



Humanitarian Food and Livelihood Assistance (HFLA)

DG ECHO Policy Guidelines

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Executive Summary

In 2010, the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (DG ECHO) published the '**Humanitarian Food Assistance: From Food Aid to Food Assistance**' policy document, its first sector-specific policy, setting the foundation for the development of several other sectoral policies over the following years. Since then, food crises have grown more complex while technology, humanitarian practices and sectoral challenges have evolved. At the same time, the humanitarian landscape is marked by shrinking funding and rising needs, requiring greater efficiency. Maximising impact is essential, accentuating the need for better targeting, quality programming, stronger coordination and innovation.

This revised policy aims to respond to the new context. It places significant emphasis on the efficiency of interventions, integrates emerging concepts, adapts to new challenges that have emerged since its initial publication, and strengthens consistency with other thematic policies developed in recent years.

The **objective** of this policy is to provide guidance to DG ECHO and its partners to:

- i) **Maximise the impact, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency** of humanitarian food and livelihood assistance (HFLA) in line with DG ECHO's general objectives, mandate and legal framework, maintaining a steadfast **commitment to humanitarian principles**;
- ii) **Inform partners** and stakeholders of DG ECHO's objectives, priorities and standards;

- iii) Create more **synergies with other DG ECHO sectors and their respective policies**.

For ease of use, the document is structured around the HFLA programming cycle, aligning with DG ECHO's Single Form.

Chapter 1 sets out the **fundamentals**, describing the conceptual framework and the **overarching objectives** that underpin all HFLA operations supported by DG ECHO. It also details the triggers that will determine DG ECHO's entry and exit criteria in food crises and sets the **boundaries** for DG ECHO HFLA interventions, clearly prioritising its **core mission** of saving lives and reducing suffering and protecting livelihoods.

DG ECHO's expectations during the **planning and design** phase of HFLA actions are explained in **Chapter 2**. All DG ECHO-supported HFLA interventions need to be preceded by a detailed needs assessment / causal analysis and designed accordingly. In addition, the chapter highlights the need for programmes to follow a complementary, **multi-sectoral and integrated approach** to ensure that humanitarian food, nutrition and livelihood needs are addressed holistically and effectively.

Chapter 3 focuses on the **implementation of HFLA actions** and integrates some of the core elements of this policy.

First, it introduces **DG ECHO's Preparedness Toolbox for HFLA**, underscoring how HFLA funding should aim to strengthen preparedness-for-response capacities through investing in disaster preparedness, anticipatory actions

and early warning systems, and the critical role of rapid response mechanisms (RRMs) and crisis modifiers (CMs) in emergency response.

Second, it clearly sets out **DG ECHO's position on targeting** and provides extensive guidance on the targeting process. Targeting is crucial for achieving effective and efficient interventions and DG ECHO will prioritise assisting those suffering from the highest levels of acute food insecurity. It also sets out DG ECHO's policy on **digitalisation**, highlighting the benefits that digital solutions can harness in terms of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

Third, it provides guidance on resource transfers and on the different **assistance modalities**, with DG ECHO favouring cash as the preferred modality to meet food needs when conditions allow and prioritising Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC) to meet basic needs.

Fourth, it clarifies **DG ECHO's position on emergency livelihoods**, expecting partners to consider emergency livelihood support to complement resource transfers to cover food needs, where feasible and appropriate.

Fifth, it describes how HFLA can support the **management of acute undernutrition**.

Chapter 4 is focused on ensuring quality programming. It explores the **climate**

emergency and its implications for HFLA programming. It also delineates the **cross-cutting issues and enablers** DG ECHO partners should leverage to enhance the quality of the programmes. This includes: (i) integrating and mainstreaming protection across HFLA interventions; (ii) ensuring the commitment to be accountable to those DG ECHO seeks to assist; (iii) preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; (iv) putting in place mitigating measures to counter fiduciary risks and fraud; (v) providing guidance on monitoring and evaluation; and (vi) calling on ECHO partners to engage in innovative HFLA practices to harness effectiveness and efficiency.

Chapter 5 articulates how **HFLA emergency interventions** supported by DG ECHO can, when context allows and resources are available, **link with longer-term operations** and help operationalise the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This includes DG ECHO's linking with inclusive social protection systems in fragile contexts and how to embed climate change adaptation measures in HFLA programming.

The guidelines conclude by laying out DG ECHO's commitments to strengthen the HFLA capacities of **local and national actors**, explored in **Chapter 6**, while the relevance of **coordination** as a key enabler of HFLA and the role of DG ECHO in HFLA **advocacy** are described in **Chapter 7**.

Acronyms

ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project
CBT	Community-based targeting
CM	Crisis modifier
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
EWS	Early warning system
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GNAFC	Global Network Against Food Crises
HFLA	Humanitarian food and livelihood assistance
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IPC/CH	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification / Cadre Harmonisé
JIAF	Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework
KOI	Key outcome indicator
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning and others
MEB	Minimum expenditure basket
MPC	Multi-purpose cash
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RRM	Rapid response mechanism
UCPM	Union Civil Protection Mechanism
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

1.1. Definitions and conceptual framework



Key message

The Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) recognises the multi-dimensional nature of food security, which necessitates a comprehensive approach, in order to address the issue effectively. DG ECHO follows the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC/CH) Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Conceptual Framework as the basis for understanding food security and outlining its support through the provision of humanitarian food and livelihood assistance (HFLA).

The World Food Summit 1996 defined food security as a situation in which ‘all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life’¹. At the World Summit on Food Security in 2009, this definition was reconfirmed and the concept extended. It is now applied by reference to the four pillars of availability, access, utilisation and stability². The summit’s final declaration also stated that the nutritional dimension is integral to the concept of food security.

Availability of food refers to the extent to which sufficient quantities of adequate and appropriate food is available either for purchase or from production (including by the household, which in many contexts is often primarily produced by women and

girls or other domestic output, the commercial sector, food reserves, or food aid. This pillar looks mostly at the macro level and the national level.

Access refers to the extent to which resources can be used to obtain adequate and appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. This depends on the income and assets available to the household, the livelihood activities and distribution of income within the household, and the price of food and basic services. Accessibility rests on physical access (such as the ability to fish or the distance to markets), financial access (such as money or access to credit) and social access (such as social networks and family support). This pillar focuses mostly on the household level but access to food may differ for different members of the household. Access to food is often

¹ FAO (1996) Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action, World Food Summit, 13-17 November, Rome.

² FAO (2009) Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security, WSFS 2009/2, Rome.

highly dependent on the specific vulnerabilities of a household or one of its members.

Utilisation of food refers to the physical use of food by an individual before consumption (including storage and processing), together with the body's biological use of food, its energy, and its micronutrients, after consumption³. This pillar looks mostly at the level of the individual and considers the different vulnerabilities of different gender, age and diversity groups.

Stability refers to both macro- and micro-level food security, both of which should exist at all times. Instability may force people to adopt extreme coping mechanisms, such as displacement outside the food production zone, child labour, child marriage, sexual exploitation or engaging in transactional sex, together with the role that migration can have as a coping strategy during food crises and its potential knock-on effects related to access to food and livelihoods⁴. Stability also takes into consideration the critical threats to food security, food production and access to food caused by climate breakdown, conflict and the threat of pandemic, as highlighted by goal two of the Sustainable Development Goals⁵.

Livelihoods refer to the capabilities, assets and activities that contribute to securing people's means living so that they can

support their basic everyday needs. Given that food assistance and emergency livelihood support are complementary aspects of emergency response, this policy now considers both. The drivers of acute undernutrition are embedded in livelihood systems. Therefore, the scope of the policy aims to bridge conceptual gaps between the nexus of food security, livelihoods and nutrition in a holistic way.

Over recent years, the policy dialogue has further evolved and now discusses food systems, defined as 'the various elements and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, as well as the output of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes'⁶. From that perspective, food security and nutrition challenges are complex problems whose solutions transcend sectoral and institutional boundaries and, in the context of globalised food systems, interact across different scales and level. In this regard, consideration of market systems and the critical role they play in food security is important.

A sustainable food system is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases for generating food security and nutrition for future

³ Determinants of food utilisation are diverse, including access to water and adequate sanitation, access to cooking utensils, health status and disease burden, as well as knowledge within the household of food storage, basic principles of nutrition, and proper childcare and child feeding practices.

⁴ See the [Global Compact for Migration](#).

⁵ See [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

⁶ HLPE (2020) Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome (page xv).

generations are not compromised⁷. Growing awareness of food system inequities and the complex connections between ecological systems and food systems have led to suggesting two additional pillars: agency⁸ and sustainability⁹. While directly addressing long-term sustainability is considered largely outside of DG ECHO's core priorities, sustainability is taken into consideration when working in collaboration with others as part of the HDP nexus. For example, in providing longer-term livelihood support and linking with social protection systems, or when looking at the environmental impact of HFLA and the linkages with climate change

adaptation. The concept of agency is linked to the issues of choice, decision-making and empowerment, enabled through the adoption of localised and community engagement approaches which protect and support the dignity of affected communities.

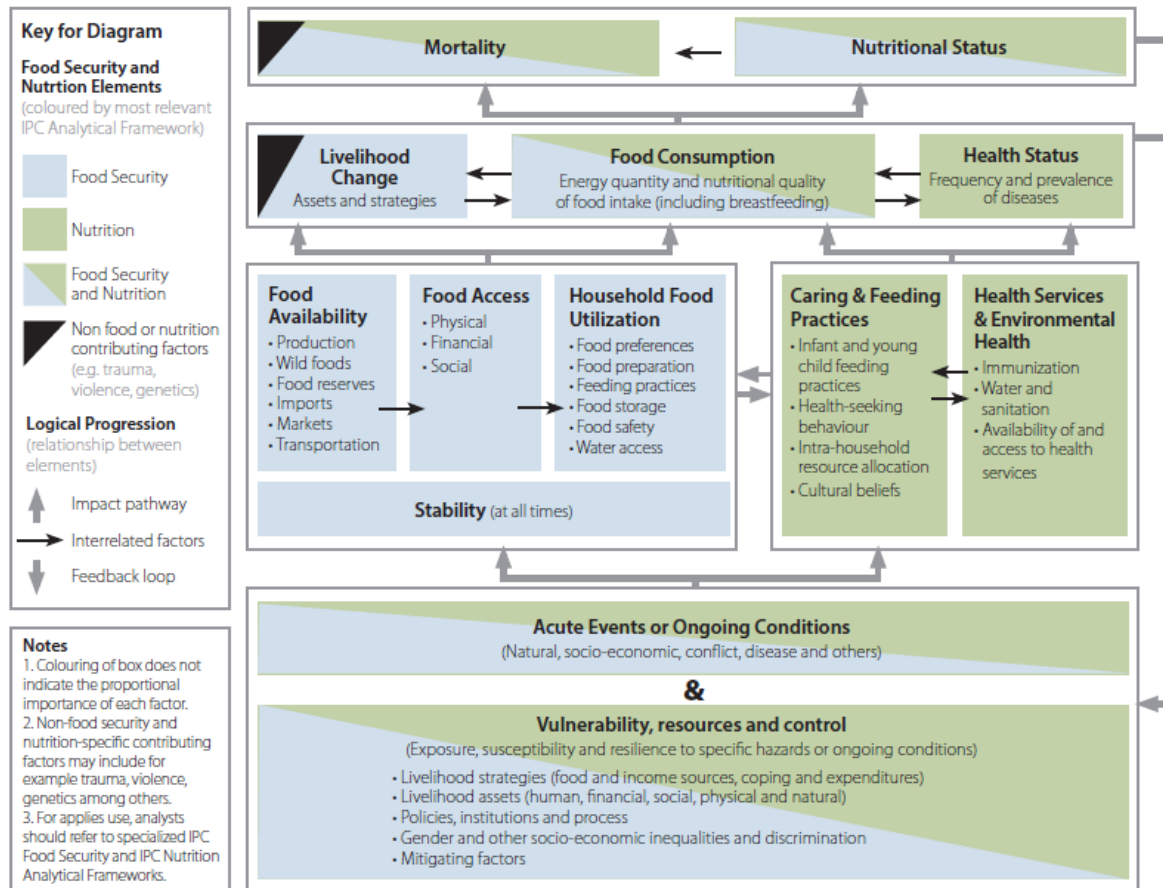
DG ECHO recognises the multi-dimensional nature of food security, which requires a comprehensive approach to address the issue effectively. It follows the IPC/CH Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Conceptual Framework as the basis for understanding food security and outlining its support through HFLA.

⁷ FAO (2018) Sustainable food systems Concept and framework, Rome. [Sustainable food systems Concept and framework](#).

⁸ Agency refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to make their own decisions about what foods they eat; what foods they produce; how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems; and their ability to engage in processes that shape food system policies and governance (HLPE (2020) Food security and nutrition, page xv).

⁹ Sustainability refers to 'refers to the long-term ability of food systems to provide food security and nutrition in a way that does not compromise the economic, social and environmental bases that generate food security and nutrition for future generations' (HLPE (2020) Food security and nutrition, page xv).

Figure 1 The IPC Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Conceptual Framework



Source: IPC (2021) Technical Manual Version 3.1. Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security and Nutrition Decisions. [IPC Manual](#)

1.2. Overarching strategic objectives and guiding principles



Key message

Within DG ECHO's core mission of saving and protecting lives, the principal objective of HFLA is to safeguard the availability of, access to, and consumption of adequate, safe and nutritious food, to protect and where possible recover livelihoods and contribute to increasing resilience for populations facing ongoing or firmly forecasted situations of acute food insecurity and acute undernutrition or recovering from them.

In pursuit of these objectives, the following principles should underpin the delivery of HFLA. These are consistent with the general principles governing the delivery of EU humanitarian aid, as laid down in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid¹⁰ that provides the legal basis for DG ECHO:

- The modalities of HFLA must respect the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Decisions on the allocation of humanitarian food assistance will be strictly needs-based in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. Funding will be allocated in an objective manner, according to these principles, to improve the food consumption of those in greatest need, without bias or prejudice.
- DG ECHO will ensure that the protection of those in need of HFLA is central to the response, including through ensuring HFLA is delivered in line with the four protection mainstreaming elements¹¹. For instance, they will ensure that humanitarian food needs are met in ways that do not create undue dependency on the relief system (i.e. being systems aware), support the functioning of markets, and do not expose affected people to undue protection risks in receiving assistance, while minimising negative environmental impacts and ensuring that conflicts over natural resources are not ignited or exacerbated. DG ECHO will ensure that protection risks as well as opportunities to contribute to protection outcomes through integrated programming are properly evaluated when considering the consequences of both intervention and non-intervention. In essence, this

¹⁰ [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid \(2008\)](#)

¹¹ Protection mainstreaming includes the following aspects: prioritising safety and dignity and avoiding causing harm; meaningful access; accountability; and participation and empowerment.

means ensuring that the principle of ‘do no harm’ is observed.

- In line with the point above, DG ECHO will ensure that human dignity is respected in the provision of HFLA. It will seek the involvement of local communities in identifying needs and designing, implementing and monitoring responses. Recognising the different needs, capacities and roles of women, girls, boys and men, including people living with disabilities, DG ECHO will systematically seek to mainstream gender and age considerations within humanitarian food needs assessments, in the design of humanitarian food assistance responses, and in analysing their impact. Partners are expected to pay attention to specific groups, such as people with disabilities or older people,

to ensure humanitarian assistance is appropriate to their needs and delivered safely.

- Food insecurity is a driver of undernutrition (alongside other causal factors), so DG ECHO will strive to ensure that positive nutritional outcomes are integrated into HFLA actions. This includes ensuring that particular attention is paid to both the specific nutritional needs and the food security needs of defined vulnerable groups, with special consideration for children and pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and older people who may have mobility challenges. Emphasis should also be placed on the early recovery of livelihood systems in order to address undernutrition.

1.3. The priorities and boundaries of DG ECHO’s HFLA



Key message

With humanitarian needs outstripping funding resources, compounded by accelerating climate change, DG ECHO will prioritise its core business of saving lives and reducing suffering and protecting livelihoods. DG ECHO will strive to support linkages where appropriate with longer-term interventions – especially in protracted crises – on a case-by-case basis and in collaboration with development actors as part of a nexus-focused exit strategy

While it is not feasible to assign strict boundaries for HFLA interventions, this section provides some guidance and parameters. More detail is provided in Chapter 5 of this policy, which focuses on putting into practice the HDP nexus.

DG ECHO's HFLA comprises of acting ahead of food crises, providing life-saving food assistance to contribute to meeting immediate food requirements and emergency livelihood support. This includes livelihood protection and early recovery, approaches that enable people to better withstand shocks and recover more quickly. These shocks have become more frequent, are of greater intensity and magnitude, and last longer, which compounds acute and chronic food insecurity and also leads in some contexts

to increasing undernutrition. While the number of people in need - and the severity of their needs - continues to rise each year, with limited prospects for improvement, leading to protracted crises in some countries, the underlying drivers of these crises are not new, the higher frequency and intensity of shocks, compounded by their overlapping impact, are contributing to a growing scale and intensity of acute food insecurity. This trend is expected to be further fuelled by an increase in climate-related and economic shocks, potentially leading to heightened conflicts.

Climate change is already having an impact on food security globally, particularly in areas with high exposure to natural hazards, where climate heating is leading



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to ever more extreme and volatile phenomena, including drought, floods, storms and heatwaves, as well as more gradual changes to the environment (e.g. desertification, sea-level rise, loss of biodiversity). The climate emergency demands that humanitarian aid minimises the environmental impact of HFLA programming and finds new ways to support households and communities to adapt to the new realities as they change over time. In this context, DG ECHO and its partners will need to increasingly adapt funding and programming to meet new and increasing needs (see Section 4.1).

