

Combined Evaluation of the European Union’s Humanitarian Response to Sudden-Onset Disasters (2016–2020) and of DG Echo’s Partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A combined evaluation of the European Union’s humanitarian response to sudden-onset disasters (Part A) and of DG ECHO’s partnership with the IFRC (Part B) over the 2016-2020 period was launched by DG ECHO in August 2021. The two parts of the evaluation are covered in separate sections (Part A and Part B).

PART A: EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION’S HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO SUDDEN-ONSET DISASTERS, 2016–2020

Objectives and scope of the Evaluation

The overall purpose of this external evaluation was to assess the extent to which DG ECHO’s tools and instruments provided a relevant, efficient and effective response to sudden onset disasters. The evaluation had a stock-taking, lesson-learning and forward-looking dimension.

The evaluation’s scope covered all support provided during the period 2016 to 2020 through three instruments: Emergency Toolbox (excluding the Epidemics Tool), Emergency Response Mechanisms, Crisis Modifiers.

Methodological approach

This evaluation of DG ECHO’s response to Sudden Onset Disasters has a theory-based design. It is based on a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) and is structured around 7 evaluation questions (EQs). These follow standard evaluation criteria as proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ALNAP¹ and the EU (relevance and appropriateness, coherence and alignment, coordination and added value, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and connectedness)

A broad range of tools were used to collect and triangulate findings in order to provide robust patterns of both quantitative data (surveys, portfolio analysis) and qualitative data (document analysis, interviews, focus group discussions and site observation). Overall, primary data collection activities covered more than 250 stakeholders, including 71 key informant interviews; multiple focus group discussions with nearly 100 beneficiaries; and a survey of 58 DG ECHO staff and 86 partner staff. Field visits were conducted in the Philippines and Nigeria. In complement, the evaluation team consulted in total more than 130 documents, including on 30 projects implemented between 2016 and 2020 by 18 different partner organisations. The evaluation team also conducted a detailed analysis of quantitative data relating to DG ECHO’s funding allocation and beneficiaries reached.

Finally, three case studies were conducted on DG ECHO’s response to Sudden Onset Disasters relying on a mixed-methods approach: two country case studies (Nigeria and the Philippines) and one thematic one (Timeliness of the process).






Background

Providing a timely and effective response to sudden-onset disasters is an important role of DG ECHO as a global humanitarian actor. To respond as rapidly as possible to unforeseen disasters, DG ECHO has developed a range of tools including Crises Modifiers (CMs), the Emergency Response Mechanisms (E/RRM), and the Emergency Toolbox (ETB). The ETB contains four tools: the Acute Large

¹ ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance) aims at increasing learning and accountability in the humanitarian aid sector.

Emergency Response Tool (ALERT), the Epidemics Tool (not included in the scope of this evaluation), the Small-scale Tool (SST), and support to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) An overview of these tools is provided in the figure below.

Figure 1. Overview of DG ECHO tools for responding to Sudden Onset Disasters

Emergency Toolbox	ALERT	SST	IFRC's DREF	E/RRM	CMs
    	<p>Launched in 2018</p> <p>Designed for large scale disasters (100,000 persons or over 50% of the population affected)</p> <p>Covers natural or technological disasters</p> <p>Up to EUR 500,000 per action</p> <p>Initial duration of the action: up to 6 months</p>	<p>Launched in 2015</p> <p>Provides assistance on a limited scale (below 100,000 people affected)</p> <p>Covers both man-made and natural disasters</p> <p>Up to EUR 500,000 per action</p> <p>Initial duration of the action: up to 12 months</p>	<p>Designed to provide support to national Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies</p> <p>Owned by the IFRC</p> <p>Replenished by DG ECHO for up to EUR 200,000 per action</p> <p>20% of DG ECHO's contribution may be used towards the FbAF</p>	<p>Designed to address localized, small-scale emergencies triggered by both man-made and natural disasters</p> <p>Highly context specific</p> <p>Pooling capacities of different partners, coordination mechanism</p> <p>Geographically and sectorally focused</p>	<p>Budgetary flexibility built into existing contracts</p> <p>Typically 10% of the budget</p> <p>Can be activated by partners subject to clearly defined and agreed triggers and thresholds</p> <p>Can be used to undertake anticipatory action and disaster preparedness</p>

