



VOICE

ACTIVITY REPORT 2015

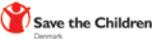
BRUSSELS, APRIL 2016

VOICE

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Cooperation in Emergencies**

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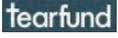
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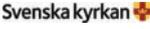
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ACRONYMS

CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
COHAFA	Council Working Group on Humanitarian Affairs and Food Assistance
CONCORD	The European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
DG ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
DEVE	European Parliament Development Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EEAS	European External Action Service
EC	European Commission
EOG	Europe and Others Group
EP	European Parliament
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EU	European Union
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
GA	General Assembly
HIPs	Humanitarian Implementation Plans
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LRRD	Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
MS	Member States
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières / Doctors without Borders
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
NOHA	Network on Humanitarian Action: International Association of Universities
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	the United Nations Refugee Agency
UNRWA	the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WG	Working Group or Watch Group
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

INTRODUCTION



Sendai, Addis Ababa, COP21, the SDGs, the HLP... Between 2015 and 2016, a series of international processes and summits led to a number of commitments by governments on how to deal with the big challenges of our times, such as development and humanitarian financing, climate change, the increasing number of natural disasters and the follow up to the Millennium Development Goals. This cycle will be continued in 2016 with the first ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.

The European Union is playing an important role in the above mentioned processes and is a global player when it comes to humanitarian aid. Bringing a collective European humanitarian NGO perspective to the discussions has been crucial. 2015 therefore became an intense year for the network influencing EU positioning especially for the World Humanitarian Summit and the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing (HLP), but also for the Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Summit. These processes naturally led to working in alliances with other humanitarian networks at global level while members advocated for NGO positions at national level in EU member states.

The engagements of the network are mirrored in the main documents for the WHS; at EU level these contributed to an EU Communication on the WHS and EU Council conclusions. At the international level they contributed to a strong focus on conflict and the humanitarian principles, the importance of local and national actors, the humanitarian-development nexus and gender mainstreaming in the UN Secretary General's report for the WHS, and on simplification of administrative burdens and reporting in the report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing.

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid remains the cornerstone policy framework for the EU. Since 2013 VOICE members stressed the importance of a new Action Plan and it was therefore a big achievement for the network when the European Commission finally agreed a new implementation framework for the EU at the end of 2015.

The VOICE DRR working group's expertise was strongly engaged in contributing to the focus given to vulnerable groups, small scale disasters and enhanced multi-stakeholder engagement, which are all reflected in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This process saw more countries involved and an increased level of their ownership. It is being adopted by 187 member states, compared to 167 for its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework for Action. Overall this framework is perceived as a positive development and is welcomed by civil society.

The year also saw humanitarian needs constantly increasing. In the 2015 EU barometer Europeans expressed 90% support for EU humanitarian assistance. Globally, the world now faces the biggest number of refugees and internally displaced people since the Second World War. Meanwhile the conflicts in Syria and the Middle East are dragging on and the resilience of those affected is shrinking. This has contributed to the unprecedented migrant and refugee stream arriving on Europe's doorstep. Volunteers and professional humanitarian NGOs have responded by reconfirming European citizens' commitment to humanity, engaging in advocacy towards the EU and helping as well as they could along the routes people took.

2016 is shaping up to be a very important year for the humanitarian sector, and for Europe. VOICE members will make their voices heard in Istanbul and bring their expertise and experience from the field to the discussions. They also plan to follow closely the outcome of the Summit and engage and monitor the follow-up processes at EU and member state level. The key question for humanitarian NGOs is, what impact all these commitments made in Istanbul and over the last year, will have for crisis-affected populations in the field?

Kathrin Schick
Director VOICE

VOICE 2015

key figures

Thanks to members' high level of engagement, the VOICE network brings NGOs' perspectives into EU decision making processes. This has a critical impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid.

WORKING TOGETHER

84



84 Members from 19 European countries



560



Members exchange and learn:
560 participants in VOICE members meetings, working groups, task forces and advocacy training.

8



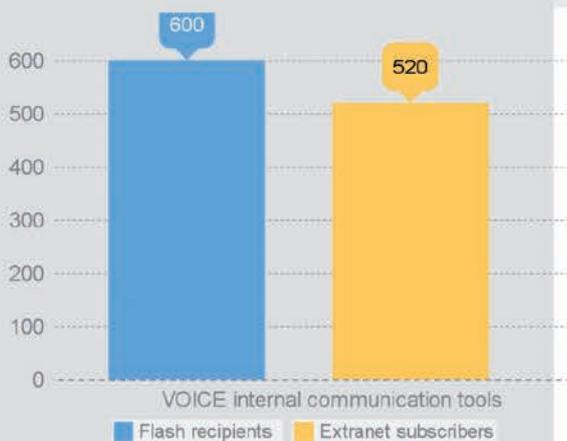
Develop key messages:
The network collectively produced 1 general policy resolution, 5 policy papers and briefings and 2 VOICE Out Louds.

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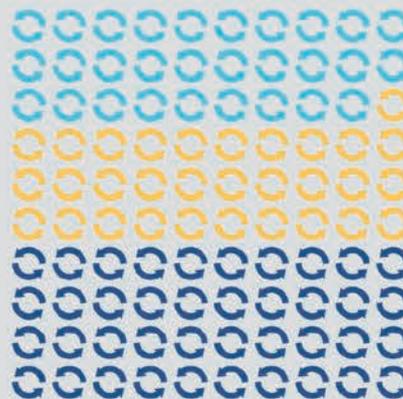


Raise our VOICE:
274 participants from 89 NGOs participated in VOICE events. VOICE Secretariat was invited to 24 events at national level.

VOICE communication tools



600 members received the 6 Flash bulletins in 2015; and 520 members were able to benefit from information posted on the VOICE Extranet



2000 readers of VOICE Out Loud



1. ENSURING POLICY, PRACTICE AND FUNDING ARE INCREASINGLY ADHERENT TO CORE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND GOOD PRACTICE

1.1 POLICY: THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID – PUT INTO PRACTICE

VOICE and the Consensus:

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid ('the Consensus') is the main policy framework for EU humanitarian aid. It was signed in 2007 by the member states (MS), the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) and was complemented by an action plan. VOICE sees the Consensus as a clear commitment to a principled and needs-based approach to humanitarian action and has played an active role throughout its development, and a mid-term review of the Consensus and its Action Plan, which expired in 2013. The VOICE Consensus Task Force then set an objective to advocate for a new, workable Action Plan.

