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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

Annual Report on the European Union's humanitarian aid operations financed in 2023

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Introduction

This report presents the Union's main activities and policy outcomes in 2023 in the field of humanitarian aid, as carried out through the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of the European Commission. It is prepared pursuant to Article 19 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aids, which requires the Commission to submit an annual report to the European Parliament and to the Council with a summary of the operations financed in the course of the preceding year.

The mandate of the DG ECHO is **to help save and preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering and safeguard the integrity and human dignity of populations affected by natural hazards or human-induced disasters** occurring inside or outside the EU. Under this common overarching objective, DG ECHO acts both as the EU humanitarian aid donor and emergency responder as well as a coordinator and facilitator of civil protection operations at EU level through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), which operates to a substantial degree outside of the EU to delivery rapidly emergency assistance and humanitarian aid in times of crisis and complements as such DG ECHO's humanitarian aid activities as described in this document. DG ECHO´s activities contribute to the realisation of the Commission´s political priorities of a stronger Europe in the world, a European Green Deal and promoting our European way of life.

The EU – through DG ECHO – provides humanitarian aid to people in need around the globe, based on the humanitarian principles **of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality** – anchored in Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – as well as in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid [(1)]. EU humanitarian aid is distributed to help those in the greatest need, irrespective of their nationality, religion, gender, ethnic origin or political affiliation. It shall also address specifically the needs as of women, children, the elderly, sick and disabled people[2].

The global context within which assistance is delivered

2023 saw significant humanitarian challenges due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the escalating situation in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine, the continuing strife in Sudan, or the protracted crises in the Sahel. The EU provided substantial support to Ukraine, with humanitarian aid operations totalling EUR 785 million since February 2022. Additionally, global food insecurity reached record levels in 2023, with five countries facing potential famine, and Palestine[3] experiencing the most severe food crisis in recent memory.

Profound challenges in the global humanitarian landscape due to protracted crises, climate change, unforeseen disasters, as well as disease outbreaks, have led to further **deterioration of the humanitarian situation** also in many other parts of the world, resulting in **unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs.** The latest United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Global Humanitarian Overview 2023 [(4)] estimated that 363.3 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection at the end of 2023, an 11.4% increase from 2022. However, funding failed to meet growing needs. The funding gap between humanitarian needs and available resources increased from a USD 18.3 billion shortfall in 2022 to a USD 27.7 billion deficit by the end of 2023 [(5)].

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(1) Joint Statement by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission (2008/C 25/01).

(2) In line with the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to which the EU is party.

(3) The designation of Palestine shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

(4) Global Humanitarian Overview 2023, December Update (Snapshot as of 31 December 2023) | OCHA (unocha.org)

(5) Global Humanitarian Overview 2022, December Update (Snapshot as of 31 December 2022) | OCHA (unocha.org)

Delivering humanitarian aid remains challenging due to **unpredictability, volatility and insecurity**, posing significant risks to humanitarian actors. Access restrictions hamper the delivery of humanitarian aid due to **restricted or denied access** to the people in need and complicates the implementation of necessary control measures, such as on-site monitoring and need assessments. Growing **violations of international humanitarian law (IHL)** further exacerbate the risks and complexities of providing humanitarian assistance.

Despite these **challenges**, The Commission **managed to reach its objectives**, in line with the priorities and key actions outlined in the Commission Communication on the EU's Humanitarian Action 'New challenges, same principles' adopted in March 2021[(6)]. The **EU remained a key global humanitarian donor**, providing humanitarian assistance in 114 countries [(7)] in a principled and needs-based manner, covering a 9.4% share of the total funding mobilised in the global humanitarian system [(8)]. The EU aims to ensure that funding is available to assist as many people in need in the greatest number of countries as possible, and that a swift, efficient and comprehensive response is provided. The DG ECHO field network (50 offices in 40 countries, with some 430 national and international staff) provides important support in this respect. The initial 2023 humanitarian budget was set at **EUR 1 643 million** [(9)]. Several budget reinforcements [(10)] were received throughout the year, originating from the following sources:

- Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (SEAR) to cover several crises, including Ukraine and the worldwide deterioration of food insecurity (EUR 579.3 million)
- Reassignments, reinforcements and redeployments from Heading VI instruments to address complexities of crises in Palestine, Armenia or Chad (EUR 69.7 million)
- Virement Aide Humanitaire (VAH - Art 30(2) Financial Regulation); allocated for Mauritania (EUR 2.7 million)
- External Assigned revenue from Member States (EUR 5.4 million).

