



## EU humanitarian aid: *Caught between nexus and independence*

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.

### KEY MESSAGES

- The European Union (EU) is facing increasingly complex and protracted crises, massive humanitarian consequences of conflicts, climate change, and exacerbated humanitarian needs as a result of COVID-19. These challenges require bold and effective responses from the new leadership of the EU.
- The European Commission is committed to enhance linkages between humanitarian aid, development, security and other policies to better respond to protracted crises. The implementation of the 'humanitarian-development(-peace) nexus' requires the adaptation of institutional cultures and localised approaches as well as drawing lessons from the EU's nexus pilot countries.
- The new European Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, faces the difficult task of ensuring synergies between his crisis management/civil protection mandate and his humanitarian mandate, especially in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The sensitive negotiations of the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 are further complicated by the fallout from COVID-19. This long-term budget will be crucial for shaping the quality and effectiveness of the EU's humanitarian aid and should provide sufficient and flexible funding for future crises.
- Given the EU's strong focus on its internal interests, tensions could arise between humanitarian needs and other EU priorities and it is crucial that the EU strengthens its commitment to and leadership on humanitarian matters. This requires a more thorough rethink of the role humanitarian aid plays in the EU's crisis management actions.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is facing increasingly complex and protracted crises and massive humanitarian consequences of the Syrian and Yemen conflicts and long-standing political, economic and social crises in Africa. Shifting geopolitics and global failures in the diplomatic sphere to prevent and resolve violent conflict, which the EU has also contributed to, or more recently failures in global health governance, have created and exacerbated humanitarian need. According to United Nations (UN) projections, a historically unprecedented number of nearly 168 million people across 53 countries are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Given the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated existing humanitarian crises and is likely to cause additional humanitarian emergencies in other countries, these numbers will increase in the coming months.<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 has added to an already full agenda of challenges for the new leadership of the European Commission. This includes the sensitive negotiations of the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 with the member states and the European Parliament and the implications of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

The new European Commission has set out to address global challenges as a "Geopolitical Commission",<sup>3</sup> linking internal and external policy and enhancing European leadership across a number of policy areas, including humanitarian aid. The envisaged role for humanitarian aid consists of working together with development and security actors to better respond to protracted crises. Yet, although the EU has been advocating and implementing the integrated approach for the past 20 years, many of its core challenges remain unresolved. One of the humanitarian actors' concerns is the risk that an integrated approach could subsume

principled humanitarian aid under broader political objectives. Moreover, both the necessity to work in a more integrated way and principled humanitarian action have to be contextualised in the reality on the ground which is often messier than the policies dictated by headquarters. This makes the task of the new European Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, incredibly difficult as he attempts to respond to the challenges facing the humanitarian sector by working together with his development, security and other counterparts, while simultaneously ensuring humanitarian access and effective delivery of life-saving assistance. Given the EU's current strong focus on its internal interests (e.g., migration management, security, and recently crisis management in response to COVID-19 within the EU's borders), tensions could arise between humanitarian needs and principles and other EU priorities.

This brief analyses current issues in the EU's humanitarian aid and makes recommendations for responding to the challenges ahead. Specifically, it addresses the tensions between the Commission's ambition to be a geopolitical actor and to better respond to multidimensional crises through a 'nexus approach' and the strong needs-based humanitarian assistance the EU provides. The analysis is based on a structured review of academic and policy sources, complemented by interviews with Brussels-based humanitarian aid policymakers.

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1. UN, 2019, A record number of people will need help worldwide during 2020: UN humanitarian overview

2. UN, 2020, Global humanitarian response plan COVID-19, United Nations Coordinated Appeal, April – Dec. 2020

3. European Commission, The von der Leyen Commission: For a Union that strives for more, press release, 10 Sept. 2019

## 2. THE EU'S APPROACH TO HUMANITARIAN AID

The EU is a key 'norm entrepreneur'<sup>4</sup> in the humanitarian sector<sup>5</sup> and the third biggest contributor of humanitarian aid worldwide, considering both its own and its member states' bilateral assistance.<sup>5</sup> The EU's humanitarian aid is legally grounded in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007). Article 214 on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) defines humanitarian aid as "ad hoc assistance and relief and protection for people in third countries who are victims of natural and man-made disasters" which "shall be conducted in compliance with the principles of international law and with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination".<sup>6</sup> The principles driving the EU's humanitarian aid were further elaborated in the 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, a tripartite policy statement endorsed by the European Commission, EU member states and the European Parliament (Box 1).

The EU's humanitarian aid differs from other forms of its foreign assistance because it is provided on the basis of need and cannot be used as a tool for facilitating and supporting crisis management operations under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).<sup>7</sup> The EU describes humanitarian aid in the integrated approach as being 'In-But-Out', meaning that although humanitarian aid is a key part of the EU's overall response to crises, it is "not a crisis management instrument".<sup>8</sup>

The main responsibility for humanitarian aid lies with the Directorate-General for European Civilian Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), which provides humanitarian aid through implementing partners such as non-governmental

Box 1. Principles driving EU humanitarian aid, as stated in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2007)

**Humanity** means that human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable in the population.

**Neutrality** means that humanitarian aid must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute.

**Impartiality** denotes that humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations.

Respect for **independence** means the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from political, economic, military or other objectives, and serves to ensure that the sole purpose of humanitarian aid remains to relieve and prevent the suffering of victims of humanitarian crises.

4. Keukeleire, S., Delreux, T., 2014, The foreign policy of the European Union, The European Union Series (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Palgrave 2014), p. 28

5. UN, 2020, Global humanitarian response plan COVID-19, United Nations Coordinated Appeal, Apr. – Dec. 2020, p. 36

6. Official Journal of the European Union, 2016, Article 214

7. Bossuyt, F., Orbie J., Van Elsuwege P., 2016, Humanitarian aid policy in the EU's external relations: The post-Lisbon framework, Report No. 3, Sieps, p. 11

