Communication under the Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIP), 2015. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2015/approach\\_communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2015/approach_communication_en.pdf)

location), on how the visibility of the European Commission will be ensured, and on the budget allocated to each planned activity.

**3. DG ECHO should reinforce ongoing dialogue and cooperation with ICRC on the operationalisation of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus**

- DG ECHO should develop more opportunities for bilateral discussions and cooperation on the operationalisation of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus with ICRC;
- DG ECHO should promote dialogue between ICRC and other relevant Commission services (i.e. DG INTPA, DG NEAR) on the implementation of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus. Tripartite collaboration with relevant Commission Services should be actively sought after (where relevant and possible) and regularly discussed at strategic and operational level.

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## The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - ECHO

### ECHO Mission

The primary role of the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of the European Commission is to manage and coordinate the European Union's emergency response to conflicts, natural and man-made disasters. It does so both through the delivery of humanitarian aid and through the coordination and facilitation of in-kind assistance, specialist capacities, expertise and intervention teams using the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)



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