

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation subject, purpose and timing

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the European Union's humanitarian interventions in Yemen and in Humanitarian Access (2015-2020). The purpose of this combined evaluation is to provide an independent assessment covering two distinct components over the period 2015 to 2020:

- Part A: a geographical component, focusing on the interventions of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (DG ECHO) in Yemen.
- Part B: a thematic component, focusing on humanitarian access approaches and activities at the global level – including Yemen as one of the country case studies.

The evaluation was carried out between January and September 2021.

Background

DG ECHO interventions in Yemen

A multilateral civil war has been raging since 2015 in Yemen between the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in control of the southern and eastern regions of the country, and the Houthi armed movement (also known as Ansar Allah), in control of the northern regions, along with their respective regional allies. The conflict has caused repeated violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), restricted access for principled humanitarian aid, massive displacements of populations, risk of famine, poverty and economic collapse, and the destruction of health and water infrastructures. As a result, in October 2020 Yemen ranked fourth out of 191 countries on DG ECHO's Index for Risk Management (INFORM). Yemen has been the "world's largest humanitarian crisis"¹ as 20.1 million Yemenis were food-insecure (two-thirds of the population), while 10 million were in acute need of food assistance.² A cholera outbreak affected over 1 million people in 2018. A whole generation of children, particularly girls, has been deprived of regular schooling, leaving them exposed to early marriage, child labour and recruitment into armed groups.

In response, DG ECHO committed EUR 558 million to the Yemen crisis between 2015 and 2020. As such, DG ECHO was the sixth biggest contributor of humanitarian assistance in Yemen over the period, providing approximately 4.7% of the total funding to the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan. DG ECHO's annual commitments increased from EUR 50 million in 2015 to EUR 119 million in 2020, with a peak of EUR 127,5 million in 2018, to respond to the intensification of the conflict and the sharp increase in the number of people in need.

DG ECHO aligned its funding on a two-pronged strategy (or 'two entry points'), aimed at addressing both the direct effects of armed conflict and displacements (corresponding to 75% of the budget), and the pre-existing and still expanding needs of Yemen in terms of nutrition, food insecurity, health, and epidemics. Over the period, 112 projects were implemented through 32 partners, the most important of which was the World Food Programme. Interventions focused on food assistance (40% of total budget), health (13%), WASH (11%), nutrition (8%), protection (8%) and coordination (6%).

¹ DG ECHO website https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/yemen_en

² OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan, Jun – Dec 2020

Challenges to humanitarian access and DG ECHO's response to date

Various constraints can limit humanitarian access for both personnel and affected communities. These are often human factors, rooted in broader political issues that are beyond the control of humanitarian organisations: active fighting, including attacks on humanitarian personnel and facilities, unexploded devices, administrative restrictions, political interference, violations or ignorance of humanitarian principles and IHL. Environmental challenges can also restrict access, including natural disasters or rainy seasons, combined with a lack of adequate transport infrastructure, damaged roads and bridges. These constraints often entail significant additional costs and delays, and sometimes reprogramming.

Mitigation measures include better communication and advocacy for humanitarian principles (strongly supported by DG ECHO), finding better ways to foster acceptance of IHL among all relevant groups and parties to a conflict, and sometimes, applying remote management with guidance for local implementing partners. In this context, close coordination, continuous capacity building in areas such as access negotiation skills, stringent security measures and humanitarian diplomacy are increasingly necessary. DG ECHO produced a set of related internal documents in 2017, notably an Advocacy Toolbox for its staff and various Advocacy Plans to be used as a strategy for facilitating access in the Central African Republic (CAR), DR Congo, Iraq, Mali, South Sudan and Ukraine.

Methodological approach

This evaluation followed a sequential process in four phases: (i) inception, for fine-tuning the evaluation design; (ii) desk phase, with collection and analysis of documentary data and information; (iii) field phase, to collect field-level information; and (iv) a synthesis phase, which included final analysis and the submission of end deliverables. Data collection (interview guidelines and surveys) and analysis were structured around a set of 15 evaluation questions (EQs) covering both components and were organised around a matrix table with evaluation or judgment criteria and indicators. The matrix inspired interview guidelines and surveys.

Seven country case studies assessed humanitarian access challenges: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen. Owing to COVID-19, field visits were conducted in Yemen only, carried out by national experts remotely supervised by international team members. The visits were completed by distance interviews and surveys addressed to the concerned DG ECHO staff, partners and external stakeholders. Despite important operational challenges, field visits were conducted in six governorates, in both north and south Yemen.

