



European
Commission

Annual Activity Report 2023

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR CIVIL
PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID
OPERATIONS

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DG ECHO IN BRIEF

The mandate of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) is to help save and preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering and safeguard the integrity and human dignity of populations affected by natural hazards and human-induced disasters. To that end, DG ECHO acts both as the EU humanitarian aid donor and emergency responder as well as a coordinator and facilitator of civil protection operations through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

As a **humanitarian donor**, the EU, through DG ECHO, provides needs-based humanitarian assistance around the globe, following the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, non-discrimination and independence. The annual budget exceeded EUR 2.42 billion in 2023, enabling DG ECHO to intervene not only in large-scale humanitarian crises – including in Ukraine, Palestine, or Sudan – but also in forgotten crises, i.e. those of severe and protracted character that do not attract media attention and where the level of international aid to affected populations is insufficient, such as in Myanmar, Haiti or the Sahrawi crisis.

Beyond being a key donor, operating through its partner organisations (United Nations (UN) agencies, Red Cross & Red Crescent movement, and international non-governmental organisations), the EU has a leading role in steering and developing thematic policies, supporting multilateral actions, and coordinating approaches with EU Member States. As an emergency responder, DG ECHO offers services in the framework of the European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC), such as Humanitarian Air Bridge operations, delivering humanitarian goods and transporting humanitarian workers to hard-to-reach areas where assistance could otherwise not be delivered.

As regards **civil protection** and more broadly crisis management, DG ECHO assumes a continuously growing role in coordinating and facilitating emergency response operations with EU Member States and Participating States to the UCPM. Through this mechanism, DG ECHO monitors and detects hazards, anticipates disaster impact, mobilises assistance on a 24/7 basis and enables rapid EU solidarity response, whenever disasters hit, or emergencies arise. DG ECHO acts with a view to improving prevention, preparedness and response to disasters as well as to fostering consistency in international civil protection work. It notably develops, maintains and mobilises rescEU, the EU's strategic reserve of emergency response capacities, and seeks new partnerships and innovations in emergency management that can match the changing risk landscape in the world. To fulfil these objectives, the budget available in 2023 for the UCPM amounted to over EUR 2 billion.

DG ECHO has more than 590 staff working in headquarters and a strong presence in the field with more than 470 staff deployed. This field presence provides first-hand information about the situation on the ground, monitors and supports operations with 50 field offices located in 40 third countries across continents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual activity report is a management report of the Director-General of DG ECHO to the College of Commissioners. Annual activity reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for its decisions as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties ⁽¹⁾.

A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and DG ECHO's specific objectives

The year 2023 was largely marked by the humanitarian impact of **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine** and by the **escalation of hostilities in the Middle East**, with the conflict in and around Gaza at its centre. It also witnessed the dramatic consequences of the ongoing conflict in **Sudan** or the **protracted complex crises in the Sahel**. In **Ukraine**, the EU responded with major humanitarian aid operations, with DG ECHO at the frontline of the EU response, mobilising all available tools, resources, and capacities to deliver assistance to populations in record time. In 2023, EUR 300 million were allocated to address immediate humanitarian needs, bringing the total assistance to EUR 785 million since February 2022. Also, DG ECHO continued the largest, longest and most complex civil protection response operation since the creation of the UCPM, providing a response to 50 requests for assistance from Ukraine in 2023, reaching a total of 176 requests since the start of the war. This involved working across different sectors, establishing linkages and synergies between all key actors involved.

The **humanitarian situation continued to drastically deteriorate** in many other parts of the world due to persistent conflict and insecurity, the impact of climate change, failed governance, epidemiological outbreaks, as well as the indirect impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, resulting in **unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs**. According to the UN Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Global Humanitarian Overview 2023, updated in December 2023 ⁽²⁾, 363.3 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, an increase of 11.4% compared to 2022 ⁽³⁾. Further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, Central Sahel, Ethiopia, Haiti, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Sudan as well as large-scale disasters such as the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria or Morocco and the devastating floods in several countries in Africa and in Pakistan are only a few of many examples of sustained increase in humanitarian needs.

As humanitarian needs have reached an all-time high level, the gap between needs and available resources has further increased. In addition, growing violations of International Humanitarian Law and access impediments made delivering humanitarian aid even more difficult and dangerous. Despite these challenges, DG ECHO **successfully managed to**

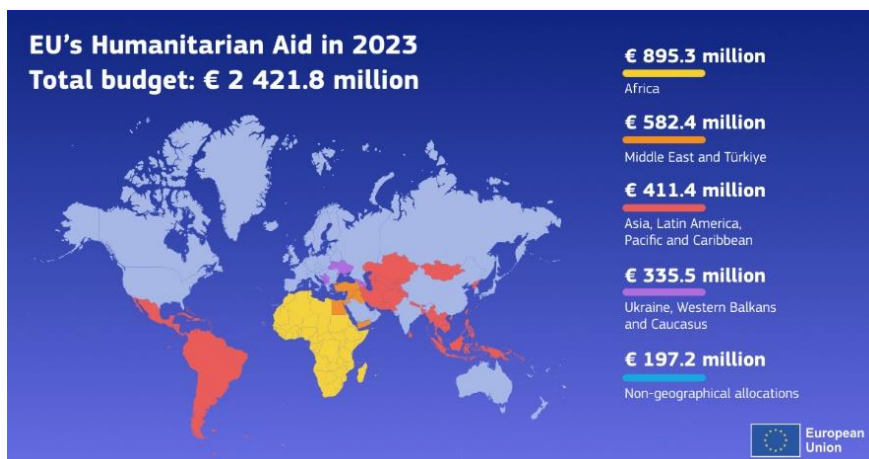
⁽¹⁾ Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

⁽²⁾ [Global Humanitarian Overview 2023, December Update \(Snapshot as of 31 December 2023\) | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#).

⁽³⁾ [Global Humanitarian Overview 2022, December Update \(Snapshot as of 31 December 2022\) | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#).

reach its objectives, in line with the priorities and key actions outlined in the Commission Communication ⁽⁴⁾ on the EU's Humanitarian Action 'New challenges, same principles'.

The EU **remained a key global humanitarian donor** in 2023, providing humanitarian assistance in 114 countries ⁽⁵⁾. DG ECHO coordinated to ensure effective humanitarian



assistance and teamed up with Member States to advocate the preservation of humanitarian space and the respect of international humanitarian law. Special attention was also devoted to improving accountability, in particular in the Horn of Africa. Efforts to respond to the global food crisis were also pursued. DG ECHO maintained high levels of humanitarian food assistance, close to EUR 670 million in 2023, despite the tight budgetary situation. Whilst this amount is lower than the exceptional allocation mobilised in 2022, it is much higher than the average spending in the last years. DG ECHO completed the development of the European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC) and supported over 100 partners with logistical and stockpile services in 15 different countries.

As regards civil protection, DG ECHO successfully negotiated the **enlargement of the UCPM** to two new Participating States: Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova ⁽⁶⁾.

Furthermore, DG ECHO **started the work on a consolidated revised proposal for its implementing acts**, which also led to kicking off the revision of the Host Nation Support Guidelines. Work also continued on the two strands for enhanced prevention and preparedness under the UCPM, notably on the **Union Disaster Resilience Goals (DRGs)** and the **disaster scenario-building at Union level**. These work strands are closely interlinked and will provide a more systematic approach to evidence-based decision-making for UCPM prevention and preparedness measures. A Commission Recommendation ⁽⁷⁾ and an accompanying Communication ⁽⁸⁾ on the DRGs were adopted in February 2023.

Regarding the promotion of the **resilience agenda**, DG ECHO coordinated with other services to mainstream prevention and preparedness to natural and human-induced disasters across the relevant policy, funding and research instruments. For example, DG ECHO has started a mapping exercise of risks, gaps and funding in Greece and Italy to support and coordinate wildfire prevention efforts. Moreover, the EU mid-term review of the

⁽⁴⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council [on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles](#) – COM(2021)/110 final.

⁽⁵⁾ The evolution of the figure is partially due to a change of methodology, following the modifications in the UN Financial Tracking System (FTS) site. See Annex 2 for more information.

⁽⁶⁾ Hereinafter 'Moldova'.

⁽⁷⁾ Commission Recommendation of 8/2/2023 [on Union disaster resilience goals](#). 2023/C 56/01.

⁽⁸⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: [European Union Disaster Resilience Goals: Acting together to deal with future emergencies](#) – COM(2023) 61 final.

Sendai framework ⁽⁹⁾ published in May 2023 highlighted some of the EU's key initiatives on the road to strengthening global preparedness, reducing risk and building resilience.

Moreover, DG ECHO ensured an efficient use of the available resources to further **develop rescEU capacities**. The negotiations, jointly undertaken by the EU and its Member States, for the procurement of a **fully-fledged aerial firefighting fleet (AFF)** at European level advanced and led to the launch of bilateral government-to-government negotiations at the end of the year. In addition, DG ECHO swiftly coordinated a total of 28 assets ⁽¹⁰⁾ in 2023 ⁽¹¹⁾. The work on rescEU capacities continued in other priority areas as well, such as medical and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) stockpiling, CBRN decontamination and detection capacities, emergency medical teams, medical evacuation (MedEvac), and shelter and emergency energy supplies. Preventive actions also stepped up in line with the **wildfire prevention action plan** launched in 2022, bringing together tools available under the UCPM to support Member States in preventing the occurrence of wildfires in Europe. As part of the prevention plan, DG ECHO launched a new peer review methodology tailored to assess wildfire risk management arrangements and gathered a catalogue of good practices on wildfire risk awareness, which will be published in 2024.

In relation to the wider discussions on **EU crisis management structures**, DG ECHO strived to optimise its role in enhancing the overall European resilience to future crises. In 2023, special attention was paid to further consolidating and strengthening the central role of the **Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)** as a 24/7 single operational hub and improving its anticipatory planning and foresight capacities and capabilities. This resulted in an increase of analytical outputs in all different categories (scientific and anticipation reports, maps quantity and type), based on the further implementation of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Facility (STAF) in the context of ERCC 2.0 initiative. The ERCC role in coordinating and facilitating the swift and targeted cross-sectoral response in the EU and around the world was recognised as the Council tasked the ERCC to provide a report on 'Immediate gaps in civil protection-relevant CBRN preparedness and response arrangements in the Union in the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine' as well as a range of other measures e.g. enhancing early warning, addressing capacity gaps, increasing market access for CBRN equipment and training and exercises.

The second edition of the **European Humanitarian Forum (EHF)**, co-organised with the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU in March 2023, re-affirmed the EU leadership and engagement on humanitarian aid and touched upon synergies between humanitarian aid and civil protection. The Forum offered a unique platform to promote dialogue on humanitarian policy issues and raise media and public attention to major policy deliverables. It allowed Member States - at ministerial level - along with the Commission to collectively pledge EUR 8.4 billion in support of humanitarian aid for 2023. A high-level

⁽⁹⁾ UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Midterm Review 2023 - Working towards the achievement of the Sendai Priorities and Targets. SWD(2023) 151 final.

⁽¹⁰⁾ 24 planes and 4 helicopters.

⁽¹¹⁾ In line with the President's announcement at her 2022 State of the Union (SOTEU) address to double the seasonal rescEU transition fleet.

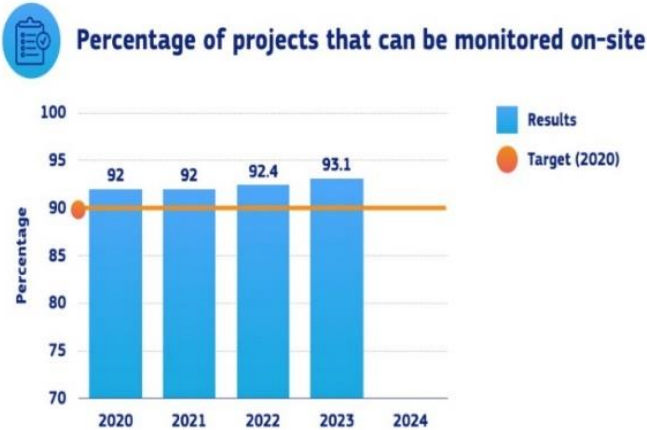
conference focusing on Education in Emergencies and a segment dedicated to DG ECHO Partners took place in the margins of the EHF 2023.

In this very challenging context, with the help of all tools at its disposal, DG ECHO contributed again to showcasing with concrete examples the **EU solidarity in action** inside the EU and around the world.

B. Key performance indicators

1. Percentage of projects that can be monitored on-site ⁽¹²⁾:

93.1% of projects that finished in 2023 were ‘monitored on-site’ ⁽¹³⁾. The rate is slightly higher than in previous years.