The Commission and member states should develop and deliver on a follow-up Action Plan, to ensure continued joint implementation of the principles of the Consensus

VOICE General Assembly resolution 2014

1.11 - Calling for implementation of the Consensus

Throughout 2015 VOICE raised the necessity for a follow-up to the expired Action Plan wherever relevant. This included, with officials in the European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO), with member states' humanitarian aid departments, especially the Latvian and Luxembourg EU Presidencies, and with the European Parliament. VOICE consistently integrated messages in its advocacy on **the continued need for implementation of the Consensus**, as well as on its continuing relevance, for example in the EU's preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). Discussions between member states on the findings of the independent evaluation of implementation 2008-2013 took most of the first half of the year. By summer, DG ECHO committed to proposing a new plan for member states' implementation based on the findings of the evaluation, the reflections of member states in COHAFA (Council Working Group on Humanitarian Affairs and Food Assistance) and the input received from the VOICE study: *NGO perspectives on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*¹.

1.12 - A new Action Plan is agreed

The **VOICE Consensus Task Force** was invited to comment on the **draft implementation plan for the Consensus**. VOICE members from Ireland, UK and the Netherlands, and Brussels based offices, joined UN agencies and the Red Cross family in a consultation meeting. The contribution of the VOICE

¹ VOICE study, Brussels May 2014, *The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid – an NGO perspective*, <http://www.ngovoice.org/documents/20140513%20Final%20NET%20VOICE%20Study%20Consensus%20on%20Humanitarian%20Aid.pdf>

network, and in particular the VOICE study, were recognized by the Commission. VOICE emphasized the need for concrete activities that member states can lead or participate in and a transparent and regular reporting format for the Implementation Plan. Members also gave suggestions for countries that could usefully be considered for country case studies and underlined the need for simplification of donors' administrative requirements. In December 2015 the European Commission adopted a Staff Working Paper on Implementation of the Consensus – a huge success for the VOICE Consensus Task Force which had worked towards this goal since 2013.

1.13 - Using VOICE expertise on the Consensus for advocacy at national level

The VOICE Consensus study has proven to be a useful resource for members in their advocacy and to highlight good practices in different EU member states. For example, NGOs in **the Netherlands** have used the evidence and good practices in it during their dialogue with their Foreign Ministry over funding. The VOICE secretariat was invited to the **Austrian** coordination committee to a discussion between NGOs and the government on humanitarian policy and practice and stressed the importance of further development of the Austrian approach to humanitarian aid. The discussion demonstrated that a member state does not need to have a large humanitarian budget to be a principled donor or to engage in policy development.

1.2 PRACTICE: EU AID ARCHITECTURE AND THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH – CONVEYING EU HUMANITARIAN NGOs VALUES AND CONCERNS

1.21 - EU humanitarian aid in the new institutional setting

Monitoring and influencing the EU aid architecture remained an important component of the network's activities in 2015. Since November 2014, the EU High Representative/Vice President, as head of the European External Action Service (EEAS), has been working more closely within the European Commission leading a team of external relations Commissioners including the Commissioner for humanitarian aid and crisis management. Other portfolios include development, human rights, protection and security, diplomacy and conflict prevention, trade, the EU neighbourhood and also migration and climate change where relevant.

The majority of EU humanitarian assistance is being delivered in fragile states through NGOs, the UN and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. It is vital to ensure that EU humanitarian aid continues to be needs-based and delivered according to humanitarian principles. The Consensus is the main framework guaranteeing this and makes clear that EU humanitarian aid has its own objectives: preserving lives, reducing human suffering and maintaining human dignity. Where and how humanitarian aid is delivered should be decided solely on the needs of affected populations, independent of political and security agendas.

VOICE's 2015 annual policy resolution gives recommendations on '*EU humanitarian aid in the new institutional setting*'. Recognizing the EU drive towards a more coherent response to the global world, the resolution underlined that new working methods take time to mature, and the Commissioners must develop an in-depth understanding for each other's mandates.

1. The EU should ensure that coordination between its institutions does not lead to a degree of integration that negatively affects humanitarian organisations as they seek to address the needs of crisis affected populations.
2. The EU should ensure clarity of roles and mandates in crisis response and management and maintain a clear distinction between political, military and humanitarian actors.
3. The EU should engage in systematic dialogue with NGOs and other actors to fully understand realities on the ground.
4. EU external communication should differentiate between political and humanitarian action and actively promote an understanding of humanitarian principles.

VOICE General Assembly Policy Resolution May 2015

1.22 - EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises

The 2015 General Assembly (GA) resolution also underlines that a key concern for humanitarian NGOs is that the EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises policy recognizes the principles of the Consensus, and in particular that **humanitarian assistance is not, and should not be used as a crisis management tool**. VOICE members notably underlined the importance of this for ensuring the security of humanitarian aid workers and their access to affected communities. In the context of the new institutional working methods VOICE works at ensuring this will be further recognized in the new Global Foreign and Security Strategy.

1.23 - Supporting NGO advocacy on the EU comprehensive approach to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq

In the early months of 2015, humanitarian and development NGOs followed closely the development of a regional EU strategy in response to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The strategy was eventually adopted by Council in March as **'the EU regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh threat'**. This was one of the first 'comprehensive approach' strategies. Concerns were high that humanitarian and development instruments were being used for the objective of combating terrorism. In early drafts by the EEAS combating terrorism was the implied purpose of the EU's humanitarian assistance and support for education in the region of the conflicts.

VOICE supported NGOs to build a broader advocacy coalition, by disseminating the information and advocacy positions for broader sign-on among its network of 84 members in 19 countries. NGOs were able to secure high-level meetings with officials in the EEAS, in several EU capitals and to brief member states' representatives on the Council working group on the Middle East. In the end, member states' position differentiated between the different objectives in Syria, Iraq and the region: responding to humanitarian needs, supporting development where possible, with a focus on the educational needs of children, and combating terrorism. While from a humanitarian NGO perspective this is still not the ideal policy framework, NGOs had been able to convince member states to considerably **clarify the EU position and safeguard the distinct objectives of the EU's humanitarian aid**.

1.24 - Building an EU institutional understanding of humanitarian assistance in conflict

Following up on the NGOs' activities in relation to the Syria strategy and the opportunities and challenges identified by the VOICE event (see below), **VOICE President** addressed a **letter** to the EU High Representative/Vice-President Ms. Federica **Mogherini**. Seeking to help to build an understanding of the humanitarian principles and mission within the EEAS, VOICE also aimed to develop a dialogue on the impact and the role that foreign policy can play in humanitarian crises

in complex emergencies and conflict situations. This was followed by a number of exchanges with the EEAS, at cabinet level, and with the teams working on conflict prevention and development coordination.

1.25 - Conflict and EU humanitarian aid - the Comprehensive Approach - what does 'in but out' really mean?

Seeking to further support VOICE members and EU stakeholders to understand the nuances of the EU comprehensive approach and DG ECHO's 'In but Out' position, VOICE organized an event in Brussels on 11 May. 88 people attended the event which was chaired by Professor Churruca Muguruza from the University of Deusto with VOICE member Oxfam's conflicts and humanitarian policy advisor, DG ECHO's Director of Operations and the Luxembourg EU Presidency chair of COHAFA as speakers. The discussion highlighted that the EU has the flexibility to mobilize different foreign policy responses to crises, which can be an asset in understanding the drivers of conflict. A large proportion of the EU's humanitarian assistance is to man-made crises where political solutions would be needed. However, joint public press and media work by the foreign policy and humanitarian departments, presents both challenges and opportunities, including for the perception of the EU and humanitarians in the field. The need for humanitarians to be better heard within the foreign policy discussions in Council was discussed, as well as the need for EU member states to join DG ECHO in driving a principled and needs based approach to humanitarian action.



