



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID  
OPERATIONS (ECHO)

Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and Pacific

**Strategic Partnerships with Humanitarian Organisations**

# Donor Roundtable

## An exploration of European Humanitarian Partnership Models with NGOs

*“We are all part of the humanitarian chain”*

**(Virtual Format)**

**27 September 2022, 10:00 – 12:30, CEST, Brussels**

**Organiser:** Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)

**Co-organisers:** Save the Children (StC) and International Rescue Committee Germany (IRC-DE)

### Summary

Together with StC-DK and IRC, DG ECHO organised a Donor Roundtable on multi-annual programming, with the participation of four EU Member States: Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Sweden, NGO programmatic partners and the director of VOICE.

Each institutional donor explained how they are implementing the Grand Bargain 2.0 commitments with regard to localization, Nexus approach, multi-year and flexible funding. They highlighted some of the constraints, linked notably to the annuality of the budget, reporting and accountability requirements, and the need to retain funding for emergency actions. They also provided some good practice examples (see details below).

Among the lessons learned from the ongoing multi-annual partnerships with NGOs, many agreed that localization and flexibility are fundamental to delivering more efficiently on the ground, together with the need to build trust with the partners.

## **Detailed report**

### **Introduction**

DG ECHO Director D, Andrea Koulaimah, confirmed the commitment of DG ECHO to continue with longer time frame programming despite the constraints in terms of annual budget. She raised the question how to reconcile predictable multi-year funded actions in protracted crises with the humanitarian imperative to quickly adapt to changes, and step up a response in events such as the increase in food prices or the growing number of IDPs or refugees. She underlined the complexity to strike the right balance between accountability requirements and flexibility; predictability (in particular, through multi-year funding) and adaptive management; less earmarking and donor visibility.

Save the Children International Humanitarian Director Gabriella Waaijman stressed that being one of the EU Pilot Programmatic Partner, as well as working strategically with Danida, Sida, and the Dutch Relief Alliance, has allowed them measuring the impact that these longer-term strategic partnerships have on the lives of children and their families. The ability to build stronger partnerships with local partners has directly contributed to providing more timely and flexible responses as well as supporting affected communities in strengthening their resilience. She emphasized that local actors are often first responders in humanitarian crises, and therefore strengthening their abilities to do so more effectively will enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian interventions.

### **Part 1: Panel Member's Presentations**

The first part of the Donor Roundtable aimed at sharing experience and understanding of the multi-annual humanitarian partnership models supported by the EU and four of its Member States. It aimed at identifying key characteristics of these models, as well as exploring commonalities and differences between them.

### **Mapping of Partnership Models**

Save the Children Brussels ECHO Partnership Manager Ilze Feifa presented an NGO mapping of the multi-annual partnership approaches. The full report of the mapping exercise was completed by three NGOs – Save the Children, IRC and Concern.

<b>Commonalities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Audit, internal processes and adherence to policies</li><li>▪ Log-frame flexibility and crisis modifier</li><li>▪ Financial reports/annual narrative focused on key achievements, lesson learned and changes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Other eligibility criteria (i.e. based in country, holding an EU Humanitarian partnership certificate)</li><li>▪ Different budget flexibility</li><li>▪ Application processes based on different criteria</li><li>▪ Localization (Dutch Relief Alliance only one to set a specific requirement of 35%)</li><li>▪ Frequency of assessment</li></ul>

VOICE Director Maria Groenewald reiterated that the longer-term programmatic approaches enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian aid by enabling INGOs to work and coordinate better with local partners. At the same time, she mentioned the need for more flexible funding.

### **Examples of European Humanitarian Partnership Models**

European Union	Denmark	Ireland	The Netherlands	Sweden
<p>The pilot Programmatic Partnerships are based on strategies of common interest and enhanced dialogue in the field and at headquarters.</p> <p>They provide greater predictability (three years of programming under a staged approach – yearly funding), flexibility to achieve medium-term outcomes, and reduced administrative work (multi-country and agreements extended every year).</p> <p>The Programmatic Partnerships have budget flexibility, allowing partners to carry over unspent funds from one year to another, provided the underspending is well justified and implementation is on track.</p>	<p>Danida pushes their NGO partners to work on improving local leadership by, for instance, channelling part of the overheads to local NGOs.</p> <p>They provide 33% of unearmarked funding and offer the flexibility to use funds across the development/ humanitarian nexus as long as at least 60% of the actions targets fragile contexts.</p> <p>Danida also allows budget flexibility across countries, as long as the main objectives are in line with the proposal.</p>	<p>From 2017-2022 Ireland provided 4 year multi-annual funding for protracted crises known as the Humanitarian Programme Plan (HPP) with 7 NGO partners. This was accompanied by a prepositioned acute crisis stream.</p> <p>Irish Aid does not pre-define the geographical or thematic areas of intervention and allows NGOs/CSOs to identify their own programme priorities and strategies in line with their own areas of expertise. However partners must reflect need and the INFORM Index is the guiding tool.</p> <p>Flexibility across budget lines (up to 20%) and in relation to carry over from one year to another (15%) was permitted within the 4 year HPP.</p> <p>For 2023-2027, Irish Aid is planning a five-year flexible funding scheme that would cover and combine longer-term development needs, chronic crises, and acute crises with a with an increased emphasis on localisation and working across the HDP nexus.</p>	<p>The Netherlands provides multi-year, flexible funding to their trusted partners gathered in what is called the Dutch Relief Alliance. The specificity of the Alliance is that its 14 members work together in a consortium, ensuring complementarity and deciding together on the partners who are best placed to respond jointly to crises.</p> <p>Programmes are designed as a Joint Response Mechanism with 25% flexibility on the budget chapters. In case of underspending, funds can be carried over from one year to another.</p> <p>The budget is allocated to the entire programming period – 24 months.</p>	<p>Sida mentioned the softly earmarked Program Based Approach (PBA) and that partners can use their own templates when submitting proposals and during the reporting stage</p> <p>There is a strong recommendation to work on the topic of localization with a participatory and inclusive approach.</p> <p>While they plan to raise the number of NGOs and contexts supported with MYF, they consider that the proportion of multi-year funding will remain limited as Sida must keep the flexibility to fund new/emerging crises.</p>