Source: ADE

Over the evaluation period, DG ECHO has provided EUR 85 million via the ETB² to respond to sudden onset disasters around the world. The annual ETB funding increased significantly over time from EUR 8 million in 2016 up to EUR 32 million in 2020. The ETB HIPs were revised multiple times each year and additional funding was provided to respond to emerging needs, when pre-allocated resources were exhausted. The ETB was deployed in a wide range of countries and crises contexts: 62 countries around the world were supported in crises ranging from avalanches to volcanic eruptions. The most common deployment of ALERT and SST has been in the case of cyclones in the Philippines, followed by floods in Afghanistan and earthquakes in Indonesia and the Philippines.

At least an additional EUR 295 million was channelled to sudden onset disasters through E/RRMs.³ DG ECHO has supported E/RRMs in 12 countries, mainly in Africa. There were only two countries with E/RRMs outside Africa namely, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Findings and conclusions

On Effectiveness

Overall, DG ECHO's rapid response tools have been largely effective in saving lives, reducing suffering, and providing human dignity for people affected by sudden onset disasters. Projects funded under the Emergency Toolbox (ETB) and DG ECHO funded Emergency/Rapid Response Mechanisms (E/RRMs) have by and large delivered the expected results⁴ and have in most cases, surpassed the target number of beneficiaries. DG ECHO's tools were found to be particularly successful in responding to emergencies in areas where disaster preparedness had taken place and there was sufficient pre-positioning of emergency items and staff capacity (e.g., the Philippines).

² Excluding the Epidemics Tool.

³ To note that there is no centralised list of E/RRMs within DG ECHO. The evaluation team used a combination of techniques to identify E/RRMs: key word searches within HOPE database and interviews with DG ECHO officials. However, the list assembled as a result of these efforts cannot be regarded as a definitive and complete list of E/RRMs.

⁴ Projects not achieving their Key Result Indicators (KRIs) were concentrated in countries with challenging contexts and significant access and security constraints such as Nigeria and Afghanistan

DG ECHO funded DREF operations have additionally contributed to the localisation agenda and promoting anticipatory action. By building the capacities of National Red Cross Societies, DG ECHO funded DREF operations have contributed to furthering its commitments to the localisation agenda (as part of the Grand Bargain commitments). Via its contributions to DREF, DG ECHO has also supported the strengthening of IFRC's Forecast based Action,⁵ in line with the recent G7 commitments on Strengthening Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Assistance⁶. There is, however, currently limited flexibility and resources within DG ECHO's rapid response toolset to invest in anticipatory action.

On Coherence and alignment

DG ECHO and partner approaches generally ensured that emergency response targeted the most vulnerable and corresponded to their most pressing needs. DG ECHO systematically prioritised vulnerability-based targeting across sectors in line with its sectoral guidelines; blanket targeting where used, was well justified. Individual projects targeted appropriately the needs of the most vulnerable in most cases thanks to (i) thorough scrutiny of partners' needs assessment by DG ECHO; (ii) systematic needs assessments by partners using established methodologies and participatory approaches; (iii) pre-selection of partners with capacity and presence on the ground and (iv) tailored approaches to engaging women and children. Only in a few, isolated cases, some issues were identified. For example, in the case of some DREF operations, DG ECHO flagged issues relating to weak needs assessment and lack of adequate clarity on targeting. Also in some difficult contexts, response was sometimes found to be driven by feasibility rather than what was most needed.

DG ECHO funded actions were largely aligned with HAR, Humanitarian Consensus, Humanitarian Principles and DG ECHO's thematic policies. Nevertheless, some practical challenges were encountered in ensuring compliance with these principles in certain contexts. These included the following: (i) increased military involvement in the delivery of humanitarian aid e.g. in Nigeria, military is positioned as a security provider and gatekeeper for humanitarian actors; (ii) beneficiary lists were in some cases undertaken in cooperation with local authorities/ community leaders who exhibited favouritism (e.g. Philippines); (iii) relief items not being distributed directly to the beneficiaries by the National Societies but handed over to the community leaders (DREF 2020 review).