Speakers and participants at VOICE event, May 2015

1.26 - Raising awareness of the role and added value of humanitarian NGOs

Building relationships with key officials and political figures within the EU aid architecture to ensure they recognize and understand the role of humanitarian NGOs in the delivery of assistance and protection to crisis-affected people is a core part of VOICE's work. In that vein, the VOICE President met with the **Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Mr. Stylianides** twice in 2016, in January and November. The President urged the Commissioner to meet with implementing NGOs especially during his field visits. Mr. Stylianides expressed concern for the security of aid workers and a keen interest in maintaining the 'In but Out' approach for DG ECHO in the new institutional set up and the broader foreign policy structures of the EU.

N. Borsinger, VOICE President and C. Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid



VOICE and the EU institutions: Advocacy highlights

EU humanitarian aid policy and practice is shaped by the European Commission, Council and European Parliament. VOICE works with all three institutions to influence relevant policies







European Parliament

Input to the DEVE Committee's report on the World Humanitarian Summit

Interview with the EP Standing Rapporteur for humanitarian aid, Guerrero Salom for the VOICE Out Loud

VOICE DRR Working Group briefs the EP delegation to Sendai

VOICE President meets Commissioner Christos Stylianides

Contribution to Commission consultations on the Consensus implementation and the WHS

VOICE Board meets with ECHO new director general, Monique Pariat and exchanges on NGOs priorities



European Commission





Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection







Council

VOICE briefing to EU Member States in view of the Europe&Others regional consultation for the WHS

EU Presidency: VOICE Director speaks at events in Latvia and Luxembourg

Together with CONGDE and IECAH, VOICE organizes a humanitarian roundtable in Spain

The Board of VOICE met with the newly appointed Director General of DG ECHO Ms. Pariat in October. The Board highlighted members' concerns linked to policy, **partnership** and **operational issues**. These included the scale and complexity of current crises, security in the field, the need for diversity and the burden of administrative requirements for NGOs (see *section 3.2*) as well as new EU initiatives such as 'EU Trust Funds' (see *section 2.4*). The Board also stressed the importance of DG ECHO support to so-called 'forgotten crises' in light of the increasing attention for Syria, and encouraged high-level EU **political engagement on the World Humanitarian Summit** (see *section 2.1*).

The President also met with **Mr. Guerrero Salom, the humanitarian rapporteur from the European Parliament (EP)**, to convey VOICE's key concerns regarding the EU and humanitarian aid. The relationship between the Humanitarian Rapporteur and VOICE has resulted in frequent exchanges on reports, and parliamentary questions. He was interviewed for the *VOICE Out Loud* magazine, expressing his commitment to ensuring recognition of the work of European humanitarian NGOs and principled European humanitarian assistance. Other collaborations included on the new international framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (see *section 3.3*) and on the European Parliament position for the World Humanitarian Summit (see *section 2.1*). Exchanges have also taken place with other MEPs and EP officials in order to assist in the identification of key issues to be addressed.

At Brussels level, exchanges among humanitarian actors continue to take place on a quarterly basis. These **informal meetings between UNOCHA, IFRC, ICRC, MSF and VOICE** have proven to be very valuable for information sharing and to ensure complementary action to safeguard the principled and needs-based approach of EU humanitarian aid.

1.27 - VOICE and the rotating presidencies of the Council of the EU

The VOICE secretariat continued to work with the Council especially through the COHAFA EU Presidency representatives and with relevant officials at national level to share NGO positions and concerns regarding EU humanitarian policy and practice. During their EU presidency, the network was invited by the **Latvian Presidency** to speak at a workshop in Riga co-organized by the NOHA network. The secretariat also met with incoming Presidencies (**Luxembourg** and the **Netherlands**) for exchanges in advance of their presidency terms. In January, the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs was briefed on VOICE priorities in 2015, such as the WHS and the implementation of the Consensus and the Comprehensive Approach (see *section 1.22 above*). This led to VOICE speaking at an event in Luxembourg and discussions on humanitarian and **civil protection** actors working together.

1.3 FUNDING: ENSURING TIMELY AND PREDICTABLE FUNDING FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

VOICE network works on the legal, policy, and funding environment to support principled humanitarian assistance. Ensuring NGOs are key partners for the EU in humanitarian aid is one of the objectives of this work. Building on the network's experience and relationships at EU and member state level in relation to financing EU humanitarian aid, in 2015, VOICE extended this work to the global level in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit's work on humanitarian financing.

1.31 - Funding for EU humanitarian aid

2015 started on a positive note thanks to the agreement on the EU budget reached in December 2014, putting an end to a year of financial difficulties for DG ECHO and its partners.

Members' engagement was highly recognized and thanks to the support of a dedicated **Task Force VOICE** advocacy proved to be of great help in the result achieved. The Task Force was thus closed after having captured the lessons to be learnt, as well as developing key messages for the planned mid-term review of the EU's multi-annual financial framework.

Later in the year, when the **2016 EU humanitarian budget** was under negotiation between the Parliament and the Council, VOICE President wrote to influential members of the European Parliament reaffirming the need for a fully funded humanitarian aid budget line and recognizing the vital role they had played in ensuring timely and predictable funding for EU humanitarian aid. The EC humanitarian aid budget agreed for 2016 was the highest ever.

Key messages from NGOs to the High-level panel on humanitarian financing:

NGO networks reaffirmed the need for timely and predictable funding; called for a reduction of the administrative burden and reiterated the need for further improvement of the current humanitarian funding streams, including to ensure that there is better access to funding for local and national NGOs and to mitigate the possible impact of counter terrorism legislation on the delivery of humanitarian aid.

