



Annual Activity Report 2020

Directorate-General European Civil Protection
and Humanitarian Aid Operations – DG ECHO

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THE DG 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 disasters and human-induced crises. Under this common overarching objective, DG ECHO works both as the EU humanitarian aid donor and as coordinator and facilitator of civil protection operations at EU level through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

The year 2020 was largely driven by COVID-19 – a global health emergency that required an unprecedented response both within and outside the European Union.

In this very challenging context, **DG ECHO provided in 2020 a concrete example of EU solidarity in action at home and around the world.**

When people were strained abroad due to flights being suspended and borders closed, the UCPM helped with the **repatriation** of over 82,000 EU citizens. When Member States were overwhelmed by the pandemic due to the scarcity of personal protective equipment and other vital medical supplies, a new **rescEU reserve for life-saving medical equipment** was set up. When our partners needed help for the delivery of essential medical and humanitarian cargo and the deployment of humanitarian and medical personnel, the **EU Humanitarian Air Bridge** operation was established. 67 flights, supporting the distribution of more than 1,150 tonnes of cargo were delivered to over 20 countries.

Despite difficult circumstances and global constraints, DG ECHO has been at the frontline of the response with a multifaceted reply, using all its tools and capacities both inside and outside the EU.

The main tools and regulatory framework

As a humanitarian donor, the EU through DG ECHO, provided needs-based humanitarian assistance based on the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, non-discrimination and independence¹. Apart from being a key donor, the EU played an important role in developing thematic policies, supporting multilateral action, and coordinating approaches with EU Member States. In response to unprecedented humanitarian needs, the **EU's final humanitarian aid budget for 2020 stands at EUR 2,138 million.**

DG ECHO manages the EU's humanitarian aid financing through individual agreements with partner organisations (NGOs, United Nations agencies, or other international organisations). The management mode applied with NGOs is direct management, and with International Organisations, including UN agencies, indirect management.

¹ In line with the Treaty (Article 214 TFEU) as well as the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid



DG ECHO has over **500 staff working in headquarters**. In addition, it has a strong presence in the field, with a network of **455 staff in 51 offices spread over 40 third countries**.

The EU's engagement in the area of civil protection is multiple. It **supports** and complements the actions taken by EU Member States in this area, with a view to improve prevention, preparedness and response to disasters, as well as to foster consistency in international civil protection work. The 2020 **budget for the UCPM was EUR 612.9 million**, starting with an initial budget of EUR 157.9 million that was subsequently increased to accommodate the response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

DG ECHO has implemented as well part of the **Emergency Support Instrument²** (ESI) of Council Regulation (EU) 2020/521 of 14 April 2020, which supports Member States in their immediate response, exit and recovery phases from the COVID-19 pandemic. DG ECHO was specifically entrusted with **EUR 220.3 million** to implement transport-related activities referred to as the 'Mobility Package': cargo transport of assistance and relief items; transfer of patients and transport of medical personnel and teams.

Finally, in 2020, DG ECHO managed for the last year the **EU Aid Volunteers initiative³** that brought together volunteers and organisations by providing support to humanitarian projects.

² The Commission adopted the proposal to re-activate the ESI on 2 April 2020. COM(2020) 175 final, which was adopted by the European Council on 14 April 2020 and the European Parliament on 17 April 2020.

³ Regulation (EU) No 375/2014

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 the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties⁴.

A. Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives

The European Union (EU) together with its Member States is the world's leading donor in humanitarian assistance, and is consistently at the forefront of the response to humanitarian crises and disasters, relying to this end on the Humanitarian Aid Regulation⁵ and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism⁶.

This year the world faced unprecedented challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Humanitarian needs were at an all-time high, driven largely by the resurgence in state-based conflicts, combined with the impact of climate change, environmental degradation, global population growth and failed governance. In 2020, the Commission delivered a strong and coordinated response in Europe and beyond, and was a key player in tackling the COVID-19 crisis globally as further detailed in section E and Part 1.

A lead and global humanitarian donor

As in previous years, in 2020 DG ECHO had to intervene in support of humanitarian organisations in the field in a wide range of crises in more than 80 countries and regions such as Syria, Turkey, Yemen, South Sudan, Venezuela, Afghanistan, the Sahel region or Ukraine. For the most part EU humanitarian funding is dedicated to addressing needs arising from protracted crises. Conflict and COVID-19 remained the main driver of humanitarian needs, while natural disasters continued to cause many people to need emergency aid. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, more than 168⁷ million people across the world needed humanitarian assistance and protection– the highest figure in decades, and more funding than ever before was required to help them.



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⁴ Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union

⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid (OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, p. 1).

⁶ Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924) as amended in March 2019.

⁷ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020

In 2020, DG ECHO continued to co-chair with Switzerland the **Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative (GHD)**⁸. It also continued to work on the implementation of the **Grand Bargain**, playing an active role as member of the Facilitation Group, not only to achieve joint progress across constituencies (humanitarian donors and partners) on the commitments, but also to help shape and steer reflections on the future of the initiative.

Work continued to mitigate **unintended impacts of counter-terrorism measures and sanctions** on principled humanitarian action. A humanitarian derogation mechanism has been included in the Human Rights Sanctions Regime⁹ while the agreed text for a standard sanctions clause for grant agreements confirms that final beneficiaries (people in need) must not be vetted. Steps were also taken to tackle banking de-risking in Syria.

Gravely concerned by the continued widespread violations of **International Humanitarian Law** (IHL) and the adverse consequences of armed conflicts for civilians and humanitarian action, DG ECHO continued to strongly advocate for compliance with IHL¹⁰. In 2020, the European Union joined the Call for Action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action ('Humanitarian Call for Action').

The **EU-UN humanitarian partnership**, covering both humanitarian aid and disaster management, remained fully embedded in the long-standing EU's support for effective multilateralism. Alongside operational co-operation in the field, DG ECHO continued supporting the UN's central coordinating role in the international response to emergencies, both human-induced and natural disasters. DG ECHO was actively engaged in the UN multilateral negotiations on the normative frameworks of the international humanitarian action, notably the annual package of humanitarian resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2020. Under DG ECHO steer, the humanitarian narrative in relation to the COVID-19 response featured prominently at UN level, including in the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly. The EU joined the Call to Action in support of humanitarian response in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹

In 2020, DG ECHO signed four **pilot Programmatic Partnerships** with four International NGO partners for a total EU contribution of EUR 37 million¹². These three-year multi-country programmes provide more predictability and flexibility to partners. The third and last year of the Grand Bargain Pilot Programme with ICRC in the Middle East ended in December 2020. This was the first Pilot Programme aiming at implementing the Grand Bargain commitments. An internal lessons learnt exercise was conducted and the final report of the action is expected end of March 2021.

DG ECHO reinforced its dialogue with main humanitarian partners, holding Strategic Dialogues with UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and WFP, including the first ever Strategic Dialogues

⁸ Unique forum for informal donor exchanges reuniting 42 donors committed to providing effective and accountable humanitarian assistance: <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/home-page.html>

⁹ Council Regulation (EU) 2020/1998 of 7 December 2020 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses (OJ L 410I, 7.12.2020, p. 1) and Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1999 of 7 December 2020 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses (OJ L 410I, 7.12.2020, p. 13).

¹⁰ DG ECHO has also continued to advocate for IHL in specific contexts, for example through the High-Level Meeting it organised in the margins of the 2020 Afghanistan Conference. IHL concerns were also raised at the occasion of the Commissioner's missions to the African Union, Ethiopia and Sudan.

¹¹ Initiated by the Chair of the 2020 Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the Economic and Social Council

¹² Targeted countries: Syria, Iraq, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, CAR, DRC, Soudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia; sectors: Education in Emergencies, Nutrition; Shelter and settlements and coordination.

EU-ICRC, EU-IFRC as well as the first ever Joint Dialogue EU-ICRC-IFRC. DG ECHO also represented the EU at governing bodies of WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR and prepared and coordinated related statements (several on behalf of the EU or the EU and Member States).

In response to the United Nations Military & Civil Defence Assets request (of May 2020) for logistic support to the UN Global Response Plan for COVID-19, DG ECHO activated the internal EU **Civil-Military Coordination** arrangements, requesting military support. The offer of an Italian military C130 plane to the UN has shown EU's readiness.

DG ECHO continued its efforts to address **forced displacement**, including in situations of protracted displacement, by strengthening self-reliance, fostering a nexus approach to forced displacement and aiming to gradually end dependence on humanitarian assistance. Following participation at the Global Refugee Forum at the end of 2019, the EU demonstrated through its policies and programmes its continued engagement to refugee responses globally throughout 2020 notably in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring our societies are more resilient and better able to adapt

DG ECHO further streamlined its Disaster Preparedness approach in the broader global **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** agenda. All Humanitarian Implementation Plans refer to risk analysis and options and priorities for preparedness for response and anticipatory action. Mainstreaming of disaster preparedness in humanitarian assistance is operated in the majority of grants.

DG ECHO is also committed to contribute to investing in disaster risk reduction across Commission services, and is the coordinating DG on the EC's commitment to the Sendai Framework for DRR, as well as promoting its implementation within UCPM States, within its humanitarian aid budget and the humanitarian development nexus work. To that end, DG ECHO elaborated a joint work programme with UNDRR for 2020-2021.

In 2020, DG ECHO published the third edition of the Staff Working Document on the "Overview of risks that the Union may face", drawing on the national risk assessments developed by the EU Member States and on the Commission's cross-sectoral policy and scientific work. Furthermore, it continued to ensure coherence on investments for DRR by following the proposals made under the various EU funds (Cohesion policy funding, Common Agricultural Policy funding, Technical Support Instrument, Recovery and Resilience Facility or Solidarity fund among others).

In 2020, DG ECHO elaborated an approach to reducing the **environmental footprint** of humanitarian assistance. A note outlined DG ECHO's ambitious phased approach to align to the European Green Deal principles of climate neutrality, climate resilience, circular economy, zero pollution and biodiversity protection, and address all dimensions of the humanitarian principle of 'do no harm'.

Responding in times of crisis

In 2020, DG ECHO mainly supported Member States most heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through the delivery of personal protective equipment under the framework of the **rescEU stockpiling**. DG ECHO facilitated transport of medical teams and cargo transport of medical equipment and relief items from third countries into the EU and within the EU, as well as transfer of patients within Europe and to neighbouring countries. The

main challenge remained to ensure fast delivery by appropriately allocating human resources and setting up new structures. It was paramount to ensure complementarity between the UCPM, including rescEU, and the recently re-activated Emergency Support Instrument.

As to the external response, the European Commission has mobilized support swiftly to respond in a coordinated manner, applying a Team Europe approach. The preparedness and response to humanitarian needs resulting from the pandemic is an important element of the external dimension of the EU's support.

The UCPM was activated 102 times during 2020 for a variety of natural and human-induced disasters with 45 requests for assistance from within Europe, 55 requests from non-EU Participating States and 2 from international organisations. 58 requests for in-kind assistance (personal protective or medical equipment, diagnostic tests, medicines and medical teams) and 27 requests for consular assistance were related to COVID-19.

Despite this unprecedented amount of requests and the overall difficult context, the UCPM and the ERCC managed to deliver. Approximately 3/4 of the 102 requests for assistance to the UCPM in 2020 were fully or at least partially answered.

Even with resource constraints and competing demands on a global scale in response to the pandemic, the UCPM facilitated the delivery of over 18 million items of critical personal protective and medical equipment in 2020, including over 3 million items from the rescEU stockpiles. Further 100,313 passengers were repatriated to Europe on 408 flights organised under the UCPM at the outset of the COVID-19 crisis.

Intra-EU solidarity prevailed, with 100% response rate to the 45 requests from EU Member States and UCPM Participating States for UCPM support to consular, medical and other emergencies (e.g. earthquakes, flooding, or hurricanes). Supporting the closest partner countries, assistance was delivered to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan.



The **ERCC** also supported international partners, including the WHO with 17 MEDEVAC requests and the deployment of emergency medical teams to Armenia and Azerbaijan, as

well as UNOCHA and WFP. The ERCC facilitated the transport of partners' humanitarian cargo on UCPM-financed flights and supported first responders on 73 occasions with high-resolution maps to enhance their situational awareness (445 maps produced via Copernicus).

While COVID-related requests constituted the main share of all activations, the ERCC and the UCPM also responded to 17 non-COVID related emergencies, following an unusually intense hurricane season in the Americas, migratory pressures in Greece, Serbia and Sudan, flooding in Niger and Sudan, and earthquakes in Croatia. 16 UCPM experts (including 7 Liaison Officers) and 14 EU emergency response teams were deployed in response to emergencies in 2020, including 6 emergency medical teams in response to COVID-19 and 6 search and rescue teams, a CBRN and a TAST team in response to the explosions in Beirut. Commissioner Lenarčič visited Croatia shortly after the earthquake in December 2020 to assess the damage and show the EU's solidarity with the Croatian people.

By the end of 2020, the **European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP)** comprised 75 response capacities offered by 22 Member and Participating States. They are available for immediate deployment under the UCPM. Additionally, 34 candidate ECPP capacities are set to be registered in the ECPP in the near future, mostly after they are certified. The capacities committed in 2020 have enhanced the preparedness for emergency response, improved geographic spread and expanded the number of medical, fire and CBRN-related capacities offered to the Pool, amongst others. Moreover, in 2020, Turkey has become the second Participating State that committed capacities to the ECPP (namely one Medium Urban Search and Rescue module and two Heavy Urban Search and Rescue modules, all INSARAG-classified). Due to COVID-19, only 2 capacities finalised the EU certification process in 2020. Eleven new adaptation grants, for a total amount of nearly EUR 4.8 million, were awarded to 7 Member States for the upgrade of national capacities to allow for their international deployment and increase preparedness and strengthen the EU response in case of health emergencies, forest fires, CBRN incidents and flooding. These capacities are Emergency Medical Teams (3), CBRN Detection and Sampling modules (2), Ground Forest Fire Fighting modules (4), one High Capacity Pumping module and one Technical Assistance and Support Team.

