



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 23 April 2021
(OR. en)

8129/21

COHAFA 37
FIN 312
DEVGEN 78
COAFR 102
MAMA 69

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	7857/21
Subject:	European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 2/2021: 'EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need, but should be longer-term and reach more girls' - Council Conclusions (23 April 2021)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 2/2021: 'EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need, but should be longer term and reach more girls', approved by written procedure on 23 April 2021.

Council Conclusions

on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 2/2021: 'EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need, but should be longer term and reach more girls'

1. The Council takes note of European Court of Auditors Special Report No 2/2021, 'EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need, but should be longer term and reach more girls', which examined projects in Jordan and Uganda in 2017 2019 in order to assess the efficiency of EU humanitarian aid for education.
2. Education is a priority for children living through humanitarian crises. In addition to formal learning outcomes, it increases resilience, provides immediate physical protection, including from gender-based violence, and can lessen the psychosocial impact of trauma on children. Humanitarian aid for education is a crucial part of an integrated approach to sustainable development, humanitarian action and conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Most importantly, it provides children with hope for the future.
3. The Council welcomes the fact that the Commission has substantially increased its investment on aid for education, reaching 10% of the humanitarian aid budget in 2019 in comparison to only 1% in 2015. In this regard, the Council welcomes the Commission's commitment to continue supporting the implementation of education in emergencies, as well as to expand the work in this area, ensuring access to inclusive lifelong learning and safe, equitable quality education and training at all levels.
4. The Council is pleased that the Commission's management of education in emergencies has been generally effective, as observed by the Court, and that projects were found to be relevant and well-coordinated, delivering expected results in providing education to children in need within the humanitarian aid framework.

5. The Council reiterates that humanitarian response should be anchored in a needs based approach with attention to the different challenges and actors involved in each humanitarian situation. In this context, working with local actors can ensure efficient response to local needs and can help identifying and supporting the most vulnerable people within society. Furthermore, the Council notes the increased challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on accessing beneficiaries, undertaking the education activities and fulfilling previously established targets, underlining a need to adapt project design and its operationalization. All these constraints resulting from the pandemic have impacts on the provision of education in emergencies with greater consequences for the support for and well-being of women and girls.
6. The Council notes that the audit identified the following areas for improvement: greater use should be made of relevant guidance from ECHO's Enhanced Response Capacity funding; the projects should target and reach a greater number of girls; programmes should be designed to run for long enough that they sufficiently tackle children's educational needs; project cost analysis and opportunities for increased cost-effectiveness should be enhanced; and the cash-for-education projects should be more focused on long-term solutions to reduce beneficiaries' dependence on cash assistance.
7. The Council welcomes the five recommendations made by the Court of Auditors on:
 1. making greater use of the results of Enhanced Response Capacity projects;
 2. providing more support for girls in education projects;
 3. providing longer-term funding for education in protracted crises;
 4. improving cost analysis in the selection and monitoring of education projects;
 5. improving the sustainability of cash-for-education projects in protracted crises.

ENHANCED RESPONSE CAPACITY

8. The Enhanced Response Capacity (ERC) is a dedicated ECHO budget that supports global, strategic, and inclusive initiatives that aim to increase the capacity of the humanitarian community to respond to crisis in the most effective and efficient manner. The Council commends the ERC's focus on system strengthening and the provision of global public goods for the humanitarian aid sector. It notes, however, the Court of Auditors' finding that the Commission made limited use of the results of ERC projects on education in emergencies, including guidance on the measurement of quality of education in emergencies, a key criterion for effectiveness. It encourages the Commission to more systematically integrate relevant tools developed with the support of the ERC in its education in emergencies activities in order to maximise the response capacity of implementing partners.

SUPPORT FOR GIRLS

9. The Council believes that humanitarian aid should aim to reach people in the most vulnerable situations. In crisis-affected contexts, women and girls, including women and children with disabilities, face a higher risk of being exposed to violence and difficulty accessing essential services, such as education. In this regard, the Council stresses that both the design and the provision/implementation of education in emergencies should be gender-sensitive, inclusive and accessible.
10. The Council is concerned by the Court's finding that EU-funded projects are not targeting or reaching a sufficient number of girls. Nonetheless, the Council recognises the challenges of reaching specific targets since the provision of humanitarian assistance should be based on needs analyses that are affected by the specificities of each context.