There was a relatively low response rate to the survey on humanitarian access from DG ECHO's field staff; however, the team remains confident that the most important challenges were identified and documented, ensuring the credibility and validity of the evaluation results.

Summary of findings about DG ECHO interventions in Yemen

Relevance

The DG ECHO strategy with two entry points was relevant and adapted to the operational context of Yemen. The strategy provided a clear and consistent message to its operational partners and other interested stakeholders regarding DG ECHO's operational priorities and approach.

DG ECHO's approach was flexible when facing changes in the operational context. The modification process of the annual financing decisions (Humanitarian Implementation Plans – HIP) generally worked well, providing additional funding for evolving situations or new challenges, such as the Hodeida blockade in 2018, the cholera outbreak in 2017 and COVID-19 in 2020. These features also enabled partners to respond well to evolving needs.

The overall DG ECHO response strategy was closely aligned to and coherent with that of OCHA (the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid) and the humanitarian community. This could be seen in the consistency between DG ECHO and the priority sectors in the UN Humanitarian Response Plans and Needs Overview reports, and their yearly evolution over the evaluation period. DG ECHO consistently supported OCHA's efforts through annual funding over the period.

DG ECHO's strategy encouraged cooperation (connectedness) with development actors and the strengthening of the Nexus process (which had slowed down in 2019 due to intensification of conflict and emergency needs), as well as limited resources and capacities. Every HIP outlined the priorities of DG INTPA (formerly DEVCO) and sometimes also the World Bank strategy for Yemen. Resilience and livelihoods were not part of DG ECHO strategy but had to be undertaken by development donors - with little practical results so far. Prospects of connectedness improved again in 2021 (see below).

DG ECHO consistently pushed for an evidence-based approach, supporting sectoral actors to utilise a variety of assessments undertaken either locally or nationally on which to base their interventions, despite the very difficult context, constraints of access and attempts at interference by some local actors. These assessments, although not perfect, were sufficiently accurate to identify the most vulnerable on a sectoral basis. DG ECHO strongly supported the inclusion of migrants in humanitarian interventions. There was however often limited gender-sensitive analysis; the Muhamasheen (a population group long discriminated against socially and economically and made more vulnerable by the destruction of cities), are still at an increased risk level.

Coherence

The interventions funded by DG ECHO in Yemen were fully coherent with the provisions of the Humanitarian Aid Regulation and the Consensus, as well as with the humanitarian principles and the advocacy for International Humanitarian Law.

The provisions of the various thematic policies were also generally applicable and applied in the context of Yemen, although a discrepancy was found in the policy approach on the use of cash for protection between DG ECHO and the lead agency of the Protection Cluster, UNHCR. According to DG ECHO's guidelines on protection, cash should be used in a targeted manner to support the reintegration of victims of violence and GBV, as a component of a comprehensive case management approach. UNHCR in Yemen does not apply case management for protection but provides multi-sectoral cash assistance to resolve what they perceive as a global protection threat.

Coordination, connectedness

DG ECHO consistently supported and advocated for the coordination of international actors in Yemen, as outlined in the HIPs. These efforts were mostly successful with the key EU and some non-EU humanitarian donors, as DG ECHO assumed an informal leadership position amongst them due to its dynamism, expertise and unique presence on the ground (see added value).

DG ECHO also strongly supported humanitarian coordination mechanisms through the annual funding of OCHA and some selected cluster co-lead agencies. This was only partly successful due to the inability of OCHA to ensure strong inter-cluster coordination, and the different "operating models" maintained by leading UN agencies.

DG ECHO was instrumental in launching the Nexus process for Yemen in 2019, together with INTPA. After a series of initial surveys, the process slowed down due to factors external to DG ECHO such as intensifying conflict, fragile governance, or limited in-country capacities. As a result, connectedness between humanitarian assistance and development actors implementing actions related to resilience is mostly absent in Yemen.

Livelihoods were not part of DG ECHO's strategy in Yemen over the period, for valid reasons of overwhelming emergency needs and limited funds and capacities. DG ECHO relied on development donors for livelihoods but the lack of thematic guidelines on this issue was also not conducive to connectedness.

Perspectives of connectedness progressed in 2021: concrete approaches were envisaged with INTPA in the HIP 2021, and the 3rd Senior Officials meeting (SOM) in June 2021 included a focus on coordination with the World Bank.

Among the clusters, tensions exist which are detrimental to coordination, such as on interoperability of databases in the food security/cash sector. Concerned UN agencies would have to adapt their own operating procedures and allow compatibility of databases while preserving data privacy/protection. To overcome this situation and support operational effectiveness, DG ECHO funded consortia distinct from the leading agencies of the clusters, such as the Cash Consortium for Yemen and the Camp Coordination - Camp Management (CCCM) consortium.

