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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

General Guidelines on Operational Priorities for Humanitarian Aid in 2024

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ACTED	Acted International Foundation
AFAD	Turkey's Disaster Management Authority
AGDA	De facto authorities
ALERT	Acute Large Emergency Response Tool
ARGUS	The Commission's duty system under phase 1 of the general rapid alert system
ASAL	Semi-arid lands
ATMIS	The African Union Transition Mission
CAR	The Central African Republic
CECIS	The Common Emergency Communication and Information System
COHAFA	The Council Working Group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid
CRRF	The UN Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DG COMM	The Commission's Directorate-General for communication
DG ECHO	The European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG HOME	The European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
DG INTPA	The Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	The Commission's Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG RTD	The Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
DP	Disaster preparedness
DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
DREF	The IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund
DRM	Disaster risk management
ECOWAS	The Economic Community of West African States
EDRIS	The European Disaster Response Information System
EEAS	European External Action Service
EHRC	European Humanitarian Response Capacity
EISMEA	European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency
EMM	Europe Media Monitor
ERC	Enhanced response capacity
ERCC	Emergency Response Coordination Centre
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPI	European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GBV	Gender-based violence
HDP nexus	Humanitarian-development-peace nexus
HIP	Humanitarian implementation plan
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HQ	Headquarters
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IAS	The Commission's Internal Audit Service
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IED	Improvised explosive devices
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross
IHL	International humanitarian law
INGO	International non-governmental organisations
IOM	The International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRG	Recognised government of Yemen

Abbreviation	Definition
ISIL	The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JRP	Joint Response Plan
MHPS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MINUSMA	The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSAG	Non-state armed groups
NWSW	North-West and South-West
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RJMEC	The Revitalized Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
RMPR	Regional refugee and migrant response plan
RRM	Rapid response mechanisms
RSC	regional security coordinators
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SAIO	The Southern Africa and Indian Ocean
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SMART	Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SPaN	Social protection across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus
SPLM-N	The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North
SRH	Sexual and reproductive healthcare
SSF	Somali Security Forces
UCPM	The Union Civil Protection Mechanism
UN	United Nations
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations' Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

The European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) manages the EU's humanitarian assistance for the victims of conflicts or disasters, both natural and human-induced, in non-EU countries. DG ECHO's mandate is to save and preserve lives, reduce and prevent suffering, and safeguard the integrity and dignity of people affected by humanitarian crises by providing relief and protection. By taking early action and focusing on preparedness, DG ECHO seeks to preserve livelihoods and build up the resilience of affected populations. It also coordinates humanitarian assistance with and among EU Member States' humanitarian departments and agencies. The overall priority is to manage aid as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to maximise the effect of EU-funded assistance, while observing EU law, international law and the principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, non-discrimination and independence.

DG ECHO is also responsible for managing the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) ¹, which covers interventions in Member States and other countries on the basis of the UCPM Decision ², and helps implement Council Regulation (EU) 2016/369 on providing emergency support within the EU ³. This regulation lays down a framework for EU emergency support in the form of specific measures appropriate to the economic situation if there is an ongoing or potential natural hazard or human-induced disaster. This kind of emergency support can only be provided in exceptional circumstances where i) the exceptional scale and impact of the disaster is such that it leads to severe wide-ranging humanitarian consequences in one or more Member States, and ii) there is no other sufficient instrument available to Member States and the EU.

This document has been drawn up further to Article 16(1) of the Humanitarian Aid Regulation ⁴ and covers humanitarian aid operations for 2024. It does not cover DG ECHO's activities in the field of civil protection, which are instead described in the annual work programme for civil protection actions that is to be adopted on the basis of the UCPM Decision.

The Commission's Communication on 'The EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles' of March 2021 (the 2021 Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action)⁵ and the subsequent Council Conclusions of 20 May 2021 set out key actions to strengthen the EU's global humanitarian impact and to meet the substantial rise in humanitarian needs triggered by COVID-19 and exacerbated by recent conflicts and disasters.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection/mechanism_en

² [Decision No 1313/2013/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924) as amended by [Decision \(EU\) 2019/420](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2019 (OJ L 77 I, 20.3.2019, p. 1).

³ [Council Regulation \(EU\) 2016/369](#) on the provision of emergency support within the Union (OJ L 70, 16.3.2016, p. 1).

⁴ [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996](#) concerning humanitarian aid (OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, p. 1).

⁵ https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/communication-commission-european-parliament-council-eu%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-action-new_en

1. General context for 2024

Humanitarian crises have become increasingly complex and severe in recent decades, and this trend is expected to continue in 2024. Conflict remains the main driver of humanitarian needs. Exacerbated by climate change and by more frequent and broader epidemics, disasters triggered by natural hazards are also increasing in intensity and scope, while the resulting economic shocks particularly impact the most vulnerable. The **interaction between climate, economic, environmental, health, displacement and conflict risks** is aggravating existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, and affecting humanitarian needs – particularly for the most vulnerable populations, including children in conflict-affected areas. Humanitarian crises and conflicts can also increase the risks of trafficking in human beings due to the particular vulnerability of people affected.

Across the world, **over 300 million people need humanitarian assistance**⁶ and protection. More funding than ever before is required if the EU is to respond appropriately. 224 million crisis-affected children and young people lack safe and quality education and the number is growing. Although clear progress has been made on the universal health coverage (this has increased from 45 in 2000 to 68 in 2019), about 2 billion people are still facing catastrophic or impoverishing health spending⁷. In this global scenario, the health needs of the most vulnerable populations affected by humanitarian crises remain unmet.

For 2023, the United Nations (UN) humanitarian launched humanitarian appeals for USD 55.53 billion. Early October, only USD 17.87 billion has been raised. This **funding gap** of USD 37.66 billion is a serious concern. **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine** has further aggravated an already challenging humanitarian context that is characterised by soaring humanitarian needs, a growing funding gap and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). It has also destabilised the global food market and the prices of food, energy, fertilisers and other commodities.

The most underfunded emergencies to date (less than 25% funded) are those in Honduras, Guatemala, Egypt, and Mali.

According to the 2023 Global Report on Food Crises⁸, around 258 million people across 58 countries were **acutely food-insecure and in need of urgent assistance** in 2022. This **confirms a daunting upward trend** as the number of people in acute food insecurity has sharply and systematically increased since the first edition of the report in 2017. Considering protracted crises in the countries and territories for which information is available in all the previous six editions of the report, the number of people in crisis more than doubled between 2016 and 2022.

Hunger is also increasing in **severity**. In 2022, the number of people in IPC/CH phase 4 (emergency) remains high, with around 35 million people in this phase in 39 countries. This number does not include Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, for which disaggregated phase data are lacking. In 2022, over 375 000 people were known to be in IPC/CH phase 5 (at risk of famine), mainly in Somalia and Yemen but also in South Sudan, Afghanistan, Haiti, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. This figure was lower than in 2021, probably due to the lack of new data for Ethiopia, where levels of IPC/CH⁹ phase 5 might have occurred in some parts of the country¹⁰.

Epidemics pose great risks to the health, lives and livelihoods of people worldwide, emphasising the important links between human, animal and environmental health (One Health¹¹), and require a new 'global health architecture' approach for quicker pandemic preparedness, prevention and response, with over 70% of epidemics occurring in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable settings. In addition, there has been a sharp deterioration in the ability to tackle pre-existing protection challenges, in particular gender-based violence (GBV) and access to **sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH)**. An increasing need for **mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** services is apparent globally.

Meanwhile, the **impact of climate change and environmental degradation** continues to be a key driver of humanitarian needs (e.g. extreme weather events and disasters related to natural hazards, the impact of climate

⁶ Global Humanitarian Overview 2022, Mid-Year Update (Snapshot as of 21 June 2022) - World | ReliefWeb

⁷ Universal health coverage (UHC) (who.int)

⁸ <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2022>

⁹ IPC Acute Food Insecurity Classification | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (ipcinfo.org)

¹⁰ <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-situation-report-22-aug-2023>

¹¹ https://www.who.int/health-topics/one-health#tab=tab_1

change on food production, availability of water resources, and the impact of soil degradation and deforestation in humanitarian contexts), forced displacement and conflict.

In situations of protracted conflict, insecurity often prevents aid from being delivered to areas where help is most needed. Activities to access and protect the most vulnerable people in conflict zones continue to be hampered by widespread **violations of IHL**. The percentage of civilian victims in conflicts has risen dramatically, attacks on medical facilities and personnel continue, students and educational staff are subject to attacks and military use of educational facilities, and ensuring the security of humanitarian personnel has remained a critical challenge. There have also been attacks on infrastructure critical to the survival of civilians (e.g. energy or water infrastructure). In 2020 and 2021, there were more than 5 000 reported attacks on educational facilities and incidents of military use of schools and universities, harming more than 9 000 students and educators in at least 85 countries. According to the Aid Worker Security Database, in 2022 there were 235 incidents against aid workers, including 116 killings, 143 injuries and 185 kidnappings. The July 2022 annual report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict highlights almost 24 000 verified grave violations against children – an average of some 65 violations every day – in 2021 ¹².

Protracted violence continues to force people to flee from their homes. The United Nations' Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported a dramatic increase in the number of **forcibly displaced people** worldwide over the last year, notably because of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The global number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) reached record levels with more than 71.1 million people displaced in their own country at the end of 2022 ¹³. In 2022, nearly three quarters of the world's refugees came from just 10 countries: Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen. The fact that only 6 million displaced people returned to their areas or countries of origin in 2022 highlights the difficulty of finding lasting solutions.

A global crisis for child **education and learning** can be witnessed, exacerbating existing inequalities and reversing gains in access to education: 1.6 billion children have had their education disrupted during COVID-19 and 463 million have had no access to any form of remote learning ¹⁴. 224 million crisis-affected children and youth are in urgent need of education support. Over half of the refugees of school age are not in school ¹⁵.

The most vulnerable people (including people with disabilities, older people, women and children) are most affected by humanitarian crises. Almost two thirds of the world's children live in a country affected by conflict and one in six live within 50 kilometres of a conflict zone ¹⁶.

Girls living in conflict-affected countries are more likely to be out of school. Girls and women also face a much greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including early marriage and unintended pregnancy, as well as trafficking for sexual exploitation, and are more affected by disasters. Preventing and responding to SGBV, which affects women, girls, men and boys, should get more priority from the earliest stages of emergencies. Humanitarian responders often lack appropriate mechanisms and adequate funding to address it comprehensively. Discrimination and environmental, physical, economic and social barriers mean that people with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from emergency responses and humanitarian services. They also face additional threats and vulnerabilities.

While global humanitarian needs are increasing dramatically, funding is not. It is therefore essential to prepare, anticipate, identify and focus on the main priorities and to observe the principles guiding the EU's humanitarian budgetary allocations. In 2024, EU humanitarian aid will remain focused on supporting those most in need in relation to sudden-onset, protracted and forgotten crises ¹⁷. Encouraging those operating in the humanitarian sector to increase their efficiency is also essential.

¹² <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Summary-of-the-Annual-Report-of-the-Secretary-General-on-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-2021-3.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023/>

¹⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-least-third-worlds-schoolchildren-unable-access-remote-learning-during>

¹⁵ *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis*, UNHCR report (2019)

¹⁶ *Children affected by armed conflict, 1990-2019*, Peace Research Institute Oslo, *Conflict trends, 2020*

¹⁷ The methodology used to that end is supported by the Index for Risk Management (INFORM).

Improving coherence between humanitarian, development and peace actions is essential, as part of an overall integrated approach to crisis and conflict. Closer cooperation to create sustainable responses for crisis-affected people.

The EU will continue to support the UN's central role in coordinating the international response to emergencies, in a spirit of effective multilateralism and with a view to finding collective solutions to global challenges.

2. Priorities

2.1. Horizontal thematic priorities: improving aid effectiveness, efficiency and quality of operations

The 2021 Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action provides an overarching framework for the thematic priorities. Given the growing challenges, the EU will give a renewed impetus to addressing growing humanitarian needs.

Aid effectiveness and result-oriented actions are still priorities for 2024. The 2023 Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report¹⁸ noted important progress in the area of cash coordination, needs assessment, increased multi-year funding and investment in empowering local actors. Despite this progress, challenges remain in relation to the achievement of a critical mass of quality funding (less earmarked and more multi-year), the participation of affected populations and support for locally-led actions. The increasing scale of humanitarian needs underlines the urgent need to take the decisions necessary to achieve reform, including through the promotion of anticipatory action and the nexus. The EU continues to support the Grand Bargain process at all stages: the EU remains in the facilitation group, continues to fund the secretariat and is committed to implementing the outcome documents of all Grand Bargain caucuses (e.g. on cash coordination, the role of intermediaries, quality funding and localisation), in addition to promoting joint and impartial identification and analysis of humanitarian needs.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue promoting the use of **multi-year funding**, taking into account the demand-driven context specific to humanitarian aid. It will also aim to increase flexible funding¹⁹.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue piloting the programmatic partnerships with UN agencies and international organisations that started in 2021 and 2022 respectively. DG ECHO will also proceed with the second year of implementing 12 programmatic partnerships, which started in 2023 (four of these have been established with UN partners, three have been formed with international organisations, and the other five involve international non-governmental organisations (INGOs)). The regions covered by these partnerships include West and Central Africa, the Greater Horn of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and northern Africa.

DG ECHO will continue mainstreaming the **multiannual** programmatic partnership model in 2024 through the geographic humanitarian implementation plan (HIP). The multiannual strategy contributes to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations in an efficient and effective manner while at the same time supporting strategic priorities of mutual interest. These strategic partnerships and longer-term programmes also support quality funding, the use of cash, the localisation agenda and the promotion of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (the HDP nexus)²⁰, while seeking greater efficiency in aid delivery. They promote innovative approaches in sectors such as Education in Emergencies (EiE), nutrition, health, forced displacement, disaster preparedness, prevention of IHL violations, coordination and addressing environmental impacts of humanitarian aid.

DG ECHO's commitment to **localised funding models**, including the expansion of contributions to country-based pooled funds²¹, is a specific action in the Commission's Communication on the EU's humanitarian action. In 2022 and building on an evaluation of the first pilot contributions in 2020-2021, DG ECHO adopted

¹⁸ [Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2023 | IASC \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](https://www.interagencystandingcommittee.org/)

¹⁹ An example is the multi-year project with UNHCR in Uganda on addressing deforestation that started in 2023.

²⁰ More information is provided on page 13.

²¹ <https://www.unocha.org/our-work/humanitarian-financing/country-based-pooled-funds-cbpf>

a more strategic approach, in line with its priorities and interests as well as with the Grand Bargain commitments, in order to support the localisation agenda. Disseminating its guidance on how to promote equal partnerships with local responders will strengthen EU support for localisation.

Aid effectiveness and efficiency will also be pursued through communicating disseminating, implementing and updating existing policies, as appropriate. In 2022, DG ECHO launched its **humanitarian logistics policy**²², which recognises that logistics is cross-sectoral and that an integrated view of the whole supply chain is needed – from procurement to delivery in the field – because this is the backbone of every humanitarian operation. In line with the Council Conclusions of 22 May 2023²³, DG ECHO continues to view a strategic approach to the humanitarian supply chain and logistics as key to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of aid, given that it accounts for 60-80% of aid spending. The efficiency gain will also contribute to other key strategic objectives, such as tackling the funding gap and improving the quality of operations when it comes to access, greening and localisation.

DG ECHO will continue to make funding available to support this shift, complemented by high-level engagement and awareness-raising. Systematic monitoring and reviews by the Commission's humanitarian experts as well as using key results indicators will ensure that EU-funded operations are implemented in line with the relevant standards and will provide a more comprehensive picture of DG ECHO's results, performance and resource requirements.

DG ECHO will continue developing and deploying the **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)** in order to complement the funding provided by DG ECHO and further support humanitarian partners. It will do so by facilitating the quick delivery of humanitarian assistance. The EHRC is a set of operational tools designed to provide rapid but temporary support to partners to fill operational gaps in the humanitarian response where the humanitarian community struggles to provide support, thus helping to cover the immediate needs of the affected population.

DG ECHO will continue to support the **development of innovative solutions and approaches** in cooperation with a wide range of actors, including development finance institutions, the private sector and the scientific community. In this regard, supporting humanitarian partners in responsibly realising the cost-effectiveness and efficiency gains offered by digital technology will be particularly important in delivering more effective assistance to people in need. Innovative financing methods based on blending²⁴ will also be used to try to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our response and help harness new sources of capital, including from the private sector. The EU's research and innovation programmes²⁵ provide opportunities to harness technological innovation, technical skills and expertise, and to foster their active application in humanitarian situations. In collaboration with the Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), DG ECHO will award the European Prize for Humanitarian Innovation (InnovAid) in 2024 with a view to promoting the sharing and scaling-up of innovative practices among donors and providers of humanitarian assistance.