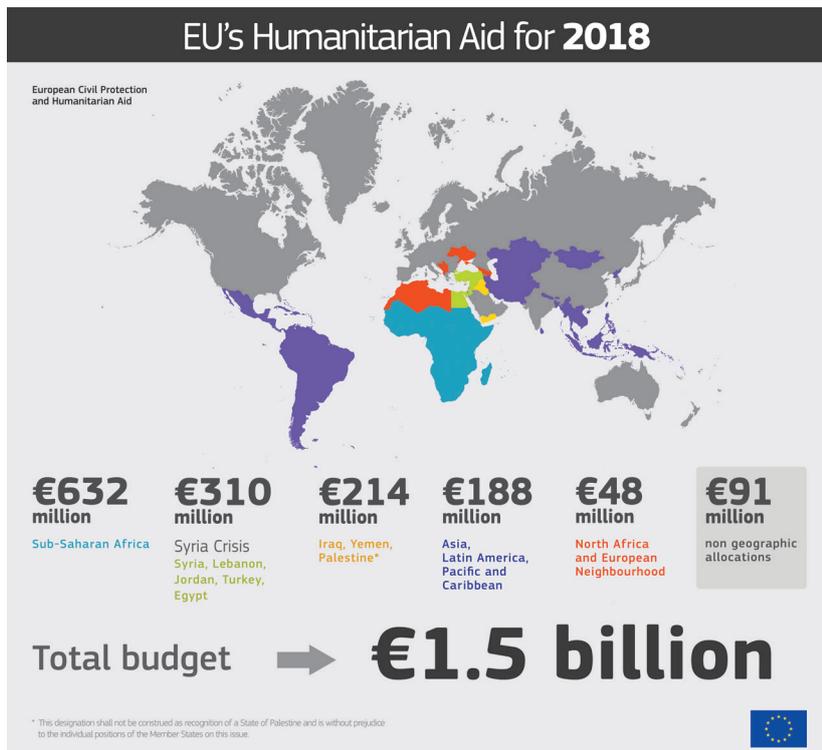
8. Council of the European Union, 2018, Council conclusions on the integrated approach to external conflicts

organisations (NGOs), UN agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). DG ECHO works together, but is institutionally separate from, the DG for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), the DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement (DG NEAR) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The European Parliament (EP) monitors the Commission's actions and delivery of aid, and together with the European Council negotiates and decides on policy proposals made by the Commission. An independent evaluation in 2014 named key aspects of **DG ECHO's added value** as its global presence and capacity to draw on a network of EU delegations and ECHO field offices (which EU member states often lack), the technical expertise of its field staff, its critical mass of funding and its insulation from strategic (political, economic, military) goals. It particularly

emphasised the critical role DG ECHO plays in promoting humanitarian principles in EU institutions and member states.<sup>9</sup>

Violent conflicts cause 80% of all humanitarian needs, according to the World Bank, and the number of non-state conflicts, which make up the majority of today's conflicts,<sup>10</sup> has risen constantly since the end of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> Many countries experience a combination of conflict, forced displacement and disasters associated with natural hazards and climate change. The total number of displaced people (internal plus cross-border) increased for the seventh consecutive year in 2018, to 70.8 million. That same year, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees both reached record levels, 43.6 million and 23.6 million, respectively. Rather than the ad hoc international band-aid

Figure 1. EU humanitarian aid funding by region, 2018



9. European Commission, ECHO, 2014, Evaluation of the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, Volume 1, Main report

10. Non-state conflicts are fought between two organised groups, neither of which is related to the state, Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Definitions

11. Rudolfson, Ida, 2019, Non-state conflicts: Trends from 1989 to 2018, Conflict Trends 2, PRIO

solution it was originally intended to be, humanitarian aid today is provided for years and the average humanitarian crisis now lasts more than nine years.<sup>12</sup> Most inter-agency humanitarian appeals in the past ten years have addressed crises in sub-Saharan Africa. Somalia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan have had humanitarian appeals since 2005.<sup>13</sup>

Given the length of crises, humanitarian assistance and development efforts often take place simultaneously. Especially in situations of mass displacement, the humanitarian community has expanded its operations beyond direct life-saving measures to include recovery and delivery of basic services.<sup>14</sup> In this context, there is consensus that some coordination is necessary between humanitarian and development policies, to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions. The 'humanitarian-development nexus' has been around since the 1990s, but given today's increasingly protracted conflicts and their humanitarian implications, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) identified the nexus as a top priority. Being "a leading actor in that field",<sup>15</sup> the EU has sought to implement the nexus by developing an extensive policy framework spanning humanitarian aid, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, security policy and development cooperation. In doing so, it has grappled to reconcile the distinct nature of principled humanitarian aid with its ambition to establish more coherence between its external policies.

The European Commission first promoted the idea of strengthening the complementarity between relief, rehabilitation and development aid in its 1996 Communication **Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)**. It argued that "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".<sup>16</sup> A 2013 evaluation by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, found that despite much effort and resources invested, new forms of collaboration, coordination and communication were rare and in many cases 'old solutions' were being proposed for 'old problems'. A crucial challenge for humanitarian actors, according to the evaluation, was to remain committed to humanitarian principles while at the same time taking into account the development and political dimensions of international cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

**The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2007)** was the EU's first comprehensive and fundamental declaration on humanitarian aid<sup>18</sup> and remains the major reference on the EU's commitment to humanitarian aid. It strongly reaffirmed the EU's adherence to fundamental humanitarian principles, while underlining the importance of achieving better linkages between relief, rehabilitation and development.<sup>19</sup> A 2014 evaluation of the implementation of the Consensus concluded that consistency between the formal humanitarian

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12. UN, 2018, Global humanitarian overview 2019, p. 4

13. UN, 2019, Global humanitarian overview 2020, p. 20

14. Medinilla A., Tadesse Shiferaw L., Veron P., 2019, 'Think local: Governance, humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding in Somalia', Discussion paper 246, ECDPM

15. Bossuyt F., Orbie J., Van Elsuwege P., 2016, Humanitarian aid policy in the EU's external relations: The post-Lisbon framework, Report 3, Sieps, p. 51

16. Commission of the European Communities, 30.04.1996, 153 final, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD)

17. Government of the Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, Linking relief and development: More than old solutions for old problems?, IOB Study, Report 380

18. Dany, C., 2015, Politicization of humanitarian aid in the European Union, European Foreign Affairs Review, Kluwer Law International, p. 428

19. Official Journal of the European Union, 2008, 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



aid policies of the European Commission and the EU member states had improved, but that the operational value of the Consensus was low. The evaluation found that EU institutions and member states had made several efforts to strengthen the coherence between humanitarian and development aid. However, a key barrier to the process remained that humanitarian aid strives to remain independent, while development aid seeks to align with recipient governments.<sup>20</sup>

A central concept in more recent debates about improving coherence is **'resilience'**, defined by the EU in 2012 as "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks".<sup>21</sup> 'Resilience' emphasises the role of the recipient and seeks to address the root causes of recurrent crises by enhancing local emergency response and prevention capacities.<sup>22</sup> However, the term 'resilience' has since become "a kind of convening concept across sectors to bring policies, initiatives and actors from security, peacebuilding, sustainable development, the fight against poverty, humanitarian assistance and climate action together". As a result, the word risks being used as a catch-all phrase, without a clear underpinning idea or purpose.<sup>23</sup>