Added value

DG ECHO provided significant added value to the international humanitarian donors engaged in Yemen. For the other donors, mostly based in Amman, the main value came from (1) the field presence in both parts of Yemen, as the EU was perceived as neutral and DG ECHO was the only international donor to travel regularly in both parts of the country; (2) the information collected through this presence and readily shared with all other donors; (3) the expertise, knowledge and analysis of DG ECHO's team; (4) its ability to discuss both constructively and critically with the UN; and (5) its emphasis on a principled approach for delivering humanitarian aid. As a result, DG ECHO was considered as the *de facto* informal leader of the humanitarian donor group.

For the partners, DG ECHO's added value compared to other donors was found in its technical expertise and guidelines, as well as in its support and flexibility.

Effectiveness

To meet its strategic objectives, DG ECHO supported activities that were well aligned to the two-point entry strategy, as described in the HIPs. Under the first entry point, DG ECHO developed strategies to respond effectively and rapidly to frequent and massive displacements. The DG ECHO-supported humanitarian responses contributed to averting famine, which was consistently outlined as the largest risk by the international community and therefore perhaps represents its biggest concrete result; and bringing under control the largest ever recorded cholera outbreak. Pending the end of the conflict and economic recovery, famine remains a real risk. Funding towards ongoing general food distributions and support to the IPC (Integrated food security Phase Classification) monitoring process were crucial in this respect. DG ECHO also strongly supported the drive towards a more cash-based intervention (i.e. "multi-purpose cash assistance"). The integrated multi sectoral support also contributed well to the ongoing management of the humanitarian crisis.

The rapid response mechanism (RRM) was the main tool supported by DG ECHO to implement the first entry point in the two-pronged strategy, together with the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) modality. The RRM was progressively put in place with a phased sequencing, and beneficiaries appreciated this assistance which provided a much faster integrated response than the usual cluster programmes. The RRM proved effective: ongoing support for those registered was provided consistently and was generally of good quality.

In a difficult context, the timeliness of the RRM responses delivered to the newly displaced beneficiaries varied from adequate (although more than the hoped-for 72 hours) to significantly later (a few weeks), in the main part due to registration challenges following governmental

interference in the registration process. There was a gap, however, in terms of the provision of the follow up support to those identified, as linkages between the RRM and the relevant clusters were not yet fully established.

Populations displaced by the conflict can be sub-divided among the recently displaced for whom RRM is appropriate, and those who had to live in the same displacement location for much longer, sometimes up to seven years. For the latter, livelihood support is much needed to start a new, more sustainable life and/or to enhance resilience, although livelihood activities were not funded by DG ECHO during the period and resilience was undermined by the slow operationalisation of the Nexus approach.

For the second entry point of the strategy, the Integrated Famine Risk Reduction (IFRR) strategy was a good example of an integrated response for food, health, acute malnutrition (moderate and severe), and WASH activities. The integration of protection activities was difficult due to challenges by authorities, particularly in the north.

Within the integrated multi-sector approach, effectiveness was also found at the individual sector level, in particular in food security (between 6 million and 13.5 million beneficiaries reached over the evaluation period through in-kind food, cash or voucher support, improved food consumption scores, and the establishment of the IFRR framework); multi-purpose cash assistance (a total of 5.5 million beneficiaries reached in 2019 through the various delivery modalities, compared with 2.1 million in 2018); nutrition (Severe Acute Malnutrition cure rates were well above Sphere indicators); and health (integrated approach through health facilities, helping to address prevention and control of a cholera outbreak in 2017-2018). The sector of Education in Emergency was implemented at a limited scale compared to needs, due to a lack of partner capacities.

Effectiveness was enhanced by DG ECHO support to cross-sectoral activities including procurement of items such as health and hygiene emergency. The DG ECHO support to interoperability is gradually gaining in effectiveness (see coordination above).

The needs, however, remain huge, and not every beneficiary received the full amount of multi-sector support they required. Programmatic implementation faced numerous challenges in an extremely volatile and complicated operational context. DG ECHO partners remained organised yet flexible and adapted to local authorities' and operational vagaries wherever possible. Coverage levels of beneficiaries was difficult to fully assess due to difficulties of monitoring programmatic progress and the lack of complete data.

