



# Annual Activity Report 2021

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR CIVIL  
PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID  
OPERATIONS

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

The year 2021 was still largely driven by the lasting COVID-19 crisis – a global health emergency that continued to require an unprecedented, coordinated response both within and outside the European Union. A globally sustained increase of humanitarian needs – intensified by resurgence of conflicts such as in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar – called for an extraordinary emergency response through both humanitarian aid and civil protection activities – the latter notably for evacuations of EU citizens and Afghan nationals from Kabul in August 2021.

In addition, large-scale disasters that occurred during the summer months - forest fires in the south of Europe and floods in Western Europe - showcased the impact of climate change. In this very challenging context, DG ECHO, through tools all available at its disposal, always provided concrete examples of EU solidarity in action inside the EU and around the world.

DG ECHO was always at the frontline of the EU response, while using all its tools and capacities to face the difficult circumstances and address global constraints.

### The main tools and regulatory framework

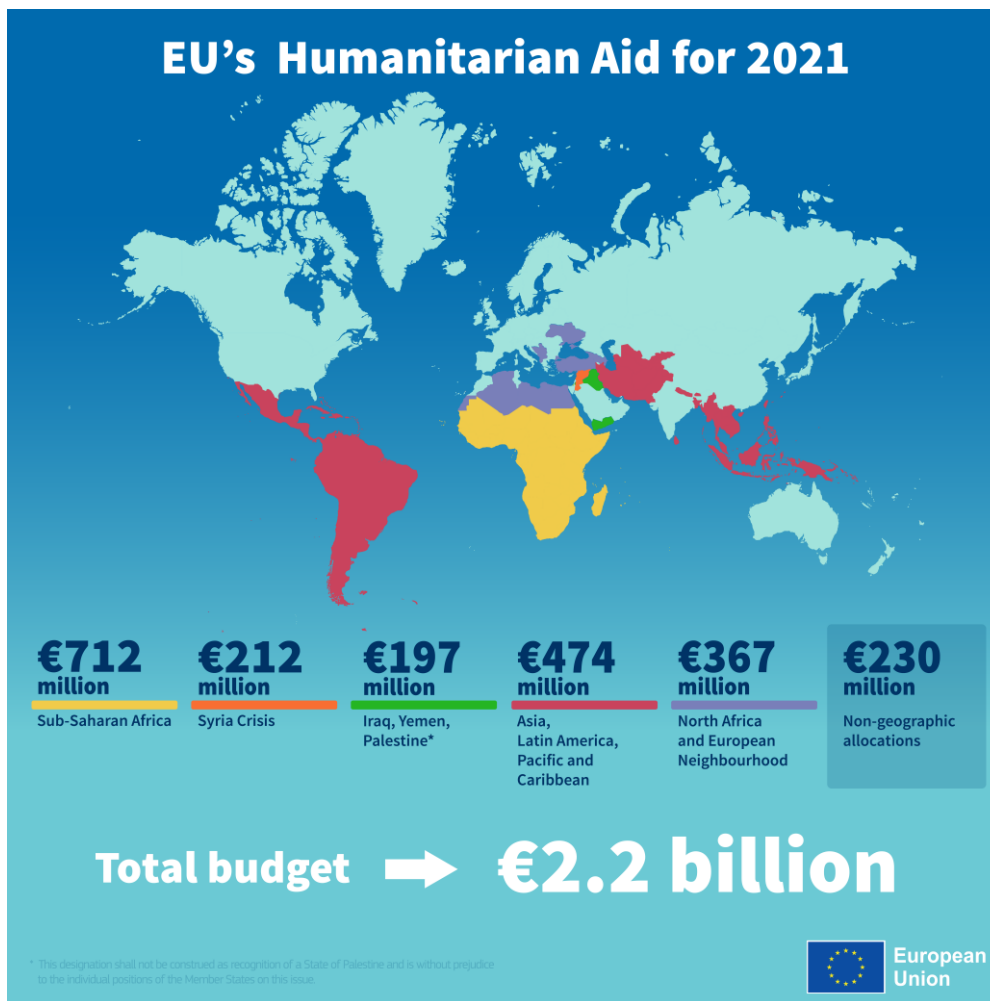
As a humanitarian donor the EU, through DG ECHO, provided needs-based humanitarian assistance based on the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, non-discrimination and independence<sup>1</sup>. In response to unprecedented humanitarian needs, the **EU's final humanitarian aid budget for 2021 stands at EUR 2 191.8 million**. DG ECHO intervened not only in large-scale humanitarian crises attracting widespread attention – like Syria or Ethiopia – but also in forgotten crises<sup>2</sup>, i.e. severe, protracted humanitarian crises, often with a low media interest, where affected populations are receiving insufficient international aid.

Beyond being a key donor for its partner organisations (international NGOs, United Nations agencies, Red Cross & Red Crescent family, and other international organisations) the EU plays an important role in steering and developing thematic policies, supporting multilateral actions, and coordinating approaches with EU Member States. DG ECHO also plays a key role as an emergency responder in organising EU humanitarian air bridge operations to deliver humanitarian goods and transport humanitarian workers, including to hard-to-reach areas where assistance could not otherwise be delivered.

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the Treaty (Article 214 TFEU) as well as the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of Forgotten Crises: Sahrawi crisis (Algeria); Burundi regional refugee crisis; Madagascar drought; Rohingya regional crisis; Armed conflict in Mindanao (Philippines)).



Giving a new impulse to this essential humanitarian work, on 10 March 2021 the Commission adopted the **Communication EU's humanitarian action: New challenges, same principles** (COM(2021)110). The Communication identifies a number of areas in which the EU will have to act in line with its priorities, such as promoting a better environment for humanitarian aid delivery, and enhancing EU global leadership. The issue of resources is crucial, and the EU commits to working on increasing the funding available, narrowing the funding gap, and to improving the use of resources available. Specific actions identified include inter alia strengthening internal EU coordination on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), while promoting an external compliance framework and linking sanction regimes to serious violations of IHL.

The EU's engagement is continuously growing in the area of Civil Protection. Through the UCPM, which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021, DG ECHO supports and complements an unprecedented number of actions taken by EU Member States, with a view to improving prevention, preparedness and response to disasters, as well as to fostering consistency in international civil protection work. It notably stepped up its efforts on the acquisition of Aerial Firefighting Assets. The 2021 **budget for the UCPM was EUR 899.1<sup>3</sup> million** including an

<sup>3</sup> Includes co-delegation from Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), please see Annex 3 Table 1.

important Next Generation EU (NGEU) component<sup>4</sup> granted to support the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Progress was also achieved as regards the regulatory framework, with the adoption of Regulation 2021/836 on 20 May 2021, which amended Decision 1313/2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism. The reviewed legislation notably introduces important improvements in prevention, preparedness and response measures notably enabling it to act as a safety net.

DG ECHO has more than **500 staff working in headquarters** and also a strong presence in the field, which provides valuable information about the situation on the ground. For the latter, DG ECHO had on 31 December 2021 more than **450 staff deployed in its 51 field offices located in 40 non-EU countries**.

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<sup>4</sup> UCPM budget for 2021: EUR 220.5 million (MFF strand) and EUR 678.6 million (NGEU).

## 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 Treaties<sup>5</sup>.

### A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives (executive summary of section 1)

The European Union, including its Member States, is the world's leading donor in humanitarian assistance and is consistently at the forefront of the response to crises and disasters, relying to this end on the Humanitarian Aid Regulation<sup>6</sup> and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism<sup>7</sup>.

In 2021 the world faced unprecedented challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Humanitarian needs continued to increase to an all-time high, driven largely by the resurgence of conflicts, combined with the impact of climate change, environmental degradation, global population growth and failed governance. In 2021, 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, DG ECHO funded in 2021 operations of humanitarian organisations in a wide range of crisis-affected countries and regions, such as Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, South Sudan, Venezuela, the Sahel region and Ukraine. The larger part of the EU humanitarian funding was dedicated to addressing needs arising from protracted crises, mainly driven by conflict and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of 2021, it was estimated that more than 235<sup>8</sup> million people across the world – the highest figure in decades – were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, and more funding than ever was required to help them. DG ECHO deployed **operations in more than 80 countries, covering 98% of the countries for which the UN had launched an appeal**. A total budget of **EUR 2 191.8 million was mobilised in 2021** for humanitarian aid, notably thanks to significant budgetary reinforcements during the year.

Beyond direct support to operations, DG ECHO also kept having a key role in shaping humanitarian policy. In March 2021 the Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action<sup>9</sup> was adopted: "New challenges, same principles", which sets out how

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<sup>5</sup> Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

<sup>6</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid (OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> 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)

<sup>8</sup> Global Humanitarian Overview 2021 [Global Humanitarian Overview 2021 | Global Humanitarian Overview \(unocha.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> See [hacommunication2021.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



EU supporting the COVID-19 vaccination rollout in remote areas of DRC.  
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the EU, with its partners and other donors, can address more effectively the growing humanitarian needs, and provide a better enabling environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Communication identified a number of emerging policy approaches, which will be further developed in the coming years in conjunction with existing policies. As part of the Communication, DG ECHO laid the ground for establishing a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)**, which is a new instrument that enables DG ECHO to directly fill critical gaps in the delivery of

humanitarian assistance, particularly in the area of the humanitarian logistics and supply chain. The Communication also sets the objective of enhancing the EU's engagement and leadership in humanitarian aid to maximise its impact, including by strengthening the Team Europe approach. In 2021, specific attention was given to support the response to the **COVID-19 pandemic in Africa**. To this end, DG ECHO mobilised EUR 100 million with a view to assisting national health systems in implementing vaccination campaigns against COVID-19, and to facilitate the “last mile delivery” of vaccines. The support package covers 34 African countries with several implementing partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UNHCR as well as international NGOs.

The **Humanitarian Air Bridge (HAB)** continued to operate with 21 flights in 2021 providing essential medical supplies and humanitarian cargo. With three new countries added in 2021, the HAB has now covered a total of 23 countries.

DG ECHO continued in the first semester of 2021 to co-chair with Switzerland the **Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative (GHD)**<sup>10</sup>, aiming e.g. to continue raising donors' awareness to the importance of promoting principled and effective humanitarian action and preserving the humanitarian space in an increasingly challenging context (overarching priority for the 3-year co-chairmanship). In the first half of 2021, donor exchanges focused in particular on challenges and concerns linked to counter-terrorism measures, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations and access impediments, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second semester of 2021, the GHD co-chairmanship was handed over to Belgium and Finland. DG ECHO also continued to work on the implementation of the **Grand Bargain**<sup>11</sup>, playing an active role as a member of the Facilitation Group, not only to achieve joint progress across constituencies (humanitarian donors and partners) on the commitments, but also to help shaping reflections on the Grand Bargain 2.0, which was

<sup>10</sup> 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>

<sup>11</sup> See [\(EN\) Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework.pdf \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](#)



endorsed in June 2021. DG ECHO has piloted the common '8+3 reporting template', which is now used by a growing number of donors and aid agencies. DG ECHO has made progress on multi-annual funding through longer-duration actions on 'Education in Emergencies' and disaster risk reduction, as well as through the new generation of pilot Programmatic Partnerships<sup>12</sup>. In line with the Grand Bargain commitment to support local responders, the Commission renewed its contributions to the Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) in South Sudan and Ukraine in 2021.

DG ECHO also pursued its awareness raising and advocacy work to ensure that counter-terrorism measures and sanctions regimes comply with International Humanitarian Law.

In 2021, DG ECHO signed three **new pilot Programmatic Partnerships** with UN and International Organisations. These multi-year multi-country programmes come in addition to the four pilot Programmatic Partnerships signed with NGOs in 2020. They provide more predictability and flexibility to partners, promote some of the Grand Bargain commitments (such as the localisation agenda; the nexus approach; the use of cash), and seek to bring overall efficiency gains. The first lesson learned exercise with NGO partners was conducted in 2021 and will feed into the reflection for the future of the Programmatic Partnership model in 2022.

DG ECHO, alongside the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), pursued efforts to develop and roll out a coordinated need assessment methodology for the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, i.e. the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF). DG ECHO, as a member of the Steering Committee of the JIAF, facilitated important agreements and paved the way for further progress in intersectoral analysis and transparency, with the introduction in 2021 of people-centred need assessments in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

DG ECHO co-chaired the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) Donor Advisory Group, together with the IFRC secretariat. The co-chairmanship gave a boost to EU visibility vis-à-vis the IFRC, national societies, as well as other donor members and observers. DG ECHO was successful in raising awareness of risk-informed preparedness and anticipation – including climate and greening – in line with the DG ECHO Disaster Preparedness Guidelines. Furthermore, fruitful discussions on issues like IFRC governance, planning, and budget fed into the design of the overall strategic framework of the IFRC Pilot Programmatic Partnership signed in December 2021.

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 IHL<sup>13</sup>. DG ECHO also

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<sup>12</sup> The pilot Programmatic Partnerships are enhanced, more strategic partnerships, offering a multi-year, multi-country perspective based on a longer-term logic of intervention. The pilot Programmatic Partnerships promote certain aspects of the Grand Bargain, such as localisation and a participatory approach, increased efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of assistance, and the promotion of a joined-up approach with development actors (nexus), of joint needs analysis and of the use of cash.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

strengthened its efforts to foster the respect of IHL and improve the monitoring of violations, in line with the abovementioned Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action. In 2021, DG ECHO organised a high-level side event on IHL in the margins of the UN General Assembly Ministerial Week. A dedicated inter-service Commission working group was established at the end of 2021, to examine the possibilities and means for strengthening coordination on IHL.

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. 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 2021. DG ECHO helped ensure, through an active participation, that 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.<sup>14</sup>

DG ECHO continued regular dialogue with the main humanitarian partners, organising EU Strategic Dialogues with WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and IFRC, as well as High-level Dialogues with a number of other key partners. DG ECHO also represented the EU in the governing bodies of WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR and prepared and coordinated related statements, including with Member States.



Mauritania: EU supporting the World Food Programme to provide food assistance and cash distributions to help Malian refugees.  
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Key actions across all policy priorities of the Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action progressed in 2021 and are expected to further develop, including through the 2022 European Humanitarian Forum. The Commission has undertaken a mapping of the use of digital tools in EU-funded humanitarian aid, with a view of developing a policy approach to increase efficiency in 2022. The impact of climate change and environmental considerations were further mainstreamed in humanitarian aid,

including through work to reduce the environmental impact of humanitarian operations. Anticipatory action was promoted, in areas from disaster reduction to food security. DG ECHO contributed to global discussions on food and nutrition through the **UN Food Systems Summit** and the **Nutrition for Growth Summit** and engaged in dialogues on coordination with other global actors, such as G7 “Famine and Humanitarian Crises Panel”. Efforts continued to further promote and implement the humanitarian-development-peace nexus

<sup>14</sup> Initiated by the Chair of the 2020 Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the Economic and Social Council

(also specifically for education), including through the programming of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe) and through conflict prevention.

In 2021, 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



Two children and a woman carrying a child make their way to a relocation centre through a flooded area in Mozambique.

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assistance. DG ECHO contributed to the preparations of the High-Level Meeting on the Global Refugee Forum held in December 2021. Furthermore, together with DG INTPA and the EU delegation in Geneva, DG ECHO started the preparations for the EU's Vice-Chairmanship (as of 1 January 2022), and then the Chairmanship (1 July 2022 – 31 December 2023) of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, with the aim of making our societies become more resilient and better able to adapt.

DG ECHO further refined and streamlined its Disaster Preparedness and risk-informed approach to humanitarian action in the broader global **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** agenda. All Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs) referred to the integration of risk analysis, risk reduction and preparedness activities into response operations and prioritisation of preparedness for response, including anticipatory actions and greening of humanitarian operations. This has resulted in further mainstreaming of disaster preparedness in humanitarian assistance into about half of the grants signed in 2021.