Food insecurity and associated negative coping mechanisms also heighten protection risks for certain groups, in particular women, girls and boys. As highlighted repeatedly by the Council of the European Union¹², women and girls are especially at risk of sexual violence, together with the dangers and injuries associated with collecting food, water and firewood. In anticipation of, or as a result of, food insecurity or loss of livelihoods, families may have to adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage. Food-insecure caregivers experience symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, which erode their ability to provide safe and caring environments for children, leading to children experiencing neglect and physical and emotional violence. Caregivers themselves may potentially be

exposed to intimate partner violence within the home. Children from food-insecure households may be up to six times more likely to experience violence within the home, compared to children living in food-secure households¹³. For these reasons, protection remains central to all DG ECHO-supported responses.

With humanitarian needs outstripping resources and severe food insecurity on the rise, it is inevitable that it is frequently necessary to prioritise where funding will go, and hard choices have to be made between direct, short-term food assistance (cash, in-kind or vouchers) and emergency livelihood support. Generally speaking, DG ECHO will respond to food and nutrition crises in situations where the classification is IPC/CH phase 3 or above: IPC/CH phase 3 'crisis'; IPC/CH phase 4 'emergency'; and IPC/CH phase 5 'catastrophe/ famine' as the highest priority¹⁴. Depending on the context and the resources available, HFLA may also aim to increase resilience to shocks (improving the ability of people to absorb shocks and recover) and to work in collaboration with others to achieve long-term impacts. The current trend in regard to increased magnitude and duration of crises and the relative decline in available funding requires improved coordination and enhanced programmatic efficiencies, together with holistic analysis of the needs and complementarities across sectors. The use of available technologies for automatised targeting and de-duplication,

¹² [Council conclusions on protection in humanitarian settings \(2024\)](#).

¹³ Jackson, Dylan B., et al. (2018) 'Food Insecurity and Violence in the Home: Investigating Exposure to Violence and Victimization Among Preschool-Aged Children,' *Health Education & Behavior*, vol. 45, No 5, pp. 756-63.

¹⁴ Note that IPC analyses indicate situations where phase 2 has been categorised on the basis of the provision of assistance – in this case the underlying severity would be considered to be IPC 3+ and assistance continued.

and efficient distribution modalities and technologies, should be explored when using DG ECHO's HFLA funding.

In protracted crises (see glossary for definition), responses are more likely to support livelihoods recovery, building resilience, self-reliance and linkages with social protection systems in order to reduce the need for humanitarian assistance in the long term as part of working in the HDP nexus with other EU services, EU Member States and other actors such as international financial institutions. That said, there are contexts in which opportunities for emergency livelihood support exist during the acute phase for some households with residual capacities. Equally, there is often the need for life-saving support during periods of protracted crises, often due to recurrent shocks coming on top of a generally stabilised crisis. The fact that different phases of an emergency can overlap and recur in a non-sequential way emphasises the need for integrated and flexible programming.

DG ECHO's HFLA funding is not the most appropriate instrument for transforming or strengthening entire food systems. However, it is important to recognise the complexity of food systems in HFLA design, such that different aspects of the system can be supported – or at least not negatively impacted. For example, to choose an appropriate assistance modality for farmers, it may be necessary to understand the following: (i) the presence

of shock-responsive elements of social protection systems; (ii) the seasonality of local agricultural food systems and lean season trends; and (iii) the role of markets, supply chains and farmers' access to financial services. Different assistance modalities can have different effects: cash will generally have positive multiplier effects on markets, while electronic transfers can foster financial and digital inclusion. Also, the modality may need to be timed based on seasonal crops and livestock calendars and should take account of the degree of market stability. In addition, integrating considerations for food safety and quality into responses should be considered, recognising its critical role at the intersection of food safety, quality, nutrition, security and sustainability.

In short, DG ECHO's HFLA funding will continue to support the core priorities outlined above. It will also take into account the complexity of food systems, in order to contribute to resilience building and sustainability so as to ultimately reduce the need for humanitarian assistance. This will be undertaken in collaboration with development actors, with HFLA funding being a key tool for operationalising the HDP nexus, building on the Council conclusions on the nexus¹⁵ ([see Chapter 5](#)).

¹⁵ Council Conclusions [Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus \(2017\)](#).

1.4. Entry and exit criteria

DG ECHO can trigger a humanitarian food assistance response when:

- Due to inadequate food consumption, emergency rates of mortality or acute malnutrition have been reached or exceeded, or are anticipated based on firm forecasts; or
- Compromised livelihoods or extreme coping strategies (including sale of productive assets, stress migration, resorting to unsafe or insecure survival practices) pose, or are firmly anticipated to pose, a severe threat to life, or a risk of extreme suffering, whether arising from, or leading to, inadequate food consumption.

DG ECHO and its partners should have a defined and realistic exit-strategy in place, wherever possible, before delivering humanitarian food assistance.

DG ECHO will consider exiting or phasing out its HFLA interventions when indicators of acute undernutrition, mortality and extreme coping (linked to inadequate food consumption or poor food utilisation), are stable below emergency levels, or are expected to stabilise below such levels. This should result from most of the crisis-affected population achieving, for a sustained period and for the foreseeable future, improvements in food consumption and food utilisation, without resorting to detrimental coping strategies, and independent of any DG ECHO

humanitarian support. This could imply that persisting needs are met either by other humanitarian donors, or by development or state actors.

The improvement of food security indicators is a process that can develop gradually, not always in a linear way and with the potential for relapses. While most of the food-insecure population might have returned to or are on the way to return to acceptable food security values, some marginal parts of the population might remain food insecure. To ensure inclusiveness, the disengagement is often not abrupt but happens as a process guided by the retargeting and reverification of beneficiaries and/or the reduction of the individual assistance (number of distributions, transfer value or food ration composition). Both the retargeting and revision of transfer value / food ration are not easy to implement but are essential in the phasing out to minimise risks of social tensions and rehearsal of food security indicators. Declining funding—especially in the context of protracted crises—may also drive the phase-out or downscaling of HFLA, even when food security indicators remain at critical levels. This underscores the importance of HDP nexus approaches to ensure sustained support in contexts of prolonged vulnerability.

For situations deemed to be fragile with persistent humanitarian risk, DG ECHO will ensure that it can monitor the humanitarian situation after its exit and will keep all options open for re-engagement if needed.

2. Planning and designing HFLA actions



Key message

DG ECHO expects all HFLA interventions to be preceded by a detailed needs assessment / causal analysis and designed accordingly, except in the most exceptional circumstances, i.e. when undertaking these steps would result in severe operational delays that would cost lives and loss of livelihoods. This should be followed by steps including response analysis and design, taking into account environmental concerns and requirements

All humanitarian programmes must be based on an assessment and understanding of risks (contextual, programmatic and organisational) and hazards, and should be implemented to respond to, and possibly reduce, these risks, including those related to protection. They should also be explicitly designed to prioritise safety, security and dignity and avoid causing harm. A conflict sensitivity

lens should be applied in fragile and conflict-affected situations, in particular. Specific measures should be identified for risk prevention and mitigation relating to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Assessments also need to consider climate change impacts, minimum environmental requirements and apply the do no harm principle.

2.1. Integrated/multi-sectoral approach



Key message

DG ECHO will facilitate complementary, multi-sectoral and integrated programming to ensure that humanitarian food, nutrition and livelihood needs are addressed holistically and effectively.

Food security is intrinsically multi-sectoral, with causal links to other sectors, such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, nutrition, and protection. Therefore, food and livelihood needs should be seen as part of the basic needs of households, and food security outcomes

cannot be achieved if other needs are not addressed.

DG ECHO will facilitate complementary, multi-sectoral and integrated programming to ensure that humanitarian food, nutrition and livelihood needs are addressed holistically and effectively.

In practice, this is about two or more sectors working together to contribute to each other's outcomes. For example, HFLA and protection may work synergistically together to reduce protection risks while contributing to both protection and food security outcomes, such as negotiations to remove checkpoints to enable farmers to safely access their land in conflict situations. Cash designed to meet multiple basic needs, including food, may reduce households' need to adopt damaging coping mechanisms, including those with protection implications (e.g. survival sex, child labour etc.). Well-established complementarities are also present between HFLA and the nutrition, WASH and health sectors. Nutrition outcomes are affected by food security, as well as by good sanitation, which may reduce waterborne diseases like diarrhoea, together with the prevention and treatment of such diseases through public health and medical services. HFLA is also linked closely to shelter / non-food items when it comes to emergency needs for cooking, such as through the provision of improved cooking stoves. In this manner, HFLA is also closely linked to logistics and to local market capacity. Complexity of food supply chains and availability of accessible and reliable distribution services will strongly correlate to food security outcomes as well.

DG ECHO acknowledges the expertise that resides in sectors and respective coordination clusters but is also aware of the danger of silos, which can become a barrier to multi-sectoral approaches and may be exacerbated by competition for resources between operational agencies. For these reasons, DG ECHO encourages

What is integrated programming?

Integrated programming refers to a way of working whereby there is coordination and strategic collaboration across two or more sectors and across agencies with the common goal of achieving better, people-centred outcomes.

It promotes a people-centred response rather than an agency or mandate-centred response.

It implies deliberate / intentional joint assessment, goal-setting, planning, implementation and monitoring.

partners to overcome such barriers through collaboration and active coordination within and across the sectors, enhancing a people-centred and data-driven approach (see Section 4.2.2).

Where possible, DG ECHO also encourages leveraging the stewardship role of the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group and establishing effective and measurable referral mechanisms between differing actors. In many cases, the use of cash as a transfer modality may help to bridge sectoral divides – especially multi-purpose cash (MPC) – and partners should actively participate in the Cash Working Group and the Food Security Cluster to enhance coordination (see Section 7.1). DG ECHO aims to complement the coordination efforts of partners by supporting the strong coordination of donors to implement multi-sectoral and harmonised approaches.

2.2. Context analysis



Key message

As context is an important driver of food insecurity, DG ECHO expects there to be a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Key elements for partners to include in the context analysis are: (i) estimates and projections for acute food insecurity and undernutrition; (ii) primary drivers; (iii) seasonality; (iv) the impact of different types of crises on livelihoods; (v) market analysis; (vi) conflict dynamics; and (vii) the political economy of the crisis.

Investments in food security information systems over the years have improved the humanitarian community's ability to respond in timely ways through early warning systems (EWSs) (see Section 3.1), as well as to channel resources in accordance with the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and nutrition. In particular, the IPC/CH¹⁶ is a common global scale that is used to gauge the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and acute malnutrition¹⁷. Increasingly, the IPC/CH is the international standard for classifying food insecurity and malnutrition, providing evidence-based situation analysis that allows for

comparisons over time and space, to inform strategic decision-making¹⁸.

Although the IPC/CH does forecast to some extent, it is not an EWS as such, and also stops short of defining needs. However, it does estimate the number of people affected by different levels of severity in terms of food insecurity and undernutrition, and it communicates the key drivers and characteristics of the situation to support response planning. Generally speaking, DG ECHO will respond to food and nutrition crises where populations are classified as IPC/CH phase 3 or above: IPC/CH phase 3 'crisis'; IPC/CH phase 4 'emergency'; and IPC/CH phase 5

¹⁶ The IPC collaborates with the CH and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), using comparable international food security and nutrition standards and protocols for classification.

¹⁷ When data from IPC analyses are not available, estimates are derived from IPC-compatible FEWS NET, the WFP's Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators (CARI) or country-specific number of people in need (PiN) for the food security sector provided by the OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO).

¹⁸ Another key source is the Global Report on Food Crises (<https://www.fsinplatform.org/global-report-food-crises-2024>), which compiles data from the IPC/CH, FEWS NET and World Food Programme (WFP) to provide consolidated analysis at the global, regional and country levels.

‘catastrophe/famine’ (the highest priority). Anticipatory action may be considered in less severe phases if the situation is likely to deteriorate according to early warning indicators and/or IPC/CH outlooks, especially in areas subject to recurrent crises, preferably in collaboration with other development-oriented actors (see Section 3.1 and Chapter 5) and complemented with local knowledge.

Seasonality and climate projections should be included in a context analysis. This can help to predict key food insecurity peaks throughout the year (including WASH, as well as health factors that might have an impact on food utilisation, such as diarrhoea or malaria). An understanding of the local agricultural and pastoral calendars should also inform response design. This includes the timing of food assistance and the modality choice, as well as the changes in the type and magnitude of needs in different months (school expenses, winter, festivities) and income opportunities (seasonal jobs) that influence households’ expenditure patterns and capacity. For example, delivering in-kind food at harvest time can be inefficient, may be detrimental to the livelihoods of farmers, and can disrupt markets.

Crises – whether rapid or slow onset, protracted, man-made or natural – may affect different livelihoods in different ways and it is important to understand the impacts on different demographic groups. For example, harvest failure may affect both subsistent farmers and poor urban people negatively, due to increased prices, but it may not have the same impact on

pastoralists. On the other hand, conflict may disrupt pastoralists’ systems if movement to key dry season pastures is obstructed. Pastoralists may typically also take longer to recover from prolonged drought due to the time needed for herds to reproduce.

In situations of political volatility, violence and conflict, and where there is the potential for access to food to be weaponised, it is important to extend food security analysis to understanding the drivers and impacts of conflict on food security, through conducting conflict sensitivity assessments. This needs to be complemented with some level of understanding of the prevailing political economy, to enable a response design that does not exacerbate drivers or cause additional harm, as well as ensuring better security and personal safety of partners’ staff and/or affected people.

Market analysis is another important part of understanding the context, in terms of how markets are affected by the crisis (both at that moment in time and how they might adapt or recover in the future) and the potential for markets to provide the commodities and services needed in the response design (see also Section 2.4). Inflation/depreciation also needs to be considered in some contexts, and its impact on household purchasing power capacity, as well as the adequacy of the transfer value when cash is the chosen modality, as direct proxies of food access. DG ECHO expects partners to monitor markets and currency dynamics regularly and to integrate their findings into their programming.

2.3. Needs assessment and risk analysis



Key message

DG ECHO expects assistance to be provided on the basis of need, and in line with humanitarian principles. To that end, impartial or independent needs assessments should be carried out to inform HFLA response design

In order to design the best response, needs assessments should investigate the objective needs of different groups within the affected population, and map these against the key drivers of food insecurity. The purpose of these needs assessments is to provide the evidence for a needs-based and people-centred response, and they should be informed by risks and driven by the needs and preferences of the affected people, rather than by the experience and preferences of the agency involved. To avoid a potential conflict of interest arising from implementing agencies conducting needs assessments, DG ECHO advocates undertaking joint, multi-sectoral, independent and impartial needs assessments, using established assessment tools¹⁹, and works with its partners to scale up such approaches while continuing to fund sector- and programme-level assessments as part of partner proposals.

Partners are encouraged to participate in assessment activities and/or capitalise on the findings in their proposals.

While multi-sectoral needs assessments are useful for generating consensus on needs, including food and nutrition, it is important to complement these with more in-depth food security assessments, which may also include livelihood analysis. These can be carried out by individual partners or several organisations collaborating together, using established tools²⁰, and assessing food insecurity, whenever possible, against IPC/CH indicators to provide more detailed understanding of the needs from a food security and livelihoods perspective, including livelihood strategies, assets and coping strategies, together with identifying how best to protect or promote livelihoods²¹. More specialised assessments targeting pastoralists and other livestock-based livelihoods including fishing communities,

¹⁹ Multi-sectoral assessment tools include [Multi-Sector Needs Assessments \(MSNAs\)](#), [Joint and Intersectoral Analysis Framework \(JIAFs\)](#), and the tools applied by independent bodies such as [ACAPS](#).

²⁰ Examples of food security and livelihood assessment tools include the Emergency Food Security and Livelihoods 48-hour Assessment Tool (Oxfam, 2012), which can be used to obtain a quick understanding of the emergency food security and livelihoods situation. The Early Recovery Livelihood Assessment ([ERLA](#)) and FAO's Livelihood Assessment Tool ([LAT](#)) are useful for assessing livelihoods.

²¹ See Sphere Interactive [Handbook](#) and the [Standards for Supporting Crop-related Livelihoods in Emergencies – SEADS handbook](#).

are recommended in appropriate contexts²². Similarly, the use of nutrition assessments is encouraged, to gauge the prevalence of acute undernutrition²³, and infant and young feeding and other care practices, together with investigating the underlying causes of acute undernutrition.

Whenever possible, assessments should be conducted in a coordinated manner. They should meaningfully engage different gender, age and social groups among affected populations in a participatory way, and should incorporate assessments from local and national actors in the overall findings. Furthermore, it is important that the information collected through needs assessments is maintained through the response design. All HFLA programmes

must be based on an assessment and understanding of risks (contextual, programmatic and organisational) and hazards (natural and man-made), and should be implemented in such a way as to respond to – and if possible, reduce – these risks, including those related to protection and the environment. The figure below summarises the elements that are covered in a risk analysis, in the form of a non-arithmetical formula in which risk equals threats multiplied by vulnerability, divided by capacity. This illustrates that the risk faced by a given population is to threats and vulnerabilities and inversely proportional to capacities²⁴:



Different groups within a given population will be affected differently by different threats, and will have different vulnerabilities and abilities to withstand these threats. Hence their exposure to risk needs to be understood, by conducting a protection risk analysis.

In addition to assessing the risk to people, DG ECHO requires risks to the environment to be assessed, and mitigation measures put in place²⁵. For example, this should consider the environmental cost or benefit of using cash or in-kind assistance or the impact of single-use plastics in packaging supplementary foods (see Annex 2).