Advocacy

High level advocacy and communication efforts by DG ECHO were consistent, highly proactive and partly successful. They were conducted throughout the evaluation period, and since 2017 through participation in the Donor Coordination Group, which resulted in senior management visits to all parties and in humanitarian demarches delivered by EU Delegations. These activities contributed to the perceived neutral position of the EU in Yemen and to DG ECHO's continued presence in both parts of the country. As of 2020, DG ECHO was instrumental in helping to launch, co-host and support the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) process, which is currently leading the coordinated humanitarian diplomacy efforts of the international community to improve access and humanitarian space in Yemen. The SOM has outlined seven key priorities or "asks" towards authorities, the progress of which are monitored by the Technical Monitoring group (TMG). Positive results of this approach were registered for instance in the dropping of a 2% tax on humanitarian aid or the increased acceptance of sub-agreements with partners and biometric registration of beneficiaries.

At the operational level, DG ECHO's efforts in advocacy among the international humanitarian community consistently supported the good practice of a principled approach. This was partly

successful due to the lack of respect for humanitarian principles and IHL by the parties in conflict. DG ECHO's advocacy succeeded however on specific issues such as providing the migrants with humanitarian assistance, contributing to setting up the IFRR for integrated response to food security, influencing the CCCM Cluster into following an area-based model, and outlining the need for greater transparency against fraud. Advocacy efforts are still ongoing to try fill in other key operational gaps, including better integration between RRM and standard humanitarian programming, interoperability, harmonised cash approach, or linkages with development donors for resilience.

DG ECHO consistently supported mandated agencies such as OCHA for overall coordination and advocacy, and ICRC regarding the respect for IHL. Specialised advocacy partners such as OHCRC and Geneva Call were also funded. These efforts were also partly successful, due to the weakness of OCHA, the disregard of parties for IHL, and the lack of sustainability of some activities (such as one-shot trainings or media events).

Efficiency and Cost effectiveness

DG ECHO was open with partners and timely discussions took place; in this respect, its regular field visits were clearly valuable. DG ECHO was flexible in terms of granting no cost extensions when programmatic delays occurred, or reallocating project funding to respond to immediate needs related to rapid onset disasters such as floods and new displacements. The single form modification request process was rather lengthy when it involved top-ups; however, partners considered this to be quicker than submitting a new proposal.

DG ECHO was a demanding donor, with high expectations in terms of standards that contributed to ensuring the cost-effectiveness of the partners. DG ECHO's monitoring and assessments of the activities, and its firmness regarding the respect of sectoral policy guidelines, pushed the partners to improve their approach. Overall, DG ECHO's rigour was balanced with enough flexibility to ensure that the activities could be modified in a timely manner depending on circumstances. DG ECHO's field and technical knowledge allowed them to understand operational constraints and therefore to accept or suggest modification of activities when necessary.

Considerations of cost-effectiveness were integrated at all relevant levels, from funding decisions to project approval process. Overall, the HIPs contributed to the cost-effective use of resources by ensuring that DG ECHO funded interventions aimed at addressing the most acute needs first, not being redundant, and integrating in their designs adequate mechanisms and measures to adapt to the changing security and access constraints. DG ECHO also introduced a simplified interim report after a period of 4 months which allowed the partners to use this deadline to leverage against constraints to access and negotiate their alleviation with the authorities, subject to modifications of the interventions.

The efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the interventions were systematically analysed by DG ECHO when selecting the interventions, based on some key criteria such as distribution of costs, delivery modalities, coherence and experience. This led to the rejection or revision of several proposals which were not deemed sufficiently cost effective.

Providing clear-cut evidence of the impact on cost-effectiveness proved difficult as it was often not directly observable. Illustrations were found in the fact that preferred delivery modalities contributed to cost-effectiveness. Using the RRM as an entry point for multi-purpose cash assistance was cost effective as it avoided duplication of identification and targeting activities. A measure of cost effectiveness could be found in the fact that all sectors, except protection and shelter, achieved lower cost per beneficiary on average than initially planned. As stated above, DG ECHO's interventions contributed also to reducing administrative delays in obtaining work agreements from the authorities. The extent to which this was achieved could be partly measured

by the surveys: most respondents confirmed that DG ECHO's efforts resulted in limiting administrative delays (55%) and extra costs for the partners (63%), and in maintaining the programming as it was initially planned (75%).

Budget

DG ECHO provided a significant budget to respond to the Yemen crisis, especially from 2018 onward when the humanitarian situation worsened following the Hodeida blockade. Overall, the budget was sufficient for DG ECHO to achieve its main objectives of contributing to respond to the most acute and urgent needs. Allocating over 75% of the funding to entry point 1 (i.e. assistance to population directly affected by conflicts and displacements) allowed for significant contributions to key sectors such as food assistance, health, WASH and protection, with tangible results. Sufficient budget was also available at the sector level to make significant contributions in terms of horizontal objectives of humanitarian aid coordination and advocacy for a principled approach.