The final **2023 humanitarian budget** amounted to **EUR 2 421.8 million**, enabling The Commission to intervene not only in large-scale humanitarian crises – such as Ukraine, Syria, Palestine or Sudan – but also in forgotten crises, allocating 17% [(11)] of its initial 2023 budget (EUR 286 million) to such crises [(12)]. Annex I presents the budget allocated to the main crises covered by the Commission´s actions in 2023.

The main actions in the different regions of the world can be summarised as follows:

- **Southeast Europe, Eastern Neighbourhood and Türkiye:** Humanitarian action in the region continued to be strongly marked by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, covering various sectors, including winterisation, cash assistance, protection, healthcare and education. The Commission allocated EUR 300 million in 2023 to Ukraine to address immediate humanitarian needs, reaching more than 17.6 million people in need. In addition, EUR 20 million were made available for emergency assistance to address the needs of Ukrainian refugees fled to Moldova, as well as the needs of their host communities. In Türkiye, the Commission provided EUR 78.2 million[13] to support both vulnerable refugees and the Turkish population affected by the two earthquakes of February 2023. Moreover, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) was successfully

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

[(7)] The evolution of the figure is partially due to a change of methodology, following the modifications in the UNFTS site.

[(8)] UN Financial Tracking System, Global Funding Overview Summary 2023

[(9)] This amount does not include support expenditure (BA lines). Including such expenditure, the initial amount for the whole instrument amounted to EUR 1 654.8 million in 2023

[(10)] On top of such reinforcements, EUR 121.7 million were mobilised from the operational reserve

[(11)] Compared to an initial budget of EUR 1 687 million which is the initial budget (EUR 1 643 million) plus the initial operational reserve (EUR 122 million, minus the Disaster Preparedness funds (EUR 78 million). The initial budget allocated to forgotten crises would represent a 17.5% of the budget mentioned above.

[(12)] i.e. those of severe and protracted character that do not attract media attention, and where the level of international aid to affected populations is insufficient, such as in Haiti or the Rohingya crisis.

[(13)] This amount includes funds from re-allocated funds, the Türkiye 2023 HIP and the Emergency Toolbox.

handed over from humanitarian to development funding under DG NEAR in July 2023, in line with the humanitarian-development nexus strategy.