²² See Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards ([LEGS](#)) Handbook.

²³ Using methods such as weight for height or measuring the mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) of a child. See the [SMART](#) methodology and the Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies ([IYCF-E](#)) Assessment Guide.

²⁴ [Source: Professional Standards for Protection Work](#) (ICRC 2024).

²⁵ [Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#)

2.4. Response analysis and modality selection



Key message

DG ECHO expects that a robust response analysis is built on the findings of needs assessments to maintain a demand-led process, whereby the most appropriate response design is evidence-based. The response analysis process should begin by defining the objectives of the response, followed by evaluating various response and modality options. The assessment should consider market conditions, operational and environmental factors, gender, age, and protection perspectives, as well as the preferences of affected populations. It should help to determine the key parameters of the response, such as target group(s), transfer modalities, rations, transfer values, duration and seasonality of the assistance, etc.

Needs assessments should provide accurate information on how a crisis has affected different people and what their humanitarian needs are. The purpose of a response analysis is to take this information and to design responses that meet those needs effectively and efficiently. This process should be guided by the programme's objective and should ensure that the response design reflects expressed needs and remains people-centred, in line with DG ECHO's emphasis on ensuring a needs-based response. The response analysis should integrate findings from a gender, age and protection risk perspective. This process should be compliant with protection mainstreaming principles (i.e. ensuring safety, dignity, the avoidance of causing harm, accountability, participation and empowerment, and meaningful access). It should also actively involve local knowledge.

Market analysis²⁶ can determine how local economies have been affected by the crisis (both at that moment in time and also how they might adapt or recover in future), and the potential for markets to provide nutritious food and other commodities to support livelihoods. By analysing market systems and value chains, it may also be feasible to identify ways to support markets in both the short and longer term, make them more resilient, and amplify the multiplier effect of cash, in-kind assistance or vouchers on markets and the local economy (both positive and negative). Market assessments can also be conducted as a preparedness activity to anticipate how market functions will be affected by specific shocks. Market analysis should cover the issue of whether all groups among the affected population can access markets in a safe and dignified way. The HFLA response design should principally focus on resource transfers and supporting

²⁶ Market assessment tools include [EMMA](#), [RAM](#), [MSMA](#) and [MARKit](#).

emergency livelihoods. For the former, DG ECHO expects partners to select the most appropriate modality or mix of modalities²⁷ (cash, vouchers, in-kind, service provision) to meet the HFLA and other basic needs identified in the assessment. While a mix of modalities may be the eventual outcome, DG ECHO nonetheless expects partners to systematically consider MPC as a means of meeting basic needs, including food (see Section 3.4.2). Partners should always ask themselves why they have not chosen cash when the conditions allow for this, either at the time of selecting a modality or at a future date. Figure 2 below illustrates how DG ECHO expects its partners to consider the advantages and disadvantages of

different modalities and to monitor markets to ensure relevance and adequacy of the modality(s) selected.

Based on the needs assessment, an analysis of the local livelihood strategies – and particularly the livelihood -based coping strategies – should provide the information required to develop response options to protect and/or recover livelihoods, and thereby decide how best to achieve food security outcomes. This might require additional investigation as different livelihoods (e.g. those of arable farmers, pastoralists and urban residents) may be affected in different ways by shocks. The impacts of gender and age dynamics and disability may also need to



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²⁷ Noting that a mix of modalities may not be an efficient response option due to the need for multiple delivery pipelines for resource transfers, while noting that ‘cash plus’ approaches may have positive outcomes.

be investigated. Livelihood coping strategies, such as migrating for work or engaging in petty trade, may provide opportunities to build resilience by spreading risk, especially if strategies involve a move away from climate-vulnerable activities (see Section 5.3).

Modality selection is important for emergency livelihood support. Some livelihoods may be supported best through a cash injection, for example, or vouchers, such as for seed fairs, or in-kind distribution of fodder or small ruminants for restocking (see Section 3.5). A compound understanding of needs, livelihood strategies, and gender dimensions, as well as how the market and local economy functions, are all important for designing effective emergency livelihood responses.

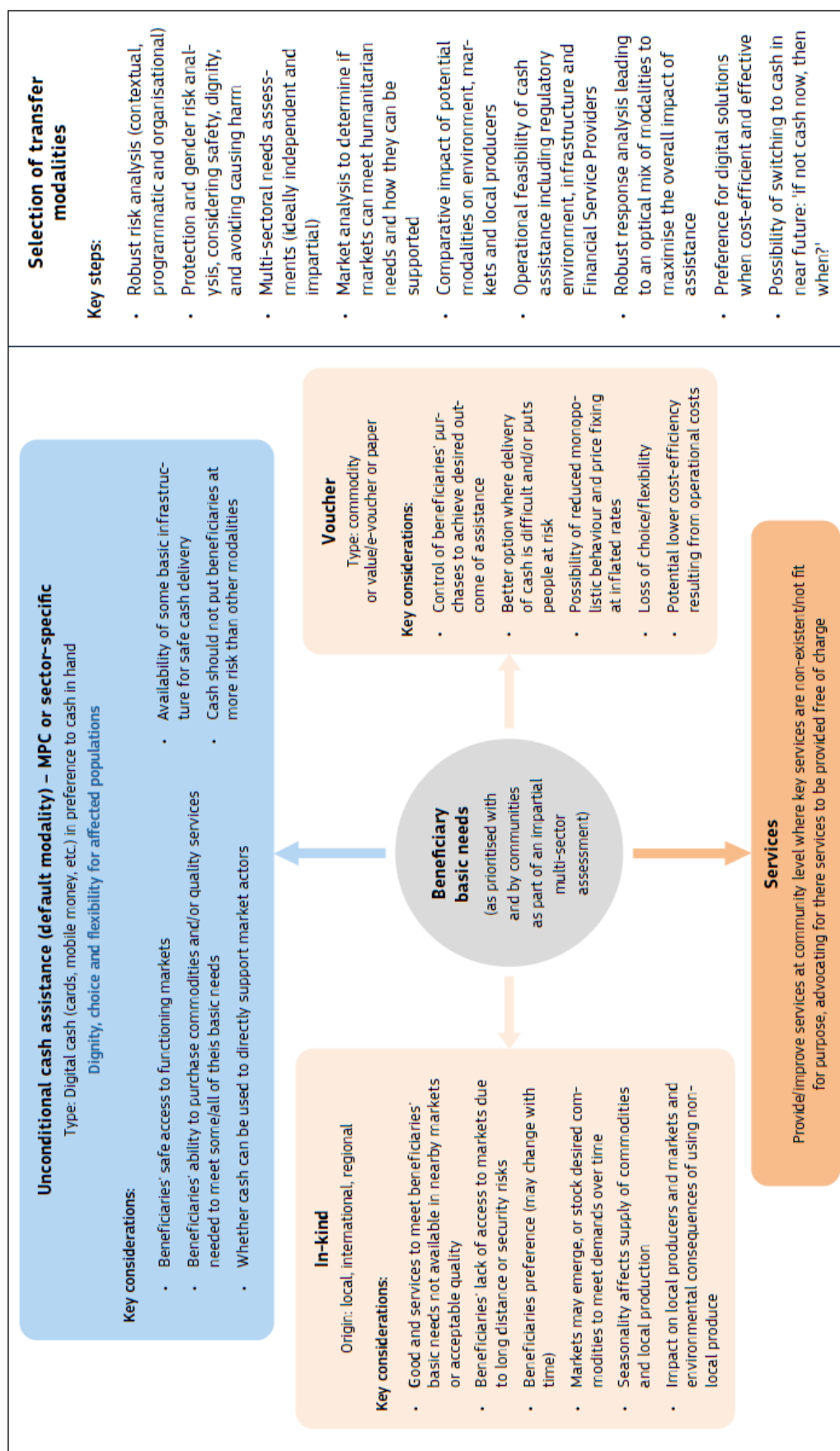
Market assessments should include an environmental perspective, whereby partners should weigh up the environmental benefits of using cash as an HFLA modality against the potential environmental impact of in-kind food that might be purchased locally, regionally or from distant markets (see Section 4.1.1). Whatever transfer modality is selected, an environmental risks analysis should be completed and minimum environmental requirements²⁸ must be respected, including consideration of transport, local production, energy sources, cooking facilities, indoor air pollution and fire hazards. It may be helpful to consider the provision of ready-to-eat rations and food varieties with shorter cooking times. Packaging solutions should limit garbage accumulation, and health hazards and waste management at distribution centres

should also be considered. Energy needs for cooking should be met through the use of clean energy sources (to avoid deforestation for example) and efficient stoves.

Other aspects of response design are discussed in detail elsewhere in the policy, such as who should be the main target of the response, which is covered in targeting (Section 3.2); rations/ transfer values, which are discussed in Sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3; and the duration, frequency and seasonality aspects of HFLA are covered in Section 3.4.

²⁸ See Annex 2 on the minimum environmental requirements.

Figure 2. Key Considerations in selecting assistance modalities for HFLA programming



3. Implementing HFLA actions

3.1. Preparedness toolbox



Key message

DG ECHO's HFLA funding should aim to strengthen preparedness-for-response capacities through investing in disaster preparedness, anticipatory actions and EWSs. DG ECHO sees rapid response mechanisms (RRMs) and crisis modifiers (CMs) as tools that make it possible to immediately respond to (or anticipate) a new crisis or a sudden deterioration within a crisis

Disaster preparedness and taking a risk-informed approach

Investing in disaster preparedness and anticipatory actions²⁹ helps to: (i) risk-proof response interventions by designing them in a way that reduces immediate and imminent risks; and (ii) put in place actions ahead of time based on forecasts, while systematically strengthening the capacity of first responders to be prepared for the impact of future risks while responding to a crisis.

Preparedness allows for an early and efficient response and therefore helps to save lives, reduce suffering and pre-empt or decrease the extent of needs. In this way it lessens the impact of a hazard and/or threat and contributes to resilience. In

particular, DG ECHO views preparedness as a way to promote and strengthen anticipatory actions, early response and flexibility, all of which are critical to managing disasters. For HFLA, this might mean the provision of seeds that can better tolerate dry conditions based on confident climate outlooks; preparations for adequate post-harvest storage; management of livestock diseases³⁰, such as Rift Valley fever, that are associated with predicted weather. This might also mean a pre-positioning supply chain strategy of in-kind food in areas where cash may not be an appropriate modality in anticipation of natural or human-caused hazards, as well as in anticipation of sudden supply disruptions. Pre-positioning strategies of in-kind food assistance will

²⁹ See DG ECHO (2021) [Disaster Preparedness Guidance Note](#) for more details.

³⁰ See the [Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards](#) (LEGS) which includes standards on preparedness relevant to issues such as livestock feed, water, veterinary support, shelter, and offtake.

usually require logistics and supplier assessments at local or in-country level, which will include availability of quality storage in key locations and transportation services for timely deployment and replenishment.

Cash preparedness will normally focus on organisational preparedness (systems and capacity), and alignment with the financial regulatory framework in place, together with programmatic preparedness, including market mapping, pre-arrangements with financial service providers, and cash information management systems. Shock-responsive social protection systems – especially when linked to climate outlooks – can provide an important early response that HFLA programmes can align with and support.

Targeted preparedness actions aim at improving the effectiveness of the response by taking action ahead of a hazard and threat, when mainstreaming disaster preparedness within a response is not possible or sufficient and a more thorough approach to disaster preparedness is needed. This can include the development of EWSs or the development of anticipatory actions protocols (see below), the development of organisational contingency plans, the emergency pre-positioning of stocks, or collaboration and capacity-strengthening interventions of local and national actors related to preparedness actions.

Anticipatory action³¹

Anticipatory action involves acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce impacts on lives, livelihoods and humanitarian needs before they fully unfold, therefore protecting development gains. This may involve pre-agreeing triggers, decision-making rules and activities that guarantee the fast release of pre-arranged anticipatory funding/financing before the event occurs or before the most acute impacts are felt. DG ECHO will, in appropriate contexts, support anticipatory action oriented to food assistance and livelihood interventions. Examples include the evacuation of livestock from flood-prone areas, handing out emergency cash so people can stock food or pre-positioning of resources in areas at high risk of population displacement. Triggers and anticipatory action activities should be contextualised to ensure they are appropriate to the specificities of both the area and the hazard, and should be developed with the participation of the affected population. In appropriate contexts, anticipatory action should be designed to consider multiple, overlapping hazards (and can be complemented by longer-term investments in climate adaptation and more resilient systems (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3), in order to avoid the risks associated with implementing cycles of short-term response within a context of overall decline).

³¹ See Section 6.2, on anticipatory action, in the guidance note for disaster preparedness.

On anticipatory action, DG ECHO-supported HFLA should:

- a) Whenever possible, encourage and support government-led processes to develop protocols which describe the activities to be undertaken, and pre-agreed triggers, established on the basis of historical and current forecast analysis;
- b) Closely coordinate and actively participate in (government-led) coordination efforts with all key stakeholders whenever possible to support a coherent approach to anticipatory actions;
- c) Support the actual implementation of anticipatory actions;
- d) Include capacity-strengthening support for anticipatory action coordination efforts, particularly related to local and national actors (including government);
- e) Strongly encourage all actors to leverage existing investments and create synergies that support scaling up of anticipatory action.

Early warning systems³²

DG ECHO-supported HFLA should actively collaborate with and support EWSs that gather reliable and timely information on food production and availability (including weather-related hazards that may affect food production and livelihoods), food prices and levels of food insecurity. EWSs are often costly systems requiring long-

term support that is best provided by development actors. DG ECHO can provide support to strengthening such systems where they have been proven to be relevant for providing HFLA and linked to well-defined exit strategies.

Key components of an EWS include the following: (i) initial risk assessment and analysis; (ii) monitoring of hazards/threats and impact-based forecasting; (iii) dissemination and communication of warnings; (iv) preparedness for response at all levels (national and community); and (v) agreed triggers for action. These elements enable individuals, communities, governments, businesses and others to take timely action to reduce disaster risks in advance of hazardous events, and therefore mitigate the impact of a hazard/threat, protecting life, livelihoods, safety and dignity, and potentially reducing humanitarian needs. EWSs can respond to a single-hazard or multi-hazard threat, or multiple threats, including nutritional and food security surveillance. They are an important source of information regarding the degree of projected food insecurity and therefore guide geographical targeting of HFLA interventions. Early warning is not an exact science and decision-making processes based on EWSs are reactions to likely and worrying scenarios. DG ECHO is aware that initial predictions might turn out not to be true and processes might have to be reversed and will therefore support an informed 'no-regrets' approach where relevant.

³² See Section 6.1, on EWSs, in the guidance note for disaster preparedness.

Rapid response mechanisms and crisis modifiers

DG ECHO views flexibility and timeliness as critical elements of managing crises more efficiently and effectively.

RRMs are contractual arrangements that DG ECHO establishes with one or multiple partners in a given country to ensure that a network of humanitarian organisations can access sufficient staff, financial and material resources to respond to recurring localised, small-scale emergencies as soon as possible after they occur. These can either be related to conflicts or natural hazards. The exact arrangements differ from country to country. Depending on the context, RRM can also include logistics preparedness actions such as funding for pre-positioning of goods and their mobilisation. Partners should develop a pre-positioning strategy considering logistics capacities at local level and promote when possible joint or shared use of storage, transportation and other common services. In the context of HFLA this could be ready-to-eat rations or

communal kitchens that can be deployed, for example, in evacuation sites, but it could also be the distribution of an emergency cash transfer.

The idea of a CM is to have a contingency reserve so as to be able to respond to (or anticipate) a crisis within a crisis. The key characteristic of a CM is the rapidity with which it can be applied. Its added value is thus evident in the event of rapid-onset shocks that are of a small magnitude but that have a significant impact. CMs should respond to more pressing and urgent life-saving needs (not necessarily responding to all needs) and they are typically designed for a limited period of time. CMs can also be used for anticipatory action, in areas where there is an anticipatory action protocol/framework in place. CMs and the RRM are not mutually exclusive. They can coexist in the same country/geographical subdivision and can be complementary, both in terms of the time sequence and the needs addressed.

3.2. Targeting



Key message

DG ECHO prioritises assisting those suffering from the highest levels of acute food insecurity. The level of need is the primary criterion for receiving assistance. DG ECHO prioritises an evidence-based and appropriate balancing of coverage and adequacy of assistance, both of which need to be taken into consideration when determining the people to be supported by a finite budget. DG ECHO acknowledges that targeting involves trade-offs. DG ECHO expects partners to balance those trade-offs and to be able to justify the chosen targeting approach.

3.2.1. General principles

Targeting criteria must be carefully designed to prioritise those with the greatest needs, both at geographical and household level.

DG ECHO expects targeting to be based on recognised food security indicators that reflect food consumption patterns and reliance on coping strategies. As a rule, DG ECHO strongly discourages targeting based on unspecific selection criteria, such as status (e.g. being registered as a refugee) or demographic categories (e.g. age, gender, disability, or household composition). However, it recognises that relying solely on food security indicators for targeting may, in certain cases, entail some limitations.

Targeting criteria must be realistic and feasible, considering available time, resources, and implementation capacities, as well as any potential access constraints. They should be easy to communicate and acceptable to the communities and local authorities. They should be clear and, as much as possible, checked against food

security indicators to allow monitoring and ensure decisions can be revisited when required. This is particularly important in rapidly evolving contexts.

