

STUDY

Requested by the DEVE committee



# The future of humanitarian aid in a new context full of challenges



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## STUDY

# The future of humanitarian aid in a new context full of challenges

### ABSTRACT

In light of the current highly challenging background of humanitarian intervention for the European Union and international humanitarian donors, the European Commission has adopted a Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles. It provides guidelines on how the EU may face this challenge in collaboration with Member States and donor partners. The Communication focuses on two main areas: (1) addressing needs, reducing the funding gap, and (2) supporting an enabling environment for humanitarian aid. Through an analysis of the Communication's seven objectives, the authors address key actions and provide final recommendations. Furthermore, authors evaluate which key actions are the most promising, critical or challenging, which have already been partially implemented and which should be prioritised. Implementation of the key actions is generally well developed, albeit many are found to share certain critical issues. These refer specifically to the need for: increased transparency and accountability; enhancing EU coordination with donor partners; and significantly strengthening the EU's leadership role. Moreover, the implementation of key actions must take greater account of dialogue and coordination both in the decision-making phase as well as in the implementation of humanitarian aid on the ground.

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## List of Acronyms

AGIR	Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative in the Sahel and West Africa
CECIS	Common Emergency and Information System
COHAFA	Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid
DG ECHO	Directorate General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EDRIS	European Emergency Disaster Response Information System
EERC	European Emergency Response Capacity
EHRC	European Humanitarian Response Capacity
ERCC	Emergency Response Coordination Centre
ERM	Emergency Response Mechanism
ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
EU	European Union
EUHAP	European Union Humanitarian Aid Policy
EVD	Ebola virus disease
FCA	Forgotten Crises Assessment
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan
GIFMM	Interagency Group for Mixed Migration Flows
GNA	Global Needs Assessment
HLP	High Level Panel
HRPs	Humanitarian Response Plans
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IOs	International Organisations
LRRD	Linking relief, rehabilitation and development
MIC	Monitoring and Information Centre
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NATL	National anti-terrorism laws
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
NSAGs	Non-State Armed Groups

OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RRPs	Regional Refugee Response Plans
SAR	Search and rescue
SCF	Save the Children Federation
State/PRM	US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
UCPM	Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/BHA	USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
USAID/GH	USAID's Bureau for Global Health
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Executive summary

Over the last twenty years, humanitarian needs have been steadily growing at an ever-increasing rate. As a result, international organisations (IOs), national governments as well as governmental and private actors have redoubled their efforts to limit – and possibly end – natural catastrophes, man-made atrocities along with political and economic breakdowns affecting civil populations. Consequently, humanitarian programmes and actions have been implemented to help people in need during and after any humanitarian crisis worldwide. The European Union's (EU) response to this widespread international trend followed very quickly with prompt engagement in humanitarian aid to help victims of man-made and natural catastrophes. This is the result of independent EU institutions' actions, cooperation with Member States and/or actions within multilateral frameworks. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) is responsible for EU humanitarian aid, with the relative European Union Humanitarian Aid policy's (EUHAP) legal basis set up in the Treaty of Lisbon. This forms part of the European Union External Action and is aimed at tackling humanitarian crises outside the EU, operating in partnership with more than 200 agencies, including United Nations (UN) agencies, Red Cross societies, other international organisations as well as (local and international) non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The European Union's commitment to humanitarian assistance is now being called upon to face new critical challenges, with the number of people suffering from humanitarian crises over the past five years having dramatically increased globally from around 90 million in 2015 to the very high record of over 235 million in 2021, according to latest UN estimates. Moreover, the situation has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the overall number of people in need has tripled, increasing by as much as 40 % in just twelve months.

Considering the current extremely challenging background for humanitarian intervention by international humanitarian donors – particularly the EU and its Member States – the European Commission has adopted a Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles. It aims to provide key guidelines on how the EU's work – mainly through its DG ECHO – in collaboration with Member States, local partners and main international organisations can step up to meet these new concerns. The Communication also reaffirms that in allocating humanitarian aid the European Union will always observe and promote humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality as enshrined in the 2008 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, not only to foster internal coordination and cooperation between Commission, Council and Parliament but also to respect International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The Communication divides guidelines into two main areas:

1. Addressing needs and reducing the funding gap.

The **first area** introduces five main objectives and related key actions:

- Promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms.
- Ensure that EU humanitarian aid can be delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need.
- Further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities.
- Ensure that humanitarian, development, peace and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises.
- Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action.

## 2. Supporting an enabling environment for humanitarian aid.

The **second area** introduces two main objectives and related key actions:

- Put compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) at the heart of EU external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers.
- Enhancing the EU's engagement and leadership.

The proposed key actions and objectives are highly relevant and have a positive impact on the development of EU Humanitarian Aid policy. Nonetheless, issues persist, mainly due to the increasing complexity of intervention scenarios and ever-growing needs worldwide. Consequently, the key actions proposed are crucial for improving development of the policy and an absolute priority to bridge the financial gap and foster the effectiveness of humanitarian actions and programmes. The coming years will undoubtedly be extremely hard for the EU and national decision-makers, calling for a vast number of decisions on increasingly complex issues as intervention scenarios continue to expand at a constantly increasing rate.

### **Objective 1: Promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms**

This objective is strictly related to the Grand Bargain<sup>1</sup> goals, explicitly requiring EU donors to be given more flexibility on cash transfer and support to local responders.

Regarding cash transfer, **three prominent aspects** provide guidelines on how to implement and reinforce flexibility and efficiency.

**The first aspect** refers to better multilateral practice. Indeed, efforts have already produced promising results by increasing the amount of aid delivered through cash transfers instead of in-kind alternatives, thereby reducing allocation delays and avoiding response overlapping. Nonetheless, some critical issues remain, including the lack of clearly defined international and multilateral agreements on: a coordinated multi-purpose and multi-annual financial plan; common (or at least coordinated and harmonised) strategic cash transfer plans; as well as flexibility and speed in adapting interventions to changes in crisis scenarios and humanitarian needs. For these reasons, valuable tools to tackle these critical aspects are: (1) the definition of a clear and concise financial action plan in agreement with multilateral humanitarian partners; and (2) an increase in *ex-ante* and *ex-post* accountability and transparency for humanitarian aid operations.

**The second aspect** refers to cash transfer and social protection, especially concerning the private sector's involvement, which is vital for increasing the donor base as well as related financial and technical

<sup>1</sup> The Grand bargain, signed in 2015, is an international agreement between some of the largest humanitarian aid donors. They committed themselves to provide a larger amount of aid to recover people in need and to improve humanitarian aid effectiveness and efficiency. These commitments include, for example, widening and increasing flexibility of cash transfers (e.g. short-term and long-term, from public and private actors, direct from donors and indirect through implementing partners). A second example is the involvement of local responders, which have become even more crucial since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic due to travel restrictions and the consequent difficulties for international donors to reach crisis-affected areas. Local responders thus take an essential role because, once they receive the aid from international donors, they are the only implementing partners able to access people in need.



resources. Nonetheless, some critical issues remain particularly regarding political considerations and doubts in terms of respect for humanitarian principles. NGOs and implementing partners are especially concerned about the risks of weakening humanitarian principles to favour efficiency, scope and value of financial resources available. Indeed, NGOs and implementing partners' aims and scope is the defence of people in need according to humanitarian principles. Their primary concern is that main international humanitarian donors in times of lack of resources and a widening financial gap could favour economic considerations to the detriment of such principles, which would stop being a priority. It is thus worthwhile to rethink how to involve the private sector, increase transparency and accountability<sup>2</sup> and develop new financial instruments. This is closely linked to **the third aspect**, namely the introduction of innovative financial products and digitalisation. To this end, EU actors are called upon to: (1) find better ways of clarifying and diversifying what exactly the private sector corresponds to and thereafter involving it in digitalisation and innovative financial instruments; and (2) introduce and favour innovative financial products and digitalisation. This approach could bring a double benefit: profiting from private sector expertise and resources in the field, along with controlling private sector commitments.

Regarding support to local responders, over the last five years EU actors have made many efforts and substantial progress in fostering assistance for implementing partners with: the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027; new toolkits and guidance for partnerships with IOs, NGOs and Member States' agencies; new international and pooled funding through the Country-based Pooled Funds initiative; new strategic action plans provided through the new Programmatic Partnerships; a better harmonised operational practice of localisation; the 8+3 harmonised template for funding reports; and a fostered commitment to counter gender-related crises. However, some critical issues are still outstanding: technical solutions to increase transparency are as yet insufficient; there is little coordination and harmonisation at global level in terms of multi-purpose plans on cash transfer; there is little coordination and accountability in terms of reducing management costs and improving aid efficiency to avoid overlapping interventions and duplication. For this reason, promoting dialogue and coordination with implementing partners, especially NGOs and local partners, must assume top priority. NGOs and local partners have to be included in negotiating the financial/action multi-annual and multi-purpose plan with their roles and responsibilities clearly indicated. Moreover, they must be involved from the outset through a collaborative dialogue on what is expected from the partnership with implementing agencies regarding cost management, transparency, accountability and responsibilities.

## **Objective 2: Ensure that EU humanitarian aid can be delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need**

The EU does not usually implement humanitarian aid directly in the field. However, it has introduced an effective mechanism for direct intervention to tackle humanitarian crises more quickly in recent years. Hence, a key action from the Communication entails establishing a European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC) within the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism framework. This action joins previous EU efforts to promote division of labour and knowledge transfer between donors both at EU level and in the field via the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) (previously the Monitoring and Information Centre, MIC). Any multi-level division of labour between the EU and Member States requires a third level of implementing agencies to be considered. Accordingly, the real challenge now is

<sup>2</sup> International humanitarian donors should make information about humanitarian aid allocation and implementation freely accessible, thus allowing to verify the aim, scope and concrete implementation of aid.

to avoid conflicting and overlapping interventions in the field between EU actors, NGOs and local partners. A priority goal is to coordinate European financial and operational tools as well as transparency and accountability mechanisms. A framework action plan needs to be discussed and negotiated in collaboration with partner agencies. However, precise reference guidelines on division of labour and responsibilities, financial instruments and data reporting must be carried out both by DG ECHO directly and by implementing partners.

**Objective 3: Further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities**

This objective has a double aim. Firstly, once the strong link between natural disasters and humanitarian crises is affirmed, the EU promotes an integrated project response<sup>3</sup> to humanitarian crises due to natural disasters through prevention interventions. Secondly, the mitigation of crises entails a link between short-term urgent relief operations and long-term development action. The objective is thus rooted in a double thematic and temporal link by recognising the interconnection between humanitarianism and sustainability while also linking short and long-term interventions. This key action is labelled the *humanitarian-development-peace nexus* approach.

Implementing this nexus requires: a precise understanding of every possible humanitarian intervention; the definition of a strategic and rational action plan with a detailed timeline from prevention to urgent relief to development; as well as vulnerability assessments and priority setting. Moreover, the nexus also promotes sustainable interventions from both humanitarian and environmental perspectives. The challenge is to design interventions that carefully consider the impact from two perspectives, namely beneficiaries' nature and their society/culture. For an intervention to have a positive impact, it must positively influence all aspects of beneficiaries' society and culture, thereby reducing countries' fragility and their inability to protect civil population from a wide range of shocks, and consequently their vulnerability to repeated outbreaks of humanitarian crises.

Some critical issues are evident here. Firstly, an international consensus is lacking not only for collecting and analysing data to define humanitarian needs but also identifying priority settings to be transposed into humanitarian activities. Secondly, the timelines for different interventions must be clarified in order to avoid an imbalance between prevention, urgent relief and development. Thirdly, the thematic interconnection and specific current prerogatives of environmental/climatic and humanitarian needs require more precise definition. This would help prevent environmental and climatic dimensions of intervention from superseding humanitarian considerations, such as social, societal and cultural issues. To overcome these drawbacks, it is important to: (1) better define the priority setting of the intervention between urgent relief, prevention and development as well as between environmental/climatic and humanitarian concerns; (2) foster harmonisation and division of labour between EU donors (e.g. European Commission, Member States and their national agencies); (3) strengthen the EU's coordination role both internally, with and among Member States, as well as externally with other humanitarian aid donors; (4) increase accountable, transparent and impartial assessment of humanitarian needs and

<sup>3</sup> This refers to humanitarian projects integrating different kinds of interventions, thus implementing the nexus. An example is the EU's response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in the Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh (2017-2019), which integrated emergency protection-oriented aid in the form of e.g. sanitary, health, nutrition, sanitation with disaster risk reduction and disaster prevention/preparedness to face the monsoon season.

priority actions; (5) enhance negotiation abilities towards international partners so as to reach a – currently lacking – international consensus regarding best practices; (6) develop a clearer assessment of needs.

**Objective 4: Ensure that humanitarian, development, peace and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises**

This objective refers to a specific aspect of the aforementioned nexus: the focus on peace operations linked to urgent relief and development. The necessary link between peace and other humanitarian operations derives from the notion that many humanitarian crises have come about directly due to conflict situations becoming protracted. Long periods of social and human insecurity lead to additional humanitarian needs. As a matter of urgency, it thus becomes necessary to intervene in conflicts as much as natural disasters, epidemics or food crises, to avoid the outbreak of other humanitarian crises. Moreover, evidence shows that interventions become even more complicated in the presence of ‘protracted crises’ and ‘forgotten crises’, two categories that are often closely correlated.

The result is the nexus linking humanitarian-development-peace: (1) rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance; (2) rehabilitation, maintenance, prevention and development intervention to restore and ameliorate local structures; (3) long term operations to set up long-standing peace in order to avoid future humanitarian crises. However, it is crucial that humanitarian assistance does not lose its specific urgent relief connotation, as delayed intervention prolongs the crisis, thus further jeopardising the effectiveness of any subsequent development operation. The latter must complement the former, not substitute for it. Accordingly, emergency assistance must be provided between 6 and 12 months after the onset of a crisis, but possibly even earlier for specific crisis scenarios, such as natural disasters. For this reason, key actions precisely focusing on coordination and dialogue between donors and implementing agencies as well as on transparency, accountability and depoliticisation must be added to the EU agenda so as to strengthen its coordinating role. This goal can be achieved by (1) facilitating meetings and discussion among implementing experts with different humanitarian and development backgrounds; (2) increasing accountability and impartial assessment of needs; (3) encouraging multi-level and multi-stakeholder actions and (4) promoting the EU’s negotiation and coordination role.

**Objective 5: Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action**

This objective refers to the need for increasing the efficiency of allocation by expanding the resource base and improving the allocation of available resources. Specifically, evidence demonstrates that the EU and Member States could increase their policy coordination and harmonisation efforts. Hence, division of labour could play a crucial role in avoiding duplicated, overlapping or sometimes even conflicting interventions, as well as the resulting waste of resources. The EU and Member States should thus prioritise donors’ comparative advantage in intervention over political considerations.

Nonetheless, humanitarian partners have reaffirmed how essential it is to shape humanitarian policy based on impartially assessed humanitarian needs and prioritising actions on needs’ indices. Regarding resource management and respect for humanitarian principles, it is essential to retain at EU level centralisation of the acquisition as well as management of information and coordination for different interventions. Furthermore, additional efforts are required to identify, define and diversify donors as well as their specific roles more clearly. This would apply, for example, to the diversification between international and local agencies and/or between public and private donors. Moreover, DG ECHO could compensate for the lack of sufficient financial resources by providing more efficient allocation and distribution. For example, this could be done by reducing the administrative burden by managing risk transfer and sharing. As a consequence of this effort, the direct funding reaching local partners could increase.

### **Objective 6: Put compliance with international humanitarian law at the heart of EU external action**

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) guides all humanitarian activities by international, national and local donors. Hence, the EU and Member States have to respect IHL in delivering humanitarian aid and sanction any breaches. The Communication reinforces IHL compliance by controlling delivery and implementation of humanitarian action, monitoring breaches and reinforcing coordination leadership. Its main goal is the protection of civilian populations and humanitarian workers, often victims of belligerents. However, implementing partners deem a number of key critical issues to be an inadequate articulation and applicability of IHL to national anti-terrorism laws (NATL), as well as a scarce and unclear definition and valorisation of humanitarian aid specificities in military operations. It is thus necessary to strengthen the EU's leadership role through EU diplomacy which: favours and advocates the ratification of IHL treaties; increases accountability; and sanctions not only any attempts to impede or delay delivery of humanitarian assistance, but also human rights abuses by armed forces. Moreover, pre-assessment of sanctions would facilitate a definition of guidelines on how to react to similar situations and thus avoid adopting *ad hoc impromptu* solutions. This way not only are accountability and transparency increased, but compliance with the IHL is also favoured. Accordingly, pre-evaluation calls for an assessment of measures adopted in the sanctions as well as their possible consequences, purpose and consistency.

### **Objective 7: Enhancing the EU's engagement and leadership**

Given the increasing financial gap in parallel with a constant increase in intensity and frequency of humanitarian crises, good practice in resource management at EU level is essential. This means promoting the EU's engagement and leadership in humanitarian activities to increase efficiency and the credibility and trustworthiness with regard to, for example, respect for humanitarian principles. Furthermore, strengthening a coordinated humanitarian assistance policy between the EU and Member States working as 'Team Europe' implies a delegation of competencies from Member States to the EU. The main advantages are the following: overcoming information asymmetries; negotiating shared preferences; increasing credible commitment and respect for humanitarian principles; acquiring specialisation; and reducing risks of politicisation.

Many positive results have already been achieved to strengthen cooperation between the EU and Member States, driven by the EU itself. This particularly applies to humanitarian operations falling within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Nonetheless, some critical issues remain. Notably, the number of interventions undertaken jointly by the EU and Member States or entirely delegated to the EU are still scarce in many crisis scenarios, while Member States are very active in bilateral aid. Thus, a greater effort in harmonisation and division of labour should be a political priority for the EU, mainly to foster aid effectiveness, accountability and credibility regarding beneficiaries and implementing partners in a multilateral perspective.

To achieve this objective and relative key actions, the focus must once again be placed on harmonisation and sound division of labour as a political priority for the EU. Furthermore, the aim is to promote and develop aid effectiveness, accountability and credibility regarding beneficiaries as well as implementing partners in a multilateral perspective. Accordingly, coordination, meetings and dialogue between donors must be given top priority in the coming years to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, not only from an economic standpoint but also from political and social perspectives. To reach this goal more effectively, it is crucial to (1) identify risk perceptions and Member States' policy preferences to understand any reasons for their limiting delegation to the EU; (2) analyse power relations between Member States' governments and national agencies; (3) increase opportunities for informal discussion and opinion sharing; (4) increase accountability to assure that bilateral humanitarian aid is not prompted by political interests, which lead to bilateral privileged relations between donors and beneficiaries.

# 1 Outline and Methodology

This study aims to critically analyse key actions proposed in the 2021 Commission Communication, which provides guidelines on how the EU can meet this challenge, in collaboration with Member States and donor partners. The Communication focuses on two main areas: (1) addressing needs, reducing the funding gap; and (2) supporting an enabling environment for humanitarian aid. It identifies seven main objectives. Accordingly, this study follows the Communication's structure, being divided into seven parts, each directly referring to one of the objectives. For each objective, it provides a sound theoretical and empirical discussion and traces analysis results back to key actions, assessing their potential impact. Specifically, it is presented: which key actions are the most promising, critical or challenging; which have already been partially implemented; and which should be prioritised. Finally, critical issues in implementing proposed actions are identified, before the concluding section sets out practical and concrete recommendations for bridging the existing gap between the formulation of key actions and the current state of their implementation.

The following research questions are addressed, each of them tackled through a specific methodology, as described below.

- **Objective 1 (O1):** how flexible and efficient is the EU's humanitarian action, especially regarding relations with local partners and cash transfers?
- **Objective 2 (O2):** is EU humanitarian aid delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need? how could this be affected by the creation of a European Humanitarian Response Capacity?
- **Objective 3 (O3):** does EU humanitarian aid sufficiently focus on climate change impacts and environmental factors' integration into humanitarian aid policy and practice? Moreover, does it strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build up resilience of vulnerable communities?
- **Objective 4 (O4):** is the nexus between humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and other policies sufficiently developed to link urgent relief and longer-term solutions effectively?
- **Objectives 5 (O5):** which measures have been adopted to increase the resource base for humanitarian action and thus tackle the financial gap?
- **Objective 6 (O6):** does EU humanitarian aid adopt the necessary measures to strengthen compliance with International Humanitarian Law?
- **Objective 7 (O7):** is the EU sufficiently engaged in humanitarian aid allocation and implementation? Does it promote its leadership and coordination role in respect to international, local and implementing partners?

The research methods adopted to address these questions are:

**Objectives 1 to 7:** all research questions are addressed and analysed referring to desktop research based on primary and secondary literature (i.e. EU legislation; EU reports; NGO communications and reports; IO reports, documents and databases). The discussion addresses current state of the art on developing the EU's Humanitarian Aid policy over the last five years, the Grand Bargain's main objectives, coordination and cooperation with Member States as well as humanitarian partners.

**Objective 2:** this is the only objective explicitly referring to a case study, namely the European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC). Hence, the methods adopted here also include an assessment of this objective by using a pilot case.

**Objectives 3, 4 & 7:** to address these specific objectives, quantitative analysis through the first-hand collection of primary and secondary data is added to the methods mentioned earlier. This quantitative

empirical approach measures crisis characteristics and coordination among humanitarian donors using the dataset of primary sources provided by leading international organisations. The primary source for measuring coordination is the European Emergency Disaster Response Information System (EDRIS). Thus, the original dataset includes all humanitarian interventions undertaken by the EU and Member States in collaboration with IOs, NGOs and local partners between 2004-2021. Using such data collection methodology increases accuracy and avoids any potentially problematic sampling procedures. Moreover, it also facilitates a long-term longitudinal approach (since the last enlargement in 2004) and a comparison with the shorter 5-year period 2017-2021. The dataset is divided into two parts. The first collects data on humanitarian crises and their characteristics. The second collects data on the EU's and Member States' intervention actions, referring to the EDRIS dataset to measure coordination. A complex multivariate and multilevel model tests the impact of crisis characteristics on humanitarian interventions through quantitative statistical analyses, which have a descriptive and explanatory scope. All results are critically discussed and graphically reported in **Annex III**. This assists our goal of determining how the key actions and objectives proposed in the European Commission Communication are currently implemented. Specifically, this analysis promotes an understanding of which key actions are the most promising, critical or challenging, which have already been partially implemented and accomplished along with those that should be prioritised. Final recommendations also identify other possible actions to be considered.

**Objectives 1, 5 & 6:** to address these specific objectives, internal reports provided directly by NGOs, IOs and local partners continually collaborating with the EU in aid allocation have proved to be particularly relevant. Accordingly, such objectives specifically refer to the relations between donors, EU institutions, and local and implementing partners. For this reason, the viewpoint of such actors was crucial in assessing current progress on meeting EU objectives and implementing the EU's key actions. Open discussions with NGOs, local and implementing partners (e.g. VOICE, Red Cross EU Office, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)), as well as follow-up email conversations have fed into the analysis. All information collected has proved to be extremely helpful and valuable in providing an insider perspective from implementing partners on several key topics such as: dialogue between donors; respect for humanitarian principles; effective cost management; joint coordinated agreement of cash transfer; respect for International Humanitarian Law; and strategic planning to cope with the humanitarian impact of COVID-19.

The core part of the study is thus divided into 5 sections:

### **1. Scene setter**

An overview of the main humanitarian challenges worldwide focuses specifically on key EU institutions and Member States' as well as global responses to crises and the implementation of commitments made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain.

### **2. The 2021 European Commission Communication**

A brief overview looks at the framework of two key areas and objectives as detailed in the EC Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles.

### **3. Addressing needs, reducing the funding gap**

This section comprises a critical analysis of the first key area and its objectives. The potential impact and challenges to key actions proposed by the European Commission are assessed following discussion and analysis for each objective.



#### **4. Supporting an enabling environment for humanitarian aid**

This critical analysis covers the second key area and its objectives, assessing the potential impact and challenges to key actions proposed by the European Commission following discussion and analysis.

#### **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

A summary of key findings is followed by concrete recommendations to the European Parliament, the European Commission and Member States on effectively implementing proposed key actions. Possible additional actions aimed at promoting the EU and its global humanitarian aid policy are also provided.