1.32 - Contributing to the future of global humanitarian financing

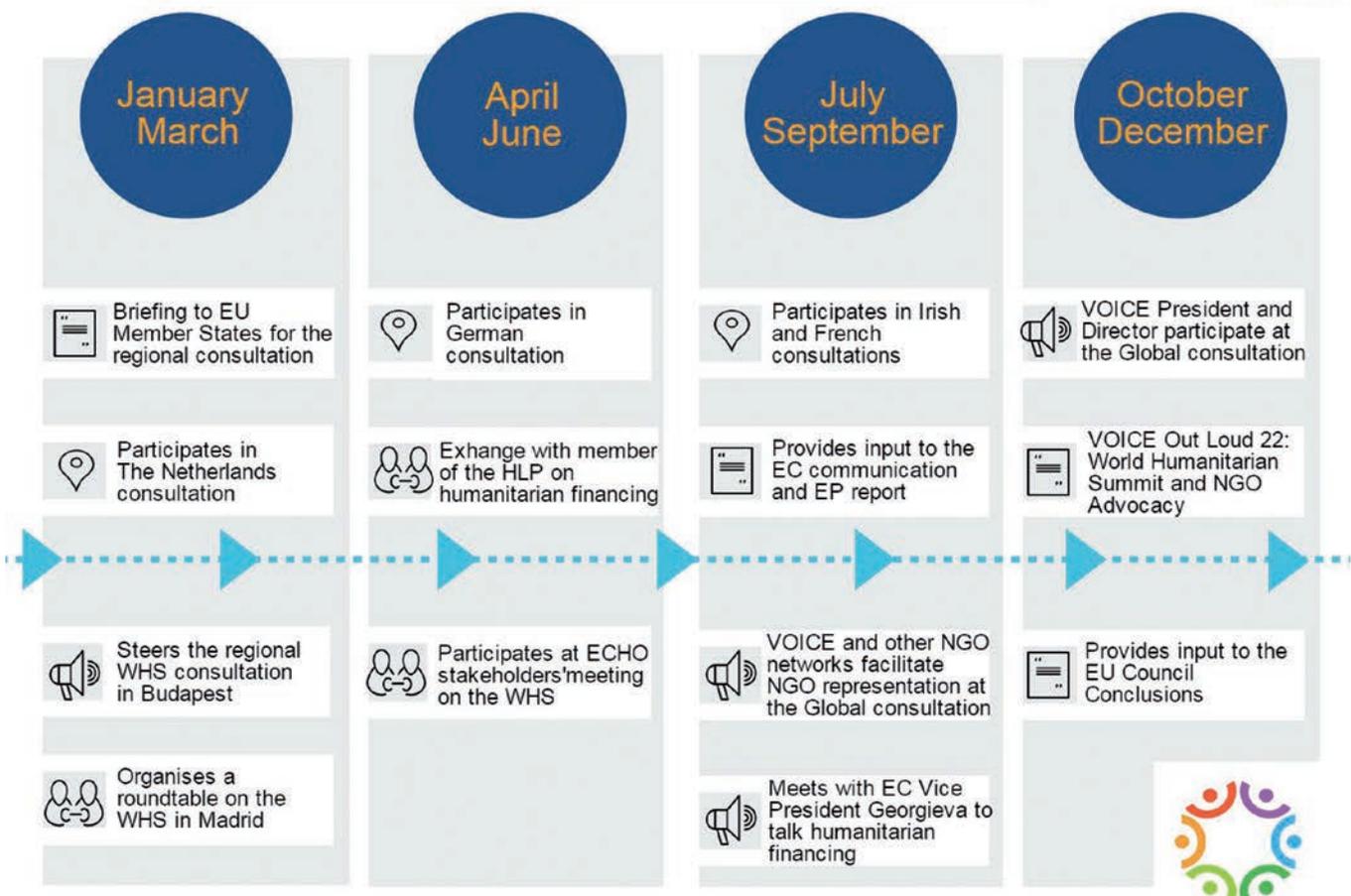
2015 also saw the call from the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon for a high-level panel on humanitarian financing. Due to the importance of this process, VOICE decided to engage its members. Members agreed common priorities and met with Dr. Sriskandarajah, a member of the panel in June. VOICE messages were also shared with the other humanitarian NGO networks and a coordinated approach was agreed (*see section 2.1 below*). On behalf of the networks, VOICE secured a meeting with one of the co-chairs of the panel, Commission Vice President Georgieva. VOICE, ICVA and SCHR representatives were present. As a follow-up, a joint letter by the networks was sent reaffirming the NGO perspectives on how to further improve the humanitarian financing architecture at global level. VOICE's advocacy was successful: many of the networks' messages were included in the report published by the high-level panel early in 2016.

2. TO INCREASE THE RECOGNITION OF NGOs AS KEY ACTORS IN THE DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

2.1 WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

The first World Humanitarian Summit will take place in Istanbul in May 2016 after a worldwide consultation process, including regional, virtual and thematic consultations, was held. NGOs deliver the majority of humanitarian assistance in the field. Throughout the process leading to the World Humanitarian Summit, VOICE has worked at global, European and national level, to ensure the voice of NGOs is heard and that their concerns are appropriately reflected in the various outcomes of the preparations. VOICE has joined forces with other humanitarian networks for this purpose.

Highlights of VOICE and the World Humanitarian Summit



2.11 - Promoting the views and participation of NGOs at global level

Over the last year VOICE, InterAction, ICVA and SCHR have worked closely together concerning the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. The main objective has been to ensure that NGOs should be represented at all stages of the process and to facilitate their participation in the relevant consultations. The NGO networks regularly exchanged information on the process and on our members' activities. In the run up to the regional Europe and Others consultation in Budapest, VOICE and InterAction were invited to represent NGOs in the Steering Committee. This provided an opportunity to influence the agenda, and for VOICE to be involved in the drafting of a paper on reducing risk and vulnerabilities, building on the expertise of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) working group (see section 3.3).



In Budapest, VOICE and InterAction brought together NGOs for informal debriefings. The VOICE representative spoke at a coordination meeting to the **Geneva Global consultation to support alignment among NGOs** and the NGO networks delivered a joint statement from International NGOs. The objective of the networks in ensuring NGOs' participation in consultations was successfully achieved; in Budapest there was strong INGO representation and in Geneva 90% of VOICE members were represented.

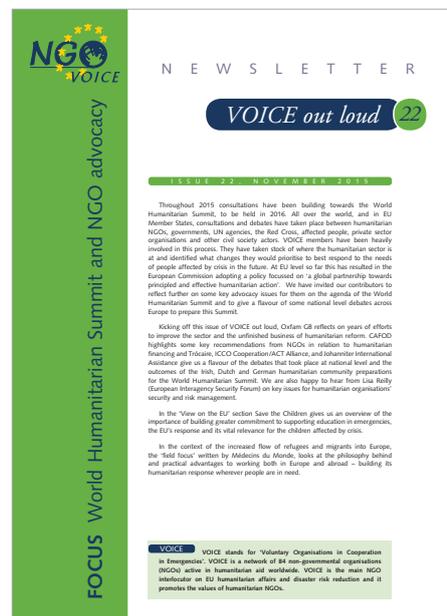
Throughout this process there was common agreement on several issues that NGOs wanted to push higher on the agenda. This included the recognition of the impact of increasing number of conflicts as drivers of escalating humanitarian needs, the importance of UN reform including coordination, leadership, accountability and partnership, and for many, the need for the humanitarian system to work further on supporting front line actors in crisis affected areas – in terms of access to decision making processes, coordination, capacity building and funding.

These priorities were further developed by VOICE members in their contribution to the second **VOICE Out Loud** magazine in 2015 *'The World Humanitarian Summit and NGO advocacy'*. VOICE Out Loud was submitted to the WHS as a contribution to the consultation.