Targeting approaches should be adapted as crises evolve. In the initial stages, the focus should be on avoiding exclusion errors, ensuring aid reaches everyone in need. As the crisis progresses, the focus should shift to minimising inclusion errors, refining methods to ensure resources are used efficiently and directed to those who truly require assistance.

DG ECHO promotes a multi-sectoral approach to targeting that integrates multiple existing datasets or data services beyond the food sector. For example, using nutrition data, data collected by health facilities, protection data, etc. The aim is to enhance referral pathways to facilitate interoperability and responsible data sharing.

In protracted crisis settings where challenges extend beyond acute food

insecurity to include limited access to basic needs and essential services, adopting a more granular vulnerability and socio-economic analysis enhances programme relevance and effectiveness. This approach

shifts the focus from solely addressing food security to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of overall access to basic needs.

3.2.2. The targeting process

Targeting in the context of humanitarian food assistance and emergency livelihood support programmes is a two-step process. First, it involves the identification of the

Geographic targeting

In its approach to geographic targeting, DG ECHO prioritises areas that are underserved by the humanitarian community and hard-to-reach areas. This process is crucial to ensure that, following DG ECHO's core priorities, the assistance reaches those who need it the most.

DG ECHO places emphasis on using IPC/CH area classifications or UN OCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO) geographic prioritisation to determine where to intervene. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge certain risks, such as underestimating food-insecure populations in hard-to-reach or marginalised areas, overlooking significant numbers of acutely food-insecure individuals in regions classified as phase 1 or 2, or neglecting vulnerable groups like mobile, undocumented, or socially marginalised people.

Areas classified as in phase 3 or worse should be supported, with priority given to those in phases 4 and 5. Where such classification processes do not exist or information is unreliable, DG ECHO encourages partners other approaches, such as the Joint Inter-sectoral Analysis

geographic areas. Second, it involves the identification of households or individuals that are most critically food insecure or most vulnerable to food insecurity.

Framework (JIAF), to ensure that selection processes are informed by up-to-date food security data and verified through a triangulation of sources.

The IPC/CH analysis often stops at a high administrative level (e.g. a region or a province). Partners are expected to use various information sources to determine and justify their geographic prioritisation for going down to the lower administrative (district, municipality or village) level, when possible, through a collective approach with the cluster.

Household-level targeting

Household-level targeting is crucial, as the household remains the primary unit for programming purposes.

DG ECHO prioritises support for those households experiencing the highest levels of acute food insecurity, with the level of need as the primary criterion for assistance. It favours and promotes focused targeting that ensures adequate support, rather than broader coverage that risks providing insufficient or sub-optimal aid.

The targeting mechanism can vary depending on the context, but it must balance efficiency and accuracy to ensure aid promptly reaches those most in need. Partners should use targeting approaches that allow a ranking of the community members by food insecurity levels, therefore facilitating prioritisation. DG ECHO acknowledges that the more homogenous the affected population is, the more difficult it is to differentiate levels of need.

In some cases, communities and authorities may advocate for wider inclusion, particularly in situations where acute food insecurity affects large portions of the population. In those situations, efforts must be made to maintain an effective and well-targeted assistance.

In certain contexts, food security indicators alone may be insufficient for an appropriate targeting at household level, due to potential biases in self-reported data and the exclusion of critical factors, such as cultural dietary habits and socio-economic influences on food security and vulnerability. To address these limitations, partners can complement food security indicators with proxy measures of acute food insecurity through integrated scoring systems. In these cases, DG ECHO strongly encourages collaboration among partners to design joint, harmonised scoring systems tailored to the context. These should prioritise vulnerability criteria (including a gender and disability-informed risk analysis and a set of context-specific socio-economic features) directly linked to acute food insecurity while remaining flexible and adaptable to the specific objectives of each programme.

Targeting approaches must be safe for crisis-affected households. Monitoring the community's perception of the targeting process is crucial, focusing on the clarity of the process, criteria, and errors of inclusion and exclusion. Partners must monitor the degree of meaningful access to, and participation in, the process of all community members, and DG ECHO is ready to support this process. The observations from the process contribute to measuring DG ECHO's protection mainstreaming Key Objective Indicators (KOI). Partners should be able to adjust their targeting approach in a timely manner in response to feedback from the community. The targeting process needs to be dynamic. The level of food insecurity of the supported population should be regularly re-assessed to capture changes in a timely manner and possibly replace recipients whose food security situation has improved with others who have greater acute need.

For certain actions, such as emergency livelihood support, supplementary criteria, such as access to land or sufficient labour skills or capacities of the household (or affected people), will need to be added to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention.

DG ECHO also encourages partners to examine intra-household disparities and address the specific nutritional needs of individuals to the extent possible.

3.2.3. Types of targeting mechanisms

- Data-driven targeting: targeting very often starts with collecting data. Ideally, DG ECHO would like to see data collection that collects data for measuring [standardised food security indicators](#)³³, at least from a sample of the population. Households will then be selected based on their level of food insecurity. However, few DG ECHO partners will have the capacity and resources to collect this data with appropriate quality and at scale. Therefore, they are expected to identify proxy indicators that strongly correlate with food insecurity and are easily observable. These proxies can be extracted from food security surveys, databases (e.g. meteorological data where appropriate) or other sources. They should always be specific to the underlying shock and sensitive to the livelihood zone and dominant livelihood strategies.
- The [Household Economy Analysis](#)³⁴ is a methodology that is used to understand and classify the economic strategies of households facing food insecurity, and the options they have in times of crisis. The Household Economy Analysis-based targeting method combines a categorisation of households using the results from overall targeted household surveys and a participatory categorisation undertaken by the community. However, as Household Economy Analysis was designed for predominantly agricultural livelihoods, it needs to be adapted when applied to urban contexts.
- Community-based targeting (CBT) is a participatory targeting approach that involves the community in the decision-making process, using criteria developed through community consultations to help determine proxy indicators that are context-specific, and understood and accepted by the community. By involving the community in the process, CBT ensures that local knowledge and perceptions of vulnerability are integrated, although it requires careful implementation. Targeting committees must represent all layers of the population to avoid reflecting the structural power imbalances and often deeply entrenched inequalities in society which could lead to elite capture, nepotism, and high risks of exclusion of certain (minority) groups. Ensuring transparency and continuously monitoring the process is important to mitigate against bias and favouritism and to ensure the process remains fair and causes no harm. DG ECHO expects partners to always include a verification step, i.e. carrying out follow-up surveys collecting data on recognised food security indicators, at least of a sample of the pre-selected households. This additional step allows assessment of the quality and accuracy of the process. CBT is usually unsuitable in conflict settings and access-constrained environments, where affected populations are highly homogeneous, and the approach can create tensions, or in areas with limited

³³ For more information see the IPC Manual on <https://www.ipcinfo.org>.

³⁴ For more information see <https://foodeconomy.com/what-is-hea/>.

social cohesion and/or rapid-onset shocks/ initial displacement settings.

- For combined approaches, CBT is often favoured as a verification mechanism and should be used in combination with data-driven approaches to mitigate against external influences or abuse of power, and to enhance transparency while upholding a degree of community ownership for the process. It can be applied as a validation exercise for preliminary lists developed by using existing datasets. Alternatively, the community can assemble a list of the potential beneficiaries first, and then a data-driven approach can be used to rank people and confirm the final group of recipients.
- Referrals are used to redirect individuals or households to other programmes that can provide the precise assistance that these people need. This mechanism is frequently used for specific programmes, such as treating acute malnutrition. Partners need to establish pathways for inward referrals, i.e. to assess the eligibility of people referred from other sectors (e.g. protection).
- The option of self-targeting through online forms – followed by a verification exercise – allows for quick targeting, especially in contexts with strong pre-existing IT infrastructure. However, it requires a level of technical infrastructure and digital familiarity on the part of the population that rarely exists outside middle-income countries.

- The use of other approaches, such as proxy means testing or targeting based on demographic characteristics (old age, female-headed households, people living with disabilities, chronic illness), is considered unsuitable for HFLA. This is at least the case in emergencies, unless the variables used have been proven to correlate strongly with food insecurity and the underlying shock.
- The use of pre-existing databases, such as social registries, can be efficient if households are already registered. However, relevant criteria for DG ECHO-funded responses may not be present in the database if they solely focus on chronic poverty. The information might be outdated and there is a high risk of exclusion errors if not everyone is included in the registry. The use of social registries might be more appropriate in longer-term/protracted crises, especially when alignment of an operation with social protection is sought.

Context is important and there may be differences between urban and rural communities for example or people with unique vulnerabilities (see also [Targeting in Urban and Rural Contexts](#) , IFRC).

Whatever the targeting mechanism selected, it should have a verification process that is based on food security indicators (IPC/CH reference table³⁵).

³⁵ For more information see the IPC Manual on <https://www.ipcinfo.org>.

3.2.4. Navigating trade-offs

DG ECHO acknowledges that targeting involves difficult trade-offs and there is no perfect solution. The primary trade-offs include:

- Accuracy versus speed: highly accurate targeting requires thorough data collection and analysis, which can be time-consuming, whereas rapid targeting methods might sacrifice accuracy for the sake of a fast process;
- Community participation versus speed: participative processes take longer and risk delaying urgently needed assistance. However, as a principle, communities should be involved in the development of targeting criteria as far as possible for accountability and ease of communication;
- Community acceptance versus impartiality: ensuring community acceptance might require incorporating local preferences and perceptions of how differences in needs should be determined and ranked, which can sometimes conflict with impartiality and can risk undermining existing solidarity networks;
- Simplicity versus complexity: simple targeting criteria and mechanisms are easier to implement and understand but may not capture the full complexity of food insecurity, whereas complex systems can be more accurate but harder to manage and explain to the population;
- Cost versus effectiveness: detailed and precise targeting methods can be costly

in terms of resources and logistics, but they can be more effective in reaching the most vulnerable people, whereas less costly methods might result in higher rates of inclusion and exclusion errors. Access may also be important in some contexts. Additional investments in more excessive targeting will not always lead to added returns;

- Collaborative and integrated versus sectoral and siloed approaches: an approach that uses different information sources and data systems ensures that various underlying vulnerabilities and risks are adequately considered. An overly narrow approach might ignore other factors that also contribute to food insecurity or harmful coping strategies.

Balancing these trade-offs is crucial for the success of humanitarian interventions; different factors might weigh more or less depending on the context and on the specific objective of the action, hence no overall guidance can be provided. However, DG ECHO expects partners to consider the different aspects carefully and to justify the chosen targeting approach, to monitor its effectiveness throughout implementation, and to address targeting errors.

3.2.5. Linking HFLA targeting with social protection targeting

DG ECHO encourages complementarity between humanitarian targeting processes and those of social protection programmes (including social safety nets) in settings where this is possible without jeopardising humanitarian principles. The following aspects are considered important (see also Section 5.1):

- Interoperability of data: organisations often encounter challenges in exchanging data between different information systems, partly for technical reasons and partly due to the need to uphold the necessary level of data protection;
- De-duplication: social protection beneficiaries should not be automatically excluded from humanitarian programmes as they could still be highly food insecure, especially if the support provided by the social safety net is grossly inadequate to weather the impact of an additional shock. Where programmes are aligned and transfer values are harmonised, de-duplication mechanisms should prevent repeat targeting of the same households. However, these mechanisms are dependent on the existence of a unique identifier;
- Complementary targeting: humanitarian actors might have to select additional households for support that are not in the social registry or are not part of a regular safety net to address acute levels of food insecurity and increase overall coverage;
- Layering of support: where safety nets provide support that is inadequate to mitigate the impact of an acute shock, humanitarian actors can support existing social protection recipients with a top-up of the transfer value to ensure a more adequate response.

3.3. Registration and data management (digitalisation and data protection³⁶)



Key message

In registering people to receive assistance, DG ECHO expects partners to apply the most suitable technological advances and innovations that strengthen interoperability and link to longer-term solutions, and to use digital solutions where this makes sense from an effectiveness or efficiency standpoint. This will typically involve the digitalisation of registration and electronic transfers when appropriate

The selected households or individuals in most cases need to be registered in order to receive assistance. DG ECHO's policy is for the programmes it supports to be 'digital by default', in order to harness the many potential benefits of digital solutions in terms of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, including the advantages inherent in electronic transfers and digital identities, and linking with multi-sectoral approaches (see Section 2.1). However, all decisions on the choice of digital solutions should comply with the 'do no digital harm'

principle³⁷. Formal identification documents are often required for registration. However, individuals or groups who are less visible or may be 'under the radar', such as child-headed households and people without civil documentation who may not be able to register, must not be excluded from assistance. Partners are called upon to develop alternative delivery mechanisms adapted and tailored to the specific situations of those without documentation

³⁶ For more information on the risks of digitalisation, privacy and data protection, see Chapter 4 of [DG ECHO's Thematic Policy No 3 Cash Transfers \(2022\)](#).

³⁷ For further details see:

- [Doing no digital harm: toward data responsibility in humanitarian action](#)
- [International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\) and Privacy International, The humanitarian metadata problem: "Doing no harm" in the digital era, October 2018](#)

Digitalisation raises specific risks with regard to data protection, especially when registration data are passed on to a third party, such as a financial service provider or vendors. For example, when vouchers are used for seed fairs or the provision of fresh food. Data protection safeguards need to be systematically in place within a thorough data protection impact assessment, in line with local data protection laws and partners' EU data protection requirements³⁸. Data protection issues arise when personally identifiable data related to affected people are stored, cross-matched and passed on to third parties, including sometimes governments, as part of humanitarian actions. Ultimately, this potentially puts registered people – often the most vulnerable members of a community – at risk of their data being used for purposes other than those for which it was collected, and of their identities falling into the hands of people or services that may wish them harm. The personal data of all registered people should be protected including those who do not receive assistance

Some opportunities and benefits of digitalisation

- The ability to easily de-duplicate data-bases.
- Enabling digital data collection, storage and visualisation (ideally through open-source tools), and effectively coding, aggregating and anonymising information.
- Instructing private sector financial service providers to execute digital payments for small or very large caseloads of beneficiaries efficiently through more-or-less automated systems.
- Tracking humanitarian transfers across sectors and modalities.
- Streamlining accountability to beneficiaries (complaints and feedback mechanisms).
- Enabling more remote post-distribution monitoring.
- Enabling linkages between humanitarian cash and social protection systems and the financial and digital inclusion of beneficiaries.

³⁸ The data protection requirements, which are part of the contractual agreement between the European Commission and its humanitarian partner organisations, ensure (through *ex ante* assessment for non-governmental organisation partners or, for pillar-assessed organisations, through complementary assessment of their data protection policies) that partners' data protection policies are in line with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In addition, the model grant agreement stipulates that organisations benefiting from a Commission grant must process personal data under the agreement in compliance with the applicable EU, international and national laws on data protection – again, particularly the GDPR. The Humanitarian Aid Contribution Agreement also outlines that each action should ensure data protection in line with the organisations' own data protection policies.

DG ECHO supports the responsible sharing of data between humanitarian organisations where this has benefits for the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian actions. Responsible data-sharing agreements should be based on sound analysis of the risks that the beneficiaries might face by sharing their data with a third party, and data protection measures must be tailored to addressing these risks.

The interoperability³⁹ of databases and registries allows responsible and safe data sharing, as well as other benefits that include:

- De-duplication of registries: to avoid multiple registration of individuals and households in more than one stream of assistance. Flagging multiple records means that overlapping programmes can remove or accept applicants, and in turn improve cost efficiency;
- Facilitating referrals: with interoperable registries, agencies are able to refer households and individuals to other

streams of assistance. For example, freshly displaced people receiving assistance from short-term RRM's can be referred to longer-term assistance programmes if needs continue beyond the RRM's duration;

- Layering assistance: vulnerable people or marginalised groups may need more than the basic level of assistance. Interoperable databases can help agencies to provide layered assistance, as distinct from 'accidental layering' through duplicate records. This can also foster the multi-sectoral approach: for example, layering HFLA with other complementary assistance, such as WASH, health and nutrition assistance, but also enhancing multi-sectoral pathways that facilitate the inclusion of those who are most in need from different entry points;
- Tracking assistance: interoperable databases offer the potential to track assistance to households across the humanitarian response.

³⁹See [‘Donor Cash Forum Statement and Guiding Principles on Interoperability of Data Systems in Humanitarian Cash Programming’](#).

3.4. Resource transfers



Key message

DG ECHO expects cash to be the preferred modality to meet food needs when conditions allow (see Section 3.4.2), and prioritises MPC to meet basic needs, including food, complemented with other modalities to meet specific sectoral outcomes. DG ECHO favours cash assistance⁴⁰ by default because cash transfers are unconditional and unrestricted. There should always be a clear justification for the value, frequency and duration of the assistance.

3.4.1. Determining the scope of the assistance

The value, frequency and duration of the assistance need to be carefully determined, regardless of the chosen modality. Transfer values (cash, vouchers or in-kind transfers) need to be calculated based on need and on what the targeted people can contribute themselves to cover their needs without resorting to negative coping mechanisms.

- The duration of assistance will be context-specific but should ensure that targeted households are again in a position to meet their needs or are referred to other sources of assistance (humanitarian or longer-term assistance).
- Different types of assistance can also be effectively used in combination. For example, when food assistance is

provided (either as cash, vouchers or in-kind transfers) to protect some transfers – such as seeds – from being eaten or sold in acute crises.

- The frequency of transfers also depends on the context and should be analysed from the perspective of the supported individual or household, while taking their exposure to protection risks into consideration.
- Seasonality may be important, especially in rural settings, where access and availability of food and livelihoods vary seasonally, and where the modality of assistance may impact on cropping and harvesting cycles, in turn affecting markets, prices, local producers and traders.