DG ECHO continued to promote investments in disaster preparedness across the Commission. DG ECHO is the Commission's focal point for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and has continued to promote the implementation of the framework in the contexts of the UCPM, humanitarian action, and the humanitarian-development nexus. To further support this, DG ECHO elaborated a joint work programme with UNDRR for 2020-2021 and contributed to the organisation of the European Forum for DRR.

In 2021 DG ECHO continued to promote 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).

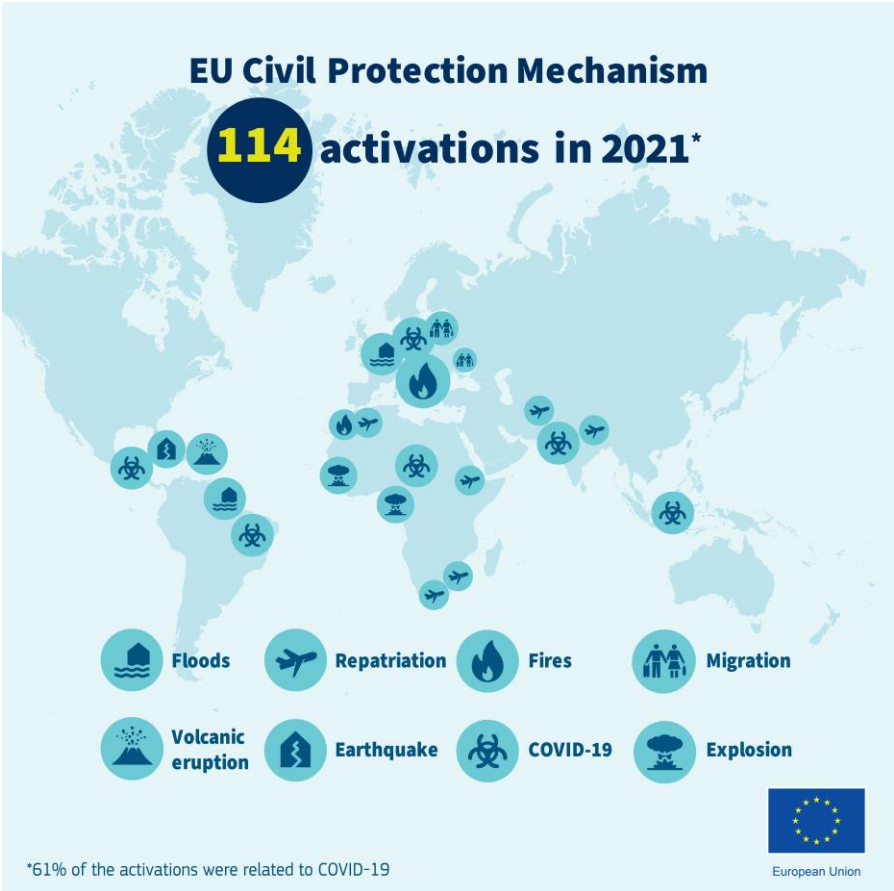
In 2021, DG ECHO began implementation of the approach to reduce **the environmental footprint** of humanitarian assistance, elaborated in 2020. The approach comprises mainstreaming environmental considerations across both projects and programmes as well

as DG ECHO's own activities in headquarters and field offices. As part of this process, in 2021 DG ECHO developed **minimum environmental requirements** for partners in priority areas where readily available solutions can provide the greatest environmental benefits (to be launched at the European Humanitarian Forum in 2022). In 2021, DG ECHO also developed multiple capacity building tools (training and compendium) and introduced for the first time specific environmental expertise into the ECHO Field Network.

## Responding in times of crisis

**The UCPM was activated an unprecedented 114 times** in 2021, for a wide range of disasters. The Mechanism provided assistance in 91% of the cases. Even with resource constraints and competing demands on a global scale in response to the pandemic, the UCPM facilitated the delivery of numerous items of critical personal protective and medical equipment, including almost 30 million of COVID-19 vaccine doses. 95 air operations were organised under the Mechanism to evacuate EU citizens and persons under EU duty of care from Afghanistan. The UCPM was a beacon of intra-EU solidarity, with a 100% response rate to the 45 requests from EU Member States and UCPM Participating States that were submitted through the Mechanism for support to consular, medical and other emergencies (e.g. earthquakes, forest fires and flooding). The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) facilitated and assisted in these operations and also supported first responders on 65 occasions with high-resolution maps to enhance their situational awareness (627 maps produced via Copernicus). While COVID-related requests constituted still the majority of all UCPM activations in 2021, the ERCC also responded to **45 non-COVID related emergencies** (such as devastating forest fires in Southern Europe and Southern neighbourhood, extreme floods in western Europe, Timor Este and Guyana, evacuations from Afghanistan, a devastating earthquake in Haiti, migratory pressure at EU's eastern border and in Ukraine). 141 UCPM experts, 14 liaison officers and 42 EU emergency response teams were deployed through the ERCC in total in response to emergencies in 2021, including 9 emergency medical teams in response to COVID-19, 6 search & rescue teams, and one Technical Assistance and Support Team (TAST) in response to the earthquake in Haiti.

As regards the ongoing response to COVID-19 emergency, DG ECHO supported in 2021 numerous countries in the world that were the most heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, through the delivery of personal protective, medical equipment and vaccines. In light of a deteriorating situation in some Member States, the **rescEU stockpiling** was mobilised. DG ECHO facilitated transport of medical teams, medical equipment and relief items from non-EU countries into the EU. The frequent mobilisation of the already established rescEU medical stockpile and the anticipation of future needs at Union level triggered the publication of a new, extended call for proposals to further develop the existing rescEU



stockpile. Launched in the fall of 2021, this new call includes procurement of therapeutics, laboratory supplies and vaccines outside as well as within the EU, and transfers of patients within Europe and to neighbouring countries. The grant agreements under this call are expected to be signed in early 2022. DG ECHO also contributed to ensure complementarity between the UCPM (including the rescEU) and the Emergency Support Instrument.

Under the **Emergency Support Instrument (ESI)** Mobility Package, DG ECHO granted in 2021 EUR 22.5 million to 9 Member States for cargo transport of COVID-19 vaccination-related equipment and therapeutics, as well as transfer of patients and medical teams in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, across two separate calls. This brings the total granted amount to more than EUR 173 million since April 2020 between 20 Member States and the UK for support to cargo transport of COVID-19 medical items, including support to operations for the transfer of approximately 450 medical personnel and 350 patients.

For external response, the European Commission mobilised support swiftly to respond in a coordinated manner, applying a Team Europe approach. The UCPM supported vaccine sharing of **almost 30 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to 39 non-EU countries**. 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 effective EU solidarity through the UCPM and the ERCC was complemented by a **revision of the UCPM legislation** initiated in 2020, which entered into force in May 2021. The amended legislation reinforced the European joint response, particularly to large-scale emergencies impacting several countries simultaneously, and established a more flexible system providing comprehensive cross-sectoral support to Member States and their citizens.

By the end of 2021 the **European Civil Protection Pool (ECP)** comprised 82 response capacities offered by 22 Member and Participating States. They were available for immediate deployment under the UCPM. Additionally, 33 candidate ECP capacities were set and will be registered in the ECP in the near future, following certification. The capacities committed in 2021 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, among other things. Despite COVID-19, the EU certification process was finalised for six new capacities in 2021. Seven new adaptation grants, for a total amount of nearly EUR 3.5 million, were awarded to 5 Member States for the upgrade of national capacities to allow for their international deployment, to increase preparedness and strengthen the EU response in case of health emergencies, forest fires, CBRN incidents and flooding.

In 2021, DG ECHO, based on its **evaluation programme**, finalised the “Evaluation of the European Union’s humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, 2017-2019”; “Evaluation of the EU’s implementation of the DG ECHO thematic policy document “Gender: different needs, adapted assistance”, 2014-2018”; “Evaluation of European Union’s humanitarian assistance in Syria, 2016-2018”, “Evaluation of the European Commission’s civil protection prevention and preparedness projects, 2014-2020” and the “Ex-post evaluation of the EU aid volunteers initiative, 2014-2020”<sup>15</sup>.

The irruption in 2021 of important crises and disasters within and outside the EU implied an increment in humanitarian aid and relief needs, difficult access to affected areas and populations in distress and required a wider coordination in the allocation of resources. This challenge was exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and the efforts to provide relief to affected populations, derived in an increased workload of interventions by DG ECHO. A wider volume of requests for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid complicated actions to reach objectives to reduce response time and improve adequacy, as well as to strengthen environmental considerations and disaster risk reduction in DG ECHO’s projects. In addition, the evolving humanitarian aid landscape, and the funding challenges to address global humanitarian needs, entailed a demanding situation for the EU’s response. Despite these difficulties, DG ECHO has adopted measures to overcome unplanned obstacles and to exponentially improve towards the achievement of its objectives.

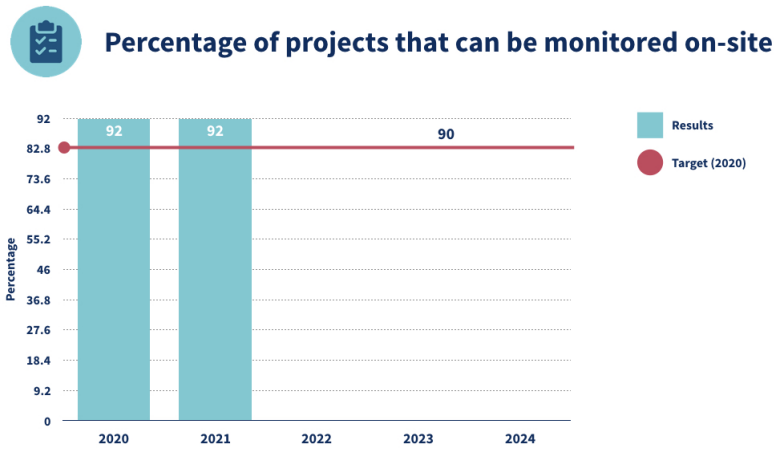
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<sup>15</sup> For thematic evaluations see [Thematic evaluations \(europa.eu\) and Geographic evaluations \(europa.eu\) for geographical evaluations](#)

## B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

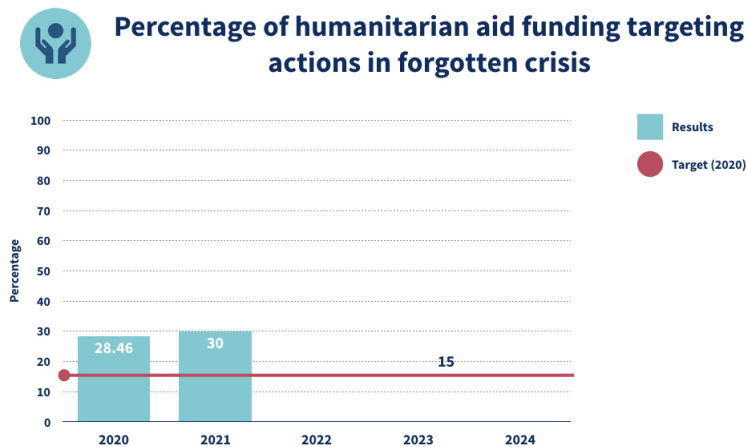
**1. Percentage of projects that can be monitored on-site** - DG ECHO objective 1: General objective 4: A Stronger Europe in the World - Specific objective 2: Humanitarian space is preserved and respect for International Humanitarian Law is ensured.

92% of projects that finished in 2021 were “monitored on-site”. This figure includes cases where physical visits in the end were not possible due to COVID-19 or other unanticipated restrictions, and mitigating measures – such as telematic or desk monitoring – were put in place. The rate remains stable compared to 2020.



**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

Around 30% of the initial commitments for the 2021 budget for humanitarian aid were allocated to forgotten crises. This rate represents a slight increase from 2020 levels and is clearly above the target of 15% set for this KPI.



**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 receipt by the Commission of the first offer of assistance in Common Emergency Communication and Information System 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 2021, the response time related to non-COVID-19 activations improved in comparison to 2020. For assistance between Member States, the average response time decreased from 182 hours to just 8 hours, and for activations outside Europe from 613 hours to 68. Both numbers are better than the targets set for 2024 (24 and 150 hours respectively). This improvement was made possible through lessons-learned exercises that took place from 2020, and especially through thematic meetings held between the Commission and Member/Participating States. Nevertheless, to further improve the UCPM ’s response to large-scale emergencies, DG ECHO continues to work on inter alia strategic autonomy in building capacities under the rescEU reserve among other measures.

Indicator	Inside Europe	Outside Europe
Response time	8 hours	68 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 completely fulfilled with the voluntary offers for assistance made by Member States and Participating States.

2021 was another challenging year with further increase in the number of requests for assistance under the UCPM – a record number of 114 activations (102 in 2020 and 20 in 2019).

Despite the very large quantities of in-kind items requested in 2021, the UCPM response was very effective. It facilitated the delivery of millions of personal protective equipment items, medical counter measures and vaccines, both to non-EU countries and to EU Member States and Participating States. This was made possible by the improved preparedness achieved through the rescEU stockpile established in March 2020 and further developed throughout 2020 and 2021, consisting of an EU safety net stockpile of COVID-19 countermeasures.



Personal Protective Equipment items (e.g. masks, million gloves etc.), medical equipment (ventilators, oxygen concentrators) mobilised both inside and outside EU. The rescEU stockpile continues to be developed by DG ECHO in cooperation with Member States and Participating States.

In total, 91% of the overall number of requests were responded to (104 out of 114). Inside Europe<sup>16</sup> 36 out of 36 (100%) requests were responded to, and outside Europe 68 out of 78 (87%) requests were responded to.

Indicator	Inside Europe	Outside Europe
<b>Adequacy of Response</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>87%</b>

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

In line with the Commission’s Internal Control Framework DG ECHO has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are called for as minor deficiencies were identified. Please refer to AAR 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. Minor improvements are necessary concerning staff awareness and knowledge of procedures relating to finance, internal control, planning and reporting. The following actions are/will be taken in this respect: Awareness raising and training of staff (already partly delivered end-2021) and strengthening of some controls. The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

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<sup>16</sup> A term "Europe" includes 27 EU MS as well as 6UCPM Participating States (Norway, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey)

## **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 assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of Commissioner Lenarčič, responsible for Crisis Management.

# 1. KEY RESULTS and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives

## External communication and visibility

In line with the objectives set in the Management Plan and with the communication ambitions outlined by the Commissioner 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 ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many of the communication actions initially planned had to be revised, some postponed, while a large share of the work delivered continued to show and explain the EU response to the pandemic, including rescEU preparedness measures and deployments.

**External communication** covered core aspects of DG ECHO's portfolio and gave further visibility to and supported the activities of the Commissioner. The communication activities covered, inter alia, major humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Ethiopia; large-scale emergency deployments such as the intense forest fire season in the Mediterranean, floods in Belgium, earthquake in Haiti; vaccine sharing operations as well as policy initiatives such as the adopted Communication on Humanitarian Action, the entry into force of the revised UCPM legislation, and the release of the latest Eurobarometer results.



Haiti: EU response to devastating earthquake. Delivery of water purification unit, coordinated by UCPM.  
© European Union, 2021

DG ECHO worked to ensure that its policy activities

feature in the Commission's communication efforts. In terms of traditional presswork, of 961 press releases and 192 press statements that the Commission spokespersons' service published in 2021, 69 press releases and 7 press statements (7.2% and 3.7% respectively) fell within the remit of DG ECHO activities. In addition, DG ECHO co-published a series of local press releases in collaboration with its active humanitarian aid partners, each highlighting the specific aid (funding) delivered by the EU in the countries concerned.