On Relevance and Appropriateness

Although DG ECHO's tools were well designed to be activated quickly, in reality there are several impediments to providing a rapid response with the ETB and E/RRMs. In the case of the ETB (specifically ALERT and SST), DG ECHO has well-established processes and systems (the Standard Operating Procedures and Flanders algorithm) which ensure quick decision-making. However, delays often occurred during the contracting and implementation stages. For instance, challenges in completing the simplified eSF and coordinating response across actors has led to delays in signature of contract. Furthermore, implementation delays (for both ETB actions as well as E/RRMs) have been caused by external factors (e.g., security and access issues, strikes), procurement delays and delays in identification and validation of the most vulnerable sections of the affected population. While some of these factors are outside DG ECHO's sphere of influence (e.g., security constraints), some of the issues causing delays can be better managed. For example, investment in pre-positioning of critical supplies has been a key enabling factor in several cases, but the use of pre-positioning remained limited.

While each tool has its relative strengths and weaknesses, they are overall complementary in their design. Normally, crisis modifiers are the quickest tool to deploy as there

⁵ DG ECHO expanded its support to anticipatory action in 2019 by supporting the Forecast Based Action Fund (FbAF) of IFRC through an indirect management funding agreement. This allowed the IFRC to use up to 20 percent of DREF for Forecast based Actions.

⁶ G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Strengthening Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Assistance, Press release, 13 May 2022. Available [here](#)

is no need for a contract modification request. Crisis modifiers thus enable partners to respond quickly and flexibly to an emergency in terms of sectoral and geographic coverage, but the funds available are limited (normally 10% of the contract value). In certain contexts, such as acute and ongoing/recurrent crisis contexts, E/RRMs are the best available tool to respond to a sudden-onset disaster as they allow a faster (as compared to the ETB) and a bigger response (as compared to crisis modifiers). E/RRMs however, usually have a pre-defined geographic and sectoral focus which limits their flexibility to respond to new needs. Embedding crisis modifiers within E/RRMs thus enhances their geographic and sectoral flexibility. Recognising the benefits of this approach, DG ECHO has been encouraging partners to increasingly embed crisis modifiers within E/RRMs.

Moreover, the mix of tools allows partners to cover all types of disasters and provide support across a range of sectors and geographical locations. During the evaluation period, the Emergency Toolbox was deployed in 62 countries around the world in a variety of disaster contexts ranging from avalanches to volcanic eruptions. Likewise, DREF resources have been used to respond to a range of emergencies (weather-related disasters, earthquakes and volcano eruptions to social unrest, forced migration and acts of violence)

Some shortfalls and gaps can, however, be noted in the use of DG ECHO's tools. Firstly, low levels of awareness/understanding of these tools have constrained their use, particularly for crisis modifiers. The latter had not been systematically used by partners during much of the evaluation period. Moreover, the evaluation also identified a gap in the ETBs capacity to respond to human-induced disasters of over 100,000 people.

On Added value

Overall, DG ECHO's rapid response tools undoubtedly added value to the humanitarian aid architecture. DG ECHO's tools were amongst the fastest relative to those of other donors and were able to provide a much broader coverage, in terms of geography, sectors, and types of crises. Moreover, DG ECHO's global field presence, technical expertise, large network of well-established partners and principled approach were further elements of its added value.

On Cost-effectiveness and Budget adequacy

DG ECHO was amongst the biggest contributors to the response to Sudden Onset Disasters providing support across sectors and types of disaster. The ETB HIPs were revised multiple times a year to account for evolving needs. However, budgets at the project level proved modest relative to needs. While acknowledging that DG ECHO has funding constraints and cannot meet all needs, areas for strengthening cost-effectiveness and improving the allocation of funds remained.

DG ECHO's flexibility in approach, and systematic monitoring supported the cost-effectiveness of its rapid response. Nevertheless, a number of projects faced significant inefficiencies. Beyond contextual constraints, the lack of prepositioning proved the biggest issue, resulting in delays and very costly procurement. Several areas for improvement were identified, including increasing investments in disaster preparedness, decreasing administrative burdens, and strengthening the use of Crisis Modifiers to enhance flexibility.