The mechanisms guiding budget allocation ensured a certain degree of objectivity regarding DG ECHO's funding of humanitarian crises. The budget allocation relied on several criteria including thorough needs assessments, overall funding of the response and operational capacities. However, DG ECHO's budget remained modest in comparison to the needs of the "world's worst humanitarian crisis". Using the amount of funding per person in need (which admittedly omits other important factors guiding DG ECHO's budget allocation), the Yemen crisis appeared to receive relatively low funding per person in need in comparison to other crises, such as Syria. Moreover, the amount of funding per person in need did not increase as much as for other crises over time.

Summary of findings on global humanitarian access

Relevance

In all case studies, the annual HIPs appropriately described the situations, including the access constraints faced by DG ECHO and its partners, and the consequences for the most vulnerable beneficiaries. The mapping of access constraints outlined that human factors such as insecurity, lack of acceptance of humanitarian principles and interferences obstructed access more often than the physical environment. This confirmed the relevance of DG ECHO's overall focus on supporting advocacy and promoting understanding of humanitarian principles and IHL among all parties.

However, access was not usually a HIP priority, except for air transport services (such as ECHO Flight or UNHAS) which were often crucial for humanitarian staff and emergency supplies. Logistics were not generally discussed in the HIPs. To face access constraints, the HIPs recommended standard activities such as joint advocacy, coordination, references to thematic policy guidelines (in particular protection) and support to specialised actors such as OCHA and WFP. Widespread training on negotiation skills for access, systematic support to Humanitarian Access Working Groups to design access strategies and action plans, or the possibility of exceptional measures such as air bridges, were usually not mentioned in the HIPs. In case of exceptional needs, DG ECHO allocated some HIP modifications specifically designed to fund (among other priorities) additional logistical resources to overcome access constraints, for instance in CAR (2020), Nigeria (2018), South Sudan (2020) and Yemen (2018, 2020).

Humanitarian access was also not mentioned among the Key Outcome Indicators and Key Results Indicators used by the DG ECHO partners in their reporting.

Coherence

In all country case studies, DG ECHO consistently supported the relevant international coordination mechanisms, even in cases where these were still incipient such as in Venezuela. DG ECHO was fully aligned with international policies on humanitarian access. The approach also consistently supported the partners in facing access challenges. At the EU level, proactive initiatives by EU institutions on respect of IHL in international fora and at country level were listed in the EU IHL report, which was officially authored by the COJUR (Working Party on Public International Law). EU humanitarian diplomacy efforts were coordinated between the decision centres of Brussels, Geneva and New York, although this structure could be further strengthened. Diplomacy was also impacted by COVID-19.

OCHA, the main international actor in humanitarian coordination and as such consistently supported by DG ECHO, was not strengthened by UN reforms and sometimes appeared to lack capacities. In Yemen, for instance, the Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG), co-chaired by OCHA, was impacted by poor coordination, unclear reporting structures and conflicts of personalities. The HAWG was not able to operate effectively for most of the reporting period. OCHA launched new efforts in 2021 to strengthen decentralised presence and expertise on the ground.

Civil-military coordination (CMCoord), which was part of the access strategies of the international humanitarian community under the supervision of OCHA, was decentralised to Istanbul by the UN reforms and also lacked support and field presence. CMCoord was not mentioned as such among DG ECHO assessed HIPs and Advocacy Plans; it was found in an annex to the Advocacy Toolbox.

In all country case studies, the approaches to access by DG ECHO and its partners were always carried out in accordance with humanitarian principles, despite heavy challenges. Humanitarian principles were ignored or poorly understood by parties in conflict in every case study.

Principled humanitarian aid delivery was a cornerstone of DG ECHO's overall approach. Respect of, and advocacy for, humanitarian principles were duly outlined in every country strategy of DG ECHO. In all country case studies, DG ECHO and its partners were dedicated to the principled approach and deployed continuous efforts to sensitise actors at all levels. There was no evidence of any divergence or doubt about the relevance of this policy to be found from any partner in all the reviewed case studies.

Effectiveness

Approaches followed by DG ECHO to address access constraints included an Advocacy Toolbox, various Advocacy Plans, and humanitarian diplomacy (see above). The Toolbox was developed in 2017 by DG ECHO to provide guidance and support to the staff on how to implement operational access decisions, but it was still not well known or used. The Toolbox was also rather synthetic and proposed a "top-down" approach by involving concerned EU or international institutions and initiatives. It did not address the capacities and skills of field actors in helping to alleviate obstacles to access; a potentially complementary "bottom-up" strategy for frontline negotiations was recently published by a specialised actor.