Linkages between humanitarian aid and other external action policies were also promoted in the **2016 Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy**<sup>24</sup> and the **2017 New Consensus on Development**.<sup>25</sup> In the years since UN Secretary-General António Guterres took office, in 2017, the debate about the humanitarian-development nexus has shifted to the **triple nexus**, which includes peace as "the third leg of the triangle".<sup>26</sup> EU ministers adopted this perspective at an informal meeting in autumn 2018. This addition came into being mainly out of concern that humanitarian aid could exacerbate conflict situations by disrupting existing power dynamics.<sup>27</sup> Addressing the underlying causes of conflicts was therefore understood as necessary to reduce humanitarian needs and work towards sustainable development. Yet, what exactly falls under the realm of 'peace' as part of the nexus is unclear, as the EU tends to use the terms 'conflict prevention', 'peacebuilding', 'security' and 'stabilisation' interchangeably. The **Council Conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus** (19 May 2017) speak of *conflict prevention and peacebuilding*,<sup>28</sup> whereas the **Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises**<sup>29</sup> (22 January 2018) refer to *stabilisation actions*. The **Council Conclusions on Humanitarian Assistance and International**

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20. European Commission, ECHO, 2014, Evaluation of the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, Volume 1, Main report
  21. European Commission, 2012, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, The EU approach to resilience: Learning from food security crises, COM (2012) 586, p. 5
  22. Bossuyt F., Orbie J., Van Elsuwege P., 2016, Humanitarian aid policy in the EU's external relations: The post-Lisbon framework, Report 3, Sieps, p. 54
  23. Hauck V., 2017, Will the new Communication on resilience help to make EU external action more effective?, Talking Points Blog, ECDPM
  24. European Union Global Strategy, 2016, Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe, A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy
  25. European Council, Council of the European Union, 2017, press release, The new European Consensus on Development: EU and Member States sign joint strategy to eradicate poverty
  26. ICVA, 2017, The "new way of working" examined, Policy Brief
  27. Awareness of the context into which humanitarian assistance is delivered and conflict sensitivity are at the heart of the "do no harm" principle. Lange M., Quinn M., 2003, Conflict, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: Meeting the challenges, International Alert; United Nations Development Programme, 2016, The peace promise commitments to more effective synergies among peace, humanitarian and development actions in complex humanitarian situations
  28. Council of the European Union, 2017, Council conclusions: Operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus, No.9383
  29. Council of the European Union, 2018, Council conclusions on the integrated approach to external conflicts and crises, No. 5413

**Humanitarian Law**<sup>30</sup> (25 November 2019) mention *peace actions* and *peacebuilding*, while the most recent joint European Commission-HRVP **Communication Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa** (9 March 2020) proposes to “secure resilience by linking humanitarian, development, *peace and security interventions*”.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. THE DILEMMAS OF THE NEXUS - FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

#### 3.1 Defining and implementing the nexus

In their **Council Conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus** (2017), EU member states stressed that translating the nexus into practice requires a common vision and cultural changes in organisations, flexible and well-coordinated financing instruments and modalities, and increased use of multi-annual financing. They emphasised the need for systematic context analyses carried out jointly by humanitarian and development actors to identify risks, underlying causes, coping capacities and resilience at different levels. Humanitarian and development actors were furthermore asked to use, wherever applicable, multi-annual planning and programming cycles, joined-up planning and coordinated programmatic approaches.

These recommendations are laudable, though they present implementation of the nexus as a mere technical problem. In fact, the nexus has remained a conceptual, political and institutional challenge. After all, humanitarian and development aid have **different normative frameworks and objectives and consequently have different ways of working**.

Humanitarian aid is short-term assistance based on humanitarian principles. Its aim is to save lives and alleviate suffering, and it is provided through specialised international NGOs and UN agencies. Development cooperation pursues long-term change oriented towards poverty reduction, sustainable development and openly political objectives. Guided by the principles of country (and democratic) ownership, alignment and mutual accountability, development cooperation works primarily in collaboration with partner government authorities.<sup>32</sup>

In practice, the distinction between the humanitarian and development spheres is not always clear-cut. The vast majority of humanitarian actors are multi-mandate organisations and accept a wider interpretation of their life-saving remit that includes addressing the causes of crises. However, although they support the humanitarian-development nexus (with the notable exception of Médecins Sans Frontières), they frequently stress the need to safeguard the space for **principled humanitarian action** and avoid its politicisation. Humanitarian agencies stress that to be able to provide impartial humanitarian assistance, they need to remain neutral to be granted access to the suffering population and ensure the safety of their staff. Working with the government, which is frequently directly or indirectly associated with the conflict, endangers humanitarian agencies' image of neutrality and their ability to negotiate access to populations in need. These organisations therefore try to find a middle ground between safeguarding humanitarian principles and **a pragmatic, collective and efficient approach in dealing with protracted crises**. Bennett, Foley and Pantuliano acknowledge this tight rope: “In practice, humanitarian principles often sit uneasily with the

30. Council of the European Union, 2019, Council conclusions on humanitarian assistance and International Humanitarian Law, No. 14487

31. European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2020, Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa

32. Medinilla A., Herrero Cangas A., Deneckere M., 2016, 'Living apart together': EU development cooperation and humanitarian aid in situations of fragility and protracted crisis, Discussion Paper 206, ECDPM



reality of crisis situations and require trade-offs in their use".<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, political realities in Europe and the adoption of an objectives-driven approach to crisis management suggest that it is "less and less realistic to apply the humanitarian principles... to the full range of relief operations that are financed by the EU budget".<sup>34</sup> Experts thus promote a more nuanced understanding of the operational application of humanitarian principles. Humanitarian agencies must take pragmatic, context-specific decisions on, for example, whether working with the state and through local institutions and systems will help meet the needs of the most vulnerable. While in some contexts, humanitarian aid's distinctive nature must be rigorously maintained, in others a more diversified, flexible and coordinated form of assistance is called for.<sup>35</sup>

Putting the nexus into practice is also impeded by a **disconnect between approaches as conceived at headquarters and the realities faced by humanitarian and development practitioners on the ground**. Joint processes imposed to achieve the nexus are often perceived as overly simplistic by actors in the field, who make use of whatever tools they have available.<sup>36</sup> Besides, **there is no agreed definition of the humanitarian-development nexus or the humanitarian-development-peace nexus** and consequently no common understanding of what constitutes good nexus programming. Given humanitarian and development actors' different principles and objectives, they may also have different understandings of what the best responses

might be in a given context. Particularly, the **lack of conceptual clarity on the peace element** of the nexus is of major concern among humanitarian NGOs.<sup>37</sup>