The initially planned communication actions were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the rapidly evolving situation and challenged access to several countries, DG ECHO could still take journalists of major French, Spanish and Polish news outlets on

press trips to Lebanon, Turkey, Mauritania and Honduras. In addition, DG ECHO could show the EU's humanitarian and civil protection response to journalists through press actions at headquarters' level and by working closely with EU Delegations and representations.

Concerning **digital media**, DG ECHO's website had as much as about 1.4 million page views, which indicates a high popularity. With over 544,000 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 2021**. A campaign showing the cross-border solidarity of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism ran in seven EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia) and recorded approximately 145 million impressions on social media and premium news sites online and through out-of-home advertising, reaching more than 36 million people.

The **"Safer Together" campaign**, developed together with an award-winning French photojournalism agency, ran throughout the whole year in eight EU countries (Austria, Denmark, Slovenia, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Portugal). With a mix of out-of-home advertising, social media promotion, partnerships with (photo and film) festivals and with media partnerships with media such as El País and La Repubblica, the campaign recorded approximately 140 million impressions, reaching approximately 37 million people.

For two other awareness-raising campaigns – on the humanitarian impact of climate change, and on the medical side of EU civil protection – the preparations started at the end 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, marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UCPM) 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).

Finally, DG ECHO's communication channels also supported the preparatory process of the upcoming European Humanitarian Forum, to be held in March 2022.

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

DG ECHO's work contributed significantly to the EU's global leadership in emergency response. In 2021, by mobilising both humanitarian aid and European civil protection assistance, DG ECHO continued providing relief and support to the most vulnerable people suffering from conflicts and disasters across the world. 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. DG ECHO manages the Commission's programmes on humanitarian aid and civil protection

through which its activities have been funded. Information on DG ECHO's 2021 achievements is also reflected on the 2021 programme statements for the humanitarian aid and civil protection programmes.

In 2021, as part of its Work Programme, the Commission adopted the **Communication on the EU's humanitarian action**<sup>17</sup>. The Communication set out policy priorities for EU humanitarian aid to better adapt to the new global geopolitical and humanitarian context for the years to come, in response to increasing humanitarian needs, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and a growing funding gap.

The Communication highlighted the role of the EU as a leading humanitarian donor in the world. It underscored that EU assistance represents the best possible value for money for its beneficiaries we serve and for European taxpayers, has the greatest possible impact on the ground and strengthens local humanitarian actors, while also projecting a strong European voice and presence on humanitarian issues around the world.

Throughout 2021, and despite the growing needs for humanitarian action and the evolving and challenging landscape in humanitarian aid response, DG ECHO delivered on specific commitments set out in the Communication. It presented a clear roadmap and timeframe for delivery (such as on the European Humanitarian Response Capacity; or the organisation of the first European Humanitarian Forum). DG ECHO engaged in a longer-term strategic effort with Member States and key partners to promote IHL compliance and to expand the donor base for humanitarian action both within the EU and externally, towards non-EU donor countries.

As part of this Communication, DG ECHO laid the ground for the establishment of a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)**. This new instrument is an important and ambitious step forward to enable DG ECHO to intervene directly to fill critical gaps in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in particular in the area of humanitarian logistics and supply chain. The EHRC will



Humanitarian Air bridge operation transporting medical equipment.  
© European Union, 2020

include several tools such as prepositioned stockpiles of emergency kits, a reinforced EU Humanitarian Air Bridge (EU HAB) and Rapid Response Teams. The overall concept of this

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<sup>17</sup> See [hacommunication2021.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

new initiative was elaborated throughout 2021 and the consultation process with Member States and DG ECHO partners started at the end of the year. The implementation phase of the EHRC will start as of 2022.

In 2021 DG ECHO continued to shape EU relations with major UN humanitarian partners, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), as well as with major International NGOs. DG ECHO continued coordinating the EU's participation in governing body meetings of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, in cooperation with EU Member States. It also held strategic dialogues with its main partners.

Furthermore, DG ECHO continued to play a leading role in different donor support groups, including the Donor Support Group of ICRC and the Donor Advisory Group of IFRC (this last one as a co-chair). DG ECHO together with Switzerland also co-chaired the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative until mid-2021. Building on the achievements of the past years and with a view to further increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian aid actions, DG ECHO continued its engagement in the relevant work streams aiming at addressing the Grand Bargain commitments. DG ECHO also contributed to the reflections on the post-2021 future of the Grand Bargain, and continued to take part in its Facilitation Group, and chaired the latter from December 2020 to January 2021 and in October and November 2021.

Against the backdrop of record humanitarian needs, DG ECHO's efforts to foster EU unity and joint action were an important contribution to making the EU's humanitarian response more effective and efficient, in particular through humanitarian diplomacy initiatives at the bilateral, regional and international levels. In all its operations, DG ECHO has sought to implement closely coordinated, joint approaches with EU Member States in international pledging conferences, while following a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach in protracted crises. In May 2021, the EU and its Member States made a joint funding announcement of EUR 30 million at the launch of the 2021 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh. At the June 2021 Pledging Conference on the Venezuela crisis, Commissioner Lenarčič could announce a Team Europe contribution of EUR 294 million from the EU and 21 Member States.<sup>18</sup> At the High-Level Ministerial meeting on Afghanistan on 13 September 2021, the EU and its Member States pledged a consolidated amount of EUR 677 million<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the EU has systematically sought to produce common messages on key humanitarian crises. In Afghanistan, after the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, common EU messages were agreed to advocate for IHL compliance by the de-facto authorities. On

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<sup>18</sup> International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants 2021 - YouTube

<sup>19</sup> Afghanistan Flash Appeal 2021 | Financial Tracking Service (unocha.org). <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1057/summary>



Bangladesh: Rohingya women listen to an awareness session on violence against women inside a women's "safe space"  
©Habiba Nowrose/The IRC. All rights reserved.

Ethiopia, the EU played a key leadership role in bringing major donors together at the highest level to advocate for access and respect of IHL, with two letters, signed by some 25 donors, sent in August and November 2021 to the Ethiopian authorities. A Senior Officials Meeting on 27 January 2022, co-organised by the EU, Denmark, Germany and UN OCHA, took stock of progress made to address protection needs, humanitarian access and strengthen compliance with IHL in Central Sahel countries.

The UCPM also included a strong external dimension in the area of disaster prevention, preparedness and response. Emergency aid was channelled by rapidly deploying of in-kind assistance, modules and expertise to non-EU countries that requested aid. Assistance also included mid- and long- term programmatic support as well as capacity building to Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood countries, policy dialogue and sharing of expertise with emergency management authorities and relevant international organisations across the globe. In 2021, the Civil Protection southern cooperation was proactively relaunched with the Union for the Mediterranean and its working groups, with a view to identifying lessons learned and future priorities, including a strategy for civil protection cooperation with southern countries. At the forefront of the response in the aftermath of disasters, DG ECHO continued to provide assistance to the affected countries and populations and seeking synergies between humanitarian aid and civil protection.

In addition, DG ECHO continued to use the full potential of its Emergency Toolbox. The Emergency Toolbox comprises four instruments designed to provide a first line of emergency humanitarian assistance to sudden-onset crises that could not be foreseen in DG ECHO's humanitarian implementation plans. It makes funding available very rapidly to help to address urgent needs in the aftermath of a disaster. The total assistance provided through the Emergency Toolbox in 2021 amounted to EUR 153.8 million<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The Emergency Toolbox is composed of ALERT (Acute Large Emergency Response Tool), Epidemics Tool, Small-scale tool and DREF. For 2021, the Emergency Toolbox funding was of EUR 34.8 million, which was increased throughout the year with an additional EUR 119 million.

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

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

Given the ever-increasing needs and limited resources, aid effectiveness and result-oriented actions remained a priority. This was a central element of the Communication on the EU's humanitarian action of March 2021, together with flexible funding, increased efficiency, impartial needs assessment, and simplification of reporting. The Communication and its follow-up also contributed to the post 2021 Grand Bargain process<sup>21</sup>.



'Eastern Ukraine: People in Need' delivers drinking water to Opytne's residents twice per month thanks to EU funding.  
© People in Need Ukraine. All rights reserved.

In line with Grand Bargain commitments, DG ECHO continued to pilot Programmatic Partnerships and engage in three new ones with UN/International Organisation partners on top of the four initial Programmatic Partnerships signed in 2020 with NGOs. It also started planning for two additional ones in 2022 focusing on IHL prevention and the coordination of humanitarian aid. Where necessary, DG ECHO further disseminated, implemented and updated existing thematic policies which may contribute to increasing the

effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The contributions to Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) in Ukraine and South Sudan, which mark an important evolution in DG ECHO delivery mode, were renewed in 2021. The renewal of the contributions was based on the globally satisfactory results of the lessons learnt exercise, which took place in 2021. The conclusions of this exercise proved that both funds help pursuing the Commission's aid strategy in both countries and are broadly relevant for meeting certain Grand Bargain commitments. It confirmed that DG ECHO and UNOCHA's interests in these CBPFs are largely aligned, especially in terms of strengthening leadership and coordination of the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country; that DG ECHO's Humanitarian Implementation Plans and the country's Humanitarian Response Plan are well aligned; and that CBPFs support localisation, flexibility, timeliness, transparency and accountability of the actions funded. DG ECHO's role as a lead donor was reinforced by its support to common evidence-based tools such as the INFORM Severity and Risk Indexes produced by the (Joint Research Center) JRC for use by many humanitarian organisations. DG ECHO also kept on having a leading role in multilateral high-level discussions, and during programme implementation in the field, on matters

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<sup>21</sup> See [hacommunication2021.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



relating to greater effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian aid (see section on Specific Objective 1: People and communities at risk of disasters are resilient and prepared).

Moreover, as part of its aid effectiveness and efficiency agenda, DG ECHO carried on supporting the development of innovative solutions and approaches, in cooperation with a wide range of actors, including its partners and the Development Financial Institutions (DFIs). In 2021 a call for pilot projects in humanitarian blended finance was launched, aiming to draw in additional private sector resources for humanitarian response. DG ECHO also sought to enable increasing digitalisation by investing in solutions aimed at supporting interoperable systems across the humanitarian community.

DG ECHO has 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; it continued to offer situational awareness analyses and scientific reports to the humanitarian aid community.

### ***Thematic policy priorities***

Over the years, the DG ECHO developed several policies and guidance documents in areas such as protection, gender, health, food, shelter and disability. These documents outline the Commission's position on key international frameworks and standards and provide concrete recommendations to its implementing partners on programming. The overall objective is to ensure quality, coherence and accountability of EU-funded humanitarian operations. A new policy on humanitarian logistics was developed in 2021 and published in February 2022 and will be discussed at the European Humanitarian Forum in March 2022.

In 2021, DG ECHO has kept on ensuring that these policies are applied in EU-funded humanitarian operations.

#### *Protection and focus on the most vulnerable*

The persisting prevalence of breaches of International Humanitarian Law and the widespread risks and instances of violence, deprivation and abuse in today's crises have made humanitarian protection a key concern in today's humanitarian contexts. In 2021 **protection** remained a priority in DG ECHO humanitarian assistance, in line with the provisions of the Commission's Staff Working Document 'Humanitarian Protection: Improving protection outcomes to reduce risks for people in humanitarian crises'. DG ECHO contributed to the preparation of the **Joint Communication on a strategic approach to support disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants**<sup>22</sup> which was adopted in December 2021.

Humanitarian crises have a different impact on women, girls, boys and men. Their differentiated needs and specific vulnerabilities during and in the aftermath of crises need

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<sup>22</sup> See: [join\\_2021\\_35\\_1\\_en\\_act\\_part1\\_v3\\_0.pdf\(europa.eu\)](#)

to be addressed accordingly. DG ECHO has continued to mainstream gender and age across all sectors, thus advancing the implementation of the approach to gender and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises outlined in the Staff Working Document ‘Gender: Different Needs, Adapted Assistance’<sup>23</sup> and the DG ECHO Gender-Age Marker. This work also contributes to the implementation of the new EU Gender Action Plan III 2021-2024<sup>24</sup> as well as the Women, Peace and Security agenda<sup>25</sup>.

The EU remained an active member of the **Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence in Emergencies** initiative and in January 2021 made eight commitments to the new Roadmap adopted in 2020. In operational terms, DG ECHO continued to support prevention and response to sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) through targeted actions, such as the provision of lifesaving sexual and reproductive health and mental health services, among others, to women in various countries in the world.

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 response, DG ECHO contributed to the preparation of the new **EU Disability Strategy** adopted in March 2021.

### *Education in Emergencies*



Helping children get back to school in conflict-torn Burkina Faso  
© European Union, 2021 (photographer: Olympia de Maismont)

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. Children are furthermore to a large extent in need of specialised protection services. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected children’s protection needs as well as the access to education on an unprecedented scale<sup>26</sup>, impacting mostly vulnerable children. DG ECHO continued its Education in Emergencies (EiE) actions across the

world, dedicating 10% of EU humanitarian aid 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.

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<sup>23</sup> See [gender\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> See [join-2020-17-final\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> See [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/peace/conflict-prevention-peacebuilding/Parliament as partners supporting the Women Peace and Security Agenda - A Global Handbook.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/peace/conflict-prevention-peacebuilding/Parliament%20as%20partners%20supporting%20the%20Women%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Agenda%20-%20A%20Global%20Handbook.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> At the first peak of the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020, over 1.5 billion children, roughly 90% of students worldwide, were out of school due to measures to control the spread of COVID-19 (UNESCO data)

DG ECHO continued to support formal and non-formal education at the primary and secondary levels of education, promoting integrated and innovative solutions to ensure that children have equitable access to quality learning, in line with its policy framework<sup>27</sup>.

DG ECHO sustained its commitment to protect children broadly and more specifically children associated with armed conflict (CAAC), for example by supporting the Safe Schools Declaration and the protection of education from attack, as also underlined in the **new EU strategy on the rights of the child** adopted in March 2021<sup>28</sup>.

The European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 2/2021: 'EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need but should be longer term and reach more girls'<sup>29</sup> recognises the key value of education to address the needs of the most vulnerable children and acknowledges the positive results of the intervention. DG ECHO is in the process of implementing the actions addressing the recommendations by the end of June 2022.

### *Cash as delivery modality*

In line with the Grand Bargain commitments, DG ECHO continued to encourage the use of cash transfers whenever appropriate. Cash transfers provide affected populations with choice, flexibility and more control over their own lives, thus preserving dignity. In particular, to support international engagement on cash transfers, DG ECHO co-chaired the Donor Cash Forum from January 2021 and actively participated and represented other donors in the caucus on cash under the respective Grand Bargain work stream.



To prevent the spread of viruses – both COVID-19 and Ebola – EU humanitarian and development funding supporting the Guinea and the French Red Cross to carry out hygiene promotion in the community in Guinea.  
© Naomi Nolte/IFRC, 2021.

### *Other thematic policies*

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, DG ECHO's **health, water, sanitation and hygiene** (WASH) assistance remained a core sector of humanitarian aid interventions in 2021. In 2021, DG ECHO continued to encourage funded humanitarian WASH actions to be risk-informed and required from its partners that WASH interventions aim at reducing the environmental footprint.