## 2 Scene setter

Over the last twenty years, ‘interest in humanitarian aid has been growing. International organisations, national governments and governmental and private actors have multiplied their efforts to limit and possibly put an end to natural catastrophes, man-made atrocities and political and economic breakdowns affecting civil population. Consequently, cooperative and unilateral emergency actions have been carried out with the aim of recovering people in need during and after any humanitarian crisis all around the world.’ (Pusterla, 2015: 1). The European Union’s (EU) response to this widespread international trend followed very quickly. Accordingly, it has promptly committed itself to intervening in international humanitarian crises and helping victims of man-made atrocities and natural catastrophes worldwide. The European Commission’s Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) is the actor responsible for EU humanitarian aid, while the legal basis for the corresponding European Union Humanitarian Aid policy (EUHAP) is set up in the Treaty of Lisbon. EUHAP is part of European Union External Action and aims at tackling humanitarian crises outside EU countries, operating in partnership with more than 200 agencies worldwide, including United Nations (UN) agencies, Red Cross societies, other international organisations as well as (local and international) nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

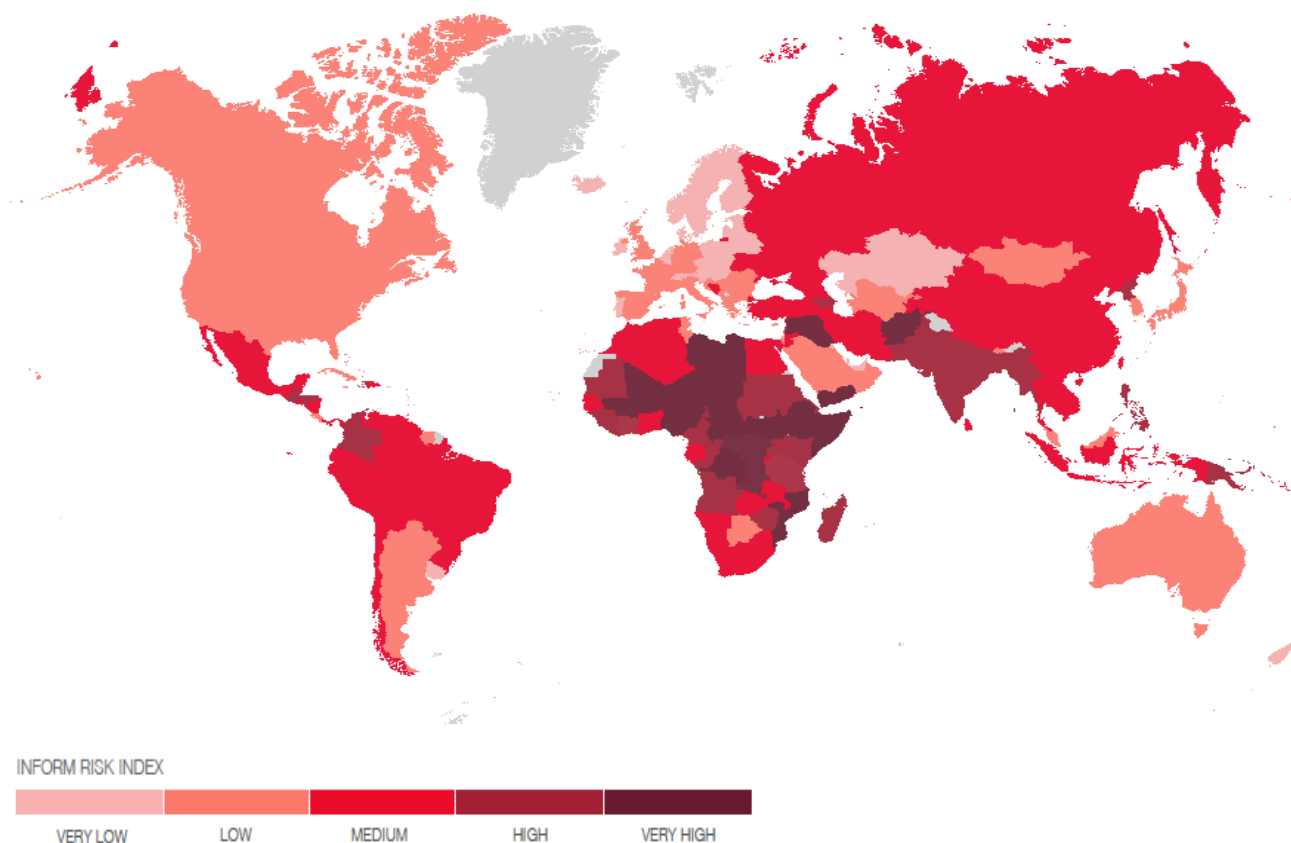
The European Union’s commitment to humanitarian assistance is now being called upon to face new critical challenges, as shown below (**Figure 1**). In the last five years, the number of people suffering from humanitarian crises has dramatically increased globally from around 90 million in 2015 to over 235 million in 2021, according to UN estimates (OCHA, 2021). Moreover, this already worrying situation has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the overall number of people in need has tripled since 2014, the annual increase from 2020 to 2021 alone has been around 40 % (DG ECHO, 2021c).

People in need result from natural and man-made crises such as drought, epidemic outbreaks and wars, leading to massive flows of refugees and internal displacement. At the same time, while the need for financial humanitarian support has increased, its delivery has become more complex and dangerous due to drawbacks in the application of basic leading humanitarian norms and principles. Additional challenges stem from the length of crises, currently an average of nine years (‘protracted crises’); moreover, many receive inadequate media coverage and there is a general scarcity of information (‘forgotten crises’<sup>4</sup>). Consequently, despite efforts put in place by the EU and Member States to increase financial expenditure devoted to humanitarian interventions, the gap between expenditure and needs has increased. Key donors within the EU are the European Commission and Germany; indeed, the European Commission and four Member States were responsible for allocating 90 % of total European humanitarian aid funds (DG ECHO, 2021c). The EU, together with its Member States, allocated EUR 15 billion in 2020 (against EUR 4.1 billion in 2012) – nearly 36 % of all humanitarian aid globally. This is set against actual financing needs of at least EUR 32.5 billion.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Forgotten crises’ are defined as severe, protracted humanitarian crises where affected populations are receiving no or insufficient international aid and where there is no political commitment to solve the crisis, due in part to a lack of media interest. This refers primarily to protracted conflict situations but can also refer to crises resulting from the cumulative effect of recurring natural disasters or even a combination of the two. ‘Forgotten crises’ almost always concern minorities within a country, groups of people whose living conditions are below the average for the country as a whole.’ (Council of the European Union, 1996: Arts. 8-9)



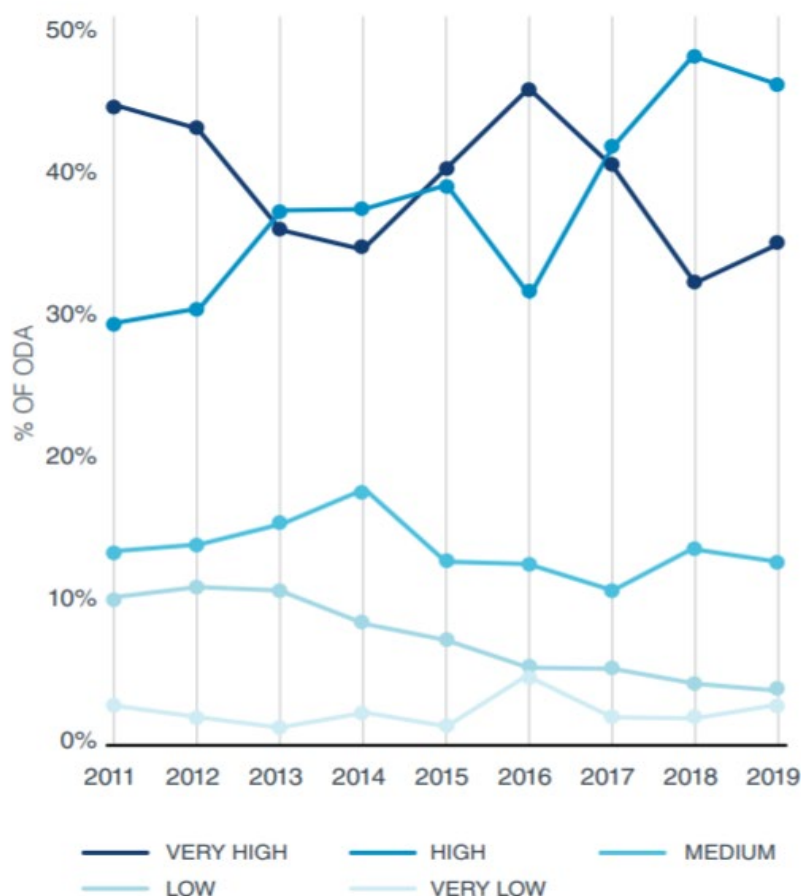
**Figure 1: Risk Index 2021**



Source: (Thow, A et al., INFORM REPORT, 2021)

Between 2011 and 2019, enormous efforts by the EU and its humanitarian partners significantly reduced people’s vulnerability to humanitarian crises globally (**Figure 2**). The relationship between vulnerability and humanitarian/development funding indicates that the number of countries with high vulnerability decreased from 27 to 18, suggesting that, despite an increased risk of incurring humanitarian emergencies, the level of vulnerability has decreased. This probably stems from assistance received to deal with humanitarian crises as well as to advance countries’ development (Thow, A et al., 2021).

**Figure 2: Vulnerability trend**



*Trend in total ODA by each category of Vulnerability 2011-2019*

Source: (Thow, A et al., INFORM REPORT, 2021)<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, this positive trend between risk and vulnerability is now reversing mainly due to the onset of COVID-19. Since 2019, this pandemic has increasingly jeopardised development progress. Increased vulnerability and setbacks in countries’ development may significantly and negatively impact the outbreak of humanitarian crises and countries’ abilities to face them. In 2019, even before the onset of COVID-19, the number of highly violent political conflicts had steadily increased, and this negative tendency has since continued. In June 2021, 358 political conflicts were registered worldwide, 55 % of which were classified as violent (OCHA, 2021).

Even worse is the scenario regarding refugees and internally displaced people (**Figure 3**). Here natural disasters are largely responsible, with an estimated 24.9 million people affected in 2019 alone and a further 9.8 million between January and June 2020, mainly in Asia. Moreover, conflicts and man-made disasters in 2019 resulted in an additional 8.5 million people being displaced, on top of the 79 million

<sup>5</sup> The Risk Index graphically reports trends in Vulnerability in combination with funding flows allocated by ODA in percentage points. Thus, the graph suggests that countries receiving ODA funds shifted from the Very High to High Vulnerability category.

between 2010 and 2019 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020a). The estimate for 2020 shows 4.8 million more displacements during the first six months of the year, mainly in Africa and the Middle East (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020a). In particular, the humanitarian crises that have broken out in Cameroon, Mozambique, Niger and Somalia are expected to increase the total number of people displaced because of man-made disasters in 2020 to figures exceeding 2019 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020b). Finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people is complex, hence the consequence is often protracted displacements (The Brookings Institution – University of Bern, 2010).

**Figure 3: Forcibly displaced people**

### Forcibly displaced people (2010-2019)

■ IDPs ■ Refugees ■ Asylum-seekers ■ Venezuelans abroad

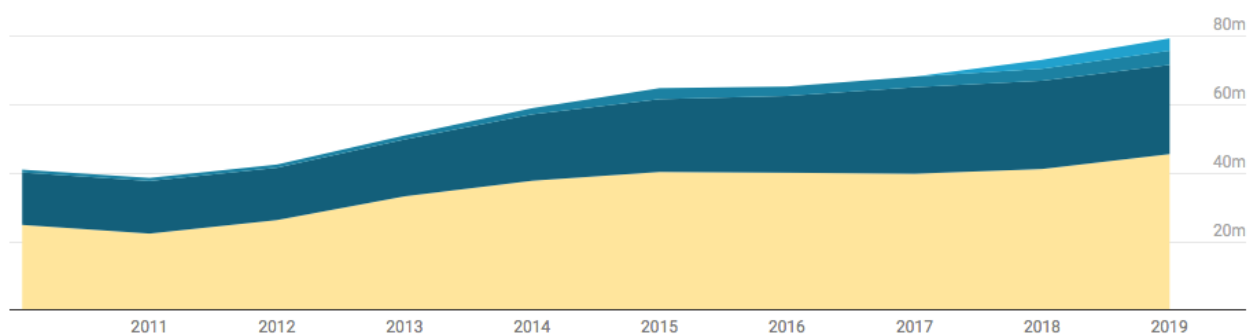


Chart includes refugees (including Palestinian refugees), asylum seekers, IDPs (conflict-induced and for 2019, also disaster-induced) and Venezuelans abroad from 2018 onward (Venezuelans abroad include refugees, migrants and asylum seekers).

Chart: OCHA • Source: IDMC / UNHCR / UNRWA • [Get the data](#)

Source: (OCHA, 2021)

The critical rise in conflicts and natural disasters has seriously heightened the prevalence of epidemics and acute hunger. Man-made disasters historically are the leading cause of health vulnerability and food insecurity, affecting 77 million people in 22 different countries. Over the last decade, this growing trend has continued due to climate change, natural disasters, very high temperatures affecting the global food system and the COVID-19 pandemic (OCHA, 2021). As a result, by year-end 2020, the number of people suffering acute malnutrition had reached 270 million. Chronic health vulnerability is witnessing the same increasing trend. Furthermore, COVID-19 generated severe consequences for health services, backsliding progress made through development interventions undertaken by the main humanitarian donors over the past two decades (OCHA, 2021). For example, vulnerability to cholera, acute watery diarrhoea, HIV, tuberculosis and malaria has started to increase again, with recent estimates predicting that the number of deaths due to these diseases will double in 2021. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to severe suffering for particularly vulnerable groups, such as older people, people with disabilities, mental or psych-social needs as well as increased gender inequality and gender-based violence (World Bank, 2021).

In 2021, this severely challenging scenario is expected to push the number of people in need worldwide to an estimated 160 million, thus demanding: a significant increase in the assistance donor base; better delivery; a stronger link between humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding; as well as coordinated inter-agency appeals. The first answer came with the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) for COVID-19. This plan, jointly with additional humanitarian appeals, represents the most consistent humanitarian appeal ever made with a total ask of USD 39 billion. 'As of November 2020, donors have generously given USD 17 billion to inter-agency plans. In 2021, 235 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection. This means 1 in 33 people worldwide needs help — a significant increase from the 1 in 45 people a year ago, which was already the highest figure in decades. The UN and partner organisations aim to help 160 million people most in need across 56 countries, which will require

USD 35 billion' (OCHA, 2021: 9).

The European Commission has identified a number of crises (**Figure 4**) which have led to well above average conditions regarding the number of victims, necessary amounts of financial aid and intervention complexity.

**Figure 4: Largest crises in recent years**

### Largest crises in recent years



Source: (DG ECHO, 2021d)

**Syrian conflict:** the EU and Member States are principal aid providers to the Syrian population. After a decade of conflict, Syria has over 6.7 million internally displaced people, more than any other country in the world, in addition to the 5.6 million migrants who have left the country. Moreover, despite the March 2020 ceasefire, in Idlib and north Aleppo the clashes continue. Additionally alarming is the surge in COVID-19 cases. As a result, over the past five years, EU donors have provided Syria with care and maintenance of post-conflict structures, food, water, sanitation and education, despite local hostilities hampering and complicating intervention. The EU and its Member States are very active in Syria and have funded humanitarian projects valued at EUR 24.9 billion since 2011. Moreover, since 2017, they have been organising the Conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' in Brussels, thus taking the coordinating lead in global humanitarian aid actions for Syria. In 2021, the European Commission alone allocated EUR 130 million to assist both Syrians in the country and people fleeing from Syria towards neighbouring countries. The EU is also collaborating with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which coordinates the main humanitarian aid efforts and, between 2012 and 2018, has allocated USD 32 billion to Syria. In particular, aid to refugees and displaced people is controlled by the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator. The United States (US) have directly provided additional help and transferred USD 601 million since 2016 mainly to cover health care and food supply. Among EU Member States, the most active in helping the Syrian population has been the United Kingdom (until January 2021), which has devoted over GBP 1 billion (USD 1.6 billion) to help refugees through international organisations and partners, such as UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross.

**Ukrainian conflict:** with hostilities having rumbled on for seven years despite numerous failed ceasefire agreements, the conflict in Ukraine is now being classified as protracted. Security and peace have still not

been restored despite the latest attempted ceasefire in July 2020. Consequently, health, food and educational structures remain in desperate need of relief, a situation that has been severely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, 3.4 million people need humanitarian assistance. Since this crisis emerged, the European Commission has single-handedly delivered over EUR 190 million of emergency financial assistance (EUR 25.4 million so far in 2021) through emergency humanitarian projects. Moreover, since 2014, the UN, through its donor partners, has provided urgent relief amounting to more than USD 1.2 billion. This includes over USD 600 million through the annual Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).

**Yemeni conflict:** Yemen is the largest humanitarian crisis worldwide, entailing a seven-year conflict and millions of people displaced, now suffering acute malnutrition and precarious health conditions. The continuation of the conflict increases the gravity of this threat year on year, so much so that the famine crisis is currently on the brink of degenerating into starvation during the course of 2021. As the financial gap in Yemen increases and the situation further deteriorates, it is becoming increasingly hard for global donors and implementing agencies to reach people in need, particularly in the regions of Al Jawf, Hajjah and Amran. Estimates report that 13.5 million people face food shortages, with the highest malnutrition rate of children under five ever recorded. This estimate is expected to reach 16.2 million by the end of 2021. EU assistance has primarily been focused on development interventions, with EUR 95 million having been allocated this year to tackle the severe consequences of conflict and famine (in addition to EUR 981 million allocated since 2015). The famine crisis provoked an unprecedented funding shortfall. The World Food Programme (WFP) has, until 2020, allocated aid to nearly 13 million people. However, it is estimated that an additional USD 1.9 billion would be needed to guarantee food assistance throughout 2021. This crisis is a striking example of the financial gap.

**Sahel hunger crisis:** the Sahel food crisis is mainly due to protracted hostilities combined with structural malnutrition, precarious health systems and climatic shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic has further challenged the already precarious state of sanitary systems. This situation has led to a constantly increasing number of people fleeing the country in addition to displaced citizens, 7.2 million in all. During the last year alone, 6 million more migrants and displaced people in need were added to 32.4 million already reported at the beginning of 2020. Humanitarian assistance is most needed in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria. Moreover, as elsewhere, protracted conflict makes it particularly hard to reach people in need. The 2021 EU financial aid allocation for the region has been estimated at around EUR 188.6 million. Previously, the EU Commission has worked under the coordination and guide of the 2016 UN Sahel Humanitarian Response Plan and in close collaboration with the United Kingdom, beside promoting the creation of AGIR, the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative in the Sahel and West Africa.

**Ebola epidemic:** the global threat represented by Ebola has severely increased in the last five years due to the onset of this disease in countries where cases had not previously been recorded, especially in West Africa. This crisis has affected not only health systems but also national economies, on which there is likely to be a longer-term impact. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been most affected, suffering twelve Ebola outbreaks on top of other pre-existing humanitarian adversity due to two decades of war and at least 1 million internally displaced people. In 2021, the DRC has faced its 12th Ebola outbreak from February to May 2021. Immediate humanitarian assistance is in place to provide health advice, treatment and vaccinations, but humanitarian workers are frequently attacked and subjected to violence due to ongoing hostilities. Within the framework of a global UN response, the EU has intervened in this crisis, allocating EUR 100 million for humanitarian and development activities as well as providing in-kind assistance for Ebola research and medical training (by EU humanitarian health experts and epidemiologists from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). Nonetheless, the scope of response was such that the UN Country Programme and the capabilities of its single agencies were not sufficient. For this reason, its coordination role was highly relevant and joined many local, national and

international donors, other than EU institutions. Particularly effective is the intervention through local implementing partners who have expertise in facing health emergencies and international agencies, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and MSF.

**South Sudan:** the country is suffering extremely diffused humanitarian crises involving around 70 % of the local population. Primary needs stem from severe malnutrition, natural hazards as well as the recovery of migrants and displaced people (1.6 million internally displaced people and 2.2 million have fled into neighbouring countries). After a five-year conflict, a transitional government has been trying to restore stable peace conditions. However, recovery is slow and spasmodic hostilities continue to be reported. In 2020, due to clashes 2 400 civilians died, more than double compared to 2019. In 2021, an additional 800 000 people in need have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. During the current year, EU funded humanitarian assistance has amounted to over EUR 79 million, primarily intended to tackle food insecurity, violence and floods, with EUR 3 million earmarked explicitly as part of the national response to COVID-19. Particularly active in response to the South Sudan crisis is the US government. In 2021, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) has allocated USD 623 million and the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM) an additional USD 10 million.

**Democratic Republic of Congo:** for decades now, the constant presence of pandemics, armed conflicts, refugees and internally displaced people, as well as food insecurity, makes the DRC one of the most significant crisis-hit countries in the world. The 2021 UN's Humanitarian Response Plan for the DRC reports financial needs of up to EUR 1.5 billion, towards which the EU has responded with an allocation of over EUR 59 million for humanitarian actions. The number of victims and people in need is extremely high, with over 5 million displaced, the highest number after Syria. Moreover, the migration crisis has been further exacerbated by generally high instability affecting the whole region. Consequently, the DRC hosts more than 0.5 million refugees fleeing from Rwanda, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Burundi. Added to these appalling difficulties, the DRC is also trying to counter the steady onset of epidemics. Aside from Ebola, the country is currently tackling COVID-19 and measles. In 2021, the EU allocated over EUR 59 million to deal with food insecurity, violence, armed clashes and epidemics. Despite significant efforts, humanitarian needs in Congo are still far from being met. Accordingly, the UN Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021 has estimated humanitarian needs at USD 1.98 billion and launched an appeal to more than 400 humanitarian partners, including UN, national and international agencies as well as NGOs. Other than EU institutions, the US government has also answered the appeal by allocating USD 400 million, including USD 125 million through USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) to tackle the Ebola virus disease (EVD) and USD 1.5 million through USAID's Bureau for Global Health (USAID/GH) for EVD response activities. Even so, it is unlikely that the necessary level of funding will be reached. Indeed, in 2020 only 36 % of the requested budget of USD 2 billion was made available.

**Venezuela:** the country faces a protracted structural humanitarian crisis, mainly due to economic, social and political instability with severe implications for health and food systems. The World Food Programme reports that this food crisis is one of the largest globally, with 14 million people enduring food insecurity. Since 2015, more than 5.6 million Venezuelans have emigrated to neighbouring countries. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this situation. Additionally, instability affects the educational system, with 70 % of school-aged children being denied access to regular education. Moreover, a worsening economic situation (the International Monetary Fund predicts a 10 % GDP shrinkage in 2021) impinges upon the government's ability to reinstate and develop food and health systems. Consequently, water access is guaranteed to only 20 % of the population and the country's health system is in danger of collapsing following the onset of COVID-19, notwithstanding being further burdened by outbreaks of epidemics, such as measles, diphtheria and malaria. The European Union funded local and UN implementing



partners with allocations totalling EUR 238 million in emergency humanitarian aid over the last five years. This funding is directed towards both people in need within Venezuela and migrants hosted in neighbouring countries. The USA is particularly active in this sense. In 2021, the US government has allocated USD 407 million in an effort to join the OCHA's 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, requesting more than USD 708 million for Venezuela as well as the 2021 Refugee and Migrant Response Plan requesting USD 1.4 billion. Other agencies involved in the coordinated intervention are the UN World Food Programme, Save the Children Federation (SCF), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Interagency Group for Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM) and local NGOs active in Colombia.

In August 2021, two other humanitarian crises came to the fore: Haiti and Afghanistan.

**Haiti:** the recent earthquake, which killed almost 1 900 people and injured over 9 900, has exacerbated a structural humanitarian crisis due to socio-political instability, political struggles and drought in many areas of the country, which has yet to repair and reinstate national structures damaged by the 2010 earthquake, Hurricane Mathew in 2016 and more recently the onset of cholera and COVID-19. In addition to the EUR 14 million allocated by the EU at the beginning of 2021, a further EUR 3 million have been devoted to urgent needs following the devastating 7.2 magnitude earthquake of 14 August 2021. The US government integrated urgent relief operations by allocating aid to cover rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance for rubble removal, shelter solutions, education along with coordination and planning of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission.

**Afghanistan:** the conflict which has been ongoing for more than 40 years has been further exacerbated by the recent wave of brutality, prompting more than 0.5 million people to flee the country, 80 % of whom are women and children. Added to this, there is an urgent need to enforce respect for International Humanitarian Law to protect the civil population. The UNHCR and the ICRC have already launched urgent appeals. In addition, the EU, through its Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM), has already allocated EUR 57 million to assist more than 18 million Afghan people who are in need of humanitarian support, mainly women and girls whose basic human rights are being severely threatened by the Taliban authorities. Human Rights Watch identifies main humanitarian needs in hunger, failing health services, education and banking systems. The general economy in Afghanistan is collapsing with a severe increase in food prices, food shortages, bank closures and limited access to cash. Food insecurity, which affected 30 % of the population before 15 August 2021, has now reached 40 %. The Taliban have also cut the Afghan central bank off from the international system, thus de facto suspending access to foreign currency reserves and international investments, the latter essential for funding the educational system. The education of 7 million students depends on these foreign investments, which also guarantee that women (representing 38 % of students) can have access to education at all levels without intimidation or threats. Local and international NGOs can no longer make up for the lack of a functioning health state system and, tragically, conditions of insecurity jeopardise the provision of aid, which consequently has had to be curtailed. Humanitarian staff have been threatened and evacuated with the closure of local offices. The UN has launched an emergency flash appeal to which the USA and the EU have already responded by guaranteeing continuation of humanitarian aid provision to the people of Afghanistan.