Fears of blurred lines between the humanitarian, development and security/military spheres have been heightened in recent years by the stronger role taken by the EU in conflict prevention and by the EU's promotion of the synergies between civil and military instruments as part of an integrated approach.<sup>38</sup> These shifts reveal tensions between the EU's political (and in some cases, military) role and its humanitarian standing. In fact, the EU has increasingly sought to enable the financing of training, equipment and infrastructure for military actors under the umbrella of its Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development (CBSD),<sup>39</sup> and to finance external activities with military and defence implications through the proposed creation of an European Peace Facility (EPF).<sup>40</sup> These developments have amplified reluctance among humanitarian organisations to engage in a cooperation that might compromise their neutrality, endanger their access to populations in need and undermine the safety of their workers.<sup>41</sup>

Not knowing what falls under the peace element of the nexus is a particular impediment to implementation of the nexus. Some point out that "efforts to better link humanitarian and development needs are being operationalized in parallel to those aimed at more closely linking security and development, with only some countries

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33. Bennett C., Foley M., Pantuliano S., 2016, Time to let go: Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era, Overseas Development Institute

34. Medinilla A., Herrero Cangas A., Deneckere M., 2016, 'Living apart together': EU development cooperation and humanitarian aid in situations of fragility and protracted crisis, Discussion Paper 206, ECDPM

35. Carpenter S., Bennett C., 2015, Managing crises together: Towards coherence and complementarity in recurrent and protracted crises, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute

36. Medinilla A., Tadesse Shiferaw L., Veron P., 2019, Think local: Governance, humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding in Somalia', Discussion Paper 246, ECDPM

37. Thomas, M., 2019, NGO perspectives on the EU's humanitarian-development-peace nexus, Voice Report, Voice

38. Juncos A. E., Blockmans S., 2018, The EU's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding: four key challenges, Global Affairs 4 (2-3); Bergmann J., 2018, A bridge over troubled water? The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and the security-development nexus in EU external policy. Discussion Paper 6/2018, German Dev. Institute

39. The main rationale behind CBSD is the assumption that security is a precondition for development and that sustainable development can only be achieved when state institutions – including the military – acquire adequate capacities. To implement CBSD, the European Commission in July 2016 proposed to adapt the regulation establishing the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). Bergmann J., 2017, Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development (CBSD): Securitising EU development policy?, Briefing Paper 24.2017, German Development Institute

advancing in a more holistic manner".<sup>42</sup> Responding to these concerns the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) has argued that integrating the peace component of the nexus should not involve 'hard security', or militarised approaches to conflict issues, as these make it more difficult to carry out integrated work across the nexus and can pose risks to implementers (especially humanitarian actors), who may be perceived as associated with military engagements by local populations.<sup>43</sup>

Another challenge in implementation of the nexus is the **difference in timeframes and lines of funding**. Humanitarian aid is usually channelled through annual funding instruments and cycles, whereas development cooperation relies on multi-annual country or thematic programmes.<sup>44</sup> In addition, **technical and financial capacities and nexus skills**, which are necessary to integrate conflict analysis into programming and to collaborate with counterparts, are limited within organisations. Certainly there is a shortage of professionals who have worked across the different programme areas, especially in leadership or management positions.<sup>45</sup> **Organisations' interests can also stand in the way**. Many organisations fail to provide sufficient incentives for sharing information or overcoming a potential risk aversion. This leads agencies and implementing partners to settle on compartmentalisation because this protects their business model.<sup>46</sup>

There is consensus **that implementation of the nexus approach should always be context-specific** and include cross-sectoral approaches which are adapted to local realities. Regarding the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD notes that, "some contexts may be conducive to greater alignment of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding planning and programming than others".<sup>47</sup> One of our interviewees observed that implementing nexus approaches in the field of food security or resilience "makes sense" and has been done by the EU since 2012, but it is more challenging in volatile conflict settings like Mali.

### 3.2 Implementation of the nexus in six pilot countries

In his answers to the EP, Commissioner Lenarčič stated that he will "seek to maximise complementarities and synergies of the existing humanitarian and development instruments, so that they can better contribute to ending crises by strengthening local resilience, supporting community-based mechanisms and promoting development".<sup>48</sup> However, given today's challenges, it will not be easy to put the EU's commitment to work in an integrated way into practice and demonstrate progress in implementation of the nexus.

40. Deneckere M., 2019, The uncharted path towards a European Peace Facility, Discussion Paper 248, ECDPM; Furness M., Bergmann J., 2018, A European peace facility could make a pragmatic contribution to peacebuilding around the world. Briefing Paper 6/2018, German Development Institute

41. In 2018, the second worst year on record for aid worker security, 405 national and international aid workers were attacked and 131 aid workers were killed with national aid workers constituting the majority of victims. A recent study on violence against aid workers states that perpetrators justify their attacks by asserting that the victims are not neutral humanitarian actors but parties to the conflict. Humanitarian Outcomes, 2019, Aid worker security report 2019 updated; Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017, Aid worker security report 2017

42. Fanning E., Fullwood-Thomas J., 2019, The humanitarian-development-peace nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations? Discussion Paper, Oxfam GB

43. Angelini L., Approaching the humanitarian-development-peace nexus: A peacebuilding perspective, Blog, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

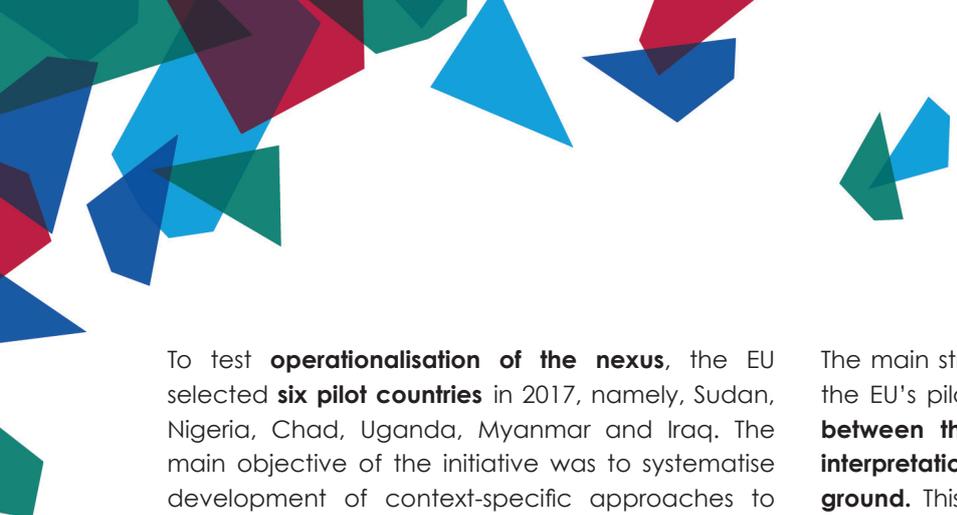
44. Medinilla A., Herrero Cangas A., Deneckere M., 2016, 'Living apart together': EU development cooperation and humanitarian aid in situations of fragility and protracted crisis, Discussion Paper 206, ECDPM