<sup>27</sup> COM(2018)304 of May 2018 and the Commission Staff Working Document on Education in Emergencies in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations: [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie\\_in\\_humanitarian\\_assistance.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie_in_humanitarian_assistance.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> See [ds0821040enn\\_002.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie_in_humanitarian_assistance.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Please see [Special Report 02/2021: EU humanitarian aid for education \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/eie_in_humanitarian_assistance.pdf)

DG ECHO actively participated in the development and the implementation of the working programme of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU (2<sup>nd</sup> semester of 2021) as regards the water-related agenda, which was one of the key priorities of the Presidency. In this regard, DG ECHO was involved in the drafting of the Council conclusions on water in the EU's external action<sup>30</sup>, adopted on 19 November 2021, and participated in several high-level water-related events during the same period.

According to the 2021 Global Report on Food Crises<sup>31</sup>, more than 155 million people experienced acute hunger requiring urgent **food, nutrition and livelihood** assistance in 2020.<sup>32</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these figures in the first half of the year, up to 161 million, and by October 2021 five countries were considered at risk of famine. High levels of acute and chronic malnutrition in children living in emergency conditions remained of concern.

To address this situation, DG ECHO acted on several fronts. Humanitarian funding was significantly increased to the 42 countries most affected by food insecurity<sup>33</sup>: initial allocations were 20% higher compared to 2020 and, additionally, more than EUR 250 million was mobilised from reserves throughout the year. DG ECHO committed to spend at least EUR 1.1 billion to fight malnutrition in the period 2021-2024 as part of an ambitious EU pledge of EUR 2.5 billion made at the Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G) in December 2021. Advocacy was intensified in key countries such as Yemen, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Nigeria.

Actions were also taken with a longer-term perspective, including a further enforcement of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in food crises scenarios, and the promotion of anticipatory action approaches (e.g. a high-level event was co-organised with the FAO and the WFP in October 2021).

In addition to DG ECHO's engagement in the UN Food Systems Summit and the Nutrition for Growth Summit, coordination with other global actors was ensured through participation in platforms such as the G7 "Famine and Humanitarian Crises Panel", the Global Network against Food Crises, or the Food Assistance Convention.

In 2021, DG ECHO finalised the development of a humanitarian logistics policy, including consultation with partners and other humanitarian actors. The policy builds on the growing consensus in the humanitarian community that the sector should drive towards a paradigm shift in its approach to humanitarian logistics, and on the experiences of the humanitarian supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic. The overarching priorities of the policy are to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid, and to contribute to the greening of humanitarian aid. The policy document was published in February 2022.

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<sup>30</sup> See [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>31</sup> See [GRFC 2021\\_050521\\_med.pdf \(fsinplatform.org\)](#)

<sup>32</sup> Global Network Against food Crises and Food Security Information Network, *2021 Global Report on Food Crises- Joint Analysis for Better Decisions*, 2021 [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000127343/download/?\\_ga=2.194853805.1210862064.1646059004-1799341724.1646059004](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000127343/download/?_ga=2.194853805.1210862064.1646059004-1799341724.1646059004).

<sup>33</sup> Countries with populations in IPC phase 4 or higher.

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

In today's armed conflicts, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations continue to be widespread and systematic causing unspeakable harm to civilian populations, destroying key civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools and rendering the work of humanitarian and medical personnel even more challenging.

Systematic violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) have been consistently on the rise, 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.

In 2021 Commissioner Lenarčič and DG ECHO continued to carry out systematic public **advocacy** inter alia through public statements, interventions in multilateral fora, and championing advocacy on specific crises and issues.

In line with the new Communication on the **EU's humanitarian action**, DG ECHO promoted a debate on how to enhance the monitoring of IHL violations, notably through a side event of the UN General Assembly in September 2021. Strengthening IHL was also a key focus of the preparatory work of the upcoming European Humanitarian Forum, namely regional conferences and a dedicated webinar in November 2021. Furthermore, DG ECHO worked towards facilitating the coordination of EU actors and supporting a stronger EU humanitarian diplomacy. To this end DG ECHO established a dedicated inter-service group on IHL (bringing together Commission services and the EEAS), which held its first meeting in December 2021.

Within the broad area of IHL compliance, the Commission has also been promoting the protection of education from attack and the protection of children in armed conflict more specifically. This was the subject of a high-level side event, jointly organised with Belgium, in the margins of the 2021 UN General Assembly.

DG ECHO also supported the organisation of a discussion series on the safety and security of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflicts organised by the EU Delegation to the UN, which produced an Outcome Document with over 40 recommendations.

DG ECHO also pursued its awareness raising and advocacy work to ensure that counter-terrorism measures and sanctions regimes comply with International Humanitarian Law. This included: publication of the new sanctions section on the DG ECHO Partners' website, publication of the Guidance on Annex 5 of the Humanitarian Aid Model Grant Agreement for the direct management, continuous dialogue with key stakeholders (Member States, donors, humanitarian operators, private sector) and close cooperation with relevant Commission's services.

### 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 a swift, efficient and comprehensive response.

In order to provide adequate and effective assistance, DG ECHO continued to use various information tools allowing to have fresh and thorough data and expert advice to underpin evidence-based decision-making. In 2021, DG ECHO continued to improve evidence-based funding allocation tools.

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 continued to put particular emphasis on responding to "forgotten crises" by devoting a sizeable part of the funding to address needs in areas of difficult access, and by providing a rapid response in areas or sectors underfunded by other donors in 2021.



Colombia: EU funding helps the Danish Refugee Council to assist displaced people in several municipalities in Telembi.

© European Union, 2021 (photographer: N.Mazars)

### **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and cross-cutting issues**

In 2021, the Communication on Humanitarian Action set out the objective of ensuring that EU humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming to reduce needs and tackle the root causes of conflicts and crises and outlined a number of key actions. Implementation of the Communication is well underway. Significant developments to date are DG ECHO's contribution to longer-term strategies for the 2021-2027 EU multiannual financial framework. DG ECHO was also involved in the designing of strategies under the newly established Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe) and made significant contributions to the programming of funds across fragile and conflict affected countries.

DG ECHO continued to push forward the need for accelerated action in the implementation of a nexus approach at every possible opportunity in 2021, including the annual strategic dialogue with strategic partners, in bilateral dialogue with UN agencies, civil society etc.

An external study on the implementation of the nexus in six pilot countries and beyond started in 2021 (DG INTPA is in the lead). This study is expected to build capacity and provide the EU and key stakeholders with recommendations to further strengthen the EU implementation of the nexus.

Given the numbers of forcibly displaced people and the length of crises<sup>34</sup>, DG ECHO continued to raise the awareness of the situation of vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and Internally Displaced People (IDPs), in line with the Commission Communication 'Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance'<sup>35</sup>. The main objective is to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of both the displaced and their host communities through a multi-actor approach from the outset of displacement crises. Both development and humanitarian actors carried on implementing the approach in an ever-increasing number of countries.

Scaling up social protection keeps on being a significant factor to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations, provide more durable solutions and enable efficient humanitarian assistance in response to sudden-onset disasters. In line with the Commission's Guidance Package on Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus<sup>36</sup>, DG ECHO continued to engage with development actors to support the development of shock-responsive social protection systems whenever feasible. Throughout 2021, DG ECHO also sustained the close cooperation with DG INTPA to increase complementarities and knowledge on social protection across the humanitarian-development nexus.<sup>37</sup>

The Commission has also continued to work on conflict prevention, including through the EU Conflict Early Warning System, designed to close the gap between early warning and early action, and which engages European External Action Service (EEAS) and Commission staff across services in a joint assessment of conflict dynamics. DG ECHO has also been contributing to the EU-conflict analysis screening (CAS) reports for fragile countries, led by EEAS, together with DG INTPA and DG NEAR.

### **Examples of Humanitarian Crises to which DG ECHO responded in 2021:**

In 2021 DG ECHO, as a global humanitarian donor, provided humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable crisis-affected people in 82 countries, including the largest crises and forgotten crises. Some significant examples of DG ECHO's response during the year are provided below.

### **COVID-19 response in external action**

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission swiftly mobilised support to respond in a coordinated manner, applying a Team Europe approach. The response to humanitarian needs resulting from the pandemic, including vaccine solidarity, has been an

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<sup>34</sup> More than 80 % of displacement crises last for more than 10 years – Source: Crawford, N. and others, 2015. *Protracted displacement uncertain paths to self-reliance* in exile. ODI, Humanitarian Policy Group.

<sup>35</sup> COM (2016)234 final/2

<sup>36</sup> SPaN 2018-2019 as can be consulted on <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/file/102971/download?token=tlgAy1s>

<sup>37</sup> Note Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Study.

important element of the external dimension of EU support. DG ECHO has been providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations affected by the pandemic, focusing on the most vulnerable populations already facing conflict, displacement, natural disasters or the effects of climate change. A total of EUR 656 million in humanitarian support has been mobilised since the beginning of the pandemic, of which EUR 204 million in 2021.

EU humanitarian response has been tailored to ensure the availability of vaccines and the swift implementation of vaccination campaigns with a particular focus on Africa, in countries with critical humanitarian needs and hard-to-reach populations and areas.

In February 2021, DG ECHO mobilised EUR 100 million to provide humanitarian support to the COVID-19 vaccination rollout in Africa, to assist national health systems in implementing vaccination campaigns and to facilitate the “last mile delivery” of vaccines. The support package covers 34 African countries with several implementing partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as well as international NGOs. The package has been designed and is being implemented by regularly consulting and informing the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (AfCDC), to ensure coherence with their continental strategy for vaccination.

In addition, to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines by vulnerable populations who for valid reasons were not included in national vaccine deployment plans (e.g. refugees, IDPs, people living in conflict zones and/or in areas), in July 2021, DG ECHO mobilised EUR 10 million to support the COVAX Humanitarian Buffer and in particular in-country operational/delivery costs. This additional humanitarian funding supported the UNICEF ACT-A Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal, which was used as centralised mechanism to cover the operational/delivery costs associated with the allocations of COVID-19 vaccines from the Humanitarian Buffer. By the end 2021, 1.6 million doses were delivered, for instance, to Iran to vaccinate refugees from Afghanistan.

## Syria

The Syria crisis, in its eleventh year in 2021, continued to cause massive displacement, casualties and tremendous suffering to the civilian population, with more than 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>38</sup> inside the country. Some EUR 220 million was allocated by DG ECHO to support the most vulnerable people impacted by this crisis, including Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. DG ECHO sustained the delivery 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 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.

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<sup>38</sup> 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic (March 2021) [EN/AR] - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb





Şahid and her children fled the war in Syria 5 years ago and found safety in Turkey. Now, they are living in Istanbul.  
© European Union, 2021

In Turkey, DG ECHO kept on providing support to the largest refugee population in the world (close to 4 million, of which 3.6 million Syrians). In 2016, the EU created the **EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey** to assist Turkey in its efforts to support refugees. Under the Facility, the EU has invested EUR 2.4 billion in humanitarian assistance in Turkey. In addition to projects funded via the Facility, the EU allocated EUR 32.5 million in humanitarian funding between

2012 and 2014 as well as EUR 531.7 million in 2020.<sup>39</sup> In December 2021, the EU announced an additional EUR 325 million to ensure the continuation of the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), the largest EU humanitarian programme, until early 2023. The ESSN provides monthly cash payments directly to refugees through a debit card to help meet their basic needs. By the end of 2021, the programme was supporting more than 1.5 million refugees on a monthly basis, while another 331 000 of the most vulnerable refugees receive cash assistance from the development part of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey<sup>40</sup>. In addition, EU-funded partner organisations provided protection and health support. In 2021, the EU continued to support vulnerable refugee families whose children attend school regularly through bi-monthly cash transfers under the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE). This is the EU's largest-ever humanitarian programme for education in emergencies. In 2021, the CCTE assisted over 695 000 children<sup>41</sup> and is expected to help more than 700 000 children to continue their education until early 2022.

DG ECHO was directly involved in international diplomatic initiatives related to the Syria crisis such as the Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" in Brussels in March 2021 or the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group in Geneva. DG ECHO organised a meeting at senior official level on humanitarian access in Syria and engaged in other advocacy efforts to promote the respect of humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law.

<sup>39</sup> Source: Turkish Directorate-General for Migration Management (DGMM)

<sup>40</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey_en)

<sup>41</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey_en)

## Afghanistan

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries has drastically deteriorated since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The last IPC assessment<sup>42</sup> (covering November 2021 to March 2022), estimated that 22.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance due to the alarming food insecurity situation, compounded by the harsh winter, recent droughts<sup>43</sup>, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the economy contraction pushing millions into poverty. Between January and 19 December 2021, 682 031 persons were newly internally displaced by conflict (compared to 676 400 as of 12 December 2020). DG ECHO has quadrupled its funding in 2021 to altogether EUR 222 million, expecting to reach at least 5 million beneficiaries in extreme need. Between September and December 2021, 280 tonnes of cargo, mainly medical equipment, COVID-19 supplies and food items, were transported to Kabul through the EU's Humanitarian Air Bridge. DG ECHO also monitored the regional implications of this crisis. Iran and Pakistan host some 6.5 million Afghans, in often difficult conditions. To share the burden with the hosting countries, additional humanitarian funding was allocated to Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan.



Berhan fled from the Tigray region of Ethiopia and now lives in Gedaref camp in Sudan.

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## Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, 2021 was marked by the Northern conflict between the Federal Government and the Tigrayan Regional Security Forces which erupted in November 2020, and which provides further hindrance to humanitarian access. Besides the Northern conflict, Ethiopia continued to face widespread humanitarian needs due to overlapping crises, often caused by inter-communal and ethnic conflicts and climatic shocks. In 2021, DG ECHO was at the

forefront of advocacy for the respect of International Humanitarian Law in Ethiopia and allocated EUR 85.5 million to humanitarian projects in the country, including over EUR 51 million specifically for the people affected by the conflict in northern Ethiopia. The EU supported the provision of life-saving assistance to internally displaced people uprooted by conflict or natural hazards, refugees, Ethiopian migrants deported from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and food insecure people affected by the locust outbreak in the region. This included protection, food aid, safe water, shelter, basic essential items, nutritional assistance and healthcare, disease prevention, and education.

<sup>42</sup> The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of standardized tools that aims at providing a common standard for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity.

<sup>43</sup> Afghanistan IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis: September 2021 - March 2022 (Issued in October 2021) - Afghanistan | ReliefWeb

## Food security crisis in Eastern Africa

Food insecurity remained a major concern in the Greater Horn of Africa region with an estimated 42 million people in need of immediate humanitarian food assistance in 2021, a 33% increase in comparison with 2020<sup>44</sup>. Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia were the most exposed hosting almost 90% of the most severe food insecure people<sup>45</sup>, with at least 401,313 people in Ethiopia and 108,000 people in South Sudan facing Catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 5) and an additional 8.3 million people facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4). The Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya were also largely affected. While conflict had been the main driver of additional acute food insecurity and severe acute malnutrition in the region, countries have been faced with the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>46</sup>, a desert locust infestation, and with weather extremes including floods and drought. DG ECHO allocated more than EUR 160 million to support the most vulnerable people impacted by this crisis.

## Yemen



Yemen: A puppet show teaches children how to protect themselves from COVID-19.

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After nearly 7 years of conflict, Yemen remains one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. The conflict intensified further in 2021, with an uptick in fighting along frontlines in Marib, Shabwa, Hodeida and Taiz, and widespread violations of international humanitarian law. More than 4 million people remained internally displaced<sup>47</sup>. The protracted economic blockade, irregular payment of salaries of public servants and institutional dysfunctionalities have brought the country to a deep economic crisis and

public services on the brink of collapse. The situation was further compounded by floods and COVID-19. An alarming 20.7 million people remained in need of humanitarian and/or protection assistance, including 12 million in acute need<sup>48</sup>. Yemen was again confronted with severe food insecurity. Currency depreciation accelerated in 2021 and food prices more than doubled. In June 2021, an estimated 47 000 people were living in famine-like conditions and 5 million were on the brink of famine<sup>49</sup>. Food insecurity continued to increase during the second half of the year. The EU is one of the major humanitarian donors in Yemen with

<sup>44</sup> 2021 IGAD Regional Report on Food Crises.