### 3 The 2021 European Commission Communication

Considering the current highly challenging background for humanitarian intervention by international humanitarian donors – particularly the EU and its Member States – the European Commission has adopted a Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles. It aims to provide key guidelines on how the EU’s work – mainly through DG ECHO) – in collaboration with Member States, local partners and main international organisations can meet this challenge. The Communication also reaffirms that, in allocating humanitarian aid, the European Union will always observe and promote the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality as enshrined in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (European Union, 2008). It aims to foster internal coordination and cooperation between Commission, Council and Parliament as well as respect for International Humanitarian Law.

The Communication divides guidelines into two main areas:

1. Addressing needs, reducing the funding gap.
2. Supporting an enabling environment for humanitarian aid.

The first area introduces five main objectives and relative key actions, summarised here in Table 1.

**Table 1: Addressing needs, reducing the funding gap – main objectives**

<b>O1</b>	<b>Flexible action</b>	Promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms
<b>O2</b>	<b>Swift delivery</b>	Ensure that EU humanitarian aid can be delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need
<b>O3</b>	<b>Climate mainstream</b>	Further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities
<b>O4</b>	<b>Humanitarian, development and peace nexus</b>	Ensure that humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises
<b>O5</b>	<b>Increased resources</b>	Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action

This first area thus mainly focuses on the importance of accompanying a large donor and financial base with improved flexibility in funding mechanisms as well as strengthened cooperation and coordination with local partners, enabling their capacities and prioritising their roles in the field. Moreover, it stresses the criticality of linking urgent relief with longer-term solutions and the nexus between humanitarian, development and peace, an approach already implemented in six pilot countries selected by the EU starting from 2017. This nexus innovatively underlines the central role of climate change in humanitarian crises and the importance of including considerations on environmental sustainability in the implementation of humanitarian actions.



**Table 2: Supporting an enabling environment for humanitarian aid – main objectives.**

<b>O6</b>	<b>International Humanitarian Law</b>	Put compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) at the heart of EU external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers
<b>O7</b>	<b>EU leadership</b>	Enhancing the EU's engagement and leadership on humanitarian aid to maximise its impact.

This area thus reaffirms IHL's central role and respect for humanitarian principles in the EU's humanitarian agenda. Moreover, the European Commission aims to enhance its leading international role as a humanitarian donor by engaging further and coordinating more effectively with local and international partners.

### 3.1 Addressing needs, reducing the funding gap

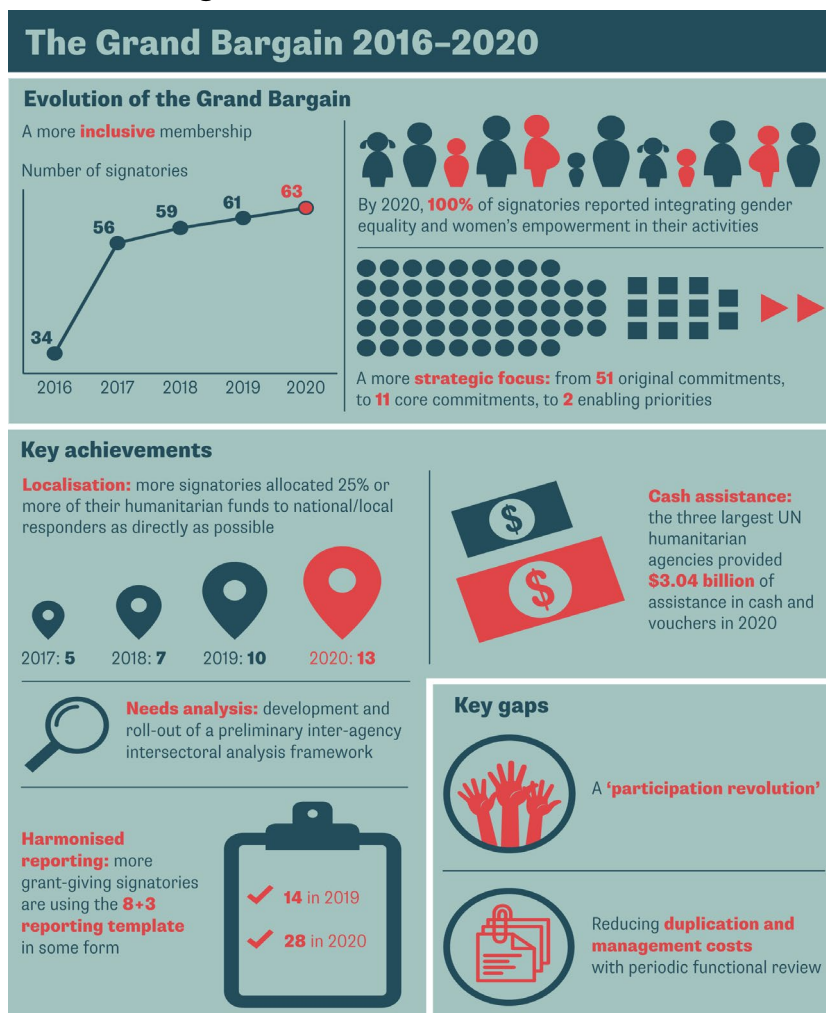
The Communication's first key area 'Addressing needs, reducing the funding gap' refers to a need to bridge the gap between increasing financial humanitarian needs and the still too limited donor base. This gap has been dramatically increasing over recent years and further exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The need for rethinking how to tackle humanitarian needs worldwide and increase the efficiency of aid allocation was first addressed in 2016. At that time, the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing<sup>6</sup> presented a report entitled '*Too important to fail – addressing the humanitarian financing gap*' (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, 2016). This report stated the fundamental principles on which, later in 2016, international humanitarian donors agreed to the Grand Bargain, based on three main pillars:

1. 'Shrinking needs by bringing development financing into crisis situations [...].
2. Broadening the resource base, including bringing in new donors and the private sector.
3. A Grand Bargain on efficiency in which donors would provide more and better-quality funding with a reduced reporting burden in exchange for aid agency reforms around localisation, transparency, participation and needs assessment, among others.' (Willitts-King and Spencer, 2021: 13)

<sup>6</sup> The High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing is a panel composed of 19 experts appointed by the UN Secretary-General with the aim of providing information and recommendations on the objectives of the World Humanitarian Summit that took place in Istanbul in May 2016. To this end, the panel aims to suggest possible solutions to reduce the financial gap, particularly regarding the reduction of needs, the mobilisation of additional financial resources and the improvement of aid efficiency.

**Figure 5: Evolution of the Grand Bargain 2016-2020**



Source: (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021)

Despite the relevant steps forward made by signatories, many efforts are still needed to achieve the Grand Bargain's main goals, displayed above (**Figure 5**). Widening the resource base (second pillar) can be particularly difficult and slow, mainly due to critical factors represented by: the private sector and little progress in greater involvement from its different dimensions as well as the inclusion of new donors; and the strengthening of local financial resources (e.g. Islamic social finance). These specific critical aspects have thus to be duly considered and addressed to overcome potential drawbacks.

Firstly, donor base enlargement must not compromise respect for IHL and humanitarian principles. Unfortunately, many new private donors are accused of favouring personal economic interests at the expense of defending humanitarian principles in establishing new partnerships. Secondly, the relevance of contributions from new donors must be better recognised and enhanced. Thirdly, bureaucratic limitations must be reduced to include and pilot local financial resources, such as Islamic social and innovative finance (e.g. bonds, investment funds and insurance).

The Grand Bargain's evolution and consequent need for pushing it forward led to agreement on the Grand Bargain 2.0 in July 2021, prompting the European Commission to publish its Communication and underline the four first-area objectives with relative key actions for European institutions and Member States. The Communication particularly stresses a few principles grounding its humanitarian aid guidelines: flexibility for donors; commitment to coordination; visibility of EU assistance; as well as accountability and transparency of aid towards aid beneficiaries. Moreover, the Communication

considers new global trends, seeing natural disasters (along with severe hunger and epidemics) as becoming increasingly more frequent and hence having a more significant impact on growing numbers of people. Accordingly, attention focuses on the relevance of fostering sustainability, including environmental factors, in decision-making and policy-shaping as well as fostering the nexus between urgent relief and long-term development solutions. The five main objectives are discussed in detail below.

### 3.1.1 Flexible action

**Objective 1** in the first area of the European Commission Communication aims to promote flexible<sup>7</sup> and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms. Six main key actions are being developed that can be thematically divided into three groups.

#### **Overview of key actions (KAs)**

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**Objective 1 (O1):** *Promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms.*

- Extend **multiannual and flexible funding** arrangements with humanitarian partners – liaising with development instruments whenever a nexus approach can be foreseen – and simplify/harmonise reporting requirements in line with the Grand Bargain, while ensuring that needs assessments are coordinated between agencies and that the accountability, efficiency and visibility of EU support are strengthened. **(O1-KA1)**
- Increase EU **support to local responders**, including by expanded use of country-based pooled funds and other funding mechanisms that prioritise local actors. **(O1-KA2)**
- Develop guidance on the promotion of **equal partnerships** with local responders. **(O1-KA3)**
- Encourage further use of **digital tools** by humanitarian partners, including through joint work to build an enabling environment. **(O1-KA4)**
- Develop specific guidance on expanding the use of **digital cash** and ensure aid recipients' access to digital solutions in the context of the revision of the EU's thematic policy on cash transfers. **(O1-KA5)**
- Support, scale up and promote investments in proven, cost-effective, **technology-based solutions** for humanitarian aid, also building on the example of the 2020 European Innovation Council awards. **(O1-KA6)**

Firstly, **O1-KA1** is a stand-alone general action devoted to **multiannual and flexible funding** arrangements. Such action inserted into the broader Objective 1 directly refers to a primary goal of the Grand Bargain, notably the promotion of predictable and multi-year mutual aid (or other pooled aid) for local responders as well as cash-transfers with high flexibility in investment decision-making and allocation. Examples in this sense are the contributions to Country-Based Pooled Funds. 'Flexible funding facilitates swifter response to urgent needs and investment in fragile, potentially volatile situations, emergencies and disaster preparedness, as well as enables response to need in situations of protracted and neglected conflicts. It strengthens decision-making bodies which include key stakeholders such as

<sup>7</sup> Flexibility may be improved from many perspectives. For example, actions can take different timeframes (short/long term), scope (e.g. food provision, health system rehabilitation), and amount and source of funding (public/private).

affected and refugee-hosting states as well as donors' (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2020). The **multiannual and flexible funding** key action entails developing further flexibility in two areas: cash transfer and support to local responders. Cash transfer and its digitalisation is central to the second group of key actions' scope, namely further use of **digital tools, cash and technology-based solutions (O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6 respectively)**. This study merges the three as sharing a common goal. In other words, they aim at fostering digitalisation in terms of **digital tools, digital cash and technology-based solutions**. The third group of key actions includes **support to local responders (O1-KA2) and equal partnerships (O1-KA3)**, which refer to relationships with **local responders**. Effective implementation of these six key actions commonly requires substantial enhancement regarding: plan of action; disbursement of funds; and relationship with increased support for direct implementation of humanitarian aid by local responders. Accordingly, the exceptionally high number of humanitarian crises that the EU is called upon to deal with, together with their increased complexity and interconnection, requires more flexible arrangements for responding promptly to unexpected natural and man-made disasters, as well as their direct and indirect consequences in terms of severe hunger, (forced) displacements and epidemics.

### **Cash transfers**

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The reliance on cash transfer to allocate humanitarian assistance has become common in global humanitarian aid, to the extent that its preferability compared with in-kind aid is no longer being questioned. The Communication promotes cash assistance as much as many other international donors. The Grand Bargain aims to transform the cash transfer into a humanitarian operational standard, thereby demystifying its presumed higher level of risk (i.e. fiduciary risk, risks to beneficiaries, data responsibility) compared with in-kind aid (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021). 'Cash is being used more effectively and efficiently. COVID-19 highlighted the value of cash and voucher assistance to meet basic needs, support local markets and reinvigorate economies. Over 200 countries have initiated or expanded social protection systems since March 2020' (OCHA, 2021: 11). The European Union in 2019 and 2020 allocated humanitarian aid cash transfers totalling EUR 1.2 billion, which represents 34 % of the total humanitarian budget (a significant increase compared with the 24 % in 2016). Countries benefiting the most from cash transfer aid are Turkey, Yemen, Lebanon and Somalia. In this regard, a positive example of good practice in cash transfer is provided by the DG ECHO-funded Turkey Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), which has been the most significant user of cash transfer in 2020, with an allocation of EUR 500 million to support more than 1.8 million refugees. DG ECHO then fostered its commitment by devoting an additional EUR 400 million for longer-term actions up to mid-2022. This practice has been promptly shared with humanitarian partners. The EU's commitment to developing its cash humanitarian aid further needs to focus on **three key points** (Maunder et al., 2018).

**Firstly**, EU policy has to reflect on when increasing the flexibility and efficiency of its cash transfer is strengthening its collaborative donor base. This aspect directly refers to the extension of **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1)**. Indeed, the new emergency environment, further pressured by the COVID-19 pandemic, called upon the EU and its international humanitarian partners to reshape their modality and delivery mechanisms in humanitarian aid allocation. This includes both the private sector's involvement to enlarge the donor base and the link between cash transfer and social protection. Accordingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely jeopardised national social protection systems, leading to calls for external humanitarian assistance to support and enable national governments and local responders to reinstate social protection systems in the short term and further develop them in the longer term. To this end, collaboration between cash donors becomes crucial. Humanitarian actors, including OCHA, UNHCR, WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have already agreed on the UN Cash Collaboration Statement and 15 NGOs have strengthened their collaboration through the Collaborative Cash Delivery Network (OCHA, 2021).

**The extension of multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1) has thus been given a high priority and its implementation shows great promise.** Nonetheless, despite many efforts undertaken in this regard and proven evidence concerning the relevance of collaborative actions in cash transferring to deliver more flexible and efficient aid by reducing allocation delays and avoiding response overlapping, **much still needs to be done.** Indeed, at global level an explicit agreement among the main humanitarian donors on coordinating multi-purpose and multi-annual financial plans is still lacking (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021, Bailey and Harvey, 2017, Cash Learning Partnership, 2020, Cash Learning Partnership, 2018). Such collaboration is required on many fronts, ranging from developing programmatic annual and multiannual action plans that adapt to changes in humanitarian contexts to strategic cash transfer plans that provide urgent relief to affected social protection systems and profoundly reduce their future vulnerability. Although concrete proposals have been presented in the last five years (World Bank, 2016, Steets and Ruppert, 2017), failure to find agreement on global cooperative cash transfers has been flagged up by major humanitarian donors, as well as NGOs and UN agencies. This has mainly been attributed to the complexity and technicality of issues at stake as well as political considerations (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021).

**Secondly**, aforementioned political considerations relate to the impact on social protection of private sector involvement in funding cash humanitarian activities. Accordingly, the private sector's role is essential in extending the donor base (second pillar of the United Nations Secretary-General's HLP recommendations) and thereby reducing the funding gap that has widened in recent years. However, although humanitarian donors have taken many steps forward in recognising the private sector's vital role in dealing notably with natural disasters and refugee crises, general doubts remain about their rationale for allocating aid, especially with regard to compliance with humanitarian aid principles. This risk is exceptionally high when direct relationships with national governments are at play, as is the case, for example, of cash transfers devoted to assisting and developing national social protection systems.

For this reason, the HLP has recommended addressing the private sector's commitment to in-kind humanitarian aid instead of cash transfer (Willitts-King and Spencer, 2021). However, recent evidence demonstrates the private sector's crucial role in cash transfer, with reports of good practices in humanitarian actions which are being undertaken jointly by public and private donors, such as the Smart Communities Coalition co-chaired by Mastercard and USAID. For this reason, in order to bridge the gap between opportunities for private sector involvement in cash transfer and respect for humanitarian principles, it has become crucial to develop innovative financial instruments, which increase transparency and accountability. This intent is well exemplified by the expanded use of **digital tools and cash, and technology-based solutions (O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6)**, which, as they are further developed in the years ahead, introduce digitalisation and technology instruments as new high-potentiality financial instruments. Moreover, better clarification and diversification of what the private sector exactly corresponds to can also be of great help. Unfortunately, to date a solid understanding in this regard remains lacking, with the 'private sector' label usually being attributed to a variety of potential donors ranging from small local enterprises in beneficiary countries to multinational companies. This inevitably impacts on appraisals of the private sector's contribution regarding the amount of aid allocated through cash transfer and potential political implications (Willitts-King and Spencer, 2021).

**Thirdly**, the role of innovative financial products and digitalisation is to be addressed. This aspect, as anticipated, refers directly to the expanded use of **digital tools and cash, and technology-based solutions (O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6)**. These key actions have **already been partially implemented, but their complete realisation cannot as yet be envisaged** either at European or international levels. Indeed, the development of innovative financial products is to date one of the Grand Bargain's least progressed objectives. This generally translates into 'blended' market products, combining public and private funds, increasing investment viability and reducing risk (Willitts-King and Spencer, 2021). Thus, it is vital to find a better formula for bringing together the public and private sectors to



realise their combined financial potential. At the same time, political considerations must be addressed by creating new ways of guaranteeing respect for humanitarian principles, which should not be sacrificed for economic efficiency. Accordingly, in a highly sensitive political area, such as humanitarian aid, these principles must always guide any humanitarian action. The success of public-private sector cooperation cannot be limited to the total amount of grant funding received. In this sense, digitalisation may potentially play a crucial role in improving accountability and control on cash transfers from both the private and public sectors. More specifically, it could improve the quality of humanitarian aid and, as such, has been included as one of the Grand Bargain's milestones. In this sense, by promoting digitalisation the European Union may positively impact the transparency of humanitarian actions and account sectors for both private and public donors. To a large extent, this effort requires guarantees that data on humanitarian aid will be encoded and published in a transparent, harmonised, timely and comprehensive manner (including continuum, crisis-zone, nature and scope of the intervention, local partners and final responders involved), before being made accessible both for analysis and further research. Moreover, beside ensuring accessibility to the precise scope of allocated funds and the humanitarian activities involved, the transaction chain for donors' funds must also be fully traceable. The open data platform's quality must meet scientific community's standards and be improved to reduce costs and provide more than enough capacity for all donors to access and encode data (Lewis and Forster, 2020c, Lewis and Forster, 2020b, Lewis and Forster, 2020a). A final crucial element to be considered is data protection, which has become even more salient in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. All requirements for data protection call for inter-agency coordination among donors and with local partners to set up guidelines and toolkits on data responsibilities (Raftree and Kondakhchyan, 2021, Cash Learning Partnership, 2021, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020). Key actions promoted in the Communication – specifically key actions intended to **the extension of multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1), digital tools and cash, and technology-based solutions (O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6)** – move in this direction. Nevertheless, additional actions could significantly increase the effectiveness of their implementation. These should address the following needs: data protection; increased transparency and accountability; improved private sector definition and diversification; and defence of social protection against the risks of donors' particular interests. More specifically, data protection proves to be a particularly sensitive issue with regard to the treatment of personal and biometric data and their use without consent. The current Afghan crisis is a relevant case in point. Indeed, even if some legislation in Afghanistan contains reference to data protection, no specific regulations provide precise and direct provisions. As a result, over the last two decades national and international actors have deployed aggressive systems to collect personal, biometric sensitive data for the purposes of maintaining security and countering terrorism. Today, following the Taliban take-over of Afghan territories, huge insecurity is being experienced by many due to the potential use and treatment of such data to identify people suspected of cooperating with Western forces.

### ***Local partners***

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Collaboration with local partners is the main scope of **O1-KA2 and O1-KA3. Such actions correctly assess the relevance of fostering good relations with partners; nonetheless, their implementation is still critical as they often fail to clearly identify and focus their scope.** In other words, their effective implementation could boost the scope and effectiveness of EU humanitarian aid if they focused more attentively on: improving the flexibility and efficiency of EU aid through increased complementarity; valorising comparative advantages of partners and co-partners when intervening in specific crisis settings; broadening geographical coverage; and avoiding overlapping interventions.

DG ECHO does not generally implement aid directly in the field and thus promotes collaboration with implementing partners, who are predominantly international organisations' agencies on the ground, non-governmental organisations and Member States' specialised agencies. Thus, they jointly create a

consortium by signing one or multi-partner grant agreements for any single grant proposal. All agreements set up the terms of collaboration *ex-ante* and define basic rules and standards. For each case, the EU then awards a seven-year EU Humanitarian Partnership Certificate to its partners, stating the fulfilment of such basic rules and standards regarding: humanitarian principles; EU, international and national law; as well as transparency and accountability (DG ECHO, 2021b). Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid (also called 'Humanitarian Aid Regulation') established the rules for defining which agencies can cooperate with DG ECHO to implement humanitarian actions in the field, namely: non-governmental non-profit-making autonomous organisations (NGOs); international agencies and organisations sharing the EU's common objectives and principles<sup>8</sup>; and Member States' specialised agencies (MSSAs)<sup>9</sup>. The 1996 regulation does not allow direct funding to local NGOs, unlike development instruments, which makes the presence of a consortium necessary (European Union, 1996: Arts 8-9).

Since the Grand Bargain was signed, the EU has channelled a further 25 % of its cash transfer through partnerships with local agencies, thus reducing management costs by delegating more power to local partners in decision-making and aid implementation. Moreover, in 2020, the EU introduced four new Programmatic Partnerships with NGOs and contributed to two Country-Based Pooled Funds for Sudan and South Africa. Such strengthening of cooperation means promoting the humanitarian-development nexus and the link between urgent relief and development to respond more efficiently to complex humanitarian crises, thus significantly responding to two of the Grand Bargain's key objectives which refer to partnership: (1) multi-year funding; and (2) reducing earmarking to reach at least 30 % in unearmarked humanitarian contributions by 2020 (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021). Furthermore, by implementing the 8+3 template<sup>10</sup> globally for use by all downstream NGO partners, the EU substantially reduced its operating costs (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2020). Finally, the EU and several Member States are increasing their efforts to establish a long-term collaboration with faith-based organisations, which are often characterised by a precise religious affiliation<sup>11</sup> and have specific socio-cultural recognition that allows them to: reach the local population of beneficiary countries easily; open a dialogue; assess precise humanitarian needs; and build bridges between donors and recipients (Perchoc, 2017).

A telling example of the EU and Member States fostering cooperation with local partners is demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic response in partnership with UNHCR. In 2020 the EU, jointly with its Member

<sup>8</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are considered equivalent partners as international organisations.

<sup>9</sup> MSSAs are national public law bodies or bodies governed by private law, set up in a Member State of the EU, with a public-service mission in humanitarian aid (European Commission, 2018: Art 2(42)).

<sup>10</sup> The 8+3 is a standardised template helping donors report on their programs. It responds to the Grand Bargain's appeal for a simplified and harmonised reporting system. 'Importantly, donors are not required to ask all eight questions of section two. Similarly, it is not a requirement to ask three additional questions of section three. Fewer questions (for example, 4+3 or 5+1) are always possible and the number of questions asked should reflect the type of activity (project or program), its size (large or small) and the type of report requested (interim or final report). Including annexes to provide additional information is also possible but should not undermine the overall intention to have concise reports. Designed this way, the 8+3 template is modular and flexible while limiting reporting to a maximum of 11 questions.' (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2019: 2)

<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, faith-based organisations have no clear definition as they can be connotated by dimensions other than the religious one, such as mission statement or primary beneficiaries. Moreover, the EU does not have precise statistics on the number and characteristics of faith-based organisation it works in partnership with, as it adopts a non-discriminatory policy in selecting its humanitarian partners and the faith-based dimension cannot be considered a valid selection criterion for establishing a humanitarian intervention agreement (Perchoc, 2017).