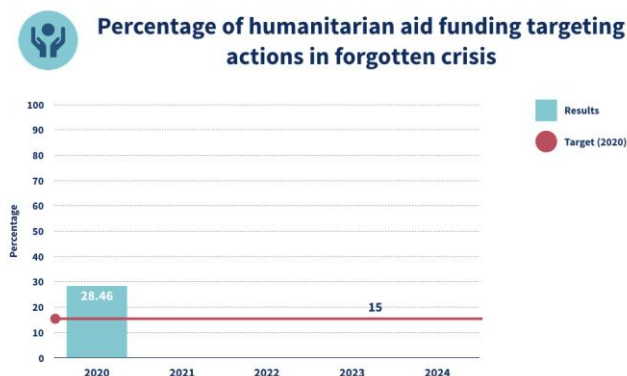
In 2020, DG ECHO, based on its **evaluation programme**, finalised the "[Combined Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Interventions in Iraq and in the Protection Sector \(2014-2018\)](#)", and the "[Evaluation of the European Union's humanitarian assistance in Ukraine \(2014-2018\)](#)".

B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

1. Percentage of projects that can be monitored on-site - 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



2. Percentage of humanitarian aid funding targeting actions in forgotten crisis - 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 Union Civil Protection Mechanism to a request of assistance - 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 duration between the moment a request for assistance has been received in the Emergency Response Coordination Centre and the reception by the Commission of the first offer of assistance in CECIS from Member States and Participating States. Civil protection being only a supportive competence, the Union can support and coordinate the Member and Participating States' action in civil protection, but it is up to these States to offer assistance. There are no cases where assistance was not delivered or was delayed due to a failure of the UCPM.

In 2020, the response time related to non COVID-19 activations was in line with former years. When it comes to assistance between Member States, the response time has even improved. For COVID-19 related activations that amounted to over 2/3 of the total activations in 2020, the general scarcity of medical assets and simultaneous important needs of all Member States and Participating States (and countries across the world) has made the quick provision of COVID-related assistance; more difficult and has in turn negatively impacted the response time of participating countries to requests under the UCPM.

	Non-Covid		Covid		Total	
Indicator	Inside Europe	Outside Europe	Inside Europe	Outside Europe	Inside Europe	Outside Europe
Response time	7 hours	150 hours	260 hours	966 hours	182 hours	613 hours

4. Adequacy of response of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism - 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 fully fulfilled with the voluntary offers for assistance made by Member States and Participating States.

2020 was an exceptional year with a sharp increase in requests for assistance under the UCPM – 102 activations in comparison to 20 in 2019. The pandemic and national crises in EU Member States and in Participating States had an impact on the ability of said States to respond to all requests for assistance under the UCPM.

As regards COVID-related activations, the exceptional circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and relating global supply chain shortages of personal protective equipment and intensive care equipment across the world resulted in a simultaneous high demand and extremely limited capacity to make corresponding offers, impacting heavily the response and leading to a low fulfilment rates inside and outside Europe.

Nevertheless, given the unusually large quantities of in-kind items requested in 2020, UCPM response was substantial. It facilitated the delivery of millions of PPE items and medical countermeasures, in particular to EU Member States and Participating States. This was mainly made possible by the urgent establishment in March of the rescEU stockpile, an EU safety net stockpile of Covid-19 countermeasures. 3.8 million of PPE items (e.g. 2 million masks, 1.4 million gloves etc.) and ventilators have been mobilised from the rescEU stockpile so far. The stockpile continues to grow and has allowed for regular deployments in response to open and constantly updated and renewed requests for assistance.

For what regards the non-related COVID-19 activations, response has been much higher when it comes to assistance offered among EU Member States and Participating States – 82% of the requested items were delivered, a positive evolution to achieve the 90% target, especially considering the response inside Europe was of 66% in 2019. For activations from third countries, an overall fulfilment rate of 9% of items requested was achieved for the 14 activations. These third country requests called for in-kind assistance in the scale of millions, as well as for modules and expertise. A large part of the requests were submitted tough at a time when Member States and Participating States were facings severe emergency situations at domestic level. Nevertheless, the UCPM facilitated the response to all those requests to which Member States and Participating States could respond to at the time; almost all requests were at least partially met. In particular the response to the emergency in Lebanon, following the explosion in the Beirut port, was spearheaded by the EU, whereby the UCPM facilitated the swift deployment of 300 emergency management

professionals and of the assistance provided by 20 EU Member States and Participating States.

Indicator	Non-Covid		Covid		Total	
	Inside Europe	Outside Europe	Inside Europe	Outside Europe	Inside Europe	Outside Europe
Adequacy of response	82%	9%	16%	1%	17%	1%

C. Key conclusions on Financial management and Internal control (executive summary of section 2.1)

In accordance with the governance arrangements of the European Commission, (the staff of) DG ECHO conducts its operations in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, working in an open and transparent manner and meeting the expected high level of professional and ethical standards.

To ensure the achievement of policy and management objectives, the Commission has adopted a set of internal control principles, based on international good practice. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used to implement the budget be set up in accordance with these principles. DG ECHO has assessed its internal control systems 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 called for as minor deficiencies were identified. Please refer to Section 2.1.3 for further details.

In addition, DG ECHO has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, including those for supervising 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 determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1 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; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director General, in the capacity of 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 the DG and the Commissioner on management matters, the main elements of this report and the assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of Commissioner Lenarčič, responsible for Crisis Management.

E. Specific actions on COVID-19

In 2020, Europe was strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission has proposed a strong and coordinated response to the health crisis as well as to the impact on Europe's economy and society. COVID-19 has also posed challenges as regards performance, control, audit and assurance in relation to the 2020 EU budget. In an exercise coordinated at corporate level, all Commission services have promoted the consistent and rigorous protection of the EU budget ensuring that appropriate mitigating measures were put in place. Team Europe has mobilised almost EUR 38.5 billion so far, with an EU contribution of EUR 14.1 billion. In total, **DG ECHO humanitarian** response to needs resulting from **the pandemic amounted to EUR 450 million.**



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As expected, the direct and indirect consequences (e.g. food insecurity) of the COVID-19 pandemic were most acutely felt by populations already affected by humanitarian crises: refugees, IDPs, people living in conflict zones and/or in areas devastated by climate change.

The European Commission¹³ immediately provided additional humanitarian funding of EUR 80 million to increase the emergency response and preparedness to the pandemic in particular in countries where healthcare systems are weak or at risk of being rapidly overwhelmed in case of epidemic outbreak.¹⁴

In addition, to allow Member States and humanitarian partners to transport humanitarian staff and supplies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to maintain the flow of humanitarian assistance and personnel hampered by the pandemic, DG ECHO put in place the **EU Humanitarian Air Bridge** offering air transport to and from various destinations worldwide. The EU HAB operations focused on the most critical areas where humanitarian emergencies are the most difficult to access – in Africa as a priority, but also in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Flights supported Afghanistan, the African Union, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Nigeria, Peru, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Venezuela and Yemen. The EU HAB addressed an unprecedented situation created by the international health crisis, and it was a concrete example on how the EU was able to adapt to respond to the new challenges that our world is facing.

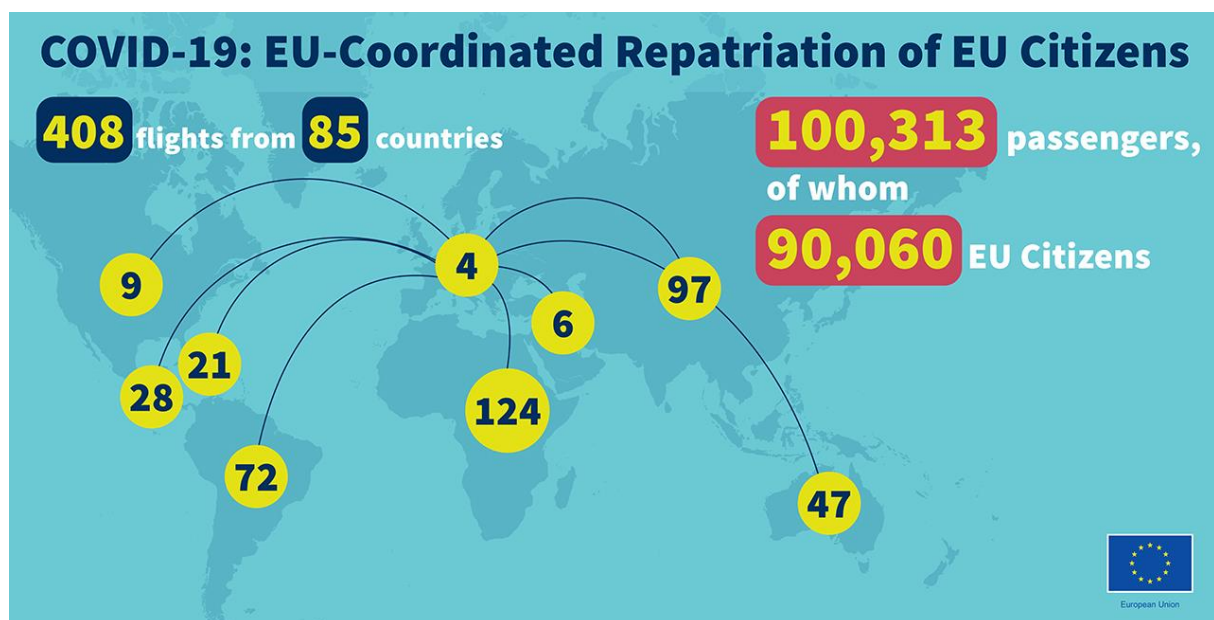
¹³ In response to the World Health Organisation's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan

¹⁴ Out of which EUR 40 million helped scaling up the response to existing and large-scale crises in sectors immediately relevant to the COVID-19 (such as health, water/sanitation/hygiene and logistics). Out of the remaining EUR 10 million, EUR 5.5 million were loosely geographically earmarked in order to provide sufficient flexibility to follow the pandemic trends and EUR 4.5 million were allocated to support WFP for the common services/logistics activities.

In their efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, many governments took measures limiting internal and cross-border movements, which unintentionally also hampered humanitarian operations. DG ECHO prompted a dialogue on avoiding impediments to humanitarian action in the COVID-19 context both with Member States (in the context of the Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA)) and in the context of its co-chairmanship of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.

From a **civil protection** perspective, DG ECHO has also been at the forefront of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, DG ECHO was also heavily involved in the **repatriation** efforts of EU citizens stranded around the world due to the pandemic. In 2020, the UCPM facilitated the repatriation of 100,313 passengers (including 90,060 EU citizens) to Europe on 408 flights. 19 Member States, 2 participating States and the UK have requested UCPM support through 27 activations. 44 grant agreements related to repatriation flights under UCPM amounted to EUR 68.2 million. DG ECHO has also created the first ever **stockpile of emergency medical equipment** under the rescEU reserve which included a wide range of medical equipment, such as personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves, gowns, etc.), as well as ventilators. In 2020 alone, the Commission signed a total of 11 grant agreements with 9 Member States for a total funding of EUR 385 million.



Secondly, in 2020 **58 requests** have been received for **in-kind assistance** through the UCPM for personal protective or medical equipment, diagnostic tests, medicines and medical teams. In total, the UCPM facilitated the delivery of over 18 million items of critical personal protective and medical equipment in 2020, including over 3 million items from the rescEU stockpiles.

Further, DG ECHO has been entrusted with the implementation of the **'Mobility Package'** under the Emergency Support Instrument. EUR 220 million were allocated to support transport-related activities, namely cargo transport of assistance and relief items; transfer of patients and transport of medical personnel and teams. From this amount, EUR 150 million were committed in 2020 to support Member States with the transport of cargo (medical supplies) from third countries into the EU. 48 contracts were signed with 17 Member States and the UK.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic was also widely covered by DG ECHO's external communication actions. Various press events were held – to the extent possible – in Brussels, as well as elsewhere in Europe and worldwide. In particular the departures and arrivals of the Humanitarian Air Bridge flights and deployments of rescEU assistance triggered a lot of media attention, often communicated jointly with partnering Member States or EU-funded humanitarian organisations. In addition to this, tangible stories of COVID-19 actions were regularly shown on DG ECHO's and the Commission's corporate social media channels, as well as through paid media advertising.

1. Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives¹⁵

As outlined in DG ECHO Strategic Plan 2020-2024, the fulfilment of this mandate directly supports the achievement of **three political priorities** of the Commission's President von der Leyen: 1) A stronger Europe in the world; 2) A European Green Deal; 3) Promoting our European Way of life.

An underlying principle that ensures the efficient realisation of the three priorities is the coordination with other Commission services. DG ECHO attaches great importance to the **link between humanitarian aid, as a rapid response measure in crisis situations, and more medium and long-term action**. The humanitarian-development and, where relevant, -peace nexus is complex and requires timely and adequate involvement of all relevant services and instruments. This is especially relevant as humanitarian crises continue to increase in duration, number, complexity and severity, including in Europe's neighbourhood. In the area of civil protection, cross-sectoral cooperation is paramount given that crises are increasingly becoming more complex. This is not only applicable to the response phase, where time is of the essence, but also in the prevention and preparedness phases. DG ECHO ensures consistency in its activities with other Commission services, and encourages Member States to do the same at national level.



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The **UCPM** continued to be an important and effective tool to mobilise and coordinate assistance provided by Participating States to respond to crises. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is the operational heart of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

As outlined in section A, in 2020, DG ECHO was at the frontline of the **response to the COVID-19 pandemic** using tools and capacities to respond both inside and outside the EU. In the internal dimension, DG ECHO mainly supported Member States most heavily affected through the delivery of personal protective equipment under the framework of the rescEU stockpiling. The legal base for rescEU medical stockpile was adopted on 19 March¹⁶ and a first grant agreement to procure masks and ventilators was signed the same month. In 2020, the Commission signed 11 grant agreements with a total funding of EUR 385 million. The stocks will be

¹⁵ An Executive Agency uses as heading: "Implementation of the Agency's Annual Work programme - Highlights of the year".

¹⁶ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2020/414 of 19 March 2020 amending Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/570 as regards medical stockpiling rescEU capacities, *OJ L 821*, 19.3.2020, p. 1.

hosted in 9 Member States. By the end of 2020, over one million masks and more than one million other types of personal protection equipment were delivered to 6 countries.

Moreover, DG ECHO facilitated transport of 283 medical personnel and 34 patients, and allocated EUR 150 million to support Member States' cargo transport needs of medical equipment and relief items from third countries into the EU and within the EU via the Emergency Support Instrument."

As to the external response, the European Commission has mobilised support swiftly to respond in a coordinated manner, applying a Team Europe approach. The preparedness and response to humanitarian needs resulting from the pandemic was an important element of the EU support.

Furthermore, to allow Member States and humanitarian partners to transport humanitarian staff and supplies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to maintain the flow of humanitarian assistance, DG ECHO has temporarily put in place the EU Humanitarian Air Bridge (HAB) offering air transport to and from various destinations world-wide. By September 2020, the EU HAB had organised 67 flights, delivered over 1,237 tons of vital medical and humanitarian equipment, and transported over 1,700 medical and humanitarian staff and other passengers.