A limited number of Advocacy Plans to facilitate access were drafted by DG ECHO as from 2017; their relevance varied, as some appeared rather confused (CAR), while most others were (logically) designed to be applied only to a specific context (Iraq, South Sudan, Ukraine). The advocacy plan designed for Mali could be considered a replicable template for good practice.

In all case studies DG ECHO contributed to humanitarian diplomacy under various forms such as joint EU messages, donors' groups or high-level field visits, as a key tool to broaden humanitarian space and access. A caveat was found in Syria, where DG ECHO's approach had to be integrated as a component of the overall EU policy, which did not facilitate humanitarian access. Senior Official Meetings were co-led by DG ECHO (with Sweden) in Yemen after the deterioration of the

access situation on the ground in 2019 and the increasingly centralised and rigid control exercised in the north by the Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (SCMCHA). The SOM process in Yemen and the monitoring of progress by the TMG delivered some positive results and could be considered as examples of good practice. In most other case studies however, advocacy efforts often delivered meagre results.

Overall, the effectiveness of DG ECHO's approaches and activities to improve humanitarian access was significant in maintaining activities as originally planned. Effectiveness was much more limited against political interference or in trying to make local actors accept a principled approach. On average only 10% of the DG ECHO respondents and 8% of the partners found the approaches and activities implemented against access constraints "very effective".

Efforts to overcome access constraints were, however, strong. Among the country case studies DG ECHO consistently supported the partners in implementing mitigation strategies adapted to the context, while facing numerous access challenges often due to combined factors of insecurity, administrative hassle, poor acceptance of principles, natural barriers and, recently, COVID-19.

Some results were achieved by focusing on specific approaches, such as in Yemen (high level advocacy), Afghanistan (training in access negotiation) or Venezuela (standard operating procedures); but much remains to be done.

Major negative effects of access constraints were still felt in terms of reduction of quantities of aid, delays and protection risks for the population served; the numbers of planned beneficiaries had sometimes to be reduced despite strategies aiming to maintain numbers while reducing quantities per head. However, highly valuable lessons were also learnt, such as the need to develop positive working relations with local actors, risk analysis and prevention before access problems occur, and the fact that access cannot be separated from security and logistics. Potential examples of good practices were captured in terms of mapping, coordination, assigned staff to access tasks, or training tools and modules for access negotiations. These lessons and practices are generally comparable among country case studies but often remain fragmented in practice; streamlining, capitalising and systematic dissemination were lacking, which was not conducive to overall effectiveness.

Within this context, localisation, which may contribute to effectiveness through increased sustainability, was still a matter of strategic debate and a challenge in Yemen – and elsewhere – considering risks of interference and low capacities. Localisation was an element of the Grand Bargain supported globally by DG ECHO but would need to be addressed gradually in the country, as most local organisations were reported by operating partners as being in need of a great deal of training and capacity building on humanitarian principles.

Efficiency / Cost-effectiveness

DG ECHO's engagement in high-level advocacy activities for humanitarian access sometimes contributed to the cost-effectiveness of the response of all humanitarian actors, such as the end of the 2% levy imposed in northern Yemen which was one of the SOM priority requests.

At the project level, the partners' needs in terms of costs related to access were not part of the strategic design; these costs were mostly supposed to be already integrated in the activities proposed by the partner and validated by DG ECHO through agreements if they corresponded to the HIP requirements. Costs related to access advisers or training were sometimes challenged by DG ECHO.

DG ECHO's support to overcome access constraints contributed however to a significant extent to the cost-effectiveness of the interventions. 60% of the survey respondents from both DG ECHO

and the partners considered that DG ECHO contributed to limiting the extra costs due to access constraints. Views were more mixed regarding the effect on cutting administrative delays: 55% of DG ECHO staff, but only 38% of the partners, agreed this was the case.

Overall, DG ECHO's flexibility in implementation was conducive to efficiency. DG ECHO was flexible enough to adapt its management to the constraints faced by the partners, notably by simplifying administrative requirements, which helped the partners to mitigate the effects of humanitarian access constraints. However, survey respondents from both DG ECHO and the partners also stressed that additional flexibility and agility – notably in terms of timing to grant no-cost extensions and funding support costs – would further reduce delays and facilitate the implementation of funded actions.

As access constraints often take a similar shape across different situations, there was a lack of dissemination and sharing of lessons learnt, and a lack of systematic reinforcement of capacities regarding access negotiation for DG staff, the partners and affected community leaders. Some partners highlighted the need to develop their capacity to deal with access challenges at the local level, notably because negotiations at a higher level did not automatically translate in the field.