On the basis of the 'do no harm' principle, DG ECHO will continue integrating **climate and environmental considerations** into its humanitarian aid policies and interventions. As the climate and environmental crisis deepens, humanitarian actors are faced with a collective responsibility to ensure that their operations address the impact of climate change and do not further harm the environment in which people live or their health and well-being. Reducing the environmental impact of EU-funded humanitarian operations helps achieve the objectives of the Commission's 2021 Communication on the EU's humanitarian action, which places a strong emphasis on addressing climate and environmental factors as part of humanitarian programming. It will also contribute to achieving the targets of the European Green Deal²⁶.

²² https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/humanitarian_logistics_thematic_policy_document_en.pdf

²³ Council Conclusions of 22 May 2023 on addressing the humanitarian funding gap (Council document 9598/23)

²⁴ combining public grants with loans or equity

²⁵ See the European Innovation Council (EIC) Horizon 2020 prizes for [affordable high-tech for humanitarian aid](#), [early warning for epidemics](#) and [blockchains for social good](#).

²⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

Since 2023, DG ECHO has been requiring mitigation of the negative environmental impacts of the actions it supports. This is primarily achieved by applying the minimum environmental requirements, which came into force in 2023. To support this step-change, DG ECHO will continue to provide capacity-building support and to roll out the **environmental guidance for humanitarian projects** ²⁷.

In line with the 2021 Communication on the EU's humanitarian action, DG ECHO and Belgium (as part of its Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2024) will co-organise the third edition of the **European Humanitarian Forum in March 2024**. This international event will host high-level discussions as well as workshops on humanitarian policies, strategies and operations. It will serve as an inclusive platform for strategic and open debates between the EU's political decision-makers and the wider international humanitarian community, including i) UN agencies, ii) signatories of the humanitarian call for action ²⁸, iii) international and national NGOs, iv) the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement (ICRC, IFRC), v) international financial institutions, vi) academics, vii) think tanks, viii) local responders and ix) local representatives.

Thematic policies

Over the years, the Commission has developed **policies and guidance** ²⁹ on areas including protection; gender; health; food and nutrition; shelter and settlements; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); education; cash; localisation; and disability inclusion. These documents outline its position on key international frameworks and standards, and provide its implementing partners with concrete recommendations on programming. The overall objective is to ensure the quality, coherence and accountability of EU-funded humanitarian operations.

As in previous years, the overarching priority of EU humanitarian aid operations will be to ensure protection and to meet the life-saving needs of affected populations, focusing on those in the most vulnerable situations.

Humanitarian sectors

Cash

DG ECHO will continue to prioritise a '**basic needs approach**': an integrated multisectoral or cross-sectoral approach to programming that aims to substantially meet the basic needs of affected populations. Addressing needs in a coordinated and demand-driven way puts people back at the centre of interventions, especially if they are empowered to make choices and tailor the assistance to meet their individual needs.

In this regard and in line with the Grand Bargain commitments, DG ECHO will continue to encourage the use of **cash transfers**, which give affected populations the dignity of being able to have more choices, flexibility and control over their own lives. In particular, DG ECHO will continue to encourage the use of **multipurpose cash transfers** (i.e. cash transfers used by beneficiaries to meet their basic needs).

The thematic policy on cash transfers (including large-scale cash transfers) sets out general policy objectives and expectations regarding partners when programming responses and using cash to deliver humanitarian aid ³⁰.

²⁷ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/climate-change-and-environment_en

²⁸ https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/en_strategy_on_strengthening_the_eus_contribution_to_rules-based_multilateralism.pdf

²⁹ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/resources-campaigns/policy-guidelines_en

³⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/thematic_policy_document_no_3_cash_transfers_en.pdf

Education

In line with the outcomes of the UN Transforming Education Summit³¹ and the 2023 High-level Conference on Education in Emergencies (EiE)³², DG ECHO will help make education more resilient, equitable and efficient by delivering **safe and quality learning opportunities** for children and young people affected by humanitarian crises and emergencies. Special attention will be given to girls and to children with disabilities. DG ECHO will continue its strong support for **EiE** in line with the Commission's staff working document 'Education in Emergencies in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations'³³. DG ECHO will promote effective and sustained investment in education, earmarking 10% of the EU's initial humanitarian budget to EiE, and help protect education from attack.

DG ECHO will continue with its comprehensive approach to children's needs, focusing on four EiE objectives: i) access, ii) quality, iii) protection and iv) strengthened EiE response capacity, including accelerated education and a rapid education response.

Food assistance and nutrition

Aid in the form of **food assistance and nutrition** will remain crucial to responding to the current global food crisis. DG ECHO will continue to provide **food assistance** that is adapted to the needs of specific groups and crisis situations, prioritising the use of cash transfers whenever appropriate and ensuring protection while fully observing the 'do no harm' principle.

In line with the Team Europe response adopted in 2022, DG ECHO will aim to increase the efficiency of its aid and coordination with other donors (for example, by advancing the triple nexus agenda and coordinating responses with EU Member States and other key actors). The Global Network against Food Crises – of which DG ECHO is a member – will play a facilitating role in this endeavour.

DG ECHO will continue to support funding for **nutrition** in emergencies and the development and widespread use of tools and innovative approaches to ensure efficient and effective programming. As nutrition outcomes are multifaceted, DG ECHO promotes i) a multisectoral and integrated approach to address severe and moderate acute malnutrition and ii) closer coordination of humanitarian and development approaches. It closely follows developments and changes in the nutrition sector so that it can adapt the way nutrition services are provided, build resilient communities and reach as many malnourished people as possible. The EU's humanitarian nutrition approach³⁴ contains guidance on how to provide nutrition services to the most vulnerable population groups.

Health

Health assistance will remain a core area of DG ECHO's humanitarian aid intervention. The overriding objective of DG ECHO's health assistance is to ensure that basic health needs are adequately addressed through a high-quality, multisectoral and 'health in all policies' approach. This includes actions such as emergency medical assistance, vaccination campaigns, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, community outreach, capacity-building and health infrastructure rehabilitation. In particular, the increased frequency and severity of disease outbreaks calls for improved epidemics preparedness and response. MHPSS, as well as GBV response have emerged as needs to be addressed in humanitarian contexts through a multisectoral approach in tandem with protection efforts. DG ECHO will review its 'Health – general guidelines' and the technical annexes³⁵ to ensure that it continues to fund needs-based and context-specific humanitarian health services in line with the latest global challenges.

³¹ <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit>

³² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1810

³³ [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/190328%20SWD%20EiE%20in%20EU-funded%20Humanitarian%20Aid%20Operations%20SWD\(2019\)150%20final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/190328%20SWD%20EiE%20in%20EU-funded%20Humanitarian%20Aid%20Operations%20SWD(2019)150%20final.pdf)

³⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/nutrition_thematic_policy_document_en.pdf

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/health2014_general_health_guidelines_en.pdf

Shelter and settlements

The EU approach to **shelter and settlements** (S&S) reflects the increased need for humanitarian interventions in this area and their importance for efficient and effective post-disaster responses and anticipatory action. Shelter is crucially important in providing protection, strengthening health and re-establishing livelihoods. DG ECHO interventions in this area will continue to be underpinned by i) promoting shelter solutions that are suitable for local areas and delivering S&S services in urban settings, ii) strengthening local capacity and ownership and iii) recognising the environmental element of any S&S action. These activities are in line with the humanitarian shelter and settlements guidelines³⁶.

Water, sanitation and hygiene

As one of the largest donors in this area, DG ECHO has significantly helped improve access to **water, sanitation and hygiene** (WASH) services for people affected by humanitarian crises. The rights of people to water and sanitation are at the core of DG ECHO's WASH mandate, along with its efforts to integrate environmental considerations into humanitarian WASH actions in order to increase the resilience of people in need and of affected communities. The primary objective of the WASH policy is to save lives and alleviate the suffering of populations facing severe environmental health risks and/or water insecurity in the context of humanitarian crises. Systematic quality control, compliance with international quality standards and systematic performance monitoring are core aspects of DG ECHO's WASH policy³⁷.

Strategic humanitarian supply chain and logistics

DG ECHO will maintain its long-term commitment to encourage a more strategic approach to the humanitarian supply chain and logistics, which are crucial in all humanitarian sectors and have a huge impact on many of the key priorities in humanitarian aid (e.g. the funding gap, efficiency of aid, greening, access, and localisation). Better use of supply chains and logistics, and greater efficiencies ultimately allow more people to be helped. Better strategic planning allows:

- items to arrive more quickly and through better access;
- higher quality items through better calibrated procurement;
- lower prices allowing more people to be helped;
- greener procurement and operations; and
- contributions to the localisation agenda.

The intention is to continue to encourage the consideration of this in all funding and ultimately to increase the impact of aid as a whole. DG ECHO will continue to build greater understanding of best practice and to aim to systematise strategic thinking in this area in 2024.

Protection of, and focus on, the most vulnerable

Serious violations of IHL have been increasing in recent years. In some armed conflicts, IHL violations are widely reported as strategic, though illegal, methods of warfare. Such methods have long-term humanitarian consequences. The continued prevalence of breaches of IHL has turned protection into a key challenge in today's humanitarian context. The Commission services will support actions to prevent violations of IHL and improve compliance (e.g. through better monitoring of IHL violations and advocacy actions).

Upholding the rights and dignity of conflict-affected people as well as ensuring a **people-centred approach** remains DG ECHO's priority. In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to prioritise protection in its humanitarian assistance, in line with the provisions of the 2021 Communication on the EU's humanitarian action and the

³⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/shelter_and_settlement_guidelines.pdf

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/WaSH_policy_doc_en.pdf

Commission's staff working document 'Humanitarian protection: improving protection outcomes to reduce risks for people in humanitarian crises'³⁸. DG ECHO will continue to mainstream protection in its humanitarian projects as well as support specialised protection interventions and advocacy on protection.

Humanitarian crises affect women, girls, boys and men differently. Their differing needs and specific vulnerabilities in crisis and post-crisis situations should be addressed accordingly. DG ECHO will continue to **mainstream gender and age** across all sectors and apply the approach to SGBV in humanitarian crises that was outlined in the staff working document 'Gender: different needs, adapted assistance'³⁹, the DG ECHO Gender-Age Marker⁴⁰, as well as the DG ECHO Humanitarian Protection Policy⁴¹ and other relevant documents. This work is in line with, and helps implement the EU gender action plan III⁴². The EU will also remain an active member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies initiative⁴³ and continue to fulfil its commitments to the road map for 2021-2025. DG ECHO will continue to help prevent and respond to SGBV through targeted actions and mainstreaming of gender and age needs, and will be looking into combining policies and strategies to promote inclusive programming.

Humanitarian crises expose children to unspeakable physical and psychological suffering. In line with the EU strategy on the **Rights of the Child** covering 2021-2024⁴⁴, the EU will continue to emphasise child protection, addressing all types of violence against children as well as providing MHPSS. Specifically, DG ECHO will continue to intensify its work to prevent and end grave violations against children affected by armed conflict, including through advocacy activities that promote compliance with IHL as well as targeted quality funding. The EU will also pay attention to other age groups (e.g. youth in line with the EU Youth Action Plan (2022)⁴⁵ and older people).

People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by natural hazards and human-induced disasters. They also face multiple barriers in accessing humanitarian services (e.g. water, shelter and food) and may have specific protection needs. In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to ensure the implementation of the 2019 operational guidance on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU-funded humanitarian aid operations⁴⁶ and make sure that its work is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁴⁷. It will also help implement the EU's 2021-2030 strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁴⁸ by supporting the building of humanitarian organisations' capacity to adequately respond to the needs of people with disabilities. DG ECHO will also pursue close contacts with organisations representing persons with disabilities.

Risk-informed preparedness for response and anticipatory action

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to promote disaster preparedness, both by integrating preparedness activities into EU-funded humanitarian operations and by implementing targeted interventions to strengthen preparedness capacities ahead of a crisis (under the Disaster Preparedness budget line).

In line with the Disaster Preparedness Guidance Note⁴⁹, DG ECHO will continue to consistently integrate risk analysis into its needs-based approach to preparedness. Understanding and anticipating potential risks is critical to acting early and intervening before a crisis hits or a situation deteriorates, thereby reducing suffering and humanitarian needs. DG ECHO will at the same time continue to promote a people-focused approach to

³⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/policy_guidelines_humanitarian_protection_en.pdf

³⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_thematic_policy_document_en.pdf

⁴⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_age_marker_toolkit.pdf

⁴¹ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/protection_en

⁴² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0284>

⁴³ [Call to action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/call_to_action_on_protection_from_gender_based_violence_in_emergencies_en.pdf)

⁴⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20Strategy%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20the,what%20the%20EU%20plans%20to%20do%20for%20them.

⁴⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_5884

⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/doc_echo_og_inclusion_en.pdf

⁴⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

⁴⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8376&furtherPubs=yes>

⁴⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/dg_echo_guidance_note_-_disaster_preparedness_en.pdf

preparedness, prioritising assistance according to individual vulnerabilities and risk exposure and leaving no one behind.

The core objective of the preparedness interventions funded by DG ECHO is to strengthen the capacity of in-country preparedness and response systems (all first-responders) to act as locally and early as possible. To this end, DG ECHO will continue to promote a system approach, ensuring sustainability by focusing at the same time on strengthening the capacities of communities and national and local governments.

In 2024, DG ECHO will pilot new approaches in order to scale up anticipatory action following the commitment made in the 2021 Communication on the EU's humanitarian action.

DG ECHO will continue to seek further synergies with the UCPM⁵⁰ to engage with and support local and national government bodies and response systems, including by using specific tools (e.g. the civil protection prevention and preparedness missions).

The humanitarian-development-peace nexus and cross-cutting issues

The objective of the HDP nexus is to better link urgent relief with longer-term solutions in order to reduce needs and tackle the root causes of conflicts and crises. It is now well accepted that the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation also need to be taken into account, as highlighted by the Joint Communication⁵¹ on 'a new outlook to the climate and security nexus'. Without compromising humanitarian principles, DG ECHO seeks to contribute to longer-term strategies to build the capacity and resilience of the most vulnerable people and address the underlying reasons for their vulnerability. It will continue to shift towards more systematic and upfront coordination and complementary programming between humanitarian, development and peace actors in all relevant contexts. This will include coordination between EU institutions, EU Member States and other relevant organisations to find opportunities for synergies, and for them to jointly help strengthen resilience and create pathways towards sustainable peace.

Currently, over 108 million people are **forcibly displaced worldwide** due to persecution, conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, disasters or the effects of climate change. The Commission Communication 'Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance'⁵² outlines a development-led response to addressing forced displacement. Its main objective is to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of both displaced people and their host communities through a multi-actor approach from the onset of displacement crises. Both development and humanitarian actors will continue to implement this approach in a growing number of countries.

DG ECHO will further strengthen its efforts to raise awareness of the situation of vulnerable IDPs. This includes supporting the implementation of the objectives of the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement⁵³ that was launched in June 2022.

Displacement triggered by disasters, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change is a growing challenge. DG ECHO will continue strengthening its operational and policy engagement in this area, along the lines of the July 2022 staff working document addressing displacement and migration related to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation⁵⁴. The **Global Compact on Refugees**⁵⁵ is a multilateral framework aimed at developing a more sustainable and dignified response to refugees' needs, in line with the EU approach to forced displacement and development. In 2024, the EU will work to implement the pledges to be announced at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023.

⁵⁰ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en

⁵¹ JOIN(2023) 19 final of 28 June 2023.

⁵² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0234>

⁵³ [Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sgsm16882.doc.htm)

⁵⁴ [Addressing displacement and migration related to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/working-documents/2022/07/2022-07-20-staff-working-document-addressing-displacement-and-migration-related-to-disasters-climate-change-and-environmental-degradation_en)

⁵⁵ <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact#:~:text=The%20global%20compact%20on%20refugees%20is%20a%20unique,seeks%20to%20better%20define%20cooperation%20to%20share%20responsibilities>

Social protection systems have been recognised as one of the core ways of strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations. They have traditionally been within the remit of the development sector, but the humanitarian community can play an important role in aligning with and complementing these efforts by supporting the creation of shock-responsive social protection systems and safety nets (e.g. cash transfers) for the most vulnerable. This requires coordination and dialogue to increase synergies between humanitarian and development action.

In 2018-2019, the Commission developed a guidance package on ‘social protection across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus’ (SPaN)⁵⁶. In line with this guidance, DG ECHO will continue to engage with development actors to support the development of shock-responsive social protection systems whenever feasible.

An increasing number of people in need of humanitarian assistance are seeking refuge in cities. However, cities’ high population density means that crises affecting them tend to have a much more severe impact. DG ECHO will therefore continue to advocate for greater attention to be paid to humanitarian needs, preparedness and resilience in urban environments. It will further explore the potential of area-based approaches and other analysis tools to improve the assessment of, and response to, urban crises.

In line with the Grand Bargain commitments and the objectives outlined in its 2021 Communication on Humanitarian Aid, in 2023 DG ECHO published new ‘Guidance on equitable partnerships with **local responders** in humanitarian settings’⁵⁷. The guidance is intended to recognise and strengthen the capacity of local and national actors (L/NAs) to respond to crises. It sets out key recommendations and commitments for more equitable partnerships with local responders. 2024 will be the first year of the guidance’s full implementation, with focuses on (i) recognising the value and skills of L/NAs and supporting institutional capacities; (ii) establishing more equitable partnerships; (iii) ensuring the participation of L/NAs throughout the humanitarian response cycle and strengthening their participation and leadership in humanitarian coordination; and (iv) facilitating access to localised financing models.