11. The Council calls on the Commission to continue increasing the consideration given to gender equality in education programmes and to girls' and female adolescents' education, supporting community awareness campaigns, combating gender-based violence, strengthening teacher training on gender equality issues and gender-based violence, supporting and increasing the number of female teachers, and tackling the gender digital divide that particularly affects girls in the context of COVID-19.
12. The Council welcomes the Commission's commitment to enhancing and monitoring the gender dimension in education projects, and it appreciates the Commission's focus on the adoption of an inclusive and integrated approach to respond to the most pressing needs of both boys and girls.

LONG-TERM FUNDING AND DURATION OF PROJECTS

13. The Council appreciates the Commission's effort to fund education in emergencies projects that are aligned with the duration of the school year and cover a period of at least one full academic year, starting to prioritise projects that are 24 months long. It shares the assessment of the Court that multi-year funding is also in line with Grand Bargain commitments and has positive effects on the efficiency and effectiveness of education in emergencies projects.
14. At the same time, the Council reiterates that the duration of projects should be context-specific, ensuring quick but comprehensive responses that allows the provision of safe spaces for children. Moreover, the Council notes that short-term education interventions can be of critical importance, but educational needs are ordinarily medium- to long-term in nature in protracted crises.

15. In this regard, the Council notes the Report's finding that most assessed projects were not long enough to address children's educational needs in a protracted crisis. It endorses the Report's recommendation that the Commission provide longer-term funding for education in protracted crises. The Council welcomes ECHO's recent progress toward the provision of greater levels of multiannual funding, and urges the Commission to accelerate this process. The Council also emphasises the Commission to redouble its efforts to provide more flexible funding.
16. The Council also encourages the strengthening of partnerships with communities and implementing partners using a coordinated approach based on participatory needs assessment in order to ensure that the Commission's support is efficiently sustained over time. Humanitarian interventions should be designed and implemented with the involvement and participation of the local population, as well as a wide range of civil society actors, who often operate close to crises-afflicted communities. This participatory methodology should be integrated into a wider approach of coordinated, multi-sectoral needs assessments, which drive coordination and sustainability by, for example, deepening links between education in emergencies and livelihoods programming.

COST ANALYSIS AND EFFECTIVENESS

17. The Council stresses the importance of aiming for maximised cost-effectiveness during the selection, implementation and evaluation of projects. To that end, it welcomes the Report's recommendation to improve cost analysis for project selection and implementation and draws attention to the Commission's responsibility to enhance monitoring of its funding activities for education in emergencies and protracted crises. The Council appreciates the Commission's efforts to provide a better understanding of the projects' costs and a better comparison of proposals at the selection phase.

18. The Council calls on the Commission to using the full potential of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) as, overall, an efficient and cost-effective means of humanitarian assistance. In order to increase cost efficiency and to reduce administrative efforts, humanitarian partners are encouraged to join harmonised systems for delivering cash assistance, where possible and appropriate.

CASH FOR EDUCATION

19. The Council recognises that cash-for-education projects are building children's resilience, notably by removing physical and financial barriers to education, enabling children to attend formal education, providing an incentive to decrease child labour, and reducing the risk of resorting to negative coping mechanisms. However, it acknowledges that these types of activities cannot be considered a long-term solution.
20. The Council calls on the Commission to establish options for long-term and resilience-building solutions, such as the development of alternative programmes and exit strategies for cash-for-education projects, to avoid creating an aid gap. The Council sees opportunities to strengthen the strategic and operational links with long-term programmes, including with social protection or long-term strategies of achieving sustainable livelihoods to children and their caregivers based on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, whenever appropriate and possible.
21. The Council welcomes the fact that the Commission has already started addressing audit recommendations. The Council welcomes the Commission's commitment to implementing all of the recommendations in full for projects and activities for education in emergencies and protracted crises funded from January 2022, as proposed by the Court of Auditors. The Council encourages the Commission to report to the Council on the steps it has taken to this end.