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

DG ECHO's work contributed significantly to the Union's global leadership. In 2020, DG ECHO continued providing relief and support to the most vulnerable people suffering from conflicts and disasters across the world, through the mobilisation of both humanitarian aid and European civil protection assistance.

In line with President von der Leyen's priority to champion multilateralism and a rules-based global order through a more active role and stronger voice for the EU in the world, DG ECHO continued to contribute actively to shaping humanitarian advocacy and policy development at the European and global levels.

This was done notably through EU leadership and engagement in the negotiations on the normative frameworks for humanitarian action at UN level, cooperation (at both country and HQ level) with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and with operational UN agencies, representation in the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and high-level humanitarian events in the margins of the UN General Assembly Ministerial Week.



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As a major donor and policy maker in the humanitarian domain, DG ECHO remained tangibly engaged in different donor groups, including the OCHA Donor Support Group, the Donor Support Group of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative that is co-chaired by DG ECHO and Switzerland

until mid-2021. A major achievement of the GHD co-chairmanship was to elevate the ambition of donors' exchanges by focusing on four key strategic priorities while taking into account the new challenges deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic: reconciling counter-terrorism measures and humanitarian aid; promoting and ensuring respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL); innovative humanitarian financing as well as assessing opportunities and challenges of the UN Development System (UNDS) reform for humanitarian response on the ground. This was also done via increased interactions with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and its Principles. To further increase the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian aid actions, DG ECHO continued to contribute to the work of the relevant work streams aiming at addressing the Grand Bargain commitments. In April 2020, DG ECHO chaired the Facilitation Group of the Grand Bargain. DG ECHO maintained its steer in terms of reduced earmarking and longer term programming while confirming its support to coordinated needs assessments and joint analysis, a prerequisite to prioritise needs and put people at the centre of the response.

The Union Civil Protection Mechanism, with its EU Member States and currently 6 non-EU Participating States, includes a strong external dimension in the area of disaster prevention, preparedness and response. This dimension materialised in 2020 in high level political and policy dialogue through the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Eastern Partnership, in starting outreaching informally to potential new Participating States, in emergency aid via rapid deployments of in-kind assistance, modules and expertise to requesting third countries, programmatic support to Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood countries (PPRD South and East).

Given the geographical proximity and shared risk landscape, enlargement partners and countries under the European Neighbourhood Policy have continued to be a key priority in 2020. Political dialogue in the Southern Neighbourhood delivered on further reflection aiming at developing an action plan for strengthened Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on prevention campaigns, emergency response and crisis management. Two new regional programmes were successfully launched on prevention, preparedness and response in countries under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) countries, as well as with the Eastern Partnership countries (PPRD EAST III), aiming at bringing these countries closer to the UCPM.

DG ECHO was at the forefront of the response in the aftermath of natural and human-induced disasters. One of the examples of the complementarity of the Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid instruments was the response to a massive explosion on 4 August that occurred in the port of the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and sent an enormous blast wave across the city. The UCPM was



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activated by the Lebanese authorities shortly after for emergency support in the area of search and rescue, personal protective equipment for first responders and chemical incidents, firefighting support, emergency medical care, and food items. The request for assistance was regularly updated by the Lebanese government. In the course of only a few

hours, the ERCC deployed an EU Civil Protection Team to Beirut and coordinated the deployment of six search and rescue teams, one CBRN team and one medical team. Overall, the UCPM coordinated the deployment of more than 300 personnel from the EU. Moreover, the ERCC facilitated the delivery of in-kind assistance from more than 15 Member States and Participating States to the UCPM.

In addition, DG ECHO contracted EUR 200 000 to IFRC via Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), mobilised EUR 2 million from the Acute Large Emergency Response Tool (ALERT), and proposed a further top-up of EUR 30 million, approved by the budgetary authority in September 2020.

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

DG ECHO continued to prioritise an integrated multi-sectoral or cross-sectoral approach to programming that aims to respond to the basic needs of affected populations, with a focus on the most vulnerable.

Aid effectiveness and result-oriented actions remained priority. In 2020, concrete deliveries on a variety of commitments of the Grand Bargain, such as more predictable and flexible funding, joint needs assessments and simplification of reporting, were delivered.

As part of its aid effectiveness and efficiency agenda, DG ECHO continued to support the development of innovative solutions, approaches and financial models, in cooperation with a wide range of actors, including financial institutions, the private sector and the scientific community. DG ECHO kept using the latest scientific expertise and tools to anticipate and prepare as much as possible for natural disasters in vulnerable areas and affected countries and continued offering situational awareness analyses and scientific reports to the humanitarian aid community.

Thematic policy priorities

Education in Emergencies

Children make up more than half of the people affected by humanitarian crises and many of them miss out on education: half of the world's out-of-school children live in crisis-affected contexts. COVID-19 has triggered school closures world-wide and exacerbated negative trends in education in humanitarian settings, depriving the most vulnerable children of learning opportunities and protection. More than 1 billion children are at risk of falling behind in education due to COVID-19. Yet, education is crucial to rebuild their lives, restore their sense of normality



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and safety, and provide them with important life skills. Therefore, DG ECHO supports Education in Emergencies (EiE) actions across the world to restore and maintain access to safe, quality and inclusive education during humanitarian crises, and to support out-of-school children to quickly enter or return to quality learning opportunities.

DG ECHO provides EiE funding based on principles outlined in the Commission Staff Working Document on Education in Emergencies in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations¹⁷, working towards the four key EiE objectives focused on access, quality, protection and capacity development. In 2020, the Commission again allocated 10% of its initial humanitarian aid budget to education in emergencies.¹⁸ This funding amounted to EUR 109 million, benefiting over 1.8 million beneficiaries, securing access to safe and quality education for girls and boys in the most vulnerable situations.

Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

DG ECHO has a zero tolerance policy towards any type of misconduct of our staff or partners, and in particular for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment DG ECHO is determined to maintain the highest standards of integrity and work ethics among its staff and across all areas of activity and committed to the prevention and fight any type of misconduct. In 2020, DG ECHO continued supporting the work to harmonise and align standards, requirements, reporting mechanisms, etc. following EU endorsement of the “Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector” in October 2018, and the ‘DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance’ adopted in July 2019.

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie_in_humanitarian_assistance.pdf

¹⁸ In line with the funding commitment put forward in the Commission’s Communication¹⁸ on Education in Emergencies and Crises (COM(2018)304 of May 2018).

Cash as the default delivery modality

In line with the Grand Bargain commitments, DG ECHO is encouraging the use of cash transfers whenever appropriate. Cash transfers provide affected populations with choice, flexibility and more control over their own lives. In order to strengthen transparency and accountability towards beneficiaries and taxpayers, DG ECHO continued to apply, wherever the context allows, the Guidance Note on the Delivery of Large-Scale Cash Transfers¹⁹. In 2020, the Guidance Note has been revised to reflect the experience gained in its implementation and is being finalised. The revision of the Thematic Policy on cash and vouchers (2013) was initiated at the end of 2020. In 2020, DG ECHO continued to actively contribute to the Donor Cash Forum²⁰.

Other thematic policies

DG ECHO's **health assistance** remains a core sector of humanitarian aid interventions and health can be seen as a proxy indicator of the overall performance of humanitarian aid. The overriding objective is to limit excess preventable mortality, permanent disability, and disease associated with humanitarian crises. DG ECHO will continue to fund needs-based, high-quality and context-specific health services to people affected by crises, in accordance with General Health Guidelines and the technical annexes. The comparative advantage of DG ECHO - proximity to the contexts through its field network of health experts - allows a constant and up-to-date analysis of current and forecasted needs. The timely provision of healthcare assistance is supported by the stockpiling for medical emergencies developed under the UCPM/rescEU. This mechanism also has an international dimension, as it could be deployed in third countries under certain conditions following an official request of assistance.



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In 2020, DG ECHO was elected to be a member of the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) of the Global Health Cluster (GHC) led by WHO, with a two-year mandate. This engagement allowed DG ECHO to closely follow the implementation of the GHC Strategic work plan 2020-2023, to participate in discussion around better coordination mechanisms in humanitarian response, and to collate up-to-date information from field organisations about challenges and good practices related to health operations.

With regards to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), WHO invited DG ECHO to join the IASC MHPSS Reference Group as observer. This provides DG ECHO with relevant insights about how MHPSS can be best addressed in emergencies, and how to ensure proper response to the needs before, during and after a crisis.

The quality assurance (QA) of medicines and medical devices has been discussed throughout 2020, aiming at filling the gaps in the current DG ECHO QA system and take

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/guidance_note_cash_23_11_2017.pdf

²⁰ Created in the first half of 2019 with like-minded donors

pragmatic steps towards a mechanism which provides enough proof of quality for medicines purchased locally through ECHO funding.

Since February 2020, the field network of health experts has produced a weekly intelligence report on COVID-19. Their technical expertise helped assess several appeals by UN Agencies and NGOs in response to COVID-19. DG ECHO has been actively involved in the Inter-Service Group on Global Health, chaired by DG SANTE, together with other Commission DGs, to contribute to global health discussions.

As one of the largest donors in **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)**, DG ECHO has contributed significantly to improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene services for people affected by humanitarian crises. Systematic quality control and respect of the international quality standards as well as systematic performance monitoring are core



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aspects of DG ECHO's WASH policy. In 2020, DG ECHO continued to encourage all humanitarian WASH actions funded to be risk-informed, and required from its partners that all the WASH interventions incorporate the environmental concerns aiming at reducing the environmental footprint of their actions.

DG ECHO's humanitarian **food and nutrition assistance** continues to represent about one third of the EU's annual humanitarian aid

budget, making the EU one of the world's major donors in this sector. DG ECHO in 2020 continued to support funding for and coordination of nutrition in emergencies, as well as the development and use of tools and innovative approaches in programming. The multi-sectoral approach to address Severe and Moderate Acute Malnutrition, and strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and development approaches was also further promoted.

In 2020, due to the compounded effects of aggravated conflicts, COVID-19 and its impact, and the locust upsurge in East Africa. DG ECHO maintained its engagement to ensure food and nutrition security by allocating EUR 491 million to provide food, livelihoods and nutrition assistance, largely exceeding the commitment of EUR 350 million made at the Food Assistance Convention. As an active member of the Global Network against Food Crises, DG ECHO contributed to the activities organised, including two high-level events where Commissioner Lenarčič participated. DG ECHO contributed with other Commission services to the preparations for the UN Food Systems Summit that will take place in 2021.

DG ECHO's approach to **shelter and settlement (S&S)** acknowledges the increased needs for humanitarian shelter and settlement interventions and their importance for efficient and effective post-disaster responses and anticipatory actions. Promoting locally appropriate shelter solutions as well as delivering S&S services in urban contexts, reinforcing local capacity and ownership and recognising the environmental element of any S&S humanitarian action in 2020 continued to be the most important elements of DG ECHO interventions in this area.



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In 2020, DG ECHO continued to mainstream **gender and age considerations** across all humanitarian sectors of action. On 5 March 2020, the European Commission Communication “A Union of Equality: Gender Equality 2020-2025” was published and the new EU Gender Action Plan III 2021-2025, which includes humanitarian aspects, was adopted in November 2020. Furthermore, the EU remained an active member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based

Violence in Emergencies initiative. In operational terms, DG ECHO in 2020 continued supporting prevention and response to sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) through targeted actions.

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by natural and human-induced disasters. They also face multiple barriers in accessing humanitarian services, such as water, shelter or food and may have specific protection needs. In 2020, DG ECHO worked on the implementation of the Operational Guidance on the **Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities** in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations.



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By providing assistance tailored to the specific needs of women, children, people with disabilities, older persons, or other groups, DG ECHO also contributes to ‘equality for all, and equality in all its senses’ which is a key overall policy priority of this Commission.

EU Aid Volunteers

This initiative brings together volunteers and organisations from different countries, providing practical support to humanitarian aid projects and contributing to strengthening the local capacity, resilience and disaster risk management of fragile or disaster -affected communities. The EU Aid Volunteers initiative - whose management is entrusted to the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)²¹ - was considerably impacted by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken by Member States (i.e. border closings; quarantine). The training of candidate volunteers which is mandatory before any volunteer can be deployed, had to be put on hold in March 2020. An attempt to resume face-to-face trainings in October 2020 was unsuccessful due to the closing of hotels and the interdiction of gatherings so that two scheduled trainings had to be cancelled at short notice.

²¹ For the programming period 2014-2020, DG ECHO was, together with DG EAC (lead DG), DG CNECT and DG JUST, one of the parent DGs of EACEA as it had entrusted the Agency with the management of the EU Aid Volunteers programme. DG ECHO took part in the Steering Committee of the Agency and had a supervisory role, which was defined in several legal documents and guidance (the EC Delegation Act to EACEA, the Memorandum of Understanding between the DGs and the Agency, the EC Guidelines on Executive Agencies, etc.). In 2020, DG ECHO took part in the work of the Steering Committee and in numerous bilateral coordination meetings at different level. DG ECHO also continued regular participation in evaluation committees for certification of organisations implementing the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, applications for grants for deployment of volunteers, as well as for tenders for training of EU Aid Volunteers.

Deployment of successfully trained EU Aid Volunteers continued throughout the year but on a limited scale due to the unavailability of trained candidates and travel restrictions across the World. About half of the already deployed volunteers had to be repatriated and were allowed to continue to support the work of their hosting organisations remotely.

An ex post evaluation covering the seven-year financial period of implementation was launched in 2020 and will be finalised at the beginning of 2021. Finally, DG ECHO supported the integration of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative into the European Solidarity Corps from 2021.

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

Over the last decade, violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) have become the rule rather than the exception. Systematic violations of IHL have been consistently on the rise and constitute one of the most critical challenges for the protection of civilians, and heavily impact the EU's efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of affected populations.

IHL compliance continues to be further challenged by new realities on the ground, such as the increasing prevalence of urban warfare, the multiplicity of non-state armed actors who are not aware of - or do not feel bound by - IHL, the reluctance of certain states to ensure accountability for IHL violations, the adoption of counter-terrorism measures that are not in line with IHL and have adverse consequences on humanitarian space and the use of new technologies of warfare.