2.2. Operational priorities reflected in the budget allocation

2.2.1 General methodology

In line with Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union⁵⁸, the Humanitarian Aid Regulation⁵⁹ and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid⁶⁰, and acting on the basis of the relevant financing decision⁶¹, DG ECHO is committed to providing relief and protection for populations affected by natural hazards or human-induced disasters in a safe and secure manner. The needs-based assessment leading to the allocation of funding is supported by its funding allocation methodologies, which are based on a number of factors, including INFORM Risk, INFORM Severity (see next section), an overall security evaluation and expert input. This assessment also pays special attention to forgotten crises.

The analytical preparatory work serves as a basis for DG ECHO’s HIPs, which provide detailed information on the operational priorities that it has identified.

DG ECHO constantly reappraises humanitarian crises as they evolve. If the need for humanitarian assistance diminishes (often when rehabilitation and development activities start), it winds down its humanitarian work. High priority is given to the close coordination of humanitarian aid and development activities as part of the HDP-nexus approach. The exit strategy for all areas of humanitarian intervention is reviewed twice a year: firstly when funds are initially allocated and secondly through a mid-term review. The latter is an opportunity

⁵⁶ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/sp-nexus>

⁵⁷ <https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/dg-echo-guidance-note-promoting-equitable-partnerships-with-local-responders-in-humanitarian-settings.pdf>

⁵⁸ Article 214 TFEU.

⁵⁹ [Council Regulation \(EC\) NO 1257/96](#) of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid (OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, p.1).

⁶⁰ [Joint Statement by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#) (OJ C 25, 30.1.2008, p.1).

⁶¹ Commission implementing decision financing humanitarian aid operational actions from the general budget of the European Union.

to review priorities for remaining funds in light of evolving needs. Humanitarian exit strategies are as far as possible discussed and coordinated with development and peace actors from the moment they are envisaged.

2.2.2 INFORM Risk and INFORM Severity

The **INFORM Risk Index** ⁶² is a global open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters and analyses three aspects of risk:

- hazard and exposure (the probability of physical exposure associated with specific hazards);
- vulnerability (the economic, political and social characteristics of the community that can be destabilised if a hazard event occurs);
- lack of coping capacity (a country's ability to cope with disasters).

INFORM Severity ⁶³ is a composite indicator that summarises a wide range of quantitative information about crisis severity. It enables the severity of humanitarian crises and disasters to be measured and compared, based on three aspects of crisis severity:

- the impact of the crisis (the scope of its geographical and human effects);
- the conditions of those affected (information on the distribution of people affected by the crisis);
- the complexity of the crisis (factors that affect its mitigation or resolution).

The INFORM tools are scientifically rigorous and freely accessible. They provide a common and objective language to analyse risks and crises.

2.2.3 Forgotten Crises Assessment

The Forgotten Crises Assessment seeks to highlight severe humanitarian crises where affected populations receive little or no international media attention and **insufficient or no international assistance due to the lack of humanitarian funding**. In principle, the EU – as a global principled donor ⁶⁴ – allocates at least 15% of its initial annual humanitarian budget to forgotten crises. The following crises were identified in the 2022-2023 assessment. This assessment, which is based on evidence as far as possible, relies principally on information from the INFORM indices (explained above), the Europe Media Monitor (EMM) tool ⁶⁵, OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) ⁶⁶ and input from field experts. The final list of forgotten crises is prepared in agreement with the EU Commissioner for Crisis Management.

For 2024, DG ECHO considers the following crises as forgotten crises:

⁶² <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk>

⁶³ <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Severity/About-INFORM-Severity-Index>.

⁶⁴ Principled aid is a term used to describe the allocation of international aid in a way that is consistent with the values of global solidarity and collective action.

⁶⁵ The Europe Media Monitor (EMM) explores and presents news reported by the world's online media. Monitoring thousands of news sources in over 70 languages, the EMM uses advanced techniques to extract information in order to automatically determine what is being reported in the news, where things are happening, who is involved and what they said. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/text-mining/topic/europe-media-monitor-emm_en.

⁶⁶ <https://fts.unocha.org/>

Region	Crisis/country
Africa	Complex crisis in DRC
	Displacement crisis in Uganda
	Conflict in Burkina Faso
	Crisis in Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon
	Banditry and intercommunity violence in Northwest Nigeria
	Complex crisis in South Sudan
	Complex crisis in Mali
	Sahrawi crisis in Algeria
Asia	Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh
	Complex crisis in Myanmar (including displacement crisis in the region)
	Conflict in Philippines - Mindanao
	Multiple crises in Iraq
	Socio-economic crisis in Lebanon
Latin America and the Caribbean	Complex crisis in Haiti
	Multiple crises in Central America

2.2.4 Other considerations

DG ECHO aims to address as many crises as possible within its available budget and to ensure a swift, efficient and comprehensive response. Funding allocations are based on needs assessments and coordination with other donors, but certain factors beyond DG ECHO's control may limit the volume of aid that can actually be delivered to the beneficiaries. These limiting factors include in particular: i) the presence of implementing organisations on the ground and their capacity to respond in a given crisis zone (absorption capacity); and ii) the interconnected problem of access restrictions caused either by insecurity or by administrative obstacles.

DG ECHO aims to ensure that proper needs assessment and monitoring take place. It only operates in remote management mode where absolutely necessary and justified by humanitarian imperatives.

Restrictions faced by partners are most prevalent in areas of conflict, where the rule of law is markedly absent or where there are political and administrative impediments. Restrictions can also result from politically motivated obstruction by governments or de facto authorities.

2.2.5 Operational objectives and budget planning

The draft EU budget for 2024 earmarks EUR 1 592 616 662 for humanitarian aid and disaster preparedness (DP)⁶⁷. This is to be used for operations aimed essentially at:

- (a) providing humanitarian aid to vulnerable people affected by disasters induced by natural hazards, human-induced crises or exceptional situations or comparable circumstances, which have entailed or are likely to continue entailing major loss of life; physical, psychological or social suffering; or material damage;
- (b) providing first initial aid to cover the immediate needs of the most vulnerable in advance of a predictable emergency or disaster. In the days after a large-scale emergency or the sudden onset of a humanitarian crisis, providing humanitarian assistance to cover the immediate needs of the most vulnerable populations affected by the emergency, crisis or epidemic outbreaks (including DG ECHO's support to the IFRC's Disaster Response Emergency Fund);

⁶⁷ Draft budget for 2024, as proposed by the Commission, excluding allocation for technical assistance.

- (c) increasing awareness and understanding of (and support in addressing) humanitarian issues and of the EU as the global leader in humanitarian aid (especially within the EU and in non-EU countries where the EU is funding major humanitarian operations) through public awareness actions and information campaigns;
- (d) developing and implementing the EHRC in order to close operational gaps in the humanitarian response to natural hazards and human-induced disasters. The EHRC helps to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance where the humanitarian community is struggling to provide support. It will also help cover the immediate needs of the affected population;
- (e) supporting innovative approaches and initiatives to increase the use of collaborative solutions such as common services, shared services and joint procurement. Support can be provided on a local, national, regional or global level, and can include supporting operations directly to digital platforms, organisational or shared tools and structural support, or research;
- (f) increasing the coherence, quality and effectiveness of humanitarian aid (for example, through the development of innovative approaches, methodologies and tools, and through support for capacity-building, coordination and preparedness);
- (g) supporting strategies and complementing existing strategies that enable local communities and institutions to better prepare for and mitigate disasters and to respond appropriately to them by enhancing their capacity to anticipate, cope and respond – thereby increasing anticipatory action, early response and resilience to shocks and reducing vulnerability;
- (h) enhancing policy frameworks and partnerships in the field of disaster preparedness and early action through the implementation of new and innovative approaches in regions/countries.

DG ECHO will maintain its extended **regional approach**, with regional responses in certain HIPs. A regional approach has the considerable advantages of making EU humanitarian assistance more rapid and flexible, and of simplifying/streamlining HIPs.

The following sections set out in more detail how DG ECHO will support humanitarian and food assistance for vulnerable people affected by disasters. They also detail its DP operations.

2.3. West and Central Africa

The West and Central Africa region ⁶⁸ is characterised by multiple conflict dynamics at regional level (the Central Sahel, Lake Chad basin and the spill-over in Chad from the Sudan regional crisis), and at country level (in the Central African Republic, North-West Nigeria and the South-West and North-West regions of Cameroon). The extension of the conflict dynamics from the Central Sahel to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo) is worrying and has led in 2023 to the allocation of additional humanitarian aid. The other countries of the Gulf of Guinea will be subject to a general surveillance with a focus on possible shocks whether natural or man-made.

The total number of people in need of emergency humanitarian assistance stands at 50.3 million ⁶⁹ (an increase of 10% in 12 months), while the number of those in need of emergency food assistance across all the west and central African countries has rocketed up to 47.8 million (21.2 million in 2020). At least 4.8 million children under the age of 5 require urgent life-saving treatment for malnutrition in 2023, including 4 million in the Sahel countries. 10.3 million people have been forcibly displaced by conflict and violence. The region also remains prone to regular epidemic outbreaks and disasters induced by natural hazards.

⁶⁸ The region includes the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Central Africa Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The figures in the text refer primarily to the situation in the following countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria.

⁶⁹ Source: OCHA Humanitarian Response Plans 2023. <https://ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-response-plan-2023>.

2.3.1. Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and spill-over to coastal countries

In 2023, the humanitarian situation deteriorated in Burkina Faso in Niger,, in the north and centre of Mali and in the Liptako Gourma region on the borders between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The 3-border area (Liptako Gourma) including Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger is experiencing a proliferation of security incidents and community conflicts, triggering population movements and growing numbers of forcibly displaced people. In Mali and Burkina Faso, attacks by non-state armed groups on national armed forces and villages are increasingly frequent, as are counteractions by military forces and intercommunal violence. The withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which is due to be completed by the end of 2023, is already affecting humanitarian operations. In a context of growing needs, access in Mali is becoming more and more challenging, because of blockades imposed by NSAGs but also because of a complexification of the conflict, with former signatory groups of the 2015 Peace Agreement now joining the conflict again. In Burkina Faso, the number of IDPs has increased 4-fold in the past 5 years. Over 2 million people are currently displaced. The coup of 26 July 2023 in Niger has created a very volatile environment, where access is restricted due to ongoing military operations in areas of need (e.g. Tillabéri) and where the delivery of humanitarian supplies is suspended at the borders, thus creating disruptions in the response in lifesaving sectors such as nutrition.

The tendency of all parties to the armed conflicts to disregard IHL is resulting in an increasing number of civilian casualties, forced displacement and protection needs. The expansion of armed conflicts has disrupted local economies and livelihoods, and has limited the presence of state institutions – thus increasing the need for access to basic services (particularly water, sanitation, hygiene, healthcare, nutrition treatment and education). More than 8 850 schools and 900 health centres have been closed or affected due to the prevailing insecurity.

Humanitarian needs are massive and all indicators show that the situation is deteriorating. So far in 2023, the total number of people in need has reached 18.6 million (an 15.5% increase on the 16.1 million in 2021). The number of IDPs and refugees has increased by 6.3% in 2023 to reach 3 173 420 people (an 82% increase on 2020). Compared with the average over the lean seasons in 2018-2022, the 2023 acute food insecurity figures have increased year-on-year by 47.8% in Burkina Faso and 44.1% in Niger.

In **Burkina Faso**, 4.7 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2023 (roughly 20% of the total population) and, for the first time, an estimated 42 000 individuals were in a state of famine (phase 5) during the 2023 lean season⁷⁰. An additional 650 000 were in phase 4 (emergency) and might fall into phase 5 (famine) if deprived of assistance. 36 localities are currently under blockades in Burkina Faso, meaning that up to 2 million inhabitants are at risk of severe food insecurity because markets and goods supply chains are interrupted. 14 other locations are under surveillance and may come under blockades, depending on how the conflict develops.

Mauritania has received an increasing number of Malian refugees since the outbreak of the conflict in Mali in 2012, currently hosting 102 190 refugees. Spontaneous returns to the country of origin have been very few, mostly due to the prevailing insecurity situation and the extremely poor access to basic services in Mali. The inflow of refugees has picked up again in 2023 due to the deteriorating situation in Mali. An estimated 1.29 million people are expected to be food-insecure in 2023 (276% of Mauritania's total population), including 472 275 people in severe food insecurity during the June-September 2023 lean season (10% of the total population).

In **Mali**, the intensification and spread of insecurity has had a major impact on the civilian population. Mali has 8.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (roughly 40% of Mali's total population) and 1.2 million people are expected to be food-insecure during the 2023 lean season, including 2 500 people in a famine-like state (phase 5), according to the latest Cadre Harmonisé. The security situation has in turn resulted in more complex and reduced humanitarian access. In addition, humanitarian operations are already becoming more difficult in the north and centre of the country, as a consequence of the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

⁷⁰ according to the latest Cadre Harmonisé - [Cadre Harmonisé | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(ipinfo.org\)](https://www.ipcinfo.org/)

In the **western regions of Niger**, the deteriorating security situation is due to increased activities of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) on the border with Mali and Burkina Faso. The number of forcibly displaced people in Niger (refugees, returnees and IDPs) has reached 700 000. The regions of Tillabery and Tahoua host 209 000 IDPs of Niger's 335 000 IDPs and more than 84 000 refugees from Mali and Burkina Faso. NSAGs are targeting armed forces and civilians, thus reducing access to basic social needs (for example, 920 schools (33% of the total number) are closed due to insecurity in the region of Tillabery alone).

The spill-over of the Central Sahel conflict into the **coastal countries** keeps evolving steadily keeps evolving at a sustained pace. The number of violent incidents is on the rise especially in Benin, Ghana and Togo and the volatility of the security situation is becoming increasingly worrying. As of the end of September 2023, the UNHCR estimated that there were more than 76,000 refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin and Togo, most of them from Burkina Faso.

In 2024, DG ECHO will focus on the humanitarian consequences of conflicts and violence, forced displacement and the food and nutritional crisis. It will provide emergency multisectoral assistance (notably emergency food assistance, protection, healthcare and nutrition, EiE, water, sanitation and shelter) to the most vulnerable conflict-affected populations (refugees, IDPs and host/local communities) and as required in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as well as in the 4 coastal countries affected by the spill-over of the Central Sahel conflict (e.g. through rapid response mechanisms (RRMs)).

DG ECHO will also, as appropriate, boost preparedness and response capacity in high-risk areas (including through anticipatory actions) and early emergency response to epidemics and natural hazards and/or human-induced disasters.

2.3.2. Lake Chad basin crisis

The humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin, which includes Cameroon (Far North region), Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states), Niger (Diffa and Maradi region) and Chad (Lac region), continues to worsen due to the deteriorating security situation and the impact of climate change. This is uprooting thousands of people and fuelling the immediate survival needs of an estimated 11.1 million people in need of life-saving assistance in the region in 2023. In the four countries affected by the Lake Chad crisis, almost 32.3 million people are facing food crisis conditions. Recurrent attacks and insecurity, along with the associated security response, have restricted free movement. Farming, trade, transhumance⁷¹ and other activities are affected, depriving millions of people of their means of survival and limiting access to basic services. The violence has also forced about 550 schools to close. The global consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have aggravated this emergency situation, adding to the consequences of erratic rain patterns on food security by disrupting trade flows and raising the price of agricultural inputs and staple foods.

The situation is particularly complex in **North-East Nigeria**, where 8.3 million people need humanitarian assistance (including more than 2.3 million, who have been forcibly displaced) and an estimated 1 million people are unable to access assistance and face considerable food crisis risks. Access to those in need has become even more challenging during 2023, with the closure of IDP camps by the local authorities in the Maiduguri Metropolitan area and the possibility that other IDP camps might also be closed in Borno State. Moreover, the 2023 lean season saw a total of 25 million Nigerians in severe food insecurity (IPC 3+), which is 5.4 million more people than in the previous year's lean season. Parts of the inaccessible areas in the North-East were expected to experience pre-famine conditions (IPC 4) due to disappointing harvests, local market conditions and inflation. This prompted the Nigerian authorities to declare a national emergency on food security on 13 July. In addition, nearly 700 000 children face severe acute malnutrition in the Northeast. Severe acute malnutrition has already exceeded the 2022 caseload and the number of admissions has increased by 30 % since April 2023.

In **Niger**, the regions bordering Nigeria (Diffa and Maradi) remain unstable due to the consequences of NSAG activity and the inflow of refugees. In particular, the region of Diffa hosts more than 120 000 IDPs and almost

⁷¹ Transhumance is the seasonal migration of livestock.

200 000 refugees from Nigeria. The socio-economic impact of the disruptions in trade flows with Nigeria resulting from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sanctions against the junta in Niamey is expected to be particularly acute in these two regions.