2. Percentage of humanitarian aid funding targeting actions in forgotten crises ⁽¹⁴⁾:



17% of the initial 2023 budget for humanitarian aid, amounting to EUR 286 million, was allocated to forgotten crises, in line with the political commitments of 15% set for this key performance indicator (KPI). Final allocations provided in 2023 to forgotten crises amounted to EUR 530 million and represented 23% of total final allocations.

Forgotten crises identified for 2023 and funds initially allocated to such crises by geographic area.
© European Union, 2023.

⁽¹²⁾ DG ECHO objective 1: General objective 4: A Stronger Europe in the World – Specific objective 2: Humanitarian space is preserved and respect for International Humanitarian Law is ensured.
⁽¹³⁾ In line with DG ECHO’s Strategic Plan 2020-2024, this figure includes cases where physical visits, due to the nature of the action (coordination, information production and sharing) were replaced by other monitoring measures – such as remote monitoring or desk reviews, to provide the best possible assurance on funded actions. Since the indicator aims to measure the ability of DG ECHO as a donor to monitor EU-funded humanitarian aid projects, valid remote monitoring shall be counted. The set threshold of 90% is also met if projects monitored remotely are counted as ‘not monitored’.
⁽¹⁴⁾ DG ECHO objective 1: General objective 4: A Stronger Europe in the World – Specific objective 3: The EU remains a global humanitarian donor by providing an adequate and effective humanitarian assistance in countries affected by humanitarian crises.

3. Response time of the UCPM to a request of assistance ⁽¹⁵⁾: In 2023, 66 requests for UCPM assistance were registered. One request introduced by Ukraine was updated 50 times. 24 requests were introduced by Member States or UCPM Participating States and 42 originated from other countries. In 2023, the average response time increased from 37 to 59 hours for activations inside Europe, mainly due to one request for which the first offer was received 53 days after the request for assistance. Without this request, the average response time was 4 hours ⁽¹⁶⁾, which is only slightly above the target of 3 hours. Requests for assistance outside Europe had very rapid response times, which decreased to 9 hours compared to 142 in 2022. It was possible to meet the target of 10 hours due to the anticipation of several requests for assistance.

4. Adequacy of response of the Union Civil Protection ⁽¹⁷⁾ ⁽¹⁸⁾: The UCPM response was very effective in 2023, addressing 96% and 93% of requests from inside and outside Europe, respectively. This was made possible by i) the reactivity of UCPM Member States and Participating States, ii) the swift development and deployment of rescEU stockpiles, iii) the significant reserve of generators developed in early 2023, iv) the three UCPM logistics hubs in Poland, Slovakia and Romania which facilitated the pooling of assistance for Ukraine, as well as v) increased offers from Member States and Participating States through co-financing transport operations.

C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework, DG ECHO has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective, and that the components and principles are present and functioning well overall. Some minor improvements are called for, as minor deficiencies were identified. Please refer to annual activity report section 2.3 for further details.

In addition, DG ECHO has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, including those from supervised entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to

⁽¹⁵⁾ DG ECHO objective 3: General objective 5: Promoting our European way of life – Specific objective 1: The needs of the most vulnerable people in times of crises are met: This indicator measures the time elapsed between the moment when the Commission receives a request for assistance and when it gets the first offer of assistance from Member States and Participating States. As civil protection is only a supporting competence, the Union can support and coordinate Member States and UCPM Participating States' action in civil protection, but it is up to these states to offer concrete assistance.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The average time of response within Europe remains high due to the increased number of complexity of response, affecting the overall efforts needed from the UCPM mechanisms and interlocutors to respond to such requests. While the challenge persists, DG ECHO is increasing horizontal coordination with other involved sectors in order to keep reducing response times.

⁽¹⁷⁾ DG ECHO objective 3: General objective 5: Promoting our European way of life – Specific objective 1: The needs of the most vulnerable people in times of crises are met: This indicator measures the percentage of requests for assistance received that have been partially or completely fulfilled with the voluntary offers for assistance made by Member States and Participating States, including rescEU.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Target values: 90% for inside Europe Activations and > 86% for outside Europe activations.

determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to section 2 for further details.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated. Minor improvements are necessary concerning staff awareness and knowledge of procedures. Targeted awareness-raising and training sessions for DG ECHO staff will continue to be organised in this respect. The Director-General, in his capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

D. Provision of information to the Commissioner

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between DG ECHO and the Commissioner on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of Commissioner Lenarčič, responsible for Crisis Management.

1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF DG ECHO

External communication and visibility

DG ECHO stepped up its communication efforts to show the EU's humanitarian aid and civil protection work in the context of Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine, the crisis in the Middle East, the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye/Syria and Morocco, the unprecedented wildfires and floods hitting the Mediterranean in the summer of 2023, the conflict in Sudan, as well as several other sudden-onset and protracted crises. Based on the overarching narrative of EU solidarity, DG ECHO developed a mix of communication activities aiming at maintaining high-level public support and political backing of EU humanitarian aid and civil protection.

In terms of **press work**, the Commission spokespersons' service published 69 press releases and 13 press announcements on the main operations and achievements by the Commissioner and DG ECHO, complemented by a series of local press releases published in collaboration with humanitarian aid partners. The successful series of field visits with European journalists was continued, with press trips to Colombia, Greece, Iraq, Madagascar, Türkiye and Ukraine.

DG ECHO conducted two **awareness-raising campaigns** in 2023, both widely exceeding their reach targets. The civil protection campaign 'Together, one step ahead' highlighted how the EU and Member States work together to tackle climate-induced emergencies in Europe and beyond. It ran in two waves, reaching over 54 million people in 11 Member States via social media and digital ads and collaborations with influencers. The humanitarian aid campaign 'Education, no matter what' championed the right to quality education for everyone, including in emergencies. Through social media ads, partnerships with influencers, documentary filmmakers, relevant media outlets, schools and festivals, it reached over 29 million people in 14 Member States.

Concerning **digital media**, a renewed focus on personal stories with strong visual impact and audiovisual productions from crises theatres, together with strong campaigning as described above, resulted in a further increase in followers on social media channels (+5.71%), in a significant rise in social media impressions (+26,4%) and the reaching of the 2 million milestone in page views of DG ECHO's website (+6% compared to 2022).

Podcast partnerships ran in four Member States, securing almost 117 500 downloads overall, and reaching an average of 15.4 million people. Various **mini-campaigns on social media** were implemented either directly by DG ECHO or by DG ECHO-funded partners as part of their visibility obligations. DG ECHO's communication channels also supported, among others, the EHF 2023. Finally, throughout 2023, DG ECHO monitored the performance of its communication activities and conducted **Eurobarometer** surveys at the end of the year on public perceptions of the EU humanitarian and civil protection work in the Member States. Their results, to be made available in early 2024, will inform future communication actions.

Reliability of performance information

DG ECHO mainly uses its own data, or information received from its partner organisations. Data is also extracted from external verified sources such as UN FTS, or from official reporting such as OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview report.

DG ECHO implements controls to provide reasonable assurance regarding the reliability of performance information related to the EU budget spending programmes. As regards data processed by the DG, the principles established in the 'Data governance and data policies' at the European Commission are followed. In addition to EC tools available (ABAC), DG ECHO uses specific information systems and databases (HOPE, EVA Actions, EDRIS, APPEL) to retrieve data encoded on a day-to-day basis. For data originating from entrusted entities (indirect management), or received from beneficiaries (direct management), DG ECHO relies upon the following controls to measure reliability of performance data.

- Certification process (for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or Member States' Specialised Agencies (MSSAs) and the pillar assessment (for the entrusted entities') reviewing the entities internal control systems.
- The regular monitoring and contacts with entities implementing actions.
- The review and evaluation of the information reported by them (periodic operational and financial reports, management declarations, independent audit reports, etc.).
- Quality controls on performance information, mainly in the form of consistency, completeness, and plausibility checks, with the primary objective of identifying indicator values that may be unusual (outliers) or encoding errors.

DG ECHO objective 1: General objective 4: A Stronger Europe in the World

Specific objective 1: The EU remains a lead humanitarian donor by providing adequate and effective humanitarian assistance to populations affected by humanitarian crises

DG ECHO contributed significantly also in 2023 to the **EU's global leadership role** in emergency response, providing relief and support to the most vulnerable people suffering from conflicts and disasters across the world, by mobilising both humanitarian aid and civil protection assistance, despite several challenges. The current geopolitical context and the impacts derived from climate change are exacerbating tensions and fuelling existing regional conflicts and protracted crises. In addition, continued widespread violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and humanitarian access impediments make delivering of humanitarian aid even more difficult and dangerous.

To **champion multilateralism and a rules-based global order** through a more active role and a stronger voice for the EU in the world, DG ECHO actively pursued its humanitarian advocacy and policy development at the European and global levels. In 2023, DG ECHO continued to work on the priorities defined in the Communication on the EU's

humanitarian action ⁽¹⁹⁾, with a focus on **addressing the ever-increasing humanitarian needs**. Significant progress was made on the implementation of commitments taken under the **Grand Bargain** ⁽²⁰⁾, notably on quality funding, joint and impartial needs assessment, and localisation, with the goal of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian response. Contributions to **Country-Based Pooled Funds** ⁽²¹⁾ were continued to further promote **localisation** and less earmarked funding. DG ECHO also rolled out the model for longer-term **Programmatic Partnerships** with selected humanitarian aid organisations, supporting approaches of shared strategic interest with 12 new Programmatic Partnerships launched in 2023. Furthermore, DG ECHO increased its advocacy and outreach for a substantially enhanced humanitarian financing effort and a better sharing of responsibility among donors, including Member States.

As regards the **Humanitarian Logistics Policy** ⁽²²⁾, DG ECHO continued to support the strategic, cross-cutting approach to the supply chain. Close collaboration with Member States on this resulted in Council Conclusions which flag this as key to closing the funding gap. An evaluation study finalised in 2023 confirmed the value of this strategy and recommended that it should continue. Training of humanitarian partners and promotion of good practices, high-level awareness-raising, and operational guidance (on humanitarian logistics) continued in 2023. The topic was also addressed at the EHF 2023.

The operational tools of the **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)** ⁽²³⁾ continued to be developed in 2023, helping the Commission to support partners and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance where the humanitarian community struggles with the immediate response. In 2023, the EHRC responded to 16 crises affecting 15 countries ⁽²⁴⁾, allocating EUR 56 million for the development and deployment of the EHRC capacities and services.



85 EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flights reached **9 countries** and transported over **3 880 tonnes** of humanitarian supplies



EU Humanitarian Aid Flights in **7 countries** transporting over **490 tonnes** and **19 400 humanitarian personnel**.



More than **840 tonnes** from the **EHRC stockpiles** have been donated to partners, for a value of over **EUR 4.4 million**



More than **100 partners** supported, including **7 UN agencies, ICRC, IFRC** and **12 Member States**

⁽¹⁹⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council [on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles](#). COM(2021)/110 final.

⁽²⁰⁾ [The Grand Bargain \(Official website\)](#).

⁽²¹⁾ Ukraine, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Venezuela.

⁽²²⁾ DG ECHO thematic policy document: [Humanitarian logistics policy](#).

⁽²³⁾ DG ECHO: [European Humanitarian Response Capacity \(EHRC\) Factsheet](#).

⁽²⁴⁾ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Egypt/Palestine, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Armenia, Nepal, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, Syria, Ukraine.

DG ECHO continued to use the full potential of its **Emergency Toolbox**, composed of the Acute Large Emergency Response Tool (ALERT), the Epidemics tool, Small-scale tool and the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), and provided the first line of emergency humanitarian assistance to sudden-onset crises, based on scientific evidence. In 2023, the small-scale tool was activated 18 times ⁽²⁵⁾, ALERT was triggered 14 times ⁽²⁶⁾ and the Epidemics tool was activated 8 times ⁽²⁷⁾. DG ECHO replenished the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) 65 DREF operations in 50 countries, including in relation to the cholera in Africa and floods and earthquakes in northern Africa and Southeast Asia.

Thematic policy priorities

Over the years, DG ECHO has developed a number of policies and guidance that outline the Commission's position on key issues and provide concrete recommendations to its implementing partners. The overall objective is to ensure quality, coherence, and accountability of EU funded humanitarian operations. In 2023, DG ECHO continued to ensure the application of these policies, as well as their further development when and where necessary to ensure that its humanitarian assistance continued to be fit for purpose.