In 2020, Commissioner Lenarčič and DG ECHO carried out systematic public advocacy through inter alia public statements, interventions in multilateral fora, championing advocacy on specific issues such as the protection against attacks of humanitarian workers, medical workers and facilities, or schools. DG ECHO continued to support engagement at multilateral level aimed at identifying practical solutions and recommendations for the international community towards the safety and security of humanitarian and medical workers.

DG ECHO in 2020 continued its advocacy work to ensure that counter-terrorism measures and sanctions regimes comply with IHL.

In 2020, DG ECHO continued to make protection a priority in its humanitarian assistance, in line with the provisions of the Staff Working Document 'Humanitarian Protection: Improving protection outcomes to reduce risks for people in humanitarian crises'²².

Specific objective 3: The EU remains a global humanitarian donor by providing an 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 and aims to ensure availability of funding for as many crisis situations as possible and that there is a swift, efficient, comprehensive response.

²² https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/policy_guidelines_humanitarian_protection_en.pdf

Providing rapid and flexible assistance both in the major crises and in so-called "forgotten crises" has become a hallmark of the EU's profile as a donor. DG ECHO will continue to put particular emphasis on responding to "forgotten crises" by addressing needs in areas that were of difficult access, and by providing a rapid response in areas or sectors underfunded by other donors in 2020.

Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and cross-cutting issues

Given the protracted nature of the majority of humanitarian crises, there is a strong consensus among the international actors to improve and strengthen the link between humanitarian and development aid, and where relevant, peace actions.

Without compromising the humanitarian principles, DG ECHO continued to contribute to longer-term strategies to build the capacities and resilience of the most vulnerable and address underlying reasons for their vulnerability.

DG ECHO further supported the development of the EU's new way of working to shift the work culture towards more systematic and up-front coordination between the humanitarian, development and peace actors in headquarters and on the ground, in full compliance with their respective mandates and roles. In this regard, DG ECHO further fostered dialogue and cooperation with other Commission services, notably DG INTPA, DG NEAR and FPI, as well, as the EEAS. DG ECHO was closely associated in developing programming guidelines of the Neighbourhood, Cooperation and International Development Instrument (NDICI) under the new Multiannual Financial Framework, and also engaged in closer consultation with other services regarding the humanitarian implementation plans, to further systematise a nexus approach across all situations of fragility and conflict-affected countries.

In cooperation with other services, DG ECHO continued to work further on clarifying and operationalising the concept of 'peace' in the triple (humanitarian-development-peace) nexus, and developed an internal guidance in this regard.

DG ECHO has strengthened its efforts to raise awareness on the situation of vulnerable Internally Displaced People (IDP) in particular and followed closely developments regarding the High level Panel on Internal Displacement, established in February 2020 also thanks to EU advocacy efforts.

In 2020, DG ECHO led the development of policy work, together with DG INTPA, in the area of displacement and migration relating to disasters and the effects of climate change. Both DGs conducted a series of virtual consultations with key stakeholders who submitted key recommendations about the role the EU can play at international level. Following negotiations in 2020, the EU accepted to join the Chairmanship of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) in 2022, which will strengthen its existing engagement in global and

multilateral fora in climate policy and Disaster Risk Reduction.



Another cross-cutting issue is social protection. Scaling up social protection systems has been identified as one of the core avenues to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations, provide more durable solutions and

enable quick and efficient humanitarian assistance in response to sudden-onset disasters. While building national social protection systems has traditionally fallen under the remit of development, the humanitarian community can play an important role in complementing these efforts in supporting the creation of shock-responsive social protection systems and safety nets for the most vulnerable. Social protection is furthermore increasingly considered as an entry and exit point for cash transfers, laying the basis for more durable solutions. In 2018-19, Commission services (DGs ECHO, DG INTPA (then DG DEVCO) and DG NEAR), developed a Guidance Package on Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus (SPaN)²³. In line with the Guidance, DG ECHO continued to engage with development actors to support the development of the shock responsive social protection systems whenever feasible.

In 2020, DG ECHO continued to engage in the global debate around **innovative finance and private sector engagement**, notably through leading the work of the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Humanitarian Resilience Investing Initiative on improving the organisational readiness of private sector and humanitarian organisations to work together. As part of this work, DG ECHO led the way in assessing its own organisational readiness, which highlighted that DG ECHO can explore the piloting of an innovative instrument involving private sector capital within its existing financial and legal framework in 2021. DG ECHO also continued its support to **humanitarian innovation, together with RTD through** the European Innovation Council Horizon 2020 Prize for 'Affordable High-Tech for Humanitarian Aid'. This prize awarded 5 humanitarian innovators with a prize of one million euros to support the scaling of their innovations amongst the humanitarian community.

Examples of Humanitarian Crises to which DG ECHO responded in 2020:

COVID-19 response in external action

The direct and indirect consequences (e.g. food insecurity) of COVID-19 were most acutely felt by populations already affected by humanitarian crises: refugees, IDPs, people living in conflict zones and/or in areas devastated by climate change – and amongst them, women, children, elderly and disabled people are disproportionately vulnerable to its effects.



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In response to the World Health Organisation's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, the European Commission immediately provided additional humanitarian funding of EUR 30 million to increase the emergency response and preparedness to the pandemic in particular in countries where healthcare systems are weak and at risk of being rapidly overwhelmed in case of epidemic outbreak.

In May 2020, an additional EUR 50 million were made available from the Emergency Aid Reserve (EAR) to further support the growing COVID-19-related needs identified in the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP)

²³ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/file/102971/download?token=tqIqAy1s>

and the appeal of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It helped scaling up the response to existing and large-scale crises in sectors immediately relevant to the COVID-19 (such as health, water/sanitation/hygiene and logistics). It supported vulnerable people in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, North-West Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Palestine and Venezuela. It also helped countries/crises not covered by this specific allocation for existing humanitarian crises. It also contributed to support the World Food Programme for the common services/logistics activities.

Additionally, to allow Member States and humanitarian partners to transport humanitarian staff and supplies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to maintain the flow of humanitarian assistance, hampered by the pandemic, DG ECHO has put in place the EU Humanitarian Air Bridge offering air transport to and from various destinations world-wide.

In parallel, DG ECHO analysed all ongoing and planned actions so as to factor in together with partners the COVID-19 situation and needs. DG ECHO has promptly equipped partners in the field with operational guidance on adaptation of programmes to ensure continued provision of other lifesaving health services, to the extent possible. Whenever possible projects were adapted contributing to the COVID-19 response in the most vulnerable settings. Adaptation did, however, not mean jeopardizing the overall humanitarian response to the needs originally identified for 2020. Apart from adapting the humanitarian response to COVID-19 where possible, DG ECHO has also been pursuing actively a joint up approach with other Commission services, notably DG INTPA and DG NEAR so as to provide a comprehensive response.

In total, DG ECHO humanitarian response to needs resulting from the pandemic amounted to EUR 449 million.

With the progressive authorisation of vaccines by the European Commission following evaluation by the European Medicines Agency, discussions on possible vaccine donations to third countries have been launched at EU level. By the end of 2020, working-level discussion among relevant European Commission Services and with EU Member States took place to explore Member States willingness to make vaccine donations and discuss as to how donations could be coordinated and supported at EU level, in close cooperation with the COVAX facility and implementing partners.

The Syria crisis

The Syria crisis, in its tenth year in 2020, continued to cause massive displacement, casualties and tremendous suffering of the civilian population, with more than 11 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country. A total of EUR 263 million was allocated by DG ECHO to support the most vulnerable impacted by this crisis, including Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. DG ECHO continued to deliver life-saving assistance and support to millions of people throughout Syria from all humanitarian hubs, including across conflict lines and international border crossings. This assistance



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contributed to the vital delivery of food, medicine, water, and shelter items for millions of Syrians directly affected and/or internally displaced by the conflict. In neighbouring Lebanon, EU humanitarian funding has contributed to cash assistance for the most vulnerable refugees, secondary healthcare for life-saving cases, non-formal education and shelter - including water, hygiene and sanitation. In Jordan, DG ECHO supported the most vulnerable refugees inter alia in the sectors of health, protection and education.

In Turkey, DG ECHO continued providing support to the largest refugee population in the world (close to 4 million, of which 3.6 million Syrians). Under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, created in 2016 to assist the country in its large-scale efforts to support refugees with funding from the EU budget and additional contributions from EU Member States, EUR 2.4 billion of humanitarian projects have been fully contracted. Next to ongoing projects funded via the Facility, the EU has allocated additional EUR 531.7 million in humanitarian funding for 2020, including EUR 485 million to ensure that the two flagship programmes Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) continue supporting the most vulnerable refugees in Turkey until early 2022. The ESSN provides monthly cash payments directly to refugees through a debit card to help meet their basic needs. By the end of 2020, the programme was supporting over 1.8 million refugees on a monthly basis. The CCTE is the biggest Education in Emergencies program. It provides cash transfers to vulnerable families to promote school enrolment and regular attendance for refugee children. By the end of 2020, the programme reached nearly 630,000 children.

DG ECHO was also directly involved in international diplomatic initiatives related to the Syrian conflict such as the Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" in Brussels in June 2020 or the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group in Geneva, organised a meeting at senior officials level on humanitarian access in Syria, and engaged in other advocacy efforts to promote the respect of humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law. In addition to coping with the impact of the Syria crisis, Lebanon was also struck by a devastating explosion on 4 August 2020 in Beirut, and DG ECHO mobilised more than EUR 30 million for emergency humanitarian needs in the immediate aftermath of the blast.

Sahel – complex crisis

In response to the complex crisis in the Sahel, in 2020, DG ECHO provided emergency humanitarian aid in seven countries of the wider Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon). The assistance has been focusing on addressing most acute needs of populations affected by armed conflicts in the region, as well as responding to food and nutrition crisis and enhancing preparedness for emergency response.

The emergency response in conflict areas included a support to Rapid Reaction Mechanisms (multi sectorial emergency aid package covering a period of 3 months) and to existing national structures to maintain access to basic services (including health or education) for the most vulnerable population. The EU humanitarian aid included as well response to protection needs of the civilian population affected by armed conflicts; support to access hard to reach areas (Humanitarian Air Services, humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination, security management).

In addition and as a response to the food and nutrition crisis, the European Commission provided food assistance to most vulnerable people during the lean season and nutrition treatment for the children who were suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition and were in need of life-saving treatment. While addressing immediate humanitarian needs, the Commission was working actively on implementing the humanitarian-development nexus in order to build the resilience of the affected population, reduce humanitarian needs and to address the root causes of food insecurity and acute undernutrition. Inter alia, in October 2020, the EU together with Denmark, Germany and the UN organised a donor conference with the objective to mobilise funding resources for 2020/2021 and galvanise political support for principled humanitarian action, unimpeded humanitarian access, strengthened protection of civilians, respect for international humanitarian law, and effective humanitarian civil-military coordination. The initiative supported strengthened collaboration between humanitarian action, development, and peacebuilding, in a Nexus perspective, eliciting national governments' commitments towards the provision of relief assistance, basic services, and durable solutions.

In 2020, the European Commission allocated over EUR 190 million (including nearly EUR 124 million to the most vulnerable population in the G5 countries²⁴ to support interventions in the sectors of food assistance, health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, protection, coordination and logistics.

Locusts East Africa

The worst infestation of desert locust in 25 (Ethiopia, Somalia) to 70 years (Kenya) has hit the Horn of Africa since end 2019. The extended rainy season in the first half of 2020 in East Africa created conditions that favoured rapid locust reproduction. By the end of 2020, the situation remains critical with new generations of desert locust breeding in several areas in eastern Ethiopia and central Somalia, as well as the Red Sea coast. Furthermore, new swarms have formed in central Somalia, and locusts are migrating towards south-central Somalia, southern Ethiopia and north-eastern Kenya.

With over 30 million people already food insecure in the region, the desert locust upsurge represents an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

The Commission mobilised EUR 66 million already in the first half of 2020 to support the response against the plague in the greater Horn of Africa region, including EUR 41 million from humanitarian funding and EUR 25 million from development funding. Funding related to all the pillars of FAO appeal (control, surveillance, food assistance and livelihoods recovery, and coordination) and was channelled through FAO, other UN agencies and NGOs, including members of the Desert Locust alliance. The objective was, by acting early, to contribute to curbing the impact of the infestation. More specifically, the humanitarian aid funding has addressed the impact of the upsurge by pre-positioning food and providing food assistance; livelihood support (seeds and fodder distribution), support to nutrition centres and procurement of nutrition supplies, using cash transfers whenever possible.

Yemen

²⁴ Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

The world's largest humanitarian crisis has further deteriorated in 2020 as a result of escalating conflict and a protracted economic blockade that has brought the country to a deep economic crisis and its services close to collapse. The situation was compounded by natural disasters and COVID-19. The conflict in Yemen and its disproportionate economic



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consequences on civilians are driving the largest food security emergency in the world. With an alarming 24.3 million people in need of humanitarian and/or protection assistance, and over 14 million of those in acute need, Yemen is again confronted with famine-like conditions. Six years into a devastating conflict marked by gross violations of international humanitarian law, there are no indications that the fighting will end soon. More than 4 million people are internally displaced. With EUR 891.7

million since 2015, of which over 60 % provided by DG ECHO alone, the EU is one of the major contributors of humanitarian aid to Yemen. DG ECHO-funded projects address the needs of populations displaced or directly affected by the conflict as well as critical food insecurity, malnutrition and health requirements, including epidemics preparedness and response against cholera and COVID-19. Humanitarian access has been shrinking and the operating environment continues to be extremely restricted, hindering a principled delivery of aid. Furthermore, humanitarian actors have suffered a significant reduction in funding, largely due to a drastic drop of humanitarian contributions from Gulf countries. These challenges are at the core of the humanitarian advocacy work of DG ECHO, who is playing a leading role among donors. In response to the deteriorating situation, additional EUR 5 million were mobilised in December 2020, bringing the total EU humanitarian funding for Yemen to EUR 119 million.

Afghan crisis

In 2020, despite the start of the Doha peace process, Afghanistan continued to be one of the deadliest conflicts worldwide, the world's third massive food crisis and generated the world's second largest displaced and refugee population. 17 million people (almost 50% of the country's population) live in areas highly affected by conflict.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the very weak health system and already dire socio-economic situation. More than 80% Afghans live in poverty and close to 16 million were severely food insecure at the end of the year. As a consequence of hunger and conflict, the number of internally displaced people increased to over 3.4 million, with over 400 000 additional IDPs in 2020. Afghans are also among the largest refugee population with some 10 million refugees worldwide, the majority of them in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan which host respectively 3.5 and 3 million Afghans, both documented refugees and undocumented mostly in very difficult conditions. Returns from Iran remained very high in 2020, due to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in Iran and the economic downturn as an effect of US sanctions.