While the use of the Flanders algorithm has improved the objectivity and speed of ETB funding allocations, challenges persisted. The algorithm has gone through iterations and improvements overtime, including the introduction of the Unified methodology for SST and ALERT. However, some challenges remained: (i) inaccuracy of PIN estimates in certain cases e.g., earthquakes; (ii) inappropriateness of PIN estimates in certain crisis contexts e.g. displaced vs affected for floods; and (iii) the low estimates for the cost per beneficiary for large-scale crises. Despite these limitations, the algorithm remains a useful tool when used alongside with field inputs. Beyond issues with algorithmic estimates, there was a perception among a few stakeholders that DG ECHO funding was in a few cases driven by strategic considerations such as visibility and its external policy objectives.

On Connectedness

DG ECHO's response to Sudden Onset Disasters was not sufficiently resilience-oriented and linkages with recovery/ development activities were limited. Over the evaluation period, only a minority of projects included resilience objectives. The Sudden Onset Disasters context (acuteness and severity of crises, security and access constraints, need for immediate response) was not conducive to the pursuit of resilience objectives and for the implementation of a nexus approach, and partners were significantly constrained in their capacity to act.

Despite acknowledging these constraints and the need to prioritise the speed of life-saving response, areas for strengthening linkages and resilience were identified. In some cases, short-term lifesaving ALERT and SST interventions have incorporated resilience-building activities such as shelter repair, livelihood programming and capacity building for local actors. E/RRMs also offered opportunities support resilience thanks to the inclusion of disaster preparedness and capacity building components. DREF was also generally valued for its support to local capacity building through Red Cross National Societies and anticipatory action. This demonstrates that resilience can be addressed even via rapid response tools. The main factors constraining the sustainability of emergency response are: (i) short duration of ETB actions; (ii) lack of follow-up with other humanitarian or development actions; and (iii) lack of connectedness between DG ECHO and the EU institutions involved in development activities (DG INTPA, EU Delegation) and EU Member States.

Finally, during the evaluation period, there were frequent top-ups to the Emergency Toolbox budget allocation with several countries using the ETB on a regular basis to respond to needs arising for recurrent disasters (e.g., Philippines, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Laos, Colombia). This raised the question of whether the humanitarian needs of these countries were adequately reflected in their HIPs as well as of the sufficiency of investments in DP/DRR, to reduce the scale of humanitarian needs in case of disaster.

Recommendations

There are five summary strategic recommendations below, as foreseen in the ToR. The complete recommendations appear at the end of this report.

Recommendation 1: DG ECHO should improve awareness and understanding of its rapid response tools among partners and the wider humanitarian community. This is to ensure the optimal and sufficient use of its tools in line with their unique characteristics. Awareness and understanding of the opportunities DG ECHO's tools were limited, over the evaluation period, undermining their usage, especially in the case of Crises modifiers.

Recommendation 2: DG ECHO should step-up its support for anticipatory action and pre-positioning of critical supplies. There is insufficient funding and flexibility within DG ECHO's rapid response tools to meaningfully support anticipatory action and the lack of sufficient pre-positioning has posed several challenges. The evaluation acknowledges and supports the measures being taken by DG ECHO to address these issues (options analysis for anticipatory action and the EHRC pillar on pre-positioning). Alongside these actions, DG ECHO should encourage partners to use crisis modifiers for pre-positioning and anticipatory action and continue to support IFRC's FbAF through DREF.

Recommendation 3: DG ECHO should strengthen the feedback loops and linkages between emergency response and HIPs and DP/DRR programming. This would lead to a more joined-up approach within DG ECHO and ensure that the humanitarian needs of crisis-prone countries are adequately reflected in the geographic and thematic HIPs (DP/DRR), thus reducing the scale of humanitarian needs in case of disaster and enabling partners to develop follow-on response to emergencies.

Recommendation 4: DG ECHO should improve Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) of its rapid response tools. The evaluation has highlighted several weaknesses in the monitoring systems for rapid response tools which should be addressed. Moreover, knowledge sharing on the use of these tools has been limited and should be strengthened.