45. Thomas M., 2019, NGO perspectives on the EU's humanitarian-development-peace nexus, Voice Report, Voice

46. Medinilla A., Tadesse Shiferaw L., Veron P., 2019, Think local: Governance, humanitarian aid, development and peace building in Somalia, Discussion Paper 246, ECDPM

47. OECD Legal Instruments, 2019, DAC recommendation on the OECD legal instruments humanitarian-development-peace nexus, OECD/LEGAL/5019

48. Answers to the European Parliament questionnaire to the Commissioner-Designate Janez Lenarčič Commissioner-designate for Crisis Management, p. 11



To test **operationalisation of the nexus**, the EU selected **six pilot countries** in 2017, namely, Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Myanmar and Iraq. The main objective of the initiative was to systematise development of context-specific approaches to cooperation between humanitarian, development and other relevant actors in situations of fragility, protracted crises and forced displacement. In particular, the EU wanted to address implementation challenges on the ground through enhanced coordination across its institutions and between the EU institutions and member states, as well as externally with other actors. Given that the process aims at adopting context-specific approaches, the choice of these countries has been assessed as appropriate and representative of a wide range of situations and stages of protracted crises.<sup>49</sup>

However, 2.5 years after its launch, information on the progress of the implementation in the pilot countries remains scarce. Aiming to shift the conversation on the nexus from the theoretical discussion to “getting the nexus done”, Lenarčič has asked for a review of progress in the pilot countries at least at the cabinet level with the Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, every few months.<sup>50</sup> So far, each of the pilot countries has been developing an action plan based on a joint situation analysis, often using conflict analysis as a starting point. An update in 2018 showed varying progress.<sup>51</sup> There were positive examples of nexus implementation in Uganda and in the EU’s National Indicative Programmes (NIPs) in the Sahel, but the results remained mixed in more difficult situations, such as Nigeria and Chad.<sup>52</sup>

The main structural constraint in the initial phase of the EU’s pilot country exercise was the **disconnect between the headquarters-driven, often abstract interpretation of the nexus, and the reality on the ground**. This resulted in a lack of clarity regarding the desired outcome and deliverables of the joint assessments, with humanitarian actors hesitating to engage in dialogues with a strong political dimension. Further institutional aspects that have impeded progress include internal debates within the EU institutions on who should lead the process and lack of expertise and staff to contribute to joint assessments and take follow-up decisions in the implementing organisations.<sup>53</sup> The EU’s approach in the pilot countries has also been criticised for its limited engagement of EU member states and NGOs, and for the limited degree of ownership and leadership of local and national authorities in the process.<sup>54</sup> Besides, when the pilot country exercise was extended to the ‘triple nexus’ in autumn 2018, no formal process of agreeing on a policy or plan of action for implementation was initiated.<sup>55</sup>

The nexus offers the EU an opportunity to adapt humanitarian and development aid to the challenges and needs of today’s crisis situations and for actors from different sectors to learn from each other. However, a lot of work remains to be done before the nexus is successfully put into practice in the pilot countries and beyond. More than policies and instruments, the EU needs to put effort into adapting institutional cultures and mentalities to new realities through a system of incentives that fosters mutual understanding of different methods, objectives and principles.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, while drawing lessons from

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49. Jones A., Mazzara V., 2018, All together now? EU institutions and member states’ cooperation in fragile situations and protracted crises, Discussion Paper 226, ECDPM

50. Interview with Commission official, February 2020

51. Thomas M., 2019, NGO perspectives on the EU’s humanitarian-development-peace nexus, Voice Report, Voice

52. Interview with Commission official, February 2020

53. Jones A., Mazzara V., 2018, All together now? EU institutions and member states’ cooperation in fragile situations and protracted crises, Discussion Paper 226, ECDPM

54. Thomas M., 2019, NGO perspectives on the EU’s humanitarian-development-peace nexus, Voice Report, Voice; Red Cross EU Office, ICRC, 2018, The European Union humanitarian-development nexus: Recommendations from the Red Cross EU Office and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Position Paper

55. Fanning E., Fullwood-Thomas J., 2019, The humanitarian-development peace nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations? Discussion Paper, Oxfam GB

56. Deneckere, M., 2017, Revisiting EU assistance in crisis situations: What place for humanitarian aid? ECDPM Talking Points Blog, ECDPM

the current pilot countries, the EU and its member states will have to localise and contextualise nexus approaches as much as possible through flexible and adaptive funding and programme design and management.<sup>57</sup>

## 4. EU HUMANITARIAN AID IN A NEW ERA

### 4.1 New leadership, evolving institutional set-up and new priorities

The mission letter to Janez Lenarčič, the **new Commissioner for Crisis Management** (the position was formerly titled the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management) of 10 September 2019 strongly emphasised enhancing the EU's preparedness and response to potential crises. Calling for a more consistent and better integrated approach to crisis management, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen mandated Lenarčič to strengthen the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) and to better position Europe to respond to high-impact, low-probability emergencies. In doing so, Lenarčič was urged to use the full potential of rescEU. RescEU is a reserve of assets introduced in 2019 and managed by DG ECHO to complement the national capacities of member states in responding to crises such as natural disasters and epidemics. Chief among rescEU's assets are firefighting aircraft, special water pumps and field hospitals.

The change of title of the Commissioner was initially met with disappointment by several Members of the European Parliament. They expressed regret at 'humanitarian aid' being dropped from the title, implying that this indicated a shift in the Commissioner's focus and humanitarian commitment. Lenarčič refuted the concern, explaining that the change did not mean a change in substance and stressing that humanitarian aid remained a distinct policy field, guided by humanitarian principles which he would "vigorously defend".<sup>58</sup> Commission officials interviewed in February 2020 reaffirmed the **unchanged balance of power between DG ECHO's two 'souls'**: humanitarian aid and civil protection/disaster management. Von der Leyen reportedly preferred the new title over 'crisis response', as it puts the focus on integrated management encompassing the security aspect, rather than on the usual civil protection response.<sup>59</sup>

One Commission official explained that 'crisis' here refers to low-probability, high-impact events such as a nuclear attack or indeed, the current COVID-19 pandemic. Having faced multiple natural disasters in recent years, in the form of forest fires and floods, the EU recognises that the emerging risks landscape requires collective capacities currently lacking in member states and has therefore sought to strengthen its Civil Protection Mechanism.<sup>60</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic represents the first test of Lenarčič's role as the European Emergency Response Coordinator, as it involves the different political, health and security layers of crisis response at the EU's disposal.