## **Part 2: Discussion institutional partners & programmatic partners (NGOs)**

The second part of the Donor Roundtable sought to identify how multi-annual partnerships add value and contribute to more effective and efficient ways of working for donors and partners, and to determine factors conducive to furthering the Grand Bargain 2.0 joint commitments.

### **Localization**

All participants agreed that the localization agenda is one of the main drivers to more effective and efficient multi-annual approaches. The **EU** stressed that there is a significant opportunity with the multi-annual partnerships to encourage partners to take localization seriously and to make a real effort towards local actors: not only through capacity building but also to ensure that the advantages of a multi-annual approach trigger down to them. Although support to local actors is not formally requested for accessing Programmatic Partnerships, it is strongly recommended. **Ireland** and **Sweden** do not use a set prescribed targets with their INGO partners in terms of earmarking funds for local CSOs. Nevertheless, it is strongly advised to address localization with a participatory and inclusive approach. **Denmark** mentioned that they place a high value on local leadership in order to pursue the Grand Bargain 2.0 agenda. For them, humanitarian action is required to be anchored locally to make implementation feasible and possible. The **Netherlands** underscored that localization is one of the distinctive features of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), and they aim to distribute 35% of its funding to local partners to develop capacity for each joint response.

### **Flexibility and Efficiency**

**Ireland** agrees to a substantial level of flexibility for partners in order to be effective in crises. Irish aid typically agrees to changes that are recommended by the partner. Years of close collaboration with their partners led to high levels of trust and facilitated these opportunities for flexibility. However, this necessitates targets that are realistic and consists of a result-based management strategy. **Denmark** also agrees to a substantial level of flexibility and the partnership modality builds on a high level of trust, where partners to a large extent are able to change and adapt without prior approval from the Ministry. Denmark has introduced a top-up modality, where partners can access additional funding to new or emerging crises to top-up their already existing engagement in order to ensure swift and effective responses. Denmark observes some specific difficulties when it comes to working with informal actors and social movements in terms of flexibility in the administrative requirements, but work to address these.

The partnership between the **Netherlands** (MFA), the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), and NGO partners has significantly improved in terms of efficiency and flexibility. They aim to reduce assessment duplication, since NGO partners do not constantly have to conduct the same assessments and are encouraged to work together. Additionally, they increased efficiency in the selection of NGO partners by referring to and accepting the EU Humanitarian Partnership Certificate instead of developing their own certificate.

When questioned about the potential for crisis modifiers and Anticipatory Action on increased effectiveness, **Sweden** emphasised that outside of the multi-year funding context, Sida has promoted Anticipatory Action for a long time. Partners benefit rather flexible terms by using soft earmarking at the crisis level. However, finding the most convenient funding window remains challenging, particularly when the needs are not yet evident. They stressed the need of harmonizing application procedures and working together to reduce the amount of time and efforts and suggested, for instance, a model where NGOs would put out application programme documents enabling donors' flexible co-funding or pooled

funding. In this regards, higher levels of transparency would make it simpler to provide flexible funding. The **EU** informed about Commissioner Lenarčič's commitment to increasing the share of multi-year funding in the future from 9% to 12% of the EU humanitarian budget.

## **Conclusion**

Support to localization and flexibility were considered as essential elements for delivering more effectively and efficiently on the ground. This calls for building trust among partners and donors. In this regards, the strategic multi-annual partnership approaches were recognised as beneficial for increased aid efficiency.

DG ECHO Deputy Head of Unit Annick Villarosa expressed her appreciation for the presentations' rich content and inspiration, which encourage more internal reflection.

IRC Executive Director IRC Belgium/Senior Director, Policy & Advocacy Europe Imogen Sudbery emphasised the importance of sharing challenges around multi-year and more flexible humanitarian funding and proposed compiling success stories in a paper.