States (mainly Germany, United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain and Denmark), allocated USD 1 613 billion to UNHCR as a contribution for addressing the effects of COVID-19 on refugees and internally displaced people. Such an allocation financed multiple Regional Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) responding to refugee and internal displacement crises, including mixed refugee-migrant displacement situations. These plans have also been implemented in partnership with local entities, including the private sector, local governments agencies, NGOs, faith-based<sup>12</sup> and refugee-led organisations in collaboration with local governments. The aim is to guarantee effective implementation of humanitarian assistance with the most precise and accountable localisation and identification of humanitarian needs (OCHA, 2021). The European Union's financial support represents 34 % of the UNHCR's total income for 2020. Compared with the previous five years, in 2020 the European Union and Germany significantly increased their contribution to the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2020). This support enabled UNHCR to implement aid faster, localise intervention and promote responses in key sectors, such as health, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), logistics and security/protection (OCHA, 2021). Moreover, the EU further supported UNHCR through multi-year funding. This financial mechanism aims at increasing the flexibility and predictability of humanitarian operations by limiting yearly income fluctuations and, consequently, positively impacting supply chains operations and capabilities in field and core operations. Contributions from Belgium and Spain are notably 98 % and 91 % unearmarked, respectively (UNHCR, 2020).

The EU has thus made tremendous progress over the last five years. This includes: the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, with new toolkits and guidance for partnerships with IOs, NGOs and Member States' agencies; increased partner access to international and pooled funding through the Country-based Pooled Funds; updated strategic action plans through the new Programmatic Partnerships; a better harmonised operational practice of localisation; the 8+3 harmonised template for funding reporting and a fostered commitment against gender-related crises. **All these efforts move towards the proposed key actions related to Objective 1, but some critical objectives have still to be accomplished.** Firstly, the technical solutions proposed and adopted to increase transparency are not sufficient to date. Secondly, coordination at global level among donors still needs improvement, as does overcoming political obstacles to joint harmonised strategic planning. The global agreement on a joint coordinated and accountable multi-purpose plan on cash transfer has not yet been reached. Thirdly, reducing management costs and improving aid efficiency to avoid overlapping interventions and duplication is not sufficiently coordinated between donors and local partners. Accordingly, aid efficiency could legitimately be perceived as being the top priority for donors – in other words, finding ways of achieving greater (cost) effectiveness and savings across the humanitarian system. However, there has been no coherent effort from donors to initiate a collaborative dialogue on what they expect from aid organisations in relation to cost efficiency and cost transparency and what may be possible from the aid organisations' perspective. (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021: 20).

Key actions proposed in the Communication – mainly **support to local partners (O1-KA2)** and **equal partnerships (O1-KA3)** – can significantly foster achieving critical objectives regarding local partners. However, one priority should be more heavily stressed in the key actions, namely the need for enhanced

<sup>12</sup> Faith-based organisations play a crucial role in the implementation of humanitarian assistance to refugee crises. They provide donors with exclusive implementing instruments to build bridges between donors and recipients and overcome potential socio-cultural drawbacks. A telling example is the commitment and responsibility of faith-based organisations' leaders to cope with xenophobia (UNHCR, 2020).



coordination at global level in the definition and implementation of a strategic plan to support local partners, with the additional opportunity to develop an EU plan for DG ECHO and Member States. In addition, harmonisation and coordination between main international donors and implementing local agencies should be strengthened. This would help reduce costs and increase effectiveness by avoiding overlapping interventions and duplication.

### 3.1.2 Swift delivery

#### **Overview of key actions**

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**Objective:** *Ensure that EU humanitarian aid can be delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need.*

- Develop a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity** to fill in gaps, as necessary, enabling the EU Member States and humanitarian partners to rapidly deliver humanitarian assistance, in coordination and complementarity with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. **(O2-KA1)**

The EU and Member States do not usually implement humanitarian aid directly on the ground. Nevertheless, the increasing need to respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian crises is a challenge for the European Commission. Namely, it must provide sufficient emergency intervention mechanisms in order for DG ECHO and Member States to strengthen effective direct intervention instruments. **O2-KA1** aims at establishing a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)**. Its function and location have yet to be clarified. Nonetheless, given its need to work in coordination with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, it could be regarded as an instrument of humanitarian assistance to be included within the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism framework. This is already the case with the European Emergency Response Capacity (EERC). Although the EERC is voluntary, Member States nevertheless benefit from EU financial support. 'The transport of teams deployed from the EERC is eligible for co-financing of up to 85 % by the EU. The costs necessary to upgrade existing national response capacities to make them deployable in an international context ('adaptation costs') can be financed up to 100 % by the EU (provided they remain below a financial ceiling of 30 % of the capacity's average development cost). The certification costs, including training, exercises and workshops, are 100 % covered.' (European Commission, 2015b)

This action joins previous EU efforts to promote division of labour (Mürle, 2007) and knowledge transfer between donors both at EU level and in the field. Hence, as an example of concrete efforts, the EU has created the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network (UCPM) to foster knowledge transfers between agencies implementing humanitarian programmes. In this case, the scope is 'to bring together civil protection and disaster management experts and organisations, increase knowledge and its dissemination within the UCPM, and support the Union's ability and capacity to deal with disasters.' (DG ECHO, 2021e).

Furthermore, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) (previously the Monitoring and Information Centre, MIC) plays a direct role in creating the European Humanitarian Response Capacity. Accordingly, whilst EHRC was initially introduced to increase cooperation and coordination between EU institutions and Member States in humanitarian aid and civil protection operations (Pusterla and Pusterla, 2020), it will now act as coordinator in the deployment of EU intervention teams (European Commission, 2015b). The ERCC mechanism has already registered very successful results, especially in tackling epidemics and health crises, thus showing the relevance of establishing a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (O2-KA1)**. Two examples are the Belgian intervention against Ebola in Guinea and Luxembourg's setting-up of a European medical evacuation centre to support people in Sierra Leone fleeing to Europe. From 2020 onwards, EHRC is expected to expand its intervention and resource base to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. In concrete terms, this should 'offer logistical assessments, support for initial deployment and procurement, stockpiling, transporting and/or distributing relief items, including COVID-19 vaccines and their delivery in fragile countries.' (European Commission, 2021a)

The top priority in further implementing this mechanism is now given to coordinating European financial tools to fund interventions and improving transparency and accountability mechanisms. Two existing EU instruments can provide the necessary support: the Common Emergency and Information System (CECIS); and the Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). The first is ‘a reliable web-based alert and notification application’ (DG ECHO, 2012). The second is a forum where, in monthly meetings, the EU Commission and Member States can foster dialogue and shape common strategic plans.

**Objective 2** is well on the way to being fully achieved thanks to the well-developed establishment of a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (O2-KA1)**. **Specific outstanding issues have not emerged** and thus in general terms the EU could start considering further development of this objective.

### 3.1.3 Climate mainstream

#### Overview of key actions

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**Objective:** *Further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities.*

#### Key actions of the EU

- Prepare guidelines and training for the EU’s humanitarian partners on **greening humanitarian aid**, with a view to reducing the climate and environmental footprint of humanitarian aid. **(O3-KA1)**
- Track **climate-related expenditure** under the EU Humanitarian Aid Regulation. **(O3-KA2)**

#### Key actions of the EU and the Member States

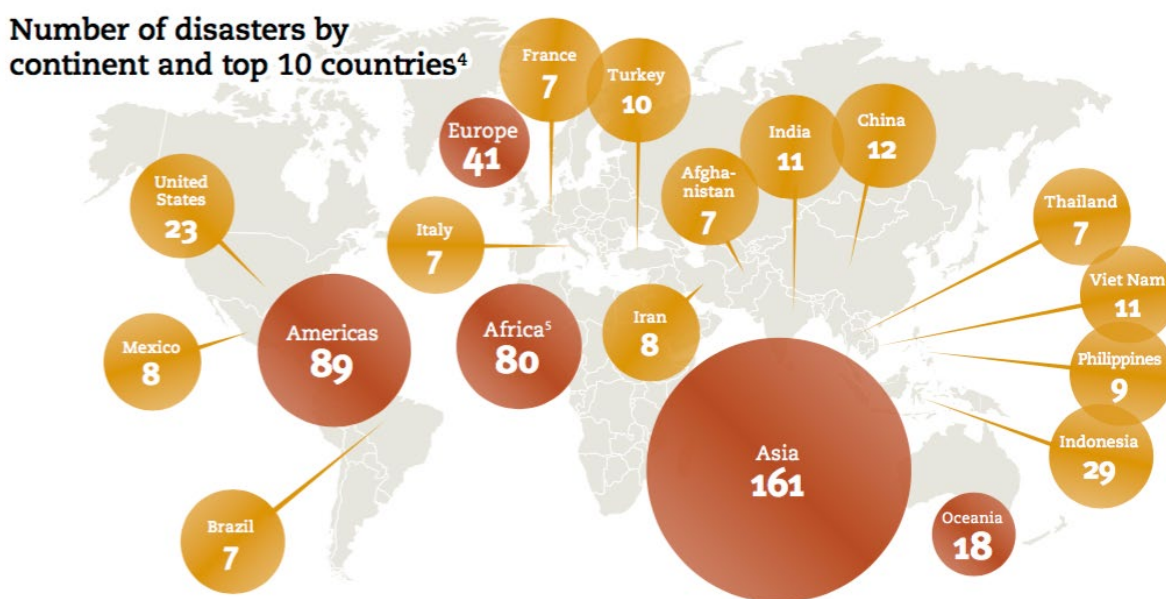
- Significantly increase the share of climate funds dedicated to **enhancing resilience** and adaptation in the most disaster-prone countries and regions, in line with the new EU climate change adaptation strategy, and as part of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. **(O3-KA3)**
- Bolster climate and environmental **resilience of vulnerable populations**, through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach and ensure dissemination and implementation of new guidance on disaster preparedness among the EU’s humanitarian partners, in close coordination with development and climate actors. **(O3-KA4)**
- Further develop and apply **risk-informed approaches**, including risk financing and scale up anticipatory action in different humanitarian contexts and regions. **(O3-KA5)**

**Objective 3** focuses on climate change and its links with humanitarian aid, each being capable of impacting the other. Key actions under the objective follow this logic. **Greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2)** are mainly addressed to EU institutions and try to limit the impact of humanitarian aid on climate change by seeking to reduce its footprint on the environment. Conversely, **enhancing the resilience of vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4) as well as further developing and applying risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5)** all address the challenge represented by climate change detrimentally impacting people’s – or entire geographical regions’ – vulnerability to humanitarian crises, largely resulting from natural hazards. Nonetheless, this study shows how the two logics are strictly interconnected and the effective implementation of each key action necessarily has a direct positive effect on the other without distinction between the directions they can take.

Addressing the impact of natural change on humanitarian aid and *vice versa* is extremely relevant, as much as elaborating precise key actions to tackle the phenomenon. Accordingly, natural disasters are highly complex in that they link multiple climatic and natural events variously described as: geophysical, meteorological, hydrogeological, climatological, biological and extra-terrestrial. Nonetheless, they also involve technological variables under industrial and transport headings. Hence, they often entail a highly negative impact on human and socio-economic conditions (EM-DAT, 2021). For example, a deficit in rainfall combined with extreme evapotranspiration may lead to drought and severe starvation. As already mentioned, floods and earthquakes are often the cause of severe pandemics. Moreover, such disasters frequently form the root cause of mass migration flows and internally displaced people.

‘The year 2020 rivalled 2016 as the world’s hottest recorded year despite the absence of a strong El Niño effect. Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, the year was dominated by climate-related disasters. These were largely responsible for the 389 recorded events which resulted in 15 080 deaths, 98.4 million people affected, and economic losses of at least USD 171.3 billion. [...]. In comparison to the previous two decades (2000-2019), 2020 was higher than the annual average in terms of number of recorded events and the annual average of economic losses, which is USD 151.6 billion.’ (CRED and UNDRR, 2021).

**Figure 6: Number of disasters by continent and top 10 countries**



Source: (CRED and UNDRR, 2021)<sup>13</sup>

Despite this strong interconnection between natural disasters and humanitarian crises, the EU has only recently developed an integrated project of response to humanitarian crises provoked in this way, starting from mitigation and extending possibly to prevention. Accordingly, to date the response to natural disasters has primarily consisted of urgent relief operations. Nevertheless, scientific literature has demonstrated the need to implement accompanying measures on two fronts. **The first** regards preparedness and the development of measures to anticipate the onset of natural disasters. This directly refers to furthering development and application of **risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5)** and entails

<sup>13</sup> Footnote 4 in the CRED – UNDRR report states that ‘The 10<sup>th</sup> spot in the list had 5 countries tied with 7 events, therefore the list actually comprises 14 countries.’

strengthening local governments' and implementing partners' response systems, by reducing their vulnerability to disasters and thereby increasing their resilience so as to facilitate rapid reaction. In this regard, over the last five years great efforts have been made by EU institutions and Member States, which have dedicated a significant part of their humanitarian funds to prevention and preparedness programmes. The further development and application of **risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5) is thus already largely implemented and is increasingly acquiring priority over time.**

**The second front relates to enhancing resilience of vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4).** This concerns linking short-term urgent relief operations with longer-term development action. These key actions refer to the *humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach*. It adds an essential element to the already implemented approach *Linking relief, rehabilitation and development* (LRRD). LRRD recognises that '[e]mergency relief operations deal with immediate needs, but should also find ways to boost resilience to future crises by providing longer-term development benefits and strengthening risk management' and it thus 'aims to link immediate assistance effectively with longer-term development policies' (European Commission, 2001). The nexus now calls attention to crises' climatic dimension, highlighting a need to increase the share of cash transferred, devoted to: climatic disaster preparedness; warning systems; sustainable developments; and environmental footprint reduction. This last aspect also recalls **greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2), given that correct implementation of the nexus is a crucial aspect for both groups of key actions. Enhancing resilience in vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4) are high-priority and urgent key actions deserving further development,** because sustainability and preparedness are the best instruments for reducing the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters and the corresponding humanitarian crises. Thus, these key actions require support and funding through long-term development cooperation rather than humanitarian relief. In this regard, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe is essential as a major financial instrument aimed at supporting sustainable development, peace and stability worldwide. This requires enhanced political and operational coordination in the European Commission, particularly within DG ECHO, DG for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) and DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). Indeed, priority should be given to resilience and nexus implementation. Moreover, **greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2) must be fostered** to give humanitarian aid a solid, sustainable dimension. This would help reduce the number of humanitarian crises due to climate change. Nonetheless, **implementing the greening of humanitarian aid (O3-KA1), the track of climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2), the enhancement of resilience of vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4) is not straightforward;** well-established best practices are still lacking, given that the nexus is a recent concept both at political and scientific level. Linking humanitarianism with sustainability has only recently appeared in literature, the former being traditionally linked with political science and economics disciplines, while the latter has traditionally been considered as part of the natural sciences. However, new multi- and inter-disciplinary projects have demonstrated clear interconnections between sustainability and humanitarian aid, resulting in an opportunity to give humanitarian aid policy a solid sustainable dimension (**greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2)**). Accordingly, the enormous complexity of current humanitarian crises calls for rethinking interventions in terms of humanitarian aid and sustainable development, particularly with regard to disaster risk reduction and support for fragile and vulnerable countries and populations (**enhancing resilience of vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4)**). The LRRD approach thus needs to link with disaster risk reduction and crisis prevention (Pusterla, 2017). In this regard, data science shows how humanitarian crises often result from the long-term exposure of vulnerable groups and geographical areas to '(disruptions in) their environment' (Heyse

et al., 2015: 13) caused by a lack of preparedness, prevention and resilience. Hence, cooperation between donors and good practice in humanitarian aid can sensibly be enforced through a substantial rethinking of the synergy between sustainability and humanitarianism. Sustainable development and humanitarian aid actions must thus converge on a common intervention logic based on the principle that highly uncertain and urgent contexts of intervention require an effort to 'improve the understanding of environment-society relations' (Enders and Remig, 2015: 48-49), as well as flexibility and trans-disciplinarity.

Moreover, effective implementation of Objective 3's key actions demands consideration of the complexity presented by specific humanitarian and environmental contexts. To this end, six elements require strengthening: 'information collection, context analysis, coherence and comprehensiveness of approaches, attention to disaster risk reduction and linking of relief, rehabilitation and development' (Heyse et al., 2015: 1-5 & 12-13, Pusterla, 2017). International humanitarian donors and implementing agencies agree on maintaining the essential role of data collection and information in downscaling the impact of natural disasters on the most vulnerable groups and populations. Coordinated, systematic and complete information as well as data collection must thus form the starting point for governments and agencies to plan and implement relief and rehabilitation operations. It is also crucial to assess the complexity of coping with any disaster by including health, population displacements, security along with drought factors in longer-term development programmes. (EM-DAT, 2021). This reference to risk assessment also directly calls into play the further development and application of **risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5)**.

This shows how **the five key actions are strictly related to one another** in an overall effort that can be seen either as virtuous or harmful, depending on the effectiveness of implementation (see Annex III). To this end, two objectives need to be pursued in implementing these key actions. The **first** comprises clear and precise knowledge of any possible humanitarian action at national and international levels to define a strategic and rational plan for disaster preparedness and sustainable development, starting from precise vulnerability assessment and priority setting (EM-DAT, 2021). The **second** objective seeks to promote a strategic intervention that is sustainable from both humanitarian and environmental perspectives. The problems of linking nature and society, as well as nature and culture must therefore be addressed. In addition to environmental considerations, the cultural dimension of any intervention context is crucial. Reducing environmental fragility can be realised only in parallel with a lessening of social and societal vulnerability by producing a positive impact on the lives not only of aid beneficiaries but also the people directly involved in its delivery (Enders and Remig, 2015: 158). 'Communication and cultural exchange is essential and an exclusive Western imprint must be avoided.' (Pusterla, 2017, Enders and Remig, 2015: 174-178)

**Whilst some progress has been made, certain critical issues are still outstanding**, as shown by the empirical analysis in Annex III. Firstly, there is currently no joint international consensus on best practices for collecting and analysing data as well as translating them into humanitarian activities. The absence of a joint agreement thus affects assessing the level and typology of humanitarian and environmental vulnerability as well as the rationale of decision-making in crisis intervention. In other words, a consensus 'helps policymakers identify the disaster types that are most common in a given country and that have had significant historical impacts on human populations' (EM-DAT, 2021) and plan a common intervention strategy. Secondly, there is a relevance of time and coordination between prevention and intervention. Inversely, a lack of coordination could lead to an imbalance in humanitarian activities, focusing more on development and jeopardising relief, or vice versa. The same can be applied to humanitarianism and sustainability. Coordination is necessary to avoid sustainability considerations linked to the environmental and climatic dimensions of the intervention superseding humanitarian considerations linked to social, societal and cultural dimensions. Hence, some work is necessary to



implement the nexus from a broader temporal and thematic perspective by coordinating relief with development and humanitarianism with sustainability.

Empirical analyses (see **Annex III**) show how the strong link between humanitarianism and sustainability is not only positively translated into the implementation of EU and Member States' humanitarian interventions but also displays identifiable trends as well as outstanding issues. It can be concluded that many efforts have already been made to implement the five key actions; however, some difficulties arise. Notably, **the most advanced key actions** are the development and application of **risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5) along with the enhanced resilience of vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4) on adopting prevention and preparedness actions. Conversely, enhancing the resilience of vulnerable regions (O3-KA3) and populations (O3-KA4) on linking urgent relief with development and humanitarianism with sustainability have yet to be tackled.** Given the strong interconnection between these five key actions, the shortcomings that emerged in key actions for Member States can be at least partially overcome by **fostering the implementation of EU key actions, namely greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2).**

In particular, much still remains to be done regarding three specific interventions aspects. **Firstly**, policy harmonisation and coherence among goals and EU donors, together with a more effective and strategically coherent division of labour (e.g. based on a comparative advantage approach) must be devised. **Secondly**, the ability to intervene in urgent relief operations at EU level is lacking. Even if the EU relies on implementation by local partners, this strategy must not reduce the EU's intervention continuum and undermine its capacity if the need to intervene directly through urgent relief operations were to arise. In its collaboration with partners, the EU must therefore strengthen its guiding and coordinating role. **Thirdly**, in responding to the need for synergy at community level, the EU must strengthen its operational scope and implementation autonomy by improving negotiation of its leading role as coordinator with Member States and setting up partner humanitarian organisation on the ground. The EU must not lose its leading role in policy-making and policy implementation for specific and strategic crises as well as intervention scenarios regarding classification and continuum. In light of these shortcomings, the implementation and fostering of **greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2) must be prioritised.** Moreover, additional actions should be considered, concerning strengthening a leading and coordinative role for the EU, together with increased fora of discussion and meetings with donors and local partners. This would foster harmonisation, coordination and efficient division of labour.

### 3.1.4 Humanitarian, development and peace nexus

#### **Overview of key actions**

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**Objective:** *Ensure that humanitarian, development, peace and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises.*

#### **Key actions of the EU**

- Undertake systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks**, needs, vulnerabilities and structural drivers of crisis as well as, when appropriate, joined-up programming and planning of EU's policies, in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. **(O4-KA1)**
- Implement effective **linkages between** the different humanitarian, development and peace **actions** and use existing tools, such as policy dialogue, to strengthen national and local capacities – including the capacity of non-state authorities – to provide basic services and support resilience building. **(O4-KA2)**

- Expand support for cash-based, shock-responsive **social safety nets**. (O4-KA3)
- Promote effective **humanitarian civil-military coordination** in all relevant contexts, as a framework to protect the humanitarian space, avoid duplication, minimise inconsistencies and maximise potential synergies with security and defence actors. (O4-KA4)
- Build synergies with EU **peace mediation and conflict prevention** efforts, in full respect of humanitarian principles, with a view to increasing efforts to alleviate suffering. (O4-KA5)
- **Integrate education** into the priority areas for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to help bridge the global gap on education, alongside sectors such as health, food security, disaster preparedness and climate resilience. (O4-KA6)

#### **Key actions of the EU and the Member States**

- Strengthen **coordination mechanisms at field level** across the EU's humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actions to ensure joined-up and coherent outcomes, with the support of EU Delegations and ECHO field offices. Work closely with the EU Member States in this framework in a Team Europe approach. (O4-KA7)
- Use the EU's **political and diplomatic engagement** and all the instruments available to prevent crises, resolve conflicts and build peace, while stepping up advocacy in support of humanitarian operations so as to facilitate access and respect for humanitarian principles, protection of civilians and international humanitarian law. (O4-KA8)

**Objective 4** has several components in common with Objective 3, especially when it comes to risk assessment and the link between humanitarian dimensions. This Objective is divided into eight key actions, four of which are similar in purpose and hence can be merged into a group seeking to link humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actions, namely: **linkages between actions (O4-KA2); humanitarian civil-military coordination (O4-KA4); peace mediation and conflict prevention efforts (O4-KA5); as well as coordination mechanisms at field level (O4-KA7)**. The four remaining key actions each have a precise scope: **risk assessment (O4-KA1); education (O4-KA6); social safety nets (O4-KA3); and political and diplomatic engagement (O4-KA8)**. These 'individual' key actions are not isolated, but integrate the group alternatively and support its implementation. As further developed later in the study, Objective 4 is particularly challenging in implementation terms because it requires strong coordination between all eight key actions. Indeed, the link between humanitarian-development-peace actions cannot be realised without a correct risk and information assessment about crisis characteristics beforehand. Moreover, EU political and diplomatic engagement must be central to lead and coordinate donors' activities. Finally, social and educational aspects cannot be excluded by the link.

The need for linking different sectors and fostering risk assessment is a consequence of humanitarian crises' complexity. Complex phenomena call for complex interventions. Consequently, response to a crisis can rarely be reduced to a simple provision of urgent relief to victims. To be effective, intervention should usually focus on three interconnected dimensions: (1) urgent relief and rehabilitation of people in need; (2) development of beneficiary countries' social, economic and health structures; and (3) adoption of warning and prevention systems. 'If relief and development can be 'linked', so the theory goes, these deficiencies can be overcome. Better 'development' can reduce the need for emergency relief; better 'relief' can contribute to development; and better 'rehabilitation' can ease the transition between the two' (Ross and Buchanan-Smith, 1994: 1).

Following this idea, since the 1990s the European Union has based its humanitarian aid policy on the principle of linking relief, rehabilitation and development, referred to in the Communication as the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Accordingly, despite very positive feedback from humanitarian operations applying the LRRD principle (such as the Ethiopian and Zambian cases), difficulties persist in

linking relief and development in conflict scenarios. This was particularly problematic considering that wars, civil conflicts and related humanitarian crises accounted for a very high percentage of all humanitarian disasters (Herbinger, 1994). Examples of such deficiencies were the fall of the Soviet Union and war in the former Yugoslavia. As a result, the nexus has added a new thematic interconnection to the pre-existing temporal link between short-term relief to longer-term development and prevention of the LRRD, namely long-lasting peace solutions for conflicts. A particular focus is thus on peace operations which are linked to other development interventions following natural disasters, health crises, relief for refugees and internally displaced people, as well as drought.