Despite the shrinking humanitarian space and very challenging security conditions, the Commission continues to provide life-saving assistance in Afghanistan, mainly in areas of the country which cannot be supported by other donors and government services. EUR 69

million from the EU humanitarian budget were mobilised in 2020, in order to support health care and different types of relief operations. In Iran and Pakistan, the Commission supported Afghan refugees, their host communities and the most vulnerable local population to access basic services, in particular health care and education, with a total of EUR 23 and 37.9 million respectively.

The centrality of International Humanitarian Law remains a key driving force of the Commission's humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. This was strongly reaffirmed in a side event to the international conference on Afghanistan in November 2020, which focused on "Humanitarian Assistance, International Humanitarian Law and Protection of Civilians, in the framework of the peace negotiations".

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran are also among the world's most disaster-prone countries. In 2020, heavy snowfalls, floods and flash floods affected the three countries. A total of EUR 2.38 million were mobilised from the EU emergency humanitarian aid to respond to natural disasters in the three countries.

Venezuela Crisis

In 2020, the humanitarian crisis generated by the socio-economic collapse of Venezuela continued to be one of the major crises worldwide. According to ACAPS²⁵, there are at least 14 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country. People's hardship has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 as well as by widespread violence, political polarization, legal insecurity, absence of fuel and massive electricity blackouts.

The dramatic situation has continued to trigger the biggest population movement in the recent history of the Americas. The number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in other Latin American and Caribbean countries has reached 5.5 million towards the end of 2020. These migrants were under great distress due to the impact of the pandemic over all the economies in host countries, as many of them survived on the informal markets. Some 140,000 Venezuelans have returned to their country during the pandemic, very often in extremely dire conditions. However, the migration outflow from Venezuela started again towards the end of the year.

In 2020, EUR 67, 7 million of humanitarian aid budget were mobilized for a crisis that remains severely underfunded. In addition, 82, 5 Metric tons of life-saving material were delivered to Venezuela through the Humanitarian Air Bridge.

The humanitarian space and access are under challenge and the harassment of local NGOs has been increasing. Bureaucratic difficulties and financial control over international organizations remain a concern. DG ECHO has therefore continued its efforts in terms of humanitarian diplomacy (also through the International Contact Group for Venezuela), and was on the frontline in the organization of the 2020 Pledging conference in response to the Venezuela migration and refugee crisis.

²⁵ Assessment Capacities Projects

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

The Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) continued to be as well an instrument projecting EU solidarity within the Union and beyond its borders. Since its inception, the international dimension of the UCPM has grown in importance and today over two thirds of the UCPM requests for assistance come from third countries. The assistance provided is not only in the form of capacities, but also technical and scientific expertise, notably in the form of Advisory Missions. DG ECHO continued to foster this type of cooperation to not only support third countries in the aftermath of a disaster, but also contributing to build more resilient disaster management structures. Based on the experience on the current COVID-19 pandemic, DG ECHO worked towards strengthening the current system of the UCPM, including the international cooperation aspects.

Given the geographical proximity and shared risk landscape, enlargement partners and countries under the European Neighbourhood Policy continued to be a key priority for the work of the UCPM. Further integrating the Pre-accession countries into the UCPM is essential, based on the history of mutual assistance.

After China requested assistance to the UCPM in February 2020, the UCPM lessons learnt Programme started a process to identify lessons and good practices. The lessons identified from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic call for reinforcement of strategic autonomy in transport and logistics (including options for direct procurement by the Commission as well as a strengthened and more flexible budget), which would be particularly relevant for the external aspect of UCPM.

The UCPM relies on state-of-the-art technical and scientific knowledge and tools to provide fast advice for more efficient and effective emergency response operations, DG ECHO works closely with other Commission services and EEAS as well as with agencies such as SatCen, Frontex, or ECDC to provide situational awareness and analysis products for emergency operations.

DG ECHO continued strengthening the early warning and information systems for natural disasters (e.g. droughts, floods, forest fires, tropical cyclones or severe weather)²⁶ and made extensive use of the services and information provided via the Copernicus programme for emergency management, climate change, and security, as well as the interfaces between these three areas. In addition, a kick-off of the Security Awareness Information Dashboard Project (SecAID) took place in March 2020. In this framework a study report on security data sets has been drafted in July to support the on-going inception report designing a prototype as well as the development of an ECHO-driven data model of security events.

DG ECHO continued strengthening its Geographic and Information System (GIS) capacity to keep supporting operations by means of cartographical and geospatial products.

DG ECHO's activities are also embedded in the larger EU response to crisis, e.g. through the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements and the production of 45

²⁶ GDACS: Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System; EFFIS: European Forest Fire Information System; GWIS: Global Wildfire Information System; EFAS: European Flood Awareness System; GLOFAS: Global Flood Awareness System; ED O: European Drought Observatory; GDO: Global Drought Observatory.

Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports. In this regard, DG ECHO continued acting as 24/7 entry point for IPCR, and provided coordination support to large emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to its unique infrastructure, the established network of contacts, its know-how and vast experience, the ERCC effectively acts as a central hub for cross-sectoral coordination. During an emergency, the ERCC brings together relevant stakeholders, institutions and services in regular crisis coordination meetings to facilitate emergency decision-making and coordinate actions. Moreover, the new UCPM legislative proposal²⁷ aims at furthering the ERCC's access to analytical, monitoring, information management and communication capacities as to be able to better support operations and inform decision-making. In this context, DG ECHO will also focus on the development of the ERCC as the single operational hub managing the EU's swift and effective response to a broad range of crises at home and around the world, in line with Commissioner's mission letter.

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

A European Green Deal requires consolidated efforts from across Member States and the EU institutions, where the Commission's contribution is crucial. Climate change needs to be prevented but also mitigated at home and abroad. Making sure our societies are more resilient and better able to adapt is key to respond to the challenge of climate change. DG ECHO, having a coordinating role at EU level for the UN framework for disaster risk reduction (Sendai) and being responsible for the UCPM (rescEU) played its part for a complete and efficient delivery of the Green Deal.

In 2020, DG ECHO contributed both to the internal and external dimension of the European Green Deal by following and participating in all the internal and external activities with relevance for DG ECHO and for Disaster Risk Reduction in general.

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

Internal Dimension

In the framework of the UCPM, DG ECHO is supporting Member States in their reporting on national disaster risk management. Furthermore, DG ECHO continued in 2020 to promote a better understanding of risk by publishing the third edition of the "EU overview of the disaster risks the Union may face" as a Commission's Staff Working Document.

DG ECHO continued to mainstream 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 but also from other funding opportunities like the Recovery and Resilience Facility or the Technical Support Instrument.

External Dimension

Disaster preparedness is part of the overall objective of relief and support to the most vulnerable people suffering from conflicts and disasters across the world through the

²⁷ COM(2020)220 final

mobilisation of both humanitarian aid and European civil protection assistance. An anticipatory approach can help reduce needs and overall relief. In 2020, DG ECHO continued strengthening disaster preparedness and early action, unleashing a new approach in the domain, and allocated EUR 50 million from the Disaster Preparedness Budget Line specifically targeted disaster preparedness actions.

The Disaster Preparedness approach and funding ensures both the mainstreaming and targeting of preparedness and climate adaptation into humanitarian action that ultimately increases the resilience to climate change of those we provide aid to. Interconnections between fragile and conflict contexts and climate change impact can be significant and should thus form part of an overall risk and vulnerability assessment. These considerations are taken into account when establishing related future funding priorities.

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

As the climate and environmental crisis deepens, humanitarian actors, from donors to local volunteers, are faced with a collective responsibility to ensure that their work does not further contribute to deteriorating the environment. This calls for taking all necessary measures to reduce the climate and environmental footprint of humanitarian aid. The recent COVID-19 pandemic makes the need to protect and restore nature all the more urgent.

The 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid already called for the integration of environmental considerations in humanitarian aid sectoral policies and interventions, even short-term emergency ones, based on the ‘do no harm’ principle – a principle for taking into consideration the negative effects of aid. For such reasons, in 2020, DG ECHO elaborated an approach to reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian assistance. DG ECHO’s ambitious phased approach to align to the European Green Deal principles of climate neutrality, climate resilience, circular economy, zero pollution and biodiversity protection, and address all dimensions of the humanitarian principle of ‘do no harm’.

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

Whenever a natural or human-induced disaster strikes, inside or outside the EU, any affected country can request assistance from the UCPM through the ERCC. In the context of the COVID-19 response, the Emergency Support Instrument was re-activated to offer further support to those EU Member States in need. The continued offer of assistance by EU Member States and Participating Countries is a proof of EU solidarity in action.

Furthermore, as part of the UCPM, DG ECHO finances cross-border and single-country projects with the aim to strengthen prevention and preparedness in EU Member States and Participating Countries. In 2020, a new methodological framework for the “Peer review on disaster risk management” was issued. This new methodology, which builds on



consultation with experts from Member States and International Organisations, was presented to national CP authorities of the UCPM. Finally, a joint DG ECHO-World Bank study on the economic dividends of disaster risk reduction and on improved risk transfer mechanisms (including insurance) was initiated and will be finalised in the first quarter of 2021.

Moreover, the UCPM continued to support activities to enhance the level of preparedness of emergency response operations managed by DG ECHO, notably through the coordination and management of specific training and exercise activities for disaster and emergency management experts.

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

The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in an exceptional year for the Mechanism, with a number of activations that reached an unprecedented number of 102²⁸, 45 of which within the EU and 57 in third countries. Out of 102 activations, 85 (83%) were COVID-19 related, including operations to support the repatriation of EU citizens from all continents, requested by 19 Member States, 2 Participating States and the UK.

In response, the UCPM facilitated the delivery of over 12 million items of critical personal protective and medical equipment in 2020, including over 3 million items from the rescEU stockpiles and supported repatriation of 100,313 passengers (including 90,060 EU citizens) to Europe on 408 flights.



For prevention and preparedness, DG ECHO aims at strengthening the cross-sectoral approach within the UCPM in view of building a stronger EU crisis management system, and therefore advocates and steers policy development work in the fields of emergency health, CBRN and security related issues.

²⁸ For reference, on average, the UCPM is activated around 20 times a year.

Implementing the revised legislation of Decision 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism adopted in 2019 was a top priority in 2020. As such, DG ECHO continued to ensure that the Union has at its disposal additional rescEU capacities in the sectors that have been approved by Member States (forest fires, medical emergencies including medical stockpiling). In relation to this, two Implementing Decisions were adopted by March 2020 and further legal reflection was undertaken throughout the year, in particular to continue extending rescEU reserve to other capacity groups, notably in the area of Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) capacities.



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When it comes to forest fires, six new grant agreements were awarded in April 2020 under the rescEU Transition in addition to a 3-year grant agreement in place. Furthermore, a grant agreement was also signed under rescEU proper for a lease of the first two aerial forest fire fighting capacities (air tractors) which will be operational until 2023. The 2020 fleet was composed of a total of 17 aerial means (8 Canadairs, 1 Dash, 2 Air Tractors and six helicopters). To be better prepared against forest fires in the long

term, the Commission signed as well first grant agreement for procurement of two medium planes.

COVID-19 has accelerated the further development of the European Union Medical capacities. 9 rescEU strategic medical stockpile at EU level were established. Moreover, the Commission signed its first grant for the development of a MEDEVAC capacity for highly infectious disease patients. The discussion on the establishment of a field hospital EMT-3 at European level continued throughout the year.

In 2020, DG ECHO continued providing financial support to the WHO to allow (among others) mentorship for the European emergency medical teams, which wish to go through the WHO classification process. In 2020 seven European Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) initiated the WHO classification. Significant final progress was also reached in 2020 with regard to the development of a European response plan for mass burn casualty disasters with the publication of the Staff Working Document on Preparing for Mass Burn Casualty Incidents and with the organization of the first pilot training.

Finally, discussions with Member States also progressed on the development of rescEU capacities in case of Chemical Bacteriological and Radio Nuclear (CBRN) events. Specifically concrete steps were taken with the approval by the Member States of technical quality requirements for rescEU capacities on CBRN Decontamination.

In addition to the development of rescEU capacities, the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP) remained the UCPM key pillar for deploying capacities and was further strengthened, with a focus on engaging with Member and Participating States so that they commit more capacities where gaps exist, and registering certified capacities in the ECPP.

To complement the response of the UCPM to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Commission proposed the reactivation of the Emergency Support Instrument. Following the adoption of the Commission's proposal through a Council Regulation, and the allocation of a significant

amount of EUR 2.7 billion, a number of activities could be launched under this instrument. DG ECHO is part of the Steering Group guiding the Task Force created to implement the actions under the instrument, and will continue supporting Member States to facilitate transport operations; e.g. cargo transport of medical equipment and relief items from within the EU and from third countries into the EU as well as transport of medical teams including operating costs, and the transfer of patients within Europe and to neighbouring countries. More specifically, the Commission allocated EUR 150 million to 48 cargo transport projects with 17 Member States and the UK, and organised a pilot operation with Bulgaria. This has financed the transport of medical equipment and supplies into the EU, for example personal protective equipment, ventilators, disinfectants, and other vital and life-saving supplies. The Commission has also signed grant agreements with Italian authorities for three projects for transport of medical personnel and three projects for transfer of patients. Through these projects, 283 medical personnel and 34 patients were transported.

Based on the experience with the COVID-19 pandemic, and in line with the joint statement of the members of the European Council on 26 March calling for a more “ambitious wide-ranging crisis management system”, DG ECHO started working towards a European Emergency Management for the future, of which the proposed targeted amendment to the UCPM legislative framework represents a first key element.

Within the scope of the existing competence on Civil Protection in the Treaty (i.e. support competence), there is still room to strengthen the Mechanism in a meaningful way. As a first building block to a future wide-ranging crisis management system, the Commission proposed in June 2020 to further enhance the UCPM legislation to endow the Mechanism with greater strategic autonomy and financial flexibility. The proposal was discussed with the co-legislators during the second half of the year with trilogue negotiations started in December 2020.

In this context, the creation of a Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network aims at reinforcing the preparedness component of the UCPM. The conceptualisation of this Network was moved forward throughout 2020, in close cooperation with Member States and Participating States. This broad outreach to stakeholders intended to gain a good understanding of real needs and to avoid duplication with existing initiatives and tools.

