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COVER NOTE

From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director

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To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Delegations will find attached document SWD(2026) 63 final.

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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

**Comprehensive evaluation of the European Commission's humanitarian aid
2017-2022**

{SWD(2026) 62 final}

1. BACKGROUND

This document summarises the Commission Staff Working Document on the comprehensive evaluation of the European Commission's humanitarian aid between 2017 and 2022. The main source of evidence for the evaluation is an external study, which built upon the findings and the conclusions drawn in the 33 specific evaluations carried out during the evaluation period. The external study assessed both the strategic and operational levels of the EU's humanitarian interventions. It examined the European Commission's role as a humanitarian donor in relations to its partners and the wider humanitarian aid system, as well as the results achieved. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance, added value, and sustainability of the Commission's humanitarian aid actions.

The main legal instrument governing humanitarian aid at EU level, the Humanitarian Aid Regulation, lays out the general objectives and framework for the EU's funding of humanitarian assistance, relief and protection operations. The evaluation period was marked by the adoption of a Communication on 'The EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles' (2021), a renewed strategic outlook setting out how the EU can address increased humanitarian needs.

Between 2017 and 2022, the European Commission continued to be one of the world's leading humanitarian aid donors. Over the evaluation period, the EU provided funding to partner organisations - non-governmental organisations, international organisations, and specialised agencies from Member States - to support the implementation of 3,386 actions, with a total value of approximately EUR 13 billion.

As a global donor, the European Commission supported humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts worldwide, in five regions: Africa (the region receiving most funding), Europe, Middle East and Northern Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. The European Commission delivered humanitarian assistance in the core sectors of food, nutrition, health, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection, education in emergencies, and shelter and settlements.

2. EFFECTIVENESS

Overall, the evaluation provides clear evidence that the EU's humanitarian interventions addressed the most pressing needs and contributed to progress towards the achievement of the objectives stated in the Humanitarian Aid Regulation.

Although effectiveness varied across countries, regions and sectors, evidence indicates that funded actions were effective overall and generated both non-quantifiable and quantifiable results and impacts on the life of assisted populations. Funded actions addressed the needs of different vulnerable groups; infants and children under five, persons with disabilities and pregnant women features among the most targeted groups.

Sectoral and thematic policies developed by DG ECHO (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) contributed to enhancing the quality of the European Commission's humanitarian response. In addition, the European Commission played a leading role in putting some topics at the forefront in humanitarian responses, such as the use of cash, the importance of disability inclusion, disaster preparedness, and environmental considerations.

Some factors might have presented challenges to the effectiveness of the thematic policies, such as a growing number of thematic policies, in some cases partners' capacity and

resources to implement all policy requirements; and contextual challenges. However, these identified challenges did not affect implementation of thematic policies on the ground.

DG ECHO's different partnership models and new initiatives (e.g., Programmatic Partnerships) enabled more strategic engagement with partners and supported the achievement of shared objectives.

3. EFFICIENCY

The evidence suggests that the efficiency of DG ECHO's systems and processes improved since the previous evaluation period (2012-2016). The European Commission often considered efficiency when making strategic choices about funding allocation; budget allocations were based on needs and considered actions of other donors. In addition, the evaluation highlighted the European Commission's flexibility to amend and top up budgets in response to evolving crises. Recent or emerging needs and contextual changes were appropriately reflected in policy documents and funding decisions.

At the same time, the efficiency of the EU-funded humanitarian actions was influenced by both internal and external factors. The assessment of cost effectiveness of EU humanitarian aid actions, and more broadly in the humanitarian sector, remains challenging. Internally, in some cases, due to the specificity of humanitarian assistance, complex administrative requirements, short funding cycles, and the fragmentation across multiple actions and partners posed challenges. Externally, factors such as access constraints, insecurity, restrictive government policies, high operating costs, and shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic further affected efficiency. Nonetheless, the European Commission demonstrated strong flexibility in response, using budget modifications, reallocations, and operational adjustments to mitigate these effects.

4. COHERENCE

The European Commission is recognised as a principled humanitarian donor, adhering strongly to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Throughout the evaluation period, the European Commission implemented measures to ensure that these principles were consistently integrated into EU interventions. This was ensured through consultations with key partners and stakeholders when adopting or updating policies. The European Commission's advocacy also played a crucial role in upholding these principles.

The EU's humanitarian aid interventions were internally coherent at both strategic and operational level. In particular, the evaluation noted the synergies with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and the Emergency Support Instrument.

Moreover, the EU's humanitarian aid interventions were coherent and complementary with those of Member States and other donors. DG ECHO participated and/or encouraged its partners to participate in existing coordination mechanisms. The European Humanitarian Forum, which was first held in 2022, was also regarded as a useful setting where the European Commission could enhance its strategic dialogue with Member States and humanitarian partners.

While evidence showed overall coherence between the EU's humanitarian interventions and the different EU external financing instruments, further efforts are needed to better

exploit synergies, to facilitate the operationalisation of the Humanitarian Development Peace nexus (HDP nexus).

5. SUSTAINABILITY

There was a notable increase in EU-funded humanitarian actions showcasing continuity of results or sustainable effects. The European Commission prioritised actions that integrated strategies linking projects to longer-term goals developed with national or local authorities to ensure sustainability beyond the humanitarian programme cycle.