This solution resulted from the well-established notion that many humanitarian crises stem directly from long-term conflict situations. Hence, prompt and direct action to restore peace is vital to avoid the outbreak of new humanitarian crises stemming from any protracted conflict. The nexus approach has thus been adopted in many beneficiary countries affected by conflict. Six countries were designated in 2017 to participate in a pilot project: Chad, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda. Moreover, a focused assistance project is aimed at tackling the Syrian crisis involving migrants fleeing towards Lebanon and Jordan. The COVID-19 pandemic is a further incentive for the nexus approach, given that the health crisis entailed a more complex humanitarian situation due to the additional onset of structural food insecurity, health vulnerability and educational fragility. The nexus also strengthens coordination between the EU and Member States' humanitarian interventions through the Team Europe approach, recently developed by the EU in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (European Union, 2017).

The debate within the European Union started in the 90s and was based on the need to manage international humanitarian crises by linking relief and emergency<sup>14</sup>. No crisis should be regarded as a static phenomenon, but instead as a dynamic evolving scenario. In this sense, to be effective, crisis management requires timely, resilient and progressive interventions, all designed to cope with the crisis's specific dimensions (Harmer and Macrae, 2004). Moreover, the scope of EU humanitarian aid policy must also anticipate the outbreak of a crisis, seeking to avoid or at least mitigate it and on occasions to help beneficiary countries be better prepared for a rapid response to crises in general. In other words, the triggering event provoking a crisis also becomes the matter of humanitarian assistance (European Union, 2001, Morsut, 2013). This principle is grounded on political bases and prioritises addressing the context of a crisis over the crisis itself. This is highly debated and contested (Herbinger, 1994) by authors affirming the principle of 'emergency as a norm', according to which interventions should attain only urgent relief of people in need.

However, evidence shows precisely the opposite. In other words, humanitarian crises often change in their nature over time and any crisis entails potential humanitarian consequences (see Annex III). This is particularly true for the so-called 'protracted crises'<sup>15</sup> (Harmer and Macrae, 2004), which often link short-

<sup>14</sup> The theoretical basis for conceptualisation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is the concept of continuum, which indicates the timing and scope of humanitarian intervention. The European Union typically attributes to the continuum five values: urgent relief; rehabilitation; care and maintenance; development; and prevention/preparedness. As anticipated, it 'denote[s] the time clusters in which stimuli from the environment are conveyed by the communication network to decision-makers' (Brecher, 1977: 57). Any humanitarian crisis may require as many interventions as the categories of the continuum, which may impact the complexity of the crisis itself.

<sup>15</sup> Protracted crises can be defined as 'those environments in which a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of livelihoods over a prolonged period. The governance of these environments is usually very weak, with the state having a limited capacity to respond to, and mitigate, the threats to the population, or provide



term needs to long-term security considerations, showing how the ‘compartmentalisation between relief and development is artificial’ (Buchanan Smith and Maxwell, 1994: 3). Accordingly, a long-lasting crisis results from a multiplicity of causes, such as climatic, environmental and economic shocks, associated with violent conflicts which may at the same time be both cause and consequence of the crisis, such as: weak governmental structures; breakdown of local institutions; as well as deterioration in the sustainability of livelihood and food systems (International Rescue Committee, 2011).

An additional difficulty in responding effectively to complex and protracted crises is the scarcity of available information and media coverage, which grounds the need to undertake systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1)** (see Annex III). The so-called ‘forgotten crises’ are ‘severe protracted humanitarian crisis situations where affected populations are receiving no or insufficient international aid and where there is no political commitment to solve the crisis, partly due to a lack of media interest. This refers primarily to protracted conflict situations but can also refer to crises resulting from the cumulative effect of recurring natural disasters, or even a combination of the two. ‘Forgotten crises’ almost always concern minorities within a country, groups of people whose living conditions are below the average for the country as a whole.’ (DG ECHO, 2021f). Cases in point are El Salvador, Burundi and Myanmar. Accordingly, if climatic and natural disasters receive very high media coverage (e.g. the explosion in Beirut, Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and bush fires in Australia), long-standing protracted crises remain largely unseen, such as civil conflicts, frequent floods, starvation due to drought, economic stresses and protracted displacement of people. The main problem is that forgotten crises are often less easy to tackle and receive much less assistance. In 2020, the major protracted and forgotten crises suffering from scarce humanitarian aid were ‘the expulsion of the Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh, the famines in the Sahel region and the domestic unrest in the Central African Republic.’ (German Federal Foreign Office, 2020). All are the consequence of long-standing complex crises, requiring complex and longer-term interventions rather than immediate urgent relief. In this regard, undertaking systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1) is crucial** because it intervenes directly in risk assessment and information provision, thus positively overcoming the risks linked to lack of crisis visibility.

For this reason, effective responses to humanitarian crises not only require intervention in the long, medium, short-term and often in the pre-crisis period, but they also call for considering the thematic dimension of the crisis varying from humanitarian needs due to natural and/or man-made disasters (see Annex III). This results in the nexus linking humanitarian-development-peace: (1) rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance; (2) rehabilitation, maintenance, prevention and development intervention to restore and ameliorate local structures; (3) long term operations to set up long-standing peace in order to avoid future humanitarian crises. **These three aspects of the nexus reflect and lay the foundations for linkages between actions (O4-KA2), humanitarian civil-military coordination (O4-KA4), peace mediation and conflict prevention efforts (O4-KA5) and coordination mechanisms at field level (O4-KA7).** At the same time, to implement the nexus, undertaking systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1)** takes a crucial role since it entails identifying needs and the best way to tackle them. Their

adequate levels of protection’ (Harmer and Macrae, 2004: 1). Examples of protracted crises are: the Haiti earthquake in 2010, which entailed epidemics and internally displaced people; the famines in the 1970s and 1980s in Ethiopia; the Afghan conflict; and protection and refugee crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The ten countries currently suffering the most protracted crises are Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, South Sudan, Nigeria, Venezuela and Mozambique. All of them are somehow related to a conflict scenario and the difficulty to restore basic human needs made possible by long-standing peace conditions (International Rescue Committee, 2021).

**implementation is thus crucial and needs to be prioritised.** Moreover, **social safety nets (O4-KA3) assume a particular relevance after the onset of COVID-19**, which revealed how a more effective intervention requires not only a precise definition of risks (O4-KA1) and effective linkages between different kinds of interventions (O4-KA2) but also expanded support for cash-based, shock-responsive social safety nets (O4-KA3).

This approach has been further corroborated by the positive experiences of NGO's, local and implementing partners. Accordingly, the nexus between urgent relief and development may increase the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. 'Crises become more protracted in the absence of political solutions and a failure to tackle the root causes of such suffering. As new emergencies erupt, the humanitarian sector is increasingly overstretched as it tries to respond to an ever-growing workload of both new and increasingly protracted crises. [...] Yet crises are not solely humanitarian in nature and the solutions, therefore, cannot be solely humanitarian' (de Castellarnau and Stoianova, 2018: 22-23). For this reason, flexibility in intervention is crucial and decision-making needs to consider crisis scenario characteristics very carefully in order to prioritise different types of intervention accordingly. Information in this sense is essential and forgotten crises certainly stand as extremely complex intervention scenarios. Moreover, in general terms, intervening in an acute crisis requires urgent emergency assistance for between 6 and 12 months after the onset of a crisis. In such a context, the specificities of humanitarian aid are particularly welcome. The case of a more stable crisis is quite different where development intervention may be most appropriate in creating the right conditions for rehabilitation, care and maintenance or even further development of local structural systems. The two approaches – humanitarianism and development – may thus be complementary, but one cannot replace the other.

A specific risk reported by local partners in substituting humanitarianism with development is to jeopardise humanitarian principles in favour of the political and security considerations of local governments (de Castellarnau and Stoianova, 2018). A first concrete example is Nigeria, where humanitarian assistance risks have been subordinated in the face of the local government's priority to combat terrorism. A second example is the protracted Sahel crisis, where procrastination in urgent relief intervention resulted in failure to rehabilitate and restore pre-crisis living conditions. Again, this is due to the framing of humanitarian assistance within broader political priorities. Mali is a final example, where military and political actors risk influencing humanitarian intervention (Pozo Marín, 2017).

In light of these considerations, **the links between actions (O4-KA2), humanitarian civil-military coordination (O4-KA4), peace mediation and conflict prevention efforts (O4-KA5), and coordination mechanisms at field level (O4-KA7) are of key relevance. They are very complex key actions and their implementation is still critical**, as it requires enhanced coordination in undertaking systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1)**. Moreover, to be effective and politically sustainable, the simultaneous implementation of **social safety nets (O4-KA3), education integration (O4-KA6)** together with **political and diplomatic engagement (O4-KA8)** cannot be ignored. Accordingly, cooperation and dialogue between donors and implementing agencies must be absolute priorities for the EU in strengthening its coordination role. Moreover, key actions aimed at transparency, accountability and depoliticisation must be prioritised, with further development and specific reference to this effect in the Communication being fully warranted.

### 3.1.5 Increased resources

#### Overview of key actions

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**Objective:** *Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action.*

#### Key actions of the EU

- Launch a pilot blending initiative from the EU's humanitarian budget to leverage additional **funding from the private sector** in a humanitarian context in 2021. **(O5-KA1)**

#### Key actions of the EU and the Member States

- Recalling the EU's commitment to provide 0.7 % of gross national income as official development assistance, work with Member States towards **stepped-up humanitarian funding commitments** commensurate with the steep increase in recent years in humanitarian needs and requirements. **(O5-KA2)**
- Step up **EU engagement** with traditional and emerging donor countries to recall the shared responsibility to support humanitarian response and integrate it more systematically into the EU's political dialogue with relevant non-EU countries. Strengthen or forge alliances at the global level with like-minded countries to promote the global humanitarian agenda. **(O5-KA3)**

**Objective 5** mainly refers to the financial gap in humanitarian resources following the increase in needs over recent years. The corresponding increase in donors' financial efforts is still inadequate to meet humanitarian needs worldwide, thus steadily bringing about a widening of the financial gap. The Communication proposes three key actions to bridge this gap between humanitarian need and donors' resources, focusing on the involvement of **funding from the private sector (O5-KA1)**, **Member States' increased humanitarian funding commitments (O5-KA2)**, and the **EU's policy to forge links with non-EU countries (O5-KA3)**.

Objective 5 is thus significantly related to Objective 1, which is already addressing the issue of donor base expansion, including the private sector and faith-based organisations. However, an additional element is worthy of attention, namely increasing the efficiency of allocation through a combination of resource base expansion and better allocation of available resources.

Regarding the latter, at EU level, empirical evidence has already demonstrated that the EU and Member States could increase their efforts towards better policy coordination and harmonisation (Veron and Hauck, 2021; see also Annex III). Here, comparative advantage in the intervention comes to the fore, particularly in regard to division of labour. Humanitarian actions undertaken unilaterally by Member States and the EU may become redundant, especially if duplicated, overlapping or sometimes even conflicting. As mentioned earlier, this signifies a tremendous waste of resources. Put differently, interventions centralised in Brussels or coordinated between the EU and Member States increase effectiveness and reduce costs for single humanitarian donors (Martens, 2005, Rodrik, 1995). To this end, so far as decision-making and policy-shaping are concerned, the EU and Member States should bear in mind donors' comparative advantage in intervention and give precedence accordingly instead of bringing political considerations to bear.

NGOs and humanitarian partners have reaffirmed the significance of shaping humanitarian policy in accordance with impartially assessed humanitarian needs and prioritising actions on needs' indices. Critical examples of aid allocated to beneficiary countries independent of any political assessment of humanitarian needs are Turkey and Syria. These cases also suggest a division of labour and separation of actions rooted in the distinction between humanitarianism and development.

Empirical evidence suggests that this indication may be beneficial in the long run for cases of protracted crises. In fact, the cost of information acquisition (e.g. needs assessment) and expertise formation is

reduced thanks to the EU's common structures. The cost of intervention is lower where the crisis is long-lasting or effective warning systems are implemented. Indeed, donors may rely upon current trends to predict future events (Blyth, 2006; Blyth, 2002). In this sense, centralisation of intervention and the link between humanitarianism and development is welcome from a cost management perspective. The EU and Member States may profit from their respective expertise, credibility and specialisations, thus sharing the cost of information acquisition, which in case of protracted crisis has already been absorbed and hence other considerations take precedence. 'The persistence of crisis entails an increase in the number of tasks and may therefore require the simultaneous participation of several actors according to their functional comparative advantage and the differentiation<sup>16</sup> of tasks among the most specialised actors' (Pusterla, 2015: 82). Accordingly, 'An environment that imposes a high volume of complex tasks, as humanitarian crises do, requires highly differentiated units because individual organisations must specialise and routinise their actions to handle the scale and difficulty of the task requirements. At the same time, a countervailing pressure exists in environments where uncertainty is high, as during a crisis, because each organisation has an incentive to diversify its capacities to cope independently with uncertainty' (Seybolt, 2009: 1033). Consequently, the inclusion of several donors may ultimately be more expedient, given that the participation of several experts and division of labour favours the distribution of tasks following the logic of specialisation. Accordingly, linking humanitarianism and development may become particularly useful when coping with crises, whilst at the same time making it possible to direct certain interventions to specific actors, thereby guaranteeing neutrality and accountability. In terms of resource management and respect for humanitarian principles, what remains essential is centralisation of the acquisition, management of information and coordination of different interventions at EU level (Pusterla, 2015).

To this end, the formulation and implementation of **funding from the private sector (O5-KA1)**, **stepped-up humanitarian funding commitments (O5-KA2)** and **stepped-up EU engagement (O5-KA3)** undoubtedly combine to represent added value and foster the EU's commitment towards an enlarged donor base. Nevertheless, to improve effectiveness and political feasibility, it is essential to include an additional key action aimed at identifying, defining and diversifying donors and their specific roles in better ways. This would apply, for example, to diversification between international and local agencies and/or between public and private donors.

More specifically, regarding **funding from the private sector (O5-KA1)**, the criteria of enlarging the donor base and promoting efficient allocation of resources should also be applied in relations with the private sector. Significantly, this action **has largely been implemented** and the EU collaborates extensively with the private sector. Nonetheless, **funding from the private sector (O5-KA1) can also be particularly critical** and sensitive in terms of politicisation and accountability. For this reason, special attention should be devoted to: (1) private donors' adherence to humanitarian principles; (2) efficiency-oriented engagement with the private sector privileging actions where they have a definite comparative advantage, such as digitalisation and new technologies; as well as (3) transparency and accountability to avoid politicisation also through the use of OCHA guidelines.

**Stepping up humanitarian funding commitments (O5-KA2)** constitutes the most critical key action. In comparative terms, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2020

<sup>16</sup> 'Differentiation is the degree of functional specialisation of units within the system'. (Alter and Hage, 1993: 160)

estimated that the EU and Member States provided EUR 66.8 billion Official Development Assistance (ODA). This represents 0.5 % of their gross national income. This is still far below the expected 0.7 % indicated in the Agenda 2030. Nonetheless, three positive aspects can be assessed. Firstly, this figure is much higher than the average 0.26 % ODA provided by non-EU countries. Secondly, 'compared to 2019 levels, EU27 collective ODA in 2020 has increased by EUR 8.9 billion (15 %) in nominal terms. ODA as a share of Gross National Income (GNI) has increased by 0.09 % between 2019 and 2020.' (European Commission, 2021b). Thirdly, four EU Member States, namely, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Luxembourg, have already reached the 0.7 % goal. Hence, a **boost in humanitarian funding commitments (O5-KA2) deserves to be pursued**. Meanwhile, compensating the lack of sufficient financial resources through their efficient allocation and distribution takes priority.

**Increased EU engagement (O5-KA3) should be a priority action. It is still underdeveloped** and far from its full potential. Accordingly, the UN still occupies the leading role in coordinating dialogue and actions with new, emerging, non-European donors. The EU should enhance its coordination role and increase its engagement in negotiation with new partners. In so doing, the EU could foster shared agreement on International Humanitarian Law, transparency, accountability, core humanitarian standards as well as agreed and consistent humanitarian practices.

## 3.2 Supporting a better enabling environment for humanitarian aid

The Communication's second key area entitled 'Supporting a better enabling environment for humanitarian aid' develops objectives and guidelines not only to increase the alignment of the EU, Member States and local partners' humanitarian assistance with international humanitarian law (IHL) but also to strengthen the EU's leadership among humanitarian partners. This means guaranteeing respect for IHL in the EU's humanitarian action and sanctions policy, following the adoption of humanitarian exceptions. Moreover, the EU is committed to coordinating and guiding humanitarian partners in monitoring their implementation of sanctions and exceptions, facilitating the effective provision of aid and providing more practical support. Hence, this key area is grounded on two main objectives:

- Put compliance with IHL at the heart of EU external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers.
- Enhance the EU's engagement and leadership on humanitarian aid to maximise its impact.

### 3.2.1 International Humanitarian Law

#### **Overview of key actions**

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**Objective:** *Put compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) at the heart of EU external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers.*

#### **Key actions of the EU**

- Establish an **EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL** to ensure a better monitoring of IHL violations in the world, facilitate the coordination of relevant EU actors and support stronger EU humanitarian diplomacy. **(O6-KA1)**
- Further strengthen the **IHL compliance framework** including as part of the EU's external instruments, inter alia through due diligence and through its political, security and human rights dialogues and trade agreements with partner countries, where relevant. **(O6-KA2)**
- Continue **promoting dialogue** between all parties involved in humanitarian assistance (donors, regulators, NGOs and banks) in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need. **(O6-KA3)**



### **Key actions of the EU and the Member States**

- Consider including serious IHL violations as grounds for listing in **EU sanctions regimes** whenever appropriate while ensuring that any potential negative impact on humanitarian activities is avoided. **(O6-KA4)**
- Continue ensuring that IHL is fully reflected in EU sanctions policy, including through the consistent inclusion of **humanitarian exceptions in EU sanctions regimes**. Work towards an effective framework for the use of such exceptions by humanitarian organisations receiving EU funding. Provide further practical support to humanitarian organisations with regard to their rights and responsibilities in the different EU sanctions regimes. **(O6-KA5)**

**Objective 6** addresses International Humanitarian Law and its compliance. To this end, five key actions have been formulated, distinguishable in two main areas: EU's engagement to foster compliance **(through an EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL (O6-KA1), a IHL compliance framework (O6-KA2) and promoting dialogue (O6-KA3))** and sanctions against serious breaches **(EU sanctions regimes (O6-KA4) and relative humanitarian exceptions (O6-KA5))**. The implementation of these two categories of actions entails different priorities and critical aspects, but all imply a clear definition of IHL as well as considering adherence to it a priority. 'International humanitarian law is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. International humanitarian law is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict' (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004). IHL is thus strictly linked to implementing the nexus and the potential impact of EU humanitarian policy on peace operations. The EU and its implementing partners are called upon to respect IHL in delivering humanitarian aid and reacting to any breaches from beneficiaries through the adoption of sanctions. As a key priority, it has to punish any violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocols, as was the case, for example, with conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Currently, IHL is based not only on IHL treaties but also on customised practices and rules generally shared and accepted by all donors.

The Commission Communication aims to reinforce its compliance with IHL through a strengthened control role in: delivery and implementation of humanitarian action; putting in place a more effective system to monitor breaches; and taking a reinforced leading role in the coordination of humanitarian interventions undertaken by EU actors and implementing partners, including by using the avenues of EU humanitarian diplomacy. To this end, implementing the two groups of key actions is indispensable. Concerning the former, namely engagement to foster compliance, the EU should rely upon its economic, diplomatic and political weight as a world-leading humanitarian donor. **EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL (O6-KA1), IHL compliance framework (O6-KA2) and promoting dialogue (O6-KA3)** may undoubtedly represent a **significant step forward** in this regard, as also advocated by the EU's main implementing partners and NGOs. As is the case of other Communication's objectives, these key actions advance the priority relevance of strengthening the EU's engagement, leadership and coordination role, which remains the key critical issue. Concerning the second group of actions, namely sanctions against serious breaches, the EU will adopt a sanction policy with exceptions in case of detected violations. Such a policy of exceptions is undoubtedly a sensitive issue which will be subject to much debate. **EU sanctions regimes (O6-KA4) and relative humanitarian exceptions (O6-KA5)** could thence be the actions which will be **politically more difficult to implement**. Consequently, **EU sanctions regimes (O6-KA4) and relative humanitarian exceptions (O6-KA5)** could be effective and feasible actions, but only provided the further elaboration of political principles supporting the policy of exceptions as well as the specific terms and conditions of its concrete application are properly set out beforehand.



The EU's engagement in promoting IHL is particularly sensitive for many local and implementing partners. Accordingly, the EU's commitment to respecting IHL has two main dimensions: protect civilian populations and protect humanitarian workers, who are often the victims of belligerents. The protection of humanitarian personnel is a matter of customary law, as officially stated in 2005 by the ICRC in the 'Customary IHL Study' (Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck, 2005). To a large extent, Rule 31 affirms that 'humanitarian relief personnel must be respected and protected'. These Rules are especially relevant since they are binding for all belligerent countries, even those that are not signatories to the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. Nonetheless, many efforts must still be made to guarantee effective protection for civilians and humanitarian personnel.

Here, open discussion with NGOs, local and implementing partners (e.g. VOICE, Red Cross EU Office, Médecins Sans Frontières, ICRC), and follow-up e-mail conversations provided further insightful information on certain key topics, such as EU engagement and leadership, as well as respect for International Humanitarian Law. NGOs and implementing partners report the following as critical objectives to be set in order to answer the new challenges in respecting IHL:

- Protection of civilians against explosive weapons in populated areas, especially during sieges, cyber terrorism and new weapon systems.
- Protection of civilians in protracted conflicts, including refugees, internally displaced people and persons with disabilities.
- Strengthening of health and education systems and structures in conflict scenarios.
- Application of IHL to conflicts with multiple Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs).
- Application of IHL in the fight against terrorism and respect for the principles of humanitarian aid.
- Application of IHL in linking peace and climatic interventions<sup>17</sup>.

The EU's partners generally consider the **last three points** the most critical (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2019, Médecins sans Frontières, 2021). Essentially, the main issue is the rather complicated and, to date, still inadequate articulation and applicability of IHL to national anti-terrorism laws (NATL). Consequently, breaches of IHL are not considered as such by the NATLs and *vice versa*. This lack of harmonisation *de facto* weakens the criminalisation of measures against humanitarian personnel and humanitarian workers' role, mainly when they are engaged in long-term and protracted humanitarian action. This also negatively influences the principle of linking urgent relief, development and peace operations. A second critical issue refers to the specificity of humanitarian action's role, which needs to be better defined and valued, not to be confused with the role of other military and civil servants. Respect for IHL regarding humanitarian workers may thus become effective only as long as counter-terrorism legislation includes humanitarian exemptions referring to:

- Possibility of providing direct assistance in areas under the control of terroristic NSAGs.
- Possibility of participating in negotiations with terroristic NSAGs.
- Respect for IHL protection of medical missions, including medical secrecy and non-discrimination in medical care.

<sup>17</sup> See ICRC's 'Guidelines for the Protection of the Natural Environment in Situations of Armed Conflict'.

The vague wording of these principles risks entailing the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance. A clear example in this sense is provided by the search and rescue (SAR) NGOs' operations to help people in distress at sea. The EU's request for NGOs to sign the Code of Conduct<sup>18</sup> in July 2017 'was a *sine qua non* condition to participate in SAR operations. [...]. Many NGOs refused to sign it because it interfered with their scope and mandate based on political neutrality and independence, freedom of providing help to any victims regardless of their origin or political status, and refusal to accept the presence of armed police on board.' (Pusterla, 2021: 84). Although NGOs were not authorised to undertake humanitarian assistance to migrants shipwrecked, the Code of Conduct and their refusal to sign had an additional detrimental impact on the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance.

Partner organisations also ask the EU to reinforce its leadership role in promoting the ratification of IHL treaties and increasing accountability for respecting IHL, particularly regarding attempts to impede or delay humanitarian assistance delivery because of human rights abuses by armed forces. For these reasons, additional key actions should be added regarding protecting civilians affected by the crises and humanitarian operators, respecting the principles of humanitarian aid in the fight against terrorism, and applying IHL in linking peace and climatic interventions.