1.4 External communication and visibility

In line with the objectives set in the Strategic and Management Plan and with the communication ambitions the Commissioner outlined at the start of his mandate, DG ECHO developed a mix of communication activities that aimed at maintaining a high level of public support and political backing of EU humanitarian aid and civil protection, geared around the narrative of EU solidarity. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak, many of the initially planned communication actions had to be revised or postponed, while a large share of the delivered work focused on showing and explaining the EU response to the pandemic (including rescEU preparedness measures and deployments, repatriations, Humanitarian Air Bridge operations). The external communication also gave further visibility to and supported the activities of the Commissioner, and covered many other topical and recurrent aspects of DG ECHO’s portfolio, including the enhanced UCPM and development of rescEU capacities (e.g. aerial forest firefighting fleet). Large-scale emergency deployments, such as the response to the Beirut explosion or the Croatian earthquake, also triggered considerable communication needs.

DG ECHO worked to ensure that its policy activities feature in the Commission's communication efforts. In terms of traditional presswork, of all 990 press releases and 212 press statements that the Commission spokespersons' service published in 2020, 73 press releases and 20 press statements (7.4% and 9.4% respectively) fell within the remit of DG ECHO's activities. In addition, DG ECHO co-published a series of local press releases in collaboration with its humanitarian aid partners active, each highlighting the specific aid (funding) delivered by the EU in the countries concerned.

The initial communication plans were heavily impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19. Due to the pandemic, no media visits with European journalists to DG ECHO funded field projects could be organised in 2020. However, the outbreak led to many new communication opportunities, seized by DG ECHO: various press events were held – to the extent possible – in Brussels, e.g. press briefings in the ERCC on the Coronavirus response, as well as elsewhere in Europe and worldwide. In particular the departures and arrivals of the Humanitarian Air Bridge flights and deployments of rescEU assistance triggered a lot of media attention. DG ECHO worked closely and provided necessary support to communication activities by EU Delegations and representations.

Meanwhile, DG ECHO prepared agreements with (audio-visual) media outlets in various EU Member States (Spain, France, Poland) to set up editorial partnerships. The purpose is to bring journalists of national media to humanitarian field projects, as soon as the travel restrictions allow, and support them in developing documentaries, reportages and (series of) in-depth articles.

Concerning digital media, DG ECHO's website enjoyed high popularity and the number of page views stayed stable around 1.5 million. With over 530,000 followers, social media keeps growing in importance and the publication of audio-visual productions, such as photos and videos, have proven to be particularly effective.

DG ECHO ran several awareness campaigns in 2020. A campaign on enhanced EU Civil Protection, with online advertising in six EU Member States (Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain), reached more than 65 million online views on Facebook/Instagram, YouTube and premium news sites. Following a similar strategy in six other countries (Portugal, Poland, Denmark, Hungary, Croatia and Lithuania), online advertising about EU Humanitarian Aid in the context of pandemics and disasters, reached another 44 million views. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the kick-off of two other campaigns was postponed to the first semester of 2021.

Throughout the year, various topical campaigns were also running, coordinated directly by DG ECHO (e.g. on the World Refugee Day, World Humanitarian Day) or by DG ECHO funded partners (as part of their so-called Above-Standard Visibility actions, developed in close collaboration with ECHO's communication unit and Regional Information Officers). Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the paid promotion on social media throughout the year was drastically reduced, as instructed by DG COMM at corporate level; this corporate approach, together with the postponement of the new campaigns led to lower reach figures than initially targeted.

2. Modern and efficient administration and internal control

2.1 Financial management and internal control

Assurance is provided on the basis of an objective examination of evidence of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

This examination is carried out by management, who monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General. The following reports have been considered:

- the reports of Authorising Officers by Sub-delegation (AOSD) managing DG ECHO's budget appropriations;
- the reports from Authorising Officers in other services managing budget appropriations in direct delegation, in particular regarding the management of funds devoted to EU Aid Volunteers programme by EACEA;
- the reports and/or management declarations from the Organisations managing grants under indirect management and the reports from the managers of the EU Trust Funds which DG ECHO contributed to;
- the contribution of the Director in Charge of Risk Management and Internal Control, including the results of internal control monitoring at the DG level;
- the reports of ex-post audits on legality and regularity;
- the Internal Audit Service Contribution to the 2020 AAR process.
- the observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA);
- the reports on recorded exceptions, non-compliance events and any cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Art 92.3 FR).

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 complete 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 (a) Control results, (b) Audit observations and recommendations, (c) Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in (d) Conclusions on the assurance.

2.1.1 Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives²⁹. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. Annex 6 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.

²⁹ 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 (FR Art 36.2). The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.

The inherent risks of DG ECHO are associated with the nature of its operations. Humanitarian aid is delivered in difficult environments characterised by unpredictability, volatility, insecurity and restricted access to crisis-affected people, which poses a significant challenge to the implementation of actions. DG ECHO seeks to contain and reduce the risks to an acceptable level, inter alia through its control architecture and security policy and guidance. DG ECHO puts emphasis on the balance between the achievements of its policy objectives and the need for effective and efficient financial and operational control of its activities.

Budget implementation

Commitments

1386 agreements were entered in 2020 for the implementation of DG ECHO's operations, of which 56% of the budget referred to direct management (DM) and 44% to indirect management (IM).

The total budget for EU for humanitarian aid³⁰, in commitments, amounted in 2020 to EUR 2,138 million, which was implemented through 1,039 agreements. This amount includes reinforcements from the European Development Fund (EUR 59.9 million), from the Emergency Aid Reserve (EUR 404.1 million), from the redeployments of other external relations lines (EUR 120.5 million), and the amending budget for Turkey (EUR 485 million). DG ECHO also managed EUR 7 million of external assigned revenue from various Member States.

Civil Protection, the Emergency Support Instrument, and EU Aid Volunteers were exclusively implemented under direct management.

The EU budget for Civil Protection, in commitments, amounted in 2020 to EUR 610.4 million (+542% compared to 2019), through 285 agreements. This significant increase was due to the reinforcement of the rescEU programme and the several budgetary reinforcements received for new operations as part of the EC response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the Emergency Support Instrument was activated, also as a part of the EC response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and DG ECHO managed EUR 220 million under this instrument, from which 55 agreements amounting to EUR 150.4 million were signed in 2020.

The EU budget for EU aid volunteers, in commitments, amounted in 2020 to EUR 3.1 million (-83% compared to 2019), through 7 agreements.

Payments

The implemented total of the 2020 budget for payments, excluding EDF, amounted to EUR 2,186.7 million, of which EUR 1,073.8 million under direct management and EUR 1,112.9 million under indirect management.

The payments managed by DG ECHO in 2020 were distributed as follows:

- EU for humanitarian aid (excluding EDF): EUR 1.907,4 million. This amount includes EUR 278.2 million of external assigned revenue from various Member States;
- EU Civil Protection: EUR 222.8 million;

³⁰ Covering "Humanitarian and food aid" and "Disaster preparedness", which can both be implemented either under Direct or Indirect Management.

- Emergency Support Instrument: EUR 48.6 million;
- EU aid volunteers: EUR 0.1 million (having EUR 3.3 million co-delegated to EACEA and DIGIT)
- Administrative & support expenditure: EUR 7.8 million.

Further details on payments are provided in Annex 7.

Control architecture

Due to the different financial procedures and risk profiles of DG ECHO's activities, separate control systems are in place for its Humanitarian Aid actions implemented under indirect and direct management, as well as for its Civil Protection actions managed under direct management. They 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 they contribute together to providing the overall reasonable assurance on the legality and regularity of transactions. Annex 6 provides a detailed description of DG ECHO's control architecture.

Reporting requirements

Following the requirements of the 2018 Financial Regulation, in 2020, DG ECHO:

- had in place several Framework Partnership Agreements that have been extended beyond 4 years³¹ (FR art 130.4);
- applied for derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity of grants³² only when 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* (FR 193.2).
- did not register any case of:
 - confirmation of instructions (FR art 92.3)
 - financing not linked to costs (FR art 125.3);
 - flat rates >7% for indirect costs (FR art 181.6);

1. Effectiveness = the control results and benefits

- Legality and regularity of the transactions

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

DG ECHO's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate, i.e. both for Direct and Indirect Management. This is, respectively, thanks to the inherent risk profile of the programmes and to the performance of the related control systems. 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 Constraints³³

³¹ See details in Annex 3; Table 15

³² 171 grants in 2020

³³ Applies only to individually authorised operations responding to IASC Level 3 emergencies; <https://www.unocha.org/where-we-work/current-emergencies>

and Remote Management³⁴ under Direct or Indirect management. 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.

The overall control objective is to ensure that the residual error rate does not exceed the materiality threshold of 2%. Ex-post controls are performed based on an audit strategy with a double approach. Firstly, it ensures that every partner organisation receiving EU funds is selected for audit every four years on average. This part of the strategy allows for establishing a representative sample³⁵ that provides an appropriate basis for calculating the error rate. Secondly, the audit strategy targets partners and grants on the basis of particular risk criteria identified during the implementation of funded actions, with the aim of maximizing recoveries and thus protecting the EU budget.

During 2020, given the restrictions linked to COVID-19, most audits have been performed remotely. However, this has not been an obstacle as such to comply with international auditing standards since the auditors have been able to gather sufficient evidence to draw their conclusions. Therefore, we can conclude that there has been no impact on the assurance provided.

The control results for 2020 show that the Residual Error Rate is 0,81% for Direct Management and nil for Indirect Management. The analysis of the audit work does not show any significant weaknesses that would have a material impact on the legality and regularity of the financial operations and, hence, on the achievement of the control objective. The overall weighted Average Error Rate, taking into account the respective weights of IM and DM, is 0,69% (0,83% in 2019).

Under indirect management DG ECHO undertakes to finance up to a maximum amount of the total cost of the operation. Non-eligible expenditure detected by auditors up to the difference between the total cost of the operation and the amount to be funded by DG ECHO which is covered by other donors, is not accounted for in the calculation of the error rate. DG ECHO's relevant expenditure, estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are disclosed in Table X below.

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2020 expenditure amounts to EUR 9.04 million, representing 0.69% of the DG's total relevant expenditure for 2020. This is the AOD's best, conservative estimation 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. The conservatively estimated future corrections for 2020 expenditure amount to EUR 5.14 million. This is the amount of errors that the DG conservatively estimates will be identified and corrected by controls planned to be carried out in subsequent years.

³⁴ DG ECHO defines "Remote Management" as an operational approach used to provide relief in situations where humanitarian access to disaster-affected populations for its partner organisations is limited by security concerns and/or formal or informal decisions imposed by de jure or de facto authorities, thus requiring adjustments to the management of the humanitarian actions.

³⁵ Based on rotation. I.e. all DG ECHO partners are audited approximately once every four years, which may vary due to risk analysis factors and audit capacity.

The difference between those two amounts results in the estimated overall risk at closure of EUR 3.90 million, representing 0,30% of the DG's total relevant expenditure for 2020.

In the context of the protection of the EU budget, the DG's estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated at Commission level in the AMPR.

Table X - Estimated risk at closure

DG ECHO	"payments made" (FY; m€)	minus new pre-financing [plus retentions made*] (in FY; m€)	plus cleared pre-financing [minus retentions released* and deductions of expenditure made by MS] (in FY; m€)	= "relevant expenditure" (for the FY; m€)	Average Error Rate (weighted AER; %)	Estimated risk at payment (FY; m€)	Average Recoveries and Corrections (adjusted ARC; %)	estimated future corrections [and deductions] (for FY; m€)	estimated risk at closure (FY; m€)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Indirect Management	1112.91	-998.20	474.63	589.34	0.16%	0.94			
Direct Management	1073.78	-802.67	428.54	699.64	1.13%	7.88			
DG total	2186.69	-1800.88	903.17	1288.98	0.68%	8.83	0.39%	5.03	3.80
DG's subsidy to EACEA	-1.26	0.00	0.00	-1.26	0,00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00
DG net total, excluding subsidies to EAs	2185.43	-1800.88	903.17	1287.73	0.69%	8.83	0.39%	5.03	3.80
DG's contribution to EUTF (Bêkou)	-1.00	0.00	0.00	-1.00	0,00%	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00
Items EDF (by 5 DGs)	61.10	-55.07	25.60	31.63	0.69%	0.22	0.39%	0.12	0.09
Overall Total, i.e. after cancelling out the contributions to the EUTFs and adding the EUTFs' expenditure	2245.53	-1855.95	928.77	1318.36	0.69%	= 9.04; and 0.69% of (5)	0.39%	= 5.14; and 0.39% of (5)	= 3.90; and 0.30% of (5)

Notes to Table X

(2) Payments made or equivalent, e.g. expenditure registered in the Commission's accounting system, accepted expenditure or cleared pre-financing. In any case, this means after the preventive (ex-ante) control measures have already been implemented earlier in the cycle. In all cases of Co-Delegations (Internal Rule Article 3), "payments made" are covered by the Delegated DGs. For Cross-SubDelegations (Internal Rules Article 12), they remain with the Delegating DGs.

(3) New pre-financing actually paid by out the department itself during the financial year (i.e. excluding any pre-financing received as transfer from another department). The "Pre-financing" is covered as in the context of note 2.5.1 to the EC (provisional) annual accounts (i.e. excluding the "Other advances to Member States" (note 2.52) which is covered on a pure payment-made basis).

"Pre-financings paid/cleared" are always covered by the Delegated DGs, even in the case of Cross-Sub Delegations.

(4) Pre-financing actually having been cleared during the financial year (i.e. their 'delta' in FY 'actuals', not their 'cut-off' based estimated 'consumption').

(5) For the purpose of equivalence with the ECA's scope of the EC funds with potential exposure to L&R errors (see the ECA's 2017 AR methodological Annex 1.1 point 15), also our concept of "relevant expenditure" includes the payments made, subtracts the new pre-financing paid out [& adds the retentions made], and adds the previous pre-financing actually cleared [& subtracts the retentions released and those (partially) withheld; and any deductions of expenditure made by MS in the annual accounts] during the FY. This is a separate and 'hybrid' concept, intentionally combining elements from the budgetary accounting and from the general ledger accounting.

(5) The Relevant Expenditure for 2020 is considerably lower than for 2019. This is due to a lower cleared pre-financing for Indirect Management (-52% compared to 2019). The difference refers largely to the significant Emergency Support Safety Net action, of which the pre-financing was cleared in 2019.

(6) In order to calculate the weighted Average Error Rate (AER) for the total relevant expenditure in the reporting year, the cumulative Detected Error Rate (DER) per management mode (Indirect Management and Direct Management) over the period 2018-2020 has been used. The figure of the AER (0,68 %) differs from that of the cumulative DER (0,91 %), as the former is based on payments after making adjustments for pre-financing, whereas the latter uses the total and actual payments made during the reporting year.