⁴⁰ Please refer to DG ECHO's [Thematic Policy No. 3 on Cash Transfers](#).

3.4.2. Cash assistance

The use of cash transfers is now widely recognised as the most appropriate, efficient and effective way of getting humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflicts or disasters, whenever possible and appropriate. Above all, cash transfers have proven to be transformative: they confer choice and a sense of dignity and empower people to tailor assistance to meet their own priorities through transfers designed to meet multiple needs. Cash is a compelling tool that can make limited resources go further and can have a multiplier effect on local economies⁴¹. At the same time, it makes DG ECHO more accountable to affected populations and taxpayers. DG ECHO favours cash because it is

unrestricted. By contrast, the use of vouchers is discouraged, as these are restricted. Cash is designed to cover multiple needs and offers greater cost efficiency and effectiveness. Vouchers (and in-kind assistance) are in themselves currency and can be exchanged for goods they are not intended for and/or sold for cash.

For these reasons, cash is the preferred modality of assistance, over in-kind transfers and vouchers, where the context allows.

Within a multi-sectoral or basic needs approach, cash is frequently designed to cover multiple needs – including food – as



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⁴¹ In rare cases, cash may have negative effects on local economies, such as inflation. Market assessments should flag up cases where this might occur; in these contexts, monitoring is important.

a single recurrent payment. The transfer value should be based on a minimum expenditure basket (MEB) calculated using market prices for the commodities to be included in the transfer. Food is typically the most pressing need, or one of the most pressing needs, and should be included in the MEB so that affected people can access sufficient quality and diversity of food commodities appropriate to their customs. The actual value transferred to individuals or households may be less than the MEB, based on an estimate of the gap between the MEB and what affected people can contribute towards their needs without resorting to negative coping strategies. If other needs are left unmet, cash for food alone will often result in households reducing food expenditure (or selling in-kind food) to cover other basic needs that they consider more pressing. Seasonality may also be important: the prices of food and other commodities (including things like heating fuel in winter) may vary throughout the year and need to be accounted for when updating the MEB and transfer value calculations.

Cash may also be used to achieve sector-specific outcomes. In the HFLA sector this may mean cash being used to cover food needs, support emergency livelihoods,

prevent undernutrition (see Section 3.6), or for complementary actions, such as supplementary feeding (in-kind), as described below. It is unethical for affected people to receive different levels of resource transfers, and it can cause confusion and tension in contexts where multi-purpose cash is being delivered alongside cash for food alone, as the transfer values will differ depending on whether they are based on an MEB or on a minimum food basket. Transfer values should ideally be set by the Cash Working Group⁴² at the national level and complied with by implementing agencies. In some cases, donors will need to come together to incentivise harmonised cash transfers in line with commitments DG ECHO shares with other members of the global Donor Cash Forum.

In the case of interventions supporting nutrition outcomes, in most humanitarian contexts cash alone is not sufficient to have a significant impact due to the variety of determinants at play. To maximise the chances of achieving positive outcomes, other interventions should be provided alongside cash (e.g. specialised food products, improved access to health services, behaviour change communication).

⁴² See [Cash Working Groups](#)

3.4.3. Vouchers



Key message

As previously mentioned, DG ECHO has a strong policy stance in favour of cash over vouchers. However, under certain well-defined conditions, vouchers can be the preferred modality, but partners must provide a clear justification for their use. Vouchers are to be disaggregated in partners' proposals and budgets and are to be tracked and reported separately from cash assistance.

Vouchers are not DG ECHO's preferred modality, as the following considerations will often weigh against the use of commodity or value vouchers:

- The possibility of monopolistic behaviour and price fixing at inflated rates;
- Limited choice/flexibility;
- In some situations, lower cost efficiency resulting from operational costs.

However, under certain conditions and in particular contexts, vouchers may be the preferred option (following a diligent modality selection process). The cash policy contains specific reasons why prioritising vouchers may be justified. These include controlling peoples' purchases to achieve the desired outcome of assistance and ensuring access to goods and services requiring specific quality standards. Vouchers may also be justified in contexts where the delivery of cash is difficult and/or puts people at risk, or where political acceptance of cash is low or where cash is even banned.

There should always be a clear justification for choosing vouchers. Reasons could include the following:

- Vouchers can result in better food diversity outcomes than other

modalities. This can result in better nutrition outcomes if vouchers are specifically designed to facilitate access to fresh foods and if it makes sense from a cost efficiency and cost-effectiveness standpoint.

- Vouchers can reduce monopolistic behaviours and price fixing by market traders, especially when the traders are few in number.
- Vouchers can help maintain purchasing power when there is high inflation.



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- Vouchers can support economies of scale linked to negotiated prices (wholesaler/semi-wholesaler), ultimately assisting more people.
- Vouchers must be disaggregated in the proposal and budget and must be tracked and reported on separately from cash assistance.

3.4.4. In-kind assistance



Key message

Under certain conditions and in particularly challenging or remote contexts (such as in hard-to-reach areas), where functioning markets are structurally absent, in-kind assistance may be the preferred option (following a diligent modality selection process). Partners purchasing food supplies must pay attention to the composition of food rations. Whenever possible and advisable, priority must be given to food that is produced and traded in the country of operation or in neighbouring countries. All procurement must comply with the procurement rules⁴³ established by DG ECHO and must comply with the Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations⁴⁴.

Regional, in-country and local supply chains will have a strong impact on the design of a food security response. On some occasions, key factors such as the availability of transport services, the accessibility to communities and the behaviour of markets will lead to consider in-kind food assistance as the preferred modality. In any case, this type of response will require an overall logistics strategy to ensure efficient and timely distribution operations.

Therefore, under certain conditions and in particular contexts, in-kind assistance may be the preferred option. The cash policy contains specific reasons justifying prioritisation of in-kind assistance:

- The goods and services needed to meet affected people's basic needs are not available in nearby markets or are not of acceptable quality.
- Affected people lack access to markets due to long distances, insecurity, or protection risks.
- In the immediate aftermath of a shock, affected people's preferences (which may change with time) are often for in-kind assistance of short duration, provided for all and without applying any targeting procedures.
- Markets may emerge over time or may begin to stock desired commodities to meet demands.
- Seasonality may affect the supply of commodities and local production.

⁴³ For more details see DG ECHO's helpdesk website: <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/actions-implementation/procurement/food-supplies>.

⁴⁴ DG ECHO (2022), Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations, [DG ECHO Guidance on minimum environmental requirements](#).

Partners purchasing food supplies must pay attention to the quality and composition of food rations. When doing so, they should consider the diversification of food items, cultural norms (including differences between rural and urban areas), related cooking energy requirements and/or seasonality aspects and nutrition adequacy, especially when fresh food is not included in the ration. The food ration must have a properly considered balance among nutrients, including the source of proteins (animal and vegetable) and micronutrients. Moreover, food rations must consider cultural and seasonal use of certain foods (high energy during winter and during festivities) and the specific nutrition needs of certain individuals due to chronic diseases and or conditions.

As for the use of genetically modified organisms, in support of the 'do no harm' principle humanitarian food assistance partners are expected to safeguard the interests of the people they are supporting in the selection of food commodities and agricultural inputs (concerning safety, appropriateness and effectiveness). Partners also need to comply with the relevant national policies and legislation in the country of operation.

DG ECHO generally discourages its partners from importing bulk food commodities and for cost-efficiency reasons favours a single pipeline per country. Whenever possible and advisable (and having due regard to the context in which the action is implemented), priority must be given to food produced and sold in the country of operation or in neighbouring countries, provided it does not substantially disturb local markets. This prioritisation should be implemented based on the need to reduce costs, limit transportation delays and prevent market

distortions. It should also, where possible, provide economic opportunities for small farmers in countries where purchases are made. However, to avoid inflationary impacts and/or disruption to the development of efficient local markets, there needs to be careful management of the operational challenges (e.g. the urgency and speed with which bulk purchases need to be made) and of the risks (e.g. of raising the expectation of long-term demand on the back of a short-term operation). Careful appraisal and consideration is also needed of other risks associated with the distribution of in-kind commodities (that may affect markets, security or protection).



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Engaging with the local market can help humanitarian actors save costs and reduce carbon emissions resulting from long transport routes. Efforts should be made to ensure the effect on the local market is positive and sustainable. Humanitarian actors can also increase efforts to boost the capacity of local suppliers (or actors) in the market, by increasing the capacities of local services, or by working with local suppliers to inform them of upcoming needs. Such efforts could be supported using a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, with funding from other actors, e.g. development donors. The key factors to be considered in all types of response are local market capacities,

mapping of critical roads and infrastructure, warehousing capacities, fuel availability and supply, telecoms, internet access and transport market information.

Implementing in-kind food assistance involves several logistical tasks and steps. DG ECHO has laid out its expectations for more efficient and effective delivery of aid and for the quality of humanitarian logistics in its humanitarian logistics policy⁴⁵. The term ‘logistics’ should be understood to cover the entire supply chain, including procurement, transport, tracking and tracing, customs clearance, local transportation, warehousing and last mile delivery.

All procurement must comply with the [procurement rules](#) established by DG ECHO. This compliance includes respecting the quality standards laid down in the national legislation of the country of origin and/or the country of destination, whichever has the higher quality standards. From a cost-efficiency perspective, in-kind food distribution tends to be more expensive than other modalities of assistance (particularly cash), making in-kind distribution viable only where cash and vouchers are not relevant.

3.4.5. Transfer conditionality



Key message

DG ECHO’s position is that there should always be a clear justification for why conditions have been imposed on the provision of HFLA. Conditionality is not generally appropriate for one-off assistance or for recurrent assistance to meet basic needs, including food. Whenever required, DG ECHO may support advocacy to governments or local authorities to encourage the acceptance of unrestricted and unconditional access to humanitarian assistance.

Cash or food for work

Cash or food for work refers to cash or voucher payments, or food deliveries, provided on the condition that people undertake designated work. Since this is a way to mobilise labour resources from the community, the primary objective of this

approach should be the community-level benefit, rather than meeting household-level basic needs. The outcome of such projects is frequently sub-optimal in quality terms and may only benefit some parts of the community – often not those who are most in need. Partners should justify how the works will benefit the

⁴⁵ DG ECHO – [Humanitarian Logistics Policy](#).

community as a whole. For DG ECHO, cash or food for work can be problematic from a value-for-money perspective, with funding often being absorbed in materials and management, rather than going to the most affected people. Therefore, DG ECHO does not typically fund cash/vouchers/food for work to meet basic needs objectives, particularly in situations of high vulnerability (IPC/CH phases 3 or 4, or other crisis situations), when unconditional assistance is appropriate. However, cash or food for work can be appropriate for disaster preparedness or water, sanitation and hygiene objectives. In these cases, it should be informed by a social and risk assessment and designed to have a positive environmental impact. Cash for work may also be appropriate for environmentally focused interventions as an emergency livelihoods supplement or to promote 'green jobs'⁴⁶, rather than to meet basic needs.

While cash for work is generally not funded by DG ECHO, other EU services do support cash for work through the International Labour Organization's 'decent work' approach. This is essentially cash for work, with a full system of support for work

around it to provide longer-term benefits. This avoids the tendency for cash for work not to comply with national employment standards. Cash for work could offer a possible exit strategy from unconditional cash assistance funded by DG ECHO, as it would contribute to a durable solution that would foster resilient livelihoods and self-reliance.

School meals programmes

DG ECHO does not prioritise school meal programmes in its HFLA interventions, particularly not as a stand-alone measure, as they are often not the most effective tool to achieve food security outcomes.

When designing response strategies, school meals should be carefully assessed in terms of their ability to reach the appropriate target groups – including infants and out-of-school children – as well as their cost-effectiveness compared to alternative approaches. Given the need to prioritise the most efficient and impactful interventions, support for school meals should be weighed against other response options that may better address food security needs.

⁴⁶ See Guidance on the Operationalisation of the Minimum Environmental Requirements, page [81](#).

3.5. Emergency livelihood



Key message

DG ECHO expects partners to consider emergency livelihood support to complement resource transfers to cover food needs, where feasible and appropriate. Since humanitarian interventions often span enough time to allow for phased approaches, integrating livelihood support at the right stage can help reduce reliance on other forms of assistance, hence enhancing the response's overall effectiveness and efficiency. It is important to acknowledge that crisis-affected people often seek and develop livelihoods, as humanitarian assistance is usually insufficient to meet all their needs.

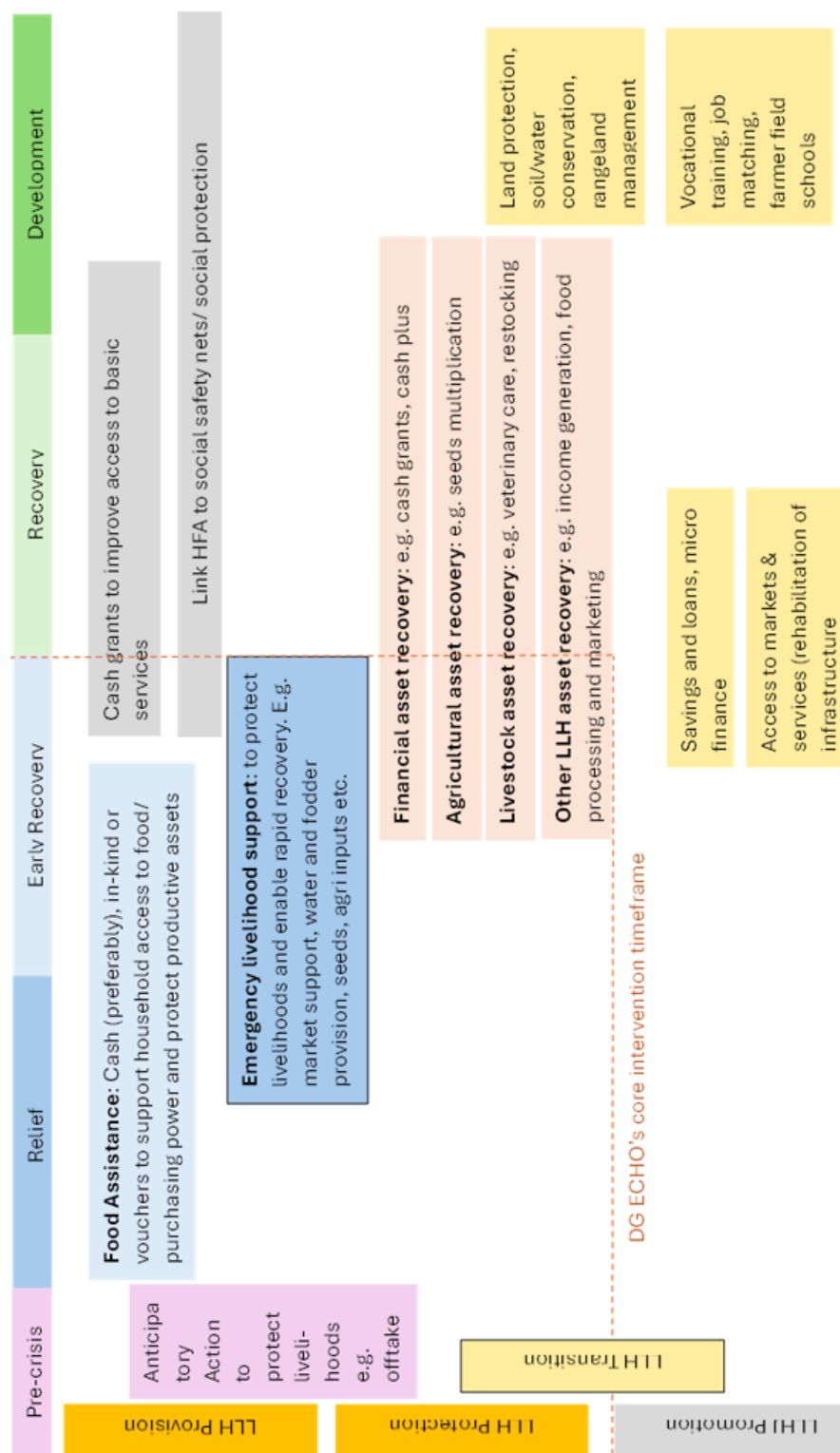
In situations of acute and widespread food and nutrition insecurity, and where resources are scarce, DG ECHO will prioritise urgent life-saving actions. Figure 3 below gives some indication of the kinds of emergency livelihood support that DG ECHO generally funds, together with what is normally considered to be beyond the core priorities.

Emergency livelihood support generally refers to actions that prevent the erosion of livelihoods assets and immediate recovery/reconstitution of livelihoods after a shock to avoid the need for damaging and irreversible coping strategies. This means that people can continue activities they were carrying out before the crisis, diversify their income and start the journey to self-reliance. Livelihood interventions can positively impact maternal and child nutrition, building human capital in the long term, and can improve protection outcomes such as reducing child labour. Emergency livelihood support may be provided at any time or stage in a crisis, including as an

anticipatory action to help prevent a predicted crisis developing or at least reduce its impact. For example, the provision of feed, and vaccines for livestock together with the rehabilitation of water points could be an anticipatory action in reaction to a drought early warning that effectively protects assets that would be lost or would see a reduction in value⁴⁷. This kind of intervention would complement resource transfers such as cash, vouchers or in-kind transfers, to meet food needs in an acute phase. Other examples include the provision of seeds and inputs, livestock restocking, veterinary support, water sources repair, cash grants or seed capital, and food banks.

⁴⁷ See Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards ([LEGS](#)).