The **food assistance, nutrition, and famine prevention** situation remained largely unchanged in 2023, with 258 million people considered acutely food insecure in the world ⁽²⁸⁾. At the end of the year, five countries were considered at risk of famine ⁽²⁹⁾, with Palestine referred to as the most severe food crisis in recent times. This led to a surge in humanitarian needs throughout the year, far exceeding the available funding and resources (food security appeals are funded at around 35%). The proliferation and escalation of conflicts, high global food prices due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, economic shocks and climatic events such as 'El Niño' contributed to this situation.

DG ECHO reacted to these crises by maintaining high levels of humanitarian food and nutrition assistance. Despite a tight budgetary situation, DG ECHO managed to mobilise additional resources from reserves, reaching around EUR 670 million (higher than the average funding of the last few years ⁽³⁰⁾). Overall, the European Commission committed EUR 8.3 billion for the period 2021-2024 to support the Team Europe response to the global food crisis. Including Member State's commitments, the pledge reached approximately EUR 18 billion.

Protection of and focus on the most vulnerable remained a key concern, due to the continued breaches of international humanitarian law and the widespread risks and instances of violence, deprivation and abuse in today's crises. DG ECHO continued making

⁽²⁵⁾ Examples include the response provided to the Dam break in Ukraine, the cyclones which affected Vanuatu, Bangladesh, the Philippines, but also the floods in Libya, Haiti or Peru.

⁽²⁶⁾ Immediate response to the floods which affected Pakistan, Somalia and Kenya, as well as for the response to the consequences of the tropical cyclones in Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi, Myanmar and Mexico and the earthquakes in Türkiye, Syria, Afghanistan, Morocco, Nepal and Ethiopia.

⁽²⁷⁾ Response to Mpox in DRC, Diphtheria in Nigeria, and responding to Cholera in Malawi, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, South Sudan, and the fire affecting health facilities in Bangladesh.

⁽²⁸⁾ Food Security Information Network (FSIN) and Global Network Against Food Crises: [Global Report on Food Crises 2023](#).

⁽²⁹⁾ Burkina Faso, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan and Palestine.

⁽³⁰⁾ EUR 530 million/year on average in the period 2019-2021.

protection a priority across all sectors of humanitarian assistance, allocating 15% of its overall financial envelope to sectoral protection activities. Humanitarian crises have a different impact on women, girls, boys and men, whose needs have to be addressed accordingly. Therefore, DG ECHO continued **mainstreaming gender and age** across all sectors of intervention, addressing all types of violence against children. Focus on conflict-related sexual violence was increased in response to observations in several recent and ongoing crises and activities calling for reinforced child protection, including advocacy as well as addressing the specific needs of children associated with armed conflicts (CAAC). These were strengthened, in line with the 2021 Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Also, DG ECHO actively engaged with the Global Protection Cluster specifically on the implementation of the outcomes of the review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Protection Policy. It remained an active member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies ⁽³¹⁾. The EU, with DG ECHO support, also prepared a pledge linked to gender for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023.

Addressing the protection needs of **persons with disabilities**, DG ECHO ensured the implementation of the Operational Guidance on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations ⁽³²⁾ and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 ⁽³³⁾. It continued to build the capacity of its partners and staff through a dedicated e-learning platform as well as awareness rising sessions. DG ECHO strengthened cooperation with organisations of persons with disabilities and, together with DG INTPA, co-hosted the annual meeting of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network in Brussels.

More than 224 million children and young people affected by crises worldwide urgently require educational support. Many are not attending school or are unable to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills as they face the threats of violence, physical and psychological distress, social inequality, and the danger of poverty. In 2023, DG ECHO continued to place emphasis on **education in emergencies**, maintaining investment in education at the ambitious level of 10% of the annual initial EU humanitarian aid budget, representing funding of over EUR 162 million. At the High-Level Conference on Education in Emergencies organised jointly with UNICEF in March 2023, DG ECHO issued a call for strengthened collective engagement and for an increase in public funding to help children caught up in fragile humanitarian settings to stay in, or to return to, learning. Global advocacy was also continued via a discussion series organised by the EU Delegation in New York putting a spotlight on the needs of the children whose suffering has remained largely unnoticed in several underfunded crises. Finally, DG ECHO contributed to a comprehensive EU education pledge at the GRF in December 2023.

DG ECHO continued to widely disseminate its policy on **humanitarian cash transfers** ⁽³⁴⁾, to increase the quality and efficiency of cash programmes. This policy marks a step-change in linking cash transfers and social protection and enables synergies with key developments

⁽³¹⁾ www.calltoactiongbv.com.

⁽³²⁾ [DG ECHO Thematic Policy Documents – The Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations](#).

⁽³³⁾ [Communication Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 - COM\(2021\)/101 final](#).

⁽³⁴⁾ [DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document No 3: Cash Transfers \(March 2022\)](#).



Distribution of multipurpose cash assistance to support Sudanese displaced people in Gedaref State, Sudan.

© European Union – Danish Refugee Council, 2023

in the field of digitalisation and greening of humanitarian assistance. In 2023, a capacity building plan for staff and partners was developed and partially rolled out. DG ECHO also continued to monitor and help shape the developments on the international scene. This included an active engagement in the donor cash forum and other humanitarian entities specialised in cash transfers (CALP ⁽³⁵⁾, Norwegian Capacity,

etc.) and a close follow-up of the transition towards the new cash coordination model ⁽³⁶⁾, including through exploring potential funding support. Contributing to shock-responsive social safety nets, along the crises cycle, continued to be a key action for DG ECHO to mitigate the impact of shocks on crises-affected population and to optimise the limited financial humanitarian resources at hand. This involves sharing responsibilities among service providers to save lives in acute emergencies and ensuring support for marginalised and displaced populations.

Health remained a core sector for DG ECHO, with EUR 334 million allocated in 2023. Because of recent natural disasters, conflicts and epidemic outbreaks, health needs increased drastically and contributed to a lack of access to essential healthcare for over half of the world's population. DG ECHO humanitarian health assistance supported existing health systems or provided life-saving medical care in vulnerable contexts. Particularly, Epidemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR), Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) were systematically integrated into projects, and promoted through webinars and events (e.g. EHF 2023). DG ECHO also submitted an MHPSS pledge to the GRF 2023, joined by several organisations and states.

In 2023, DG ECHO's **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)** policy in relation to increasing public health emergencies continued to focus on improving access to safe drinking water, equitable sanitation and hygiene services for people affected by humanitarian crises, along with supporting the coordination and management capacity of the sector. Besides integrating environmental considerations into WASH interventions, DG ECHO placed the human right to water and sanitation at the core of its mandate and collaborated closely with other DGs, EU agencies, and the EU Member States in the implementation of the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation. In March 2023, DG ECHO joined the Water International Interservice Group to prepare for the EU's presence at the UN 2023 Water Conference. As part of this work, two voluntary commitments were developed which became part of the EU's WASH commitments included

⁽³⁵⁾ For more information please see www.calpnetwork.org.

⁽³⁶⁾ [New Cash Coordination model | IASC \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](https://www.interagencystandingcommittee.org/).

in the Water Action Agenda. DG ECHO participated in the drafting of the new EU Communication on Water Resilience expected to be adopted in the first quarter of 2024.

As regards **forced displacement**, DG ECHO coordinated the EU participation in the GRF 2023 in Geneva in December, where 15 forward-looking pledges were announced to reiterate the EU's commitment to continue efforts in addressing some of today's most severe displacement crises. 2023 also marked the end of the EU's tenure as Chair of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) (July 2022 – December 2023), which was jointly coordinated by DG ECHO and DG INTPA, and was greeted by the various stakeholders of the Platform as a successful and productive chairmanship. In this context, DG ECHO supported and directly contributed to the organisation of a series of dialogues and information and knowledge sharing activities of the PDD, in Geneva as well as in the framework of the 28th annual UN Climate Change meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP28) in Dubai.

Specific objective 2: Humanitarian space is preserved and respect for IHL is ensured

In today's armed conflicts, **IHL** violations remain widespread. As such, DG ECHO continued its focus on fostering a better enabling environment for principled humanitarian aid in the context of increasing violations of IHL and the growing impediments to access. In 2023, DG ECHO pursued its systematic **advocacy** through public statements and interventions on IHL in multilateral forums and high-level events. During the EHF 2023, a number of sessions touched upon humanitarian diplomacy, protection of humanitarian workers, urban warfare and improving compliance with IHL to safeguard humanitarian space, reaffirming the EU's support at the highest levels. Furthermore, DG ECHO continued **promoting dialogue** between donors, regulators, humanitarian operators and the private sector in order to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need, for instance in meetings such as the Tri-Sector Group Annual Meeting in London and the Workshop on Humanitarian Exemptions from Sanctions in Geneva.

On behalf of the Commission, DG ECHO contributed extensively to the preparations and drafting of the sixth annual report on the implementation of the EU Guidelines on IHL and facilitated the coordination of relevant EU actors, amongst others, through the dedicated inter-service group on IHL. Stronger EU humanitarian diplomacy was supported, such as the EU humanitarian advocacy initiative on Sahel and Niger endorsed by a joint letter of HRVP Borrell and Commissioner Lenarčič sent to the Foreign Ministers of EU Member States in May 2023. At the ministerial side-event co-hosted by the EU at the UN General Assembly, Commissioner Lenarčič raised the alarming humanitarian crisis in Sudan and its impact on the region and advocated for parties to end the conflict and uphold respect for IHL, in particular ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access.

DG ECHO provided funding for IHL-related projects, supporting for example, through its thematic pilot Programmatic Partnership, the programme for the prevention of IHL violations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). DG ECHO further focused on strengthening the monitoring of IHL violations. To that end, the EU financed several projects in 2023 that aimed at addressing gaps in terms of monitoring IHL violations, strengthening data collection and monitoring standards or reinforcing evidence-based advocacy. The protection of humanitarian and healthcare workers, which are increasingly

under attack in many parts of the world, as well as key infrastructure in urban contexts were supported and advocated for, and actions were stepped up for CAAC. In 2023 DG ECHO also launched a first EU mechanism of immediate, concrete and tangible legal, medical and material support for the humanitarian workers victims of such attacks.

DG ECHO continued to support the **compliance of EU restrictive measures with IHL**. To that effect, DG ECHO appropriately promoted the consistent inclusion of **humanitarian exceptions**, in particular humanitarian exemptions in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2664(2022) in EU sanctions regimes. In 2023, the humanitarian exemption was introduced in approximately 30 EU sanctions regimes, including in Myanmar, Nicaragua, Niger, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.

Specific objective 3: The EU remains a global humanitarian donor by providing adequate and effective humanitarian assistance in countries affected by humanitarian crises

DG ECHO provides humanitarian relief throughout the world in a **principled and needs-based manner**. It aims to ensure that funding is available to assist as many people in need in the greatest number of countries as possible, and that a swift, efficient, and comprehensive response is provided. Delivering rapid and flexible assistance both in major crises and in the so-called forgotten crises has become a hallmark of the EU's profile as a donor. DG ECHO continued to put particular emphasis on devoting a sizeable part of funding to address needs in areas of difficult access, and on providing a rapid response in areas or sectors underfunded by other donors. In 2023, DG ECHO identified 15 countries or regions as 'forgotten crises' and allocated 17% of its initial budget (over EUR 286 million) to help the most vulnerable people affected by these crises ⁽³⁷⁾.

Given the protracted nature of most humanitarian crises, DG ECHO pursued its actions in 2023 on the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus**. The nexus aims at improving and strengthening the link between humanitarian and development aid and, where relevant, peace actions in order to better connect urgent relief and longer-term solutions, and jointly address the causes of fragility and seek durable solutions for affected populations. This has led to more efficient responses.

In Iraq, for example, a comprehensive nexus programme allowed for the return and civil registration of 6 million of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) previously living in Daesh ⁽³⁸⁾ controlled areas, ensuring their access to basic social service and long-term reinsertion into a sustainable self-funded national social security scheme. In Myanmar, a comprehensive analysis of humanitarian needs, political economy, gender, and conflict drivers in the Nexus Response Mechanism informed the design of humanitarian and development projects.

⁽³⁷⁾ Final allocations provided in 2023 to forgotten crises, amounted to EUR 530 million and represented 23% of final allocations. Please refer to section B of the Executive Summary for more information.

⁽³⁸⁾ The Arabic acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State (IS).

Examples of humanitarian crises to which DG ECHO responded in 2023

Russia's war of aggression against **Ukraine** had a devastating impact on millions of Ukrainian citizens, resulting in civilian deaths and suffering, massive displacement, and large-scale destruction of critical infrastructure, and causing large humanitarian needs. The situation in areas closer to front lines and those under Russia's and Russian proxies' military control remains extremely volatile. More than 17.6 million ⁽³⁹⁾ people in the country needed humanitarian support in 2023. With an allocation of EUR 300 million, DG ECHO provided life-saving assistance mainly through cash transfers and humanitarian protection to populations directly exposed to war and displacement.