<sup>45</sup> WFP Regional Food Security & Nutrition Update. Regional Bureau Nairobi, August 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Notably translating into unemployment, drop in remittances and increased global food prices.

<sup>47</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-february-2021-enar>

<sup>48</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-february-2021-enar>

<sup>49</sup> IPC, Yemen: Acute Food Insecurity Situation October - December 2020 and Projection for January - June 2021, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1152947/>

EUR 692 million of humanitarian aid since 2015 (62% of the total EU assistance to Yemen in the period, EUR 1 110.9 million). In 2021, DG ECHO allocated EUR 134 million to Yemen, the highest ever annual allocation. However, the crisis remains overall underfunded and the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan was the least funded in percentage terms, since the onset of the conflict in 2014, with 58,2% covered. This resulted in downscale or termination of critical food aid, wash, health and protection programmes. DG ECHO-funded projects aimed at addressing 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. In 2021, 10% of DG ECHO funding was allocated to improve access to education for out of school children. The operating environment continues to be very challenging, particularly for INGOs, with frequent administrative obstructions and delays. DG ECHO, in collaboration with Sweden, continued to play a leading role in humanitarian diplomacy and coordination, advocating for principled humanitarian aid and unrestricted access.

## **Venezuela**

In 2021 Venezuela went through the sixth consecutive year of economic recession and hyperinflation, facing an increasing deterioration of the internal humanitarian situation. Over 14 million Venezuelans were in need of assistance already prior to COVID-19.<sup>50</sup> The pandemic has exacerbated the needs for health, water, food and education. According to UNHCR-IOM, around 6 million Venezuelans have left their country since the beginning of the crisis and together with host communities remained in urgent need of support in a context where access to social services and livelihoods became extremely difficult as a consequence of the pandemic (Latin America being the region most severely impacted by the pandemic worldwide). In 2021, DG ECHO allocated EUR 82 million to fight the consequences of the crisis. The majority of the humanitarian funds has been used inside Venezuela, but aid is also provided to Venezuelan migrants and refugees as well as to host communities in neighbouring countries. DG ECHO has also been heavily engaged in the preparation of the 2021 Venezuela Pledging conference in response to the regional consequences of the crisis as has led the Humanitarian Assistance working Group of the ICG for Venezuela.

## **Rohingya Crisis and Myanmar**

Following the massive displacement from Myanmar of August 2017, 884,000 stateless refugees reside now in the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh, most of them living in an extremely congested mega-camp, fully reliant on humanitarian aid, without freedom of movement, livelihoods opportunities and access to social services. About 472,000 vulnerable people from host communities in Cox's Bazar are also in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>51</sup>. In Myanmar, about 600 000 Rohingya still live in Rakhine State in very dire conditions, part of them in confinement camps where they are fully dependant on humanitarian assistance<sup>52</sup>. In addition, following the Myanmar military coup in February 2021, the humanitarian

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<sup>50</sup> For PIN inside venezuela: Venezuela Complex crisis | ACAPS and for the regional dimension see RMRP 2022 | R4V

<sup>51</sup> Bangladesh Joint Response Plan 2021.

<sup>52</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mmr\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_2022.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mmr_humanitarian_needs_overview_2022.pdf)

situation across Myanmar remains extremely volatile, with large-scale displacements of population, inside the country and in the region (mainly Thailand and India). It is estimated that about 700 000 people were displaced at the end of 2021. Humanitarian needs have dramatically increased, with 6.2 million people targeted by the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022. In 2021, to address the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, in Myanmar and in South-East Asia, as well as the increased humanitarian needs in Myanmar, DG ECHO has provided EUR 66 million in humanitarian assistance. The main sectors of intervention have been basic health care (including COVID-19 response), water, sanitation, shelter, nutrition, education, protection, psychosocial support, and disaster risk reduction.

### **The Central African Republic (CAR)**

The crisis in the Central African Republic is one of the world's most protracted crises. In 2021, 57%<sup>53</sup> of the population – some 2.8 million people out of 4.9 million - needed humanitarian assistance. More than a quarter (nearly 1.4 million people) are displaced inside the country or to neighbouring countries. Clashes between armed groups and national forces led to new violence and criminality throughout 2021, triggering further waves of displacement across the region. Adding to the negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19, this new crisis further worsened food insecurity in a country already affected by a high prevalence of acute malnutrition. DG ECHO provided humanitarian aid to crisis-affected populations in CAR and to Central African refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad and Cameroon, for a total amount of EUR 22.5 million, providing food assistance and livelihood support, health, shelter, water, sanitation, and education in emergencies to the most affected population. Such support contributed to reinforcing humanitarian coordination, security and logistics. In addition, DG ECHO financed actions to protect civilians, including prevention of sexual violence, support to victims, and actions offering a protective and educational environment for children at risk of forced recruitment, abuse and violence. Some EU-funded projects also helped to respond to the health crisis caused by the pandemic, in particular by providing access to clean water and sanitation for vulnerable people.

### **Ukraine**

After more than 7 years of conflict, the security situation in eastern Ukraine remained volatile in 2021. Since the July 2020 ceasefire, there were fewer hostilities and civilian casualties. However, in 2021, daily incidents continued to cause damage to housing, water and electricity supply, schools, and health facilities, which left about 3.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, of which one third were older persons. At the end of 2021, the Russian military build-up at the border with Ukraine led to an escalation of tensions and increasing concerns over humanitarian consequences in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. Since the beginning of these new developments, the EU has been preparing for all scenarios, working together with donors and partners to prepare the humanitarian response to be implemented in 2022.

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<sup>53</sup> [République centrafricaine Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2021 - Central African Republic | ReliefWeb](#)

The EU has been one of the largest humanitarian donors to the crisis in eastern Ukraine, with an allocation of EUR 28.9 million in 2021. The EU humanitarian funding, delivered through UN agencies, non-governmental organisations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, helped people access healthcare, including better preparation and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding also supports the rehabilitation of damaged houses, schools, and hospitals. It provides affected people with the means to meet their basic needs and access safe water, education in emergencies, and protection services including legal support. In 2021, EU funded humanitarian assistance reached more than 750 000 people in Ukraine's government-controlled areas and in the non-government-controlled areas.

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

In 2021 the UCPM continued to be 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 non-EU countries. Furthermore, the assistance is provided not only in the form of short term response capacities, technical and scientific expertise, but also long term regional and bilateral capacity building measures supporting the EU's external policy and diplomacy in particular in the Balkans and Turkey (e.g. IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) Forest Fires and Floods regional programme), the European Southern neighbourhood (PPRD (Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters) South III which ended in 2021 with a major cross-regional exercise involving simultaneously the ERCC and crisis rooms from southern countries) and the Eastern neighbourhood (e.g. PPRD East programme launched in December 2020). On the future of cooperation, DG ECHO initiated a series of bilateral and regional consultations that will become the basis for the future IPA and PPRD Mediterranean programmes that will be launched in 2022. The technical cooperation dialogue with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and its working groups on volunteers and citizens engagement translated into a successful joint ECHO-UfM meeting in October 2021. DG ECHO continued to foster this type of cooperation not only to support non-EU countries in the aftermath of a disaster, but also to contribute to building more resilient disaster management structures and establishing a trustful technical partnership with the EU.

Given the geographical proximity and shared risk landscape (floods, earthquakes, fires, health emergencies and climate change), enlargement partners and countries under the European Neighbourhood Policy continued to be a key priority for the work of the UCPM. Integrating further countries benefiting from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance into the UCPM is essential, based on the history of mutual assistance. Redefining the civil protection partnership cooperation modalities with the wider neighbourhood countries is also essential for the UCPM's future and credibility.

The UCPM Lessons Learned Programme continued to identify lessons and good practices from UCPM deployments and cross-cutting activities to enhance the efficiency and

effectiveness of the Mechanism as a whole. In the course of 2021, the Commission, alongside Member and Participating States continued to explore possibilities to implement follow-up actions identified in 2020, while ensuring that additional lessons were identified. Thematic meetings were held on the 2021 floods affecting Western Europe and on the 2021 forest fire season. The meetings allowed UCPM Member and Participating States to share their experiences to draw lessons across the whole disaster risk management cycle.

The Lessons Learned Programme provides an essential platform for learning and improving the Mechanism and enables all stakeholders to be better prepared for the future. Lessons identified over the year include the need to continue enhancing and reinforcing Early Warning Systems for actionable information to allow for informed decision-making, and the further translation of early information/awareness into early action. Similarly, cross-sectoral coordination at all levels (e.g. local, national, and EU) and continuous communication with experts is to be encouraged and promoted, alongside the need to continue to raise awareness of the UCPM and its services.

The lessons learned for the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the UCPM revision of 2019 was needed, but that the UCPM needs to be further reinforced to better respond to large-scale emergencies affecting most, if not all, the EU Member States simultaneously. The identified gaps call for the reinforcement of strategic autonomy in building capacities under the rescEU reserve, as well as transport and logistics, which would be also relevant for the external dimension of the UCPM.

DG ECHO has paved the way for the extension of the rescEU reserve to new types of capacities (Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear decontamination and stockpiling, with others been considered for future inclusion), while simultaneously developing further the existing capacities. Calls for proposals for the further development of medical stockpiles with new types of medical countermeasures and for the creation of the first CBRN decontamination capacities have been launched and the relevant grants will be signed in early 2022.

The UCPM relied on the ERCC Situational Awareness Capacity to pool state-of-the-art technical and scientific knowledge and tools to provide fast advice in the form of scientific and technical analysis and maps for more efficient and effective emergency response operations. In 2021, 673 situational maps and 52 analytical briefs were shared with the management to support the decision-making process.

DG ECHO worked closely with other Commission services, including DG JRC and DG DEFIS, and the EEAS as well as with agencies such as SatCen, Frontex, or the ECDC to develop transboundary and multi-hazard Early Warning Systems and provide mapping and analysis products for emergency operations. In 2021, DG ECHO continued to strengthen the early warning and information systems for natural disasters (e.g. droughts, floods, forest fires, tropical cyclones or severe weather), namely GDACS, EFFIS, GWIS, EFAS, GLOFAS, EDO and

GDO54 and worked towards their integration. DG ECHO 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.

## **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 will be crucial. Climate change and its impacts need to be mitigated at home and abroad. Making sure our societies are more resilient and better able to adapt is key to responding to the challenge of climate change. DG ECHO continued to play its part for complete and efficient delivery of the Green Deal by contributing to both its internal and external dimensions.

In 2021, DG ECHO contributed to several actions of the European Green Deal, in particular to the development and implementation of the new EU Forest and Adaptation strategies by taking into account the outcomes of the latest Overview of Natural and Human-induced Disasters the European Union may face<sup>55</sup> as a Commission's Staff Working Document. DG ECHO also continued to promote mainstreaming of disaster risk management in the context of the new Sustainable Finance Strategy<sup>56</sup> and other EU policies such as the revised Energy performance of buildings directive<sup>57</sup>. DG ECHO also advanced with the implementation of its approach to reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid. Specifically, minimum environmental requirements for DG ECHO's humanitarian partners were developed, together with several capacity building tools: an online training, a Compendium of good practices, and the recruitment of the first Thematic Expert on Environment in ECHO's Field Network.

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

#### **Internal Dimension**

In 2021, the Decision No 1313/2013 that established the Union Civil Protection Mechanism was amended to strengthen European solidarity in particular in large-scale emergencies impacting several countries at the same time where voluntary and national assistance is not sufficient. The Mechanism is better prepared, more flexible, can respond faster and offer more comprehensive cross-sectoral support to Member States and their citizens, including through a significantly enhanced budget. In the framework of the UCPM, DG ECHO has been supporting Member States in their reporting on national disaster risk management. Furthermore, in 2021 DG ECHO kept on promoting a better understanding of risks following

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<sup>54</sup> 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; EDO: European Drought Observatory; GDO: Global Drought Observatory.

<sup>55</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/89fcf0fc-edb9-11eb-a71c-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>56</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/210706-sustainable-finance-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/210706-sustainable-finance-strategy_en)

<sup>57</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021PC0802&qid=1641802763889>





Preparing for an earthquake in Slovenia.  
 © European Union, 2021 (photographer: Žiga Živulovic)

the publication in 2020 of the Overview of Natural and Human-induced Disasters the European Union may face as a Commission’s Staff Working Document. In 2021, DG ECHO also started to develop the concept of Union disaster resilience goals following the revision of the UCPM Decision.

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. It actively participates in the ongoing preparation of the 2021-2027 programming period as well as in the technical support instrument call of 2021. One of the highlights of the year was the release of a joint DG ECHO-World Bank study on “Economics for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness”, which provides new evidence to demonstrate the economic argument for investing in disaster resilience, calls for new instruments for financial preparedness to disasters and crises and for strengthening capacity of civil protection authorities.

The year 2021, saw the official establishment of the European Civil Protection Knowledge Network with the adoption of a specific implementing act and governance structure. The Network aims at strengthening the Union Civil Protection Mechanism prevention, preparedness and response activities. It brings together civil protection and disaster management actors to collaborate and learn from each other with the objective of strengthening the EU’s overall ability and capacity to deal with disasters. The development of a web platform and other communication tools, such as a quarterly newsletter, ensure the visibility of the newly established Network and contribute to increasing awareness about its objectives.

### **External Dimension**

Disaster preparedness is part of the overall objective of bringing relief and support to the most vulnerable people suffering from conflicts and disasters across the world by mobilising both humanitarian aid and European civil protection assistance. In 2021, and despite challenges to incorporate disaster preparedness in the increasing number of projects deriving from the COVID–19 pandemic and onset crises, DG ECHO strengthened its approach to disaster preparedness, implementing a renewed strategy further placing an accent on a multi-risk approach and on anticipatory actions as a way to reduce needs.

The Disaster Preparedness strategy and dedicated funding ensures the mainstreaming of preparedness, climate adaptation and environmental concerns into humanitarian action, ultimately increasing the resilience of the beneficiaries of the aid. As interconnections

between the impacts of conflict and climate change are significant, they are also accounted for in the overall risk and vulnerability assessment and funded operations.

Addressing disaster and climate-induced displacement remained crucial; according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 30.7 million new internal displacements were caused by disasters in 2020 alone<sup>58</sup>. In addition, many more are displaced by more permanent slow onset impacts of climate change, like sea-level rise, frequent droughts or desertification.

DG ECHO has also engaged in applying a nexus approach by closely liaising with DG INTPA and DG NEAR to ensure the inclusion of preparedness, climate and environmental concerns in their multi-year plans in order to seek better linkages with humanitarian action in these areas.

Tracking resilience and climate action has been done through the Resilience Marker and the Climate Tracking. The Resilience Marker is a tool used in the design of each DG ECHO funded action and is also used to monitor progress in terms of integrating preparedness, climate and environmental concerns in humanitarian actions.

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

DG ECHO's approach to reducing the environmental impact of its humanitarian aid operations is a key contribution to the European Green Deal. Climate neutrality, climate resilience, the circular economy, zero pollution and the protection of biodiversity are key pillars of the European Green Deal. Integrating environmental considerations in DG ECHO's humanitarian aid operations and those of its partners, among others by the "greening" of logistics and sectors like food assistance, shelter, water and health, can contribute to addressing all of those key pillars.