Figure 3. Overview of types of livelihood interventions by phase and type



Source: adapted from Study on emergency livelihood support activities in integrated food assistance interventions. Inspire+, 2024

Resources for emergency livelihood support are likely to increase proportionally as an acute crisis stabilises and early recovery becomes a higher priority, depending on the context. When early warning is effective, livelihood protection interventions are most effective as an anticipatory action. In stable situations, where people have access to livelihood assets (land, livestock, businesses etc.), livelihood recovery options should be considered at an early stage to kickstart longer-term recovery processes in collaboration with development actors

(see also Section 5.2). The relative efficiency and effectiveness of supporting livelihood recovery versus resource transfers should be part of the decision-making process; when emergency livelihood interventions are more cost efficient, they should be prioritised. Partners are expected to conduct a response analysis (Section 2.4) to choose the most appropriate modality or mix of modalities for emergency livelihood support.

3.6. Nutrition-sensitive HFLA



Key message

With regard to nutrition specifically, the HFLA strategic objective is summarised as follows: to prevent significant and life-threatening deterioration of nutritional status by safeguarding the availability of access to and consumption of adequate, safe and nutritious food while protecting livelihoods and promoting conditions for the restoration of self-reliance. More details can be found in the [DG ECHO nutrition policy](#).

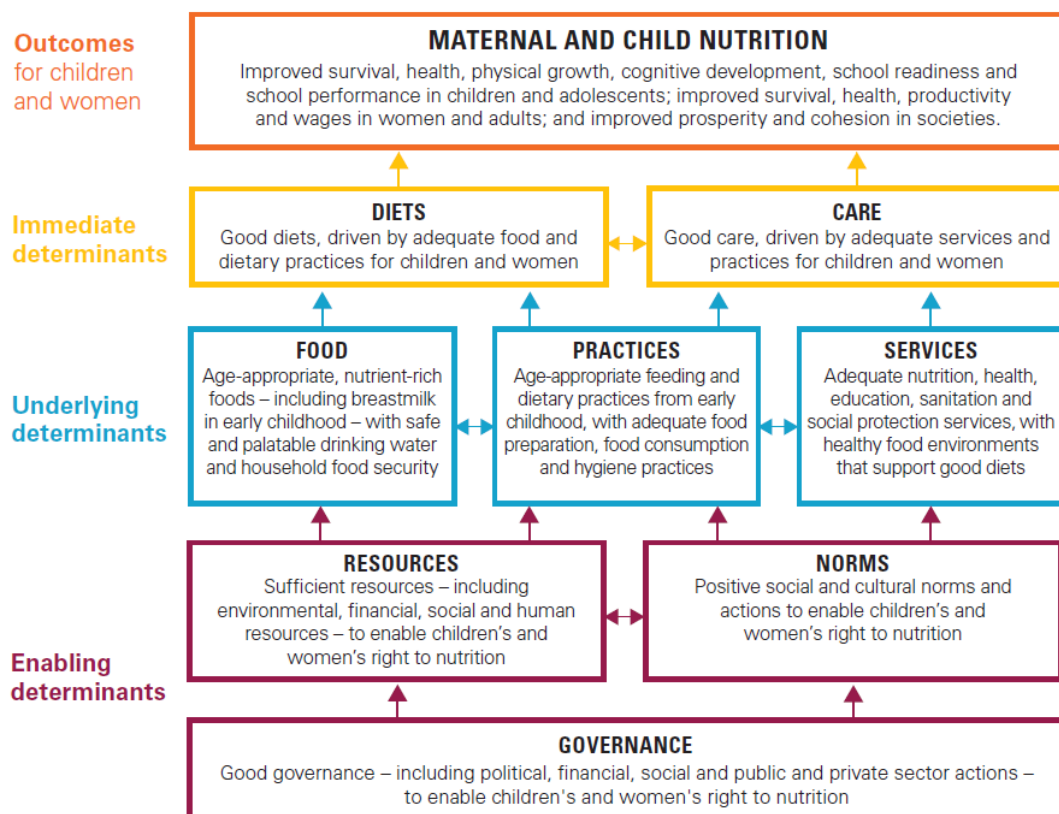
Conceptual framework

DG ECHO follows UNICEF's conceptual framework on maternal and child nutrition⁴⁸ (see Figure 4 below). The framework provides a holistic view of the multifaceted manifestation of child malnutrition and conceptual clarity regarding the enabling, underlying and immediate determinants of adequate

nutrition, their horizontal and vertical interconnectedness, and positive outcomes resulting from improved nutrition. From this standpoint, food insecurity is seen as one driver of undernutrition, alongside others. Conversely, good food security is seen as an important factor in preventing undernutrition in children and mothers but is not its only cause.

⁴⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/media/113291/file/UNICEF%20Conceptual%20Framework.pdf>

Figure 4. UNICEF Conceptual Framework on the Determinants of Maternal and Child Nutrition (2020)



UNICEF Conceptual Framework on the Determinants of Maternal and Child Nutrition, 2020.
A framework for the prevention of malnutrition in all its forms.

Management of acute undernutrition⁴⁹

The most important way HFLA can support the management of acute undernutrition is to reduce food insecurity at household level. This removes one of the main causes of undernutrition. HFLA can also complement nutrition and health actors working to provide supplementary foods for children with moderate undernutrition, using the most

appropriate modality (cash, vouchers or in-kind assistance). However, this may have a limited impact on nutritional outcomes. Other activities such as screening referrals and providing cash for transportation and caretakers may also be considered.

Supporting nutrition outcomes

DG ECHO's HFLA aims to pay particular attention to providing affected people with timely access to safe and well-

⁴⁹ Entry criteria for nutrition operations follow World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations of above 10% global acute malnutrition (GAM) with aggravations (equivalent to IPC acute malnutrition phase 3 'Serious' GAM 10-14.9%) or above 15% GAM ([Food Security Cluster](#)).

balanced food, of sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary requirements, including for pregnant and lactating women. Food assistance should also conform to local dietary preferences and be acceptable to affected people, while also aligning with national and international standards⁵⁰.

HFLA offers myriad ways of complementing the use of nutrition, WASH and health interventions to improve nutritional outcomes, especially when the food assistance is provided in the form of cash. Cash has been shown to complement supplementary feeding programmes for children with both severe and moderate undernutrition, and to complement

behavioural change communication, for example, resulting in increased food consumption and dietary diversity. WHO recommends⁵¹ providing cash transfers in addition to routine care and in combination with other social support interventions to decrease the risk of relapse and to improve overall child health during outpatient care and after exit from treatment, depending on contextual factors such as programmatic costs.

Emergency livelihoods can also be important for bolstering food security during a shock in the short and medium term. They are also a means of preventing undernutrition, particularly by protecting livelihood assets and



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⁵⁰ Such as national and international food safety standards, and international guidance, policies and standards on infant and young child feeding in emergencies, including the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

⁵¹ WHO (2023) [WHO guideline on the prevention and management of wasting and nutritional oedema \(acute malnutrition\) in infants and children under 5 years.](#)

enabling people to avoid damaging coping mechanisms. Equally, addressing undernutrition in children and adults has a positive impact on their capacity to work, earn and contribute to household resilience over time.

Extending support to livelihoods with a focus on climate change adaptation (see Section 5.3) can have a positive impact on livelihoods, food security and nutrition in the longer term. It could be adjusted to be more nutrition-sensitive by considering nutrition-dense foods⁵² as part of agricultural recovery initiatives. Aligning interventions with existing social protection systems – and especially shock-responsive components – may also be beneficial for particularly vulnerable groups in the longer term, as part of a nutrition-sensitive strategy. These approaches would normally be considered when a partner is working in collaboration with a development donor for sustainability.

DG ECHO encourages nutrition partners to also engage with the Food Security Cluster and the Cash Working Group to provide technical inputs into on the adequacy of cash transfers, especially for multi-purpose cash, through the MEB calculation and transfer value determination process. This input should ensure that food commodities selected for the MEB reflect the nutritional requirements (micro as well as macro nutrients) for children and pregnant and lactating women, and that the transfer value is adequate to cover the cost of a quality healthy diet and not just calorific requirements⁵³. Equally, where cash is not appropriate, nutrition partners will need to work with the Food Security Cluster to define the nutrition quality of food rations or vouchers, particularly for pregnant and lactating women and younger children.

⁵² For example, orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, dark green leafy vegetables and ground nuts.

⁵³ See [Cost of the Diet tool](#).

4. Improving the quality of programming

The following sections outline cross-cutting issues and DG ECHO's related expectations that need to be implemented throughout every HFLA

action. The main purpose of these accompanying activities is to improve the quality of the programmes and ensure DG ECHO's various related policy commitments are put into practice.

4.1. Acknowledging the climate emergency and its impact on humanitarian action



Key message

DG ECHO acknowledges that the climate emergency will require the humanitarian sector to adapt in several ways: (i) reduce the environmental impact of humanitarian aid; (ii) adapt to the emerging and increasing needs of vulnerable people affected by climate change; and (iii) support households and communities to adapt to the new realities (see also Section 5.3 and Annex 2).

Climate change is already having an impact on food security globally. This is particularly the case in areas with high exposure to natural hazards, where climate heating is leading to ever more extreme and volatile phenomena, including drought, floods, storms and heatwaves, but also in the case of more gradual changes to the environment (e.g. desertification, sea-level rise). Such changes are now impacting – and will increasingly impact – livelihoods, such as through global reductions in yields of staple crops, loss of rangeland livestock and reductions in food availability⁵⁴, with the greatest risks facing the most vulnerable people. The climate

'The climate emergency will not intersect with other areas: instead, everything will intersect with climate change. This is a whole new paradigm for humanitarians, and we need to urgently reframe our vision and approach.' (Hugo Slim in [Humanitarians and the Climate Emergency](#))

emergency demands that humanitarian aid minimises the environmental impact of HFLA programming and finds new ways to help households and communities to adapt to the new realities as they change over time (see

⁵⁴ Special Report on [Global Warming of 1.5 °C. IPCC \(2018\)](#).

Section 5.3). DG ECHO and its partners will need to increasingly adapt funding

and programming to meet new and increasing needs.

4.1.1. Greening HFLA interventions

Greening HFLA interventions refers to:

- Adapting ways of implementing HFLA in order to minimise the environmental impact; and
- Focusing on supporting projects that have positive environmental impacts.

The former is a complex area that requires deep analysis. For example, cash may seem like a 'greener' way of transferring resources, as it avoids transporting in-kind food and boosts local production. This may be the case, but it depends on where the local

markets are procuring and transporting commodities, and the methods used by local farmers to grow food, which may (or may not) be damaging to the environment, such as the unregulated use of agro-chemicals. Market assessments should include an analysis of the energy supply in local markets and the types of energy used, and whether enough is available to meet food needs (cooking food, boiling water, producing heat and light) without affected people resorting to seeking unsustainable sources (e.g. fuel wood, which may be freely available) (see Section 5.3).

4.1.2. Minimum environmental requirements

During an emergency or a protracted crisis, ensuring access to safe, nutritious, good-quality and culturally appropriate food in the right quantity at the right time and in the right place is an enormous challenge. Given uncertainties such as climate change, this challenge is likely to increase. Transformative change must embrace innovation across the whole food system, with increased emphasis on promoting national food systems and small-scale and locally driven food

science and technology that addresses local food security, generates employment and contributes to the local economy (see Section 6.3). For further details on how to implement the minimum environmental requirements, see Annex 2 and the [Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#).

4.2. Mainstreaming protection and accountability to affected populations⁵⁵



Key message

Food insecurity has an impact on the safety and security of individuals, households and communities. Food insecurity very often causes protection risks or forces people to adopt harmful coping strategies. Ill-designed HFLA actions could contribute to violence, coercion, deliberate deprivation and abuse. Thus, DG ECHO expects partners to design and implement HFLA in a way that supports the prevention of such risks⁵⁶. DG ECHO prioritises HFLA actions that put people at the centre, and that seek, share and act upon their feedback. DG ECHO has zero tolerance for inaction related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

4.2.1. Integrating and mainstreaming protection

DG ECHO's policy position is fully in line with the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee's \(IASC's\) Statement on the Centrality of Protection](#)⁵⁷. This includes the requirement to consider basic protection principles in all HFLA assistance funded by DG ECHO. Food insecurity very often causes protection risks or forces people to adopt harmful coping strategies such as children being sent to work when livelihood support is insufficient, or girls being married off at an early age. Thus, if properly designed and implemented, HFLA can play an important role in preventing and

mitigating these risks. Well-conceived and implemented protection

programming can have positive food assistance outcomes, and vice versa. A

simple example of this is protection advocacy to promote freedom of movement, which gives households secure access to markets to buy and sell goods and services. Inappropriate support can heighten protection risks: for example, requiring identity documents for the receipt of assistance may contribute to the exclusion of the most vulnerable, and not accounting for

⁵⁵ See DG ECHO (2016), Humanitarian Protection. Improving protection outcomes to reduce risks for people in humanitarian crises, [DG ECHO Protection Policy](#).

⁵⁶ See the [EU Council Conclusions on Protection in Humanitarian Settings](#) (May 2024), which provide guidance using accountability to affected people (AAP) as a means of reducing protection risks related to food insecurity.

⁵⁷ IASC (2013), The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action. Statement by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals, [Inter-Agency Standing Committee's \(IASC's\) Statement on the Centrality of Protection](#).

energy needs may expose women and girls in particular to risks of gender-based violence when they need to travel far in search of firewood.

Mainstreaming protection refers to the imperative for each and every humanitarian actor (not only protection actors) to prevent, mitigate and respond to protection threats caused or perpetuated by humanitarian action/inaction. This is to be achieved by ensuring the respect of fundamental protection principles in all humanitarian programmes, including HFLA. It ensures that the protective impact of aid programming is maximised, and that adequate consideration is given to the

specific protection needs of groups at higher risk, such as children or people with disabilities. Humanitarian teams should be adequately composed in terms of gender and age, and have experience of incorporating gender, age, protection and inclusion concerns in their work.

The following protection mainstreaming elements must be ensured in all HFLA activities:

- Prioritise security, safety and dignity, and avoid causing harm;
- Meaningful access⁵⁸: ensure people's access to assistance and services – in



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⁵⁸ 'Meaningful access' encompasses the following aspects: (i) available in sufficient quantity and quality; (ii) provided on the basis of need and without discrimination; (iii) within safe and easy reach; (iv) known by people potentially accessing services; (v) physically and financially accessible; (vi) culturally relevant and socially acceptable.

proportion to need and without any barriers (e.g. discrimination).

- Accountability: set up appropriate mechanisms through which affected populations can measure the

DG ECHO's protection mainstreaming requirements naturally go hand in hand with the principles outlined in DG ECHO's gender policy, the Gender and Age Marker, and the Operational Guidance on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations. For instance, each of the four mainstreaming elements can be applied to: (i) removing different barriers that women, men, boys and girls, people with disabilities, and other discriminated groups (such as LGBTIQ+

adequacy of interventions, address concerns and complaints for information sharing, transparency and participation (for more details, see the next section).

people), might face; (ii) reducing or mitigating the negative impact of these barriers; and (iii) strengthening capacities to withstand and overcome the barriers. Moreover, the participation of different gender and age and diversity groups (including people with disabilities) in the design, implementation and monitoring of a humanitarian action is a core principle of protection and gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion.

4.2.2. Accountability to affected populations

Accountability to affected people (AAP) is a commitment to take account of, give account to, and be held to account by the people we seek to assist. Accountability, transparency, independence and governance need to be ensured to the highest standards, as laid out in the [IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People/Populations](#)⁵⁹. AAP includes:

- Systematically sharing timely, relevant and actionable information with communities;
- Supporting the meaningful participation and leadership of affected people in decision-making,

regardless of sex, age, disability status and other characteristics;

- Ensuring community feedback systems are in place to enable affected people to assess and comment on the performance of humanitarian action, including on sensitive matters such as sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, fraud, corruption, racism and discrimination.

DG ECHO's partners should establish and document an understanding of the context, communication culture, language and customs to facilitate safe, meaningful and respectful engagement with various groups of affected communities. DG ECHO's partners

⁵⁹IASC (2017), Revised Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, [IASC Revised Commitments on AAP and PSEA](#).

should prioritise the exchange of accurate, useful and timely information that is communicated in locally appropriate terms. Working closely with local and national actors (see Section 6.1 below) will facilitate this approach.

Feedback should be collected at key decision points in the HFLA programme cycle, on both the humanitarian response and partners' performance, including service quality, relevance and responsiveness to people's concerns. This can form part of post-distribution monitoring. People affected by crisis, including children, should know that they have a right to raise a concern or complaint about the humanitarian assistance they did or did not receive, how the assistance was delivered, or the behaviour of staff involved. Partners are expected to develop independent and confidential complaints and feedback mechanisms/grievance redress mechanisms, ideally through a common service across the response. These need to be simple to use and easy to access by different groups of affected communities, and adapted as far as possible to their preferences. Easy and meaningful access means removing or reducing barriers (such as physical,

cultural, language, gender, age and/or literacy barriers) to a form of communication (such as a phone for hotlines). Multiple channels (phone, social media, email, or face-to-face meetings, where possible) may help in this regard, and efforts should be made to use adequate techniques and contents (e.g. same-sex consultations, child-friendly methods). Complaints and feedback/grievance redress mechanisms can also be a trigger for referrals (see below).

Referral is the process of directing an individual or a household to another service provider because they require further action to meet an identified need which is beyond the expertise or scope of the current service provider: for example, if a person needs mental health support. The criteria used for referrals are set by those other programmes. Referral can be either internal or external, with the latter referring to when the referral is to another organisation. HFLA programmes must also be able to receive inward referrals, i.e. have processes for assessing the eligibility of people referred by other sectors, e.g. the protection sector.