2.12 - Shaping the EU position towards the WHS

At European level, VOICE agreed that it wanted to work for a strong EU position that reflects the important role the EU plays as a global humanitarian donor. The principled and needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance the EU has committed to through the Consensus also gives it considerable leverage and influence inside the humanitarian system. As a first step towards a strong EU position, VOICE, in a **briefing paper for EU member states** issued in January ahead of the Europe and Others consultation in Budapest, called on the Commission to develop a policy position and on the Council and EP to adopt conclusions and a report respectively. VOICE submitted this briefing to the consultation: it highlighted key issues and recommendations for the member states, and gave visibility to members' individual contributions.

VOICE was pleased to have contributed to achieving a decision by the European Commission to adopt a **Communication on the WHS**, and in June was invited to a consultation on its planned priorities.



Members joined relevant UN agencies and the Red Cross family, to underline the importance of the **Consensus as the basis for the EU position**, the importance of the conflict theme, and the possible impact of counter-terrorism measures on humanitarian effectiveness. Members underlined the role of local actors and faith based organisations, the importance of a gender perspective, and the continuing relevance of the humanitarian principles. The secretariat followed the meeting with a letter to DG ECHO and was happy to see many members' recommendations reflected in the Commission's Communication *'Towards the World Humanitarian Summit: A global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action'* which was presented to the EP and Council in September.

The texts take into account the extensive consultations and reports to date. I would like to thank you for VOICE's input to this process. The many stimulating and forward-looking ideas, which you have shared in your position paper as well as during consultation meetings, have undoubtedly contributed to the Communication.

extract from letter addressed to VOICE President by Commissioner Stylianides

The European Parliament commissioned a **study** on which it would later build its own report. The secretariat exchanged with the author and commented on areas of the draft. For **the report**, many VOICE members gave input to individual MEPs, while the centre-left political group held a consultation for humanitarian actors in which NGOs participated actively.

VOICE continued its **call on the EU member states to develop a joint position** in advance of the UN Secretary General's report. The secretariat supported members' engagement and advocacy at national level for a joint EU position by participating in events throughout the European Union on the Summit. The VOICE Director was particularly active as a Europe and Others steering committee member. She spoke at the **Dutch** Humanitarian Summit and participated in the **Irish** Humanitarian Summit. She also spoke at the **German** NGO consultation, and in **France** on a high-level panel at the 'Convergences' conference in Paris. The **Luxembourg** Foreign Ministry also invited her to speak at its annual conference with its NGOs, providing a great opportunity to influence the incoming EU presidency. The VOICE secretariat also spoke at a consultation organized for diaspora in **UK**. Each speaking engagement was an opportunity to underline the added-value of humanitarian NGOs in humanitarian action and to advocate for the key issues which should be high on the global and European agendas. The network also published an article in the **Hungarian** Foreign Policy Review on NGO perspectives on the World Humanitarian Summit Process.



High-level briefing on the World Humanitarian Summit, Luxembourg, March 2015

VOICE also organized a **roundtable in Madrid**, bringing together 36 people. The VOICE Board met with the Spanish Foreign Ministry, DG ECHO, Spanish members CARITAS Española, OXFAM Intermón, Médicos del Mundo, and Acción contra el Hambre and other relevant stakeholders to discuss the World Humanitarian Summit. The roundtable was supported by IECAH (the Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action), an independent Spanish research and consultancy organisation, and the Spanish NGO platform.



Speakers at Humanitarian Roundtable in Madrid, March 2015

In December, under the leadership of the Luxembourg Presidency and following a discussion in the Foreign Affairs Council on priorities for the Summit, the **Council adopted conclusions**, underlining humanitarian access and the importance of the humanitarian principles, the need for implementation of the UN Transformative Agenda to achieve reform and the participation of all actors in the Summit. VOICE welcomed these first conclusions as they reflect most VOICE messages shared on several occasions with the COHAF and through VOICE members at national level.

2.2 BRINGING NGO MEMBERS' EXPERTISE FROM THE FIELD TO THE EU

VOICE promotes the role of NGOs as professional humanitarian actors. The network's members are active at EU and national levels in humanitarian advocacy and programming issues in relation to major crises. The secretariat ensured members had access to the information regarding crisis coordination such as the meetings held on **Ebola, Nepal and Yemen**. As main implementers in the field, they bring their expertise and experience from the field to operational and policy discussions in Brussels. The secretariat uses opportunities as they arise to give visibility and voice to members and their concerns. During 2015, this was the case with regard to High-Level meetings convened in Brussels on the Ebola crisis and on the crisis in the **Central African Republic**. A number of exchanges with NGO networks were also organized supporting advocacy around the Syria crisis, and with UN officials from the UNHCR and UNRWA on **the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean** and on the **situation in Gaza**.

The secretariat was also happy to offer meeting space and its network to members for exchanges with field experts. Examples include on the situation in **northern Nigeria**, on the situation for **children in Ukraine**, on advocacy related to **West Bank/Area C** and on **monitoring displacement in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories**. This contributes to the strengthening of humanitarian NGO advocacy in Brussels.

2.3 NGOs AS HUMANITARIAN ACTORS IN EUROPE

The mixed migration flows into Europe, the so-called European 'refugee crisis', brought a new dimension for VOICE's work in 2015 – underlining the role that humanitarian NGOs already do or could play at home. The secretariat aimed to support members that were becoming active in the crisis



within the EU, by sharing information – identifying quickly that protection, coordination and funding were areas of high concern and that there were no suitable EU funding instruments to support members’ engagement within the EU. VOICE members’ humanitarian activities were often only made possible thanks to other sources, especially own funds. However, not all members felt they could or should become active and many focussed instead on advocacy towards the EU especially around the Valetta Summit and on EU member states’ responsibilities. With the intention of giving members the opportunity to share their experiences, VOICE organized an **event** on *‘Humanitarian*

NGOs – actors in the European Refugee Flow?’. The event was very popular with over 100 participants and gave members the chance to exchange about the different dynamics and factors that drove their diverse decisions in relation to choosing to become active or not within the EU.

VOICE also engaged in the debate with other networks such as ECRE and CONCORD, gave input to an ICVA advocacy paper and was invited to meetings with humanitarian experts in **The Hague** and in **London** on options for NGO engagement at European level.

2.4 MONITORING EU FUNDING FOR NGOs

The VOICE secretariat supports the role of NGOs as humanitarian actors by monitoring the funding available. In 2015 this involved a reinforced engagement around the annual EU **humanitarian implementation programming (HIPs) process** (see section 3.1), but also some novel challenges in relation to EU funding structures. Having established a Trust Fund for linking emergency and development assistance in the Central African Republic in 2014 (the Bekou fund), the EU then created two further **Trust Funds**, one for the Syria Response (the Madad fund) and one for Emergency support to Africa for migration. Members participated in a number of consultation and information meetings regarding these funds and encouraged the EC and the EEAS to evaluate the success and lessons-learned of the trust funds before multiplying them further. VOICE also asked for more NGO consultation regarding their implementation and shared questions with the EP for the DEVE Committee’s exchanges with the relevant Commissioners. Throughout the year VOICE secretariat ensured that relevant information was shared to support members in seeking access to these funds.