### 3.2.2 EU leadership

#### Overview of key action

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**Objective:** *Enhance the EU's engagement and leadership on humanitarian aid to maximise its impact.*

#### **Key actions of the EU**

- Organise a **European Humanitarian Forum** in 2021 to promote dialogue on humanitarian policy issues. **(O7-KA1)**
- Promote and engage in further **dialogue with key stakeholders** on taking forward the key proposed actions set out in this Communication. **(O7-KA2)**

#### **Key actions of the EU and the Member States**

- Encourage common messages by the EU and its Member States on key humanitarian crises and encourage consolidated EU and the Member States pledges at international humanitarian pledging events (alongside national ones) in a **Team Europe** approach. Strive to consolidate the EU and Member States' positions in relevant international and multilateral forums. **(O7-KA3)**
- Develop the option of use of external assigned revenue for EU Member States to avail themselves of the EU's **humanitarian field presence and expertise**. **(O7-KA4)**

**Objective 7** stresses the importance of further increasing the EU's leadership role, especially concerning stakeholder and implementing partners (**through the organisation of an European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1) and dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2)**). It also promotes the Team Europe

<sup>18</sup> The Code of Conduct had relevant implications for the EU's international relations and counter-terrorism policy. It mainly asked NGOs 'not entering Libyan territorial waters; not making communications or sending light signals that would function to facilitate contact with migrants smugglers and traffickers; not transferring rescued individuals to separate boats after taking them on board; allowing police and government officials to board vessels for inspections; and complying with other logistical requirements in terms of communication, reporting and tracking with the RCC in Rome.' (Holberg, 2011-2012)

approach by enhancing the relevance of coordinated EU institutions and Member States' humanitarian actions (**Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**). Stepping up a Team Europe approach is the consequence of a long-term development process within EU Humanitarian Aid policy, which dates back to 1996. Since then, many efforts have already been made in this regard and the Communication key actions appear **very promising** in terms of making significant progress. Their implementation thus favours policy effectiveness and efficiency through increased coordination, better division of labour and precise definition of roles. Moreover, the presence of the EU and Member States as a joint humanitarian actor strengthens their leadership. The following discussion will highlight steps taken thanks to key actions' implementation as well as the remaining critical aspects and drawbacks.

The general objectives and principles guiding the EU Humanitarian Aid policy have primarily been stated in Council Regulation 1257-96. Yet, the first explicit reference to EU Humanitarian Aid policy in EU Treaties dates back to the Treaty establishing the European Community in 2006, which also referred to the promotion of coordination between the European Union and its Member States<sup>19</sup>. A more precise definition of cooperation between the EU and Member States has been the matter of ten-year long negotiation rounds which led to a 'Commission call for a consensus' on humanitarian aid (European Commission, 2008). The Consensus stated the necessity for strengthened cooperation between the European Union and Member States to implement a more efficient and coherent policy. This clarification arises from the peculiar competence arrangements that EU Treaties attribute to the Humanitarian Aid policy. Accordingly, the European Union has never had exclusive humanitarian aid competencies, as the Treaty of Lisbon enacted parallel competencies. In other words, 'the Union shall have competence to carry out activities and conduct a common policy; however, the exercise of that competence shall not result in Member States being prevented from exercising theirs' (European Union, 2007: Art 2C, Par 4)<sup>20</sup>.

Figure 7 here details the top 20 contributors of international humanitarian assistance in 2019. It highlights how EU institutions' allocation is considered separately from those of EU Member States' governments. Indeed, certain national governments are listed in their own right amongst the top 20 donors. Data shows the extent of European financial commitment (EU plus Member States) and the financial potential of an enhanced Team Europe approach under EU leadership fostering the pooling of resources among various European actors.

<sup>19</sup> '1. The Community and the Member States shall coordinate their policies on development cooperation and shall consult each other on their aid programmes, including in international organisations and during international conferences. They may undertake joint action. Member States shall contribute if necessary to the implementation of Community aid programmes. 2. The Commission may take any useful initiative to promote the coordination referred to in paragraph 1' (European Union, 2006: Art 180).

<sup>20</sup> A practical example of how parallel competencies concretely work is well represented by reconstruction after the Haiti earthquake. The competence of providing urgent aid for the reconstruction of the health system has been delegated to DG ECHO by Member States. Meanwhile, some Member States also decided to deliver additional support bilaterally without profiting from the EU's channels. Notably, this national bilateral aid was meant for the rehabilitation and development, on a longer term, of the sanitary system not included in the multilateral intervention.

**Figure 7: Top 20 contributors of international humanitarian assistance in 2019<sup>21</sup>**



Source: (Development Initiatives, 2020)

**Figure 7** shows the huge impact of single EU Member States’ governments in the allocation of humanitarian aid. Germany, UK<sup>22</sup>, Sweden, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Spain, Ireland and Finland are all amongst the 20 top donors. Unfortunately, it also shows the reduction of overall aid allocation by 5 % from 2018 to 2019 and, as **Figure 8** below clarifies, this is mainly due to the reduction of public aid.

<sup>21</sup> As anticipated, the double \*\* close to the EU institutions indicates that ‘EU institutions are also included separately for comparison and are shaded differently to distinguish from government donors’ (Development Initiatives, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Data refers to 2020. UK’s data are encoded as an EU Member State until 31 January 2021.

**Figure 8: Decrease in international humanitarian assistance**



Source: (Development Initiatives, 2020)

With a constant increase in the complexity, intensity and frequency of humanitarian crises, the humanitarian financing gap has become a serious problem and for this reason good practice in coordination among EU donors is now even more relevant for effective policy-making (Figure 8). Accordingly, the EU’s engagement and leadership in humanitarian activities is presented as a core objective in the Communication. By 2020, the negative trend in allocation of aid had already been reversed, with the EU allocating globally a humanitarian budget of EUR 2 billion (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: EU’s Humanitarian Aid for 2020**



Source: (European Commission, 2021b)

The strengthening of a coordinated humanitarian assistance policy between the EU and Member States working as a **‘Team Europe’** implies a delegation of competencies from Member States to the EU. Within Humanitarian Aid policy, this delegation has a number of advantages: helping to overcome information asymmetries; negotiating shared preferences; increasing the credibility of commitment and implementation of humanitarian principles; acquiring specialisation; and reducing risks of politicisation. In other words, common intervention in humanitarian crises through EU channels is oriented towards both efficiency and credibility (Tallberg, 2002, Epstein and O’Halloran, 1999).

In terms of efficiency, the benefits relate to: more rapid and effective acquisition of information in a crisis context; the formation of new expertise; the transferring of expertise already acquired by partners; together with more rapid and coordinated decision-making (Huber and Shipan, 2006). The high complexity and technicality of humanitarian assistance make information acquisition and expertise formation particularly difficult and expensive. Delegation allows national donors to rely upon the EU's structures. 'DG ECHO can rely on an apparatus of officials competent in logistics and technical issues. It has put into action a well-structured strategy and developed a set of methodologies to react against humanitarian crises. It is also an important information provider for identifying and analysing crises, thanks to its massive presence in the field. DG ECHO has a permanent representation in the countries receiving the EU's humanitarian aid' (Pusterla, 2015). In 2021, the EU can count on 155 international humanitarian experts in the field and 298 national staff members. Such a presence involves seven regional offices and field offices in more than 40 countries (European Commission, 2021a). Their role is 'designed to strengthen the overall need-assessment capacity of the humanitarian aid community – especially in emergency situations – to monitor humanitarian situations and projects, and to foster greater coordination and synergies among actors in the field (facilitation role)' (DG ECHO, 2006: 10). Member States do not have the same large capacity in the field and their officials are often not humanitarian aid experts, but instead employees of national embassies devoting just a limited percentage of their working time to humanitarian aid. They are not formed and trained in humanitarian operations, activities and logistics. Member States acting bilaterally risk shaping policy-making without the necessary technical expertise and an extensive network of (local) partners to rely on. European Commission officials have specialised expertise that Member States' politicians and staff can exploit to implement humanitarian activities, mitigating information asymmetries and misinformed policy-making. It thus becomes crucial for a coordinated EU Humanitarian Aid policy that the EU further develops its leadership and presence in the field, by coordinating the division of labour, fostering harmonisation of procedures and activities, as well as developing channels for the continuous acquisition of information<sup>23</sup> and formation of expertise, in order to valorise the real added value of Member States and (local) implementing partners.

Regarding the benefits of delegation in terms of credibility, at stake is the central role of implementing and respecting humanitarian principles, much advocated by NGOs and local (implementing) partners. Accordingly, delegation is expected to reduce politicisation and increase the credibility of donors' commitment. As anticipated, one of the key objectives from the Communication is the development of better enforcement mechanisms and IHL accountability with the implementation of sanctioning mechanisms to deter any potential breaches. Moreover, relying upon national governments risks the involvement of political considerations (Riddell, 2007), given that humanitarian aid can be a relevant foreign policy instrument impacting bilateral relations (Pusterla, 2016) between national governments of donors and beneficiaries. As a result, the credibility of neutral and impartial commitment risks being jeopardised. Hence, the suspicion may arise that donors not only prioritise national interests to the detriment of victims' real needs, but also profit from highly mediatised crises to improve their own visibility (Soderlund, 2008) and international humanitarian profile. Delegation to the EU reduces such risks for two main reasons. Firstly, multilateralism 'can remain less politicised than intergovernmental

<sup>23</sup> In this sense, examples of already implemented initiatives are the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) and the Common Emergency and Information System (CECIS).



links. This in turn endows multilateral agencies with an advantage in the exercise of conditionality, that is in lending that is conditional on changes in government policies' (Rodrik, 1995: 2). Secondly, EU officials' mandate is not subjected to re-election considerations and is thus less prompted by political considerations. Moreover, EU accountability instruments are an additional incentive to focus on victims' needs and forgotten crises.

Finally, EU tools for information acquisition and sharing, as well as its accountability, further foster the effectiveness and credibility of coordinated and/or delegated aid. Worthy of special attention is the transparency and objectivity of instruments whose information results from a joint effort by the EU, Member States and humanitarian partners working in close collaboration. This entails reciprocal checks as well as harmonisation of best practices. The Forgotten Crises Assessment (FCA) and the Global Needs Assessment (GNA) warrant mention among these instruments. Such quantification tools strengthen the apolitical credibility of decision-making as well as the transparency and accountability of implementation.

These considerations, jointly with empirical evidence reported in **Annex III**, certainly corroborate the relevance of **organising a European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1), initiating dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2), adopting a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and developing humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**. They underline how much priority has already been assigned to the 'Team Europe' approach (**O7-KA3**) and the enforcement of a better presence in the field by EU Member States (**O7-KA4**). However, they also recall the central EU leadership role (**through the organisation of an European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1) and dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2)**) to make effective the implementation of **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) as well as facilitating the development of humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**. Indeed, EU engagement and leadership and its coordination role would provide Member States with the necessary tools to implement effective humanitarian actions in the field. Nonetheless, although **these key actions have been partially implemented** with relevant results, **some critical points remain**. Indeed, empirical evidence (see Annex III) reveals that only a limited number of humanitarian actions have been undertaken by adopting the Team Europe approach and Member States' availment of the EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise. **The implementation of a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and development of humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4) can be seen as being too limited as of yet and thus warranting further efforts.**

Analytical results reported in **Annex III** show Member States' significant tendency to strengthen cooperation by using Team Europe. Certainly, the implementation of **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and development of humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4) have produced relevant results**, when humanitarian actions are aimed at implementing the nexus between humanitarian-development-peace and urgent relief coupled with long-term development goals. This result also seems to corroborate the efforts made by Member States to comply with the key actions under Communication's Objectives 3 (Climate Mainstream) and 4 (Humanitarian, development, peace nexus). However, despite promising efforts, data show how the overall number of interventions undertaken jointly by the EU and Member States or entirely delegated to the EU is still rare for many crisis scenarios. Moreover, the EU's leadership and coordination role is still critical (**organisation of an European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1) and dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2)**) because too often the EU fails to promote a common humanitarian intervention policy based on common guidelines taking into account the specificities of humanitarian scenarios. Consequently, the variability of Member States' humanitarian preferences in favour or against cooperation depending on the crisis characteristics remains very high. **Some work thus remains to be done to foster cooperation from a Team Europe perspective thereby increasing the EU's leadership and engagement.** Greater harmonisation and better division of labour should be political priorities for the EU efforts to: increase coordination between Member States and EU institutions; foster aid effectiveness; improve

accountability; and raise the credibility of beneficiaries and implementing partners, possibly from a multilateral perspective.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, the **organisation of an European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1), dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2), adoption of a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and development of humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)** are crucial, as has also been strongly advocated by the EU's humanitarian partners. Moreover, such key actions play essential roles in achieving the Communication's other objectives. Accordingly, coordination, meeting and dialogue between donors should be top priorities over the coming years to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian aid from economic, political and social perspectives.

## 4 Conclusions and recommendations

This study has addressed the seven objectives and relative key actions included in the European Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles. Academic research and evaluation reports have shown the relevance of key actions proposed and provided robust evidence supporting their positive impact on the EU's Humanitarian Aid policy development. Nevertheless, many critical issues have also emerged. This is mainly due to the increasing complexity of intervention scenarios and the steady escalation of needs worldwide. Consequently, the key actions proposed are crucial for better development of the policy as well as an absolute priority to bridge the financial gap and foster the effectiveness of humanitarian actions and programmes. The coming years will certainly be extremely hard for the EU and national decision-makers. The decisions to be taken are multiplying and becoming more complex as intervention scenarios continue to grow at an ever-increasing rate. EU and national policy-makers can use the study's recommendations as potential tools to further their courses of action and the already well-developed implementation of the key actions.

The following paragraphs present main conclusions and advance some practical recommendations directed at EU institutions and Member States engaged in humanitarian interventions to implement the Communication's main objectives and proposed key actions. Moreover, they summarise any particularly critical issues and stress priority actions that need to be undertaken.

### ***Objective 1: Promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms***

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#### **Conclusions:**

Extending **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1)** is a high priority action and whilst its implementation is showing signs of promise, much still needs to be done.

**Digital tools, cash and technology-based solutions** (respectively, **O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6**) have already been partially implemented, but there is still a very long way to go before their full potential can be realised both at European and international levels.

Expansion of **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1) and digitalisation (O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6)** are moving in the right direction. However, additional key actions could significantly increase the effectiveness of their implementation. They should address the following needs: data protection; increased transparency and accountability; better private sector definition and diversification; as well as defence of social protection against the risks of donors' particular interests.

Increasing EU **support to local responders (O1-KA2) and equal partnerships (O1-KA3)** correctly assess the relevance of fostering good relations with partners; nonetheless, implementation is still critical because there is often failure in detecting the key core of these actions' scope.

Expanding EU **support to local responders (O1-KA2) and equal partnerships (O1-KA3)** can significantly foster the achievement of critical objectives regarding local partners. However, one priority should be more heavily stressed: the need for enhanced coordination at the global level in the definition and implementation of a strategic plan to support local partners. In addition, harmonisation and coordination between main international donors and implementing local agencies should be strengthened. This would help reduce costs and increase effectiveness by avoiding overlapping interventions and duplication.

- **Recommendation 1: devise a clear and concise financial action plan** in agreement with multilateral humanitarian partners. This plan should set up a multiannual financial arrangement, including a minimal but precise number of agreed key actions and the necessary flexible tools to adapt financial allocation to match possible changes in the crisis contexts. Key actions must be ambitious but realistic. The plan should also include specific programmatic targets, which are

measurable and easily accessible to guarantee accountability and transparency. Key actions addressed: Extending **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1)**. Actors involved: DG ECHO and the EU Parliament, in stressing the need for additional funding. The European Commission, DG ECHO and Member States in coordinating the planning; the EU Parliament in reviewing the Commission's work programme's schedule as well as DG ECHO's operational strategy.

- **Recommendation 2: increase ex-ante accountability and transparency.** A detailed Gantt chart, depicting the plan's schedule and clearly indicating the start and conclusion of its activities, the resources at disposal, the objectives and the tasks, should be included in the multiannual plan. Milestones and deliverables need definition as much as the intervention timeframe (always including time windows for flexible adjustments to contextual changes). Moreover, a clear division of labour for multi-purpose actions and a detailed description of competencies and tasks for donors should be defined to avoid overlapping tasks and inefficient distribution of resources. Key actions addressed: extending **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1)**. Actors involved: the EU Parliament in reviewing the Commission's work programme schedule and DG ECHO's operational strategy.
- **Recommendation 3: increase ex-post accountability and transparency.** Data on all interventions undertaken, including the value of funds spent, details of the spending goals and their achievements, must be encoded and made accessible for reference by donors, implementing partners, and any other governmental and non-governmental actors involved in the action. Data are also to be put at the disposal of external scientific evaluation (data science). Key actions addressed: extending **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1)**. Actors involved: the EU Parliament in reviewing the Commission's work programme's schedule and DG ECHO's operational strategy.
- **Recommendation 4: improve clarification and diversification in the definition of the private sector.** The private sector needs to be categorised. For example, a multinational company cannot be associated with and treated in the same way as a small local enterprise. A more precise appreciation together with explicit labelling and differentiation in categories of private sector donors are necessary. This would allow better understanding and valorisation of the private sector's contribution regarding aid allocations through cash transfer and prevent potential political implications conflicting with humanitarian principles. In this sense, **the private sector**, especially those organisations with expertise in digitalisation and innovative financial instruments, should be involved in defining new digital and technological tools and their development and implementation. This approach could bring a double benefit: profiting from private sector expertise and resources in the field, along with controlling private sector commitments. Key actions addressed: Further use of **digital tools, cash and technology-based solutions** (respectively, **O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6**), and extending **multiannual and flexible funding (O1-KA1)**. Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy.
- **Recommendation 5: innovate financial products and increase digitalisation and data protection.** These have a double goal of increasing efficiency and increasing accountability. All humanitarian aid funds from both the private and public sectors should be encoded and published in a transparent, harmonised, timely and comprehensive way, being made accessible for external review, scientific analyses and further research. The digitalisation of data must thus be reinforced. Firstly, datasets and repositories on humanitarian interventions are often lacking information or imprecise in describing them. An example is the instrumental EDRIS dataset. Member States encode data independently, but there is little harmonisation on how data should be encoded and relevant information is missing, such as the intervention continuum and precise scope of allocated funds. Secondly, data protection must be reinforced. Key actions addressed: Further use of **digital tools**,

**cash and technology-based solutions** (respectively, **O1-KA4, O1-KA5 and O1-KA6**). Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy. Particularly, DG ECHO should promote innovation among partners donors by demonstrating the practical use of new technologies.

- **Recommendation 6: improve dialogue and coordination with implementing partners.** NGOs and local partners must be included in negotiating the financial and action multi-annual and multi-purpose plan. Their role and responsibilities must be clearly indicated in the plan. Moreover, they must be involved from the outset through a collaborative dialogue on what is expected from the partnership with implementing agencies regarding cost management, transparency, accountability and responsibilities. Key actions addressed: Increase EU **support to local responders (O1-KA2)** and **equal partnerships (O1-KA3)**. Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy. Member States for coordinating partnerships especially with national agencies and implementing partners.

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**Objective 2: Ensure that EU humanitarian aid can be delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need**

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**Conclusions:**

Objective 2 is on the right path to being achieved thanks to a **very well-developed European Humanitarian Response Capacity (O2-KA1)**. **Specific outstanding issues do not emerge** and in general terms the EU could start considering further developing this objective. The top priority in further implementing this mechanism is now given to coordination of European financial tools to fund interventions as well as transparency and accountability mechanisms.

- **Recommendation 1: coordinate European financial and action tools** to fund interventions as well as transparency and accountability mechanisms. A framework action plan should be discussed and negotiated in collaboration with partner agencies. However, precise reference guidelines on the division of labour and responsibilities, financial instruments and data reports are to be applied in humanitarian interventions carried out by implementing partners and DG ECHO directly. Key action addressed: Further development of a **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (O2-KA1)**. Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for supervising coordination and implementation. Member States for coordination.

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**Objective 3: further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build the resilience of vulnerable communities**

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**Conclusions:**

The five key actions are strictly interrelated and so is their implementation. Thus, whilst some progress has been made, specific critical issues remain outstanding.

**Greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1), tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2), enhancing resilience of regions (O3-KA3) and vulnerable populations (O3-KA4)** are not straightforward because well-established best practices are to date lacking, given that the nexus is still a recent concept at both political and scientific levels.

**Greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2)** need to be promoted and prioritised to give humanitarian aid a solid sustainable dimension.

**Enhancing resilience of regions (O3-KA3) and vulnerable populations (O3-KA4)** are high-priority and urgent key actions. Current implementing measures are providing good results and thus warrant continuation.

**The development of risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5)** is already largely implemented and is increasingly acquiring priority over time.

- **Recommendation 1: devise a better definition of intervention priority setting** between urgent relief, prevention and development, as well as between environmental/climatic and humanitarian concerns. The intervention scope must be rooted in precise guidelines, guaranteeing that any crisis context, whilst including different dimensions, is allocated a specific level of intervention based on the corresponding contextual priority. To this end, a predefined categorisation gridline defined at EU level to assess characteristics of crisis scenarios would be particularly useful to identify effectively and quickly the kind of crisis at hand and hence delineate the best possible intervention. Accordingly, a common gridline could help identify disaster types immediately based on common recurrent distinguishing features. Key actions addressed: **greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2)**. Actors involved: The European Commission, DG ECHO and Member States for coordinating policy orientation. The EU Parliament for influencing the strategic decisions and policy orientations of the Commission.
- **Recommendation 2: foster a strategy of harmonisation and division of labour between EU donors**, which is necessary to guarantee a more coherent intervention strategy in precise crisis contexts. This division of labour must be based on a comparative advantage approach and always guarantee adherence to humanitarian principles. Key actions addressed: **greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2)**. Actors involved: the European Commission, DG ECHO and Member States for coordinating policy orientation. The EU Parliament for influencing the strategic decisions and policy orientations of the Commission.
- **Recommendation 3: strengthen the EU coordination role**, which to date is still too limited in urgent relief operations. The EU must strengthen its operational scope, foster coordination and its leading role with Member States. Key actions addressed: **greening humanitarian aid (O3-KA1) and tracking climate-related expenditure (O3-KA2)**. Actors involved: the European Commission.
- **Recommendation 4 (strongly advocated by NGOs and linked to Recommendation 2): devise a more accountable, transparent and impartial assessment of humanitarian needs and priority actions** based on needs' indices, for negotiation, coordination and harmonisation with humanitarian partners. A systematic collection and encoding of data on man-made and natural disasters would improve information at donors' (governments, agencies, EU institutions) disposal to design and implement an intervention. These are also essential to integrate different thematic crisis components: natural disasters, health and famine, conflicts (with subsequent peacebuilding operations). Key actions addressed: **the development of risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5)**. Actors involved: the European Commission, DG ECHO and Member States for coordinating assessment and report.
- **Recommendation 5 (linked to Recommendation 4): foster negotiations to reach a currently lacking international consensus regarding best practices** for collecting data on humanitarian needs and priority actions based on needs' indices. To date, the complexity of crisis scenarios still makes collecting reliable and accountable information difficult. Different donors adopt various procedures and tools in terms of definition, methods, tools and sources. Key actions addressed: **the development of risk-informed approaches (O3-KA5)**. Actors involved: the European Commission, DG ECHO and Member States for negotiating and agreeing on best practices.
- **Recommendation 6: draw up clear assessments of actual needs**. Donors should be required to design interventions from a clear assessment of exactly what is required, whether development or humanitarian or both. Key actions addressed: **enhancing resilience of regions (O3-KA3) and vulnerable populations (O3-KA4)**. Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The



EU Parliament for supervising Commission's policy orientations. Member States for a coordinated assessment.

**Objective 4: Ensure that humanitarian, development, peace and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises**

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### Conclusions:

The implementation of **linkages between actions (O4-KA2), humanitarian civil-military coordination (O4-KA4), peace mediation and conflict prevention (O4-KA5) and coordination mechanisms at field level (O4-KA7)** is crucial and needs to be prioritised. These are very complex key actions and their implementation remains critical as it requires enhanced coordination with the systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1)**.

The systematic **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1)**, in the nexus implementation, takes a crucial role in identifying needs and the best way to tackle them.

**The expansion of social safety nets (O4-KA3)** assumes a particular relevance after the onset of COVID-19.

The parallel implementation of **social safety nets (O4-KA3), integrated education (O4-KA6)** as well as **political and diplomatic engagement (O4-KA8)** needs to be fostered to improve the nexus' effectiveness as well as political and socio/cultural sustainability. Accordingly, coordination and dialogue between donors and implementing agencies must form an absolute priority for the EU in strengthening its coordination role.

Finally, additional key actions aimed at transparency, accountability and depoliticisation must be prioritised and specific reference to this effect in the Communication calls for further development.