- **East and Southern Africa:** The region continued to be marked by conflicts, population displacements, epidemics and extreme weather conditions (such as prolonged floods and droughts in the Greater Horn of Africa or the intense cyclonic season particularly in Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique). The significantly deteriorating humanitarian situation in many countries such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya), South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi or Mozambique, resulted in a generalised food insecurity situation and in a loss of livelihood. The Commission also mobilised additional resources to address the impact of the conflict in Sudan that started in April 2023, and generated the largest displacement crisis worldwide as well as a humanitarian crisis that impacts the wider region. The initial budget of EUR 330.7 million was increased to over EUR 595.02 million to address these and other pressing humanitarian needs in the region.
- **Middle East:** Following the terrorist attack on Israel of 7 October 2023, the ensuing conflict in Gaza and the resulting displacement of most of the Palestinian population residing in Gaza (1.7 million people), The Commission quadrupled its humanitarian assistance to Palestine to more than EUR 100 million[14], to address the most basic needs of Palestinians. The Commission continued also to address the needs of the population in Syria, which were further compounded by the earthquakes in February 2023, by providing more than EUR 182 million of assistance (i.e. delivery of food, medicine, clean water, emergency shelter, protection, and education in emergencies). In Jordan and Lebanon, over EUR 79 million were allocated to support Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities.
- **West and Central Africa:** Th Commission allocated over EUR 181.5 million of its initial budget to address food insecurity and malnutrition caused mainly by conflict, and multisectoral needs of internally displaced people, to ensure the transport of staff and goods and to support disaster preparedness in the Sahel countries, the Lake Chad Basin, North-West and South- West Cameroon, North-West Nigeria, and the Central African Republic. Reinforcements, especially to address food insecurity, were mobilised, resulting in a final budget for the region of over EUR 279.3 million.
- **North Africa, Iraq and the Arab Peninsula:** The Commission committed EUR 143 million to address the needs of conflict-affected displaced and refugee populations in North Africa (Libya, Egypt and Algeria – the Sahrawi refugees) and Iraq, and of those affected by conflict in Yemen, covering multi-sector assistance to areas such as water, sanitation and hygiene, food and nutrition, education in emergencies, healthcare – including mental health and psychological support, integrated protection response, legal assistance (civil documentation) and shelter interventions. Additional funding, mainly reinforcing the response to the conflict in Yemen, allowed to reach a final allocation of EUR 183.12 million for this region.
- **Asia and the Pacific:** The Commission allocated over EUR 258.59 million to the region in 2023, mainly targeting the increasing humanitarian needs of the population in Afghanistan (in particular the women and girls whose rights and opportunities were further restricted by the interim Taliban leadership) and addressing the growing humanitarian needs of the multi-faceted crisis in Myanmar, including forced displacement to neighbouring countries, mainly Bangladesh. Support was provided in Pakistan following the intense floods, and the needs arising from natural disasters as well as the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines were also addressed. The Commission addressed the humanitarian consequences of tropical cyclones and droughts affecting several Pacific islands.
- **Americas and the Caribbean:** The Commission's actions focused on providing relief

(14) Including EUR 92.5 million form the HIP and EUR 10 million mobilised through the EHRC.

to people affected by the internal and regional impact of the crisis in Venezuela, the armed conflict in Colombia, the complex crisis in Haiti, the pervasive organised violence in Central America, Mexico and Ecuador. The humanitarian needs of displaced people throughout the continent, the impact of natural and climatic disasters and acute food insecurity and malnutrition were addressed, and support for disaster preparedness was provided. The Commission initially allocated over EUR 81 million to the region which was increased to reach EUR 152.82 million at the end of the year.

The Commission works with **around 220 partners** (of which 118 were funded through contracts signed in 2023 – list included in Annex II). 45.9 % of the 2023 funding was distributed to Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs), 43.3% to UN agencies, 10.6% to international organisations and 0.2% to governmental organisations.

Delivery of adequate and effective humanitarian assistance to affected populations

To **champion multilateralism and a rules-based global order**, the Commission actively pursued its humanitarian advocacy and policy development at the European and global levels, working on the priorities defined in the Communication on the EU's humanitarian action [(15)]. Significant progress was made on the implementation of commitments taken under the **Grand Bargain** [(16)], notably on quality funding, cash and localisation. Contributions to Country-Based Pooled Funds [(17)] were continued to further promote localisation and less earmarked funding. A model for longer-term **Programmatic Partnerships** [(18)] was rolled out, supporting approaches of shared strategic interest with 12 new Programmatic Partnerships launched in 2023. Furthermore, the Commission advocated for a substantially enhanced humanitarian financing effort and a better sharing of responsibility among donors, including Member States. In this context, the Council of the EU in May 2023 adopted a voluntary target encouraging Member States and other donors to devote 0.07% of their Gross National Income to humanitarian assistance.

Regarding the **Humanitarian Logistics Policy** [(19)], the Commission continued to support the strategic, cross-cutting approach to the supply chain which was flagged in Council Conclusions (9282/23) [(20)] as key to closing the funding gap. An evaluation study finalised in 2023 [(21)] confirmed the value of this strategy and recommended that it continues. Training of humanitarian partners and promotion of good practices, high-level awareness-raising, and operational guidance (on humanitarian logistics) continued in 2023. The topic was also addressed at the European Humanitarian Forum (EHF) 2023.