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57. Medinilla A., Tadesse Shiferaw L., Veron P., 2019, Think local: Governance, humanitarian aid, development and peace building in Somalia, Discussion Paper 246, ECDPM

58. European Parliament, 2.10.2019, Committee on Development, Hearing of Janez Lenarčič Commissioner-Designate (Crisis Management), p. 7

59. Gros-Verheyde, N., 2020, Coronavirus crisis: The von der Leyen Commission lacks audacity. Congenital weakness? Blog, Civil Protection, Bruxelles2

60. European Commission, 2018, press release, rescEU: Commission welcomes provisional agreement to strengthen EU civil protection



The COVID-19 pandemic will have **devastating immediate and medium-term consequences for countries with existing humanitarian crises**. Weak health systems and governance combined with poor basic service delivery constrain their abilities to prevent the spread of the virus and to provide health care to infected people.<sup>61</sup> IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers are especially vulnerable, as they live in crowded environments without adequate health, water and sanitation services. Furthermore, the capacity of hosting countries, the majority of which are low- and middle-income countries with relatively weak health care systems, to provide for these groups may be severely undermined.<sup>62</sup> Current containment measures are already having multiple negative implications for ongoing aid operations. Particularly travel restrictions have limited the movement of goods, aid workers and beneficiaries and slowed or terminated humanitarian operations. As a result, food insecurity levels, for example, in the Sahel region, are “spiralling out of control”, according to the World Food Programme.<sup>63</sup>

Following the integrated approach to crisis management, Lenarčič is part of an EU response team of five Commissioners, with Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Transport Adina Vălean and Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni.<sup>64</sup>

When COVID-19 was spreading in China, **the EU acted quickly on the basis of need through the Civil Protection Mechanism** with the ERCC coordinating the delivery of over 30.5 tonnes of personal protective equipment (PPE) to China in late February 2020. Also in February, the EU committed €232 million to an aid package for global efforts to boost global preparedness, prevention and containment of the virus. This includes €114 million for the World Health Organization’s response in countries with weak health care systems and €15 million to support measures such as rapid diagnosis and epidemiological surveillance in Africa.<sup>65</sup> When the virus began its rapid spread in Europe in early March, the EU’s focus turned inward. With a shortage of PPE in Europe, member states failed to show solidarity and sometimes acted to one another’s detriment (e.g., France and Germany banned exports of PPE), leading Von der Leyen to rebuke their “only for me” response.<sup>66</sup> On 19 March, a Europe-wide equipment pool was created under rescEU, with a budget of €50 million to procure protective respirators and masks. That budget was increased by €75 million on 27 March, to organise repatriation flights and increase medical stockpiles.<sup>67</sup> On 2 April, the mechanism received a further boost through the EU Emergency Support Instrument, to allow wider stockpiling of essential resources and coordinated distribution across Europe.<sup>68</sup> With China now using ‘mask diplomacy’<sup>69</sup> and PPE as a soft power tool, the Commission’s geopolitical ambition

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61. UN, 2020, Global humanitarian response plan COVID-19, United Nations Coordinated Appeal, April – December 2020

62. What’s in blue, 21.03.2020, Possible implications of COVID 19 on international peace and security

63. Clarke G., 2020, Burkina Faso crisis and COVID-19 concerns highlight pressure on Sahel food security, UN News, Newsletter, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

64. Maurice E., Bloj R., Buzmaniuk S., Antonini C., Angelo C., 2020, Covid-19: European responses, a complete picture, Policy Paper, Robert Schuman Foundation

65. European Commission, press corner, 24.03.2020, The EU’s response to COVID-19

66. European Commission, press corner, 26.03.2020, Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament plenary on the European coordinated response to the COVID-19 outbreak

67. Robert Schuman Foundation, European Decisions

68. Council of the European Union, 7.04.2020, Council position on draft amending budget No 2 to the general budget for 2020: Providing emergency support to Member States and further reinforcement of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism/rescEU to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, 7201/20

69. Zachová A., 2020, How effective is China’s ‘mask diplomacy’ in Europe? Capitals Special Edition, Euractiv

may have suffered a blow. In addition, humanitarian principles suffered several blows in the competition between countries over PPE and the failure to provide assistance to Italy when it was needed most.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast to Commissioner Lenarčič's focus on the crisis management part of his mandate, there has been little regard for the **humanitarian situation in Greece and at the Greece-Turkey border**, where thousands of migrants and refugees are stranded and the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak is high.<sup>71</sup> Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson expressed concern about the conditions of asylum seekers on the Greek islands and undertook action, speaking with the Greek authorities, international refugee agencies and charities to try to improve conditions and working on the relocation of unaccompanied minors from Greek hotspots.<sup>72</sup> Although assistance in the form of sleeping bags, blankets, power generators, tents, and other essential items was provided to Greece via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and ERCC,<sup>73</sup> severe overcrowding and lack of medical equipment in reception centres could yet lead to widespread deaths.<sup>74</sup> The Greek government has nonetheless resisted the EU's request to move the asylum seekers at greatest risk from COVID-19 from the islands to the mainland. Furthermore, the EU's pledge to take in 1,600 unaccompanied minors from the camps

has been slowed due to the pandemic. Similarly, in Libya, the confirmation of 10 cases of COVID-19 has raised fears about the ability of the country's weakened health care system to respond to the pandemic. Both Malta and Italy have closed their ports to migrants to curb the spread of the virus, and Malta has urged the EU to launch an "immediate humanitarian mission".<sup>75</sup> The European Commission needs to live up to its promise to support and improve the situation of refugees.<sup>76</sup> Yet at the moment, like its member states, the EU is focused on the immediate safety and security of European citizens and dealing with the economic fallout from the pandemic within its own borders.

Some steps have been taken towards a global EU response to the pandemic, including support to partner countries. Most notable was the adoption of the joint European Commission-HRVP **Communication on the Global EU Response to COVID-19 on 8 April 2020**.<sup>77</sup> It announced the provision of more than €15.6 billion (of existing external action resources) in financial support and aimed at providing a single framework of action for all European external responses in support of partners to address the crisis. This involves a joined-up strategy called 'Team Europe', which also implies constant liaison between DG ECHO and humanitarian DGs in member states.<sup>78</sup> An important aspect of this assistance is the emergency response

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70. Michalopoulos S., 2020, Coronavirus puts Europe's solidarity to the test, Coronavirus column, Euractiv

71. The Guardian, 2020, Lesbos coronavirus case sparks fears for refugee camp, World - Europe column, 11 March

72. Politico, 2020, EU confidential, 28 March

73. European Commission, ECHO, 2020, EU mobilises support to Greece via Civil Protection Mechanism, 6 March

74. Donor tracker, 2020, Germany suspends humanitarian admission of refugees following EU border closures in COVID-19 crisis, Deutsche Welle, 20 March