4.2.3. Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

The continued integration of protection for people caught in crisis situations, including through the prevention, mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, is and will remain a strong feature of the EU's humanitarian aid.

As laid out in its [Guidance Note on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment](#)⁶⁰, DG ECHO has zero tolerance for inaction related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. This means that its staff, partners, implementing partners and others involved in implementing DG

⁶⁰ DG ECHO [Guidance Note on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment](#).

ECHO-funded grants are expected to take all reasonable action to prevent, detect and respond swiftly to sexual exploitation and abuse incidents, in line with DG ECHO's above-mentioned Guidance Note and other relevant principles and standards, such as the

IASC's six [Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)⁶¹.

4.3. Fiduciary risks, fraud and value for money



Key message

DG ECHO's partners must identify all fiduciary risks at the proposal stage and adopt relevant mitigating measures, including adapted operational approaches. Throughout the action, full implementation of these mitigating measures is expected, together with a frequent review of those measures to ensure they continue to be adapted to the context. DG ECHO requires partners to comply with the obligations set out in the anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism legal framework. DG ECHO expects partners to ensure that HFLA operations, like all other funded activities, represent the best possible value for money.

4.3.1. Fiduciary risks, fraud, and compliance with sanctions and anti-terrorism laws

Fraud is a deliberate act of deception carried out to obtain personal gain or to cause loss to another party. It is fraud when aid is prevented from reaching its intended beneficiaries due to the action or inaction of DG ECHO's partner, its staff or its implementing partner. Aid diversion is different to fraud, due to its external nature. Aid diversion occurs when, due to the action or inaction of *external* actor/s, aid is prevented from

reaching the intended beneficiaries or activities.

Food assistance has been [identified](#)⁶² as a sector that is prone to aid diversion and fraud. In-kind food assistance is often a high risk, as it has a high monetary value. Procurement risks are particularly pertinent, including risks related to contracts associated with the transportation of commodities. Bulk foods are hard to trace when diverted

⁶¹ IASC (2019), Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, [IASC Six Core Principles SEA](#).

⁶² See, for example, Jenkins, Matthew / Transparency International (2024), *Corruption in humanitarian assistance in conflict settings*, [Jenkins 2024](#).

directly from a warehouse, inventory documents may be falsified, and corrupt suppliers may deliver poor-quality or adulterated food. Distributors at the distribution site can reduce entitlements or skim food off for sale later, and recipients can be forced to 'share' their ration after the distribution has taken place. Research⁶³ has shown that the longer the sub-contracting chain, the more in-kind materials, the higher their value, the further the distance to reach the beneficiaries, the greater the risks of fraud and aid diversion. When law and order break down, food aid is at a high risk of looting.

In contrast, cash assistance, especially when transferred electronically, is less visible and generally more easily tracked. However, cash is still perceived to pose a risk, particularly in relation to aid diversion, money laundering and the funding of terrorism, although [the evidence suggests](#)⁶⁴ that cash transfers do not entail higher risks (in terms of fraud) than other assistance modalities.

Due to the high risks, over time the HFLA sector has developed advanced mitigation procedures. Putting mitigating measures in place from the very beginning can help to prevent and detect possible fraudulent activity and/or aid diversion, and reduce operational, financial and reputational damage. DG ECHO's partners must identify the risks at the proposal stage and adopt relevant mitigating

measures, including adapted operational approaches. This information is to be provided in the section on 'assumptions and risks' and 'contingency measures' of the Single Form. It is particularly important to have strong oversight, together with effective and efficient internal control mechanisms while the project is being implemented. Throughout the action, full implementation of these mitigating measures is expected, together with a frequent review of the measures to ensure they remain adapted to the context.

HFLA, especially in-kind food assistance, is at risk of being perceived as direct support to terrorist activities, even when provided in accordance with humanitarian principles. Partners need to be aware that they may encounter such misguided public perceptions and should use context-appropriate mitigation strategies. Under all circumstances, DG ECHO requires partners to comply with the obligations set out, among others, in the legal framework on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism. Ideally, compliance measures should not delay or limit assistance to populations in critical need, particularly in conflict or high-risk areas. The EU implements counterterrorism measures adopted by the United Nations and has adopted counterterrorism measures of its own to support the fight against

⁶³ See, for example, Transparency International (2017), *Collective resolution to enhance accountability and transparency in emergencies. Synthesis Report*, [Transparency International 2017](#), and Transparency International (2014), *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations*, [Transparency International 2014](#).

⁶⁴ See, for example, Idriss, Iffat (2017), [Conflict-sensitive cash transfers: unintended negative consequences](#).

terrorism⁶⁵. DG ECHO also requires partners to comply with the EU's legal framework on sanctions. To help humanitarian operators to navigate complex sanctions landscapes when delivering humanitarian aid, the European Commission has published various guidance notes, factsheets and

FAQs, such as the [Guidance note on the provision of humanitarian aid in compliance with EU restrictive measures](#)⁶⁶. The relevant regulatory frameworks may include specific provisions to facilitate the delivery of principled humanitarian aid⁶⁷.

4.3.2. Value for money

Actors involved in delivering humanitarian assistance have a responsibility to use the resources in the best way, striving to achieve the best results with the least resources. Hence, DG ECHO expects partners to ensure that HFLA operations, like all other funded activities, represent the best possible value for money. Cost efficiency is one of the metrics DG ECHO considers when assessing proposals; innovative financing mechanisms such as blended finance may play a role in increasing resource efficiency. DG ECHO expects partners to be transparent about their costs and to achieve optimal

efficiency of HFLA operations without compromising quality and impact. The total cost-to-transfer ratio is a standard way of measuring cost efficiency, defined as the proportion of the value of net transfers received by beneficiaries to the total programme cost (see [Annex 4 to the cash policy](#)). However, it is not the only criterion DG ECHO uses to assess value for money. To the extent possible, this level of transparency should be offered for all transfer modalities as it allows for comparison between different projects and modalities across space and time.

⁶⁵ Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism adopted on 15 March 2017, [Directive \(EU\) 2017/541](#)

⁶⁶ European Commission (2022), Commission Guidance Note on the provision of humanitarian aid in compliance with EU restrictive measures (sanctions), [Commission Guidance Note on compliance with sanctions](#).

⁶⁷ Recital 38 provides that 'the provision of humanitarian activities by impartial humanitarian organisations recognised by international law, including international humanitarian law, do not fall within the scope of this Directive, while taking into account the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union.'

4.4. Measuring performance/monitoring and evaluation



Key message

In pursuit of transparency, accountability and effectiveness, DG ECHO expects partners to systematically monitor HFLA processes and outputs, while also measuring outcomes using established and recognised outcome indicators. Partners are also expected to include the protection mainstreaming process indicator in their monitoring framework.

Monitoring includes the collection and analysis of data related to the progress. It is primarily a comparison between what was originally planned with what actually happens, and is accompanied by regular feedback obtained through accountability to affected people to validate programme relevance and effectiveness (see 4.2.2 above). DG ECHO expects partners to establish

baseline information, to conduct post-distribution monitoring, and to collect endline data. Monitoring should promptly identify challenges and possible areas for improvement. In this regard, the logical framework (or 'logframe') of the supported action is an essential tool for developing a feasible monitoring plan. It is also important for improving the project's efficiency and



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effectiveness and achieve relevant impact and acceptance by affected people.

To ensure accountability and comparability, DG ECHO expects partners to use a limited number of required outcome indicators for HFLA. It has established recognised standard indicators that are frequently used to measure the performance of HFLA operations. These indicators should be reflected in the logframe, be routinely monitored, and form the basis for systematic reporting by the partner, alongside any internal or external evaluation of the operation. The indicators undergo regular review and thus might change. The latest details can be found on DG ECHO's partners' website⁶⁸. Where available, nutritional information and data should be monitored and reviewed within all HFLA operations. Where operations specifically seek to address malnutrition, nutritional key outcome indicators (KOIs) and key result indicators (KRIs) must be incorporated into the project cycle and logframe⁶⁹. DG ECHO recommends measuring nutrition outcomes using the Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS, which can be obtained from the food consumption score), Minimum Dietary Diversity-Women (MDD-W), and Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD), as appropriate to the context. DG ECHO

expects partners to always monitor a qualitative indicator that measures partners' efforts to systematically mainstream protection principles, namely the '% of beneficiaries (disaggregated by sex, age, and disability) reporting that humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe, accessible, accountable, and participatory manner.' Similar to the Gender and Age Marker, the protection mainstreaming KOI is the starting point for regular dialogue between DG ECHO and partners on how projects are being implemented (i.e. programme quality) and to discuss improvements that can be made. This indicator is intended to make it easier to put protection mainstreaming into practice and provide a way to measure the identification, implementation and monitoring of required corrective actions/measures. Partners are expected to include this protection mainstreaming process indicator in their monitoring framework and to follow [DG ECHO's Protection guidance](#)⁷⁰ for this process. DG ECHO strongly encourages its partners to also adopt the (voluntary) environmental indicators. These are also available on the partner website⁷¹.

Third-party monitoring: DG ECHO strongly encourages independent monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning service provision to improve the accountability of HFLA

⁶⁸ For more details, see DG ECHO's partners' website: <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/reference-documents-ngo>

⁶⁹ DG ECHO recognises that multi-purpose cash assistance may not directly improve nutritional outcomes.

⁷⁰ DG ECHO (2021), DG ECHO Protection Mainstreaming, Key Outcome Indicator and Monitoring Tool, Technical Guidance, [DG ECHO Protection Mainstreaming Monitoring Guidance](#).

⁷¹ <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/download/referencedocumentfile/299>.

programming. Third-party monitoring is an example of independent monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning. It is the systematic and intentional collection of process or outcome monitoring data by a specialised agency not directly implementing a DG ECHO programme. It complements direct field monitoring by implementers and DG ECHO staff. It can also be an effective way of collecting independent data on the perceptions and preferences of targeted affected people. Third-party monitoring can be operated through free telephone hotlines, with data triangulated by more in-depth field monitoring if access allows. Third-party monitoring is encouraged by DG ECHO but is not a requirement.

Evaluation: DG ECHO is committed to strengthening the evidence base on HFLA. This is to be achieved through funding internal and external

evaluations that are based on common outcome indicators and value-for-money methodologies. Evaluations are usually carried out by independent external evaluators, but internal staff members can also evaluate an action as long as they take an objective approach. This would normally mean that the evaluation is carried out by staff who were not involved in the response. HFLA evaluations should use the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria specified in DG ECHO's [guidance for partners](#)⁷². An evaluation should be planned in advance and described in the Single Form. Where operationally justified in the action proposal (Section 9 of the Single Form), evaluation costs may be considered eligible expenses under the conditions explained in the guidance.

4.5. Innovation



Key message

DG ECHO encourages innovation in HFLA programming and is open to the adoption of innovative approaches where they can be shown to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of operations.

Some good examples of where DG ECHO has encouraged innovation include digitalisation and the use of electronic transfers such as mobile money in the

delivery of cash assistance, including to cover food needs. This has dramatically improved the efficiency of transferring cash and often reduces exposure to

⁷² For more details, see DG ECHO's partner website: <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/actions-implementation/monitoring-and-evaluation>.

protection risks for recipients. It can also have financial inclusion benefits. Another example is the funding of mobile bakeries after an earthquake, in consideration of people's preferences and eating habits. Innovative approaches can include the approaches taken: for example, working in partnership with the private sector (where appropriate) to accelerate innovation and to help to bring scalable, sustainable solutions to humanitarian programming.

It is impossible to predict future innovation, but one clear and pressing issue is the need to find responses to climate adaptation at household and community level that are appropriate for humanitarian contexts and which go beyond technology-based solutions.

This goes hand in hand with developing approaches that reduce HFLA's environmental impact and facing other environmental challenges that are emerging or will emerge in the coming years. At the time of writing, other areas where innovative approaches could bring benefits include: (i) improving identity management; (ii) achieving stronger interoperability of databases and de-duplication of beneficiary registries, making use of technologies such as blockchain; (iii) the use of artificial intelligence in humanitarian operations⁷³; and (iv) improving access to insecure/hard-to-reach areas using GPS referencing and QR codes. While DG ECHO encourages the inclusion of proven innovative approaches in HFLA responses, it will not fund research activities⁷⁴.

⁷³ Innovative technologies should, in all cases, be in line with local and international law, including (where applicable) the EU's General Data Protection Regulation and the EU AI Act, as well as with ethical standards.

⁷⁴ The Humanitarian Implementation Plan Enhanced Response Capacity tool has the capacity to fund certain research initiatives under certain criteria (which are set each year). See DG ECHO website for more details.

5. Putting the humanitarian-development-peace nexus into practice

Poverty, conflict, fragility and forced displacement are deeply interlinked and must be addressed in a coherent and comprehensive way as part of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus. The Council of the European Union⁷⁵ recognises the linkages between sustainable development, humanitarian action and conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as well as the importance of diplomatic and political solutions to support peace and security, in line with the EU Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The Council stresses the importance of investing in prevention and addressing the underlying root causes of vulnerability, fragility and conflict, while simultaneously meeting humanitarian needs and strengthening resilience and social cohesion, thus reducing risks.

In contrast with the past concept of linking relief, rehabilitation and development, which was mainly perceived as a *sequential* process of exiting humanitarian action and handing

it over to development partners, working in the HDP nexus implies collaboration across the spectrum *at any stage or phase* of an emergency, where both immediate humanitarian needs and the underlying structural deficiencies are addressed *simultaneously* through different actions and operators. Ideally, this should encompass joint assessment and planning processes. In practice, this could see DG ECHO and partners prioritising meeting urgent food needs and protecting livelihoods at the local level while other EU services and EU Member States work in collaboration to address causal and structural factors at the national and regional levels. These approaches meet in the support of food security strategies, longer-term livelihood support, linking HFLA to social protection systems, working to build climate resilience through adaptation, and building the overall resilience and cohesion of households, communities and institutions living in peace.

⁷⁵ [Council conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus.](#)

5.1. Linkages to social protection⁷⁶



Key message

DG ECHO will strive to contribute to inclusive social protection systems⁷⁷ during periods of fragility, conflict and/or forced displacement to better address and respond to the needs of crisis-affected populations, unless a lack of legitimacy on the part of governments or de facto authorities would mean that they were in breach of humanitarian principles and international agreements. Building social protection systems is a core task of government, supported by development actors. DG ECHO expects that HFLA responses (particularly when cash is the chosen modality) will, where possible and appropriate, link to existing social protection systems⁷⁸ or the building blocks of future longer-term assistance from the outset.

In most cases, linking HFLA actions to social protection systems should be undertaken alongside addressing the structural causes of food and nutrition insecurity and supporting livelihoods in the long term. This will require DG ECHO working together with development actors, and especially other EU services and EU Member States. The rationale for contributing to the social protection systems includes the following aims:

- Increasing the resilience of the poorest households, thereby lessening the impacts of shocks and the need for humanitarian assistance;

- Facilitating the scaling up of systems to respond to shocks and crises faster and more efficiently;
- Facilitating the inclusion of the most vulnerable populations;
- Ensuring that chronic food security needs are increasingly taken care of in a sustainable way by development actors, thus optimising the limited financial humanitarian resources to hand.

Decisions on whether to link with social protection systems should be grounded in humanitarian principles. DG ECHO partners are expected to weigh up the trade-offs of linking HFLA to social

⁷⁶ For the EU's definition of social protection see the [Communication on Social Protection in European Union Development Cooperation](#) here, and in the Glossary (Annex 1).

⁷⁷ In humanitarian contexts, comprehensive social protection systems are often fragile, underdeveloped, or entirely absent. As a result, social protection in these settings typically relies on – or is limited to – social safety nets.

⁷⁸ The [social protection across the humanitarian-development nexus \(SPaN\)](#) resources provide extensive guidance on linking humanitarian assistance to social protection systems. This serves as a complement to DG ECHO's cash policy document.

protection systems, rather than linking by default. Assessing the suitability of linking with social protection systems requires strategic technical discussions with national and local authorities and with relevant development and peace actors – especially with other EU services and EU Member States. This should include a joint analysis of context, stakeholders and risks as part of a broader HDP nexus process.

Transferring a DG ECHO humanitarian caseload to development actors or the government is a potential exit strategy from continuous HFLA support, particularly in stable contexts. However, this requires strong internal coordination on policy, strategy and funding instruments, within the EU and with other donors, to ensure that linkages are made and sustained. This is core to the Team Europe⁷⁹ approach and the closer dialogue with EU Member States, in which DG ECHO plays a leadership role as a reference donor.

Barriers to linking HFLA responses to social protection systems may include obvious factors such as the absence of an appropriate social protection system in the country, limited functionality or immaturity of existing systems, and their incapacity or limited capacity to take on additional caseloads from

humanitarian programmes. A further barrier stems from the potential exclusion of marginalised groups, IDPs or non-citizens such as refugees or migrants from national social protection systems; this issue might be resolved through advocacy efforts towards durable solution. DG ECHO will not normally support social protection systems directly, but in some cases it will support pilot mechanisms if resources permit. Other factors include misaligned funding cycles, and targeting and transfer values that may be inadequate in humanitarian contexts.

DG ECHO will strive to contribute to shock-responsive elements of social protection systems in order to improve their timeliness, cost effectiveness, accountability and long-term sustainability. Shock-responsive components will normally include early warning systems, a triggering mechanism for the release of funds, a contingency plan, and the institutional arrangements and financial support required to be effective (see Section 3.1 on anticipatory action and early warning systems). DG ECHO partners should play a role in making social protection systems more shock-responsive and anticipatory where possible.