Since the start of Russia's war of aggression more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees fled to Moldova, of which nearly 112 000 remained in the country ⁽⁴⁰⁾. In response, DG ECHO made available EUR 20 million in emergency assistance for Moldova, including cash assistance and protection services, to address the needs of refugees and their host communities.



The EU continues its emergency assistance to Ukraine as winter sets in - Millions of people did not have access to basic services, including water, electricity and heating, while food supplies are running low.
© European Union, 2022.

The escalation of violence in the **Middle East** following the terrorist attack on Israel of 7 October 2023 led to large-scale destructions in Gaza and the displacement of its entire population of 2.2 million people. Humanitarian needs in all sectors are massive. Violence also escalated in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. DG ECHO responded by quadrupling its assistance to Palestine to more than EUR 100 million after 7 October to address the most basic needs of Palestinians.

Faced by droughts, insecurity and violence, restrictions for women to participate in society and food insecurity, the humanitarian situation in **Afghanistan** continued to worsen, with the number of people in need increasing to 29 million ⁽⁴¹⁾ in 2023. DG ECHO provided lifesaving assistance through its partners and funded Humanitarian Air Bridge (HAB) flights, delivering 710 tonnes of life-saving medical relief items (mainly) for humanitarian organisations in Afghanistan.

⁽³⁹⁾ [UN OCHA – UKRAINE Situation Report](#).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ [UNHCR – Operational data portal](#).

⁽⁴¹⁾ [Afghanistan Protection Brief - December 2023 - Afghanistan | ReliefWeb](#).

By the end of 2023, the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces that erupted on 15 April had displaced 7.5 million people ⁽⁴²⁾, half of whom are children. This makes **Sudan** the country with the largest number of internally displaced persons, as well as the largest child displacement crisis in the world. More than half of the population – 24.7 million people – needed assistance in 2023 ⁽⁴³⁾. Sudan is one of the five countries with the highest risk of hunger and requiring the most urgent attention ⁽⁴⁴⁾. In 2023, DG ECHO focused its assistance on multi-sectoral lifesaving basic services. Following an initial allocation of EUR 44 million, DG ECHO increased to more than double its funding to EUR 125 million to address the deteriorating crisis, prioritising emergency actions in the most conflict-affected areas and the localities hosting displaced households. With 13 flights, the Humanitarian Air Bridge (HAB) transported over 640 tonnes to Chad and Sudan. DG ECHO also addressed the spillover effects of the Sudan crisis in Eastern Chad and South Sudan that saw a considerable influx of people fleeing the conflict.

DG ECHO continued to address the needs of the population in **Syria**, as well as the needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in neighbouring countries (Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq). Inside Syria, 15.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance ⁽⁴⁵⁾ in 2023. DG ECHO maintained its focus on multi-sectoral life-saving actions. In **Lebanon** and **Jordan**, more than 4.6 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance ⁽⁴⁶⁾. In **Türkiye**, close to 3.7 million refugees needed humanitarian support in 2023 ⁽⁴⁷⁾. In February 2023, two earthquakes caused massive destruction and suffering in southeast Türkiye, creating new needs among both refugees and the Turkish people. This disaster further exacerbated the living conditions of the already vulnerable refugees. In 2023, the EU provided EUR 78.2 million in humanitarian funding for the earthquake response ⁽⁴⁸⁾. The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) was successfully transitioned from humanitarian to development funding under DG NEAR in July 2023.

After 9 years of war, and a fragile truce, **Yemen** is facing a tragic humanitarian situation further exacerbated by climate change, a collapse of health and education systems, epidemics, landmines and a migration crisis. In 2023, 21.6 million people – 67% of the population – needed humanitarian assistance and protection services. 4.5 million were displaced and 17 million people faced acute food insecurity ⁽⁴⁹⁾. In 2023, the EU allocated more than EUR 145 million in humanitarian aid to assist those affected by the conflict, focusing on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

The severe humanitarian crisis in the **Horn of Africa** continued in 2023, with more than 43 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. Conflicts and the impact of natural hazards, such as large-scale droughts and floods, aggravated by

⁽⁴²⁾ [IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix](#).

⁽⁴³⁾ Unless referenced specifically, all figures in this section have been extracted from the [Global Humanitarian Overview 2023, December Update \(Snapshot as of 31 December 2023\)](#).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ [Hunger Hotspots. FAO–WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity: November 2023 to April 2024 Outlook](#).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ [UN OCHA Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview \(December 2022\)](#).

⁽⁴⁶⁾ [UN OCHA: Revised Emergency Response Plan for Lebanon \(June 2022\) and for Jordan: Statistics for Registered Persons of Concern \(UNHCR, November 2022\)](#).

⁽⁴⁷⁾ [UNHCR Türkiye Operational Update, June 2023](#).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ DG ECHO website: [Türkiye - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁽⁴⁹⁾ [UNHCR on the Crisis in Yemen \(UNHCR, 2023\)](#).

the El Niño phenomenon, are driving internal displacement, food insecurity and cross-border flows. DG ECHO continued to support the most vulnerable through multi-sectoral humanitarian action and mobilised additional funding throughout the year to respond to cholera outbreaks, floods and new population displacements. DG ECHO devoted considerable efforts to improve accountability of aid. More than EUR 180 million were allocated in 2023.

The **DRC** has experienced a further large-scale escalation of violent conflicts between the Congolese army FARDC, various armed groups, and the M23 insurgency supported by Rwanda and a dramatic increase in humanitarian needs, particularly in the eastern provinces. Human rights and IHL violations as well as widespread sexual and gender-based violence occur daily. A scale-up was declared in June 2023 regarding the whole humanitarian system, a massive funding gap remains (60.4% unmet requirements at the end of 2023 ⁽⁵⁰⁾). DG ECHO's response included EUR 100 million to address humanitarian needs, logistics support (EU Humanitarian Aid Flights as well as two Humanitarian Air Bridges organised in the first quarter of 2023 and in August 2023), and strong advocacy efforts.

The situation in the **Sahel** deteriorated markedly in 2023, due to the combined effect of the intensification of the conflict and the rise in political instability, as evidenced by the coup in Niger in July 2023. This very volatile environment led to further restrictions in humanitarian access and made coordination and advocacy for principled humanitarian action more challenging. As a result, humanitarian needs are growing at an alarming pace, reaching 34.5 million people in need ⁽⁵¹⁾. The main drivers were the unprecedented levels of forced displacement, including a growing refugee influx from Mali to Mauritania and Algeria, and the worsening food and nutrition crisis. In 2023, DG ECHO responded to the most urgent needs of conflict-affected populations.

The **Lake Chad Basin crisis** affecting Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon continued unabated. The food and nutrition crisis aggravated in Northeast Nigeria, with close to 25 million people facing a food crisis (IPC3+) country wide. Decisions by the Borno State authorities, such as the camp closure policy now broadened beyond Maiduguri are making the response more difficult to deliver. Despite facing growing humanitarian access restrictions, DG ECHO continued to provide multisectoral assistance to the people most exposed, focusing particularly on food assistance.

In **Southeast Asia**, the Cox's Bazar district, in Bangladesh, is home to the world's largest refugee camp, hosting more than 1 million aid dependent Rohingya refugees. In Myanmar, 17.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 2.6 million are internally displaced persons ⁽⁵²⁾. In 2023, DG ECHO delivered basic life-saving humanitarian aid to the Rohingya refugees and the host community and addressed the needs of the most vulnerable people affected by the violence and conflict in Myanmar.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ [Coordinated Plan DRC – Financial Tracking Service \(UN OCHA, 2023\)](#).

⁽⁵¹⁾ [Sahel Crisis Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview 2023](#).

⁽⁵²⁾ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mmr>.

In 2023, **Venezuela's** socio-economic and political crisis continued with severe humanitarian consequences for 20.1 million people ⁽⁵³⁾. Since the beginning of the crisis, more than 7.7 million people have left the country ⁽⁵⁴⁾. In 2023, DG ECHO continued to provide integrated protection and humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups, inside Venezuela and in the region, across all relevant sectors. To offer more visibility to this crisis and its regional dimension, in March 2023, DG ECHO co-organised with Canada a Solidarity Conference with refugees and migrants from Venezuela. DG ECHO continued its efforts to improve operating conditions and access for humanitarian actors through donor coordination and the ECHO-facilitated Humanitarian Aid Working Group of the International Contact Group.

Haiti continues to suffer from the consequences of escalating violence and socio-political upheavals. In 2023, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), over 8 400 people were killed, injured or kidnapped in gang-related violence ⁽⁵⁵⁾. As a result, in 2023, around 5.2 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance ⁽⁵⁶⁾, 4.9 million Haitians were affected by a large-scale food crisis and the number of children suffering from severe malnutrition increased by 30% to more than 115 600 cases ⁽⁵⁷⁾. DG ECHO helped respond to the most urgent protection, food and nutrition needs of the most vulnerable households.

Specific objective 4: Adequate and effective civil protection response and preparedness is provided to people in need

The UCPM, through its external dimension, provides tangible **EU solidarity** in the world. It is growing in importance, with requests for assistance in 2023 coming from 27 third countries. DG ECHO continued to foster this type of cooperation to support third countries in the aftermath of disasters and to contribute to building more resilient disaster management structures. Thanks to its unique infrastructure, the established network of contacts, its know-how and experience, the **ERCC** effectively acted as a **central hub for cross-sectoral operational coordination** and situational awareness. DG ECHO further increased the ERCC's access to scientific, analytical, monitoring, and information management and communication capacities. The aim was to better support operations and cross-sectoral coordination and inform decision-making by strengthening early warning capabilities and its anticipatory planning, among others. Specific focus was put on security-related policy areas (e.g. CBRN, Critical Entities Resilience (CER), cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), hybrid and cyber threats).

The UCPM relies on state-of-the-art **technical and scientific knowledge and tools to provide fast advice** to have more efficient and effective emergency response operations. DG ECHO also worked closely with other Commission services, the European External Action Service and decentralised agencies (EU Satellite Centre, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)) but also with

⁽⁵³⁾ [Informe-de-Seguimiento-de-la-EHC-HumVenezuela-Noviembre-2023-2.pdf](#).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ [Refugees and migrants from Venezuela](#).

⁽⁵⁵⁾ [Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Haiti \(BINUH, December 2023\)](#).

⁽⁵⁶⁾ [Haiti: Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 \(UN OCHA, April 2023\)](#).

⁽⁵⁷⁾ [National nutrition Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions survey 2023 \(UNICEF, May 2023\)](#).

scientific partners (e.g. those with expertise in natural hazards or radiological/nuclear risks) to provide situational awareness and analysis for emergency operations.

Experts and response capacities are thoroughly prepared to respond to any kind of disaster thanks to a comprehensive **training and exercises programme** further refined under the umbrella of the **Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network**. The programme was relaunched with a new look in September 2023. It enhances the individual competences of experts and key personnel, as well as the coordination and interoperability of modules, Technical Assistance Support Teams, other response capacities and experts with other actors involved during an international deployment. In 2023, 18 training courses took place with almost 320 course places offered to experts. In addition, a number of **online modules** are available on different disaster management topics and in different languages, from stand-alone modules, such as ‘Cultural Sensitivity and Gender’ or ‘Information Management’, to refresher and pre-learning for blended training courses. The training offer was complemented with 16 module exercises and five full-scale exercises, and 68 experts attended 15 exchanges hosted by civil protection authorities from across Europe.

DG ECHO also tapped into **scientific expertise on natural hazards and human induced disasters**, both from the European Scientific Partnerships and the JRC. In 2023, the European Anthropogenic Hazard Scientific Partnership (EAHSP), which brings radiological and nuclear expertise and knowledge to the ERCC, produced 137 monitoring reports, gave five training courses and was fully activated three times. The enhanced European Natural Hazard Scientific Partnership (ENHSP) produced 77 emergency reports and 161 monitoring reports, in addition to on-call advice. Furthermore, wildfire experts from the ENHSP were hosted in the ERCC throughout the summer of 2023 as part of a specialised wildfire season support task force, providing daily updates on the wildfire situation across Europe. The above partnerships, along with the strong collaboration with the JRC, especially in the field of early warning and anticipation (e.g. multiple cases of dam breach simulations, including in the Nova Kakhovka dam in Ukraine or for El Niño), enabled better preparedness levels for the ERCC and UCPM in general.



EU's response to the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria - In Türkiye, following the request to activate the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

© European Union, 2023.