75. UN Refugee Agency, 2020, Libya: Humanitarian crisis worsening amid deepening conflict and COVID-19 threat, Briefing notes, 3 April

76. Von der Leyen U., 2020, A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe, Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024

77. European Commission, 8.4.2020 11 final, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19

78. Michael Köhler, Deputy Director General, DG ECHO, in a webinar on the European response to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the delivery of humanitarian aid organised by Egmont and the Norwegian Refugee Council, 8 April 2020



to the health crisis and resulting humanitarian needs, for which €502 million has been allocated.<sup>79</sup> The EU has also committed to provide immediate support to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan launched by the UN on 25 March (total target of €1.86 billion), as well as to the appeal of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement launched on 26 March (total target of €750 million). In addition, the EU will provide immediate humanitarian aid in pandemic-affected countries in support of health; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and logistics. While this response package is a good start, its focus on traditional diplomatic, humanitarian and development instruments may be insufficient for the task at hand and needs to be complemented by multiple other financial, humanitarian and regulatory tools.<sup>80</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is encouraging that on the day of publication of the joint communication Lenarčič acknowledged that, “[w]e are facing what could become the biggest humanitarian crisis in decades. The impact of the corona virus outbreak on the most fragile countries, migrants and the most vulnerable people is likely to be dramatic.... [W]e need to respond vigorously to the public health emergency, **make sure humanitarian actors continue to have access to carry out their life-saving assistance** and support transport and logistics for key humanitarian operations”.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, following the UN Secretary General’s appeal for an immediate global ceasefire, High Representative Josep Borrell urged “all warring parties to **comply fully with International Humanitarian Law and guarantee unimpeded access for humanitarian aid**”. He also reiterated that the application of humanitarian

exceptions provided under EU sanctions will ensure that sanctions do not obstruct the global fight against COVID-19.<sup>82</sup> These are important demonstrations of the EU’s commitment to humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law at a time when these are strongly needed. It will be paramount for the EU to continue to show leadership on humanitarian issues as challenges increase.

#### 4.2 The future of financing for EU humanitarian aid

While the new Commission is at the beginning of its five-year term, the EU is negotiating its next long-term budget (also known as the ‘**multiannual financial framework’ or MFF for 2021-2027**). The next MFF will determine the role the EU can play as a leading humanitarian donor. It is a major opportunity to shape the quality and effectiveness of the EU’s humanitarian aid, and to finance a more pragmatic approach to crises while safeguarding principled humanitarian action.<sup>83</sup> Given that the number of people in need of humanitarian aid has almost tripled since the adoption of the last MFF in 2012, from 62 million to an estimated 168 million people 2020,<sup>84</sup> the provision of sufficient funds for humanitarian aid in the next MFF is crucial.

The Commission responded to the growing number of protracted crises and the need for sufficient and flexible funding in the past by proposing a substantial increase for humanitarian aid in the next MFF. In contrast to the €6.62 billion allocated to the Humanitarian Aid Instrument for the 2014-2020 period,<sup>85</sup> the next MFF proposes €11 billion (€9.76 billion in constant prices) for humanitarian

79. DG ECHO has readjusted some of its programmes to reach this amount. These are not new resources (Michael Köhler, *ibid.*)

80. Jones A., Sergejeff K., Sherriff A., Teevan C., Veron P. 2020. The challenge of scaling up the European Union’s global response to COVID-19. Briefing Note 116, ECDPM

81. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_604](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_604)

82. Council of the EU, press release, 3.4.2020, 206, Declaration by the High Representative Josep Borrell on behalf of the EU on the UN Secretary General’s appeal for an immediate global ceasefire

83. Voice, 2018, Post 2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF): What EU humanitarian aid needs and why; Deneckere M., 2017, Revisiting EU assistance in crisis situations: What place for humanitarian aid? ECDPM Talking Points Blog, ECDPM

84. UN, 2018, Global humanitarian overview 2019, p. 22

85. European Parliament, Fact sheets on the European Union - 2020, Humanitarian aid; European Parliament, 2019, Parliamentary hearings of the Commissioners-designate, An analysis of the portfolios of the Von der Leyen Commission, Compendium of Briefings, European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)

aid. Yet, as the Commission plans to present an updated MFF proposal at the end of April as part of the EU's recovery strategy to tackle the economic fallout from COVID-19,<sup>86</sup> it is difficult to predict the consequences the pandemic will have on the next EU long-term budget. There are concerns that the EU focus on its internal economic crisis will come at the expense of those parts of the budget that are internationally oriented.

In addition to the amount of funding available, the architecture of the next MFF is crucial for the future of the EU's humanitarian aid. While the European Commission proposed a massive change on the development side by consolidating various instruments into the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), the Humanitarian Aid Instrument was kept separate under Heading VI ('Neighbourhood and the World').

Thus, humanitarian aid remains an independent policy in external action with the ability to respond to crises in a flexible, timely and principled manner. However, in the section on humanitarian aid the Commission's MFF proposal states that "[i]n many crisis situations, there is a strong emphasis on **complementarity between humanitarian aid and development assistance with a view to ensuring a smooth transition from relief to sustainable development** supported by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument".<sup>87</sup> The text on the NDICI, on the other hand, states that "**[i]nteraction and complementarity with Humanitarian Aid will take place through geographic programmes as well as**

**through the pillar dealing with resilience and linking relief, rehabilitation and development**, in order to ensure a seamless continuum of activities."<sup>88</sup>

The EU is responding to the need to be a stronger security actor and a rapidly responding crisis manager, and this ambition is showing in the MFF discussions. The proposed NDICI has a **rapid response pillar** for crisis management, conflict prevention and resilience building (including LRRD). The aim is to maintain a quick response capacity, similar to that provided by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). While this could represent an opportunity for the implementation of the humanitarian-development nexus, the fact that it takes over some of the actions of the IcSP, including Capacity Building for Security and Development, might impact the way EU assistance is perceived. Furthermore, to ensure that future funding is fit for nexus programmes, more flexibility and complementarity will have to be achieved by giving non-humanitarian instruments a larger role in protracted crises.<sup>89</sup>

Also worth noting is that funding for civil protection has been subsumed into Heading V 'Security and Defence',<sup>90</sup> alongside other protection-related programmes, encompassing both the internal and external dimensions of civil protection.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, while Lenarčič's mission letter gives him responsibility for the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, this mechanism is separate from humanitarian aid in the EU budget (but it can also cover actions outside the EU).

