

Coordination, Complementarity and Coherence in EU Humanitarian Assistance

The European Union is currently the largest humanitarian assistance donor in the world and contributes over 30% of the total international public budget for humanitarian assistance. The single largest portion of EU humanitarian assistance activities is under the responsibility of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Assistance ¹ (DG ECHO).

Background

The mandate of DG ECHO was formally established by a Council Regulation (EC) in 20 June 1996 on humanitarian assistance. Article 10 of this Regulation mandated the Commission to take measures "to promote close coordination between its own activities and those of the Member States, both at decision-making level and on the ground (...) in order to guarantee and enhance the effectiveness and consistency of Community and national humanitarian assistance systems."

The EU competence on development cooperation was established by the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which formalised the existence of a European development policy functioning in liaison with those of Member States, while recognising their interdependence. To guide its practical implementation the Maastricht Treaty established three specific principles: coordination, complementarity and coherence – the '3 Cs'. Although there is no explicit reference to humanitarian assistance in the Maastricht Treaty it is considered implicit that DG ECHO is obliged to also respect these principles.

DG ECHO was required to evaluate how the various organisational changes that its management had initiated in the period between 2000 and 2005, also in relation to a previous evaluation of 1998/99, the Commission reform process, and new challenges affecting

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IS FRAGMENTED BETWEEN THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION

humanitarian activities. In the light of the Maastricht Treaty, it was also deemed pertinent that this evaluation would look into how the 3 Cs had been respected into DG ECHO's and the overall EU activities in the field of humanitarian assistance. The EU Heads of Evaluation thus proposed to include this topic

in the wider 3 Cs evaluation initiative². The evaluation of DG ECHO was subsequently managed by its evaluation unit, with input from France, Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The resulting evaluation report includes a specific chapter on coordination, complementarity and coherence in EU humanitarian assistance, which looks into DG ECHO's cooperation with (1) European Member States; (2) European Community (Parliament, Council and Commission); (3) the United Nations; (4) the International Red Cross; and (5) international NGOs. This info brief will highlight some of the main findings and conclusions of the evaluation with regard to the first two of these five foci.

Key findings

The evaluation first of all observes that DG ECHO has taken a few initiatives to improve coordination and the exchange of information with Member States. A system of information on humanitarian assistance spending has been developed – the 14-point system, as it is known. The evaluation team considers this system an excellent initiative, while recognising that the reliability of the statistical data gathered by the system is hampered by the existence of different interpretations as to what should be included under the term 'humanitarian assistance'. A Humanitarian Assistance Committee (HAC) has also been created to discuss guidelines presented by the Commission on humanitarian assistance.

The HAC is the only formal activity at EU level that brings together the 25 EU Member States and the Commission in the field of humanitarian assistance activities.

With regard to European cooperation, the evaluation concludes that humanitarian assistance is fragmented between the Member States and the Commission, and that coordination is limited to exchange of information only. The report also underlines that with respect to humanitarian assistance policy and operations, there is no formal coordination between the EU Member States and the Commission.

Inside the Commission, coordination on humanitarian assistance is also limited. Currently, five Directorate-Generals deal with activities that may fall within the realm of humanitarian assistance or impact on it: ECHO, Development, EuropeAid, External Relations, and Environment. A scrutiny of coordination between them shows undefined 'grey zones', as well as gaps in terms of complementarity and coherence.

The evaluation team further observes much room for improvement in the EU institutions, given that neither the Council nor the European Parliament have specific committees or working groups on humanitarian assistance. Although the HAC is composed of representatives of Member States, its mandate and role does not currently allow it to function as an active forum for humanitarian issues. The Committee's mandate could therefore be upgraded to allow the meetings to also be used to discuss 3C related issues.

Based on these findings, the evaluation team concludes that the lack of coordination, complementarity and coherence in EU humanitarian assistance has a negative impact on its efficiency and diminishes the impact of the EU in global humanitarian assistance policy and operations. The evaluation team adds that it appears that national priorities and the preference for national visibility are more important issues in international humanitarian assistance than the effective and coordinated assistance of the EU as a whole.

Recommendations

The evaluation includes a number of recommendations to improve the present situation, including more systematic briefings to the European Parliament on EU humanitarian assistance; the creation of a specific Council Working Group; and the further concentration of Commission humanitarian assistance activities under DG ECHO.

A number of important steps in the area have been taken by the EU during 2007, including the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid that was signed by the Presidents of the Commission, Council and European Parliament on 18 December 2007, as well as the specific provisions for humanitarian assistance in the Draft EU Reform Treaty. Such an improved policy and legal framework would be supportive to further concrete and practical measures to improve coordination, complementarity and coherence in the field of EU humanitarian assistance, once these are taken.

The 3Cs and the European humanitarian tradition

The evaluation refers to the specific legal basis of DG ECHO, which is "(...) *subject to the principles of international humanitarian laws, namely that the assistance is administered with impartiality, non-discrimination and neutrality.*"

The DG ECHO evaluation report considers such practice to be consistent with the 'European humanitarian tradition of needs driven implementation'. The evaluation team concludes that this makes it difficult for the Directorate General to coordinate its actions with others, and to harmonise its actions with developing countries' needs and strategies.

For example, in the context of the coordination with DG Development, the report mentions that "(...) *DG DEV activities are based on the EU/ACP agreement that delegates powers of decision to the ACP national governments, while DG ECHO acts independently and impartially. This in reality limits the possibilities of complementarity, because of the differing interests.*"

Download the full report at www.three-cs.net

- 1 This information brief has been prepared by the ECDPM, based on the final evaluation report.
- 2 A synthesis study of all six joint-evaluation studies that were done in the context of this initiative is also available at www.three-cs.net

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Each issue focuses on a specific theme relating to the 3Cs initiative of the Heads of Evaluation for External Cooperation of the EU Member States and the European Commission.

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3Cs Initiative

This initiative was launched by the Heads of Evaluation of the EU Member States and the European Commission.

Comments, suggestions

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