(8) The calculation is based on the cumulative (2014-2020) recovery rate of DG ECHO provided by DG BUDG and corrected based on DG ECHO's internal checks. A rate of 0.39 % was obtained.

- **Fraud prevention, detection and correction**

DG ECHO has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2013, on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every four years. It was last updated end-2020. Its implementation is continuously monitored. All necessary actions have been implemented.

The Anti-Fraud Strategy includes an Action Plan with actions of raising fraud awareness, developing cooperation with partners and other donors, and increasing efficiency and effectiveness of internal anti-fraud activities.

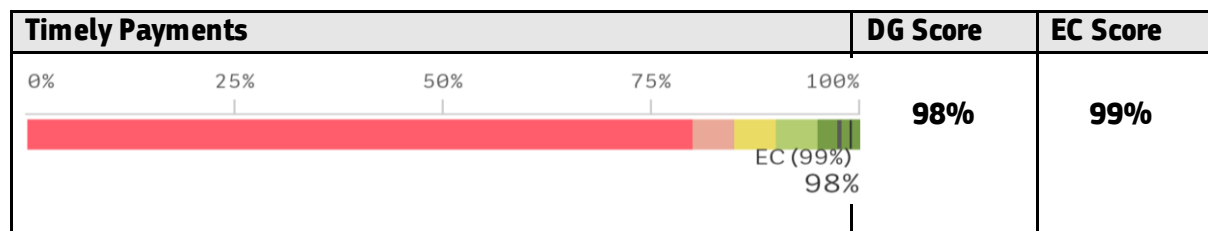
The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows:

- One training session for field staff working on projects in Syria focusing on raising fraud awareness and on reporting;
- Participation in the Syria Investigations Working Group on cooperation and exchange of good practice and intelligence for fighting fraud;
- Promotion of participation of ECHO staff members in the first OLAF Anti-Corruption Conference held in December 2020;
- Follow-up of OLAF financial recommendations. OLAF recommended financial recoveries under 2 investigations concluded in 2020. They are currently under analysis. For 2 out of the 3 investigations closed prior to 2020 and which were pending action at the end of 2019, DG ECHO has recovered during 2020 the amount recommended. For the 3rd case, DG ECHO has finalised the legal assessment and will launch the contradictory procedure with the beneficiary in 2021;
- DG ECHO has ensured an initial assessment of fraud allegations received in our dedicated functional mailbox. In 2020, 103 allegations were reported (79 in 2019);
- 50 allegations of fraud received in DG ECHO were transmitted to OLAF in 2020. Out of these 50, 5 resulted in OLAF investigations; 15 are still under OLAF's assessment; and 30 were dismissed. OLAF opened an additional investigation based on allegation submitted directly to them by a whistle-blower.
- DG ECHO representatives regularly attended the Fraud Prevention and Detection Net events chaired by OLAF as well as actively participated in the external relations subgroup's meetings organised by OLAF for close cooperation and discussion of common anti-fraud issues between the EU external relation services.
- DG ECHO has taken all the necessary measures to protect the financial interests of the Union, through the analysis of financial, operational and reputational risks – and when required – suspending operations, contracting and payments, in close liaison with field experts, partners and, where relevant, with competent authorities.

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

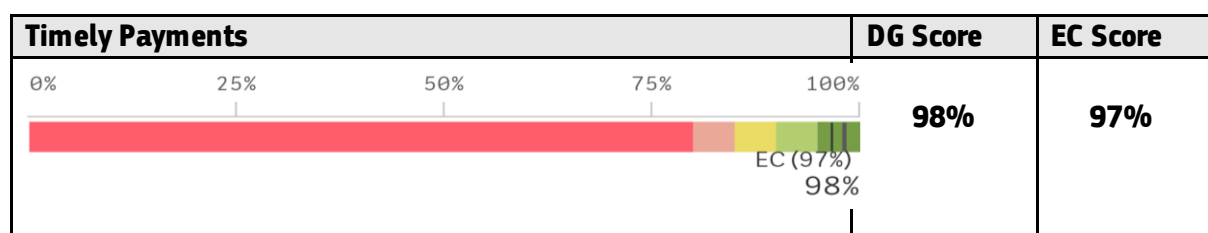
2. **Efficiency = the Time-to-... indicators and other efficiency indicators**

DG ECHO BUDGET



The result of 98% achieved by DG ECHO is an excellent result taking into consideration the significant increase in payment appropriations in 2020 as well as the complexity of DG ECHO projects.

EDF BUDGET



The result of 98% achieved by DG ECHO is an excellent result taking into consideration the significant increase in payment appropriations in 2020 as well as the complexity of DG ECHO projects.

In 2020, DG ECHO has rationalised the internal workflow for approval of Humanitarian Aid grant agreements and amendments. We have automatized the majority of special clauses to be inserted in our agreements, therefore reduced the number of necessary legal vetting (checks). As a result, this has shortened the workflow and accelerated the signature of agreements/amendments.

In 2020, DG ECHO has also introduced some changes in the Single Form that intend to reduce the number of additional requests for information at the final report stage. This should consequently speed up the payment time, although the effects will be mainly visible in 2021, as the new changes are implemented as of 1 January 2021.

Additional indicators taken into account to measure the control efficiency in DG ECHO are reported in Annex 4 and Annex 7.

The overall level of efficiency indicators has remained satisfactory and stable compared to the previous year. DG ECHO continues to work to improve the efficiency of its control systems.

3. **Economy = the estimated cost of controls**

The estimated cost of controls costs are calculated from the Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) allocated to the control activities functions both at HQ and the Field Offices, and the cost of (ex-post) external audits. The total cost of controls³⁶ of DG ECHO is estimated to EUR 6,9

³⁶ As stipulated in the Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA) between the Commission and Entrusted Entities, DG ECHO contributes for their overall administration/management in the broad sense with an overhead of 6.5-7% of the direct eligible costs

million, which represents a decrease compared to 2019 (EUR 7,5 million) due to lower audits costs³⁷.

The average cost of audits (including ex-ante field audits and ex-post audits/UN verifications) was EUR 8.847. The total cost of audit assignments undertaken by audit firms for outsourced audits amounted to EUR 212.318.

The estimated cost of the control strategy³⁸ represents 0,23% of the 2020 indirect management budget and 0,27% of the direct management budget³⁹.

The overall estimated cost of the control strategy represents 0,31% of the total budget (0,34% in 2019), also taking into account horizontal control costs not allocated to the two management modes. Thus, the costs of controls for DG ECHO in 2020 are below the benchmark of 0,5% of the total budget managed in 2020, and they are to be considered proportionate to the inherent risks of the activities performed by DG ECHO.

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 to detect non-eligible expenditure amounting EUR 0.3 million for the indirect management and EUR 13.5 million for the direct management, i.e. EUR 13.7 million in total.

In terms of economy, the estimated cost of controls of EUR 6.9 million is very well covered (199%) by the quantifiable benefits of EUR 13.7 million of detected non-eligible expenditure.

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

- The cumulative detected error rate, which for the period 2018-2020 is 0,91%;
- The preventive effect of limiting operations to those organisations which after been duly assessed, have qualified to become a partner organisation through the signature of a partnership agreement;
- DG ECHO's ex-post audits, in addition to detecting ineligible expenditure, give assurance on the partners internal controls as well as on their compliance with the FPA 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;

for the projects granted in indirect management. In the large scale cash-assistance ESN project, DG ECHO, following the recommendation of the ECA to increase efficiency, has reduced the overhead costs to 3,85%.

³⁷ The HQ audits for 2020 were launched already in 2019 and thus instead using the budget of that year. Furthermore, no field audits or audits of DG ECHO field offices were carried out during 2020 due to COVID-19

³⁸ The amounts of EDF budget and assigned revenues managed by DG ECHO are taken into account in the calculation of the cost of controls. However, the EUTF and the Aid Volunteers budget implemented by EACEA are excluded.

³⁹ Due to a change to the reporting structure of the 2020 AAR, comparisons to last year for these figures cannot be made at the level of management modes.

- In addition to ex-post audits, DG ECHO normally carries out field audits of on-going projects that contribute to partners' awareness and knowledge of the eligibility rules of claimed expenditure. However, this type of audits were not carried out in 2020 due to the travel restrictions linked to COVID-19;
- The follow-up of fraud allegations are 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 ineligible 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 as well as the ensuring quality monitoring of the actions funded on the ground.

2.1.2 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 (IAS)

During 2020, the IAS performed a multi-DG audit on the pillar assessment process in the external action family. The report, issued in January 2021, identified a critical finding at corporate level that resulted in a general critical recommendation for a number of DGs including DG ECHO⁴⁰. The IAS found that “incorrect information on the status of pillar assessments in the databases and repositories of pillar assessed entities led the Directorates-General/Services to sign a number of agreements without prior positive pillar assessment and without imposing supervisory measures.”⁴¹ In the case of DG ECHO, the IAS recommends to i) ensure that the outcome of the pillar assessment and the established supervisory measures are included in the IT tool HOPE/FICHOP, as appropriate ii) Ensure that supervisory measures are applied as prescribed by the FR iii) Remind staff in charge of the verification of agreements to verify diligently prior to the signature of agreements that either the entity is compliant with the relevant pillars, or it is partially compliant and the established supervisory measures are applied.

The IAS also had two findings at Commission level that resulted in two very important recommendations for DG ECHO to i) set out the responsibilities for monitoring of the communication of the substantive changes by the entities, the analysis of these changes and the identification of additional measures, when relevant and implement them effectively, and, ii) For ongoing and future pillar assessments (and independently of the

⁴⁰ The financial impact has been assessed as a maximum of EUR 12,4 million paid in 2020 out of the total EUR 2 186 million (EUR 1 034 million under Indirect management), which is below the 5% threshold of the minimus rule that would require a reservation.

⁴¹ DG ECHO has examined the pillar assessments of UN partners that were not included in the audit sample, to judge whether other UN partners funded in 2020 had as well had an incomplete pillar assessment. This was not the case, and the conclusion is that the validity of the finding of the audit is limited to the audit sample.

contracting authority), effectively use the possibilities at its disposal (e.g. participation in meetings, review of draft reports (their compliance with terms of reference, completeness, quality)) to ensure that pillar assessments are of a good quality and may be relied on for taking an informed decision on budget implementation tasks under indirect management, adequately document the pillar assessment review process, communicate correctly and timely the outcome of the pillar assessment, including the supervisory measures when applicable, to the pillar-assessed entity and to other Commission Services and establish roadmaps for the implementation of recommendations, monitor their implementation and systematically review the relevance and sufficiency of the established supervisory measures.

DG ECHO has accepted the recommendations and an action plan has been submitted to the IAS. The three recommendations should be implemented by 30 June 2021. An instruction note will be adopted by the Director General. It will set out the responsibilities within DG ECHO units to ensure that the outcome of the pillar assessment and the established supervisory measures are adequately recorded and applied. The instruction note will also identify the responsible unit in charge of the monitoring of the substantive changes communicated by the entities pillar assessed, the analysis of these changes and the identification of additional measures that can be needed following these changes. Finally, a specific checklist will be developed for the review of the PA reports to ensure that the pillar assessment process is adequately monitored and properly documented, in line with the IAS recommendation.

The 2019 IAS audit on DG ECHO's control strategy for humanitarian aid actions issued two very important recommendations on i) the ex-ante controls before final payment and ii) the ex-post audits. The implementation is on-going and a number of sub-actions have already been implemented. Concerning ex-ante controls before final payments, the following actions have been taken: The Financial Manual, guidelines, templates and the checklist used by the financial actors have been updated to reflect the elements related to certified correct; results of field audits are systematically communicated to the financial unit before the verification of the final report of the audited action, the financial and operational checks on the eligibility of VAT have been strengthened by revising the template for the reporting by ECHO partners and including these in the checklist. For the ex-post controls, DG ECHO has taken action by revising its audit methodology on the use of pillar assessments when preparing verification assignments; reassessing the policy for minimum sample size and the methodology used by audit contractors; the remaining actions will be addressed in the updated Audit Manual by December 2021, which is according to the action plan.

In its contribution to the 2020 Annual Activity Report process the IAS has concluded that the internal control systems in place in DG ECHO for the audited processes are effective, except for the findings giving rise to the five recommendations mentioned above.

European Court of Auditors (ECA)

The ECA's Annual Report for the 2019 financial year - which was adopted by the ECA in September 2020 - detected two cross-cutting issues on i) ineligible expenditure linked to VAT payments claimed and ii) ineligible expenditures linked to time-recording systems. Corrective measures have been taken. The new ECA report on the performance of the EU budget in 2019 did not highlight any issues linked to DG ECHO. For the financial year 2020, the ECA's Statement of Assurance is underway.

In January 2021, the ECA published its Special Report 02/2021: *EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need, but should be longer-term and reach more girls*. Regarding sound financial management the report only recommends to improve the costs analysis in the selection and monitoring of education projects. DG ECHO is in the process of establishing the action plan to implement the recommendations by early 2022.

In 2020 DG ECHO continued its implementation of the actions to address the recommendations of the two special reports issued in 2018, i.e.: - No. 27/2018: - *The Facility for Refugees in Turkey*; - and No. 35/2018: *Transparency of EU funds implemented by NGOs*.

Conclusion

On the basis of the information related to IAS and ECA audits, an audit finding affecting different DGs, has been considered as critical. Given the nature of the finding - which is not caused by a weaknesses in the internal control system of DG ECHO - as well as its extremely limited financial impact, EUR 12,4 million, which represents less than the 5% of the total payments made, not only by DG ECHO as a whole but also under indirect management, as required by the minimus rule to exempt a reservation. DG ECHO does not qualify it for issuing a reservation in this AAR.

2.1.3 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.

DG ECHO assesses on a continuous basis the effectiveness of the internal control system, in order to determine whether they work as intended and ensuring that any control weaknesses in the system are detected, analysed and considered for improvement. In addition, specific assessments are performed to ascertain whether the internal control systems and their components are present and functioning.

The purpose of these management assessments is to provide reasonable assurance that the internal control principles adopted by the EC are implemented and functioning in the DG, that the assessment findings are evaluated and that any deficiencies are communicated and corrected in a timely manner, with serious matters reported as appropriate.