2.5 WORKING WITH OTHER ACTORS

Working with other actors is key to multiplying VOICE messages and reaching out further. Throughout the last years, there has been regular exchange with other humanitarian networks. As highlighted in previous sections, **joint work and advocacy campaigns** were necessary to ensure the perspective of NGOs in global processes would be heard. In addition to the work on the WHS and humanitarian financing, ICVA and VOICE decided to work together on studies focusing on the administrative conditions attached to humanitarian funding to NGOs from donors.

Thanks to members, synergies and cooperation were ensured between VOICE and other networks. CONCORD (the European development NGO confederation) briefed the VOICE DRR Working group on the development of the Sustainable Development Goals and offered the group the opportunity to participate in a consultation. **VOICE, CONCORD and EPLO** also met at Directors’ level, leading to common preparation concerning the process towards an EU Global Foreign and Security Strategy, expected in June 2016.



When it comes to **quality and accountability initiatives**, VOICE continued to share relevant and timely information with its members in relation to the achievements regarding the Core Humanitarian Standard. The launch was welcomed by the majority of professional humanitarian NGOs. It was followed by the establishment of the Humanitarian Quality and Accountability Initiative in Geneva, a brand new organisation for certification against the Standard. In 2015 VOICE was happy to be able to publish an article in the URD magazine on NGO perspectives on Quality and Accountability initiatives.

In 2015, the VOICE secretariat's expertise was particularly sought by the **NOHA university network**. The secretariat and members brought their expertise and provided an NGO perspective to various NOHA training sessions for the Masters students and for other actors. NOHA students were presented with the importance of NGO engagement in advocacy campaigns and policy development, the development of

and limits of civil-military relations in the field, and were introduced to the relations between NGOs and donors from funding to policy making. VOICE director also participated in a new e-learning tool developed by NOHA: through a video which is freely available on YouTube, Kathrin Schick introduces the VOICE network and the added value of NGOs.



3. COLLECTIVE ACTION IN PURSUIT OF QUALITY HUMANITARIAN AID

3.1 NGOs AND ECHO PARTNERSHIP: THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE FPA WATCH GROUP

VOICE continues to be a key interlocutor for DG ECHO in the development of policies and financial procedures related to EU humanitarian aid. Its long-standing role facilitating the FPA Watch Group on behalf of all ECHO NGO partners is well recognized and the Group provides a forum for dialogue and collaboration on the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with DG ECHO.

After finalizing its contribution to the FPA guidelines, the FPA Watch Group undertook its important task of **monitoring** the **implementation** of the fifth **FPA** and started assessing whether the changes introduced in the FPA 2014 provide a **simplification** and support NGOs when implementing DG ECHO funded projects.

Early 2015, the group provided substantial input to DG ECHO to strengthen its practice in relation to the HIPs process (see *section 2.4*); it asked for wider field consultation during the preparation phase, for the HIPs not to be published all at once given they are the main opportunity for DG ECHO partners to present projects, as well as further clarity on the selection process for proposals. Other important issues discussed during 2015 included the internal consultation on the liquidation phase and development of recommendations, the eligibility of stocks management costs, rules applying to consortia and the audit process.

The FPA Watch Group, together with the DRR Working Group, undertook an internal consultation on experiences with the **Resilience Marker** and shared recommendations with DG ECHO in order to improve the marker and its guidance notes. This was very much welcomed by DG ECHO, and the marker was revised to incorporate the concept of community capacity in addition to vulnerability assessments. This means that communities are more likely to be involved in project implementation from the beginning.

After three years this group's mandate came to an end in 2015. **The FPA Watch Group was therefore reconstituted.** VOICE thanks all the 32 members of the FPA Watch Group who dedicated much time and energy to contribute to the positive and constructive dialogue between the NGOs and DG ECHO in relation to the 2014 FPA. VOICE is pleased that so many of the FPA Watch Group members have decided to stay engaged for another term, proving the relevance of this group and its capacity to make the NGOs' perspective heard, and welcomes members who have just joined.

3.2 MEMBERS ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In the beginning of 2015 VOICE actively engaged with DG ECHO regarding operations via a **remote management** approach. NGO experts were invited to a brainstorming session providing substantial comments resulting in DG ECHO largely revising its remote management guidelines. As a response, VOICE then provided a consolidated feedback to DG ECHO based on members' feedback.

The finalized guidelines are most welcome since they better reflect the approach DG ECHO and its partners take on the ground while recognizing the real challenges they face.

The **EU Aid volunteers initiative** was officially launched in January 2015. Primarily it intends to offer opportunities for European volunteers to contribute to humanitarian aid operations worldwide but also for local actors to benefit from capacity building activities. Throughout the year, VOICE shared information about the progress of the initiative with its members and collected feedback. Indeed, for VOICE members with the experience of working with DG ECHO, the initiative presents significant novelties which increase the administrative burden. The Commission is working through an Executive Agency of the Commission (EACEA) that is in charge of implementing the initiative, a call for proposals approach has been adopted, each organisation has to go through a certification process to take part in the initiative, and consortia are mandatory. VOICE stressed the need to simplify the process if the Commission wants to see the initiative succeed as initially planned. The challenges faced by members in relation to the initiative and their concerns were also shared with DG ECHO during its annual partners' conference.

In September 2015 VOICE members shared their know-how during a DG ECHO workshop **on protection**. DG ECHO would like its guidelines to become more strategic/policy oriented and in line with current practices and thinking. The secretariat involved members in the official consultation which followed and will keep on being engaged in 2016.

Following on from the network's study on the Consensus, VOICE recruited a consultant mid-2015 to work on a **study on donors' humanitarian funding and conditions for working with NGOs**. After an extensive desk review, a comparison of the different rules and regulations of three EU member states and the EC was undertaken. VOICE members from the chosen member states and the FPA Watch group provided significant comments based on their experience to the review especially regarding the rules having the strongest impact on the daily management of operations. By the end of the year, data on funding and practices were fully gathered, the editing of the study was ongoing and the final publication was released early 2016.

Based on the findings of the study, VOICE contributed to a joint networks' initiative (ICVA and InterAction). Aiming at improving the wider donors' community's administrative practices, the networks provided consolidated recommendations and comments to an **IASC study** on donors' conditionalities reflecting the perspectives of the large humanitarian NGO community.

3.3 BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AID AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2015 a number of key international summits took place. This was a big opportunity for the VOICE DRR working group to demonstrate its engagement and expertise on the issue of bridging humanitarian aid and development and influence the processes. VOICE DRR Working Group led several successful advocacy actions around the Sendai framework for DRR and the network reached out to the development community thanks to a significant event organized at the European Development Days.