The operational tools of the **European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC)** [(22)] continued to be developed in 2023, helping the Commission to support partners and facilitate humanitarian assistance, delivering humanitarian goods and transporting humanitarian workers to hard-to-reach areas where assistance could otherwise not be put in place. In 2023, the EHRC responded to 16 crises affecting 15 countries [(23)], allocating EUR 56.58 million for the development and deployment of the EHRC capacities and services. In particular:

- 85 EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flights reached nine countries and transported over 3 880 tonnes of humanitarian supplies.

(15) COM(2021)/110 final, see footnote 5.
(16) The Grand Bargain
(17) Ukraine, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Venezuela.
(18) Programmatic Partnerships.
(19) DG ECHO thematic policy document: Humanitarian logistics policy.
(20) Council conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap, 22 May 2023
(21) Evaluation of Humanitarian Logistics in the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid operations, 2018-2022
(22) DG ECHO: European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC) Factsheet.
(23) Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Egypt/Palestine, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Armenia, Nepal, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, Syria, Ukraine.

- EU Humanitarian Aid Flights in 7 countries transported over 490 tonnes and 19 400 humanitarian personnel.
- More than 840 tonnes from the EHRC stockpiles were donated to partners for a value of over EUR 4.4 million.

The Commission made full use of its **Emergency Toolbox,** composed of the Acute Large Emergency Response Tool (ALERT), Epidemics tool, Small-scale tool and Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), providing first line emergency humanitarian assistance amounting to EUR 44.5 million to unforeseen events around the world. Some examples of the allocation of funds are:

- The Small-scale tool was activated 18 times including the responses provided to: the Nova Kakhovka dam break in Ukraine, the cyclones which affected Vanuatu, Bangladesh, the Philippines, but also the floods in Libya, Haiti and Peru.
- ALERT was triggered 14 times for the immediate response to the floods which affected Pakistan, Somalia and Kenya, as well as for the response to the consequences of the tropical cyclones in Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi, Myanmar and Mexico and the earthquakes in Türkiye, Syria. Afghanistan, Morocco, Nepal and Ethiopia.
- The Epidemics tool was activated 8 times to support the response to Mpox in DRC, to Diphtheria in Nigeria, to Cholera in Malawi, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Sudan, and the fire affecting health facilities in Bangladesh.
- The Commission replenished 65 DREF operations implemented by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 50 countries, including in relation to the cholera in Africa, and to floods and earthquakes in northern Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Furthermore, in 2023 DG ECHO ensured policy application and development, providing recommendations to partners for high-quality, coherent, and accountable EU-funded humanitarian operations.

Amidst escalating conflicts, high food prices due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, economic shocks, and climatic events, the Commission allocated around EUR 670 million [(24)] to **food assistance, nutrition, and famine prevention**, with a total commitment of EUR 8.3 billion for 2021-2024 to support the Team Europe response tackling the global food crisis.

Health projects received EUR 334 million, supporting global health systems and providing life-saving medical care, with particular focus on epidemic prevention, preparedness and response, and mental health and psychological support and sexual and reproductive health (SHR).

DG ECHO maintained focus on **water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)** policies, striving to improve access to safe drinking water, equitable sanitation and hygiene services for people affected by humanitarian crises.

Systematic advocacy through public statements and interventions on **IHL** in multilateral fora and high-level events continued in 2023, covering topics such as humanitarian diplomacy, protection of humanitarian workers, urban warfare and improving compliance with IHL to safeguard humanitarian space. DG ECHO continued promoting dialogue between donors, regulators, local authorities, humanitarian operators and the private sector in order to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need. Furthermore, DG ECHO focused on strengthening the monitoring of IHL violations, inter alia, through strengthening the data collection and monitoring standards or reinforcing evidence-based advocacy. DG ECHO also launched a first project to provide for immediate, concrete and

[(24)] Higher than the average funding of EUR 530 million/year in the period 2019-2021.

tangible legal, medical and material support for the humanitarian workers victims of attacks.