Lessons and good practices identified under the **UCPM Lessons Learnt Programme (LLP)** ⁽⁵⁸⁾ provide the basis for learning and improving. In 2023, five meetings were organised ⁽⁵⁹⁾. Next to the recurrent meeting on UCPM activations, these thematic reviews focused on wildfires, floods, the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria and the UCPM activations related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Overall, the UCPM was praised

⁽⁵⁸⁾ <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/ucpm-lessons-learnt-programme>.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Four UCPM LLP final reports published in 2023 for meetings on wildfires in 2022; medevac operations; annual meeting; RU's war against UA and EQ in TR/SY. The report for the meeting on wildfires and floods in 2023 is still in the drafting process (Annex 2 – Performance Tables).

for its flexibility and efficiency. Some improvements were identified related to improved flow of information from requesting and offering countries, better dissemination and training on new schemes and tools, as well as further simplification of grant procedures. The meetings also showed the need to continue **delivering prevention and preparedness activities**.

As novelty element, in 2023 DG ECHO introduced indirect management as a new implementing modality following the UCPM legislative amendment from May 2021 by conducting a study on 'Economics for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness'. The action was implemented by the World Bank and aimed (i) to improve the knowledge base on disaster and climate risks in the Member States and facilitate the sharing of knowledge, good practices and information, (ii) to support the Member States' national civil protection systems to address the impact of disasters and climate change and (iii) to promote prevention measures in the Member States through the sharing of good practices, and facilitate access to specific knowledge and expertise on issues of common interest.

DG ECHO continued to work on the **UCPM evaluation** launched in 2022, as provided for in Article 34 of Decision No 1313/2013/EU ⁽⁶⁰⁾, covering activities carried out between January 2017 and December 2022. This evaluation was chosen for scrutiny by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board and was discussed in the Board's meeting of 14 February 2024. The evaluation is expected to be published in the first quarter of 2024.

DG ECHO objective 2: General objective 1: A European Green Deal

Specific Objective 1: People and communities at risk of disasters are resilient and prepared

DG ECHO continued to contribute to complete and efficient delivery of the Green Deal's objectives through both its internal and external dimensions ⁽⁶¹⁾.

Internal dimension

In the framework of the UCPM, DG ECHO continued to promote a better understanding of disaster risks and analysed the latest summaries of risk assessments and capability assessments submitted by Member States and Participating States. The first progress report on **disaster risk management** under the prevention pillar of the UCPM (Article 6 report of Decision No 1313/2013/EU) based on this analysis was finalised in 2023 and will be published in 2024. DG ECHO continued to pursue **mainstreaming disaster risk reduction across EU policies**, with a special focus on mobilising long-term investments in disaster risk management from cohesion, agricultural and research policy funding, and linking with the EU climate and environmental policies.

Work has also advanced on new strands for enhanced prevention and preparedness under the UCPM such as the **Union Disaster Resilience Goals (DRGs)**. The Commission

⁽⁶⁰⁾ [Decision – 2013/1313 – EN – EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁽⁶¹⁾ [Overview of natural and man-made disaster risks the European Union may face](#).

Recommendation and accompanying Commission Communication on the DRGs ⁽⁶²⁾ adopted in February 2023 point to five strategic areas where Member States and the Commission need to work together to strengthen the collective capacity to withstand future disasters, protect citizens, and safeguard livelihoods and the environment. They reinforce linkages with resilience efforts in other areas, such as in security, environment and climate change. Work advanced on the DRG flagship initiatives, with i) a first set of European-wide disaster scenarios to improve risk assessment and anticipation completed, ii) the rescEU transitional aerial firefighting fleet doubled during the 2023 summer season, iii) a first internal version multi-hazard dashboard completed and public version to be available in mid-2024, and iv) an ongoing pilot feasibility study for a pan-European awareness campaign. The DRGs are a **key EU contribution to objectives of the Sendai framework** and to the **implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly with regard to Goal 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) and Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable).

In addition, DG ECHO financed 29 prevention and preparedness projects, including cross-border projects and the support to national disaster risk management authorities, with the aim of **strengthening prevention and preparedness in EU Member States and UCPM Participating States**. One peer review on disaster risk management was conducted in Moldova, providing a concrete opportunity to identify areas for improvements and highlight good practices. In May 2023, a specific peer-review assessment framework tailored for wildfires was introduced, sparking considerable interest. Out of nine submitted requests, three were successfully granted peer reviews.

External dimension

The civil protection external cooperation was significantly boosted by the **signature of binding Administrative Agreements (AAs) with Ukraine and Moldova** which became new UCPM Participating States. The formal application of Georgia to join the UCPM was received in March 2023. Expressions of interest were also received in 2023 from Armenia and Israel. In November 2023, a UCPM Administrative Arrangement on civil protection cooperation was signed with Canada, strengthening the readiness for disasters and improving climate resilience and disaster risk reduction.

Discussions on the UCPM financial contribution for the period 2020-2027 were continued with Turkish authorities at political, managerial and technical level, with the aim to reach a financial agreement aligned with other enlargement Participating States. Furthermore, regional high-level events were organised in Rome in June on Climate Change and Civil Protection between regional experts, stakeholders and Director Generals (DGs) from the UCPM and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and in Valencia in October, under the Spanish Presidency, between the UCPM DGs and the UfM DGs for Civil Protection.

As regards the UCPM regional cooperation, a series of new flagship initiatives (worth EUR 20 million) were launched in 2023; these include the PPRD Med programme in the Mediterranean, and IPA CARE in the Western Balkans and Türkiye (2023-2028), as well as

⁽⁶²⁾ [Communication on European Union Disaster Resilience Goals](#): Acting together to deal with future emergencies - COM(2023) 61 final. [Recommendation on Union Disaster Resilience Goals](#) - (2023/C 56/01).

the new On-Site Assistance (OSA) facility in both regions. A multi-country gap and hazards analysis action covering the Enlargement and Neighbourhood partners also started to support the future external UCPM cooperation strategy.

In March 2023, a cross-border full-scale exercise between Palestine, Jordan and Israel (PDEX), simulating a response to an earthquake, was successfully conducted in Jericho and Tel Aviv. The three parties called for the establishment of a sub-regional early warning system for earthquakes that would cover the Jordan valley in the future.

DG ECHO continued also in 2023 to further strengthen its support to disaster preparedness ⁽⁶³⁾, promoting **multi-hazard preparedness and anticipatory action**. In this regard, it continued to work on gradually increasing funding to scale up anticipatory action in line with the Communication on Humanitarian Aid. In addition, following the declaration of the 2023 EU-LAC summit acknowledging the importance of international cooperation in the area of Disaster Preparedness and Disaster Risk Management, DG ECHO has been working on the preparation of a MoU to promote EU-LAC international cooperation activities to strengthen the areas of disaster risk prevention, vulnerability reduction, preparedness for a timely response, resilience building and climate change adaptation. According to UNDRR, this would be the first region-to-region agreement of its kind. This EU-LAC MoU is expected to be signed in May 2024.

DG ECHO continued to encourage partners to include preparedness measures and climate, environmental and conflict risk considerations into all the humanitarian actions it funds, to help ensure that impacts, including those related to climate, were accounted for in all sectorial interventions, including those related to displacement.

In order to increase the sustainability of its operations and further promote resilience, in 2023 DG ECHO continued **promoting complementarities and linkages between the disaster preparedness actions it funds and related development interventions**.

This approach implies, for instance, encouraging DG INTPA and DG NEAR to include preparedness aspects in development programming under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

The EU, represented by Commissioner Lenarčič, in COP28 endorsed two relevant “non-negotiation” outcomes: a) the “Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace”, focusing on climate action in fragile and conflict-affected settings, underpinned by a “package of solutions” encompassing individual pledges and announcements by signatories; and b) the “Getting ahead of disasters: a Charter on finance for managing risks”, setting out principles for the future of finance for disasters.

Specific objective 2: The environmental impact of humanitarian aid and civil protection operations is reduced

In order to reduce the carbon footprint and the environmental damage of humanitarian aid, **Minimum Environmental Requirements** and associated guidance became mandatory in 2023 for all EU-funded humanitarian aid operations ⁽⁶⁴⁾. New voluntary environmental

⁽⁶³⁾ Implementing the approach adopted in 2021 ([DG ECHO Guidance Note on Disaster Preparedness](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁾ [Guidance on the operationalisation of the mers for eu-funded humanitarian aid operations.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

indicators were also released in 2023 in order to help partners reflect the minimum environmental requirements in their projects. The EU/DG ECHO also became the first financial supporter of the Secretariat to the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations by announcing financial support (EUR 200 000).

Further to a Council invitation ⁽⁶⁵⁾, recommendations from a DG ECHO initiated study investigating how the UCPM can green its operations and support Member States in their own greening efforts were presented in February 2023. Building on this, on 24 May 2023 DG ECHO presented in the Council a four-point action plan: the further development of a strategy and action plan; the development of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework; the identification of climate-related complementary funding sources; and capacity building (e.g. via Knowledge Network, Lessons Learnt programme).

DG ECHO objective 3: General objective 5: Promoting our European way of life

Specific Objective 1: The needs of the most vulnerable people in times of crises are met

2023 was characterised by a **high number of UCPM activations**, notably linked to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the conflict between Israel and Hamas, the intense European wildfire season and a series of other severe emergency situations, such as the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, large-scale dam breaks in Libya and Ukraine, or the evacuation and repatriations from Sudan and Niger, amongst other. To facilitate deliveries and to allow for pooling of assistance from Member States to Ukraine, the Commission continued to finance three UCPM logistical hubs. The ERCC also worked with Member States and other services to better prepare for next summer's wildfire season by repositioning firefighting capacities in several European countries.

The **rescEU framework** was further strengthened in 2023: Concerning **aerial firefighting capacities**, the priority was to secure a consensus on the text of the relevant agreement with the manufacturer of medium amphibious assets. Significant advancements were made in the negotiations and the development of the fully-fledged European aerial firefighting fleet. In parallel, the focus was put on reinforcing the **rescEU transition arrangement** in light of the increasing wildfire threat across the EU, with the doubling of the rescEU



Wildfires in Greece: biggest rescEU aerial firefighting operation - The ERCC deployed 11 firefighting planes and 1 helicopter from the rescEU reserve.

© European Union, 2023.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ [Council conclusions on civil protection work in view of climate change aiming at making civil protection operations greener and more sustainable.](#)

transition fleet, notably through the leasing of additional light planes and helicopters to also serve Central Europe.

Concerning **Emergency Medical Teams** (EMTs), DG ECHO worked closely with the EMT consortium to establish European 'EMT2' specialised care teams, signing a grant for the development of three field hospitals and 18 medical teams. A **medical evacuation** hub in Poland was also financed for the medical evacuation of Ukrainian citizens or other persons located in Ukraine suffering from severe illness, war injuries and life-threatening conditions, requiring urgent, specialised, or long-term medical care. In 2023 alone, 2 297 patients were evacuated from Ukraine. Moreover, an advisory mission to Ukraine was completed in October 2023 to ensure the efficient management of burns and trauma patients.

With the new reserves created in 2023, the **rescEU medical and CBRN stockpiles** comprise devices, and personal protective equipment and countermeasures, that pose a significant risk of rapid depletion or increased demand during crisis scenarios. Currently, there are 21 stockpiles hosted by 16 Member States. DG ECHO awarded three grant agreements for detection, sampling, identification and monitoring of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear capacities.

DG ECHO signed six additional rescEU grants with five Member States and one Participating State for temporary **shelter**, increasing the available reserves for emergency accommodation facilities. These complement the two existing grants with Romania and Sweden whose assets were mainly deployed in Ukraine and Türkiye. Following continued massive bombardments of critical infrastructure in Ukraine, DG ECHO deployed thousands of **emergency generators** under rescEU to Ukraine, as well as to Moldova, and established a significant buffer for possible future needs.

The two rescEU donation hubs established in 2022 in Belgium and Poland remained operational during 2023, channelling resources from the private sector and third countries and contributing to the overall UCPM's response operation in Ukraine with more than a million items delivered, further highlighting the UCPM's flexibility and innovation during major crises. Focus continued on developing the **European Civil Protection Pool (ECP)** through engagement with Member and Participating States, with a view to increase pre-committed and certified resources ready for deployment to a disaster zone at short notice.