Early 2015, the DRR Working group played a crucial role in the regional steering group for Europe and Others WHS consultation. The group actively supported the development of a background document under the theme *Reducing vulnerabilities and managing risks*. The group then stayed engaged and shared VOICE members' expertise and expectations linked to the issues of DRR, resilience and risk management in order to be reflected in VOICE positions.

2015 was also the **European Year of Development (EYD)**. VOICE joined the **Civil Society Alliance** dedicated to make CSO perspectives visible during the entire year. This was a unique opportunity for the network to promote its work in relation to building bridges between humanitarian aid and development. The EYD theme for the month of August was Humanitarian Aid and thus the network published members' stories from the field on the EYD website offering much appreciated visibility to good case studies, particularly on DRR and community involvement. The magazine of the EYD civil society alliance also featured VOICE activities.

our world
our dignity
our future

CIVIL
SOCIETY
ALLIANCE



Speakers at EDD VOICE event, June 2015

Another successful activity was the event the DRR working group organized during the **European Development Days (EDD)** on the importance of linking DRR with other aid approaches including climate change adaptation, development and humanitarian aid. The event used the lens of affected communities to further underline how these different aid approaches must be well connected. Bringing together EU policy makers, NGO experts and practitioners, the event was an important step in engaging the development community more with regard to DRR and further demonstrated the added value of the VOICE working group.

This event also built on the work members undertook throughout the year in relation to the development and adoption of **the Sendai framework for DRR** – an international framework outlining commitments and standards for disaster risk reduction. Joint advocacy efforts with other NGO networks on DRR resulted in two jointly launched position papers: “Achieving impact where it matters” (March 2015) and “Ensuring sustainable development: the need to invest in DRR” ahead of the **Addis Ababa conference on financing for development** (June 2015). The first paper was complemented by an open letter targeting EU decision makers and highlighting critical priorities for European NGOs. As a consequence, members from the DRR working group were invited to brief the European Parliament delegation in advance of Sendai, further highlighting the recognition given to the solid expertise of the members of the group.

I would like to thank you for your positive engagement in this process and I look forward to working together to implement this new DRR framework.

Letter to VOICE Director from Commissioner Stylianides regarding the process for Sendai

The EYD was also the focus of the first 2015 edition of the **VOICE biannual magazine VOICE Out Loud no 21 'European Year of Development - what's in it for humanitarian aid?'** Based on members' professional expertise and profound experience on the matter, they contributed articles sharing what the better linkages between development and humanitarian aid can bring to both donors' and NGOs' overall programming. Attention was also given to the limits and the potential drawbacks the approach may have in certain humanitarian settings. A unique opportunity to share these experiences was also a workshop, led by the CAERUS research consortium with practitioners, on the role of education, health, and data in fragile contexts.

4. A VIBRANT NETWORK

Through its activities the VOICE network aims at engaging members in building a vibrant network, further enhancing members' ownership, common positioning and sharing of good practices. In order to reach VOICE's main objective of influencing EU humanitarian policy, VOICE engages in outreach and networking, gathers, filters and shares information for the benefit of the professional life of its member organisations. Bringing members' expertise and experience to decision makers' tables is fundamental for its strategic plan and work programme.

4.1 VOICE INITIATIVES FOR MEMBERS

In 2015 VOICE was pleased to be able once again to offer its members a number of ad-hoc opportunities for exchange and capacity building. 17 staff from 14 of the network's member organisations, working across 8 EU member states, took part in a highly appreciated **two-day EU advocacy training** course. This supports the network's objective of linking national and EU level humanitarian advocacy.



VOICE EU advocacy training, December 2015

VOICE secretariat continues to share information with 520 members' staff through the extranet, a members' only area of the VOICE website. VOICE uses working groups/task forces, external opportunities, events and national roundtables as well as the annual General Assembly to **bring together members for exchange**. Altogether 274 people from 89 NGOs, including 60 members, participated in **4 VOICE events**, and 121 people from 37 NGOs participated in **14 Working Group/Task Force meetings**. Ad-hoc opportunities for exchange

among members on specific crises are also used to develop collective understanding and positioning. Lastly, much work is taken forward through bilateral meetings and informal contacts. The secretariat regularly gives targeted advice and support to members in their dealings with EU institutions.

VOICE also published six editions of the internal **Flash newsletter** reaching almost 600 members' staff as well as ad-hoc briefings or updates on important issues such as the WHS or important institutional changes which were shared with members' focal points.



4.2 VOICE REACHING OUT

Twice a year, VOICE publishes a public magazine, **VOICE Out Loud**, showcasing members' work and analysis. This is distributed to stakeholders in EU institutions, and the broader interested public. It is the widest read publication of the network and is freely downloadable on the website. Subscription has grown over the years to a total readership over 2000 people. The first VOICE Out Loud in 2015, contributed to the **European Year of Development** and the second focussed on the **World Humanitarian Summit**.

The VOICE website and extranet is a major platform for sharing information and knowledge about VOICE activities. In 2015 work started on **developing a new website**. The website showcases members' work, such as reports, advocacy priorities and position papers. In 2015 this included issues such as the World Humanitarian Summit, children caught up in conflict, risk management, Sahrawi refugees and crises in Nepal, through Syria, Central African Republic, and Yemen to the aftermath of Haiti. The site also gives **visibility** to the activities of the network and the VOICE efforts to join wider initiatives of the humanitarian and development communities such as the World Humanitarian Day and the European Year of Development's Humanitarian Month.

Outreach at national level

14 countries

VOICE Board and staff travelled to 14 member states to exchange with members, share NGO perspectives and advocate for principled humanitarian aid.

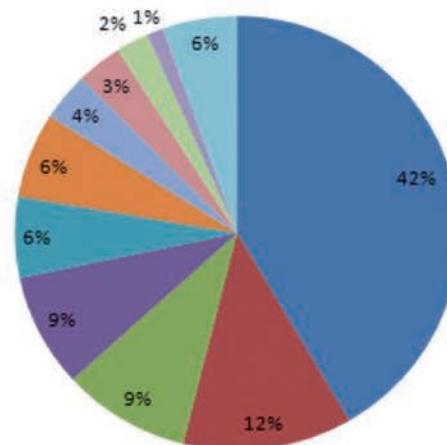
Key events

VOICE mainly intervened in WHS related events at national, regional and global level.

VOICE also contributed to NOHA events and trainings as well events linked to DRR.



Members participation in VOICE meetings



560 participants in VOICE meetings and events from 13 countries



5. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE NETWORK

5.1 VOICE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The VOICE 2015 General Assembly took place on 12 May in Brussels. **81% of the total membership was represented thanks to the participation of 66 representatives of VOICE member organisations (both individual and family)**. SCHR, MSF, IFRC and ICRC also took part in the morning session as observers.

