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Designing communication campaigns

Above Standard Visibility (ASV)
for EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Actions

*This document serves as an annex to the **Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union-funded Humanitarian Aid Actions**. It provides general guidance on the design of so-called “**Above Standard Visibility (ASV)**” actions. The purpose of such ASV actions is to raise awareness of humanitarian issues particularly among defined audiences in the EU Member States, show the tangible results of EU-funded humanitarian aid, and trigger public engagement and endorsement.*

ASV actions are more than merely putting extra resources into the standard communication approach. ASV plans should not only focus on the quantitative output, but also – and more importantly – on creativity, quality and impact.

The concrete application of this guidance manual depends on and may be adapted to the specific circumstances of the individual project. Partner organisations are invited to consult DG ECHO in case of doubt.

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Campaign strategy

Define your communication objectives

- Clearly describe what you want to achieve with the communication campaign in a few objectives: e.g. awareness, engagement, conversion.
- Define key performance indicators for each specific objective: impressions, clicks, content share; views to a website; subscriptions/new likes to a page, etc.
- The main objective of ASV campaigns is to raise public awareness of and support for the EU and its humanitarian work. Specify how the campaign contributes to this objective and how it complements other communication actions (by your own organisation, by the Commission).

Define your target audience

- Clearly describe whom you want to reach: country/region; socio-demographic profile; knowledge, media consumption and general interests. This will allow your media planner to select the right media and (for social media) target the right audience. Be aware that your message and campaign style may need to be tailored to the country (culture, knowledge, public opinion, etc.).
- ASV communication campaigns should target the public at large in (parts of) the EU. Communication towards local audiences outside Europe, or advocacy initiatives towards specific stakeholders are not the priority of such campaigns.
- Do not “preach to the converted” (own networks, existing audiences on social media channels, the Brussels Bubble). Give priority to people with a neutral or fairly positive attitude towards the EU, humanitarian aid, international solidarity, climate change and environment, etc.

It is essential to set clear and measurable targets on reach and expected outcome (SMART).

Content and style

Develop a clear, personal and visual message. An EU-funded campaign does not have to be institutional. Do not shy away from creative, disruptive or out-of-the box ideas.

- Draft your messages for the selected audience, not for your colleagues and Partners. Make sure that there is a common understanding of the terminology used. Focus on human interest, emotional stories that show how EU aid has helped your organisation assist those in need, without making the narrative or the tone-of-voice too sentimental.
- Create a “persona” (a random member of the target audience, lacking your background and expertise) in your mind and ask yourself: would this person understand fully what this is about in a few seconds? Just because it make sense to you, it will not necessarily make sense to someone else.
- Develop or adapt your messages in the languages of your audience. Avoid complex narratives and acronyms. If drafting your messages originally in English/French, avoid idioms that may not translate well.

The KISS principle:

Recent audience research by DG ECHO and its campaign Partners has shown that awareness and knowledge about EU Humanitarian Aid is relatively low. Hence the importance of keeping the message clear and to-the-point, and framing it into the basic narrative of “EU as leading humanitarian donor”.

In other words: respect the KISS principle, and “Keep it Short and Simple”

- On social media, use creative assets in a smart way – photos, videos, GIFs are a key item of a post for the user. They attract attention and provide more information (at least contextually) compared to your text. Are the creative assets of a high quality, consistent, to the point? Is the audience receptive to them?
- In particular, for campaigns in the humanitarian sphere, readers/viewers expect a call-to-action. Make it clear what you expect from the audience: to like or share the campaign, visit a website for more information, take part in a creative challenge.

EU Branding

As shown in various evaluation reports, EU citizens hardly associate the EU – seen as a legislative and financing bureaucracy – with humanitarian aid actions. Clear and visible references to the EU are not only a formal requirement for EU-funded actions; they are essential for clear, understandable and transparent communication with the target audience.

The “European Union” (in full, not the “European Commission”, “ECHO”, “EU Humanitarian Aid” or other institutional references) should be clearly mentioned in the headline and/or body copy of the campaign.

In addition to this, the official emblem (*with* “European Union” or “Funded/Co-funded by the European Union” underneath or next to it), should be part of the graphic or audio-visual design.

How to position the EU emblem?

- Make the emblem large enough, and link it visually to the main message of the campaign. This way, it will be clear that the EU is (one of) the sender(s) of the message (and not just an institutional sponsor).



- For videos, show the emblem throughout the whole clip (not only in the final billboard).
- For co-branded campaigns (with one or more Partners), clearly dissociate the different emblems or logos.



The official emblem is available in all official EU languages here:

<https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/visibility/visual-identity-official-logo>

- Emblem + “Funded by the European Union”
- Emblem + “European Union” (simplified visual, may be more appropriate for posters, video clips)

Media mix and outreach

Invest in the right media mix

- Reserve 70% of your total campaign budget for distribution (media buying and outreach). For smaller-scale actions, where creative costs cannot be covered with 30% of the budget, the dissemination plan should include a well-prepared approach to generate “earned” publicity.
- Be realistic but ambitious in social media spending. Social media costs depend on the selected country, the channel, the purpose (mere reach, repetitive messaging, activation), the time of the year, etc.