In terms of forced displacements, **Cameroon** is the second-hardest hit country in the region after Nigeria, with 2 194 819 forcibly displaced people and a total of 4.7 million people in need. The Far North of Cameroon is home to 1.6 million people in need and 743 139 forcibly displaced people (117 738 Nigerian refugees, 427 833 IDPs and 203 166 returnees). In the Far North, 937 052 people are projected to be IPC 3-5 (a 27% increase on figures for the same period last year). The endemic violence in the region, combined with natural hazards such as recurrent floods during the rainy season, has led to new displacements of population and increased the pressure on host communities.

In **Chad**, 6.9 million people currently need assistance across the country. 1 million of these are subject to severe food insecurity (42.8% more than the 2018-2022 average – which does not include the spike in needs caused by the Sudan conflict). Chad has 1 002 560 refugees and one of the highest densities of displaced people in the world. The outbreak of the Sudan crisis caused a shift of funding to the crisis in the east of the country (see below), increasing the gap with the needs of and response to the Lake Chad crisis. The situation regarding protection in the Lake Province remains worrying, with 465 incidents reported in the first half of 2023 and an acceleration in the last months with 435 incidents registered in August. As a result of conflicts and displacements, and of limited natural resources and minimal access to social services, Chad is ranked third from bottom in the World Bank's Human Development Index.

Epidemic outbreaks are frequent in the Lake Chad region, due to poor healthcare coverage and lack of access to clean water and sanitation.

In 2024, humanitarian efforts will continue to prioritise multisectoral emergency assistance and protection for populations affected by conflict (IDPs, refugees, returnees, local people and host communities), including those in hard-to-reach areas, and will also help the RRM mechanism to continue responding to new forced displacements.

Food assistance will remain key, along with shelter, nutrition, healthcare and WASH. Support will also be aimed at boosting preparedness and response capacities in high-risk areas, including through anticipatory actions. In addition, DG ECHO will advocate for a stronger strategy on humanitarian access and compliance with IHL.

2.3.3. Humanitarian crises in Central Africa: the Central African Republic, North-West Nigeria, the North-West and South-West regions in Cameroon, and Eastern Chad.

The **Central African Republic (CAR)** is still reeling from the increased violence and displacements during and after the presidential and parliamentary elections at the end of 2020. Humanitarian needs remain very high. 3.4 million people (56% of the population) need emergency humanitarian assistance. Almost 3 million are in food crisis and more than 20 % of the population is currently displaced either within the country or in neighbouring countries. Since 2022 in stable areas, a large number (over 100 000) of IDPs have returned to their places of origin. However, the total number of IDPs remains significant (514 547 in July 2023) because the movement of return is being counterbalanced by new/fresh displacements in conflict zones. The crisis is continuing to spill over into neighbouring countries (353 701 refugees from CAR are still hosted in Cameroon, 211 882 in the DRC and 128 312 in Chad) and prospects for large-scale repatriation are limited in the short term, due in part to persisting instability in regions of return (the areas of the CAR bordering Cameroon and Chad). The fact that humanitarian workers are operating in a highly insecure environment greatly restricts humanitarian access.

The insecurity/humanitarian situation in **North-West Nigeria** continues to be worrying, due to the combination of criminal gang activity and intercommunal violence. This zone, which has the worst public health indicators in the country, also has a worrying high prevalence of cases of severe and acute malnutrition in the five states of Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kano and Katsina. However, the humanitarian presence is limited.

More than 600 000 people have been internally displaced by the ongoing crisis and 56 480 have sought refuge in Niger/Maradi area. Humanitarian needs (especially nutrition, health and protection) are very high in this part of Nigeria. The North-West is not yet covered by the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), but the increasing needs prompted the issue of an operational response plan during the year.

The crisis in **the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions in Cameroon** has led to 1 078 599 people being forcibly displaced within the two NWSW regions and to the neighbouring West, Littoral and Centre regions. 89 045 Cameroonians have fled to Nigeria. Thousands of people continue to suffer from human rights violations and abuses in the NWSW regions. Food and drinking water are the top priority needs for displaced people in these two regions, followed by health and education. An estimated 700 000 students have been affected by the closure of two out of three schools in the NWSW regions (over 3 500 schools are non-functional).

The outbreak of the Sudan conflict in April 2023 triggered a massive refugee crisis in the **east of Chad**. 423 657 Sudanese refugees and 67 780 Chadian returnees have crossed the border into the regions of Wadi Fira, Ouaddai and Sila. The vast majority of refugees and returnees are women and children (including many pregnant and lactating mothers) and have significant protection needs. The displaced population is extremely vulnerable and has acute humanitarian needs in all respects but especially as regards shelter and basic necessities. They currently have little access to dignified shelter and latrines. The crowding of the displaced population and deplorable health conditions pose a high epidemic risk. The UNHCR foresees that a total of 600 000 people will have arrived in Chad from Sudan by the end of 2023. This sudden influx is putting additional pressure on a part of Chad that was already hosting 400 000 Sudanese refugees, who had arrived during the previous Darfur crisis. In addition to the impact of the Sudan conflict, Chad is experiencing several other humanitarian crises for which the response is poorly funded and which are further exposing Chad to instability and insecurity.

In 2024, DG ECHO's humanitarian assistance in Central Africa will continue to address the most acute humanitarian needs in these crises with a focus on supporting the humanitarian response in unstable and hard-to-reach areas, and particularly focussing on food assistance, nutrition, WASH, protection, and access to social services (health and education). Assistance will include disaster preparedness wherever possible and with a HDP nexus perspective.

2.4. Eastern and southern Africa

2.4.1. The Upper Nile basin

South Sudan

5 years have passed since the signature of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, but very little progress has yet been made in implementing it (particularly with the unification of armed forces, the drafting of a new constitution and the establishment of reliable voting registers). On 4 August 2022, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, and the First Vice President, Riek Machar, signed an agreement on a road map to extend the transitional period until 22 February 2025, with national elections due in December 2024. In August 2023, the Revitalized Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) completed its first year of activity. South Sudan has nevertheless continued to be affected by political instability and high levels of insecurity due to violence between different clans. The combined negative effects of recurrent internal conflicts and climate change (notably 4 consecutive years of unprecedented floods that triggered massive displacement and destruction of crops) mean that South Sudan is facing its worst humanitarian crisis since independence in 2011. Over 9.4 million people (including 5 million children) are estimated to need humanitarian assistance and protection. Around 2.2 million people are internally displaced and a further 2.3 million South Sudanese are refugees in neighbouring countries. South Sudanese people have suffered deteriorating and acute food security since the country became independent. Extreme levels of food insecurity and malnutrition affect two thirds of the population, making South Sudan one of the most food-insecure countries in the world. An estimated 7.8 million people (63% of the population) experienced severe food insecurity during the April-July 2023 lean season.

The outbreak of conflict in neighbouring Sudan on 15 April 2023 has placed further stress on the humanitarian situation. As of 20 September 2023, the fighting had forced over 280 000 individuals to seek safety across the border, with the approximately 2 000 new arrivals in South Sudan every day on average. The vast majority of these refugees are South Sudanese returnees. Before 15 April 2023, Sudan hosted over 800 000 South Sudanese refugees. The influx of people has created hotspots of congestion that create a risk of disease, triggered inter-ethnic tensions and highlighted the inability of the country's infrastructure to absorb shocks.

South Sudan remains one of the most challenging countries for humanitarian access, due to frequent operational interference and bureaucratic impediments, and an increase in reported attacks against humanitarian staff and assets. The cost of humanitarian operations keeps increasing because aircraft are the main means of transportation due to the very challenging road conditions during the rainy season (June-October).

DG ECHO's 2024 strategy for South Sudan will continue to focus on life-saving interventions, notably in the case of new shocks, and to target the most vulnerable people in the most severely affected areas through rapid response mechanisms. DG ECHO will also support the provision of humanitarian protection assistance to communities affected by violence in the country, focusing on critical SGBV cases and children affected by armed conflicts. Continued support will be provided for EiE that includes child protection. To reinforce the impact of the assistance, DG ECHO will support the humanitarian community's activities in coordination, logistics, safety and security, context analysis, data collection, monitoring and conflict sensitivity. Furthermore, DG ECHO may support targeted multihazard DP actions to strengthen early warning systems by developing local contingency and preparedness plans for effective response focused on natural hazards and human-induced disasters. Opportunities to connect humanitarian, development and peace actors will be pursued.

Sudan

Since the October 2021 coup, Sudan had been experiencing a serious upsurge in violence and conflict where the different groups competed for resources as well as for political, economic and social power. The situation deteriorated into open war on 15 April 2023, when heavy fighting broke out in Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The conflict quickly spread to other states and additional armed actors became involved, with clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and the SAF reported in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. Khartoum state and the Darfur states remain the areas the most affected by the violence. The situation is particularly worrying in Darfur because the conflict has assumed an ethnic dimension there, with reports of alleged atrocities and ethnically motivated killings.

The humanitarian situation in the country was already highly critical before 15 April 2023 because humanitarian needs had reached record levels and a third of the population required humanitarian assistance. The current conflict has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and is generating the highest number of forcibly displaced people and refugees in the region. Over 4.2 million IDPs and 1.1 million individuals had crossed international borders to neighbouring countries as of 20 August 2023⁷². 24.7 million people (half of Sudan's population) now need humanitarian assistance – almost 9 million more than before the conflict began.

The conflict and subsequent displacements are triggering massive protection needs, especially as regards sexual and gender-based violence and child protection. Targeted attacks, occupation, looting and lack of medical staff and supplies have put 80% of health facilities out of service and Sudan is now experiencing a major health crisis. Sudan is also facing its worst food crisis in a decade, driven by the conflict, high food prices (inflation is more than 200% compared to last year), and climate shocks and hazards. The latest

⁷² <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-situation-report-17?close=true>

integrated food security phase classification (IPC) analysis ⁷³ projects that a record 20.3 million people (over 40% of the country's population) will face acute hunger between July and September 2023.

Under its 2024 strategy for Sudan, DG ECHO will focus on addressing critical humanitarian needs by delivering emergency life-saving basic services and protection assistance to populations forcibly displaced and affected by conflict, natural hazards, climate shocks or epidemics. DG ECHO will provide an integrated response to health, nutrition and food security crises to prevent and/or reduce excess mortality and morbidity, while also reinforcing the HDP nexus when feasible. A continued response will be provided in education in emergencies, focusing on providing children with safe access to high-quality formal and non-formal primary education, with strong integration of child protection, mental health and psychosocial support into EiE programming. Given the current access constraints and increased bureaucratic impediments, enhanced support for coordination, logistics, safety and security, context analysis and conflict sensitivity will also be provided. DG ECHO will also support cross-border humanitarian operations on a needs-based approach and when feasible from an operational and legal point of view.

Uganda

Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and one of the five largest in the world. It currently hosts more than 1.5 million refugees, mostly from South Sudan and the DRC. The number of refugees has been steadily increasing (by 36 000 between January and July 2023). Severe under-resourcing means that refugees in Uganda are experiencing the largest food ration cuts in the region (82% of refugees receive only 30% of a full ration). Combined with significant cuts to life-saving basic services (including protection), the progressive and inclusive Ugandan refugee protection and assistance model is coming under increasingly severe strain. The scale and severity of the refugee crisis continues to outstrip national and local capacities. Uganda is also prone to disasters, such as natural hazards and epidemics.

Uganda is a pilot country for the HDP nexus and the UN Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and is a co-convenor for the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. These processes are interlinked because the EU and its Member States are committed to addressing forced displacement in Uganda by establishing and supporting sustainable solutions for displaced and other vulnerable people.

DG ECHO's strategy for 2024 will build on the progress made in 2023. There will be a stronger focus on providing life-saving assistance to refugees and host communities, based on vulnerabilities, localisation of the response as well as strengthened nexus efforts; and on strengthening local first-emergency responders' capacities to address the wide range of crises (including epidemics, new refugee influxes and natural hazards or human-induced disasters) in a DP framework.

2.4.2. Horn of Africa ⁷⁴

The Horn of Africa continues to be affected by the combined impact of internal conflicts; the aftermath of an unprecedented drought and other climate-induced disasters; a lack of governance and resilience programmes; and the impact of global dynamics on food and energy prices and delivery. Large parts of the population across the Horn of Africa are temporarily or quasi-permanently displaced and are suffering from severe food insecurity. The humanitarian response remains largely underfunded, access is often challenging, and the political and conflict dynamics in parts of the region further complicate the response.

The humanitarian outlook in **Ethiopia** remains bleak for 2024. In 2023, the country grappled with a huge hunger and protection crisis while dealing with the impact of recent and ongoing conflicts (including the

⁷³ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156504/?iso3=SDN>

⁷⁴ The Horn of Africa region includes Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

consequences of the northern conflict) and climate hazards. The country faces a generally fragile political and security situation and the risk of conflict remains very much present across the country.

Protecting civilians, advocating for compliance with IHL, improving humanitarian access and observing humanitarian principles will remain paramount and among DG ECHO's priorities when responding rapidly to new emergencies.

Following on the Refugees Act of 2021, which came into effect in February 2022, **Kenya's government policy** is shifting to transform refugee camps into settlements where refugees can integrate into the local economy and access services alongside the host communities. Kenya is hosting over 630 000 refugees, mainly from Somalia and South Sudan, and this number is continuing to rise. The drought that had affected the Horn of Africa since the end of 2020 started to subside in the first half of 2023. However, the impact of five consecutive below-average rainy seasons is likely to persist well into 2024. Millions of people have left food-insecure drought-affected areas. In **Somalia and Ethiopia**, people's ability to cope with recurrent shocks has been drastically reduced by extreme drought, floods and violent conflict, and this has led to multiple forced displacements. In 2023, an estimated 8.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance in Somalia and 20 million in Ethiopia. Over 8 million people were internally displaced in the two countries combined.

Conflicts continue to cause massive (mostly internal) displacement, civilian casualties and destruction of property and livelihoods. Escalating conflict and insecurity, and armed actors' disregard for IHL and international human rights law give rise to widespread life-threatening issues, while also hindering principled humanitarian access. In Somalia in 2024, the progressive withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission (ATMIS), the transfer of security duties to the Somali Security Forces (SSF) and the expected intensification of attacks by non-state armed actors will probably lead to additional displacement and will make it even harder to gain access to people in need. DG ECHO's support for **Kenya** in 2024 will focus on basic survival services (food, WASH, healthcare and nutrition, protection and EiE) for the most vulnerable people living in formal or informal camps. DG ECHO will also continue its efforts to link humanitarian interventions for refugees to sustainable solutions. Food security in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) will be closely monitored should more funding become available.

In **Somalia and Ethiopia**, DG ECHO will prioritise emergency-focused life-saving assistance and protection for conflict-affected populations and those suffering from high levels of food insecurity or epidemic outbreaks. Early response capacity will be strengthened in areas with high levels of displacement, an IPC 3+ classification and a high prevalence of acute malnutrition. EiE outreach to displaced out-of-school children and integrated actions, including protection, will also be supported.

Given the satisfactory results of the HDP nexus approach to the refugee situation in **Djibouti**, DG ECHO will continue to prioritise the provision of protection services and other types of assistance to vulnerable migrants, in coordination with the EU delegation. It is estimated that the number of forcibly displaced people from neighbouring countries will increase, largely due to ongoing conflicts in Ethiopia.

2.4.3. Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean ⁷⁵

The Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (SAIO) region is prone to both **climate-induced disasters (such as droughts and cyclones) and human-induced hazards** caused by armed conflict and violence. These hazards represent a major risk for exposed populations and result in loss of life, internal displacement, destruction of livelihood assets and damage to major infrastructure that hampers the delivery of assistance in some severely affected areas. During the 2022-2023 cyclonic season, the region was hit by cyclones Cheneso and Freddy. Cyclone Freddy lasted 34 days (the longest lasting tropical cyclone on record), wreaked havoc in the region and put more pressure on an already fragile humanitarian situation. Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique

⁷⁵ The SAIO region includes Botswana, the Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

were hit hardest during the cyclonic season and the resulting heavy rainfall and floods, with around 2.7 million people being affected.

In 2022-23, nearly 30 million people in the region have been experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity. The affected countries include Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The situation has been exacerbated by a challenging political and socio-economic environment, internal conflict and insecurity. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will continue to have a direct impact on food security in the region and on fuel-price inflation.

The region hosts over 400 000 refugees, asylum seekers and other people of concern, mainly from the DRC and Burundi. Across the region, over 1.5 million people are currently internally displaced. Around 16.5 million people across the region live with HIV.

In the Grand South and Grand South-East regions of Madagascar, 3.86 million people are facing acute food insecurity and around 700 000 children are likely to be suffering from acute malnutrition. The food security situation is exacerbated by worsening health, water and sanitation conditions across Madagascar.

In Zimbabwe, at least 4.25 million people (over 25% of households) are facing food insecurity in 2023-2024 and need humanitarian assistance.