Added value

The added value of DG ECHO in terms of humanitarian access in the field was quite high in all case studies. Added value was in particular to be found in the field presence and expertise of DG ECHO staff, the upholding of the principled approach, the wide network of partners and the support provided to coordination mechanisms.

The added value of the EU versus the member states depended on the context. Overall, the EU was often weak politically, although that situation also made the EU more credible as a neutral humanitarian stakeholder, with access to all parties. In that context, the diversity of the member states could also be an asset to facilitate access negotiations in some countries, depending on historical relations.

Summary of conclusions and recommendations on DG ECHO interventions in Yemen

A concise summary of the conclusions and recommendations is presented below. The complete versions are listed at the end of this report.

Overall assessment on Yemen

Faced with overwhelming emergency needs, a highly complex political context, strong access challenges, a lack of resilience linkages with development donors and limited resources, DG ECHO performed as effectively and efficiently as practically feasible in Yemen over the evaluation period. The strategy was relevant and adapted, and DG ECHO's field presence, high technical expertise and proactivity in advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy efforts ensured DG ECHO a de facto informal leadership role among concerned humanitarian donors. Results were clear in contributing to avoid famine, bringing cholera under control and responding to the multi-sectoral priority needs of displaced people. However, limited early recovery and development programmes to support transition as well as weak links between emergency and longer-term aid (i.e. "humanitarian-development Nexus") limited resilience at community level.

Specific conclusions on Yemen

On strategy

Conclusion CY1: in a context of overwhelming emergencies, DG ECHO's two entry point strategy, focusing on immediate needs and key pre-existing concerns further aggravated by the conflict, was relevant and adaptable to the operational context of Yemen, and was well aligned with the overall strategy of the humanitarian community.

On connectedness and Nexus

Conclusion CY2: despite DG ECHO's efforts, the humanitarian-development Nexus lost momentum between 2019 and 2021. This delayed connectedness with community level resilience and livelihood activities by development actors, which would benefit those displaced in the medium to long term.

On added value

Conclusion CY3: DG ECHO provided significant added value to the international humanitarian donor community engaged in Yemen. This was due to its unanimously recognised expertise based on a unique field presence in both parts of Yemen; its highly knowledgeable and proactive staff; the perception of neutrality of the EU; and its ability to discuss both constructively and critically with the UN. As a result, DG ECHO was the *de facto* (although informal) leader of the humanitarian donors' group for Yemen.

On coordination

Conclusion CY4: DG ECHO consistently supported international coordination mechanisms and integrated approaches including through consortia. It advocated for the strengthened presence on the ground of OCHA, which lacked both human and financial resources.

On effectiveness

Conclusion CY5: overall, DG ECHO and its partners were effective at the operational level in Yemen. They contributed to significant results such as avoiding famine (to date), bringing under control a cholera outbreak and avoiding similar large-scale outbreaks, in addition to providing emergency assistance to the displaced, and supporting health and education services. These results were achieved through the promotion of integrated, area-based multi-sectoral interventions that followed a principled and evidence-based approach. This approach was applied under each of the two strategic entry points, such as through the Rapid Response Mechanism, and effectively targeted support to the most vulnerable whenever possible, although there was a gap in gender needs assessments.

On advocacy

Conclusions CY6: the advocacy efforts of DG ECHO at all levels to promote a principled approach and overcome challenges to humanitarian space were consistent and very proactive, but only partly successful given the lack of respect for humanitarian principles and IHL by the parties to the conflict. At the higher level in particular, the co-chairing by DG ECHO of the Senior Official Meetings process combined with TMG monitoring positively contributed to improving humanitarian space in Yemen and provided an example of good practice in humanitarian diplomacy.

As a service of the neutrally perceived EU, DG ECHO was present in the field although, since 2019, no longer always at the proper senior level that would be required to enter into overall/strategic discussions with increasingly assertive local political decision-makers.

On cost-effectiveness

Conclusions CY7: DG ECHO's consistent attention to cost-effectiveness throughout project implementation - from the selection of experienced partners to the combination of high standards and adequate support when monitoring interventions - contributed to maintain a cost-effective response, given access constraints and the difficult context.

On budget

Conclusions CY8: while DG ECHO provided a significant budget to respond to the Yemen crisis, ensuring it could contribute to meeting the most acute and urgent priority needs, the level of funding was low in comparison to the needs of the "world's worst humanitarian crisis".

Recommendations on Yemen

There are five summary strategic recommendations below, as foreseen in the ToR. The complete recommendations appear at the end of this report.