Under the umbrella of the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network (UCPKN), the UCPM continued to **increase the level of preparedness of emergency response operations** managed by DG ECHO. In 2023, along with the UCPM training and lessons-learnt programmes, a range of exercises and exchanges of civil protection experts took place. In addition, the UCPKN launched its engagement in supporting the design of Horizon Europe Civil Security for Society (Disaster-Resilient Societies destination), continued to develop its dedicated IT online platform and fostered the building of partnership and knowledge sharing through projects, communication outreach and events. The latter included a summer school Evidence for Policy in Disaster Risk Management, in May 2023, and a dedicated 2-day seminar for Young Civil Protection Professionals, in October 2023.

2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Assurance is provided on the basis of information on efficiency and effectiveness of internal control systems and governance processes. The management monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis and carries out an objective examination with internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General. The following reports / documentation have been considered:

- the reports from Authorising Officers by Sub-delegation (AOSDs) managing DG ECHO's budget appropriations;
- the reports and/or management declarations from the organisations managing grants under indirect management, as well as the results of the DG's supervisory controls on the activities of these bodies;
- the latest Annual Financial Statements of the UN entities and international organisations receiving payments from DG ECHO during the reporting year;
- the contribution by the Director in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control, including the results of internal control monitoring at DG level;
- the reports on recorded exceptions and non-compliance events;
- the reports on ex-post supervision and audit results;
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, and the observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS); and the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

The systematic analysis of the available evidence provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in the full coverage of the budget delegated to the Director-General of DG ECHO.

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into 2.1. Control results, 2.2. Audit observations and recommendations, 2.3. Effectiveness of internal control systems and resulting in 2.4. Conclusions on the assurance.

2.1. Control results

This section reports on the control results used by management to support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives (ICO) ⁽⁶⁶⁾. The DG ECHO assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in Annex 5 of the annual activity report. Annex 6 of the annual activity report outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the **relevant control systems**.

DG ECHO's Humanitarian Aid operations are implemented both under Direct and Indirect Management, while Civil Protection is implemented essentially under Direct Management.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ 1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) reliability of reporting; 3) safeguarding of assets and information; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (Article 36(2) FR).

DG ECHO's control systems are adapted to the specific risks of each control segment and ensure a proper implementation through several layers of checks and controls at the various stages of the project cycle. These controls should not be seen in isolation, as together they contribute to providing the overall reasonable assurance on the legality and regularity of transactions. DG ECHO puts emphasis on the balance between the achievements of its policy objectives and the need for an effective and efficient financial and operational control of its activities.

DG ECHO's **2023 budget** was again the highest ever, amounting to EUR 4.4 billion. Commitment appropriations originating from the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) strand amounted to EUR 2.70 billion, of which EUR 2.42 billion were allocated to humanitarian aid operations, EUR 276 million to civil protection and EUR 8.75 million for other prerogatives and support and administrative expenditure. Additionally, DG ECHO had at its disposal EUR 1.73 billion for civil protection coming from NGEU funds, including the amount carried over from 2021 and 2022.

The level of payments amounted to EUR 3 393.1 million in 2023. 73.3% of all payments related to humanitarian aid operations (EUR 2 486.11 million) ⁽⁶⁷⁾, which includes a contribution of EUR 10 million to the EU Trust Fund (EUTF). On top of this, EUR 1.27 million payments came from European Development Fund (EDF) ⁽⁶⁸⁾. Under the UCPM, payments made in 2023 amounted to EUR 889.16 million for programmes implemented under direct management and EUR 0.19 million under indirect management. Moreover, EUR 17.69 million were paid for administrative and other external actions.

Despite the challenging circumstances related to the management of the humanitarian aid and civil protection budget, DG ECHO maintained particularly good implementation rates as regards commitment and payment appropriations, achieving consumption of 99.9% for budgetary commitments and 95.2% for payments appropriations under the MFF strand. For the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) budget, the contracted amount stands at 99.9% of the total operational budget (2021-2023) managed by DG ECHO.

In line with the 2018 Financial Regulation, DG ECHO's assessment for the **reporting requirement** is as follows:

- had zero Financial Framework Partnerships beyond 4 years (Article 130(4) FR);
- did not register any case of: confirmation of instructions (Article 92(3) FR), financing not linked to costs (Article 125(3) FR), flat rates >7% for indirect costs (Article 181(6) FR);
- applied derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity for 616 grants in 2023, as the AOSD considered that, for the purposes of humanitarian aid, emergency support operations, civil protection operations or crisis management aid and/or other exceptional and duly substantiated emergencies, an early intervention by the Union was of major importance (Article 193(2) FR).

⁽⁶⁷⁾ In 2023 payments amounted to EUR 1 111.17 million for humanitarian aid direct management and EUR 1 374.94 million for humanitarian aid indirect management.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Payments were made as forecasted and announced to Member States. The remaining payment appropriations will be used in the following years, as the budgetary principle of annuality does not apply to the EDF budget.

2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls

a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

DG ECHO uses internal control processes to ensure sound management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions it is responsible for, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes and the nature of the payments concerned.

1) Control objectives

DG ECHO has put in place procedures to ensure ex-ante legality and regularity of expenditures, including those referring to operations implemented under Exceptional Extreme Operational Constraints and Remote Management under Direct or Indirect Management ⁽⁶⁹⁾. The overall control objective is to ensure that the residual error rate does not exceed the materiality threshold of 2%.

2) Assessment of the control results

Ex-post controls are performed on the basis of the **2021-2027 audit strategy** with the objective of assessing the legality and regularity of financial transactions implemented by the DG (financial HQ audits), addressing specific DG ECHO risks through risk-based audits and assessing the Partners' compliance with eligibility rules, such as ECHO 2021 Certificate.

The implementation of DG ECHO's audit activities in 2023 was almost completed according to plan. The difficult security situation in several implementing countries (Türkiye, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia) resulted in the cancellation of nine field audits. Nevertheless, auditors could obtain sufficient evidence from the financial HQ audits completed in 2023 to draw conclusions in line with the auditing standards.

DG ECHO finalised audits of 71 randomly selected humanitarian aid projects implemented through direct management mode, with a total value of transactions tested amounting to EUR 100 million. EUR 1.23 million was identified as ineligible expenditure resulting in a detected error rate of 1.23% in 2023 (compared to 2.94% in 2022). For projects implemented under indirect management, the audit of 27 projects did not identify any ineligible expenditure for transactions totalling EUR 134.7 million. As in previous years, DG ECHO continued to apply a multi-annual approach for the calculation of the **average detected error rates**, as humanitarian aid activities have an overall stable set-up in terms of targeted beneficiaries, eligibility criteria, management and control modalities. Accordingly, based on the above audit findings, the average detected error rate amounts to respectively **0.0028%** and **1.45%** for projects implemented through indirect management and direct management mode. DG ECHO will keep on closely monitoring the evolution of the detected error rates and stands ready to review relevant control mechanisms if necessary.

As regards civil protection, randomly selected audits for 10 projects implemented under direct management were finalised in 2023. Auditors tested transactions worth EUR 42.4

⁽⁶⁹⁾ These procedures include clear requirements for partners applying to all stages of the process, i.e. before and during the implementation of operations and at the final reporting stage.

million, of which EUR 326 456 was identified as ineligible, representing an average annual ⁽⁷⁰⁾ detected error rate of **0.77%** in 2023.

3) Overview of DG ECHO risk profile

DG ECHO's portfolio consists of **three main control segments with low error rates**: Humanitarian Aid implemented through Direct and Indirect Management and Civil Protection implemented essentially under Direct Management. The **inherent risks** of DG ECHO are associated with the nature of its operations, which are delivered in difficult environments characterised by unpredictability, volatility, insecurity, and restricted access to crisis-affected people. DG ECHO seeks to reduce the risks to an acceptable level, for example through its control systems ⁽⁷¹⁾, security policy and guidance ⁽⁷²⁾.

In 2023, a comprehensive risk identification and assessment was performed based on the Commission's guidance on Risk Management, with the involvement of all DG ECHO Directorates. The whole risk exercise adopted a bottom-up approach with top-down steering throughout the different phases, from its initiation to its conclusion. The main goal was to identify the risks to be included in the 2023 Critical Risk Register and to identify and assess potential new risks, if any, that could affect the achievement of DG ECHO's objectives, defining at the same time appropriate mitigating actions.

4) Table (X): Estimated risk at payment and at closure

Based on all the above, DG ECHO presents in the following Table X an estimation of the risk at payment and risk at closure for the expenditure managed during the reporting year:

Table X: Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR million) ⁽⁷³⁾

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Civil protection agreements are on average shorter than 12 months.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Annex 6 provides a detailed description of DG ECHO's relevant control systems for budget implementation (RCSs).

⁽⁷²⁾ A review of DG ECHO Field Security handbook as well as the draft of a proper DG ECHO Security policy note were launched in the course of the year. Furthermore, a guidance note on private travel to high-risk areas has been issued.

⁽⁷³⁾ The full detailed version of the table is provided in Annex 9.

DG ECHO	Payments made	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
	(m EUR)	(m EUR)	(m EUR)	(%)	(m EUR)	(%)	(m EUR)	(%)
HUMA Direct	1 101.17	913.37	13.29	1.46%	2.37	0.26%	10.93	1.20%
HUMA Indirect	1 376.21	1 115.67	0.03	0.00%	0.01	0.00%	0.03	0.00%
Civil Protection Direct	889.16	84.85	0.65	0.77%	0.12	0.14%	0.54	0.63%
Civil Protection Indirect	0.19	-2.40	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%
Other Direct	15.09	14.42	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%
Other Indirect	2.60	2.40	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00%
DG ECHO total	3 384.41	2 128.31	13.98	0.66%	2.49	0.12%	11.49	0.54%

Additional information on EDF and contributions to EUTF (amounts in EUR millions)

DG ECHO	Payments made	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
	m EUR	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Total EDF	1.27	7.59	0.03	0.35%	0.01	0.12%	0.02	0.23%
Total EC Budget	3 393.15	2 130.72						
of which Bekou	0.00	0.00						
of which Africa	10.00	10.00						
of which Colombia	0.00	0.00						
of which Syrian Crisis (Madad)	0.00	0.00						
Net EC Budget (excluding EUTF)	3 383.15	2 120.72						
Total EDF budget	1.27	7.59						
of which Bekou	0.00	0.00						
of which Africa	0.00	0.00						
of which Colombia	0.00	0.00						
of which Syrian Crisis (Madad)	0.00	0.00						
Total EC Budget excluding EUTF	1.27	7.59						
T003 : Bekou	0.00	0.00						
T005 : Africa	0.00	10.00						
T006 : Colombia	0.00	0.00						
T004 : Syrian Crisis	0.00	0.00						
Total EU Trust Funds	0.00	0.00						
DG ECHO Total	3 384.41⁷⁴	2 128.31						

(⁷⁴) This figure represents the 2023 total payments under the BGEU budget (EUR 3393.15 million), plus payments made under EDF funds (EUR 1.27 million), minus contributions sources from the BGEU to EU Trust Funds (EUR 10 million).

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2023 expenditure, 0.66%, is the AOD's best conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year, not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. This expenditure will subsequently be subject to ex-post controls and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in subsequent years, corresponding to the conservatively estimated future corrections for 2023 expenditure, 0.12%. The difference between those two results is the estimated overall risk at closure of EUR 11.49 million, representing 0.54% ⁽⁷⁵⁾ of the DG's total relevant expenditure for 2023.

For an overview at Commission level, DG ECHO's estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated in the Annual Management and Performance Report (AMPR).

5) Preventive and corrective measures

As regards the corrections carried out in 2023, DG ECHO has in place an effective mechanism for preventing and correcting errors, through ex-ante and ex-post controls, amounting to EUR 2.6 million and EUR 5.1 million respectively (compared to EUR 2.1 million and EUR 1.2 million in 2022). Whereas the corrections made before payments are similar to last year, the corrections implemented after payments significantly increased compared to 2022, which can mainly be explained by the above average detected error rate in 2022 for ex-post audits on projects implemented through direct management.

DG ECHO works closely with other DGs to ensure a streamlined approach to the follow-up of Pillar Assessment of UN entities that have supervisory measures due to failing assessment of one or several pillars. No follow-up was launched in 2023, as the UN entities did not implement the corrective measures on time. Nevertheless, the supervisory measures continue to apply until the follow-up exercise will be completed.

b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

DG ECHO's current Anti-Fraud Strategy covers the period 2021-2024. DG ECHO has developed and implemented its own **anti-fraud strategy** since 2013, based on the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every 4 years and whenever necessary. It was last updated in October 2021 (DG ECHO Anti-Fraud Strategy 2021-2024) following a fraud risk assessment. Its implementation is being monitored and reported on a regular basis to the Director in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control (DRMIC). All necessary actions have been implemented.