In 2021, DG ECHO carried on pursuing the ambitious goal of decreasing the environmental footprint of humanitarian assistance by reducing as much as possible the negative environmental impact of its operations and those of its partners. DG ECHO also worked with its partners throughout 2021 to develop minimum environmental requirements, which will start gradually applying in the Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs) in 2022. Environmental concerns were and will continue to be mainstreamed in the different thematic policies (e.g. cash guidance, forthcoming humanitarian logistics policy). In 2021 DG ECHO also developed multiple capacity building tools (training and Compendium) and recruited the first Thematic Expert on Environment into the ECHO Field Network. While the "greening" process of humanitarian aid is still at a relative early stage, and many reports still need to incorporate environmental considerations, DG ECHO is taking considerable steps to exponentially make progress towards environmental objectives.

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<sup>58</sup> Data for 2021 still not available from the Internal Monitoring Displacement Centre – GRID 2022 not published.

## **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. The continued offer of assistance by EU Member and Participating States is a remarkable proof of EU solidarity in action.

In 2021, as part of the UCPM, DG ECHO financed cross-border projects with the aim to strengthen prevention and preparedness in EU Member and Participating States. Moreover, the UCPM continued to support activities to enhance the level of preparedness of emergency response operations managed by DG ECHO. Under the umbrella of the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network, successful preparedness activities such as the UCPM training and lessons learnt programmes, exercises and the exchange of civil protection experts provided experts and capacities the skills and competences to respond to disasters inside and outside Europe. The Knowledge Network aims at gradually introducing new initiatives and new, digital, methodologies in its services to further support the UCPM and its Member States and Participating States. To do so, it follows a comprehensive, inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach. In 2021, the UCPM continued to be an important and effective tool to mobilise and coordinate assistance provided by EU Member and Participating States to respond to crises.

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

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 was an exceptional year for the UCPM due to the lasting effects of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as from other major emergencies such as the crisis in Afghanistan. Compared to the average of 25 UCPM activations a year, in 2021 the UCPM was activated 114 times. 69 activations were COVID-19-related, and 45 times to non-COVID-19 related emergencies<sup>59</sup>. In 2022, this trend may continue if the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet under control and keeps overwhelming national capacities in the European Union and in partner countries abroad. Beyond COVID 19-related requests, the number of requests for UCPM activations is likely to remain higher than in pre-pandemic times as activations are on the rise also due to the instrument increased visibility during recent years.

DG ECHO continued working towards the successful completion of the negotiations on the Commission proposal to enhance the UCPM presented in June 2020. Following intense negotiations in the last part of 2020 and beginning of 2021, a political agreement was reached under the Portuguese Presidency. This led to the successful adoption of the revised UCPM legislation, which entered into force in May 2021. 2021 saw already how some of the

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<sup>59</sup> Including: the earthquake in Haiti, crisis situation in Afghanistan requiring repatriation of EU citizens, the intense forest fires in South Europe and Southern Neighbourhood the floods in Belgium, migration pressure in Lithuania and Ukraine, the explosions in Equatorial Guinea, Lebanon and Sierra Leone, volcano eruptions in St Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados and the DRC as well as marine pollution accidents in Sri Lanka, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Sweden.

key elements of the new legislation were initiated, such as the work on defining Union wide Disaster Resilience Goals and related disaster scenarios.

**The European Civil Protection Pool (ECP)** remains the key pillar for deploying capacities when the UCPM is activated, and was further strengthened in 2021, with a focus on engaging with Member and Participating States so that they commit more capacities where gaps exist and certifying already committed capacities. Definitions and goals for ECP capacities had been assessed with the aim to be revised in the coming years. DG ECHO continued to ensure that the EU has additional rescEU capacities in the sectors approved by Member States (forest fires, medical emergencies), and continued to extend rescEU reserve to other capacity groups, notably in the area of Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) capacities.

At the beginning of 2021, the **rescEU medical stockpile** included an important number of personal protective equipment, including masks and gowns, as well as medical equipment in relevant quantities to constitute an EU-level safety net aimed at combatting serious cross-border threats to health. A new call for proposals to further develop the existing rescEU stockpile was launched in 2021, with the objective of including additional types of items such as therapeutics, laboratory supplies and vaccines. The completion of the process is expected for early 2022.



In 2021, Greece activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to request support for their regional and national firefighters in tackling the forest fires.

© Hellenic Fire Corps (photographer: George Chionidis)

Concerning **aerial forest firefighting capacities**, the successful rescEU transition capacities were again financed in 2021, with 15 aerial forest firefighting capacities including both airplanes and helicopters. Moreover, building on the first rescEU planes was concluded with France in 2021. An additional grant agreement was signed in December 2021 with Greece for the procurement of 2 such aircraft. In negotiating with the only worldwide manufacturer of relevant medium amphibious planes, DG ECHO agreed with interested Member States to

coordinate the process closely and negotiate jointly to obtain the best possible deal. Weekly coordination meetings were established to this end in the second semester of 2021 as well as joint meetings of DG ECHO and concerned Member States with the manufacturer. They will continue in 2022 until the production is launched, and government-to-government agreements are signed.

In the area of **medical emergencies**, following discussions with Member and Participating States, and the calls for more flexibility in developing the capacities, it was agreed to focus on the development of a few EMT-2 capacities with specialised cells, that could be deployed together or separately. The corresponding change in the legal basis is expected to be adopted in early 2022, thus enabling the implementation work to start soon after. Moreover, building

on the first grant for the development of an aerial medical evacuation capacity (MEDEVAC) for highly infectious patients signed in 2020 (Norway), a second grant for the operationalisation of the capacity was negotiated in 2021 and is expected to be signed in early 2022. Discussions with Member and Participating States are taking place as well on a multi-purpose transport capacity including the ability to evacuate disaster victims. The legal basis for transport and logistics capacities (possibly also covering disaster victims' evacuation) should be adopted in early 2022.

Discussions with Member States are also on-going on the development of rescEU capacities in case of Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) events. Following the adoption of the relevant legal basis, a call for proposals for the development of CBRN decontamination capacities was launched in 2021. The procedure is expected to be completed in early 2022. In parallel, discussions with Member and Participating States' experts have allowed for progress in the definition of the types of CBRN stockpiling capacities to be developed. Discussions with Member States have advanced in defining relevant implementing decisions for rescEU capacities in the areas of detection, surveillance and monitoring (DSM) and mobile labs. In addition, the development of rescEU capacities is also advancing in the areas of shelter capacities as well as transport and logistics where expert level discussions have been concluded in defining quality requirements and the implementing decisions are expected to be adopted in early 2022.

Under the Emergency Support Instrument's (ESI) Mobility Package, in 2021, DG ECHO granted EUR 22.5 million to 9 Member States for cargo transport of COVID-19 vaccination-related equipment and therapeutics, as well as transfer of patients and medical teams in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, across two separate calls. This brings the total granted to more than EUR 173 million since April 2020 to 20 Member States and the UK for support to cargo transport of COVID-19 medical items, including support to operations for the transfer of approximately 450 medical personnel and 350 patients.

Based on the experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in line with the joint statement of the members of the European Council on 26 March 2020<sup>60</sup> calling for a more "ambitious wide-ranging crisis management system", DG ECHO sustained in 2021 to support the Commission-wide efforts to establish a European Emergency Management for the future. This happened by starting the implementation of related new legislative provisions (such as on Union wide disaster resilience goals and disaster scenarios) and close coordination with Member States on the adoption of the related Council on Conclusions on European crisis management.

Following the creation of **DG HERA**, DG ECHO established and continued to develop close working relations with DG HERA to ensure synergies and complementarities. DG ECHO and DG HERA's joint actions were focusing specifically on the further development of rescEU stockpiles, with DG HERA contributing to the evaluation of applications submitted in a call for proposals for medical counter measures stockpile under rescEU as well as contributing to the

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43076/26-vc-euco-statement-en.pdf>

questionnaire for Member States on the development of the stockpile of CBRN countermeasures.

## **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 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, as well as the results of the DG's supervisory controls on the activities of these bodies;
- the latest Annual Financial Statements of the UN agencies and international organisations receiving payments from DG ECHO during the reporting year.
- 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 observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA);
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control;
- 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 available evidence. 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 2.1.1 Control results, 2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations, 2.1.3 Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in 2.1.4 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 objectives (ICO)<sup>61</sup>. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. The AAR 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.

The inherent risks of DG ECHO are associated with the nature of its operations, which are delivered in difficult environments characterised by unpredictability, volatility, insecurity and restricted access to crisis-affected people, 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**<sup>62</sup>, security policy and guidance. As for the control architecture (see further Annex 6), DG ECHO framed during the year its Control Strategy in a dedicated document, with reference to the Commission's Internal Audit Service's 2019 audit of DG ECHO's Control Strategy. Furthermore, the Audit and Anti-Fraud strategies were revised to ensure that the relevant procedures are well up-to-date and aligned with the DG's control environment and the Commission's control framework.

DG ECHO's actions are implemented under the management modes of Direct Management and Indirect Management, which are each assigned a dedicated Control System adapted to its particular risks. Humanitarian Aid uses both management modes, while Civil Protection is implemented essentially under Direct Management. The control systems 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.

DG ECHO puts emphasis on the balance between the achievements of its policy objectives and the need for an effective and efficient financial and operational control of its activities.

In 2021, **DG ECHO's budget**, in commitment appropriations, was EUR 2 423.6 million corresponding to the MFF strand: EUR 2 191.8 million for Humanitarian aid, EUR 220.5 million<sup>63</sup> for Civil Protection and EUR 11.3 million for Other Prerogatives and Support and Administrative Expenditure. Moreover, in 2021 DG ECHO had EUR 678.6 million for Civil Protection and EUR 0.5 million for Support Expenditure coming from NGEU funds. **The 2021 budget, EUR 3 102. 7 million**, is the highest ever allocated to DG ECHO, and it follows the second highest one, i.e. the 2020 budget. Its execution was affected by the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other major crises (e.g. Afghanistan, Tigray, famine in several regions), as well as external factors such as the establishment of HERA. Despite these

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<sup>61</sup> 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.

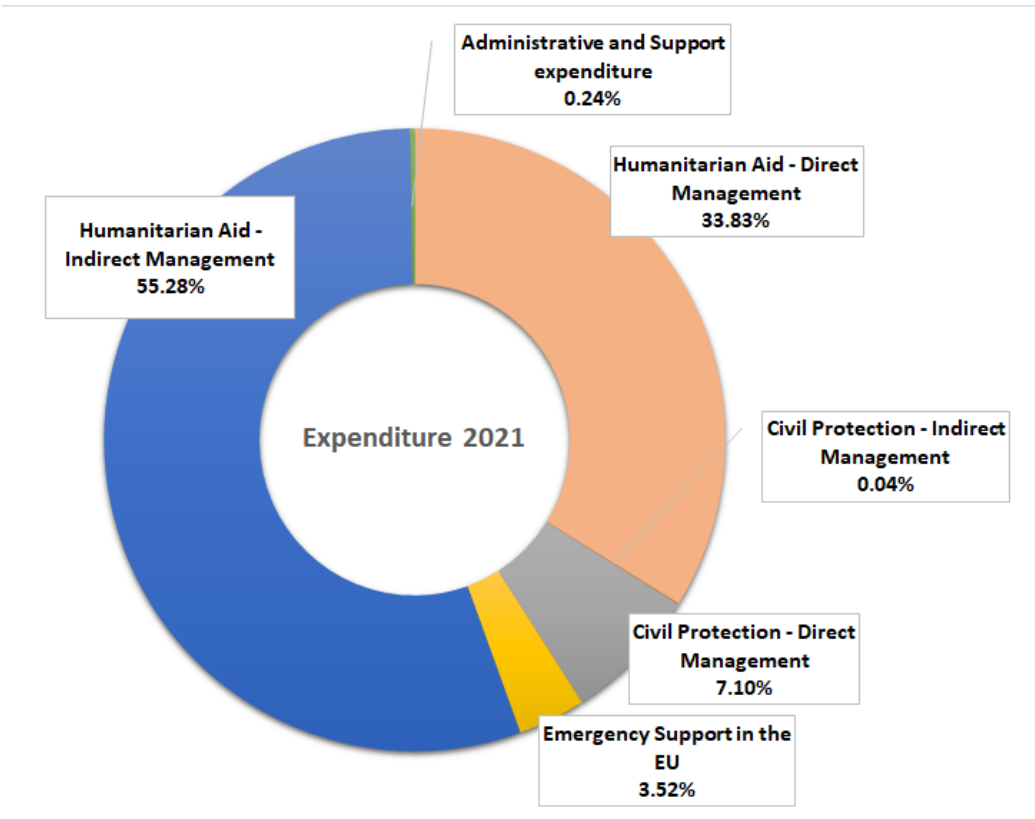
<sup>62</sup> Annex 6 provides a detailed description of DG ECHO's control architecture.

<sup>63</sup> Includes co-delegation from Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), please see Annex 3 Table 1.



challenging circumstances, DG ECHO maintained particularly good implementation rates as regards commitment and payment appropriations, achieving consumption of 100% for commitments and 97% for payments.

The figure below presents an overview of DG ECHO’s various kinds of expenditure for 2021.



## Overview payments table (amounts in EUR million)

Risk-type / Activities	Grants	Procurement Contracts	Contribution agreements	Delegation agreements	ECHO Field Network contracts	Administrative and Service level agreements	EU Trust Fund / European Development Fund	Total Expenditure	Non expenditure items
Humanitarian Aid Direct Management	850.605.880	9.663.703			45.234.314	690.232	23.008.456	<b>929.202.585</b>	
Humanitarian Aid Indirect Management			1.397.461.570	116.170.585			5.879.101	<b>1.519.511.256</b>	
Civil Protection	177.767.176	15.331.848				2.155.800		<b>195.254.824</b>	
Emergency Support within the EU	96.342.387							<b>96.342.387</b>	
Administrative & Support Expenditure	10.527	5.827.085			36.270	598.226		<b>6.472.108</b>	
Off balance sheet <sup>64</sup>									<b>-1.404.529.849</b>
Cash and Cash equivalents <sup>65</sup>									<b>7.473.119</b>
<b>Totals (coverage)</b>	<b>1.124.725.970</b>	<b>30.822.636</b>	<b>1.397.461.570</b>	<b>116.170.585</b>	<b>45.270.584</b>	<b>3.444.258</b>	<b>28.887.557</b>	<b>2.746.783.160</b>	<b>-</b>

<sup>64</sup> Off balance items cover the outstanding budgetary commitments not yet consumed (RAL) of DG ECHO. Table 5bis Annex 3.

<sup>65</sup> Cash and cash equivalents concern the balances of DG ECHO imprest accounts at year end. Table 4 Annex 3.

## Reporting Requirements

Following the requirements of the 2018 Financial Regulation, in 2021, DG ECHO:

- had zero Financial Framework Partnerships beyond 4 years (FR art 130.4).<sup>66</sup>
- applied for derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity of grants (785<sup>67</sup> in 2021) 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 of controls

#### a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

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

DG ECHO's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate, both for Direct and Indirect Management. This is, respectively, thanks to the inherent risk profile of the programmes and 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 Constraints<sup>68</sup> and Remote Management<sup>69</sup> 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.

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<sup>66</sup> Article 130(4)(c) FR only covers FFPAs under which grants are being awarded, meaning means FFPAs with NGOs. FFPAs with NGOs ended on 31.12.2020 and were replaced by certification as of 2021.