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86. Euractiv, About: Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF)

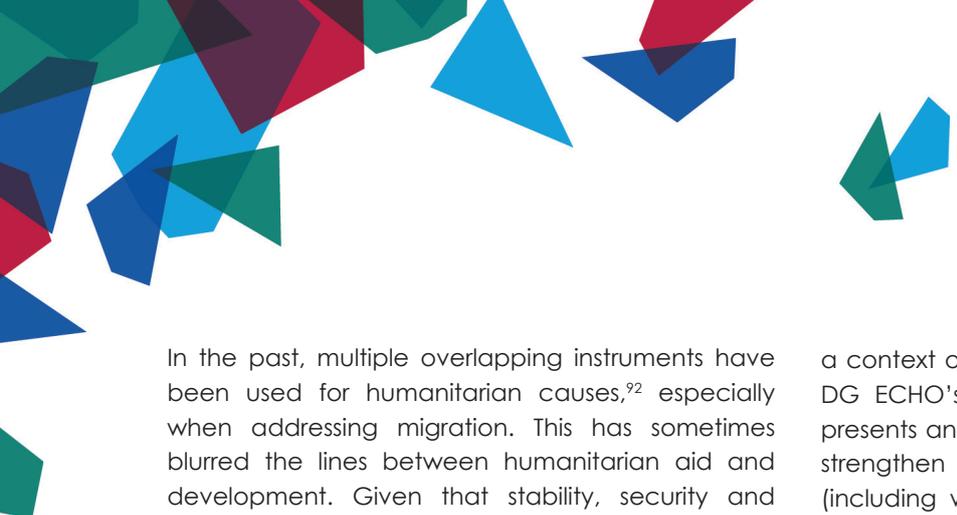
87. European Commission, 2.5.2018 COM 321 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A modern budget for a Union that protects, empowers and defends: The multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027

88. European Commission, 2.5.2018 COM 321 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Modern Budget for a Union that Protects, Empowers and Defends The Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027

89. Rural21, 2019, The international journal for rural development 53, p. 14

90. As opposed to the current split between Heading III 'Security and Citizenship' and Heading IV 'Global Europe'.

91. European Commission, 7.3.2019 COM 125 final, Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending decision no 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism



In the past, multiple overlapping instruments have been used for humanitarian causes,<sup>92</sup> especially when addressing migration. This has sometimes blurred the lines between humanitarian aid and development. Given that stability, security and resilience matters require more holistic approaches and more coherent instruments, **the extent to which coherence and complementarity between instruments will be ensured in the next MFF is a key element to watch.**

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Commission, and its Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, have taken office at a time when the humanitarian sector is under enormous strain. Humanitarian needs are increasing as a result of long-standing conflicts, shifting geopolitical dynamics that have created or exacerbated humanitarian crises, climate change and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges require bold and effective responses. The EU aims to tackle the challenges by integrating humanitarian, development, security and other policies. But its evolving role in crisis situations in which it has a political and/or security interest makes it, sometimes simultaneously, a humanitarian and a military actor. This dual role might undermine its credibility as a principled humanitarian actor. Despite significant policy energy spent in the past 20 years to link humanitarian aid with other forms of action, to test new approaches and to expand the EU's toolbox, there remains a lack of conceptual clarity on priorities. A more thorough rethink is needed of the role of humanitarian aid and how to address today's crises.

The difficulty of Lenarčič's task to work in an integrated way with other Commissioners while upholding the principles of humanitarian aid in the current situation should not be underestimated. In

a context of renewed focus on 'double hatting' of DG ECHO's leadership, the COVID-19 pandemic presents another balancing act between its task to strengthen the EU's crisis management capacities (including within the EU itself) and the enormous humanitarian needs in the rest of the world. Once the worst of the COVID-19 emergency has passed, it may become even more difficult for the Commissioner to reconcile and maintain synergies between internal crisis management and the EU's external role as a humanitarian actor.

Based on the analysis here, we present the following recommendations to inform an effective and relevant EU humanitarian aid approach that balances the nexus and independence demands it is confronting.

**First, all EU institutions – the European Commission, EEAS, Council and European Parliament – should support a bottom-up, context-specific implementation of the nexus, responding to both challenges and opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation.** They should jointly clarify the 'peace element' of the nexus and clarify how it is meant to be achieved by humanitarian and development actors in different contexts as well as how organisations should cope with situations in which objectives between the different actors clash.

**Second, interinstitutional collaboration and a 'nexus way of working' should be pursued at all levels:**

- Joint conflict analyses should be systematised across the different humanitarian, development and political departments of **EU delegations** and ECHO offices on the ground.
- **EU delegations** should enhance consultations with local, national and international NGOs, EU member states and the UN to contribute to the development and implementation of joint action plans in the pilot countries.
- **DG ECHO and DEVCO** need to be more transparent regarding progress in the pilot

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92. The EU's ability to rapidly deploy different funding sources for humanitarian aid when needed was highlighted in the 2018 peer review by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

countries, on which limited to no information is available in the public domain. They should also draw lessons from these countries to take forward in the upcoming programming exercise for the EU's external action resources for 2021-2027. Developing a methodology and programming options is necessary to enable the triple nexus approach to be rolled out in other contexts.

- A common strategic framework for coordination should be defined between the Humanitarian Aid Instrument/DG ECHO and the geographic pillar of the NDICI/DG DEVCO to ensure complementarity and a smooth transition from relief to sustainable development.

**Third, financing systems need to be appropriately adapted:**

- **DG ECHO and DEVCO** should strive as much as possible to fund complementarity programmes that call for cross-sectoral interventions and enable the testing of bottom-up, innovative, collaborative solutions, based on the local context and local opportunities.
- **DG ECHO** should continue and enhance its efforts to move towards multi-year programming in certain regions or via piloting exercises. DG DEVCO should introduce financial tools into its development activities to bring flexibility and adaptive management to its programmes.
- **All actors involved in the MFF negotiations** should ensure that funding for humanitarian aid does not drop below the amount proposed by the Commission in 2018. The technical negotiations on the NDICI should ensure that the NDICI rapid response pillar, as managed by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and involving all relevant services, becomes a useful nexus instrument.

**Finally,** management of the COVID-19 emergency should be grasped as an opportunity to systematise coordination and ensure synergies between

humanitarian aid and civil protection **within DG ECHO.**

- DG ECHO, DEVCO and NEAR could, in the medium term, consolidate and institutionalise the cooperation structures established during the COVID-19 response.
- **DG ECHO** should further strengthen its role in overseeing the EU's implementation of humanitarian principles in the response to COVID-19, for example, in the global provision of PPE and medical equipment and in the rolling out of vaccines.
- Given the implications of the pandemic, such as its disproportionate effect on difficult-to-access vulnerable communities, the increasing scale of needs, and technology dependence, are likely to drive significant long-term changes in the humanitarian system, **DG ECHO, together with other EU institutions,** will need to adapt to this evolution of the humanitarian sector and invest in new ways of working in order to remain relevant. ■



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