The security situation in Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique remains volatile, with 2.3 million people reported to be affected by the conflict. The province is suffering from violent activity with armed groups attacking villages and civilians, and clashing with security forces – causing deaths and forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee within the province and to the neighbouring provinces of Niassa and Nampula. Recent months have seen a significant increase in and growing trend of returns to districts of origin, but the number of IDPs remains high at over 830 000 individuals displaced. Around 50% of the IDPs are children and over 1.65 million people face severe food insecurity in northern Mozambique. The conflict has disrupted the education of thousands of pupils.

DG ECHO's strategy for 2024 in the region will be based on three pillars.

- The first pillar will involve providing needs-based, rapid and life-saving multisectoral humanitarian aid to populations affected by climate-induced and/or human-induced disasters. Priority will be given to specific underserved conflict-affected districts in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique and to the Grand South and South-East regions of Madagascar, as well as to Zimbabwe if appropriate. This pillar may also reinforce the response capacities in the region.
- The second pillar will involve providing EiE services to displaced populations and their host communities in Cabo Delgado and neighbouring provinces in northern Mozambique. The focus will be on ensuring safe learning spaces and providing education programmes for children in areas affected by violence and forced displacement.
- The third pillar will involve reinforcing past DP investment across the region in situations of recurrent and predictable crises, particularly for climate-related disasters and urban preparedness. The focus will be on
 - strengthening early warning systems and early/anticipatory action;
 - multipurpose cash preparedness and, if possible, linking this to shock-responsive social protection systems; and
 - strengthening the overall preparedness and response capacity of local actors and organisations (including national disaster management authorities and first responders), with a specific focus on logistics.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to actively work to develop the many opportunities to strengthen the HDP-nexus approach in the region, with a particular focus on chronic food insecurity, resilience to drought, disaster-risk reduction and the early recovery of communities affected by disasters induced by natural hazards. It will also stay involved in the area of EiE and continue to strengthen the integrated approach in response to the crisis in northern Mozambique. Advocating for respect for 'humanitarian space' and for observation of humanitarian principles and IHL will remain critical.

2.4.4. Great Lakes region ⁷⁶

The Great Lakes region continues to be confronted with several complex crises, both protracted and acute, affecting millions of people. These crises include natural hazards and human-induced disasters, resulting in recurrent forced displacement, food insecurity and under-nutrition, and protection issues (including rapes and other forms of SGBV on a massive scale). In 2023 in particular, the humanitarian situation in the eastern DRC has deteriorated further as a result of a steep escalation of violence and insecurity (particularly in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri), which has pushed millions of people into a humanitarian disaster.

In North Kivu, fighting between the M23 armed group (widely believed to be supported by Rwanda) and the DRC army has displaced more than 1.1 million people since the violence erupted in March 2022. The majority have been displaced since the end of 2022. More than half a million displaced people live in precarious conditions in and around Goma (the capital of North Kivu province) and do not receive sufficient humanitarian assistance. The war in North Kivu has also greatly increased insecurity in other provinces of the DRC because various non-state armed groups have been exploiting the resulting security vacuum. In Ituri province, for example, fighting against and between NSAGs continues to increase and many of these armed groups explicitly target the civilian populations of other communities in their attacks.

The DRC remains the most food-insecure country in the world. 27 million people have faced acute food insecurity in 2023. The protection of civilians in conflict-affected areas remains a major concern in the DRC. Ongoing conflict and high insecurity are also partly responsible for the dramatic increase in food insecurity because they often prevent farmers from cultivating their land and accessing local markets. There are more than 6 million IDPs in the DRC, which has the largest number of IDPs in Africa.

Furthermore, the regional crisis in the Great Lakes region, which already hosts over 1 million refugees from other countries in the region, is continuing and adding to the still ongoing Burundi refugee crisis. A new regional refugee crisis may be developing as an increasing number of Congolese are fleeing the violence in the eastern DRC. Meanwhile, returns to Burundi from Tanzania and other refugee-hosting countries have decreased, mostly due to socio-economic reasons and a lack of livelihoods. At the same time, donor funding for this crisis has also decreased due to the numerous other humanitarian crises worldwide, and this has led to significant cuts in food rations for these refugees (particularly in Tanzania). This funding decrease and a strict encampment policy have caused vulnerable refugees to leave their camps to look for food and work, and this has in turn created important protection risks, mostly for women and children. It is not expected that returns to Burundi and other countries of origin will accelerate in 2024, so the regional humanitarian crisis will be aggravated further.

In 2024, DG ECHO will address urgent humanitarian needs arising from conflict, displacements and epidemics with a focus on, and a strict prioritisation of, new and most severe humanitarian needs. It will pay particular attention to protecting civilians affected by conflict, and to ensuring that interventions in hard-to-access areas controlled by armed groups will only be funded if compliance with humanitarian principles and the ‘do-no-harm’ principle is demonstrated.

The need to react flexibly to new humanitarian crises means that DG ECHO will continue to support the systematic inclusion of ‘crisis modifiers’ into actions. This will allow ongoing aid projects to react swiftly to newly developing crises, and allow emergency response mechanisms to provide a swift response capacity in such volatile contexts. It will also address food insecurity and acute malnutrition in the region, taking into account emergency thresholds, local capacities and overall funding availability.

DG ECHO will as a priority provide immediate multisectoral assistance and protection to address the basic needs of refugees, while at the same time working with development actors on longer-term solutions for more protracted situations (particularly in the fields of health and education). It will continue to advocate for the voluntary character of refugee returns. In Burundi, it will focus mainly on protection activities (including for returning refugees).

⁷⁶ The HIP Great Lakes region includes Angola, Burundi, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia.

All countries in the region are prone to natural hazards and human-induced disasters. DG ECHO already supports DP actions in Burundi, Congo and the DRC. It will also provide additional funds in Burundi and Congo.

In line with the HDP-nexus commitments, DG ECHO continues to be actively involved (in coordination with development partners) in searching for self-reliance solutions in forced displacement settings for IDPs and refugees in the region and for sustainable solutions for returning refugees to Burundi. It will continue to advocate for 'humanitarian space' to be respected, and for humanitarian principles and IHL to be observed, along with support for humanitarian coordination and logistics where relevant, including vital EU humanitarian flight services to access remote areas in the DRC. While supporting emergency responses to epidemics, DG ECHO will continue to pursue its aims of integrating preparation for, and emergency responses to, communicable disease outbreaks into its support for the health sector and of ensuring coordination with ongoing development interventions in this sector where feasible.

2.5. Eastern Neighbourhood, Western Balkans, Caucasus and Türkiye⁷⁷

2.5.1. Ukraine

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that started on 24 February 2022 is having a devastating impact on millions of Ukrainians, especially the most vulnerable and those living close to the conflict zones and in Russian-occupied and illegally annexed territories of Ukraine. As of October 2023, over 11 million people had been forced to leave their homes⁷⁸, including over 6.2 million people who had been forced to leave the country⁷⁹. According to the revised UN Humanitarian Response Plan⁸⁰, 17.6 million people in Ukraine (49% of the population) need humanitarian assistance.

Severe damage to infrastructure (including water and electricity systems) and the upcoming cold season mean that the needs in the relevant sectors will continue to be massive. The high likelihood of critical electricity and gas supply shortages due to heavy bombardments means that providing shelter solutions and addressing unmet basic needs will remain a key priority. Access to healthcare continues to be severely impacted by security concerns, restricted mobility, broken supply chains and mass displacement; 14.6 million people in Ukraine are estimated to need health assistance. Furthermore, the protection of civilians in conflict-affected areas remains a major concern; the Protection Cluster has reported that 14.7 million people will need protection assistance. According to the UN, 5.7 million school-aged children have been affected since the start of the full-scale invasion; thousands of educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed by hostilities and need to be repaired. Landmines and unexploded ordnance are endangering the safety and security of people and preventing the restoration of agricultural activity.

Humanitarian access to the Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts as well as to other areas that have fallen under Russian military control is challenging or impossible, but humanitarian needs are enormous and life-saving assistance to vulnerable people in those areas is vital.

In 2024, DG ECHO's intervention will continue to target conflict-affected people, focusing on the most vulnerable individuals (e.g. IDPs in collective centres, people with disabilities, isolated older people and poor single-parent-headed households in the highest war affected areas and under-served geographical areas with the highest reported humanitarian needs). DG ECHO will support immediate multisectoral emergency assistance: basic needs (mainly through cash assistance); WASH; shelter (including winterisation); healthcare (including MHPS, GBV and SRH); protection; light and medium rehabilitation of schools; EiE (including child protection); and actions against landmines. DG ECHO will continue to advocate for the respect of IHL, humanitarian principles and humanitarian access.

⁷⁷ For this document the Western Balkans and Caucasus includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

⁷⁸ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ukraine/>

⁷⁹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁸⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-response-plan-february-2023-enuk>

DG ECHO will maintain a flexible approach to addressing rapidly evolving needs and adapting to the challenging operational context.

2.5.2. Türkiye

On 6 February 2023, two devastating earthquakes struck 11 provinces in south-eastern Türkiye. According to Turkey's Disaster Management Authority AFAD, the death toll reached 50 783 (including at least 7 300 Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye) and 107 204 people were injured (as of 5 April 2023). More than 850 000 buildings collapsed or sustained damage, including 199 000 heavily damaged buildings that were still being demolished 5 months after the earthquake.

Türkiye is the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, with most refugees living in protracted displacement. The earthquakes struck areas that were hosting approximately 1.8 million Syrian refugees (47% of all Syrian refugees in Türkiye).

Protection remains a critical need because refugees continue to face difficulties in accessing social services and exercising their rights, and are therefore exposed to increased risks. In 2024, the EU's humanitarian support in Türkiye will focus on increased targeted outreach in the protection, WASH, health and EiE sectors. EU humanitarian funding will focus on supporting the most vulnerable groups in these sectors and filling gaps, while also encouraging a multisectoral approach in project implementation and strengthening linkages between sectors.

2.5.3. Moldova

Up to 3 October 2023, over 905 052 refugees from Russia's invasion of Ukraine had arrived in Moldova⁸¹, mostly women and children⁸². 118 635 Ukrainian refugees are currently recorded as living in Moldova, mostly in private rented accommodation (apartments and hotels) or with host families. The number of long-term displaced people in Moldova is expected to remain stable at around 100 000 during 2024. However, further escalation of the conflict in southern Ukraine and adverse impact of winter conditions may trigger a new influx of refugees into Moldova. The vast majority of Ukrainian refugees currently residing in Moldova have no income and need assistance with basic needs, protection, healthcare, education and proper shelter during the winter. DG ECHO's priority is to respond to the emergency needs of the most vulnerable segments of the refugee population.

2.5.4. South Caucasus

As of 6 October 2023, more than 100 000 Karabakh Armenians fled to Armenia after Azerbaijan launched a military operation against Nagorno Karabakh on 19 September 2023. In 2023, the EU has announced €10.45 million in humanitarian aid in response to the crisis. This funding comes in addition to the EUR 20.8 million already provided since the 2020 war in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Most people that arrived in Armenia have no income and need urgent assistance. The EU humanitarian funding will address the immediate humanitarian needs of the displaced people in Armenia with shelter, food, healthcare, hygiene and sanitation, but also protection services and psychosocial support.

Additional and urgent EU support will be required in 2024 to continue addressing the humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected populations displaced to Armenia in the same areas of intervention.

⁸¹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10784>

⁸² There are currently more than 93 000 Ukrainians in Moldova (62.3% are women and 29.4% are children).

Furthermore, the region is vulnerable to natural hazards. In the event of any unforeseen large-scale disasters and/or potential conflict-related emergencies, funding of life-saving activities may need to be considered on the basis of a robust and coordinated needs assessment.

2.5.5. Western Balkans

As for the **Western Balkans region**, besides mixed migration, risks and consequences of natural hazards should also be carefully monitored. Funding of life-saving activities will be considered, if relevant.

2.6. Middle East

2.6.1. Syria regional and Lebanon crises

Syria

The Syrian conflict continues to cause massive displacement, many casualties and suffering for the civilian population. 15.3 million people currently need humanitarian assistance in Syria and almost half of these are children. More than 13 million Syrians remain displaced, including 6.8 million inside Syria itself. Throughout 2023, as part of its principled and needs-based humanitarian response throughout the country, DG ECHO has continued to provide life-saving assistance to meet acute humanitarian needs (particularly the needs of displaced people) and protracted needs that have exacerbated drought and water shortages. The situation is particularly concerning in north-western Syria, where over 4.1 million civilians are in dire humanitarian need. In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to provide a swift response that is needs-based, multisectoral and life-saving. Its strategy will reflect the deteriorating humanitarian situation, which is characterised by a significant increase of basic needs, IHL and international human rights law violations, and protection challenges, along with a reduction in aid resources and government capacity due to the economic crisis. Flexibility will remain a central part of DG ECHO's response given the volatility of the security environment, increased access challenges (to north-western Syria in particular) and disasters induced by natural hazards such as flooding or droughts. Areas of assistance will include protection, healthcare, WASH, coordination, food security and livelihood support, education, and emergency preparedness and response. Humanitarian access and the protection of civilians (including humanitarian workers) will remain serious challenges.

DG ECHO will prioritise assistance to the most vulnerable people, basing itself solely on their needs and regardless of their geographical location, using all available routes, and considering its partners' operational capacities. Risk management will remain at the centre of its response strategy. DG ECHO will also continue its strong humanitarian advocacy for compliance with IHL, improved access and protection for civilians. It is premature to consider exit scenarios (due to the coexistence of protracted and acute large-scale humanitarian needs), but DG ECHO will continue to seek consistency and complementarity with other EU financial instruments, encouraging partners to explore referrals and resilience opportunities within their programming.

Lebanon

The deep political, socio-economic and financial crisis in Lebanon has shown no sign of abating, with devastating effects on the population (including the large number of refugees). The lack of a functioning government, rampant inflation and unstable exchange rates are exacerbating shortages of fuel and other vital supplies. The removal of subsidies is making essential products and health services unaffordable for many Lebanese nationals and refugees. Lebanon's dependence on grain imports from Russia and Ukraine has left it vulnerable to the negative impact of shortages. Poverty as well as food insecurity has drastically increased over the past year.

Lebanon hosts one of the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide, with an estimated 1.5 million registered and non-registered Syrian refugees. The issue of Syrian refugees continues to figure prominently in political debates and rhetoric and has been exacerbated by the growing crisis. Social tensions between refugees and host communities are rising. In 2024, DG ECHO will maintain its focus on providing life-saving assistance and protection to the most vulnerable in order to address existing and emerging humanitarian needs. Protection and accountability remain key elements of its strategy. DG ECHO will continue to focus on Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese but other groups will also continue being considered within an integrated response. Close coordination between different EU services and instruments will remain of paramount importance to ensuring the operational continuity of actions and assistance, and to addressing longer-term needs.

Jordan

Jordan is currently hosting over 740 000 refugees, including 660 000 Syrians, over 80% of whom reside in host communities⁸³. 7 000 non-Syrian asylum seekers remain undocumented, have only limited access to basic services and face protection risks.

The Syrian crisis has brought to the fore some of the underlying challenges that Jordan faces in areas such as employment, the business environment, climate change and management of natural resources. The socio-economic situation of refugees – and of the population in general – has further deteriorated due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which has caused a rise in unemployment and the cost of living. 65% of Syrian refugee households experience food insecurity. In addition, the education sector has been heavily affected by the crisis, and child labour, early marriage and GBV are on the rise. 7 years after the closure of the north-eastern border with Syria in 2016, around 7 500 people are still stranded at the 'berm' on the Syrian side of the border (Rukban) and this number is not expected to fall significantly. In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to assist refugees in host communities and refugee camps, focusing mostly on access to protection, healthcare and education services. It will continue providing WASH services to the population stranded at the 'berm'. It will also continue to coordinate with other EU instruments to ensure a smooth transition to longer-term solutions for refugees and host communities.

2.6.2. Palestine⁸⁴

In the Gaza Strip, the large-scale hostilities that broke out in October 2023 left several thousand people dead and injured and caused a massive deterioration of the already precarious humanitarian situation. All indicators point to an unprecedented dramatic situation and massive humanitarian needs of more than 2 million people. The situation is characterised by extensive destructions of housing and infrastructure, extensive displacements, and interrupted supply of basic commodities such as food, electricity, and fuel. All public services are at the brink of collapse. As a direct consequence of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza, the already very fragile and tense situation has also deteriorated across the West Bank, where Palestinians are confronted with the consequences of the ongoing Israeli occupation and recurrent IHL violations, Israel's continued policy on settlements, an increasing level of temporary access restrictions, evictions, demolitions, and confiscations, as well as settler violence.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to protect and assist the most vulnerable people in Gaza, focussing in particular on the sectors of health, food, water and sanitation, and shelter/NFI. In the West Bank, DG ECHO will continue to support vulnerable communities who are at risk of displacement and lack access to basic services. Close coordination with other Commission DGs and services and the EEAS in the areas of health,

⁸³ UNHCR, June 2023.

⁸⁴ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the EU's Member States on this issue.

WASH, social protection, and area-based activities will continue to ensure that programmes involve aspects of both immediate relief and resilience-building.