On Nexus and resilience

Recommendation RY1: pursue efforts in revitalising the Nexus process and expand it beyond EU institutions, with the main objective of operationalising resilience building.

On adapting the strategy

Recommendation RY2: advocate with development donors to include in their resilience and livelihood programmes (1) the needs of longer-term internally displaced persons – which need to be better distinguished under the first entry point of DG ECHO strategy, and (2) considerations on the specific needs of the Muhamasheen, which should be highlighted under the second entry point of the strategy.

On humanitarian diplomacy and field presence

Recommendation RY3: strengthen DG ECHO's field presence with (1) a scheduled agenda of senior management visits to discuss at high level with local decision-makers the strategic broadening of humanitarian space, and (2) supporting as needed the establishment of other interested humanitarian donors in Sana'a.

On advocacy

Recommendation RY4: further advocate among donors, OCHA and the clusters on key issues concerning operations (interoperability, handover of RRM, resilience), **programming** (Muhamasheen, Mahram regulation in TMG monitoring) and **resourcing** on behalf of OCHA.

On sectoral improvements

Recommendation RY5: **elaborate or update thematic guidelines** as appropriate (livelihoods to optimise connectedness and resilience, cash for protection); **increase focus on capacity development** to prepare for localisation, and improve gender needs assessment, RRM timeliness, nutrition for adolescent girls and mental health/psychological support interventions.

Summary of conclusions and recommendations on global humanitarian access

Overall assessment on humanitarian access

The efforts made by DG ECHO to address the constraints to humanitarian access were consistent at the higher level. In all case studies, DG ECHO supported the relevant international coordination mechanisms and aligned its strategy with international policies on humanitarian access. DG ECHO also strongly supported humanitarian diplomacy as a key tool to broaden access, with some positive results. At the programming and operational levels, however, the tools to be used by DG ECHO staff and partners were not sufficiently adapted: annual HIPs described access constraints but did not appropriately translate them into programming priorities; a few advocacy plans and an advocacy toolbox were prepared but were little used and need to be upgraded with valuable lessons learnt. Furthermore, UN OCHA – the main international humanitarian coordination body with the mandate on advocacy and which supports civil-military coordination - was weakened by UN reforms. In that framework, DG ECHO was often effective in maintaining activities as originally planned despite access constraints. The fact that humanitarian principles and IHL were generally overlooked by parties in conflict remained a key challenge.

Specific conclusions on humanitarian access

On financing decisions

Conclusion CA1: DG ECHO duly described access constraints in its annual Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs), although it did not prioritise them enough.

On advocacy plans

Conclusion CA2: DG ECHO's advocacy plans for facilitating access were of varying quality and relevance as a global template, since most of them focused on country specific dimensions. One of them (Mali) can be considered as best practice.

On humanitarian diplomacy

Conclusion CA3: DG ECHO strongly supported humanitarian diplomacy as a key tool to broaden humanitarian space and access. The Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) process combined with TMG monitoring in Yemen can be considered as an example of good practice, despite resistance by local actors.

On international coordination for access

Conclusion CA4: DG ECHO provided consistent support to international humanitarian coordination mechanisms, in particular OCHA. Nevertheless, in some cases field coordination remained an issue mostly due to structural factors of the global humanitarian architecture and resource constraints, including in terms of Civil-Military Coordination.

On effectiveness

Conclusion CA5: Results of efforts by DG ECHO and their partners to overcome access challenges were limited despite efforts. DG ECHO's approaches and activities were often able to maintain activities as originally planned. Effectiveness was much more limited against political interference

or in trying to make local actors accept a principled approach. The advocacy toolbox was little used; valuable lessons were learnt across case studies but remained fragmented in practice.

On added value

Conclusion CA6: The added value of DG ECHO in terms of humanitarian access was high, based on field presence, expertise, principled approach, network of partners and support to coordination mechanisms. However, the EU as such had sometimes less political influence than specific member states.

Recommendations on humanitarian access

Three strategic recommendations are summarised below, as required by the ToR. The full recommendations can be found at the end of the report.

Recommendation RA1: strengthen humanitarian diplomacy on access, in particular through more high-level field visits, synergies with member states, and using the SOM-TMG process in Yemen as a template.

Recommendation RA2: better support OCHA in its access facilitation functions, for instance by advocating among donors, supporting the posting of CMCoord Officers, and streamlining the Access Working Groups.

Recommendation RA3: strengthen guidance and capacity building of DG ECHO staff and partners on advocacy and negotiations for access, such as through a template for advocacy plans and financial support for global trainings on access negotiations for frontline field actors to complement the toolbox.