- **Recommendation 1: facilitate meetings and discussion among implementing experts** with different humanitarian and development backgrounds, as well as humanitarian and peacebuilding perspectives to share information and expertise. Restoration of peace must be understood as a synergic and integrated aspect of humanitarianism that must be involved with and linked to other humanitarian operations. Moreover, peace operations must be integrated through a cross-cutting approach between urgent relief and development. Key actions addressed: **links between actions (O4-KA2), social safety nets (O4-KA3), humanitarian civil-military coordination (O4-KA4), peace mediation and conflict prevention (O4-KA5) and coordination mechanisms at field level (O4-KA7)**. Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy. Member States for coordinating partnerships especially with national agencies and implementing partners. In this sense, at EU level, humanitarian and development operations should be conceived as politically shared DG ECHO/DEVCO responsibilities. Moreover, the European Commission and Member States should enhance coordination between their respective humanitarian and development departments based on needs assessment, while Member States should implement LRRD projects also within their national development and humanitarian budgets. Finally, DG ECHO should promote the discussion and definition of common guidelines with Member States, NGOs, military and other implementing partners as well as international humanitarian donors.
- **Recommendation 2: increase accountability and impartial assessment of needs** to guarantee that peace operations respect humanitarian principles. Constant joint and impartial monitoring of performances of humanitarian partners should be incentivised. Risk management and oversight processes should be undertaken by external experts to ensure neutrality and impartiality. Key action addressed: **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1)**. Actors involved: DG ECHO could foster

humanitarian aid neutrality and detach humanitarian activities from any other, potentially more politicised, EU foreign policy activities. Member States should apply further key actions also in national policies.

- **Recommendation 3: encourage multi-level and multi-stakeholder actions.** The nexus supports interventions on different thematic and temporal dimensions. Such complexity may increase the effectiveness of implementation by involving a multiplicity of different actors based on their specific values, scale, expertise and priority-setting. This requires the EU to foster its partnering implementing agencies through dialogues, exchanges, negotiation and venues/times for meetings. This aspect has been strongly advocated by humanitarian partners directly, complaining about scarce and limited opportunities for meeting, confrontation, discussion and coordination with the EU. Key actions addressed: **linkages between actions (O4-KA2), humanitarian civil-military coordination (O4-KA4), peace mediation and conflict prevention (O4-KA5), integrated education (O4-KA6) and coordination mechanisms at field level (O4-KA7).** Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy. Member States for coordinating partnerships especially with national agencies and implementing partners.
- **Recommendation 4: foster the EU's negotiation and coordination role** among humanitarian, local and implementing partners. Implementing the nexus requires the EU to take the lead in coordinating with development and humanitarian actors, to avoid development actors' interventions becoming more focussed on development rather than humanitarian needs. The same applies to humanitarian actors favouring humanitarian over development links. Key actions addressed: **EU joint analyses of the risks (O4-KA1) and political and diplomatic engagement (O4-KA8).** Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. Member States for coordinating partnerships especially with national agencies and implementing partners.

#### **Objective 5: Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action**

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##### **Conclusions:**

**Funding from the private sector (O5-KA1)** has already largely been implemented. Nonetheless, it can be particularly critical and sensitive in terms of politicisation and accountability.

**Stepped-up humanitarian funding commitments (O5-KA2)** is the most critical key action. Its implementation warrants greater promotion. Meanwhile, compensating for the lack of sufficient financial resources through an efficient allocation and distribution should take priority.

**Stepped-up EU engagement (O5-KA3)** should be a priority action and would deserve more commitment to reach full actuation.

- **Recommendation 1: improve the identifying, defining and diversifying of donors and their specific roles.** This would apply, for example, to the diversification between international and local agencies and/or between public and private donors. Actors involved: The European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy. Member States for coordinating partnerships especially with national agencies and implementing partners.
- **Recommendation 2: arrange for more direct funding to local partners.** Key actions addressed: **stepped-up humanitarian funding commitments (O5-KA2).** Actors involved: DG ECHO should reduce the administrative burden and manage risk transfer and sharing, to compensate for the lack of sufficient financial resources with their efficient allocation and distribution.

**Objective 6: Put compliance with international humanitarian law at the heart of EU external action**

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**Conclusions:**

**EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL (O6-KA1), IHL compliance framework (O6-KA2) and dialogue between all parties involved (O6-KA3)** undoubtedly represent a **significant step forward** in the Commission Communication's aim to reinforce compliance with IHL.

**EU sanctions regimes (O6-KA4) and the relative humanitarian exceptions (O6-KA5)** are politically more difficult to implement because the policy of exceptions is subject to much debate. Consequently, **employing EU sanctions regimes (O6-KA4) and the relative humanitarian exceptions (O6-KA5)** could undoubtedly be effective and feasible but only so long as the further elaboration of political principles supporting the policy of exceptions as well as the specific terms and conditions of its concrete application takes place beforehand.

- **Recommendation 1: strengthen the EU's leadership role through EU diplomacy** to improve and advocate the ratification of IHL treaties; increase accountability; sanction any attempt of impeding or delaying humanitarian assistance delivery; and sanction any human rights abuses by armed forces. Key actions addressed: **EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL (O6-KA1), IHL compliance framework (O6-KA2) and dialogue between all parties involved (O6-KA3)**. Actors involved: the European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for advocacy. Particularly, DG ECHO could integrate further IHL compliance into its programmes.
- **Recommendation 2: pre-assess sanctions.** This approach facilitates the definition of guidelines on how to react to similar situations and thus avoid adopting *ad hoc impromptu* solutions. In this way, accountability and transparency are also increased and compliance with the IHL is improved. For this purpose, the pre-evaluation requires to evaluate the measures adopted in the sanctions, the possible consequences, the purpose, and the consistency. Key actions addressed: **EU sanctions regimes (O6-KA4) and the relative humanitarian exceptions (O6-KA5)**. Actors involved: the European Commission and DG ECHO. The EU Parliament for reviewing the Commission's policy orientations. Member States for negotiating and agreeing on the assessment of sanctions.

**Objective 7: Enhancing the EU's engagement and leadership**

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**Conclusions:**

**An European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1), dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2), a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and the EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)** form the basis for highly relevant actions. They underline the priority attributed to the 'Team Europe' approach (**O7-KA3**) and the enforcement of a better presence in the field for Member States (**O7-KA4**). However, they also highlight the central role of EU leadership (**O7-KA1 and O7-KA2**) to make effective the implementation of **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) as well as the EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**.

Despite a **European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1), dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2), a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4) having been partially implemented** with relevant results, some critical aspects remain, primarily with regard to the extent of that implementation.

Notably, the implementation of **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and the EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)** is still too limited and warrants further efforts. Also, the leadership and coordination role of the EU is still critical (**European Humanitarian Forum (O7-KA1) and dialogue with key stakeholders (O7-KA2)**)

- **Recommendation 1: identify risk perceptions and policy preferences of Member States** to understand the reasons limiting their inclination for delegation to the EU. Notably, the following risks deserve consideration: defence of state freedom/autonomy of decision and action; promotion of national priorities; leadership and freedom of decision; as well as action not only in negotiation with EU institutions and other Member States but also interactions with other local, national and international donors. Key actions addressed: **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**. Actors involved: EU institutions and Member States. Sharing humanitarian aid findings of EU Member States through COHAFA can favour learning across Member States about policy preferences – particularly with newer MS donors – and design action-oriented activities to promote cooperation between Member States and the European Commission. Finally, another way to promote cooperation at the EU level is to encourage Member States to participate in defining the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) best practices. This will help identify their preferences and agree on common financial and implementation best practices in humanitarian actions.
- **Recommendation 2: analyse power relations between Member States' governments and national agencies.** The possible fragility suffered by Member States in the negotiation and implementation phase could lead to bilateral aid instead of delegation. Power differentials should be reduced and different agendas, values and norms valorised. Key actions addressed: **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**. Actors involved: the European Parliament, Council and Member States.
- **Recommendation 3: increase opportunities for informal discussion and opinion sharing** (also in person other than through the proposed form to improve a dialogic approach). Accordingly, cooperation is accessible in the case of common interests and convergence of preferences. Moreover, identifying Member States' political preferences can help identify the possibility of cooperation in common humanitarian interventions. Cooperation can thus be fostered both vertically (between EU and Member States, or between national agencies and local partners) and horizontally (among Member States). Key actions addressed: **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**. Actors involved: the EU institutions and Member States.
- **Recommendation 4: increase accountability.** It must be assured that bilateral humanitarian aid is not prompted by political interests and does not lead to bilateral privileged relations between donors and beneficiaries. Key actions addressed: **a Team Europe approach (O7-KA3) and EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise (O7-KA4)**. Actors involved: the EU institutions and Member States.

## **Recommendations to the European Parliament**

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The following is a summary of the European Parliament's crucial role in supporting implementation of key actions and addressing critical aspects and concrete actions it can undertake also *vis-à-vis* other actors. This would help to (1) foster the implementation of the EU's key actions and (2) support and encourage Member States' efforts in implementing their key actions.

- **Issue: decision-making.** In the humanitarian aid field, the European Parliament, through its co-legislative prerogatives shared with the Council of the European Union, should negotiate and approve the Commission's policy-oriented decisions. It should also oversee the European Commission's implementation measures.
- **Issue: financial and budgetary provisions.** The European Parliament should monitor humanitarian aid delivery to guarantee: (1) a match between financial provisions and real humanitarian needs; (2) clear assessments of humanitarian needs; (3) respect for humanitarian principles; as well as (4) ex-ante and ex-post accountability and transparency. In addition, it should advocate an increase in humanitarian aid funding to narrow the gap between needs and currently allocated resources.
- **Issue: negotiation and leadership.** The European Parliament, especially through the committee on Development (DEVE) should politically influence – through opinions, reports and resolutions – the European Commission's strategic decisions and policy orientations. In this regard, it should highlight the relevance of increasing DG ECHO's intervention in key areas, such as education and health, which currently are scarcely covered by key actions and objectives proposed in the Communication. Three possible channels through which to exercise this role could be: (1) Parliament's revision of the European Commission's annual work programme and DG ECHO's operational strategy; (2) meetings between DEVE members and the Commissioner for Crisis Management; as well as (3) reports by the DEVE's standing rapporteur for humanitarian aid. The third option could maintain EU contacts with international humanitarian actors, thanks to its own prerogatives, monitoring financial and budget provisions, and humanitarian aid programme's political orientations.

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## Annex I: Key dates

The following list illustrates, in chronological order, the legal framework of the European Union Humanitarian Aid policy. Article 214 of the Treaty of Lisbon regulates the main principles of assistance, relief, and protection underpinning the EU's commitment to humanitarian aid in favour of victims of natural and man-made disasters worldwide. Moreover, article 196 grounds the leading role in the coordination of Member States' civil protection systems. It also defines the role of European institutions in framing the implementation of humanitarian decisions and actions at EU level.

- 1996: Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid. (European Union, 1996)
- 2007: Treaty of Lisbon – amending the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty Establishing the European Community (TEC), 2007/C 306/01. (European Union, 2007)
- 2008: Commission Staff Working Paper, European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid-Action Plan. (European Commission, 2008)
- 2009: Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament — EU strategy for supporting disaster risk reduction in developing countries, COM/2009/0084 final. (European Commission, 2009a)
- 2009: Council Conclusions of 30 November 2009 on a Community framework on disaster prevention within the EU. (Council of the European Union, 2009)
- 2009: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters. (European Commission, 2009b)
- 2010: Commission Staff Working Paper of 21 October 2010 — Risk Assessment and Mapping Guidelines for Disaster Management. (European Commission, 2010a)
- 2010: Communication from the Commission of 22 November 2010 — The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: five steps towards a more secure Europe, CoM(2010)673. (European Commission, 2010b)
- 2012: TFEU: Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, 2012/C 326, 26.10.2012. (European Union, 2012)
- 2013: Communication from the Commission of 16 April 2013 — An EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change, CoM(2013) 216 final (European Commission, 2013)
- 2013: Regulation (EU) No 1290/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 laying down the rules for participation and dissemination in 'Horizon 2020 — the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020)' and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1906/2006. (European Union, 2013b)
- 2013: Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism Text with European Economic Area (EEA) relevance. (European Union, 2013a)
- 2014: Communication from the Commission of 8 April 2014 — The post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action: Managing risks to achieve resilience. (European Commission, 2014)



- 2014: Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative'). (European Union, 2014)
- 2014: Council conclusions on the post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action: Managing risks to achieve resilience (9884/14, May 2014). (Council of the European Union, 2014a)
- 2014: Council conclusions on Risk Management Capability — Adoption (June 2014, 13375/14 and June 2014). (Council of the European Union, 2014b)
- 2015: Communication from the Commission of 2 September 2015 — Towards the World Humanitarian Summit: A global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action. (European Commission, 2015a)
- 2016: Council Regulation (EU) 2016/369 of 15 March 2016 on the provision of emergency support within the Union. (European Union, 2016)
- 2017: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the regions: rescEU Solidarity with Responsibility, COM/2017/0773 final. (European Commission, 2017a)
- 2017: Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament & of the Council amending Decision 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, COM/2017/0772 final - 2017/0309 (COD). (European Commission, 2017c)
- 2019: Decision (EU) 2019/420 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2019 amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, PE/90/2018/REV/1. (European Union, 2019)
- 2020: Legislative proposal to amend Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism. (European Commission, 2020)
- 2021: Regulation (EU) 2021/836 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, PE/6/2021/REV/1, OJ L 185. (European Union, 2021b)
- 2021: Consolidated text: 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. (European Union, 2021a)

## Annex II: Overview of key actions in the 2021 EC Communication

### Key actions for the EU

**Objective:** *Promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action and funding mechanisms.*

- Extend multiannual and flexible funding arrangements with humanitarian partners – liaising with development instruments whenever a nexus approach can be foreseen – and simplify/harmonise reporting requirements in line with the Grand Bargain, while ensuring that needs assessments are coordinated between agencies and that the accountability, efficiency and visibility of EU support are strengthened.
- Increase EU support to local responders, including by expanded use of country-based pooled funds and other funding mechanisms that prioritise local actors.
- Develop guidance on the promotion of equal partnerships with local responders.
- Encourage further use of digital tools by humanitarian partners, including through joint work to build an enabling environment.
- Develop specific guidance on expanding the use of digital cash and ensure aid recipients' access to digital solutions in the context of the revision of the EU's thematic policy on cash transfers.
- Support, scale up and promote investments in proven, cost-effective, technology-based solutions for humanitarian aid, also building on the example of the 2020 European Innovation Council awards.

**Objective:** *Ensure that EU humanitarian aid can be delivered swiftly and efficiently to those in need.*

- Develop a European Humanitarian Response Capacity to fill in gaps, as necessary, enabling the EU Member States and humanitarian partners to rapidly deliver humanitarian assistance, in coordination and complementarity with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

**Objective:** *Further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities.*

- Prepare guidelines and training for the EU's humanitarian partners on greening humanitarian aid, with a view to reducing the climate and environmental footprint of humanitarian aid.
- Track climate-related expenditure under the EU Humanitarian Aid Regulation

**Objective:** *Ensure that humanitarian, development, peace and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises.*

- Undertake systematic EU joint analyses of the risks, needs, vulnerabilities and structural drivers of crisis as well as, when appropriate, joined-up programming and planning of EU's policies, in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
- Implement effective linkages between the different humanitarian, development and peace actions and use existing tools, such as policy dialogue, to strengthen national and local capacities – including the capacity of non-state authorities – to provide basic services and support resilience building.
- Expand support for cash-based, shock-responsive social safety nets.

- Promote effective humanitarian civil-military coordination in all relevant contexts, as a framework to protect the humanitarian space, avoid duplication, minimise inconsistencies and maximise potential synergies with security and defence actors.
- Build synergies with EU peace mediation and conflict prevention efforts, in full respect of humanitarian principles, with a view to increasing efforts to alleviate suffering.
- Integrate education into the priority areas for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to help bridge the global gap on education, alongside sectors such as health, food security, disaster preparedness and climate resilience.

**Objective:** *Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action.*

- Launch a pilot blending initiative from the EU's humanitarian budget to leverage additional funding from the private sector in a humanitarian context in 2021.

**Objective:** *Put compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) at the heart of EU external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers.*

- Establish an EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL to ensure a better monitoring of IHL violations in the world, facilitate the coordination of relevant EU actors and support stronger EU humanitarian diplomacy.
- Further strengthen the IHL compliance framework including as part of the EU's external instruments, inter alia through due diligence and through its political, security and human rights dialogues and trade agreements with partner countries, where relevant.
- Continue promoting dialogue between all parties involved in humanitarian assistance (donors, regulators, NGOs and banks) in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need.

**Objective:** *Enhance the EU's engagement and leadership on humanitarian aid to maximise its impact.*

- Organise a European Humanitarian Forum in 2021 to promote dialogue on humanitarian policy issues.
- Promote and engage in further dialogue with key stakeholders on taking forward the key proposed actions set out in this Communication.

## Key actions for the EU and the Member States

**Objective:** *Further mainstream climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities.*

- Significantly increase the share of climate funds dedicated to enhancing resilience and adaptation in the most disaster-prone countries and regions, in line with the new EU climate change adaptation strategy, and as part of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach.
- Bolster climate and environmental resilience of vulnerable populations, through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach and ensure dissemination and implementation of new guidance on disaster preparedness among the EU's humanitarian partners, in close coordination with development and climate actors.
- Further develop and apply risk-informed approaches, including risk financing and scale up anticipatory action in different humanitarian contexts and regions.

**Objective:** *Ensure that humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, aiming at reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises.*

- Strengthen coordination mechanisms at field level across the EU's humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actions to ensure joined-up and coherent outcomes, with the support of EU Delegations and ECHO field offices. Work closely with the EU Member States in this framework in a Team Europe approach.
- Use the EU's political and diplomatic engagement and all the instruments available to prevent crises, resolve conflicts and build peace, while stepping up advocacy in support of humanitarian operations so as to facilitate access and respect for humanitarian principles, protection of civilians and international humanitarian law.

**Objective:** *Significantly increase the resource base for humanitarian action.*

- Recalling the EU's commitment to provide 0.7 % of gross national income as official development assistance, work with Member States towards stepped-up humanitarian funding commitments commensurate with the steep increase in recent years in humanitarian needs and requirements.
- Step up EU engagement with traditional and emerging donor countries to recall the shared responsibility to support humanitarian response and integrate it more systematically into the EU's political dialogue with relevant non-EU countries. Strengthen or forge alliances at the global level with like-minded countries to promote the global humanitarian agenda.

**Objective:** *Put compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) at the heart of EU external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers.*

- Consider including serious IHL violations as grounds for listing in EU sanctions regimes whenever appropriate while ensuring that any potential negative impact on humanitarian activities is avoided.
- Continue ensuring that IHL is fully reflected in EU sanctions policy including through the consistent inclusion of humanitarian exceptions in EU sanctions regimes. Work towards an effective framework for the use of such exceptions by humanitarian organisations receiving EU funding. Provide further practical support to humanitarian organisations with regard to their rights and responsibilities in the different EU sanctions regimes.

**Objective:** *Enhance the EU's engagement and leadership on humanitarian aid to maximise its impact.*

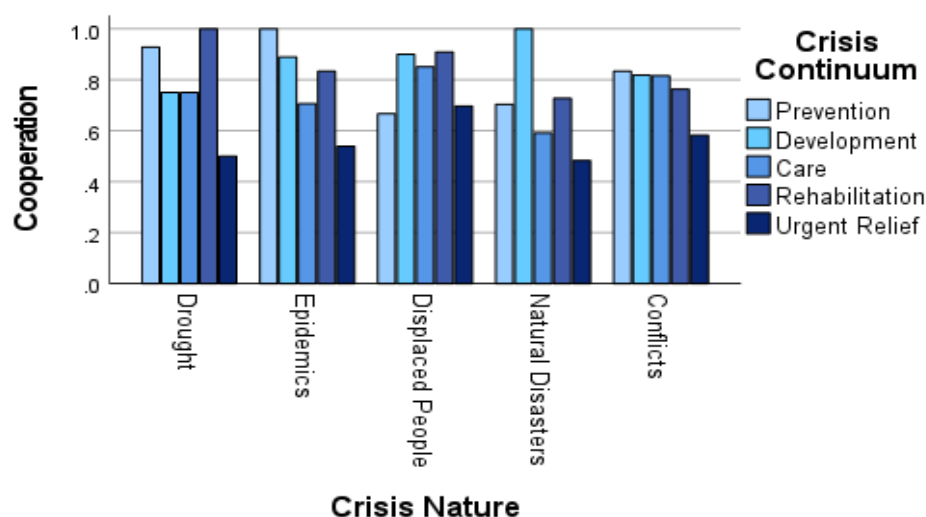
- Encourage common messages by the EU and its Member States on key humanitarian crises and encourage consolidated EU and Member States pledges at international humanitarian pledging events (alongside national ones) in a Team Europe approach. Strive to consolidate the EU and Member States' positions in relevant international and multilateral forums.
- Develop the option of use of external assigned revenue for EU Member States to avail themselves of the EU's humanitarian field presence and expertise.

## Annex III: Data analyses of EU donors' coordination

### Nexus implementation

Empirical evidence on humanitarian crises tackled by the EU and Member States corroborates the theoretical discussion on the relevance of the nexus implementation<sup>24</sup>. **Graph 1**<sup>25</sup> refers to 688 crisis scenarios over the last five years, subdividing them according to three characteristics: nature, continuum and cooperation. **Nature** indicates whether the humanitarian crisis refers to drought, epidemic, displaced people, natural disasters or conflicts. **Continuum** 'denote[s] the time clusters in which stimuli from the environment are conveyed by the communication network to decision-makers' (Brecher, 1977: 57) and distinguishes the specific humanitarian assistance needs using five categories: urgent relief; rehabilitation; care and maintenance; development; and prevention/preparedness. Finally, for any crisis, **cooperation** indicates whether the intervention has been undertaken jointly by the European Union and Member States or solely by single Member States. **Graph 1** helps understand if the intervention continuum could depend on the type of crisis and intervention cooperation. In other words, it displays in which crisis contexts (delineated by nature and continuum) the European Union is already directly engaged and in which scenarios the European Union's engagement and cooperation between EU donors still require strengthening. The analytical model provides information on the impact of single variables and their simultaneous presence.

**Graph 1: Impact of nature and cooperation<sup>26</sup> on continuum (2017-2021)**



<sup>24</sup> The UK is included until the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Authors have realised all graphs, tables and analyses; data on humanitarian crises are collected from the EU Global Needs Assessment, UNHCR, EM-DAT / CRED, Inform reports; data on EU and Member States' interventions from the EDRIS dataset (information found on the EDRIS dataset are encoded directly by Member States and the UK – until 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2021). Graph 1 is a clustered bar chart analysing the impact of crisis nature on cooperation, and the impact is clustered per categories of continuum (nominal variable).

<sup>26</sup> Cooperation is computed on a scale measuring the quantity of humanitarian aid (in EUR) compared to the total funding that EU donors allocate through centralised humanitarian actions and programs at the European institutions level. The higher this quantity, the higher cooperation.

Firstly, **Graph 1** shows the distribution of humanitarian interventions depending on the **nature of crises (and clustered according to the continuum categories)**, highlighting significant differences in cooperation between EU donors resulting from different crisis scenarios. Secondly, what emerges here is that humanitarian assistance devoted to urgent relief is much less the object of centralised intervention at EU level and more concerned with interventions of single Member States than any other continuum category. This applies to any crisis category and is somewhat surprising considering that humanitarian assistance is traditionally meant to provide urgent assistance to people in need. Put differently, the European Union often centralises and coordinates interventions aimed at prevention. This reaches 100 % in contexts of epidemics and very high percentages in case of drought and conflicts. More generally, interventions at EU level represent at least 50 % of all interventions for any category of continuum and nature. This indicates a very positive tendency for the EU's commitment to implement a humanitarian policy **linking short-term urgent relief operations with longer-term development action**.

Some considerations can also be drawn concerning the nature of crises. Two aspects are particularly relevant here. The **first** refers to **sustainability**, and stresses the focus on natural disasters. Sustainable interventions also mean preventing the onset of climate disasters and developing sustainable beneficiaries' structures and response systems. The **second** relates to the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach**.

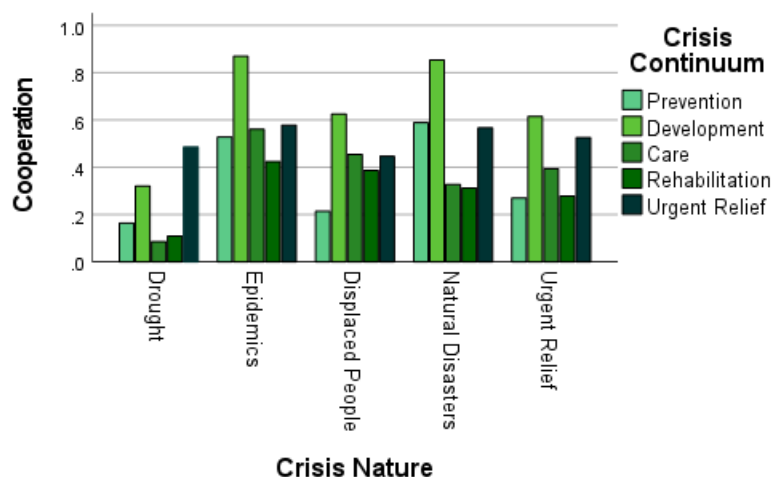
Regarding the first aspect, the graph indicates that the EU has directly engaged the most in prevention and development actions any time the crisis concerns natural disasters and drought (the two crisis nature categories most related to **sustainability and climatic changes**).