2.7. North Africa, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula

2.7.1. Yemen

Yemen has entered its ninth year of conflict between the internationally recognised government of Yemen (IRG), which is supported by a Saudi-led coalition, and the Houthi group (Ansar Allah). After the conflict intensified during 2021, the UN brokered a truce in April 2022, which was not renewed in October 2022 but did provide the longest period of respite for civilians in Yemen since the war started in March 2015. Despite ongoing political negotiations and diplomatic back-channel talks, a de facto truce remains fragile and long-term peace perspectives remain unclear. The truce has decreased the impact of the conflict on civilians, but Yemen remains one of the world's largest and worsening humanitarian crises⁸⁵. In 2023, the Yemen HRP estimated that 21.6 million out of a total population of 32 million people (67.5%) are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, and that the staggeringly high number of 17.3 million people are facing high levels of food insecurity. After years of war, the rate of conflict-related injuries, psychological trauma and malnutrition have increased substantially. Disasters caused by natural hazards and climate-induced events (e.g. drought and flooding) are expected to become a new key driver of displacements in 2023.

The latest IPC study projects that food insecurity will worsen by December 2023 in the southern governorates⁸⁶. Malnutrition levels in Yemen are among the highest in the world. The latest IPC analysis estimates that 500 000 children will be acutely malnourished in areas under the IRG's control, and that nearly 100 000 of these children are likely to be severely malnourished. The near-collapse of the healthcare system has left 21.9 million people in need of health assistance. Most public health facilities in Yemen are short of supplies, equipment and trained staff, and only half are considered to be in a functional state. The system is struggling to address excess mortality due to recurrent epidemic outbreaks as well as the direct and indirect effects of the conflict.

Protection of civilians and systematic IHL violations remain a major concern. The 2023 HRP estimates that 17.7 million people need protection services. Landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other explosive remnants of war are a daily threat to civilians. Moreover, the increased restrictions on the movement of female aid workers significantly hamper the delivery of aid.

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers face threats to their safety and dignity in Yemen. There have been reported cases of mass killing, GBV, arbitrary detention, forced labour and trafficking in human beings.

<https://fews.net/east-africa/yemen/key-message-update/november-2022>In 2024, DG ECHO will focus on multisectoral and integrated interventions that address the needs of vulnerable people directly exposed to conflict and disasters caused by natural hazards resulting in displacement and affected by the health, nutrition and food security crises and severe protection risks.

DG ECHO will focus on locations with the highest concentration of life-saving needs. In light of the non-permissive operational environment, DG ECHO will focus its operations on those areas and sectors where access is preserved and principled. In addition, the response will boost coordination and critical logistical capacities, and the development of interoperable systems to enable better integration of emergency and recovery assistance, thus supporting the HDP-nexus approach.

Some opportunities for lasting solutions (including returns) may materialise during the current de facto truce. DG ECHO will support efforts to gather evidence and analysis of the intentions of the displaced population to enable adapted durable solutions that ensure principled (i.e. voluntary, safe and dignified) return.

⁸⁵ <https://fews.net/east-africa/yemen/key-message-update/november-2022>

⁸⁶ The results of the Food Security and Livelihoods Assessment / IPC in de-facto authorities (DFA) is not yet known.

2.7.2. Iraq

5 years after the military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the humanitarian situation in Iraq has significantly improved. There has been a notable decline in the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance from a peak of 11 million people in 2017 to 2.5 million in 2022. As a consequence, in 2022, the international community initiated a transition process out of the humanitarian/emergency phase towards a longer-term agenda on sustainable solutions, in which national authorities will have a leading role. There was no Humanitarian Needs Overview or Humanitarian Response Plan for Iraq for 2023. This was replaced in February 2023 by a Humanitarian Transition Overview.

However, Iraq's recovery process continues to face political, security and socio-economic challenges in a highly unstable context. 1.2 million Iraqis remain internally displaced, including around 180 000 people who are still living in camps. Nearly 1 million vulnerable Iraqis (half of them children) still have a range of long-term acute needs and significant challenges in meeting their basic needs due to barriers to return and limited recovery, reintegration and reconciliation activities. Their protection risks are exacerbated by poor and insecure living conditions and particularly by the lack of critical civil documentation, which is key to their ability to access essential public services.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to provide specialised protection services to the most vulnerable displaced people living in camps and informal settlements, in particular those who lack key civil documentation. It will support their reintegration into the national social protection system.

The humanitarian system alone cannot provide all the support needed by these remaining people. The needs of IDPs and refugees require a comprehensive response that goes beyond short-term humanitarian assistance. In this context, the nexus approach is crucial for addressing the complex challenges faced by IDPs, for including them in the Iraqi national social safety net system and for developing plans to facilitate the return or sustainable integration into host communities of displaced populations.

2.7.3. Algeria - Sahrawi crisis

The Sahrawi refugees hosted in five camps in south-west Algeria (near Tindouf) are almost entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance. They have little prospect of being able to return, integrate or resettle in a protracted crisis of 48 years. The environment is extremely harsh. Basic social services are provided but cannot be sustained without continuous external assistance. The scope for agriculture production is minimal and formal economic activities are not possible. Development donors are largely absent and the main support comes from humanitarian funding. A few humanitarian donors increased their support to USD 27.5 million in 2023, but the humanitarian funding for this forgotten crisis remains neglected and had significantly decreased in 2022 (USD 35.6 million in 2021, 22 million in 2022). Global inflation makes the funding situation particularly difficult and there is a risk that the food assistance pipeline may be discontinued. DG ECHO is the second-largest donor to the Sahrawi refugee camp population, with a leading role in the WASH, food/nutrition, health and education sectors.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to focus on the refugees' basic needs, such as food assistance, water and sanitation, essential medicines and EiE. It will closely observe the evolution of the delivery methods for food assistance. It will also promote a more evidence-based and strategic approach to nutrition, directing through its newly established programmatic partnership with the UN World Food Programme (WFP) towards vulnerability-based targeting and away from in-kind distributions. It will pay further attention to the environmental impact of the projects it funds. In parallel, it will continue advocating for greater burden-sharing between all donors and other EU instruments to support livelihood and self-reliance initiatives. Employment opportunities are particularly important for young people, who feel increasingly frustrated by their dependency on aid and their bleak future prospects.

2.7.4. Egypt

Egypt hosts an estimated population of over 300 000 refugees and asylum seekers, who are living in some of the most overcrowded and poorest neighbourhoods of the largest cities, where the host communities suffer from similar levels of vulnerability. Since April 2023, over 280 000 people have fled from Sudan to Egypt and 50 000 of these have registered as refugees. The UNHCR expects that about 150 000 additional registered refugees will arrive before the end of 2023. Roughly speaking, half of the refugees are Syrian, 30% are from Sudan (numbers increasing) and the other 20% are mainly from the Horn of Africa and South Sudan. More than half are women and there are many female-run households. The number of unaccompanied and separated children is significantly increasing with the influx of refugees from the violence in Sudan. Refugees in Egypt face many significant barriers when trying to access basic services and also suffer from discrimination and stigmatisation. 80% of refugees⁸⁷ and asylum-seeker households report that they cannot meet their basic needs and many resort to negative coping strategies, such as reducing the number of daily meals.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to support refugees and asylum seekers by assisting the most vulnerable through an effective ‘one refugee’ approach that will focus on basic needs. It will also support access to quality education, and provide mainstreamed protection activities throughout its actions. The approach will also strengthen the HDP-nexus framework, including coordination and advocacy initiatives.

2.7.5. Regional actions

North Africa and the Middle East are troubled by violations of IHL, a shrinking humanitarian space, restrictions on civil society organisations, criminalisation of aid, and attacks on humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructures. This is often linked to armed groups and de facto authorities (AGDA). IDPs, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers face increased violence and targeted exploitation. They often lack legal status and civil documents and are denied access to basic services. They need humanitarian assistance and specialised protection services. The region is a destination and transit point for migrants and refugees, and is a hot spot for accelerated climate change and increased competition for resources. Conflict and tensions remain a driver for displacements.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to address these specific humanitarian challenges, which cut across national borders, via three dedicated regional initiatives. DG ECHO will support humanitarian workers at risk through a dedicated mechanism that provides legal, medical, psychological and material support with priority for national humanitarian workers. DG ECHO will also engage with armed groups and de facto authorities, as well as with their regional networks and influential religious leaders in order to improve their compliance with international humanitarian norms and to strengthen the protection of civilians.

A dedicated allocation for Libya and Morocco is not initially foreseen in 2024. However, and in line with previous years practice, funding of life-saving activities will be considered, when necessary.

2.8. Asia

2.8.1. South-West Asia and the Central Asia region

Afghanistan

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has become the location of one of the largest and most complex humanitarian emergencies worldwide. Humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are drastically increasing. The revised Humanitarian Response Plan (June 2023) indicated that 29.2 million Afghans need

⁸⁷ Source: UNHCR, June 2022 (unpublished data).

humanitarian assistance (compared with 28.2 million at the beginning of 2023 and 6.3 million in 2019). More than 64% of the Afghan population cannot meet its basic needs.

In a country affected by decades of conflict and natural hazards, the main drivers of humanitarian needs are i) recurrent droughts⁸⁸; ii) restrictions on women's participation in society that have a range of protection and other humanitarian impacts; and iii) food insecurity. Around 17.2 million people (40% of Afghans) are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity. This includes nearly 3.4 million people (around 8%) who are experiencing emergency (IPC phase 4) levels of food insecurity. Global and local economic shock, as livelihood loss and increased debt is one of the biggest drivers of underlying need, particularly in urban areas. The proportion of household income spent on food increased from 65% in 2021 to 73% in 2023, indicating protracted reduced expenditure on other basic needs. Fundamental services are continuing to deteriorate. There are major challenges regarding infrastructure maintenance and the provision of basic services by the Taliban, which prevent community and economic recovery. The overall severity of need is static or increasing, and coping measures are exhausted, so both urban and rural areas are now equally affected. The restrictive humanitarian environment has led many donors to reduce their humanitarian funding, even as needs have been increasing. This lack of funding has caused humanitarian partners to reduce the quality of aid and the number of beneficiaries. Despite the numerous Taliban edicts restricting the humanitarian environment, humanitarian organisations have managed to continue their principled work, although this does require additional time and expenditure.

In Afghanistan, DG ECHO will continue to address the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations (prioritising remote hard-to-reach communities as much as possible) and to advocate for an environment that makes possible the equitable and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. Principled humanitarian engagement and needs-based interventions will be central to DG ECHO's response. Afghanistan is frequently affected by natural hazards (mainly floods and droughts), so it will be important to maintain the multisectoral support capacity for saving and sustaining the lives of affected populations. The increasing restrictions on girls' education mean that EiE remains a priority. It is essential to give practical consideration on how best to target and include women in order to ensure equitable and wider access to assistance for the whole population. Particular attention will be paid to coordination between humanitarian and basic human needs actors and programmes in order to realistically promote mid- to longer-term solutions.

Pakistan

In a context of high political and economic instability, Pakistan hosts an estimated 3.7 million of Afghans (including 1.4 million refugees). This figure excludes new arrivals since August 2021, whose number is estimated at between 800 000 and 1 million. Undocumented Afghans are the most vulnerable.

The humanitarian situation is worsening in Pakistan. It has been exacerbated by an economic crisis and aggravated by a deteriorating food and nutrition situation (due to crop loss). A year after the 2022 floods, approximately 1.8 million people are still living near contaminated stagnant floodwater. Those who have returned to their place of origin lack key basic services, access to livelihood opportunities and basic food items. They are at risk of sliding into emergency levels of hunger and increasing levels of acute malnutrition have been reported. The humanitarian situation is likely to deteriorate still further in light of an early-warning forecast of floods and droughts during the next monsoon season that are bound to affect a population that has not yet recovered from the 2022 floods. More than 7 million women and children need immediate access to nutrition services and nearly 4 million children lack access to health services. The March 2023 IPC food survey in 43 districts estimated that 10.52 million people are in IPC phases 3 (crisis 8.45 million) and 4 (emergency – 2.07 million). Pakistan is one of the top 10 most populated countries facing emergency level food insecurity (IPC4) and the fifth country in terms of the percentage of its population facing IPC4.

⁸⁸ During the 2018 and 2021-22 seasons.

The 2024 DG ECHO strategy in Pakistan will continue to focus on the refugee crisis, on meeting the protection and humanitarian needs of Afghans, regardless of their status; on addressing the impact of the devastating floods of 2022; and on people affected by man-made and natural hazards. In accordance with the ‘do no harm’ principle, DG ECHO will focus on sectors that benefit Afghans and host communities alike, in particular food security and nutrition. DP strategy will foster the institutionalisation of multihazard approaches by strengthening the governance and ownership of disaster risk management (DRM) for risk-based preparedness. In conjunction with targeted disaster-preparedness engagement, natural hazard-induced disasters should likewise be addressed when necessary by incorporating a preparedness approach into all policies.

Iran

Iran is facing a deteriorating humanitarian situation and will continue to be severely hit by several crises, such as:

- the 40-year Afghan refugee crisis, with Iran hosting up to 4.5 million Afghans (including new arrivals since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021), many of whom are very vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian aid (especially those who are undocumented);
- a health system that was severely impacted by COVID-19 as well as by the country’s difficulties in importing medical goods and its limited capacity to provide life-saving healthcare;
- a socio-economic crisis that includes the consequences of US sanctions and the impact of COVID-19, and which has serious consequences for people’s livelihoods;
- the negative impact of climate change and natural hazards (e.g. floods, earthquakes and locust infestation) on food and nutrition.

In 2023, DG ECHO will continue to focus on the humanitarian needs of Afghan refugees and the most vulnerable Iranians. Particular attention will be given to newly arrived Afghans who are being hosted in temporary settlements and to people affected by natural hazards. DG ECHO will also continue with the DP strategy to strengthen DP policies and systems and boost logistics-response capacity as well as the capability of humanitarian partners and stakeholders.

Central Asia

Central Asian countries are prone to natural hazards and are often hit by floods, flash floods, droughts and earthquakes. There have also been tensions at the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border. In recent years, DG ECHO has responded to several emergencies through the IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), in addition to the pilot programmatic partnership with the IFRC in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

In 2023, DG ECHO will continue to closely follow the situation in the region (particularly the spill-over effect from the Afghan crisis) and will continue responding to small-scale natural hazards and human-induced disasters.

DG ECHO has a dual focus on: i) displacement tracking/monitoring, protection monitoring, analysis and response action to support refugees who are on the move and therefore the most vulnerable; and ii) disaster preparedness to reinforce local preparedness and response capacity (whenever possible working at government level), with the systematic inclusion of those who are most vulnerable in relevant DRM plans at all levels).

2.8.2. South and South-East Asia

Bangladesh

Following extensive military crackdowns in Myanmar’s Rakhine state in August 2017, the massive influx of Rohingya refugees has worsened the humanitarian situation in the city of Cox’s Bazar, which is now home to

almost 1 million Rohingya refugees. In addition, around 30 000 have been relocated to the Island of Bhasan Char. Rohingya refugees are stateless and not allowed to pursue education or formal employment. They remain vulnerable to exploitation and serious protection risks, live in congested and increasingly insecure camps and are entirely dependent on humanitarian aid. The February 2021 military coup in Myanmar has further reduced the prospects of a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees to the country. The 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh calls for funding of USD 876 million to assist 1.47 million people, both Rohingya refugees and host communities. As of October 2023, only 42% of the JRP had been funded.

DG ECHO's strategy for Bangladesh in 2024 will focus on the response to the refugee crisis with a view to continuing to ensure comprehensive humanitarian multisectoral assistance, (including protection in all its aspects), food assistance, health, nutrition, WASH, shelter and camp coordination and camp management, EiE and responsiveness to suddenly arising and unexpected needs.

Bangladesh is also one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, being exposed to a variety of natural hazards, including cyclones, floods and earthquakes. DG ECHO will continue to help address the emergency needs generated by major disasters that overwhelm national response capacities. In parallel, it will also help scale up measures to improve preparedness for natural hazards. DG ECHO will build on opportunities to further improve the anticipatory action framework and approach in the country, with the aim of strengthening shock-responsive components of social protection and safety-net mechanisms to address the needs of those who are most vulnerable to specific risks.

Myanmar

Following the February 2021 coup d'état, 17.6 million people in Myanmar currently need humanitarian assistance and protection services⁸⁹. The UNHCR estimates that there are almost 2 million IDPs in Myanmar. The updated 2023 HRP is requiring USD 887 million and targeting 5 million people. As of October 2023, only 28% of the HRP had been funded.

In 2024, DG ECHO's strategy in Myanmar will address the acute humanitarian needs of IDPs and other conflict-affected people across the country, while maintaining essential assistance to long-term IDPs. Given the magnitude of needs and operational constraints (in terms of access and operational conditions), DG ECHO's priority will be to provide emergency and life-saving assistance, while also supporting a nexus approach through appropriate operational synergies with other programmes. DG ECHO has provided significant support to strengthening the capacity of local networks through international partners to ensure timely and high-quality preparedness for multisectoral response. This will remain a DG ECHO priority in 2024. The major spread of conflict across Myanmar has affected many geographical areas. Increased assistance delivery in conflict-affected areas will be prioritised, based on demonstrated capacities and involving local partnerships.