Recommendation 5: DG ECHO should improve the speed and transparency of contracting for ALERT and SST. Significant delays in contracting were observed, which should be addressed. Concurrently, DG ECHO's practice of pre-selection of partners for ALERT and SST raise questions of transparency. While the need for speed justifies such an approach, actions could be taken to strengthen transparency without reverting to open calls.

PART B: DG ECHO'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE IFRC, 2016-2020

Part (B) of the evaluation assessed how the relations between DG ECHO and IFRC have evolved over the period 2016 to 2020, and the extent to which these past developments have laid the foundations for a strong and sustainable partnership going forward.

The evaluation was designed to answer four key questions:

List of evaluation questions for Part B
<p>EQ 8: Alignment between DG ECHO and the IFRC in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• strategies and objectives?• prioritising crises and needs?• advocacy priorities, communication campaigns and visibility efforts?
<p>EQ 9: Quality and results of a structured, strategic, timely and functional dialogue between the two organisations?</p>
<p>EQ 10: Success of the partnership in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• maximising efficiencies and decreasing management and related costs, including administrative burden?• improving effectiveness and cost effectiveness in their response?
<p>EQ 11: Contribution of the partnership to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening coordination within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC, ICRC, EU National Societies and beyond), and with other humanitarian actors, notably UN?• Strengthening a Nexus approach between the humanitarian response and development?

The evaluation was based on extensive desk research, including documentary review, thematic case studies and two online surveys targeting relevant DG ECHO staff as well as IFRC officials. In addition, to complement the information collected from desk resources, interviews were conducted with 56 key informants.

The key findings and insights emerging from the evaluation are summarised below.

Strategic Alignment of strategies and objectives

DG ECHO has had a long-standing partnership with IFRC, with varying intensity of funding and strategic engagement overtime. By the end of the evaluation period, IFRC was the largest recipient of DG ECHO funding and DG ECHO was IFRC's biggest donor.

The partnership was strongly anchored in common core values and approaches, including a principled approach to humanitarian response as well as a multi-sectoral approach to programming. IFRC's longer term strategies (Strategy 2020⁷ and Strategy 2030⁸) were well aligned with DG ECHO's guiding policy documents for humanitarian response, namely the HAR and Consensus.

⁷ IFRC (2010). Strategy 2020.

⁸ IFRC (2021). Strategy 2030. <https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Strategy2030-FR.pdf>

Both organisations shared common goals under the Grand Bargain commitments, perhaps most explicitly in promoting cash transfer programming and the localisation agenda. This led to strengthened capacity in cash transfer programming as well as providing a channel through which DG ECHO could support localisation.

DG ECHO's interest in developing a complementary alternative to the "blue pillar" was well served through a partnership with the IFRC (a component of the "red pillar")⁹. For instance, through its contribution to the IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), the partnership allowed DG ECHO to achieve wider coverage of crises, thus enabling DG ECHO to fulfil its role as a truly global humanitarian donor.

Despite significant alignment between DG ECHO and IFRC, there are areas where there is scope to improve cooperation and collaboration. These include engagement on Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP), and coordination with the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism. There was no joint advocacy strategy between DG ECHO and IFRC. Several interviewees, including IFRC staff members, raised the need for a strategic approach to joint advocacy, communication and visibility which has largely been opportunistic and ad hoc, with the exception of the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme.

While still nascent, efforts to engage DG NEAR and DG INTPA showed potential to widen the EU partnership with IFRC, but it remains too early to determine how effective such a partnership would be.

Dialogue

There was regular dialogue between DG ECHO and the IFRC on a wide range of topics of mutual interest such as localisation, quality of response, the humanitarian -development nexus, cash transfers, climate change and the greening of humanitarian response. **In addition to the strategic dialogue, informal managerial and technical dialogues have been a key component of the partnership** between DG ECHO and IFRC, helping to resolve differences, raise issues of concern as well as highlight common areas of interest and to seek technical guidance in areas such as preparedness, anticipatory action, the ESSN and proposals for actions. This dialogue was characteristically strongest among respective headquarters, except in the case of the ESSN where it was found to be stronger at a country level.