The internal control self-assessment exercise was carried out in January 2021 in compliance with the corporate methodology. All 17 principles were assessed covering the five control components. The self-assessment was based on three main pillars: 1) the evaluation of DG ECHO's 32 monitoring indicators 2) an analysis of a wide range of information received from various sources and 3) a staff survey with representatives per each Directorate from different staff categories.

The information analysed included:

- The Authorising Officer by Sub-Delegation (AOSD) reports submitted by each Directorate;
- The results of audits and follow-up engagements performed by IAS and the ECA during 2020;
- The status of the implementation of recommendations from previous IAS and ECA audit work;
- The results of the risk assessment exercise; and;
- The analysis of the register of exceptions and non-compliance events.

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 mainly related to limitations imposed by restrictions linked to COVID-19:

- Principle 1: Ethics trainings were put on hold due to COVID-19.
- Principle 4: DG ECHO did not reach the 70% target value of staff replying that within the last year they had the opportunity to participate in the learning and development activities needed to be efficient in their job.
- Principle 5: Presentations to increase awareness on internal control rules could not be delivered to all units, being put on hold due to COVID-19.
- Principle 10: The percentage of actions monitored on the field is slightly lower than the target value. The COVID-19 crisis as well as security constraints had an impact on the monitoring visits.
- Principles 10 and 12: The IAS identified some weaknesses in the internal control system linked to the pillar assessment process in indirect management and issued one critical and two very important recommendations. The risk detected, if having been materialised, would have affected a marginal part of the total payments done by DG ECHO in 2020⁴². In addition, the IAS issued two very important recommendations, at the end of 2019, linked to ex-ante and ex-post controls in the control strategy for humanitarian aid.

DG ECHO will ensure that these weaknesses are properly addressed in 2021. E.g. the DG ECHO HR Business Correspondent has finalised a learning and development plan, including a training on ethics. A specific training for DG ECHO staff, including ethics to refresh it generally in the DG, is planned to take place as soon the presence in the office will be resumed. In regards to monitoring of actions in the field, DG ECHO has ensured alternative ways of remote monitoring via desk reviews and close contact with partners for those actions that could not be field visited during the COVID-19 crisis. The IAS critical and very important recommendations are currently being addressed and should be implemented by, at the latest, 30 June 2021. See actions under the IAS section on above.

In conclusion, the exercise did not result in the identification of any weaknesses, errors or actions that could jeopardise the overall effectiveness of DG ECHO's internal control system⁴³. Therefore, DG ECHO concludes that its internal control system was effective

⁴² The critical recommendation is linked to a partial assessment at corporate level of the control system of two International Organisations that have received funds from DG ECHO in 2020 which represent 0,22% of the total payments of the DG. The potential financial impact, if materialised, could reasonably be estimated at 56 720 EUR. The conclusion is that the risk identified is under control while the financial impact is below the de minimis thresholds.

⁴³ Regarding the critical recommendation from the IAS, please see our assessment and conclusion under section 2.1.2

during the reporting year and the components and principles were present and functioning as intended.

2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance

This section reviews the assessment of the elements already reported above (in Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3), and the sub-conclusions already reached. It draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified with reservations.

The information reported stems from the results of management and auditor monitoring contained in the reports listed. These reports results 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.

For 2020 DG ECHO's residual error rate remained low at 0,39% (0,81 % for Direct Management and nil for Indirect Management), with a global implementation rate of 92,9%. The cumulative (three-year) residual error rate was 0,63%, compared to 0,70% in 2019. The overall amount at risk at closure was EUR 3,89 million. In order to address the risks related to the legality and regularity, transactions of grants with a value of EUR 78 million⁴⁴ have been audited (implemented under both direct and indirect management). An amount of EUR 0,43 million of ineligible expenditure (detected by ex-post audits) was identified. The global cost of control has been estimated at 0,31% of payments, generating an estimated quantifiable benefit of EUR 13,7 million. The analysis of the (control) efficiency indicators show a positive result. DG ECHO has implemented all appropriate ex-ante and ex-post controls in line with the control strategy.

Despite travel restrictions linked to COVID, in 2020, 92% of the grant agreement actions were monitored in the field, or it was ensured that satisfactory alternative ways of monitoring were applied. DG ECHO has put in place procedures to ensure legality and regularity of underlying expenditure including those incurred in operations implemented under Exceptional Extreme Operational Constraints or Remote Management. These procedures include clear requirements to be respected by our partners before and during the implementation of the operations as well as at reporting stage. All operations are within the scope of DG ECHO's own ex-post controls⁴⁵.

DG ECHO reacted swiftly to allegations of misconduct in order to protect the financial interests of the EC, transmitting to OLAF all necessary information on received or detected fraud allegations.

⁴⁴ For the 2019 AAR, the total amount of grants audited was quoted (EUR 479 million), i.e. not the total amount of transactions audited as was the case for 2020. To enable a comparison, the total amount of grants audited in 2020 was EUR 369 million. The main reason for the decrease between 2019 and 2020 is travel restrictions due to COVID-19. However, the audit coverage remained at a high and satisfactory level of 17%.

⁴⁵ Exception for controls related to the EUTF and the Aid Volunteers budget implemented by EACEA that are excluded.

The IAS concluded that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective except for the critical finding related to the agreements signed by DG ECHO with UN agencies. The IAS also identified two very important findings on substantive changes and Commission Services' involvement in the pillar assessment process. DG ECHO has accepted the recommendations and is taking action to address them. The financial risk linked to the critical finding, that as a matter of principle was not linked to the internal control systems of DG ECHO, is very limited, well below the thresholds to apply the de minimis rule⁴⁶ and will not result – if materialised – in an error rate above 2%.

The 2020 Statement of Assurance exercise from the ECA is still underway, it is not expected to have any negative impact on DG ECHO's assurance provided in this report, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms. The same goes for the performance audit on Education in Emergencies which was undertaken in 2020 and in which there was only a minor finding linked to financial management.

The implementation of the Internal Control Framework has been assessed. All the principles are present and functioning, although some improvements are needed to address the minor weaknesses identified. Overall, the internal control system is effective.

Taking into account the information reported in sub-sections 2.1.1-2.1.3, 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 based on 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.

Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, 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 her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

⁴⁶ See foot note 42.

2.1.5 Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Director-General of DG ECHO

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view⁴⁷.

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, 31st March 2021

(e-signature)

Paraskevi MICHOU

2.2 Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

2.2.1 Human resource management

Human resources⁴⁸ at headquarters at the end of 2020 totalled 540 staff, of which 51% official, 29% contractual and 11% external staff. Moreover, DG ECHO made use of a small number of service providers (9%). DG ECHO employed 156 field experts and 299 local staff for a total of 455 people working in DG ECHO field offices on 31 December 2020.

The specific circumstances due to COVID-19 pandemic required significant effort at senior and middle management level to support the staff and monitor their well-being.

⁴⁷True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

⁴⁸ Counting active staff occupying a job in DG ECHO.

In this respect, DG ECHO launched several initiatives to facilitate social virtual interactions and exchanges (e.g. Coffee roulette), including monitoring well-being and work-life balance of staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. Huge effort has been made to provide timely and regular information to DG ECHO staff and to support managers in the new way of working. Detailed internal analysis of the Pulse Surveys results for DG ECHO, have been extremely helpful in this respect and were used as basis for regular discussions with ECHO management.

Moreover, in 2020 DG ECHO continuously worked on the following deliverables: a) a gender-balanced Talent Management strategy, b) an attractive working environment, c) elaboration of a new Learning & Development plan, d) creation of a Newcomers package to facilitate the integration of newly arrived staff, e) launch of new internal communication initiatives and f) a close follow-up to the results of the 2018 staff survey.

To promote gender diversity in leadership, the Commission committed itself to achieve 50% of female representation in middle management by 2024. In 2020, DG ECHO reached its specific target of first female appointments in middle management positions. It also appointed a female senior manager. At the end of 2020, DG ECHO had 9 female middle managers out of 20 (45%) and 3 female senior managers out of 7 (43%) - 1 middle management post was vacant. DG ECHO has also timely implemented all complementary measures for reinforcement of gender equality policy at management level adopted by the College in October 2020. Furthermore, DG ECHO continued to motivate and support the career development of women with a potential and interest for a management role. More precisely, in addition to opportunities offered by the Female Talent Development, DG ECHO offered coaching packages to five female colleagues with a potential and interest for management role. Moreover, three out of the five deputy Head of Unit positions published in 2020 in the DG, are currently occupied by women colleagues who were before team leaders within the DG.

As follow-up to the staff survey, in order to quickly integrate newly recruited staff, DG ECHO finalised a 'newcomer's package' with relevant information for all new ECHO staff. This initiative together with regular meeting between newcomers and the Director-General and mentoring system facilitate further the integration, in particular under the COVID-19 pandemic and teleworking.

In addition, in 2020, ECHO management endorsed Management Charter, a result of a collective reflection on our core values and main areas raised in the Staff Survey 2018. This sent an important signal to all staff.

Yet importantly, DG ECHO actively contributed to the wider consultation process on the new HR Strategy, while starting at the same time internal reflexion on the Local HR Strategy.

2.2.2 Digital transformation and information management

Data, information and knowledge are strategic assets, and DG ECHO is paying particular attention to improving the way these assets are managed and used. Reporting and analytics have become an increasingly important area in DG ECHO in the past years, with analytics capabilities having been reinforced in 2020.

More concretely, in 2020 DG ECHO further developed its data warehouse and associated reporting tools, also in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. New reports have been developed to efficiently contribute to Team Europe and DG ECHO COVID-19 reporting

requests. In this context, DG ECHO adapted its publication to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), to fulfil the pressing need for timely and accurate information on worldwide COVID-19 financing. However, the crisis slowed down the piloting of the IATI import functionality in EDRIS due to lack of availability of the Member States' counterparts.

Moreover, DG ECHO integrated new data assets, from various internal and external sources, to implement the new Country Information Dashboard (CID), in the context of evidence-based policymaking. The processes for data collection have been documented and particular attention given on aspects like access, sharing, use, processing, preservation, deletion, quality, protection and security.

Concerning the Commission's 2020-2021 work programme on data, information and knowledge management, and in particular the application of Data governance to key data assets, the data owners and data stewards have been identified for the various data assets of DG ECHO.

In addition, DG ECHO pursued the rationalisation process of its reporting portfolio, along with individual coaching sessions and several awareness actions, in order to ensure correct usage of the tools.

An 'open, inclusive and cooperative way of working' is the base of the political guidelines for a Commission that is digital, agile, flexible and transparent. DG ECHO is successfully piloting the possibilities offered by the new Microsoft Office suite (MS365) in order to harmonise as much as possible its ECHO-Field ICT architecture to the Commission ICT architecture, with a view to facilitating the online collaboration with its field offices spread around the world.

In the context of the digital strategy and digital transformation, DG ECHO drafted its IT modernisation plan which was approved by the ECHO IT Steering Committee in 2019 and submitted to DIGIT in 2020; it is composed of two priorities; "Priority 1 - data for better policy-making" and "Priority 2 - ICT ECHOFIELD and Office 365". The Country Information Dashboard (CID) and the COVID-related reporting mentioned above contribute to priority 1. The early adoption of Microsoft 365 in the field offices contributes to priority 2.

Under the Internal Data Protection Regulation (IDPR), entered into force in December 2018, DG ECHO has the legal obligation to integrate the principles of data protection into all aspects of our procedures and business activities. In 2020, DG ECHO has been working on the implementation of the EC's Data Protection Action Plan (C(2018)7432) and will continue in the period 2020-2024 to build up its requirements.

The current data protection legislation allows international transfers of personal data in principle if the EU standards for the protection of the rights and freedoms of the data subject are guaranteed also after the transfer.

Moreover, the invalidation of the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield (the Schrems II judgement) poses concrete challenges for services transferring personal data to third countries or using international cloud services. [DG] will continue to assess its processing activities in light of the requirements of the Schrems II ruling and will coordinate with relevant Commission services and IT governance bodies, as well as the Data Protection Officer, to be able to draw from horizontal approaches to similar situations. The Commission services, coordinated by the Data Protection Officer, replied to a request from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) to all EU institutions to identify and map their international

transfers and to report certain categories of transfers and are awaiting the EDPS' reaction. The goal is to minimise the risks linked to ongoing and future international transfers of personal data, notably by informing all data subjects of the legal situation in which such transfers take place, in order for operations undertaken by the Commission services to comply with EU data protection law.

During this year, DG ECHO has completed the conversion of legacy notifications, removed/archived those no longer in use, created new records and used the appropriate decentralised corporate ones, progressively provided by the DPO. DG ECHO has been developing the necessary adaptations of data records and related privacy statements and has continuously kept on listing new draft records.

Furthermore, the relevant DG ECHO intranet page has been revised and updated with more information and guidance. In terms of mapping exercises, DG ECHO has established an inventory of its processing operations, which is continuously being updated, and provided an inventory of the service contracts involving transfer of personal data to third countries, following the 2020's judgment of the EU Court of Justice (Schrems II case) invalidating the Privacy Shield Decision. In 2020, DG ECHO has been advancing its awareness-raising activities among its staff on data protection issues, procedures and management. Staff and middle management have been fully and necessary involved in the above-mentioned mapping exercises and invited to participate to the Data Protection Day 2020 activities.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tailored trainings in person were replaced by updated guidelines, close guidance and step-by-step remote support to the staff members. In particular, the second half of 2020 has shown an increased number of inquiries by staff member regarding embedding data protection principles in communication activities, organization of virtual meetings/workshops, targeted consultations, etc. Some of such requests of support have been resulting in creation of new draft records which are currently under revision.

2.2.3 Sound environmental management

In the context of EMAS Global action plans, DG ECHO has taken full account of its environmental impact in all its actions and actively promoted measures to reduce the related day-to-day impact of the administration and its work.

One of the main results of the year 2020 was the reduction of paper use. Due to the context of the sanitary crisis, the use of paper has been greatly reduced from March to December 2020. However it is important to highlight that this could have been allowed also by the actions took by the European Commission, such as promoting paperless working method, launching of qualified electronic signature.

One of the objectives to reach for 2020 was to encourage colleagues in DG ECHO to take more part in EMAS actions, such as Velo Mai. This year the event has been reported to October 2020. Again, due to the crisis, it is hard to estimate how many DG ECHO's colleagues took finally part to such events. However, EMAS campaigns, trainings, etc. are regularly published on DG ECHO intranet.

In addition, it has recently been requested to OIB service to install electric terminals for bicycles in DG ECHO car parks. This request is also part of a greener approach to the environmental footprint and could encourage more colleagues to use bicycles once the return to the office will be organised.