Regional refugee crisis

Countries in South-East Asia are experiencing two regional crises that have their root causes in Myanmar: i) Rohingya refugees (Indonesia, India, Malaysia and Thailand) and ii) refugees from Myanmar following the many internal conflicts triggered by the 2021 coup d'état (Thailand and India). More than 500 000 people are estimated to be in need of protection and assistance (most of them are women and children).

In 2024, DG ECHO's response to the regional refugee crises will include a non-discriminatory 'one-refugee' approach to support humanitarian interventions that target the most severely affected populations in need of protection and assistance, irrespective of their country of origin. The approach will aim at a protection-centred response that ensures access to essential needs and services (food, healthcare, WASH, nutrition, shelter, education, as well as basic and specialised protection services). Advocacy to ensure access and response is vital, but the primary focus will be on ensuring that the response is delivered.

Philippines

⁸⁹ according to the 2023 UN Humanitarian Needs Overview

The Philippines is prone to significant humanitarian crises prompted by both natural hazards and conflicts. This is particularly the case in Mindanao, where there has been a long-standing internal conflict between government armed forces and various NSAGs. According to the UNHCR, over 142 000 people were still displaced in October 2023, but this number will continue to change as local conflicts develop.

In 2024, DG ECHO will focus on the unmet forgotten humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable families affected by internal conflict in Mindanao. Priority will be given to conflict-affected communities that have no access to immediate relief assistance and where the current operations of the government do not regularly provide social and relief assistance to the people. The most acute humanitarian needs still include food security, protection, early recovery, WASH, healthcare, and education. To complement humanitarian actions, the disaster-preparedness capability of local government will be improved to include strategies that specifically aim at reducing the vulnerability of conflict-affected families.

Nepal

Nepal is a low-income country and highly vulnerable to multiple natural hazards (e.g. earthquakes, landslides, floods and fires) compounded by unplanned settlement, population pressure, poor economic development and low literacy rates.

In 2024, DG ECHO's disaster-preparedness investment will continue to foster the uptake and institutionalisation of harmonised (as much as possible common) multi-hazard approaches by strengthening local DRM governance and ownership. The primary focus will be on Nepal's earthquake- and landslide-prone regions. This may include urban DP and landslide management, building on available learning and evidence, and the legacy of DG ECHO's previous targeted DP investment.

Disaster preparedness in South and South-East Asia

In 2024, the main aim of DG ECHO's disaster preparedness strategy in other countries of the region will be to put people at the very core of regional and State-level DRM design. This will be pursued by building on DG ECHO's previous targeted DP investment to reinforce local preparedness and response capacity, working at government level whenever possible. The systematic inclusion of those who are most vulnerable in relevant DRM plans at all levels – advocating for inclusive policies that comprehensively protect vulnerable and at-risk populations so that they are better prepared to withstand shocks and crises wherever they reside – will continue to remain at the centre of DG ECHO's activity. DG ECHO will also continue to seek improvements in the localised preparedness systems in conflict-affected and fragile settings, whenever possible acting in anticipation of shocks and crises. Thematic focus will continue to be put on supporting anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection systems.

2.9. Latin America and the Caribbean

2.9.1. Central America

The Central American countries and Mexico are subject both to significant exposure to natural hazards and to high levels of inequality and poverty. The fact that Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico rank highest among the countries in the region in the 2021 INFORM index confirms that they are significantly more exposed to natural hazards and that they host vulnerable groups with a limited crisis response and risk-reduction capacity. The region is also witnessing endemic organised violence, which has a major humanitarian impact on individuals and communities that is similar to those the impact of conflicts. The total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has reached 9.3 million in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (almost 25% of the total combined population of these three countries). Nicaragua has been marked since 2018 by intensified repression, human rights violations and a continuous decrease in the humanitarian space, and is now generating more asylum seekers and refugees (more than 5% of its population). Indigenous communities are increasingly victims of land evictions and violence. The government is also systemically denying and under-reporting the existing food and internal displacement crises. Successive climate shocks in recent years (exacerbated by droughts related to El Niño), a decrease in purchasing power and the interruption of school food programmes during the pandemic have seriously affected food security in the region. In 2023, over

8 million people suffered from food insecurity (IPC 3 or above), mainly in the ‘Dry Corridor’ of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has aggravated the situation.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to support protection and relief assistance for populations suffering from the effects of multiple crises, including the most vulnerable victims of organised violence, forcibly displaced people, and those requiring food assistance and short-to-medium-term livelihood support. DG ECHO will also support DP activities in full coordination with longer-term development actions. It will also continue to monitor and respond to epidemics. DG ECHO will monitor population movements – especially from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua as well as from outside the sub-region – that are triggered by violence, poverty, food insecurity and social unrest, including mass mixed-migration flows to Mexico and Panama. It will address the related humanitarian consequences based on assessed needs.

2.9.2. South America

Countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru continue to experience an unprecedented influx of over 6 million migrants/refugees from Venezuela. Most migrants live in an irregular situation, are exposed to threats to their protection, lack access to basic services (healthcare, food, water and education) and are still suffering the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Response capacities in the host countries are overwhelmed, triggering appeals for international support. South America is also prone to various hazards (including floods, earthquakes and forest fires) and large indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable to these multidimensional threats, which are further aggravated by climate change (and weather-related events such as El Niño). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic (the region has been the most affected worldwide) and more recently the inflation caused by the latest stage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are creating new risks (including increased population movement, social unrest and unprecedented levels of food insecurity).

In 2024, DG ECHO will consolidate and extend its current response to human mobility, with a particular focus on protection and life-saving operations for the most vulnerable groups in areas of transit and agglomeration. DG ECHO will also put particular emphasis on the needs of indigenous populations across the continent, which have been traditionally marginalised.

In parallel, DG ECHO will continue to support disaster-preparedness activities to strengthen local, national and regional response and coordination capacities to better tackle the multiple humanitarian challenges. It will to this end continue to closely coordinate with local, national and regional institutions, and pursue synergies with the UCPM.

Colombia

Humanitarian needs have been rising in Colombia over the past decade, despite significant development gains such as the 2016 peace agreement. Throughout 2023, at least 13.1 million people have been in need of humanitarian assistance. Wider territorial control by armed groups (particularly in rural areas) has escalated the conflict and added to the existing needs, thus leading to increased displacement, attacks in urban areas, reduced humanitarian access and a spike in the number of curfews. The situation has been further complicated by the spill-over from the Venezuelan crisis⁹⁰, Colombia’s exposure to natural hazards and the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19. As a result, the main humanitarian needs are in the areas of food security (16.8 million people in need), health (12 million), protection (9.8 million), WASH (8.6 million), and shelter and non-food items (8.7 million).

In 2024, DG ECHO’s strategy will be to focus on responding to the overlapping humanitarian consequences of i) the conflict, ii) the mixed migration flows and iii) disasters caused by natural hazards. Support will be

⁹⁰ There were 2.4 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia in August 2023.

provided to the most affected and vulnerable populations (such as Afro-Colombians and indigenous people) – especially recently displaced people, rural communities affected by the armed conflict and people subject to food emergencies. The priorities are in the areas of protection (case management), health (mainly comprehensive primary healthcare, sexual and reproductive health, mental health and psychosocial support, and mother and child health), EiE, disaster preparedness and food security (evidence generation). The assistance provided includes some cross-policy aspects, such as integrating the following into all actions: (i) protection, (ii) IHL and efforts to increase access to advocacy, (iii) the nexus approach, and (iv) localisation and ethnic sensitivity.

Venezuela

The complex crisis in Venezuela continues to unfold, with severe consequences for people's living conditions (particularly in terms of access to food, healthcare and education). Malnutrition rates have exceeded the emergency level and national health services have almost collapsed, so that only emergency services are available (largely thanks to international support). The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated every aspect of the humanitarian emergency. Food-security levels have deteriorated further and are expected to rise significantly due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In 2019, the WFP estimated that around 9.3 million Venezuelans were food-insecure⁹¹. However, HumVenezuela (a Venezuelan civil society organisations' platform) estimates that there are 18.9 million food-insecure people within the country⁹².

The complete exclusion of up to 3 million of school-aged children from the current educational system exposes them to further risks of exploitation, abuse and forced recruitment. 7.2 million refugees and migrants have fled Venezuela. Around 84% of these are hosted in other Latin American and Caribbean countries. By March 2023, over 211 000 Venezuelans were recognised as refugees worldwide and over 1 million asylum claims were still pending⁹³. At least 8.4 million people need humanitarian assistance due to the migration crisis (RMPR 2022⁹⁴).

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuela in response to needs that have been identified inside the country and in the wider region. Multisectoral actions will focus on providing basic health services, protection, access to food and nutrition services, WASH and shelter support for people on the move; and also on mainstreaming disaster preparedness. EiE will be supported with a set of integrated activities to make schools a protective environment. Based on an all-risk analysis, actions will particularly target i) children under 5 and young people; ii) pregnant and lactating women; iii) older people; iv) indigenous communities in remote areas; v) populations in transit ('caminantes'); vi) new arrivals and/or daily migrants ('pendulares') and vii) vulnerable groups. In parallel, DG ECHO will continue to support the humanitarian coordination, inclusion and strengthening of local organisations, the enlarging of the 'humanitarian space' and the coordination of leading donors at country level with a renewed effort within the framework of the Humanitarian Aid Working Group of the International Contact Group⁹⁵.

2.9.3. The Caribbean

The Caribbean is highly vulnerable to natural hazards, notably hurricanes, storms, flooding and drought (the last of these has been intensified by the El Niño phenomenon since 2015, with a particularly worrying impact on Cuba and the Dominican Republic). The region has also been severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which have had a heavy impact on national economies.

⁹¹ <https://www.wfp.org/publications/consolidated-approach-reporting-indicators-food-security-caribbean-guidelines#:~:text=The%20Consolidated%20Approach%20to%20Reporting%20Indicators%20of%20Food,classified%20into%20one%20of%20four%20food%20security%20categories>

⁹² Document - Venezuela Situation - Fact Sheet: March 2023 (unhcr.org)

⁹³ UNHCR Venezuela Situation Fact Sheet June 2022 - Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) | ReliefWeb

⁹⁴ <https://rmp.r4v.info/>

⁹⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/international-contact-group-venezuela-ministerial-declaration-1_en

DG ECHO will maintain its support for disaster preparedness (building on the lessons learned from, and achievements of, previous interventions) within a wider HDP-nexus strategy that links relief to rehabilitation and development. It will continue to cooperate with disaster-management institutions at local, national and regional levels to promote integration in their policy and legislative framework, and the sharing of best practices. It will also stand ready to provide rapid humanitarian assistance in response to new sudden-onset disasters in the region. It will seek continued synergies with UCPM interventions. It will also support needs-based food security and protection activities to help displaced populations (particularly refugees from Venezuela and Haiti) and other groups of people that have been forcibly displaced by disasters.

Haiti

In 2023, more than 5 million Haitians (40% of the population) needed humanitarian assistance. The situation has been aggravated by the dramatic increase of gang-related violence in the metropolitan areas, which has forced thousands of families to move within and outside the country. The violence has affected access to public services such as health or drinking water for more than 1.5 million people, exposing them to dramatic protection risks. Gangs control 80% of Port-au-Prince and block the main roads, making the delivery of humanitarian aid to other departments of the country extremely difficult. The coping capacities of the vulnerable population have further deteriorated due to: i) political upheavals (e.g. the inability of the current government to call free and transparent elections), ii) social tensions related to the fuel shortage and the high rate of inflation (more than 48% according to August 2023 data), iii) prevailing food insecurity and iv) other factors such as climatic hazards.

The latest updated IPC analysis confirms that the food security situation is worsening, with 50% of the total population being acutely food-insecure (IPC phases 3 and 4) and 1.3 million people being in an emergency situation (IPC phase 4). The food and nutritional status of vulnerable Haitians has deteriorated due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The nutritional situation among children aged under 5 is worsening. A national SMART survey conducted this year revealed that child malnutrition was on the rise: more than 115 600 children are estimated to be suffering from severe wasting in 2023 (a 30% increase on last year). According to the latest available data from UNICEF, approximately 20% of children aged under 5 in Cité Soleil district of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince are suffering from severe or moderate acute malnutrition – 5 percentage points above the emergency threshold set by the WHO.

In 2024, DG ECHO will continue to support the provision of food assistance to vulnerable populations facing a food emergency, and of nutritional inputs for children aged under 5 and children with severe acute malnutrition. It will also continue to address the protection needs of victims of gang-related violence, as well as those of forced returnees/deportees. Efforts to support disaster preparedness and build local rapid-response capacities will also be maintained. All interventions will be designed to complement the EU's longer-term development actions, following the establishment of a joint humanitarian-development intervention framework in Haiti. In parallel, DG ECHO will step up its humanitarian monitoring and advocacy efforts in light of the worryingly deteriorating socio-economic and security situation in the country.

2.10. Response to sudden-onset emergencies

The EU response will continue to address humanitarian needs in the context of sudden-onset emergencies (e.g. epidemic outbreaks, cyclones, floods, earthquakes and landslides). Its interventions in this context fall within the Emergency Toolbox HIP⁹⁶ and are designed to ensure rapid funding in response to a broad range of sudden-onset and first-response needs.

Epidemics

Epidemics are a major threat to the health, lives and livelihoods of vulnerable people in developing countries. Communicable diseases that have appeared or reappeared in recent years have demonstrated their epidemic potential and their capacity to significantly overwhelm national resources and quickly spread across borders,

⁹⁶ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/funding-humanitarian-aid/financing-decisions-hips_en

causing regional or global emergencies. The burden of endemic and epidemic-prone diseases tends to increase exponentially in more complex emergency situations that involve disasters, climate change and conflict. Such crises increase vulnerability to infectious diseases alongside reduced national capacities to respond to public health risks, especially if health systems are already poorly resourced. The generally low level of vaccination coverage in developing countries increases the risk of infection spreading. The fact that health workers are particularly at risk of infection means that a proper response relies on the availability of medical evacuation options. Early and effective action is required to reduce morbidity and mortality during disease outbreaks. Response-capacity is key to an effective response but is only possible with an appropriate degree of preparedness.

Small-scale tool

Small-scale disasters affect a relatively limited numbers of people but still have a seriously negative impact on lives and livelihoods. They can occur in remote or isolated areas without regular support or assistance. The objective of the ‘small-scale tool’ is to provide victims of natural or human-induced disasters with rapid relief assistance when a small-scale response is sufficient to cover unmet needs.

Acute Large Emergency Response Tool (ALERT)

Large-scale sudden-onset disasters can have an enormous effect on the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable populations. In many countries, the effects of a disaster may, when combined with high levels of vulnerability and insufficient local capacities, be devastating and require urgent life-saving assistance. It is usually critically important to address needs rapidly within the first few days. The purpose of the ALERT is to provide an initial response to cover the immediate needs of the most vulnerable in the immediate aftermath of a large-scale disaster – whether caused by natural or technological hazards, or by a new humanitarian crisis.

Support for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies through DREF

In most small-scale emergencies, emergency assistance is generally provided at local or national level. National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, supported by the the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), are often best placed to provide an immediate response because they are rooted in the local community and can mobilise local people as volunteers. In support for the DREF, DG ECHO meet its localisation commitments and is based on the need to ensure a quick-reaction capacity with a minimal administrative burden for those concerned. DG ECHO's contribution to the DREF can also be used under the IFRC's anticipatory-action pillar of the DREF. Anticipatory-action operations aim to address specific predetermined threats. Action is triggered once the threat has become a real or imminent event.

Emergency response reserve

As a complement to the ALERT, the emergency response reserve is intended to provide adequate resources if a sudden natural or human-induced crisis occurs on a large scale and if there is a serious deterioration in any ongoing crisis.

2.11.Complementary and thematic activities

European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)

The EHRC was launched in March 2022 with the objective of supporting humanitarian partners by facilitating the quick delivery of humanitarian assistance. The EHRC is a set of operational tools designed to provide rapid but temporary support to partners in order to fill operational gaps in the humanitarian response where

the humanitarian community struggles to provide support, thus helping to cover the immediate needs of the affected population.

The objectives of the EHRC are to:

- support humanitarian partners in providing effective, efficient and timely assistance to people in need in the aftermath of a natural or human-induced disaster, and in situations of protracted crisis where operational gaps are identified;
- strengthen humanitarian access with the provision of safe and reliable transport, logistics and supply-chain solutions;
- enable more rapid, targeted and direct EU interventions launched and steered by DG ECHO to improve the humanitarian response and to fill gaps;
- show stronger EU leadership in steering and deciding on the delivery of humanitarian assistance, triggering Team Europe initiatives and driving the humanitarian agenda to support the EU's overall role as a global actor and its political and diplomatic leverage in the crisis;
- be a useful advocacy tool to raise the profile of a crisis, draw attention to operational constraints faced by humanitarian actors on the ground and articulate EU diplomatic support in humanitarian access negotiations with local and national authorities;
- raise EU visibility and promote Team Europe initiatives.