During the evaluation period, the funding relationship dominated over the more strategic aspects of the partnership. This imbalance was evident in the negotiations concerning the ESSN as well as those relating to country choices for the Programmatic Partnership. For instance, in the case of the Programmatic Partnership, the two organisations were not completely aligned in terms of the approach to selection of countries to be included in the partnership, and this created some tension. For example, in one instance, IFRC's Regional office invested time and effort in conducting a selection process to identify appropriate countries to engage in the Programmatic Partnership, only to be provided with a list of pre-selected countries by DG ECHO. Overall, informants reported that engagements tended to be more intense around funding opportunities, with missed opportunities for collaboration and cooperation on humanitarian issues of mutual interest, including for instance specific advocacy opportunities.

Notwithstanding the above issues, the Programmatic Partnership offers the opportunity to consolidate and enhance the partnership going forward. The success demonstrated through IFRC's implementation of the ESSN contributed to the prominent role of the IFRC in the Programmatic Partnership which is an opportunity to consolidate the relationship around mutually agreed objectives and programming across 25 countries. This also presents an opportunity to gather learning about how the partnership has worked and can be enhanced going forward.

⁹ The blue Pillar refers to UN Organisations while the Red Pillar refers to components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Efficiency, effectiveness and Management costs

DG ECHO funding to the IFRC over the evaluation period was generally not flexible or predictable (apart from ESSN). This is mainly associated with DG ECHO's inability to provide multi-year funding. However, the Programmatic Partnership which started in October 2021 provides for flexible and predictable funding within an agreed programming framework.

While no notable cost efficiencies can be attributed to the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA), the ESSN agreement with IFRC has generated tangible cost savings for DG ECHO in the form of a reduction in indirect costs for managing the programme as well as a reduction in direct support costs.

The partnership has contributed in several ways to improving DG ECHO's response. For example, DG ECHO's funding to DREF has enabled it to widen its coverage of crises as well as address its strategic objective of responding to forgotten crises. At the same time, partnership with IFRC has enabled DG ECHO to meet the Grand Bargain commitments on localisation. DG ECHO's funding of the Forecast based Action Fund (FbAF) has also enabled clearer support to the Humanitarian Development Peace nexus by protecting assets and increasing resilience of supported households. The programmatic partnership between DG ECHO and IFRC however, is at too early a stage of development to determine whether it has improved DG ECHO's response.

Strengthened internal and external coordination and contributions to the nexus

The partnership has necessitated improved coordination between EUNS and IFRC, but challenges have persisted. Informants from both organisations recognise the complexity of the triangular relationship between DG ECHO, the IFRC and EU National Societies (EUNS). The IFRC Secretary Generals' directive that EUNS assume priority for EU funding has to some extent dampened anxiety and competition over the funding relationship. However, some underlying tensions have persisted according to informants. This has been despite the fact that EUNS do not have the same access as the IFRC to some EU funding streams as a result of the latter's International Organisation Status. The Programmatic Partnership has necessitated increased coordination between EUNS and the IFRC but has provided the grounds for the development of new ways of working and tools. These new ways of working and tools have the potential to enhance EUNS/IFRC coordination in the future.

DG ECHO's support to the IFRC has however, strengthened the capacity of National Societies to deliver humanitarian assistance (including to undertake anticipatory action), thereby contributing to the localisation agenda. Informants suggested that invariably this support was limited to capacity strengthening as it related to delivery of assistance rather than core capacity strengthening of a National Society.

Despite the nexus¹⁰ gaining in importance for both organisations, the partnership served only to a limited extent to make progress in this area. However, going forward, the expansion of FbA by the IFRC opens new avenues for DG ECHO to support resilience interventions with the potential to protect development gains. This coupled with DG ECHO's role in facilitating engagement between IFRC and DG NEAR and INTPA has the potential to yield results in future but remained nascent over the evaluation period.