How to plan social media advertising?

- The Commission’s average target for social media buying is to limit the CPM (cost per thousand impressions) to €3.5 - 4.5, and to limit the cost per video view to maximum €0.05.
- When you promote videos on social media or online channels (Youtube, pre-roll on third websites, Facebook/Instagram), try to get a completion rate (viewers watching the clip until the end) of minimum 25%; so-called bumper ads (non-skippable 6-seconds) are the best format for this
- Click-through rates of 0.2%-0.3% are realistic for awareness campaigns on humanitarian topics.

DG ECHO’s social media team is at your disposal to review proposals of social media advertising plans, and to give feedback on the estimated targets. For more detailed indicators, please see the table at the end of this document.

- Look for all opportunities of generating earned media so to increase the multiplication of the campaign. Identify possible Partners and ensure they are aware of your campaign even prior to its launch. Use all tools at your disposal – tagging Partners on social media can very well be accompanied by the outdated but more direct tool of making a phone call! Keeping your Partners in the loop also adds legitimacy to your campaign. Ready-made campaign toolkits, shared ahead of the campaign launch, can ease the uptake and multiplication by your Partners.
- Try to integrate the campaign in a broader mix of communication actions (e.g. press communication on a related news topic, addressing media in the targeted country or region).
- Given the limitations of most ASV campaign budgets, we recommend going for a narrow audience segmentation and a limited duration of the campaign; instead of scattered media spending with very limited impact, a more focused approach (e.g. one or two countries/regions, one week) can be more successful.

Working with social media influencers

Celebrities and social media influencers can help amplify a message towards and through their well-defined, loyal audiences.

However, DG ECHO recommends that every such collaboration is carefully studied in advance and done on a pro-bono basis, to avoid any reputational risks related to

- associating the European Union with inadequate portfolios, visual content and political views of the personalities (e.g. excessive nudity, vulgar language, open criticism of EU policies, etc.);
- remunerating influencers for expressing their support for and encouraging solidarity with vulnerable people, which may be seen as unethical.
- Having that said, in case of projects involving travel, it is considered reasonable to reimburse the cost of transport and accommodation borne by the celebrities or influencers invited to take part.

Campaign implementation

Plan well in advance

- For large-scale campaigns, start the preparations well in advance and consider hiring a creative agency, with experience in working with similar projects to help you with innovative and creative ideas and reaching your goals.
- While large-scale actions should run for a limited time for best results, please note that your communication should cover the whole span of the project. This means that in addition to a large -scale action such as a campaign, you have to ensure continuous visibility of the project on your social media channels throughout the lifespan of the project.
- Your campaign does not take place in a vacuum – always be aware of what is happening in the world around you. This is useful not only for identifying opportunities, but also risks. Look for the right news “hooks” to launch and run the campaign: international days, specific national events in the target country, newsworthy summits or conferences, announcements of new policy initiatives, etc.
- Avoid competition with other humanitarian campaign initiatives. If possible, coordinate the launch of your campaigns with other Partners. By sharing your plans well in advance with the Regional Information Officer and Headquarters, you can avoid a situation where another major campaign is running in the same period and you may decide to anticipate/postpone the action.

Involve your ECHO counterparts

- Discuss the ASV with the Regional Information Officer (RIO), and DG ECHO’s Headquarters where relevant, at the proposal stage. By the time the contract is signed, an ASV has to be agreed with the RIO and uploaded to the system (APPEL).
- Consult the RIO (with realistic deadlines) throughout the planning of the action, especially for major milestones such as concept, dissemination strategy, narrative. Consult on the content before it goes live.
- Update the RIO throughout and after the major action about the results reached. Provide a final report.
- DG ECHO can support the campaign on its social media channels. Also, for major campaigns, ECHO may liaise with the Representations in targeted EU Member States to inform about the action. For major events or interviews and depending on availability, ECHO may propose the involvement of an EU representative. Also, ECHO may provide high-level quotes for the press releases.

Monitoring and evaluation

Regularly monitor the performance of your campaign; in particular online channels and social media allow you to see the immediate impact and correct where needed. Do not be afraid to experiment. Despite best practices and knowledge, what performs better is often what no one expects. Play with different creative assets, messages, audiences.

Monitor the engagement with the audience on social media, and prepare a good community management approach. Prepare defensives (in the languages of the campaign) to respond quickly to obvious comments or criticism.

Measure the results (during and after the campaign) in a structured and professional way (related to the SMART indicators you set for each objective, mentioned above).

Report in detail about the overall outcome, and assess to what extent the initial objectives were met. Report also on your own “lessons learnt” throughout the campaigning process.