To achieve these objectives, the EHRC covers temporary weaknesses and gaps in the humanitarian supply chain and humanitarian expertise. The different services of the EHRC include (i) the provision of common logistics services to humanitarian partners in the form of international and in-country transport operations (across various modes of transport), (ii) warehousing capacities, (iii) pre-positioning and delivery of emergency stockpiles and other supply chain/logistical support and coordination, and (iv) deployment of expertise and capacities.

EHRC deployments are coordinated with humanitarian and civil protection stakeholders and respect the UN's overall coordinating role in order to build on the respective sectors' particular areas of expertise and to foster synergies.

Given the nature of the capacities developed, the EHRC will target populations that are more likely to be affected by disasters caused by extreme natural events (primarily in countries with a low capacity to cope with and respond to emergencies). It will consider emergencies both in urban and rural settings. It is planned that the EHRC will be used both for sudden-onset disasters and for protracted crises where a peak in needs of the affected populations or particular constraints for humanitarian access require specific support that the EHRC can provide. It is expected that EHRC assistance might be activated in sudden-onset disasters in parallel with activation of the UCPM. DG ECHO and in particular the ERCC will in those circumstances ensure the complementarity of activities and that the lines of conduct of operations are clear.

To assess needs and operational gaps, DG ECHO will make full use of its field network, its experience and reliable primary or secondary data. When a full assessment of needs and gap is not possible, DG ECHO will be able to act on a 'no regret basis' for the deployment of essential EHRC services, drawing on past lessons. In accordance with the principle of complementarity with DG ECHO funding, the EHRC will not be used as a tool to fill funding gaps.

Respect for humanitarian principles will be ensured throughout the use of the EHRC and will remain a pivotal key element of decision-making.

Supporting a paradigm shift in humanitarian logistics

In 2022, DG ECHO launched its humanitarian logistics policy, which recognises that logistics is cross-sectoral and the backbone of humanitarian action. Given the significant opportunities for efficiency and effectiveness gains, this policy called for a paradigm shift in this area towards a more strategic approach.

In 2024, DG ECHO will provide specific financial support for initiatives that contribute to this through a strategic approach in terms of humanitarian supply chains and logistics in general. It will roll out an implementation plan, in particular funding projects which make it possible to make greater use of common services, shared services and joint procurement – at regional or global level; and ranging from support to operations on the one hand to research and structural support to organisations on the other hand.

Policy-support toolbox

Access to the right mix of policy-support tools and making the best use of them are essential to creating and maintaining a systemic, long-lasting impact on the humanitarian system in priority areas that are important for DG ECHO and for the humanitarian system as a whole.

In a context of increasingly complex humanitarian challenges and scarce resources, the capacity of humanitarian actors to respond to ever-growing needs is often stretched to the limit. Addressing this issue is a question not only of increasing financial resources, but also of improving tools, knowledge, coordination and preparedness, as stated in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid⁹⁷.

The development and roll-out of innovative and well-informed policies also ensures that DG ECHO's operational activities meet the highest international standards in terms of quality and timeliness.

DG ECHO's policy-support toolbox is composed of the enhanced response capacity (ERC) and a policy-support framework contract. Through the ERC, DG ECHO has championed numerous policy initiatives at international level, and helped develop and build the capacity of its partners to deliver. The policy-support contract has supported DG ECHO's internal policy development and helped to assess (and, when relevant, further refine) its policy tools.

Visibility, information and communication

In 2024, DG ECHO will increase awareness and understanding of, and support for, humanitarian issues, especially in the EU and in non-EU countries where the EU is funding major humanitarian operations. It will do this by organising high-impact public awareness, information and communication campaigns. Providing transparent and accountable information on the impact of EU humanitarian aid and disaster response (and its underlying values) is crucial to maintaining and mobilising continued support and relief assistance. Effective communication will also highlight the EU's cooperation with international, national and local partner organisations in delivering relief assistance to people affected by humanitarian crises.

DG ECHO's communication approach reflects the special characteristics of humanitarian aid, with a view to preserving a distinct identity for principled, needs-based humanitarian action, in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the Communication on the EU's humanitarian action.

Communicating the EU's response to sudden-onset, ongoing and protracted crises remains at the core of communication planning, together with awareness-raising on more strategic themes (including IHL, the humanitarian principles, food security, and 'forgotten crises'). The content related to EU humanitarian aid will be disseminated through various channels such as print, digital and social media and podcasts. This content will be produced both by DG ECHO and by humanitarian partners. Additional initiatives will include media

⁹⁷ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42008X0130\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42008X0130(01)), page 7.

trips for journalists. The various communication initiatives will also be complemented by the stakeholder and outreach activities around the annual European Humanitarian Forum.

Joint communication actions with the European Commission's humanitarian partners are integral to this approach. Operational activities funded by DG ECHO will therefore fully integrate them into its overall approach, aligning them with the visibility requirements of the Commission's corporate model grant agreement and its subsequent guidance to DG ECHO's funded partners.

Where appropriate, DG ECHO's communication actions will contribute to the Commission's corporate communication, led by DG COMM as domain leader, in particular on the implementation of #NextGenEU⁹⁸ and the themes of the European Green Deal, and the EU in the world⁹⁹ (the latter in collaboration with the other external policy DGs in the Commission and the EEAS).

3. Delivery, coordination and control of humanitarian aid

3.1 Ways and means of delivering aid

Field network

DG ECHO's field network of 50 field offices in 42 countries is considered to be one of its key strengths and a distinctive feature of the Commission's humanitarian aid policy. It is composed of both international and local experts and contributes decisively to the EU's status as a 'reference donor', whose strong position in international forums is based on first-hand operational knowledge. The field network makes it possible to improve the quality of humanitarian aid by ensuring coordination with stakeholders, including EU delegations, Member States and international organisations. The field network is flexible, responsive and adjusted to the need for humanitarian interventions. It can therefore strengthen the EU's reaction capacity in situations where a sudden crisis arises and it is increasingly building on available synergies with civil protection.

The field network's basic role is to increase the effectiveness and suitability of the EU's humanitarian action by:

- helping to identify and evaluate humanitarian needs in the field and their possible evolution;
- monitoring EU-funded humanitarian aid projects, providing technical advice on needs assessment and analysing proposals and lessons learned;
- contributing to the coherent roll-out of policy guidelines that guarantee a consistently high level of quality for EU-funded humanitarian aid projects;
- representing the Commission in relevant humanitarian aid clusters/forums, advocating with relevant stakeholders at local/regional/global level (within the framework established by HQ) and ensuring appropriate communication and visibility actions – while also keeping office structures flexible, agile, adapted to needs and based on appropriate resource, logistics and security management arrangements separate from the EU delegations.

The field network is therefore crucially important in helping to increase the impact of humanitarian aid and improve DG ECHO's ability to determine priorities on behalf of the Commission.

Security sector

The security sector is the operational security arm of DG ECHO. It ensures the security of personnel and the integrity of DG ECHO premises and assets in all countries where DG ECHO operates. DG ECHO's mandate is such that its supervisory missions will often be in high-risk countries and areas. Without assurance of adequate security provision, DG ECHO could not be one of the world's leading humanitarian donors.

⁹⁸ https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en

⁹⁹ <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20230313213644/https://futureu.europa.eu/en/processes/EUInTheWorld>.

The security sector's normal functions are conducting, supervising and implementing DG ECHO's security policies, security briefings, standard operational procedures, country security plans and security trainings with regard to humanitarian and civil protection activities. It is also responsible for the management and technical advice on security-related incidents, crisis response measures and evacuation procedures.

At field level, the security sector is represented by the regional security coordinators (RSCs) who are based in Dakar, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Panama, Amman, Bangkok and Kyiv. These RSCs are a fundamental part of DG ECHO's security work and are the main security points of contact in the field. They are tasked with establishing and maintaining a security network that links DG ECHO's personnel and management in the region and promotes strong security awareness among DG ECHO's partners. The RSCs also conduct regular security risk assessments for their regions of assignment, working with the EEAS' and Member State's security staff and with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and other agencies and organisations to improve coordination and implementation of security management arrangements. They are ready to deploy within the region or globally at any time to cover security crises following input from HQ.

Relations with (international) partners

DG ECHO carries out its humanitarian aid mandate by funding projects proposed by partner organisations, which currently number around 200. The partner organisations are European humanitarian NGOs, international organisations (including UN agencies) and specialised agencies in the Member States¹⁰⁰. With some of these organisations (strategic partners, who jointly account for more than half of the annual humanitarian budget, and (pilot) programmatic partners), DG ECHO organises annual high-level dialogues and strategic dialogues to discuss major issues of shared interest. It will continue to coordinate the EU's preparation for meetings of the governing bodies of those strategic UN partners for which it has the lead. This coordination includes liaising with EU Member States. DG ECHO will also continue to participate actively in the donor groups established by several major partners.

Having a diverse range of partners is important because it allows comprehensive coverage of an ever-growing list of needs in complex situations across the world. Grants and contributions are decided on the basis of the best proposals covering the needs of those most vulnerable. Partner organisations make a commitment to highlight the origin of EU aid.

Programmatic partnerships

High quality funding is at the heart of the Grand Bargain 2.0¹⁰¹, which delivers as much aid as possible to vulnerable populations through: i) a quid pro quo approach, ii) humanitarian actions being increasingly efficient and effective, iii) accountability to beneficiaries, iv) support for local actors, v) greater predictability of funding, vi) flexibility, vii) simplified reporting and viii) donor visibility. DG ECHO is committed to continuing to support this process.

Programmatic partnerships are one way to implement these shared commitments. They address multiannual strategic and geographic priorities of shared interest between DG ECHO and its partners, and promote innovative policy approaches.

The programmatic partnerships allow activities that benefit from a longer time frame such as capacity-building actions for local partners or a nexus programme. The expected benefits are:

- more and/or better outcomes at the end of the programme than if the partner had embarked on successive but distinct annual projects;
- efficiency gains and economies of scale that increase the number of direct beneficiaries;
- an enhanced dialogue at headquarters (HQ)/field level with the partners on specific topics of common interest;

¹⁰⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/partnerships/humanitarian-partners_en

¹⁰¹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-20-structure>

- further testing and rolling-out of more efficient and innovative approaches.

When properly designed, programmatic partnerships enable progress towards key Grand Bargain commitments in the quid pro quo logic, notably (i) reaching more people in need, (ii) quicker, enhanced accountability to affected populations, (iii) support to local and national actors, (iv) more flexible funding for aid organisations, (v) advancing the efficiency agenda and (vi) transparent reporting.

Since 2020, DG ECHO has launched pilot programmatic partnerships with NGO partners (ACTED, Concern, IRC and StC) as well as with UNICEF, the FAO, OCHA, the IFRC and the ICRC.

In 2024, DG ECHO will proceed with the second year of implementing 12 programmatic partnerships started in 2023. 9 programmatic partnerships will continue to be implemented by DG ECHO in West and Central Africa and the Greater Horn of Africa, primarily in health, nutrition, protection and EiE. 2 programmatic partnerships will continue to be implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean, covering health, coordination, EiE, food security, protection, shelter, settlements and WASH. 1 programmatic partnership will continue to address food assistance in Algeria within the context of the Sahrawi crisis.

3.2 Coordination and information exchange

Various mechanisms are in place to ensure coordination and the exchange of information on crisis response and humanitarian aid activities in general, including:

- exchange of information on overall operational strategies and on responses to specific crisis situations (this is a regular feature on the agenda of the Council Working Group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) attended by EU Member States);
- crisis reports, which are shared with Member States and contribute to shared assessments and understanding of the situation on the ground, thereby helping with the overall coordination of the EU's and Member States' humanitarian response;
- regular exchanges with partners at HQ and in the field;
- the European Disaster Response Information System (EDRIS), which collects data on DG ECHO's and Member States' humanitarian aid activities;
- the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS), which enables information exchange, situational awareness and coordination during emergencies with the UCPM member and participating states;
- the ERCC, which is a 24/7 coordination hub enabling coordinated and swift responses to disasters by supporting humanitarian aid and civil protection activities by:
 - facilitating a coherent EU response during emergencies and supporting other EU services and the Member States in crisis situations;
 - supporting the institutional crisis management process as well as other DGs through the Commission's duty system under phase 1 of the general rapid alert system (ARGUS) so that all incoming communications concerning an ongoing or potential crisis are directed to the ERCC;
 - acting as the 24/7 operational focal point in the context of the integrated political crisis response arrangements and of a coherent information flow for the production and dissemination of the integrated situational awareness and analysis reports;
- international forums and donor groups, in which DG ECHO continues to participate (e.g. the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, the ICRC Donor Support Group, the IFRC Donor Advisory Group and the OCHA Donor Support Group);
- regular exchanges of views in the European Parliament on the EU's response to crises (particularly in the Parliament's Committee on Development but also increasingly in its Committee on Foreign Affairs);

- ad hoc crisis coordination meetings of the Commission's DGs and services (and, where appropriate, the EEAS) to exchange information (e.g. ARGUS meetings, the EEAS Crisis Platform and security-critical incident management);
- regular information exchange and upstream coordination with the relevant Commission services (DG HOME, DG INTPA, DG NEAR and FPI in relation to crisis-response interventions under the NDICI - Global Europe Regulation¹⁰² and in relation to the humanitarian-peace-development nexus to ensure optimal deployment of DG ECHO resources and coherence of interventions involving different EU funding instruments; regular information exchange through an inter-service group on IHL;
- regular information provided to Member States' focal points about activating the EHRC tool in emergency situations;
- regular geographical evaluations (each with a suitable thematic/sectoral focus) covering all regions in which DG ECHO operates and covering all humanitarian themes and sectors every 5 years (with the results being posted on DG ECHO's website¹⁰³);
- thematic platforms, such as the Global Network against Food Crises.

3.3 Monitoring the use of funds

The Commission ensures the correct implementation of EU-funded operations with several layers of checks and monitoring, both internally and using external actors. This includes appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to non-EU parties (including review procedures where appropriate) as well as rules and procedures to ensure compliance with EU restrictive measures¹⁰⁴, taking account of the relevant IHL principles.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a key tool for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of EU initiatives. DG ECHO's five-year evaluation programme provides comprehensive evaluation coverage of its humanitarian aid and civil protection activities over the relevant period.

In 2023, the following evaluations will be completed and the reports will be made available on DG ECHO's evaluation webpage¹⁰⁵:

- evaluation of humanitarian logistics in the European Commission's civil protection and humanitarian aid operations (2018-2022) and of the mobility package within the Emergency Support Instrument re-activation (2020-2022);
- evaluation of regional crisis in Venezuela and the partnership with the UNHCR (2017-2021).

The following evaluations are currently ongoing or are expected to start soon, and will be completed in 2024:

- interim evaluation of the UCPM (2017-2022);
- comprehensive evaluation of the European Commission's humanitarian aid (2017-2022);
- evaluation of DG ECHO's partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2018-2022);
- evaluation of the EU's humanitarian interventions in central Africa (2019-2023) and DG ECHO's partnership with Unicef.

Controls carried out by DG ECHO

¹⁰² Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009 (OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p. 1), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/947/oj>.

¹⁰³ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/evaluations_en

¹⁰⁴ www.sanctionsmap.eu. The sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The sanctions are based on legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between a published legal act and an update on the website, it is the OJ version that prevails.

¹⁰⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/evaluations_en

The main aspects of DG ECHO's environment as regards checks include the following supervision and monitoring procedures, and prior and subsequent checks:

- strict mechanisms for the selection and quality-control of NGOs and international organisations as DG ECHO partners, with explicit requirements for their financial credentials;
- assessment of the needs of people affected by crises through a worldwide network of DG ECHO field experts;
- appraisal of project proposals and on-the-spot project monitoring through a worldwide network of DG ECHO field experts;
- regular field visits to project sites by geographical desk officers, technical experts, external auditors, and DG ECHO managers;
- an obligation for partners to produce reports after the end of each operation to justify their expenditure – DG ECHO's operational and financial desk officers carry out a thorough analysis of the reports and check the eligibility of expenditure;
- external auditors contracted by DG ECHO audit the legality and regularity of expenses claimed; and check the soundness of financial management and control systems, and compliance with the requirements set out in the certificate ¹⁰⁶.

These procedures and checks should not be seen in isolation. Each one helps provide assurance on the legality and regularity of transactions and their compliance with relevant rules and obligations. Checks are also carried out within the Commission itself by its Internal Audit Service (IAS), whose mission is to issue recommendations, opinions and advice on the Commission's departments' and EU agencies' internal control system.

Additional controls

DG ECHO's operations and financial management are also subject to external audits. The European Court of Auditors audits the EU's finances and, increasingly, the performance of its activities. Observations and recommendations are published in the Court's annual and special reports, which are forwarded to the European Parliament and the Council.

Specialised committees of the European Parliament and Council exercise control over the financial management of Commission DGs and services. In this context, the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control organises annual hearings with a number of Commissioners as part of the procedure for discharging the European Commission's annual accounts.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/humanitarian-partnership-2021-2027/eu-humanitarian-partnership-certificate-2021-2027>