Regarding the second aspect, the **link between urgent humanitarianism and longer-term peace operations** shows a positive tendency. Accordingly, it seems that over the last five years urgent relief interventions are by far the continuum category where the EU intervenes less compared with Member States acting independently. However, conflicts and displaced people (the two crisis categories most related to and influenced by peace-building) are the crisis scenarios where EU interventions are more often centralised. The commitment level in longer-term peace operations is not always as high as in other crisis scenarios, such as natural disasters.

The main criticism here indeed refers to the high variability and volatility of cooperation. There are still numerous crisis scenarios in which the EU's presence is rare. It is certainly not possible to detect precise contexts where the direct intervention of single Member States seems preferable (e.g. for reasons of comparative advantages in the intervention). A possible interpretation is that, faced with similar intervention contexts in terms of crisis nature and intervention continuum, the donor, the timing and the modality differ considerably from one intervention to the other. A fostered strategy of harmonisation and division of labour between EU donors is necessary to guarantee a more coherent intervention strategy in specific crisis contexts.

**Graph 2** below makes a possible comparison with longitudinal perspective, considering trends over the past five years with a longer timeline of 2004-2021. This has two primary goals: firstly, estimating if results emerging in Graph 1 are due to specific conditions relative to the period (e.g. the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic may have significantly contributed to the 100 % intervention cooperation in the presence of epidemics) or remain constant in the longer run; and secondly, clarifying whether or not the new approach to humanitarian aid adopted after the Grand Bargain's signature has already produced some impact compared with the previous period.



**Graph 2: Impact of nature and cooperation on continuum (2017-2021)**

Several conclusions can be drawn. **Firstly**, the second graph shows a much lower tendency favouring cooperation at the EU level compared with the period 2017-2021. This applies to all crisis categories and generally also to continuum categories. This result suggests that the Grand Bargain guidelines regarding cooperation and coordination have been transposed and developed at EU humanitarian aid policy level. Accordingly, the number of interventions centralised at EU level was often significantly under 50 %. Drought is a case in point, given that the 50 % mark is not reached in any of the continuum categories. **Secondly**, urgent relief was not the category of continuum associated with the lowest level of cooperation, but rather this concerned the case of care and rehabilitation. **Thirdly**, development in the presence of epidemics was, even before the onset of COVID-19, the crisis scenario with the highest rate of cooperation between EU donors, followed closely by development in coping with natural disasters. **Fourthly**, the crisis category in which the EU has increased its commitment the most is drought, while the crisis continuum is prevention. This seems to support the EU's engagement in strengthening beneficiary countries' prevention systems and adopting sustainable actions to reduce climatic changes structural consequences (such as drought).

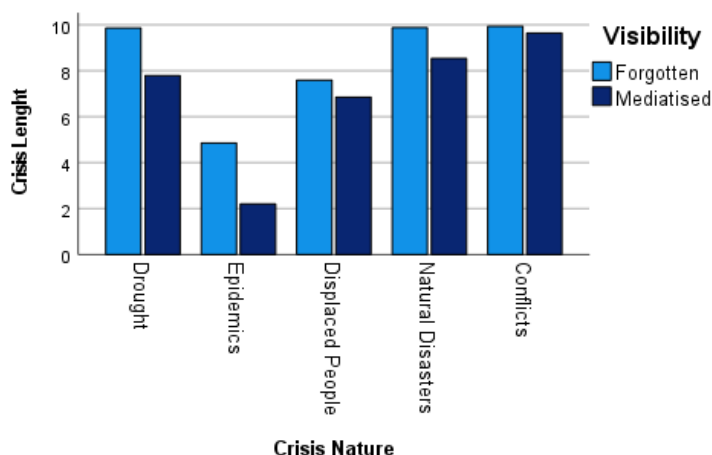
### Nexus: protracted crises and information/risk assessment

The relevance of nexus implementation is now analysed by considering the crucial role of key actions related to **risk assessment and information acquisition (particularly O3-AK1 and O3-AK2)**. Moreover, critical issues related to **protracted crises** are addressed. Analyses refer again to the humanitarian crises that the EU and Member States have tackled over the last five years. **Graph 3**<sup>27</sup> refers to 688 crisis scenarios over the last five years, subdividing them according to three characteristics: nature, visibility and length. Nature indicates whether the humanitarian crisis refers to drought, epidemic, displaced people, natural disasters or conflicts. Visibility distinguishes between 'mediatised' and forgotten crises (risk assessment and information acquisition). Length reveals the presence of protracted crises. **Graph 3** indicates if and to what extent visibility may depend on the type of crisis and its length. If so, it shows the extent of the dependency. Such an observation then identifies particularly complex crisis scenarios

<sup>27</sup> All graphs, tables and analyses; data on humanitarian crises are collected from the EU Global Needs Assessment, UNHCR, EM-DAT / CRED, Inform reports; data on EU and Member States' interventions from the EDRIS dataset (Information found on the EDRIS dataset are encoded directly by Member States and the UK – until 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2021). Graph 3 is a clustered bar chart.

challenging humanitarian interventions. The analytical model, other than including variables measuring length and nature, also considers their interaction to verify how the two conditions' simultaneous presence may impact crisis visibility and thus, in particular, the implementation of **O3-AK1 and O3-AK2**.

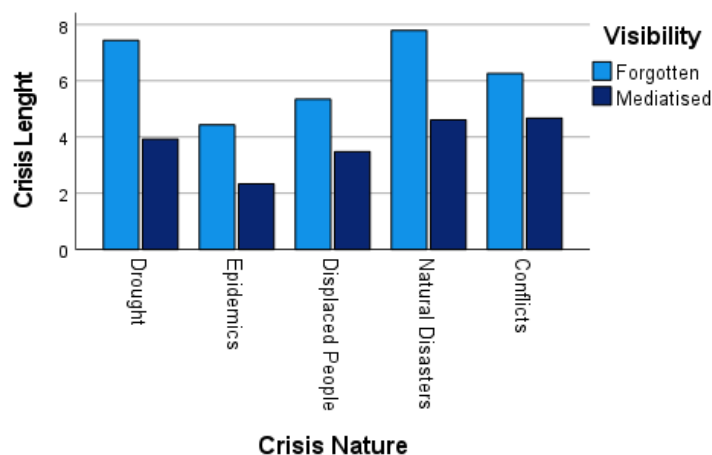
**Graph 3: impact of nature and length on visibility (2017-2021)**



**Graph 3** suggests that the longer a crisis persists (protracted crisis), the higher the risk of it being forgotten. This consideration applies to any crisis category. However, the trend is much more pronounced in epidemics, drought and natural disasters, while it tends to be less in cases of displaced people and conflicts. Two conclusions can be drawn. **Firstly**, the longer a crisis persists, the more significant is the increase in 'under mediatisation' risk, consequently making intervention and resolution more complex. The following longer-term solutions of care and maintenance or development of local capabilities and structural systems may reduce the fragility and vulnerability of beneficiaries to the outbreak of a new crisis. Humanitarian assistance must not lose its specific urgent relief connotation in favour of other longer-term policies, such as development, with the implementation of an urgent-development nexus. The latter must complement the former and not be a substitute for it. The risk is that a crisis may endure over time with the relative complications if the urgency of immediate humanitarian intervention is neglected. A **second** relevant element deduced from empirical evidence is that different crises impact mediatisation in various ways. In particular, it is clear that conflicts, displaced people and drought are generally less risky in terms of visibility than epidemics and natural disasters. More precisely, compared to conflicts, the risk of 'under mediatisation' of a crisis is seven times higher in contexts of epidemics. The result is that humanitarian crises, often highly related and producing severe impact, can more easily become structural and trigger a path dependency process. Hence, for the nexus to be effective, it must be implemented from the outset of crises to avoid them becoming structural and 'forgotten', which would make any subsequent intervention efforts to restore pre-crisis living conditions more costly and complex. This is especially true in the case of epidemics and natural disasters.

**Graph 4** below introduces an additional discussion element by providing the same analysis as **Graph 3** but from a longer-time perspective. The timeframe is the period 2004<sup>28</sup>-2021, to explore whether the last five years show a different tendency than the two previous decades, especially with regard to protracted crises.

<sup>28</sup> Since the EU's enlargement in 2004.

**Graph 4: impact of nature and length on visibility (2004-2021)**

The trend seems to be confirmed. In the longer run, crisis length still significantly and negatively influences the mediatization of a crisis and this applies to all crisis categories. In particular, regarding crisis length, its impact seems even more pronounced than in the previous five-year scenario. In other words, the more protracted a crisis, the less media attention it attracts. However, looking at the various crisis types, some differences emerge. More specifically, those more affected by under mediatization due to their long duration are drought and natural disasters, while epidemics, displaced people and conflicts are less influenced in this way. Indeed, this is much more pronounced than in the five-year scenario. What can be drawn from this is that analysing the opportunity to implement the nexus requires a longer-term perspective than just the last five years. If the period 2004-2021 is considered, the relevance of promoting urgent relief increases. The persistence of a crisis has to be avoided from the outset, while longer-term development interventions are undoubtedly welcome at a later stage and only after the essential humanitarian relief is guaranteed to people in need.

## EU leadership – Team Europe

The two following groups of graphs (**Graphs 5 and 6**) display the Team Europe (**O7-KA3 and O7-KA4**) strategy in practice. They show the extent to which the EU and Member States have cooperated in allocating humanitarian aid. Furthermore, they report analyses on cooperation between the EU and Member States for any possible crisis scenario referring to crisis type (**Objective 3 and 4**), visibility (**O3-AK1 and O3-AK2**), diffusion, severity and continuum of the intervention. For the period 2017-2021, **Graph 5** provides a detailed analytical overview of the crisis scenarios in which cooperation is still more critical and those in which a high degree of cooperation has already been achieved. **Graph 6** adopts a longitudinal perspective, displaying cooperation over a more extended period of time. Hence, comparing **Graph 5 and Graph 6** makes it possible to draw some conclusions on efforts undertaken over the last five years by the EU and Member States to strengthen cooperation and situations where additional efforts are required.

Ethiopia is a topical example of how different degrees and forms of cooperation can coexist in the same crisis scenario but vary depending on the specific characteristic of the crisis itself and the subsequent intervention. Firstly, Ethiopia was already in need of humanitarian assistance in 2004 (starting date of observations). Secondly, the country presents a very complex scenario involving long-lasting, constantly evolving and overlapping crises. For example, the conflict between the Federal Government and the Tigrayan Regional Security Forces makes it virtually impossible to find long-term peace and security, as clashes between governmental and insurrectionist forces break out very regularly. This general condition of instability unsettles the population producing internally displaced people and migrants, the vast majority of whom fled to neighbouring Sudan. DG ECHO estimates that, since November 2020, more than 68 000 people have crossed to Sudan. Moreover, additional crisis scenarios result from climatic and

natural disasters, such as locust infestations and extreme winter conditions. Furthermore, this long-lasting crisis significantly impacts the already fragile health and food structures. Hence, there are frequent food and nutrition shortages that lead to epidemics, such as cholera. Considering all the different humanitarian crises, it is reckoned that 20 % of the Ethiopian population requires external humanitarian assistance (DG ECHO, 2021a). The following table displays how the different humanitarian crises suffered by Ethiopia have been reported and encoded, analysing the EU and Member States' engagement in aid allocation.

**Table 3: Crises and interventions in Ethiopia (2004-2021)**

Year	Nature	Visibility	Diffusion	Severity	Continuum	Cooperation
2004-07	Conflict	Mediatised	Widespread	Low	Relief	Low/Medium
2008-10	Conflict	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Rehabilitation	Medium
2019-21	Conflict	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Rehabilitation	Medium
2004-11	Drought	Mediatised	Widespread	High	Multiple	Medium
2004-11	Drought	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Multiple	Low
2015	Drought	Mediatised	Circumscribed	Low	Relief	Medium
2005-08	Epidemics	Mediatised	Circumscribed	Low	Multiple	Medium
2013	Epidemics	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Development	Medium
2019-21	Epidemics	Mediatised	Widespread	High	Relief	High
2005	Displaced	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Relief	Low
2010	Displaced	Mediatised	Widespread	Low	Relief	Low
2005-08	Natural	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Relief	Low
2008-11	Natural	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Relief	High
2013	Natural	Mediatised	Circumscribed	Very Low	Development	Medium
2016	Natural	Mediatised	Circumscribed	Low	Multiple	Medium
2019	Natural	Mediatised	Circumscribed	High	Relief	High

Similar work has been undertaken for all the humanitarian crises worldwide since 2004, including details of EU and Member States' interventions. From the analysis of this data, relevant conclusions can be drawn regarding the EU and Member States' cooperative humanitarian efforts, as well as some criticism.

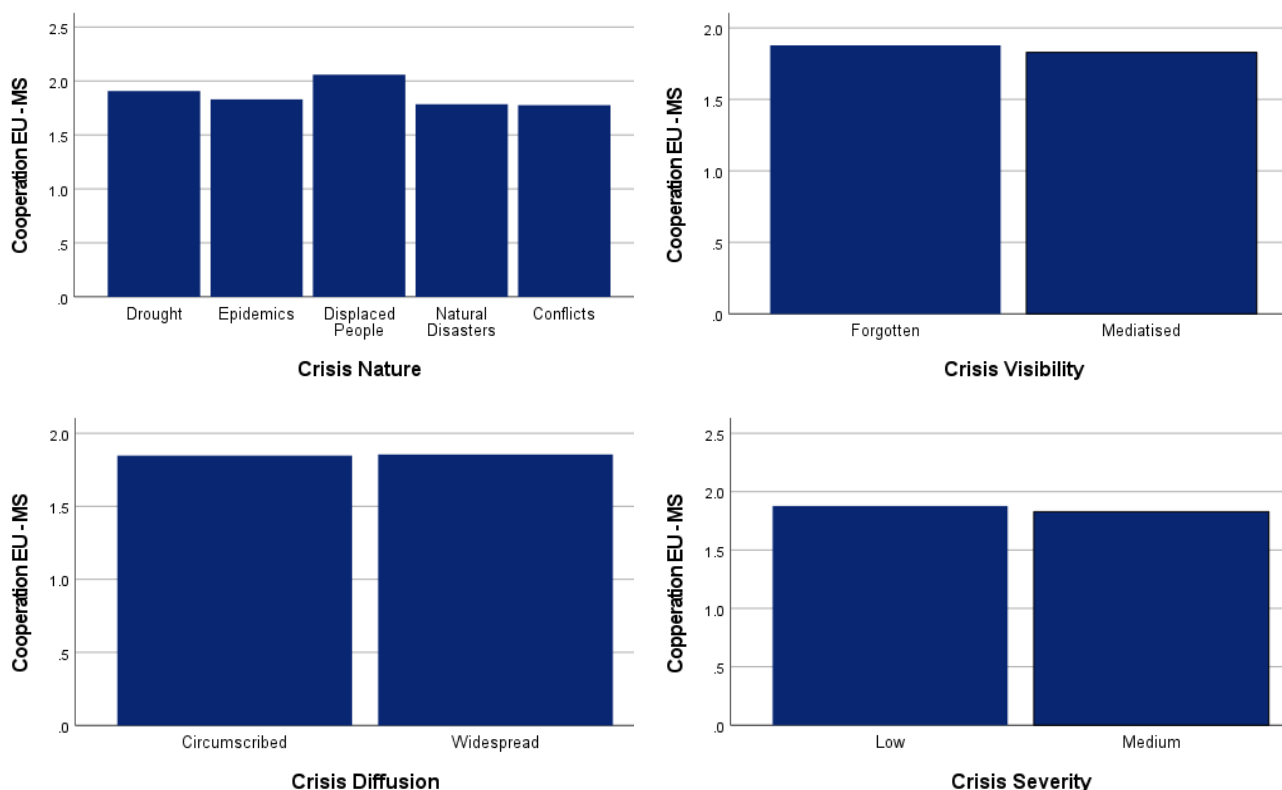
**Graph 5**<sup>29</sup> refers to 688 crises over the last five years and shows the EU and Member States' tendency to cooperate closely in allocating humanitarian aid, depending on specific characteristics of the crises

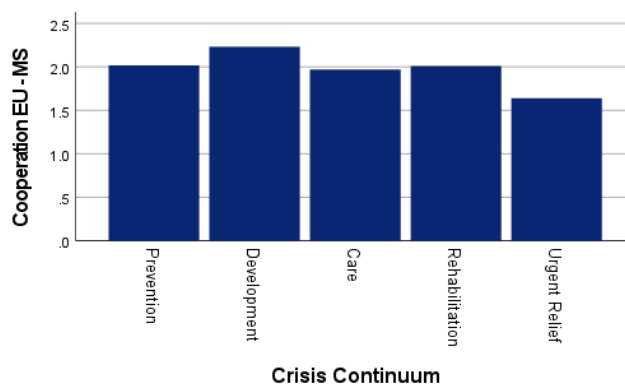
<sup>29</sup> Authors have realised all graphs, tables and analyses; data on humanitarian crises are collected from the EU Global Needs Assessment, UNHCR, EM-DAT / CRED, Inform reports; data on EU and Member States' interventions from the EDRIS dataset (Information found on the EDRIS dataset are encoded directly by Member States and the UK – until 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2021).

and/or the related humanitarian interventions. Concerning cooperation, ‘high’ is based on Member States’ preferences for delegation to the EU, while a low level excludes EU involvement and instead features direct crisis intervention by a single Member State. Between these extremes, there are different levels of partial delegation, where one or more Member States intervene in addition to centralised involvement at EU level.

Over the past five years, crisis diffusion does not seem to significantly influence the level of cooperation, so that, in general terms, the incidence of combined approaches to cooperation is relatively high. Seemingly, visibility shows a limited positive influence of forgotten crises on cooperation, thus indicating an effort by Member States and the EU to adopt a joint policy to tackle the problem of under mediatisation and possible negative consequences in terms of crisis duration and intervention effectiveness. A positive, albeit limited, impact is also reported in cases of severe crises. The criticality of particular crises indeed prompts EU actors to cooperate. More relevant is the influence of nature and continuum, at least across some of their dimensions. Notably, a crisis involving migrants and internally displaced people significantly favours cooperation. Over the past five years, displacement of people is thus perceived as a common problem more than any other crisis category. Finally, the same applies to continuum. An intervention aiming at developing beneficiaries’ structures and systems for a better and longer-term recovery is more often a joint policy. This is in line with the approach of linking urgent relief–development.

**Graph 5: Cooperation and nature, visibility, diffusion, severity and continuum (2017-2021)**





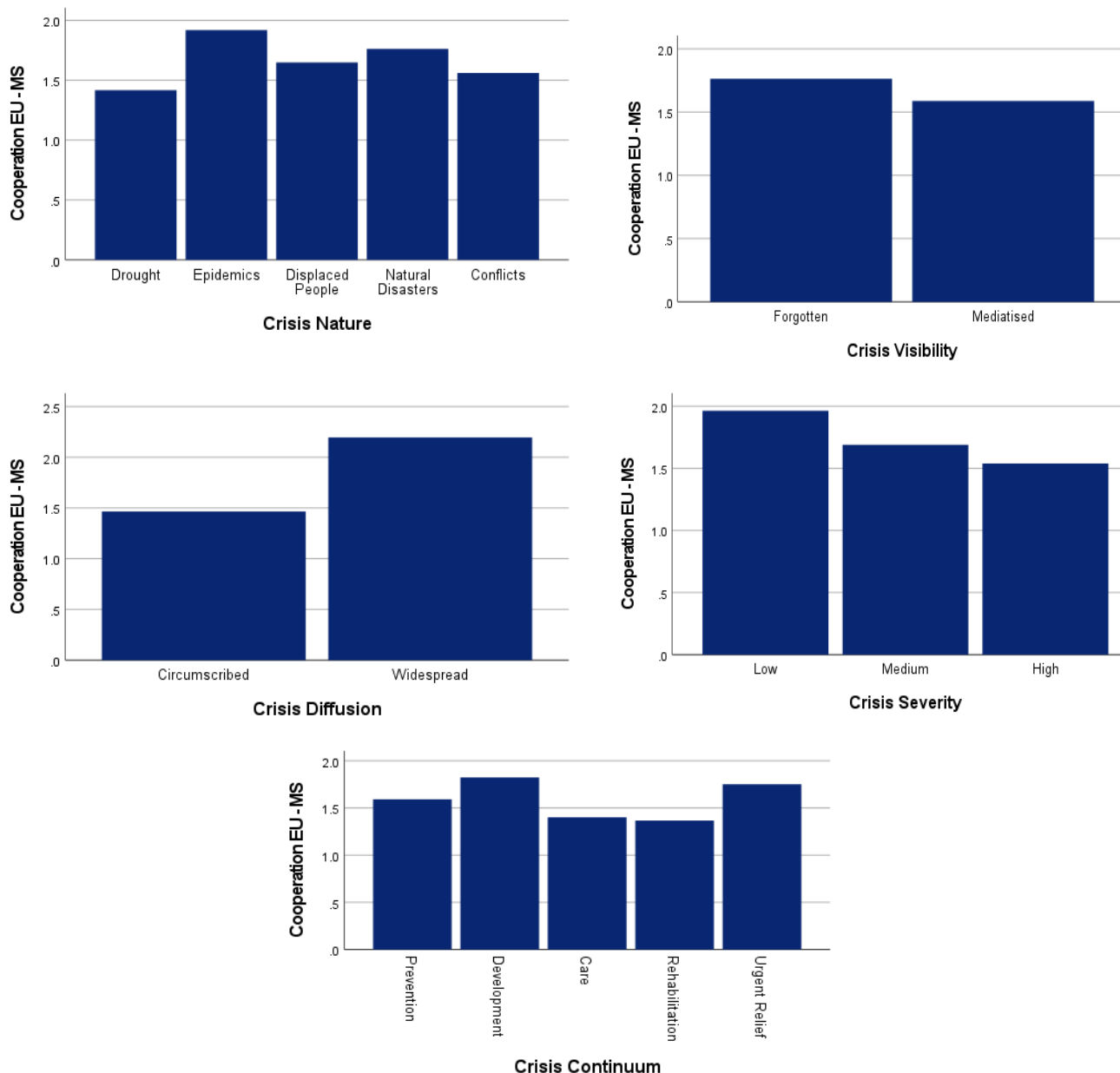
Of particular relevance here is the longer-term tendency in favour or against cooperation. Accordingly, **Graph 6** compares the last five years with the longer-term period 2004-2021, including 3 921 crises. Conclusions can thus be drawn about the goals achieved since 2017 to strengthen the **Team Europe** approach.

The first consideration is that all characteristics of the crises and/or the interventions have a bigger impact on cooperation over a longer period of time. Even visibility and diffusion, which are less significant, make a difference in the level of cooperation. Visibility, in particular, as in the five-year scenario, shows a tendency for cooperation higher in the case of forgotten crises than mediated ones. Conversely, diffusion indicates a much higher positive influence on cooperation when widespread crises are being tackled. In such cases, Member States relied upon EU humanitarian channels to implement interventions involving whole regions or crossing borders. In the long run, diffusion is thus perceived as a factor of crisis complexification, leading to a more joint approach. However, this tendency has been reducing over the past five years.

Interestingly, crisis severity gives rise to a different tendency. Between 2004-2021, cooperation was preferred in cases of low severity levels, while between 2017-2021 cooperation takes the lead in high severity scenarios. This seems to suggest a higher level of trust in EU channels' capacity to tackle severe crises than national tools. Crisis nature also produces different results. Here, the crises addressed by joint action at EU level are epidemics and natural disasters. Put differently, crises with high-security concerns and peace-building operations negatively influenced cooperation (Pusterla and Pusterla, 2017). This result corroborates EU efforts to implement the nexus approach over the past five years, strengthening cooperation to produce a humanitarian-development-peace linkage.



**Graph 6: Cooperation and nature, visibility, diffusion, severity, and continuum (2004-2021)**



The two groups of graphs show a tendency towards strengthening cooperation following objectives included in the Grand Bargain and the 2021 Commission Communication. Particularly significant is the positive impact of the nexus between humanitarian-development-peace and the approach linking urgent relief and long-term development goals. Nonetheless, the overall number of interventions undertaken jointly by the EU and Member States or entirely delegated to the EU is still low for many crisis scenarios. Moreover, the variability of choice in favour or against cooperation depending on the crisis characteristics remains very high. These results indicate that some work has to be done to foster cooperation from a Team Europe perspective. They also suggest that a greater harmonisation effort and a better division of labour should be a political priority for the EU to foster aid effectiveness, accountability and credibility regarding beneficiaries and implementing partners, potentially also from a multilateral perspective.

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