<sup>67</sup> The increase of this figure from last year (171) refer to new instructions received from the Commission's Central Services for the current report, which relate to the interpretation of Art. 191.2 of the Financial Regulation, and change the scope of reporting on this issue. Thus, the figure should include 1) all grants for which costs were reimbursed before the submission of the grant application, and 2) all grants for which the action started before the signature of the grant agreement. Last year, DG ECHO reported only Category 1, which then excluded all Civil Protection grants that falling into Category 2. Thus, it is deemed that the difference of figures between the years is (mainly) due to the shift of scope of reporting, and should not affect the conclusions of the AAR.

<sup>68</sup> Applies only to individually authorised operations responding to IASC Level 3 emergencies; <https://www.unocha.org/where-we-work/current-emergencies>

<sup>69</sup> 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.

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 on the basis of 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 to establish a representative sample<sup>70</sup> that provides an appropriate basis for calculating the error rate. Secondly, the audit strategy targets partners and grants based on particular risk criteria identified during the implementation of funded actions, with the aim of maximising recoveries and thus protecting the EU budget.

The 2021 audit plan was fully implemented. Access restrictions, including due to COVID-19, had little impact, as no field audits were planned or carried out during the year. Nevertheless, the auditors were able to remotely obtain sufficient evidence to draw their conclusions, in line with the auditing standards. Therefore, we can conclude that there was no impact on the assurance provided.

The control results for 2021 show that the **Residual Error Rate** is 1.55 for Direct Management (1.13% in 2020<sup>71</sup>) and zero 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 (representative) Error Rate, taking into account the respective weights of indirect management and direct management, is 0.51% (0.69% in 2020<sup>72</sup>).

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.

For direct management, the EU undertakes to finance a percentage of the total cost of the operation. This means that any non-eligible expenditure detected by audit will be included in the error rate calculation and cause a recovery of EU funds.

Through recoveries and financial corrections, DG ECHO has in place an effective mechanism for correcting errors. During the reporting year the executed corrective capacity amounted in total to EUR 6.86 million representing 0.22% of the relevant expenditure. The benefit at ex

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<sup>70</sup> 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.

<sup>71</sup> The increase from last year of the average error rate is due to a higher number of audits of Civil Protection grants included in the 2021 error rate calculation, some of which resulted in high disallowances. Civil Protection action has a different set of rules and different beneficiaries than HUMA actions, which is reflected in the increased number of errors.

<sup>72</sup> In 2020 DG ECHO had unusually low relevant expenditure for Indirect Management, due to the clearing that year of the pre-financing for the large Emergency Social Safety Net contract with the World Food Programme. Thus, the relevant expenditure for Direct Management was relatively high (compared to that of Indirect Management), which – with its higher detected error rate – caused a higher percentage (0.69) in 2020 compared to 2021. The figure for 2019 was 0.56, i.e. much closer to that of 2021. Thus, the difference between the years is mainly due to the status of pre-financing, rather than anything else.

ante level control amounts to EUR 4.63 million, while recoveries and financial corrections following the results of ex post controls amounted to EUR 2.23 million.

DG ECHO's relevant expenditure, its estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are set out in Table X: Estimated risk at payment and at closure.

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2021 expenditure amounts to EUR 15.75 million, representing 0.51 % of the DG's total relevant expenditure for 2021. This is the AOD's best, conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made.

This expenditure will subsequently be subject to ex-post controls and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in subsequent years. The conservatively estimated future corrections for 2021 expenditure amount to EUR 11.77 million.

The difference between those two amounts results in the estimated overall risk at closure of EUR 3.98 million, representing 0.13 % of the DG's total relevant expenditure for 2021. This is no significant change compared to last year.

For an overview at Commission level, the DGs' estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated in the AMPR.

### **Complementary Pillar Assessment**

Following the entry into force of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 (the Financial Regulation), the Commission requested all entities to be entrusted with EU budget implementation to complete the complementary pillar assessments (ex-ante checks on management and control systems) by 31 December 2021. The pillar assessments of the main partners are expected to be completed within the first half of 2022, as the large majority of the final reports have been received and are currently under analysis in order to assess whether additional supervisory measures are needed.<sup>73</sup>

Although new contribution agreements cannot be concluded before the pillar assessments are finalised, and few Financial Framework Partnership Agreements are still being negotiated, mitigating measures were put in place to minimise the impact on the implementation of indirect management interventions. Such measures include the following:

- Substantial increase in contacts with the entities (mostly UN agencies) to accelerate the process. The main result is that at this moment all pillar assessments with major partners are finalised or at an advanced stage;

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<sup>73</sup> See Annex 7 for most recent state of play on complementary pillar assessment on entities led by DG ECHO.

- Specific conditions (supervisory measures) for signing contracts with these entities in duly justified and exceptional cases have been set, in order to ensure compliance with the Commission rules.

Moreover, ongoing contracts continued normal implementation and amendments were still possible.

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

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

DG ECHO	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) <i>at payment</i>		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) <i>at closure</i>	
		(3)		(4)		(5)	
		<i>m EUR</i>	%	<i>m EUR</i>	%	<i>m EUR</i>	%
Indirect Management	2 111.70	0.55	0.03	0.41	0.02	0.14	0.01
Direct Management	980.51	15.20	1.55	11.36	1.16	3.84	0.39
<b>DG total</b>	<b>3 091.76</b>	<b>15.76</b>	<b>0.51%</b>	<b>11.77</b>	<b>0.38%</b>	<b>3.98</b>	<b>0.13%</b>

DG ECHO	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
(1)	(2)	(3)		(4)		(5)	
	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Items EU (by all) <i>of which DG's contrib. to EUTF 'A' (1 row per EUTF), if any</i>	3 049.75	15.53	0.51	11.61	0.38	3.92	0.13
Items EDF (by 5 DGs) <i>of which DG's contrib. to EUTF 'B' (1 row per EUTF), if any</i>	42.01	0.22	0.51	0.16	0.38	0.06	0.13
= sub-Total (a) EU (and EDF), <u>minus</u> contributions to EUTFs	3 091.76	15.75	0.51	11.77	0.38	3.98	0.13
<b>Total = sub-total (a) + sub-total (b)</b>	<b>3 091.76 m EUR</b>	<b>15.76 m EUR</b>	<b>0.51%</b>	<b>11.77 m EUR</b>	<b>0.38%</b>	<b>3.98 m EUR</b>	<b>0.13%</b>

#### b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

DG ECHO developed and has been implementing its own **anti-fraud strategy** since 2013, based on the methodology provided by OLAF. The strategy is updated every 4 years and whenever necessary. It was last updated in October 2021 (ECHO Anti-Fraud Strategy 2021-2024) in order to align with the new Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy and its commitment to effective internal and external communication regarding the fight against fraud and to further improve fraud detection, e.g. by defining the procedure for whistle-blowers to report fraud cases in ECHO grants as well as the fraud response, e.g. by specifying the coordination mechanism with OLAF. Furthermore, the revision took into account the new context of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Its implementation is being monitored and reported on a regular basis during the bilateral meetings that the Internal Control Coordinator holds with the Unit in charge of its implementation. All necessary actions have been implemented.

DG ECHO contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy (CAFS), and is e.g. implementing – together with OLAF and the DGs with emergency instruments – action 29 of the CAFS on *evaluation of fraud risks and vulnerabilities with regard to spending in emergency situations*, which is expected to be finalised in the first semester of 2022.

Furthermore, DG ECHO followed up on all of OLAF's financial recommendations. Two out of three financial recommendations were fully implemented and one partially. In the case of partial implementation, DG ECHO decided to apply an approach different than OLAF's. DG ECHO communicated this decision to OLAF in the framework of the Financial Monitoring Exercise 2021 and OLAF did not object. The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows:

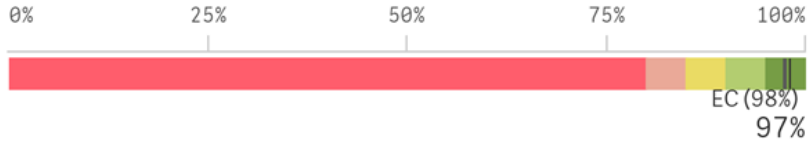
- DG ECHO has ensured an initial assessment of fraud allegations received in the dedicated functional mailbox. In 2021, 115 allegations were reported and assessed (103 in 2020).
- 31 allegations of fraud received in DG ECHO were transmitted to OLAF in 2021. Out of these allegations, 2 resulted in OLAF investigations; 14 are still under OLAF's assessment; and 15 were dismissed.
- Three awareness-raising sessions for Headquarters staff on Internal Control, Fraud Prevention and the new DG ECHO Anti-Fraud Strategy took place.
- Participation by ECHO representatives in the annual meeting of the Syria Investigations Working Group on cooperation and exchange of good practices and intelligence for fighting fraud. The scope of the working group is now extended to any country in a crisis worldwide that receives aid from the EU and US. The name changed accordingly to 'Complex Emergencies Working Group'.
- DG ECHO representatives regularly attended the Fraud Prevention and Detection Net events chaired by OLAF and participated actively in the external relations subgroup's meetings organised by OLAF for close cooperation and discussion of common anti-fraud issues between the EU external relation services.
- DG ECHO has taken all the necessary measures to protect the financial interests of the EU, 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 of controls

### Time-to-pay

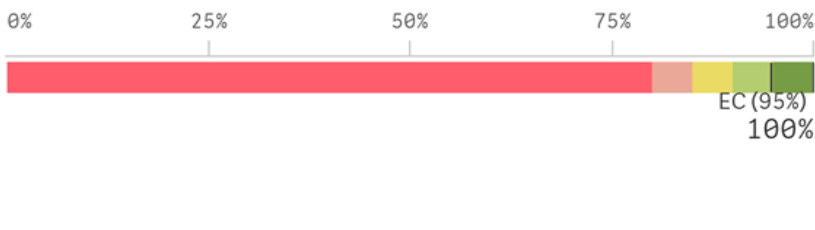
#### DG ECHO BUDGET

Timely Payments	ECHO Score	EC Score
	97%	98%



The result of 97% achieved by DG ECHO is an excellent result taking into consideration the significant increase in the overall volume of activity in 2021 as well as the complexity of DG ECHO projects.

**EDF BUDGET**

Timely Payments	ECHO Score	EC Score
	<b>100%</b>	<b>95%</b>

The result of 100% achieved by DG ECHO is an excellent result taking into consideration the significant increase in the overall volume of activity in 2021 as well as the complexity of DG ECHO projects.

**Time-to-grant:** For Civil Protection e-grants, the average time-to grant was 247 days compared to the legal deadline of 274 days. DG ECHO was within the legal deadlines.<sup>74</sup>

**Time-to-inform:** For Civil Protection e-grants, the average time-to-inform was 143 days compared to the legal deadline of 182 days. DG ECHO was widely within the legal deadlines.<sup>75</sup>

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

In 2021, DG ECHO introduced the new corporate Model Grant Agreement (MGA) and the new Humanitarian Aid Contribution Agreement (HACA) to align with the corporate approach. Both model agreements have been streamlined and automatized through the DG’s IT system to reduce the risk of errors. Furthermore, there was an update of the financial checklists to reflect the contractual changes (MGA and HACA) to ensure better coherence between the new requirements and the checks.

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

<sup>74</sup> Time-to-grant is calculated for 8 Preparedness and prevention projects granted for the 2021 Call for Proposals. Humanitarian and other Civil Protection grants fall under Art. 195(a) FR.

<sup>75</sup> Time-to-inform is calculated for 9 Preparedness and prevention projects granted for the 2021 Call for Proposals. Humanitarian and other Civil Protection grants fall under Art. 195(a) FR.

### **3. Economy of controls**

The estimated cost of controls is calculated from the Full-Time Equivalents (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 controls<sup>36</sup> of DG ECHO is estimated to EUR 8.1 million.

The average cost of audits (including ex-post audits/UN verifications) was EUR 15.174. The total cost of audit assignments undertaken by audit firms for outsourced audits amounted to EUR 1.001.463.

The estimated cost of the control strategy<sup>76</sup> represents 0.22% of the 2021 indirect management payments and 0.28% of the direct management payments.

The overall estimated cost of the control strategy represents 0.30% of the total payments (0.31% in 2020), also taking into account horizontal control costs not allocated to the two management modes. Thus, the costs of controls for DG ECHO in 2021 are below the benchmark of 0.5% of the total payments in 2021, 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 detecting non-eligible expenditure amounting EUR 0.9 million for the indirect management and EUR 11.3 million for the direct management, i.e. EUR 12.2 million in total.

In terms of **economy**, the estimated cost of controls of EUR 8.1 million is thus very well covered (151%) by the quantifiable benefits of EUR 12.2 million of recovered 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 2019-2021 is 0.93%.
- The preventive effect of limiting operations to those organisations that, after being duly assessed, have qualified to become a partner organisation.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> 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 is excluded.

<sup>77</sup> See Annex 7 for the status of complementary pillar assessments.

- DG ECHO's ex-post audits, in addition to detecting non-eligible expenditure, give assurance on the partners internal controls as well as on their compliance with the contractual requirements, including non-financial aspects such as compliance with humanitarian aid principles, detection and management of misconduct, whether relating to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, or fraud.
- In addition to ex-post audits, DG ECHO normally carries out field audits of ongoing projects that contribute to partners' awareness and knowledge of the eligibility rules of claimed expenditure. However, this type of audits was not planned or carried out in 2021 due to the travel restrictions linked to COVID-19.
- The follow-up of fraud allegations is both qualitative (deterrent effect and assessment of partners' capacity to investigate) and quantitative (recovery of amounts affected by fraud).
- The deterrent effect of the implementation of both ex-ante controls and ex-post controls, leading to a limitation of the occurrence of non-eligible items and, more generally, to the promotion of sound financial management.

Technical Assistants working in the DG ECHO Field Offices contribute to the assurance-building process by supporting budget implementation through both the needs assessment used for the allocation of funding and 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**

The recommendations stemming from the multi-DG audit on the pillar assessment audit in the external action family have been timely and fully implemented, which the IAS also concluded in its follow-up audits. The corporate critical recommendation on agreements signed with pillar-assessed entities, that also concerned DG ECHO, has been addressed by a note setting out the responsibilities for the pillar assessment process at DG-level, including the management of supervisory measures. Furthermore, DG ECHO has addressed the two “very important” recommendations on i) substantive changes by designating the units responsible for the analysis when notified by the pillar-assessed entity and aligning the internal guidance with the corporate one; ii) the Commission Services' involvement in the pillar assessment process by setting out the internal tasks related to the pillar assessment, including instructions and the establishment of a checklist covering the different steps of the review process.

The two “very important” recommendations on ex-ante and ex-post controls stemming from the 2019 audit on the control strategy for humanitarian aid have both been followed up by the IAS. Given that the high risks have been addressed, the IAS downgraded both recommendations to “important”. The recommendation on ex-post controls has been sent as ready for review to the IAS. For the ex-ante controls there are still some actions to be taken, most notably the introduction of operational checks, before giving certified correct, on the information reported by International Organisations and UN Agencies on their implementing partners and contractors. This reporting option, although not mandatory, follows the adoption of the new Humanitarian Aid Contribution Agreement (HACA) and the final reports under the new agreement are expected in the course of 2022. The action is set to be implemented at the end of March 2022.