¹⁰ For a discussion on the meaning of the nexus please refer to Inter-Agency Standing Committee and UN Working Group on Transitions Workshop, 20-21 October 2016 Background paper on Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

Overarching conclusion of the evaluation

The evaluation demonstrates the strategic added value of the partnership for DG ECHO in:

- **Promoting the localisation agenda:** Through the network of 192 National Societies the IFRC has considerable reach and the potential to increase the coverage of DG ECHO crisis response.
- **Delivering large-scale response:** By demonstrating the potential of the IFRC as a reliable complementary alternative to the “blue pillar” for large-scale programme implementation.
- **Improving the efficiency of its response:** The partnership with IFRC may in some circumstances result in efficiency gains, particularly if it retains a willingness to negotiate indirect costs on large-scale programmes, however this should not be at the expense of quality programming.
- **Expanding the use of multi-purpose cash transfer programming:** There is strong alignment between the intent of DG ECHO and IFRC on expanding the use of cash assistance. Contrary to the sector-based approach of the UN to cash assistance, the IFRC is better aligned with DG ECHO's multi-purpose cash assistance agenda.

There is, however, scope for strengthening the partnership between the two organisations. The evaluation makes the following recommendations in this regard:

Strategic recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continue to deepen and expand the dialogue with IFRC in strategic areas of interest including facilitating engagement with other Directorate Generals of the Commission.

- **Consider whether the frequency of Strategic Dialogues at HQ level is sufficient.**
- **Strengthen strategic dialogue between the two organisations at the country level.** During the evaluation period, dialogue at the country level was mostly focused on funding/contractual opportunities rather than broader humanitarian issues of mutual interest. Dialogue in the context of the ESSN has been an exception in this regard.
- **Create opportunities for mutual learning and information sharing (including dedicated thematic meetings)** on topics such as greening of humanitarian response, cash transfer programming and climate change among others would provide opportunities for increased technical expertise and exchange.
- **Ensure organisation-wide dissemination of dialogue results** to promote increased Regional and country level engagement.

Recommendation 2: Develop in collaboration with the IFRC a joint organisation-wide strategic advocacy plan based on aligned interests. The advocacy plan should:

- **Consider using as its basis the thematic areas of the Programmatic Partnership as well as the country experiences for advocacy and communication and visibility.**
- **Set specific target audiences at national, regional and international levels for advocacy and communication and visibility activities.**

- **Engage headquarters, regional and country office staff in the planning and advocacy initiatives in order to promote wider engagement of staff across both organisations and members.**
- **Set specific target indicators in the plan and monitor progress against the plan.**

Recommendation 3: Capture learning and manage knowledge about the partnership in a more systematic manner and disseminate this throughout the organisation. The IFRC should consider a similar approach.

- **Develop a structured approach** to capture learning and manage the knowledge about how the partnership has worked.
- **Critically document the processes and tools developed** as part of the design of the Programmatic Partnership to capture the new way of working.
- **Dissemination:** Consider as part of this approach the need for regular learning events and knowledge management and dissemination strategies.

Operational Recommendations

Recommendation 4: Manage the mismatch of expectations in some operational areas by gaining a better understanding of what the partnership can offer in relationship to:

- **Needs Assessment:** Work to understand the strengths and weaknesses of IFRC's needs assessment approach, recognising that contextual issues can constrain or limit effectiveness of existing needs assessment approaches.
- **Protection and AAP:** Both Protection and AAP are elements of a people-centred approach promoted under the Grand Bargain commitments. Clarifying the role the IFRC can play in this regard - based on an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses - would support DG ECHO's Grand Bargain commitments.
- **The Humanitarian Development and Peace nexus:** Continue to explore how to engage on the HDP nexus, facilitating a better understanding among other Directorate Generals of the role that IFRC could play as well as how existing tools such as FbA can promote a nexus approach.
- **The EU Civil Protection Mechanism:** the need for improved coordination between the EU system and IFRC's emergency response mechanisms, FACT, ERU etc.
- **FbA:** Specifically explore what DG ECHO can offer with regards to support to readiness associated with early action, including training and pre-positioning of supplies. DG ECHO will also need to adopt a position vis a vis IFRC's newly introduced¹¹ use of more flexible triggers for release of funds for early action.

¹¹ In 2022.