DG ECHO also contributed to the revised Commission anti-fraud strategy (CAFS) Action Plan of July 2023, notably to the formulation and planning of actions 20, 21b, 22 and 24 in the framework of the fraud prevention and detection network, including the External Actions subgroup and bilateral consultations.

DG ECHO followed up OLAF's financial recommendations with the following results: 70% of the financial recommendations issued in 2019-2023 were fully implemented, 10% partly

⁽⁷⁵⁾ The risk at closure compared to last year decreases mainly due to a decrease of the estimated risk at payment.

implemented, 10% not implemented ⁽⁷⁶⁾, and 10% of the recommendations are still under analysis.

The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows.

- DG ECHO has ensured an initial assessment and follow-up of fraud allegations received in the dedicated functional mailbox. In 2023, 174 allegations were reported and assessed (compared to 118 in 2022).
- 32 fraud allegations received in 2023 were transmitted to OLAF. Out of these transmitted allegations, 2 resulted in OLAF investigations; 8 are still under OLAF’s assessment and 22 were dismissed. In addition, OLAF has informed DG ECHO of the opening of an investigation following a notification which was sent directly to OLAF.
- Two awareness-raising sessions on fraud prevention and how to act if confronted with fraud allegations took place. One session was targeted at Headquarters staff who have joined DG ECHO in the past year and another session was organised for headquarters and field office staff of DG ECHO Directorate C. In addition to these sessions, the information on how to report fraud allegations was presented to civil protection grant beneficiaries.
- DG ECHO representatives attended the Fraud Prevention and Detection Net events chaired by OLAF and participated actively in the external relations subgroup’s meetings organised by OLAF for close cooperation and discussion of common anti-fraud issues between the EU external relations services.
- DG ECHO contributed to the revision of the CAFS Action Plan.
- To ensure coordination and to exchange best practices in the prevention, detection and response of fraud and aid diversion, meetings with other major donors and partners took place.
- DG ECHO took all the necessary measures to protect the financial interests of the EU, through the analysis of financial, operational and reputational risks – and, when required – by suspending operations, contracting and payments, in close liaison with field experts, partners and, where relevant, competent authorities.

On the basis of the available information, DG ECHO has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective.

2.1.2. Efficiency of controls

Timely Payments	DG ECHO Score	EC Score
BGEU: A horizontal progress bar for BGEU. The bar is divided into four segments: red (0-75%), orange (75-94%), yellow (94-99%), and green (99-100%). The total length represents 94%.	94%	99%
EDF: A horizontal progress bar for EDF. The bar is divided into four segments: red (0-75%), orange (75-91%), yellow (91-99%), and green (99-100%). The total length represents 100%.	100%	91%

⁽⁷⁶⁾ DG ECHO did not find sufficient grounds to justify a full or a partial recovery due to the lack of proven fraudulent behaviour or intention and considering that no direct and substantial breach of the EU legal framework could be proven.

The above results are excellent taking into consideration the significant increase in the overall volume of activity in 2023 as well as the complexity of DG ECHO projects.

For civil protection e-grants, the average **time-to-grant** was 198 days ⁽⁷⁷⁾ compared to the legal deadline of 275 days. The average **time-to-inform** was 79 days ⁽⁷⁸⁾ compared to the legal deadline of 183 days. Accordingly, both ratios were widely within the legal deadlines.

DG ECHO continued to implement the new contractual frameworks (Model Grant Agreements (MGA) and Humanitarian Aid Contribution Agreements (HACA)) in the IT tool HOPE. Due to the technical limitations of the system and other priorities of the IT team, a significant part of all humanitarian aid contracts and amendments still need manual adaptations, leading to increased risks of errors and oversights.

Additional indicators to measure the control efficiency in DG ECHO are reported in Annex 4. The overall level of efficiency indicators remained satisfactory and stable compared to the previous year. DG ECHO continues to work on improving the efficiency of its control systems.

2.1.3. Economy of controls

DG ECHO's estimated cost of controls amounted to EUR 9.7 million in 2023. It is composed of the cost for staff performing control activity functions both at HQ and in the Field (estimated at EUR 8,8 million) and the cost for audit assignments undertaken by external audit firms for outsourced audits (EUR 0,9 million).

The estimated cost of the control strategy represents 0.34% of the 2023 humanitarian aid payments and 0.14% of the civil protection payments. The overall estimated cost of the control strategy represents 0.29% of the total payments, compared to the same rate in 2022. Thus, the costs of controls for DG ECHO in 2023 are below the benchmark of 0.35% of the total payments in 2023, and they are to be considered proportionate to the inherent risks of the activities performed by DG ECHO.

2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, DG ECHO has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.

In terms of **effectiveness**, the ex-ante controls and the ex-post audits resulting from the implementation of the control strategy have allowed DG ECHO to detect non-eligible expenditure amounting EUR 7.7 million in total. In 2023, the total amount of financial

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Time-to-grant is calculated for 31 projects from the UCPM-2023-KAPP call (covering prevention, preparedness and full-scale exercises) and UCPM-2023-TRACK 1 call (covering the technical assistance in disaster risk management to national civil protection authorities and other national disaster risk management authorities in eligible countries. Humanitarian and other Civil Protection grants fall under Article 195(a) FR.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Time-to-inform is calculated for 54 projects from the UCPM-2023-KAPP call (covering prevention, preparedness and full-scale exercises) and UCPM-2023-TRACK 1 call (covering the technical assistance in disaster risk management to national civil protection authorities and other national disaster risk management authorities in eligible countries. Humanitarian and other Civil Protection grants fall under Article 195(a) FR.

corrections and recovery orders was higher than in 2022 (EUR 3.3 million), mainly due to the above average detected error rate in 2022 for ex-post audits on projects implemented through direct management. As a result, the ratio measuring the **economy** (comparing the estimated cost of controls to the quantifiable benefits) increased from 34.3% in 2022 to 74.4% in 2023.

In terms of **efficiency**, to have a fair and full picture of the impact of the control systems, the above figures should be read in combination with other benefits which are equally important, i.e.:

- the preventive effect of limiting operations to those organisations that, after being duly assessed, have qualified to become a partner organisation;
- DG ECHO's ex-post audits, in addition to detecting non-eligible expenditure, give assurance on the partners internal controls as well as on their compliance with the contractual requirements, including non-financial aspects such as compliance with humanitarian aid principles, detection and management of misconduct, whether relating to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, or fraud;
- in addition to ex-post audits, DG ECHO carries out field audits of ongoing projects that contribute to partners' awareness and knowledge of the eligibility rules of claimed expenditure. The follow-up of fraud allegations is both qualitative (deterrent effect and assessment of partners' capacity to investigate) and quantitative (recovery of amounts affected by fraud);
- the deterrent effect of the implementation of both ex-ante controls and ex-post controls, leading to a limitation of the occurrence of non-eligible items and, more generally, to the promotion of sound financial management.

Technical Assistants working in the DG ECHO Field Offices contribute to the assurance-building process by supporting budget implementation through both the needs assessment used for the allocation of funding and ensuring quality monitoring of the actions funded on the ground.

2.2. Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

Internal Audit Service

The IAS audit on the *Control strategy for grant management under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism*, finalised in January 2022, issued one very important recommendation related to the grant award procedure and the use of exceptions. DG ECHO accepted the recommendation and is taking all necessary steps to ensure the timely implementation of the remaining activities by the set deadline (31.03.2024). Actions already implemented resulted in an updated Civil Protection step-by-step guide which provides clarifications on i) the use of these exceptions, ii) the evaluation procedure and iii)

the content of the automatically generated award decision. Moreover, DG ECHO revised its Control Strategy updating the description of the related control activities.

Moreover, the IAS completed two audits that involved DG ECHO in 2023, the audit on financial management of humanitarian aid under indirect management and the limited review on data protection, with no critical/very important findings reported.

In its contribution to the 2023 Annual Activity Report process, the IAS concluded that the internal control systems in place in DG ECHO for the audited processes are effective, except for the observation giving rise to the very important recommendation.

European Court of Auditors (ECA)

The ECA's Annual Report concerning the financial year 2022, published in October 2023 ⁽⁷⁹⁾, did not raise any specific observation and recommendations to DG ECHO. The ECA considers that DG ECHO strengthened checks and took action to prevent recurrent errors. This included issuing new guidance to staff, increasing training and awareness-raising activities for both their own staff and beneficiaries, and strengthening financial monitoring and controls. Moreover, it was concluded that the recommendation issued in the 2020 annual report, requesting DG ECHO to establish a procedure ensuring that partner organisations base their allocation of shared costs on expenditure actually incurred, had been implemented.

For the financial year 2023, the ECA's Statement of Assurance audits are currently being conducted.

The ECA examined the Commission's management of the development strand of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), including the response to the February 2023 earthquake, and assessed whether the funds were used efficiently and effectively to support refugees and host communities. The Court also followed-up on the recommendations made in the Special Report 27/2018, which focused on the humanitarian strand of the FRIT, and considered all recommendations addressed to DG ECHO as fully implemented. DG ECHO contributed to the replies provided on the main observations, conclusions and recommendations made by the Court and participated in the pre-adversarial and the adversarial meetings with the ECA. Publication of the final report is due in April 2024.

A new performance audit launched in 2023 will focus on humanitarian operations managed under remote management. The preparatory phase has been finalised in February 2024 and the audit is expected to start in March/April 2024. The objective of the audit is to assess whether DG ECHO's delivery of humanitarian aid through "remote management" is well justified, effective and efficient.

Conclusions

On the basis of the information on IAS and ECA audits, including the conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control in DG ECHO, the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective, except for the process where the IAS issued a very important observation. DG ECHO has taken action to mitigate the risks and the established action plan will ensure the timely implementation of the recommendations.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ [Annual reports concerning the financial year 2022 | European Court of Auditors \(europa.eu\)](#).

2.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice, to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is a compulsory requirement. DG ECHO uses the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with the internal control principles and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

The **assessment of the internal control system** was carried out between September 2023 and February 2024. It included the review of the Internal Control Monitoring Criteria (ICMC) and considered results of audits and follow-up engagements performed by IAS and ECA. Furthermore, a dedicated **survey** was conducted in December 2023 with representatives of all staff levels for the evaluation of the ICMC. Overall, the results of this survey were positive, indicating the staff's overall good understanding of the control systems in place. It concluded on the need to undertake some additional targeted activities to further improve the staff awareness and knowledge of procedures, in particular related to the whistleblowing procedures and the Control Strategy.

During 2023, six non-compliance events and three exceptions were reported. DG ECHO thoroughly assessed all reported **deviations**, also considering the exceptional circumstances that made them indispensable and concluded that none of those affected the effectiveness of the internal control system.

DG ECHO's risk assessment performed in the last quarter of 2023 confirmed the two **critical risks** on 'access restrictions on DG ECHO's activities and controls' and 'security of DG ECHO staff'. Indeed, access restrictions continued to be high in several ongoing crisis theatres, affecting not only the humanitarian needs assessment and the delivery of aid, but also the field monitoring of the actions funded. Deployment of the EHRC, diplomatic advocacy and outreach, or continued engagement in civil-military coordination are only a few examples of mitigating measures put in place to reduce the risk.

The DG ECHO has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective, and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified related to staff awareness and knowledge of procedures. The detected deficiencies have a low impact on the overall effectiveness of the control system and improvements and/or remedial measures are put in place. DG ECHO will ensure the timely implementation of the recommendations made by IAS on the UCPM control strategy.

Information on the assessment of the Internal Control Systems is provided in Annex 8.

2.4 Conclusions on the assurance

The information reported in Section 2.1 stems from the results of management monitoring and auditors' opinion contained in the reports listed. These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a comprehensive coverage of the budget delegated to the Director-General of DG ECHO.

DG ECHO faces several inherent risks due to the nature of its operations, which can hinder the achievement of its objectives. The control architecture of DG ECHO aims to ensure that risks are mitigated to an acceptable level in a cost-effective manner. Taking into account the information reported in sub-sections 2.1-2.3, including the various reports from the internal and external control bodies, there is evidence that the internal control system in its entirety is implemented effectively in DG ECHO. The procedures put in place ensure the control of the main risks and in doing so provide reasonable assurance that the financial information in this report represents a **true and fair view** of DG ECHO's operations. Resources are used for their intended purpose and the AOD has managed them on the basis of the principles supporting sound financial management. Furthermore, the materiality criteria set for legality and regularity of the financial operations are respected, no significant information has been omitted, assets and information have been properly safeguarded, and measures were put in place to ensure prevention, detection and correction of fraud and irregularities.

In conclusion, based on the elements reported above, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director-General, in his capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

2.5 Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Director-General of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors for years prior to the year of this declaration.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the institution.