Considering the IAS emphasis of matter made in its overall opinion on the Commission’s financial management: “Implementation of the EU budget in the context of the current crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic: need for a continuous monitoring and assessment of (new/emerging) risks and for the definition and implementation of corresponding mitigating measures”, DG ECHO has identified a critical risk on potential difficulties in the delivery of humanitarian aid due to restricted or denied access to the people affected by a humanitarian crisis which has been exacerbated by recent political crises and the COVID-19 crisis. This risk concerns not only the delivery of aid, but also the controls as well as humanitarian needs assessments. Mitigating measures are embedded in humanitarian aid procedures and policies, including risks assessments and international and local advocacy for the release of waivers for humanitarian staff and supplies. In terms of performance of verification and control processes, such as field monitoring and on-the-spot audits, which aim at providing assurance on the legality and regularity of payments, on sound financial management and on quality of aid delivery, DG ECHO has adapted its control framework by conducting remote monitoring, desk reviews and remote audits. In addition, DG ECHO has revised its audit plan and audit strategy, including the audit methodology, to ensure full flexibility so that on-the-spot audits can be postponed and conducted whenever the situation makes it possible.

In its contribution to the 2021 Annual Activity Report process the IAS has concluded that the internal control systems in place in DG ECHO for the audited processes are effective.

### **European Court of Auditors (ECA)**

The ECA’s Annual Report for the 2020 financial year - published in October 2020 – addressed two recommendations to DG ECHO. First, DG ECHO should carefully check the eligibility of the costs submitted by the beneficiaries of ESI actions – in particular the regularity of procurement procedures. Second, DG ECHO should establish a procedure to ensure that partner organisations base their allocation of shared costs on expenditure actually incurred. Corrective measures have been taken and the recommendations have been implemented. The ECA report on the performance of the EU budget in 2020 did not highlight any issues linked to DG ECHO. For the financial year 2021, the ECA’s Statement of Assurance is underway and so far has not detected any significant issues.

In the second half of 2021, the ECA conducted a follow-up audit on their Special Report 35/2018: *Transparency of EU funds implemented by NGOs*. The ECA assessed, in its preliminary conclusions, that the recommendations related to DG ECHO had been fully and timely implemented.

In 2021, DG ECHO worked on the implementation of the recommendation on improving the cost analysis in the selection and monitoring of education projects, which stemmed from the ECA Special Report 02/2021: *EU humanitarian aid for education: helps children in need but should be longer-term and reach more girls*. The recommendation is set to be implemented by the end of June 2022.

## Conclusions

On the basis of the information on IAS and ECA audits, including the limited conclusion of the IAS, there are no open critical or very important recommendations. The risks detected in audits have been mitigated.

### 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.

## Methodology

The internal control team monitors and assesses the functioning of the internal control principles in DG ECHO. The assessment is done in line with the corporate guidance<sup>78</sup>. To document the process, DG ECHO uses the assessment tables, which is a non-mandatory tool annexed to the corporate guidance.

DG ECHO's assessment of the effectiveness of its internal control framework was carried between November 2021 and February 2022 and was based on the following elements:

- Evaluation of DG ECHO 2021 Internal Control Monitoring Criteria.
- Analysis of the registers for exceptions and non-compliance events.
- Results of the risk assessment exercises 2021 and 2022.
- Results of audits and follow-up engagements performed by IAS and the ECA in 2021.
- Analysis of OLAF reports/recommendations.

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<sup>78</sup> icf\_implementation\_guide.pdf (europa.eu)

- Collection of the AOSD reports submitted by each Directorate.

Moreover, the findings from previous years were considered, to ensure the continuity of the internal control activities and the identification of tendencies (weaknesses and/or improvements). The results of dedicated survey with representatives of all staff levels for the evaluation of the Internal Control Monitoring Criteria were also considered.

### **Outcome of the assessment**

Principle level: Out of the 17 internal control principles, the assessment concluded that 15 are present and functioning well. Two principles (Principle 10 and 12)<sup>79</sup> are present and functioning well but some improvements are needed due to the number, nature, and significance of the deficiencies detected.

Component level: In terms of components, four out of five are present and functioning well with minor improvements needed. One component<sup>80</sup> is present and functioning, but some improvements are needed. Additional information on the outcome of the assessment of the Internal Control Systems is provided in Annex 8.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, 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. These deficiencies are linked with staff awareness and knowledge of procedures relating to planning and reporting, internal control, and finance. The improvements and/or remedial measures implemented or envisaged include awareness raising sessions, continuous scrutiny, careful monitoring and strengthening of some controls. These minor deficiencies bear a rather low impact in the overall effectiveness of the control system.

Nevertheless, no major internal control deficiencies, errors or gaps that could put at risk the overall effectiveness framework, were identified. The deficiencies identified would be subject to relevant follow-up and mitigating measures in 2022.

#### **2.1.4. Conclusions on the assurance**

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

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<sup>79</sup> Principle 10: The Commission selects and develops control activities that contribute to the mitigation of risks to the achievement of objectives to acceptable levels. Principle 12: The Commission deploys control activities through corporate policies that establish what is expected and in procedures that put policies into action.

<sup>80</sup> Component 3: Control Activities.

DG ECHO faces several inherent risks due to the nature of its operations, which can hinder the achievement of its objectives. The control architecture of DG ECHO aims to ensure that risks are mitigated to an acceptable level in a cost-effective manner.

Taking into account the information reported in sub-sections 2.1.1-2.1.3, 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 on the basis of the principles supporting sound financial management. Furthermore, the materiality criteria set for legality and regularity of the financial operations are respected, no significant information has been omitted, assets and information have been properly safeguarded and measures were put in place to ensure prevention, detection and correction of fraud and irregularities

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated. Minor improvements are necessary concerning staff awareness and knowledge of procedures relating to finance, internal control, planning and reporting. The following actions are/will be taken in this respect: Awareness raising and training of staff (already partly delivered end-2021) and strengthening of some controls. The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

## 2.1.5. Declaration of Assurance

### **Declaration of Assurance**

*I, the undersigned,*

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

*In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation*

*Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view <sup>(81)</sup>.*

*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 or those of the Commission.*

*Brussels, 31 March 2022*

*(e-signature)*

*Paraskevi MICHOU*

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<sup>81</sup> True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.



## 2.2. Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

### 2.2.1. Human resource management

DG ECHO employs a **competent and engaged workforce** and contributes to **gender equality** at all levels of management to deliver effectively on the Commission's objectives, priorities and core business. Human resources<sup>82</sup> at headquarters at the end of 2021 totalled 552 staff, of which 50% official, 31% contractual and 11 % external staff. DG ECHO made use of a small number of service providers (8%). With only half of its workforce being official, the DG is facing a high turnover with related loss of expertise and knowledge. Moreover, it is expected that the population of officials will be further reduced in the next years when existing temporary allocations will end. DG ECHO employed 158 field experts and 299 agents under national law, i.e., 457 people working in DG ECHO field offices on 31 December 2021.

As regards **gender diversity in leadership** and the **female representation** in middle management, at the end of 2021, DG ECHO had 9 female middle managers out of 19 occupied posts (47%) and 3 female senior managers out of 6 occupied posts (50%). Moreover, one middle management post and one senior management post were vacant and were occupied by female acting managers. During 2021, DG ECHO actively promoted **talent management and career development** activities at all levels such as the Junior Professionals Programme, the External Management Development Opportunities for Commission Managers, the European Diplomatic Programme, the EU Fellowship programme and the EPSAS Young talents. Likewise, DG ECHO continued to motivate and support the career development of women with a potential and interest for a management role. Furthermore, DG ECHO launched a 360° feedback evaluation for its senior managers.

The continued **COVID-19 pandemic** situation affecting the working method and presence in the office throughout 2021 required strengthening efforts at senior and middle management level to support the staff and monitor their well-being. In this respect, dedicated trainings for managers were organised to provide them with tools and techniques helping them to cope with teleworking and future hybrid ways of working including for example ethics, managing hybrid teams, key conversations, and unconscious bias. Those trainings also included the transition to a more digitalised collaboration and interaction with the staff (M365/TEAMS). Moreover, the **Management Charter** was signed by newly recruited managers in 2021. This is a key reference document for staff well-being whereby managers commit to optimising staff well-being and ways of boosting staff engagement together with the respect of work-life balance.

Difficulties and substantial workload (both at Headquarters and in the Field Offices) were encountered during the year due to the evacuation of the Afghanistan Office; the revised set up in Ethiopia (evacuation of dependants and TA rotation system); and the temporary evacuation of Goma and Bukavu staff (DRC) to Rwanda due to the volcanic activity. All

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<sup>82</sup> Counting active staff occupying a job in DG ECHO.

evacuations were successfully carried out. They ensured the safety of DG ECHO staff (expatriate and local) and EU interests (including financial and reputational aspects), as well as the interests of partners and their staff. To deal with these exceptional circumstances, DG ECHO re-aligned priorities and tasks of the Field Network. After the successful evacuation of DRC and Kabul, lessons-learned exercises were undertaken and shared within the Field Network which were used when the Ethiopian Office was partially evacuated.

Concerning **knowledge-sharing activities**, in addition to several information sessions organised by some units on different topics of interest for the staff of the DG, the Director-General hosted an information session for ECHO staff after the adoption of the **Communication on Humanitarian Aid**<sup>83</sup> in March 2021.

In July, DG ECHO published the best practices for remote managing of teams and sustained its welcoming activities (welcome package, virtual coffee with the Director-General, welcome session, appointment of a mentor, coffee roulette, etc.). DG ECHO launched an internal EU-Survey to build a comprehensive picture of the preferences and perceptions of the staff on the return to work, feeding into the corporate consultations on the working methods and building policies.

Several consultations held in 2021 directly with the staff or through My ECHO Group led to the adoption of the **local HR strategy** and related action plan<sup>84</sup> while keeping in mind the possible need to align the local strategy to the final text of the corporate strategy. DG ECHO started implementing the short- and medium-term actions in 2021 and will pursue the implementation in the coming years with the help of My ECHO Group.

ECHO continuously seeks opportunities for **efficiency** gains in ways of working and enhancement of organisational performance. Addressing this need was identified when drafting the local HR Strategy. Hence, DG ECHO started reflecting on its own methodology and solutions. Work will continue on this issue in 2022.

DG ECHO paid particular attention to its **internal communication** and updated staff and management on a timely manner with news articles about important developments, main achievements, HR communications, etc. posted on DG ECHO's intranet.

In December, DG ECHO endorsed its **Learning and Development plan for 2022 and 2023**, which is an important milestone of 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, with enhanced analytics capabilities

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<sup>83</sup> COM(2021)110.

<sup>84</sup> Endorsed by the senior management on 29 July 2021.

being expanded to cover the various “business” areas of both humanitarian and civil protection.

With this background, the following **four priority areas** were strengthened in 2021:

- **Enhance data and information management** in support to DG ECHO’s policy priorities – this entails combining data from various sources in order to use them for evidence-based policy, project implementation, visibility and transparency of the EU action. This is fully in line with the Commission Communication on Data, Information and Knowledge Management, which aims to maximise the use of data for better policy-making. It is also in line with the digital modernisation plan of DG ECHO, priority 1 – “Data for better policy-making”.
- **Enhance digital communication and collaboration with stakeholders** to support further ECHO engagement. In this context, DG ECHO successfully piloted the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) import functionality with several Member States.
- **Foster a collaborative and efficient workplace** by encouraging fast adoption of new user-centric, integrated collaborative tools. In this context, DG ECHO successfully piloted the Microsoft Office suite (M365), facilitating the online collaboration between HQ, Field, EEAS and other stakeholders in a secured and standardised manner. This is fully in line with the 'open, inclusive and cooperative way of working' but also with the digital modernisation plan of DG ECHO, priority 2 – “ICT ECHOFIELD and Office 365”.
- **Boost a secure and resilient digital environment** contributing to a high level of network and information security, with various actions taking place in 2021 to reinforcing the security of the information systems and networks.

During 2021, together with JRC, DG ECHO continued to develop a Security Awareness Information Dashboard (SecAID) as a prototype combining data, information and analysis on conflicts, security and safety matters.

Considering the **digitalisation of working processes**, DG ECHO developed the new FIT module (Funding Information Tool) to support the humanitarian aid funding allocation working process. This module will support the preparation of the country budget allocation for the World Wide Decision and the associated HIP’s, starting from 2022 for the preparation of the 2023 World Wide Decision. Moreover, DG ECHO drafted a business case on the Mission Security Clearance Tool (MSCT) for DG ECHO staff going on missions to high-risk countries. The business case should support the development of a solution for the MSCT.

The rules applicable to the **protection of personal data** in the Commission were reinforced on 11 December 2018, with the applicability of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 (IDPR). On 7 November 2018, the Commission adopted a Data Protection Action Plan for the implementation of the IDPR (C(2018) 7432 final). Under this data protection framework, DG ECHO staff have the legal obligation to integrate the principles of data protection into all

aspects of their procedures and business activities. DG ECHO worked on the implementation of the Data Protection Action Plan and will continue to build up its requirements by 2024.

DG ECHO Data Protection's Team continued organising awareness-raising activities among its staff (for instance through tailored trainings) which were focused on how to comply with data protection obligations in the daily processing operations and how to handle data breaches.

As a follow-up of the implementing activities carried so far, DG ECHO continued adapting its Privacy Statements to the related decentralised corporate records for common processing operations within Commission services as well as mapping those data processing activities which were not yet covered and required the submission of a specific record in the Data Protection Management System.

DG ECHO closely followed up on the latest legal and procedural developments and consequently reflected them on its Intranet. Following the European Court of Justice's judgement in the **Schrems II case (C-311/18)** invalidating the US-EU Privacy Shield, DG ECHO, in line with corporate approach, kept monitoring and following up the results of the mapping exercises involving international transfers of data.

**DG ECHO's external website** moved in November 2021 to Drupal 8, a new better secured platform and is now aligned to the look and feel of the Commission Information website. As a result, ECHO's website is more coherent in terms of thematic structure, clear navigation, common layout and a more cost-effective approach (standardised functionalities, components, and IT solutions). Considering that more than 40% of the ECHO external website traffic comes from smartphones, the new website responds better to their needs, giving a more user-friendly, responsive experience on mobile devices and tablets.

### 2.2.3. Sound environmental management

The Communication on the **European Green Deal** stipulates that the Commission, as an institution and employer, aims to be climate neutral by 2030. DG ECHO continued to actively contribute to the achievement towards this target during 2021 by complying with EMAS requirements but also going above by measuring the carbon emission from missions, prioritising virtual meetings and conferences, making compliance with the EMAS guide for more sustainable meetings mandatory. The **"greening" of the DG ECHO field network** continued as part of DG ECHO's commitment to sound environmental management.

Beyond that, DG ECHO tracks resilience and climate action. This is done via two different tools: the **Resilience Marker** and the **Climate Tracking**. The Resilience Marker, currently included in the ECHO Project Proposal Single Form, has been revised to better reflect preparedness in humanitarian actions as well as measuring the environmental dimension of DG ECHO-funded humanitarian actions. A broad climate tracking system at commitment-level has been introduced, which will help DG ECHO better demonstrate its contribution to

climate action. In the future, this can be refined to track climate action across all projects with new and/or revised project indicators. This tracking system is valid for both civil protection and humanitarian assistance projects.

DG ECHO is committed to **reducing the environmental footprint** of its humanitarian operations, and that of its partners. This directly responds to the **'do no harm' principle**. In 2020, DG ECHO adopted an ambitious approach to reducing its environmental footprint and that of its partners. DG continued its implementation throughout 2021. Greening was incorporated into policies, for example it is an overarching priority of the humanitarian logistics policy to be published in 2022. DG ECHO is equally considering what aspects of civil protection assistance can have a reduced environmental footprint.

DG ECHO continued to raise staff awareness on more environmentally friendly behaviour at work and home by sharing **EMAS campaigns** and actions through its network and its intranet. As such, in 2021, DG ECHO organised a plogging activity with its staff, advertised EMAS campaigns on zero-waste, shared tips on how to reduce staff's emissions from home, to name just a few. DG ECHO reduced its parking lot for cars and increased rooms for bikes in order to encourage sustainable transport modes.