Despite coordination challenges, there were success stories in the operationalisation of the HDP nexus. Flexibility, coordination, and funding predictability could be further strengthened with a view to facilitating complementarity between humanitarian, peace and development actions.

6. EU ADDED VALUE

The EU funded humanitarian aid interventions generated a clear added value compared to what individual Member States could have achieved. The European Commission's added value included its global and local presence compared to other donors through its unique network of humanitarian field offices spread in 40 countries; its technical and thematic expertise; a programming approach that was sensitive to filling in gaps; its stance as a strongly principled donor; its role in coordination and advocacy; its network of partners; and its use of different preparedness and rapid response instruments in response to crises.

Interrupting EU humanitarian aid interventions and funding would have severe negative consequences. This would create a substantial financial gap in a context where the overall global humanitarian funding is decreasing.

Actions with the potential to maximise EU added value include: strengthening the European Commission's role in coordination; strengthening advocacy activities; continuing efforts towards localisation and capacity-building of local actors; supporting and strengthening the field network; facilitating the implementation of thematic policies through capacity building and engagement; enhancing sustainability and HDP nexus considerations; and enhancing multi-year funding.

7. RELEVANCE

The EU's overarching humanitarian aid objectives remained relevant in the face of a rapidly changing humanitarian landscape and increasing humanitarian needs. The most relevant objective focused on saving and preserving life, alleviating human suffering, and maintaining human dignity. In this regard, DG ECHO's strategies, as outlined in the Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs), were well aligned with the EU's overarching objectives, policies and commitments. Most HIPs demonstrated the flexibility needed to adapt to changing conditions.

Overall, DG ECHO's thematic policies provided essential frameworks for guiding and prioritising funded actions, and were generally comprehensive and up to date, though this varied by policy. The use of cash-based modalities increased throughout the evaluation period, influenced by the European Commission's advocacy. The EU's commitments towards forgotten crises (devote 15% of its initial humanitarian budget to forgotten crises)

and Education in Emergencies (commitment to aim to dedicate 10% of the humanitarian assistance as of 2019) – were relevant to addressing significant underfunding and increasing needs.

The range of partnership approaches adopted by the European Commission enabled appropriate responses to various crises. Strategic dialogues with some partners enabled strategic discussions and leveraging partners' capabilities.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The EU's overarching humanitarian aid objectives enshrined in the Humanitarian Aid Regulation remain relevant in the face of a rapidly changing humanitarian landscape and increasing humanitarian needs. EU's humanitarian interventions were effective overall and addressed the most pressing needs, although effectiveness varied across countries, regions and sectors. The European Commission's funding is considered essential by its humanitarian partners across different regions, including more geographically remote ones where its presence is more limited.

The key features of the European Commission in delivering principled humanitarian aid and disaster relief include: a strong and flexible emergency response capacity, a broad and diverse partner network, well-developed thematic policies and expertise, and a significant field presence that enhances contextual understanding and response. Its active advocacy role and leadership on humanitarian policy, firmly rooted in humanitarian principles and international law, further reinforce its global impact.

A qualitative, accountable, and principled humanitarian action by the EU stands as a strong confirmation of its commitment to global solidarity and human rights, enhancing its reputation and influence on the world stage. Investment in humanitarian assistance also contributes to global stability, helping to prevent crises from escalating into security threats, economic shocks, and the prospect of failed states.

The importance of **further promoting efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action in all sectors is underscored**, including by strengthening the HDP nexus, promoting quality funding, locally led responses, and cash assistance where relevant and possible.

The European Commission is confirmed as a key humanitarian player and should continue strengthening its engagement and leadership in global humanitarian affairs. Its needs-based approach, focus on forgotten crises, and principled stance – including strong support for international humanitarian law (IHL) – remain highly relevant and impactful. The Commission continues to shape the global humanitarian agenda, mobilise support among like-minded and emerging donors, and advocates across multilateral fora.

Thematic policies are essential for driving quality in humanitarian responses. Continued efforts should be maintained to ensure their visibility, integration across the programming cycle, and alignment with emerging needs. Recent steps include the adoption of minimum environmental requirements for humanitarian aid, the launch of policy updates in key sectors, and the publication of guidance on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law.

In a global context where the humanitarian system is underfunded and the overall gap between available resources and humanitarian needs is expected to grow, the

need to further enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of EU humanitarian aid interventions is confirmed. The European Commission has expanded the use of quality and flexible funding – including multi-year and multipurpose cash transfers – and launched the Programmatic Partnership model to support longer-term, strategic collaboration with partners. These efforts enhance predictability and alignment with shared priorities. Work on localisation is advancing, notably through the rollout of guidance on equitable partnerships. In parallel, disaster preparedness and anticipatory action are being scaled up, supported by a dedicated roadmap and increased funding. The Commission is also investing in supply chain and logistics coordination, encouraging joint approaches and resource pooling to increase cost-efficiency.

The European Commission’s humanitarian aid unique features (field network, network of partners, internal tools and instruments) have proven to add value to the humanitarian system.

DG ECHO is adapting its evaluation and monitoring systems to make them more suitable to analysing the effectiveness and efficiency of its actions. Efforts to strengthen data collection, analysis, and indicator harmonisation are also reinforcing the evidence base for programming.

In sum, the European Commission’s combined policy leadership, scientific evidence and analytical tools, operational flexibility, strong partnerships, and robust field network remain essential assets in delivering timely, principled, and effective humanitarian assistance in an increasingly complex and underfunded global context.