Brussels, 31 March 2024

Maciej POPOWSKI

⁽⁸⁰⁾ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG.

3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION

3.1 Human resource management

DG ECHO employs a **competent and engaged workforce** delivering effectively on the Commission's objectives, priorities and core business while responding to major unforeseen crises such as, for 2023 - and in addition to the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine - the escalation of hostilities in the Middle East. For that, DG ECHO relies on its staff in Headquarters and on an extensive field network ⁽⁸¹⁾.

DG ECHO stayed committed to encouraging **gender diversity in leadership**, including the representation in middle management with the appointment of three female and one male Heads of Unit in 2023. By the end of the year, DG ECHO had eight female middle managers out of 18 occupied posts. Moreover, three out of five Director posts were occupied by female senior managers.

The implementation of DG ECHO's **equality mainstreaming work plan** was regularly monitored by the Equality Working Group and was last updated in November 2023.

The **Management Charter**, which is a key commitment to the shared values on which DG ECHO is built, was signed by all newly recruited managers in 2023. **Workload assessment and resource allocation** is a crucial issue for the newly appointed Director-General, given the current workforce composition and the need for more efficiency. A request for a reorganisation was prepared after several years of growth where DG ECHO was at the forefront of the Commission response to dramatically deteriorating emergencies (war in Ukraine, climate change induced natural disasters, rising number of conflicts, etc.).

The **new organisational structure** was approved by the College on 12 December 2023 with an entry into force on 1 February 2024. It aims to improve the structure; reinforce coordination and strategic steer, better blend civil protection and humanitarian aid policies and actions; underline the importance of safety and security, create clearer entry points for highly strategic and cross-cutting issues, rebalance the coverage of geographical units, and rebalance workload across units.

DG ECHO also paid particular attention to **internal communication**, updating staff and management in a timely manner on all HR news. DG ECHO's reorganisation process has been largely communicated through an open and transparent communication ⁽⁸²⁾ on the planned changes and a dialogue requesting input from all staff, including staff in DG ECHO's Field Network offices. For this process, DG ECHO created a specific page ⁽⁸³⁾, to

⁽⁸¹⁾ Human resources at headquarters at the end of 2023, totalled 591 staff, of which 51,24% officials, 29,27% contractual and 10,66% external staff. DG ECHO made use of a small number of service providers (8,63%). DG ECHO is present in the field with a network of 470 humanitarian staff (166 field experts and 304 agents under national law) spread over 50 field offices in 40 countries, including the ones most severely affected by crises.

⁽⁸²⁾ Key messages were shared through several channels, such as MyECHO news section, email messages from the Director-General, Town Hall meetings, ECHO Days, senior and middle management meetings, etc. The Director-General also asked line managers to deliver messages to their staff and answered key questions (what, why, how, and what it will mean to each member) of staff through Town Hall meetings Q&A sessions, Slido polls, open door policy, listening cell and cooperation with career guidance officers.

⁽⁸³⁾ [ECHO Tomorrow](#).

gather all information on the reorganisation and keep staff updated, as well as a functional mailbox managed by the HR Correspondent Team to listen to and address staff concerns. **DG ECHO HR intranet page** has been entirely updated and revamped into the SharePoint Online Platform. This included the revision of all DG ECHO recruitment guidelines to improve their user-friendliness and to better support the recruiters.

Nurturing team spirit and ensuring an efficient onboarding of newcomers is key. DG ECHO continued to implement and promote numerous actions in that regard, including the welcome package to all newcomers, a newcomer corner on the intranet, intra-unit mentoring, 'Coffee roulette', induction sessions, online coffee with the Director-General, team events or targeted management debriefings. DG ECHO also held several physical Town Hall meetings to discuss notably its new structure.

3.2 Digital transformation and information management

On digital culture, as far as **collaborative working** is concerned, DG ECHO fully exploits the possibilities offered by Microsoft 365 and harmonises as much as possible its DG ECHO **field ICT architecture** to the Commission ICT architecture to ease the online collaboration with its field offices spread around the world. A new architecture in the latest SharePoint Online has been launched to overcome the limits faced with the classic SharePoint Online in terms of searchability, tagging, and uniqueness of content types. It will improve the search experience of the users through a general search page based on keywords and automatic suggestion for refiners.

On the way forward to **digitalisation**, DG ECHO received the corporate green light to launch the digitalisation of its mission security clearances to High-Risk Countries and Areas (HRC) and will now proceed with the development of the solution. Moreover, the modernisation of DG ECHO's three main information systems ⁽⁸⁴⁾ has been pursued and finalised at 80%, migrating from legacy development tools to the new recommended tools. It has been done in line with the dual pillar approach by reusing corporate building blocks like eUI to accelerate the development and favour a seamless digital landscape. Security has also been high on the agenda, with the introduction of multi-factor authentication for the sensitive information systems. The adoption of a new development paradigm with automated testing and more systematic vulnerability testing campaigns with the support of DG DIGIT services contributed to a more secure environment.

On information and IT security, DG ECHO has fully adopted the **governance, risk and compliance (GRC) tool** and has been part of the early adopters of the associated risk assessment and management tool. Regarding compliance with the IT security policies and standards as defined in Commission Decision 2017/46 and its implementation rules, DG ECHO updated them whenever requested. The security posture of the M365 set up for DG ECHO Field has been reviewed with the support of CERT-EU and Microsoft.

Cyber awareness actions continued being proposed in 2023 to DG ECHO's staff and particular attention was given to the DG ECHO Field-based staff who do not benefit from the regular Commission operations. Two cyber awareness trainings were organised for all Field-based staff during the year. ECHO Field-based staff also participated to some

⁽⁸⁴⁾ HOPE, APPEL and FSM.

Cybersecurity Awareness sessions organised by CERT-EU. A monthly cybersecurity report is produced for our DG ECHO Field Network to follow up trends and main issues. For the Headquarters a Cybersecurity Awareness Day was organised.

Data, information, and knowledge are strategic assets, and DG ECHO is paying particular attention to improving the way these assets are managed and used. In 2023, DG ECHO continued its collaboration with the External Relations family DGs to automate the production of several OECD DAC reports. This collaboration has contributed to drastically reduce the time spent on collecting and verifying the needed data. DG ECHO (together with DG INTPA and DG NEAR) also followed the discussions led by the JRC on the country knowledge project and is ready to contribute with information on beneficiary countries.

Regarding **humanitarian aid policy commitments** taken by DG ECHO on localisation of aid and multi-year funding, a new dashboard has been produced allowing for real time follow up. The data warehouse has also been enriched with new attributes. A new dimension based on the consumption year has been introduced to better align with the way the Office for the UN OCHA collects humanitarian financial information.

Many data quality reports ⁽⁸⁵⁾ have been developed for the management of the field network to help data owners and data stewards comply with the data policy. These reports facilitate controls and support users for early detection of data discrepancies in sensitive areas like user data, incompatibility between user functions and assigned roles/rights, or data inconsistencies in the information system and the field offices archiving system.

In the area of **civil protection activities**, a proof of concept is in place with the objective of facilitating access to quality data in a secured way to all civil protection units and avoiding duplication of information/data. This is done with the support of DIGIT in the context of the EC Data Platform through the introduction of new dashboards (Civil Protection Data Repository project) with appropriate data governance. Building on this, 17 reports have been developed in the context of the prototype and several demos have been presented to the users to validate the look and feel and the usability of the tool. This contributed to improving the tool and will facilitate the adoption of the final solution.

On **document management**, DG ECHO promotes the on-line administration internally and externally, automating several internal processes encouraging staff to use digital options instead of paper. DG ECHO is currently modernising the archiving procedures of its Field offices. DG ECHO piloted the use of ARES in two Field offices in 2023. Furthermore, the paper archive has been significantly reduced as 15 000 files have been removed.

In 2023 DG ECHO continued working on the implementation of the EC's **data protection** action plan (C(2020) 7625) and built up its efforts to train all its staff by 2024. To that effect in 2023, 17 sessions were held, during which around 95% of DG ECHO HQ staff was reached, covering all Units, incl. DG ECHO Field Network staff. DG ECHO reviewed 7 existing records and published 2 new records. **Privacy statements** were equally reviewed and updated, whereas new ones have been prepared for new and recurrent processing activities (i.e., for DG ECHO meetings, events, webinars, etc.). DG ECHO has followed relevant legal and procedural developments and updated its 'Data Protection Corner' in DG ECHO's new

⁽⁸⁵⁾ 21 new data quality reports and more than 100 were updated in 2023.

intranet SharePoint Online Platform. As a follow-up to the IAS Strategic Audit Plan on Data Protection, DG ECHO – together with DG INTPA, DG NEAR, DG TAXUD, DG TRADE and FPI – participated in the IAS Limited Review on Data Protection, performed during the second half of 2023. The audit engagement is completed, and the Final Audit Report was received in January 2024.

DG ECHO's **external website** is currently in transition to Drupal 8 to be aligned to the look and feel of the Commission Information website and to ensure coherence in terms of thematic structure, navigation, layout and a cost-effectiveness approach (standardised functionalities, components, and IT solutions). It will be a more user-friendly, responsive portal with a better experience on mobile devices.

3.3 Sound environmental management

During 2023, DG ECHO contributed to achieving the 'climate neutral by 2030' target by complying with **EMAS** requirements and advice. The "greening" of humanitarian aid also continued as part of DG ECHO's commitment to sound environmental management. DG ECHO presented recommendations from an independent study in February 2023, investigating how the UCPM can green its operations⁽⁸⁶⁾.

In 2023, DG ECHO endeavoured to further reduce its energy consumption by following the recommendations laid out in the **energy performance of buildings (EPB)** issued by the Belgian Authorities. These recommendations included the follow-up of EMAS action plans, temporary measures to reduce energy consumption, actions to raise staff awareness on consumption and actions to reduce it. A comprehensive strategy to reduce DG ECHO's footprint, including greenhouse gas emissions from missions, was produced encompassing also: tips to save energy, organise sustainable meetings and reduce waste.

The technical projects related to buildings' operation, energy efficiency, waste management, catering and biodiversity are managed by the EMAS Site Coordinators teams in the Commission's Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels (OIB). For 2023 DG ECHO undertook the following actions:

Energy saving actions: Several tips and tricks to save energy at work and home on an individual basis were shared through the intranet such as tips to save energy at home and work; how to leave a greener footprint digital waste.

Even though **paper consumption** has already decreased significantly according to the latest data available, staff was encouraged to limit paper consumption.

Waste management actions: In 2023, waste sorting stations were installed in DG ECHO buildings and individual paper and trash bins were withdrawn. A plogging action was carried out on 11 May with DG ECHO colleagues in the context of the EMAS spring campaign. The collection of old textile and electronic appliances for charity was organised together with DG MARE from December 2022 to mid-February 2023.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c4394af4-b7eb-11ed-8912-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

In terms of **commuting**, a vast majority of DG ECHO staff is using soft mobility or public transport to come to the office. Nevertheless, actions to further promote soft mobility were carried out, such as: Velomai challenge ; a challenge to ride from Brussels to Hallerbos during the spring season; a DG ECHO bicycle tour on 20 September.

The **digitalisation of our way of working** is consistently increasing our energy consumption. An article raising staff awareness on digital waste and sobriety was published.

Staff awareness and participation were key to reach the abovementioned objectives. In addition to the above articles shared by DG ECHO EMAS correspondent, other activities and campaigns launched by EMAS were shared on the Commission's intranet such as: the interinstitutional EMAS day, the EMAS spring campaign, less waste more action, Velomai campaign; EMAS basics training for all staff.

3.4 Examples of economy and efficiency

To test new ways of delivering humanitarian aid - and in line with its World Humanitarian Summit/Grand Bargain commitments - DG ECHO continued drawing lessons from the **Pilot Programmatic Partnerships** with international NGOs, UN agencies and other International Organisations launched in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The main features of the new approach are a more strategic support to shared objectives, a more efficient and effective way of delivering assistance notably through a multi-annual perspective and more predictability of funding, simplified reporting accompanied by more transparency and trust on both sides, and joint monitoring and enhanced dialogue at both field and headquarters level. The model was rolled out successfully with **12 new Programmatic Partnerships** launched in 2023.

DG ECHO continued to encourage coordination between partners to foster joint approaches, synergies and, hence, efficiency gains. This was promoted notably through statements, on behalf of the EU and/or on behalf of the EU and its Member States, during meetings of governing bodies of UN strategic partners, and through Strategic Dialogues and High-level Dialogues held annually with some of the main UN/International Organisation partners (World Food Programme, UNICEF, UNHCR, World Health Organization, International Organization for Migration, ICRC and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).