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

The Commission allocated 15% of its financial envelope to **protection** activities, as the **focus on the most vulnerable** remained a key concern and priority due to the continued IHL breaches, the widespread risks and instances of violence. Gender and age, as well as the inclusion of persons with disabilities[25], were mainstreamed across all sectors of intervention, and all types of violence against children were systematically addressed. Attention to conflict-related sexual violence was increased in response to observations in several recent and ongoing crises. The Commission strengthened its activities calling for reinforced children protection, including advocacy, as well as outlined the specific needs of children associated with armed conflicts. The Commission actively engaged with the Global Protection Cluster and remained an active member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

The Commission continued to place emphasis on **education in emergencies (EiE)**, maintaining its commitment to invest in education at the ambitious level of 10% of the annual initial EU humanitarian aid budget. Accordingly, EUR 162 million were provided to support access to safe and quality learning to children and young adolescents affected by crises.

In order to reduce the carbon footprint and the environmental damage of humanitarian assistance, **minimum environmental requirements and recommendations** became mandatory in 2023 for all EU-funded aid operations [(26)]. New voluntary environmental indicators were also released in 2023 in order to help partners reflect the minimum environmental requirements in their projects. The EU also became the first financial supporter of the Secretariat to the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations (EUR 200 000).

The Commission continued also in 2023 to strengthen its support to disaster preparedness [(27)], promoting **multi-hazard preparedness and anticipatory action**. In addition, following the declaration of the 2023 EU-LAC summit acknowledging the importance of international cooperation in the area of disaster preparedness and disaster risk management, The Commission has been working on the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding to promote EU-LAC international cooperation activities on disaster preparedness and prevention, as well as to foster information sharing and training opportunities. In 2023, over EUR 78 million were allocated to targeted preparedness activities. 32.3% of EU-funded humanitarian operations included elements of disaster preparedness [(28)].

DG ECHO developed also in 2023 a mix of **communication activities**, aiming at maintaining a high level of public support and political backing of EU humanitarian aid, based on the narrative of EU solidarity. For instance, DG ECHO published a series of central and local press releases (in collaboration with humanitarian aid partners) and resumed its series of field visits with European journalists. DG ECHO ran in 2023 the **humanitarian aid campaign "Education, no matter what"**, which championed the right

[(25)] In line with the guidance note "The Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operation".
[(26)] guidance_on_the_operationalisation_of_the_mers_for_eu-funded_humanitarian_aid_operations.pdf (europa.eu).
[(27)] Implementing the approach adopted in 2021 (DG ECHO Guidance Note on Disaster Preparedness).
[(28)] This figure derives from a revised methodology, which solely relies on the reporting by the EU's Humanitarian Partners and may not include preparedness mainstreaming efforts in other sectors of operations.

to quality education for everyone, including in emergencies, and reached more than 29 million people in 14 Member States. As far as **digital media** is concerned, there has been an increase in social media channels' followers (+5.71%) and a significant rise in social media impressions (+26,4%), whilst DG ECHO's website reached the 2 million milestone in page views.

Review of any outside assessment conducted on specific operations

Commission evaluation services are responsible for steering, coordinating, monitoring and reporting of the evaluation function. They produce timely, high-quality evaluation results to ensure evidence for informed decision-making and accountability. The evaluations can be geographic, thematic or focused on a specific partnership. Annex III provides a list of evaluations completed in 2023 and of ongoing evaluations.

RELEVANT LINKS

- General information on DG ECHO:
  http://ec.europa.eu/echo/en
- Financial information on the European Commission's humanitarian aid activities in 2023:
  Financing decisions (HIPs) 2023 - European Commission (europa.eu)
- Operational information from previous years:
  European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations | European Commission (europa.eu)
- 2023 Annual Activity Report:
  DG ECHO AAR 2023 (europa.eu)
- 2023 Annual Management and Performance Report:
  Annual management and performance report 2023 - European Commission (europa.eu)
- DG ECHO evaluation reports:
  https://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/evaluations_en
- European Commission and Member States' humanitarian aid funding data:
  Home - European Commission (europa.eu)