The GA welcomed the exchange with **Claus Sorensen, Director General of ECHO**, particularly around the then forthcoming EC Communication on the WHS, the growing involvement of local actors and the impact of the mixed migration crisis on the humanitarian aid budget.

The Board convened **two different workshops**. The first one gave VOICE members the opportunity to provide their input into the **mid-term review of VOICE Strategic plan**; identifying main achievements and key priorities for the next three years for VOICE. The second one explored the **information flow** within the network and provided some elements of reflection on how to further improve internal communication and engagement of the members.

5.2 VOICE WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS IN 2015

VOICE was happy to welcome three new members to the network in 2015 after their approval by the General Assembly. **Norwegian Church Aid, Plan Belgium** and **Save the Children Netherlands** joined the network through their respective families – VOICE becoming then a network of 84 organisations from 19 European countries.



5.3 VOICE BOARD

At the General Assembly, the **President, Nicolas Borsinger, was re-elected** for a second 3-year mandate and **two new Board members** were elected: Ann Foley from Plan UK and Marco Rotelli from Italian member INTERSOS

During the year, the Board **met five times** and participated in the VOICE roundtable in Madrid, VOICE events in Brussels and in the ECHO annual partner conference, bringing a European perspective to the national level and national level perspectives to the European level.



VOICE Board at retreat in Belgium, July 2015

The Board held a **Board retreat** in July. The focus of the retreat was the **mid-term review of the VOICE strategic plan**. After an analysis of the changes affecting the environment VOICE members operate in, and recognizing the achievements since 2013 as well as the recommendations from the VOICE learning review, the Board agreed on a process and the main priorities in order to present the outcome of this review to the next GA. The outcomes of the GA workshops were also taken into account.

5.4 VOICE SECRETARIAT

2015 has been an active year for the secretariat. On top of its daily activities aimed at implementing the annual work programme, the team moved into a **new office** closer to the EU Institutions. For even better cooperation and team spirit, the staff participated in **internal trainings on first aid and on communication** and visited **Aachen**.



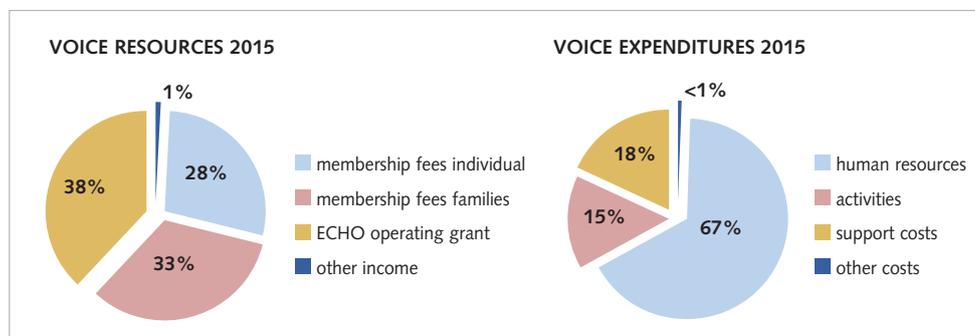
VOICE secretariat, December 2015

The secretariat in 2015 included the Director (*Kathrin Schick*), Programme Coordinator (*Magali Mourlon*), Advocacy and Communication officer (*Celia Cranfield*), Policy and Communication assistant (*Carolina Morgado until July*) and office administrator (*Guillaume Brouillet until May, then Cécile Muller*). VOICE would also like to thank the three interns (*Fiona Arnone, Sara Podor and Marjorie Tonnelier*) who supported the secretariat during the year.

5.5 FINANCES

VOICE finances consist of membership fees and support from the European Commission. Membership fees are differentiated by category of membership. The main categories are individual NGOs and families of NGOs.

In 2015 the turnover of the VOICE network as administered by the secretariat totaled €522,761. As in previous years, the majority of this (61%) was made up of membership fees. The DG ECHO 2015 operating grant provides resources for VOICE activities and services to members and DG ECHO partners, and enabled the network to increase its outreach and support to collective advocacy.



84 VOICE MEMBERS IN 2015

AUSTRIA

CARE Österreich
 Caritas Österreich
 Hilfswerk Österreich
 SOS Kinderdorf International
 World Vision Österreich

BELGIUM

Caritas Secours International Belgium
 Handicap International Belgium
 Médecins du Monde Belgium
 Oxfam Solidarité – Solidariteit
 Plan Belgique – België

CZECH REPUBLIC

ADRA Czech Republic
 People in Need (PIN)

DENMARK

ADRA Denmark – Nødhjælp og udvikling
 ASF Dansk Folkehjælp
 DanChurchAid (DCA)
 Danish Refugee Council – DRC
 Mission East – Mission Øst
 Save the Children Denmark – Red Barnet
 Denmark

FINLAND

FIDA International
 Finn Church Aid
 World Vision Finland

FRANCE

Action Contre la Faim
 ACTED – Agence d'Aide à la Coopération
 Technique et au Développement
 CARE France
 Handicap International France
 Médecins du Monde France
 Secours Catholique – Réseau Mondial
 Caritas
 Secours Islamique France
 Secours Populaire Français
 Solidarités International
 Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF)

GERMANY

ADRA Deutschland e.V.
 Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB)
 Deutschland
 CARE Deutschland – Luxemburg e.V.
 Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e.V.
 Deutscher Caritasverband e.V (Caritas
 Germany)
 Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe
 Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V.
 Malteser International
 Medico International
 Plan International Germany
 World Vision Germany

GREECE

Médecins du Monde – Greece

IRELAND

Concern Worldwide
 Trócaire

ITALY

Caritas Italiana
 CESVI – Cooperazione e Sviluppo
 GVC – Gruppo Volontariato Civile
 INTERSOS – Organizzazione Umanitaria
 Onlus

LUXEMBOURG

Caritas Luxembourg

THE NETHERLANDS

CARE Nederland
 Cordaid
 ICCO (Dutch Interchurch Aid)
 Oxfam Novib
 Save the Children Netherlands
 ZOA

NORWAY

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
 Norwegian Church Aid

PORTUGAL

Médicos do Mundo

SLOVAKIA

Habitat for Humanity International

SPAIN

Acción Contra el Hambre
 Caritas Española
 Oxfam Intermón
 Médicos del Mundo

SWEDEN

Church of Sweden – Svenska kyrkan
 International Aid Services (IAS)
 PMU Interlife

SWITZERLAND

Medair

UNITED KINGDOM

Action Against Hunger
 ActionAid
 ADRA UK – Adventist Development and
 Relief Agency
 CAFOD
 CARE International UK
 Christian Aid
 HelpAge International
 International Medical Corps UK
 International Rescue Committee (IRC UK)
 Islamic Relief Worldwide
 Mercy Corps
 Oxfam GB
 Plan International UK
 Save the Children UK
 Tearfund
 World Vision UK



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VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 84 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

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