⁷⁹ See 7.3 for more on the EU/Team Europe approach.

5.2. Linking emergency livelihood support to longer-term interventions



Key message

Where the context allows and resources are available, DG ECHO strives to link ongoing support to emergency livelihoods (Section 3.5) with longer-term interventions that aim to: (i) foster self-reliance and resilience; and (ii) reduce the need for HFLA in the future. This will normally only be considered in collaboration with development actors.

DG ECHO emergency livelihood actions described in Section 3.5 focus on the protection and/or recovery of livelihoods as they existed before the crisis. The aim is to reduce the severity of the crisis, while restoring the affected population's pre-crisis self-reliance capacities. DG ECHO does not generally prioritise longer-term livelihood support such as large-scale public works, small and medium business development or livelihood diversification, as this goes beyond DG ECHO's core mandate and priorities. Similarly, vocational training and job matching are not a priority of DG ECHO emergency livelihood support but might be considered if they are functional and part of the broader livelihood recovery strategy and based on identified needs of skills development. Partners are encouraged to take into account gender and social dynamics in the context of livelihood recovery and development. This highlights the importance of addressing the specific needs of marginalised groups and promoting equitable access to resources. Additionally, it is important to reduce risk, using approaches such as disaster preparedness, to help communities adapt to changing conditions and reduce vulnerability to future shocks.

However, opportunities should be leveraged to link HFLA and emergency livelihoods work to longer-term actions through collaboration with more development-oriented donors, such as EU services, EU Member State bilateral investments and international financial institutions such as the World Bank. In principle, this kind of collaboration can occur at any point during a crisis as part of a comprehensive HDP nexus approach, where both immediate humanitarian needs and the underlying structural deficiencies are addressed simultaneously through different actions and operators. More typically, opportunities to align HFLA with longer-term objectives will occur in protracted crises or when the acute phase of an emergency is tapering off, with a shift to recovery and development. In exceptional cases, where livelihoods have been completely lost (such as entire livestock herds for pastoralists or as a consequence of permanent displacement), emergency livelihood support could consider new or alternative livelihood strategies that become available. This can also be seen as a positive exit strategy and should be planned in advance by partners.

5.3. Climate change adaptation

“Strengthening resilience, disaster risk reduction and **climate change adaptation** by linking humanitarian action, development cooperation and environmental policy, as part of the humanitarian development-peace nexus will remain essential to ensure a coherent approach to disaster and climate-related displacement and migration.” [The Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles \(2021\)](#)⁴⁰

Climate change adaptation refers to measures that reduce the negative consequences of current and projected climate change impacts, while taking advantage of potential new opportunities. ([Climate and](#)

[Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations](#))

Climate change impacts affect all four dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilisation and stability. It is therefore a key driver, along with environmental degradation, of food insecurity. Environmental sustainability has been suggested as an additional dimension of food security⁸⁰. The design of HFLA programmes must, therefore, take climate change into account in order to ensure sustainability and impact. This is not just about the increase in the frequency and intensity of shocks, but also the disruption to food systems and livelihoods of vulnerable people in rural and urban



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⁸⁰ HLPE (2020), *Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030*, A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome (page xv).

settings. In addition to food production and livelihoods, water scarcity is likely to be an increasing issue in some areas. The impact of extreme heat/heatwaves also needs to be embedded in HFLA programming, especially in terms of disrupted food value chains and aspects such as post-harvest storage, together with the impact of extreme heat on livestock, fisheries and crops.

DG ECHO encourages close collaboration with development partners to promote climate change adaptation and to help communities transition away from climate-vulnerable

livelihoods. DG ECHO could support this transition, e.g. by favouring climate-resilient crops and climate-smart agriculture within its livelihood support activities, or by prioritising the sourcing of products from sustainable agriculture in its food procurement processes. Caution should be taken to avoid unintended negative outcomes of poorly planned climate adaptation initiatives⁸¹. In this regard, localised adaptation strategies that account for communities' unique needs and capacities are important to recognise and use where possible.

⁸¹ See [Weathering the storm: Reducing the impact of climate risks and environmental degradation on people enduring armed conflicts](#) (ICRC, March 2024).

6. Localisation and capacity sharing and strengthening

6.1. Localisation and partnerships with local and national actors



Key message

DG ECHO expects its partners to recognise, respect, support and strengthen the capacity of local and national actors to respond to crises, and to change the way they work so that local and national actors participate in decision-making and take the lead in specific contexts. This will contribute to more appropriately addressing the needs of affected populations and to ensuring that humanitarian responses are better prepared and more effective.

DG ECHO understands localisation as ‘making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary’⁸², and strengthening international investment in and respect for the central role of local and national actors, with the goal of increasing the reach, effectiveness, accountability and sustainability of locally led humanitarian action. Locally led action denotes approaches where programmes are conceived, shaped and delivered by or closer to the affected communities, highlighting the power and agency of affected people and local actors in

humanitarian action. This not only includes civil society actors but also

strengthens the resilience and capacity of state institutions such as local and national government⁸³. Diaspora populations can also be important contributors to locally led emergency assistance.

DG ECHO’s guidance note on promoting locally led action⁸⁴ summarises DG ECHO’s position on how it will further operationalise its commitment to localisation in responding to humanitarian crises. The note sets out

⁸² See [the website of the Grand Bargain](https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/) workstream on localisation for current thinking in relation to localisation and locally led action: <https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/>.

⁸³ Local and national actors may, in certain situations, include formal/informal groups that represent affected people and local private sector actors.

⁸⁴ DG ECHO (2023), Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Settings DG ECHO guidance note, [DG ECHO Guidance Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders](#).

key recommendations, expectations and commitments for more equitable partnerships with local responders. The document highlights the importance of:

- Recognising the value, resources and skills of local and national actors (including national and local authorities) and supporting (institutional) capacities;
- Establishing more equitable partnerships;
- Ensuring the participation of local and national actors (including national and local authorities and communities) throughout the humanitarian response cycle;
- Strengthening the participation and leadership of local and national actors in humanitarian coordination (including national and local authorities);
- Facilitating access to localised financing models.

DG ECHO aims to support HFLA interventions that promote locally led

approaches. These include working with farmers' associations to produce food to be used in food vouchers programmes and working with religious groups to operate communal kitchens and provide hot meals in displacement centres. Partners should also support local and national actors' participation – and whenever possible take on a leadership and decision-making role – in all food and livelihoods-focused humanitarian coordination forums. DG ECHO partners are encouraged to develop strong and supportive partnerships with local and national actors to implement HFLA actions, as laid out in the guidance note. This should include close coordination with national and local authorities (see Section 7.2). DG ECHO expects its partners to cover an adequate share of their local/national partners' overhead costs and to demonstrate a longer-term commitment in their partnerships with local and national actors, especially women-led and women's rights organisations and/or those representing marginalised people.

6.2. Capacity sharing and strengthening



Key message

DG ECHO will contribute to strengthening the capacity of local and national actors that work with its humanitarian partners, in line with the localisation guidance note⁸⁵.

The potential complementarity between the knowledge and skills of

international and local actors should be fully exploited in determining the

⁸⁵ See also European Commission (2021), Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles, [Communication on Humanitarian Assistance](#).

appropriate response, particularly building on local and national actors' knowledge of the local systems and needs. Local and national actors should be given support to design, deliver and coordinate more varied, effective and appropriate forms of HFLA. DG ECHO encourages and will, when relevant, give priority to projects that include mutual capacity-strengthening methodologies in which international and local actors learn from each other.

In this regard, DG ECHO specifically aims to support the following:

- Developing the leadership and decision-making capacities of local and national actors, to enable them to operate as effective and impactful lead organisations in locally led action;
- Developing capacity for nutritional surveillance, food security and nutrition surveys and assessments, and formulating assistance of an appropriate nutritional quality that is adapted to the needs of specific groups;
- Developing methodologies to assess and select the most appropriate response modalities in any given context, and further strengthening local actors' capacity to implement varied modalities of HFLA;
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacities, such as identifying food security outcome indicators and collecting the necessary data (including for establishing baselines), together with strengthening local and national actors' administrative and financial capacities (where required).

7. Coordination and advocacy

7.1. Food Security Cluster/ inter-cluster coordination



Key message

DG ECHO supports inclusive coordination under strong and capacitated leadership using the cluster approach to coordination and encourages all efforts to make this approach work effectively. DG ECHO expects all its HFLA partners to actively engage in the respective forums and to also support their local partners in that regard.

The Food Security Cluster (which includes consideration of livelihoods) coordinates country-level food security response plans before, during and after a humanitarian response action.

The aim is to ensure timely, coherent and effective food security interventions. Cluster coordinators lead, steer and coordinate the food security response towards a common strategic objective agreed with partners and cluster lead agencies. At the global level, these are the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). At the country level, chairing can be shared with national authorities. It has become good practice to elect a non-governmental organisation as co-chair.

DG ECHO encourages the full participation of its HFLA partners in inclusive, sector-specific, operational coordination forums at field level. It encourages partners to become co-chairs in-country, where capacity and resources allow and where partners are strategically well-placed to do so. DG ECHO can contribute financial resources to ensure the role is effectively filled. DG

ECHO supports ensuring the maximum involvement of local and national actors (including consideration of issues such as language – see also Section 6.1 above). Similar arrangements should be established at the local/sub-national level to ensure coordination is well tailored to the local context, improving the speed and relevance of the response.

Partners should actively coordinate preparedness and contingency planning for HFLA. For HFLA delivered as cash or vouchers for food, this should include joint feasibility and risk assessments and the development of a minimum food basket, in coordination with the Cash Working Group. Other working groups (e.g. on accountability to affected populations or anticipatory action) also play an important role and DG ECHO encourages its partners to participate in these groups. Ensuring alignment on emergency livelihood strategies is also important.

DG ECHO strongly encourages cross-sectoral discussions as well as robust data-sharing mechanisms between the Food Security Cluster and the WASH,

Health and Nutrition clusters on how to better align activities⁸⁶. Furthermore, it also requires partners to work towards enhanced coordination on protection. A high degree of consistency and complementarity, as well as close coordination, between the Food Security and Protection clusters will facilitate protection mainstreaming and enhance the centrality of protection: for example in strategic response plans.

Food security actors tend to be better at identifying vulnerabilities, while protection actors tend to be better at identifying threats. Moreover, food security actors are better equipped than protection actors to analyse drivers of food insecurity and resulting harmful coping strategies, and can contribute to attenuating protection challenges in areas where protection actors have no access.

7.2. National and local authorities



Key message

DG ECHO recognises that national authorities are the primary duty bearer in regard to assisting and protecting people affected by a crisis. It strongly encourages its partners to coordinate their actions with national authorities where this is not in opposition to providing principled humanitarian assistance.

National authorities are the primary duty bearer in regard to assisting and protecting people affected by a crisis. DG ECHO provides support for its humanitarian partners so that they can intervene where the authorities' capacity and/or willingness to do so is absent or overwhelmed. However, humanitarian agencies cannot and should not be seen as a substitute either for assisting affected populations or for the protection role and responsibility bestowed on national authorities or – when that fails – international actors.

DG ECHO strongly encourages coordination with national – and in

particular local – authorities where this is not in opposition to providing principled humanitarian assistance.

DG ECHO cannot directly fund national or local authorities, but it can provide support through its humanitarian partners in various ways, such as supporting needs assessments and data collection processes: for example, through UN agencies, following the localisation guidance note (see Section 6.1 above).

DG ECHO partners should also be aware that in certain contexts DG ECHO may provide civil protection assistance, alongside humanitarian assistance,

⁸⁶ At the global level this is called 'inter-cluster/inter-sector collaboration'.

through the activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)⁸⁷. While the mechanism typically focuses on logistical, technical and medical

support, it may also provide basic relief supplies, including food and water in cases of extreme need.

7.3. Coordination with development actors and programmes in-country



Key message

Through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the EU will deploy all of the instruments needed not only to address short-term needs but also to provide long-term solutions and, in conflicts, contribute to building lasting peace.

To step up its work to link humanitarian relief with development and peacebuilding, DG ECHO coordinates with other EU services, EU Member States and non-EU development actors. The EU and its Member States have developed the concept of ‘Team Europe’, which has been applied since April 2020. The objective of this approach is to ensure that humanitarian, development, peace and other policies all work together to better link urgent relief and longer-term solutions, with the overarching aims of reducing needs and tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises. In particular, the Team Europe response to global food insecurity, which is accompanied by a financial package, comprises four strands of action: (i) solidarity, which includes humanitarian food assistance; (ii) production; (iii) trade; and (iv) multilateralism.

Adopting an HDP nexus approach is essential, and DG ECHO will capitalise on opportunities to collaborate with development partners, particularly with other EU services. For example, DG ECHO can support farmers at the local level to adapt to climate change (see Section 5.3) (e.g. through conservation farming practices), while another EU service or EU Member State works at the national level to build the capacity of the government’s extension service for climate-smart technologies or research into drought- or flood-tolerant seeds. These kinds of synergies are most likely to be successful where joint analysis and joint planning are undertaken, such that different services work on similar themes at different levels (national, district or local) and with various actors ranging from food producers to national ministries and the private sector, where appropriate. The common objective in this example

⁸⁷ EU Civil Protection Mechanism, see https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en.

would be to build adaptive capacity to climate change at the national, sub-national and local levels, so as to reduce

the need for humanitarian assistance and HFLA in the future.

7.4. Advocacy and influencing the global agenda



Key message

DG ECHO has an obligation and an operational requirement to advocate on behalf of chronically poor and food-insecure people, especially as global food insecurity rises. DG ECHO also contributes to the EU's framing of the global agenda on food security and advocacy for action against hunger and undernutrition, in collaboration with other international partners, including to promote respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). This includes advocating for the systematic implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2417, which condemns the use of starvation as a method of warfare, and for the most efficient and effective use of resources, including the use of varied HFLA response options, according to needs.

DG ECHO is effective at providing expertise and examples leveraging its presence on the ground and its direct contact with partners at country level through its field network, to inform the global agenda with clear and consistent messaging. DG ECHO also pursues advocacy objectives directly through humanitarian diplomacy as part of Team Europe, and with EU Delegations, the EU Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA), the Food Security Cluster, the Global Cash Advisory Group and the European Humanitarian Forum, as well as through its influence with global organisations such as with FAO and WFP's governing boards.

To facilitate action at the global level, in 2016 [DG ECHO and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships \(DG INTPA\) founded, alongside other](#)

[organisations](#), the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC)⁸⁸. GNAFC is a multistakeholder initiative of humanitarian and development actors who are united in their commitment to tackling the root causes of food crises and to promoting sustainable solutions. The EU's contribution has been key in enabling the flagship publication of the GNAFC, the Global Report on Food Crises, which has become the reference document for acute food insecurity globally.

DG ECHO advocates for the systematic application of UN Security Council

⁸⁸ [Global Network Against Food Crises \(GNAFC\) \(fightfoodcrises.net\)](#).

Resolution 2417, which condemns the use of starvation as a method of warfare, and promotes compliance with international humanitarian law to prevent food crises. These include special protections for objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, together with the protection of civilian and natural environment infrastructure, and the use and removal of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Other key advocacy priorities pursued by DG ECHO include:

- Calling for an expanded and more diversified donor base to support

humanitarian response to rising acute food insecurity;

- Gaining and maintaining humanitarian access;
- Protecting humanitarian personnel;
- Advancing commitments to the HDP nexus; and
- Integrating food security into global, regional and national climate policy.

Additionally, to complement and substantiate advocacy and diplomatic efforts, the EU supports initiatives that aim to enhance evidence-based reporting on conflict-induced hunger by strengthening and complementing existing accountability mechanisms.

ECHO will coordinate and align its advocacy efforts with partners to ensure consistency and amplify impact.

ANNEXES

The purpose of these annexes is to expand on DG ECHO's policy stance regarding key topics outlined in the policy and to offer additional technical guidance to partners, supporting their collaboration with DG ECHO. Over time, further annexes or technical notes may be developed to clarify DG ECHO's position on emerging policy issues and technical approaches.

Annex 1: Glossary

Acute undernutrition

Acute undernutrition, with its main characteristic of wasting, occurs as a result of rapid weight loss or a failure to gain weight within a relatively short period of time. Recovery from wasting is relatively quick once optimal feeding, health and care are restored. Wasting results from short-term but usually critical deficiencies in macronutrients (fat, carbohydrates and proteins) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), and is often linked to disease. Usually divided into moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) and severe acute malnutrition (SAM), which combine as global acute malnutrition (GAM).

Adequate food consumption

An ultimate determinant of 'food security', adequate food consumption is defined for humanitarian purposes as the bodily intake of sufficient food (in terms of quantity and quality) to avoid excessive mortality (in absolute and relative terms), acute malnutrition, or other life-threatening effects and consequences (e.g. stress migration).

Anticipatory action

Anticipatory action is defined as acting ahead of a predicted hazardous event to prevent or reduce impacts on lives and livelihoods and humanitarian needs before they fully unfold. This works best when activities as well as triggers or

decision-making rules are pre-agreed, and decisions are made to guarantee the fast release of pre-arranged funding⁸⁹.

Cadre Harmonisé

The [Cadre Harmonisé](#)⁹⁰ (CH) is a unifying tool that helps to produce relevant, consensual, rigorous and transparent analyses of current and projected food and nutrition situations. It classifies the severity of food and nutrition insecurity based on the international classification scale through an approach that refers to well-defined functions and protocols. Similar to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the CH relies on existing national food security and nutrition information systems. Over the years, CH and IPC partners have worked closely to harmonise their tools and processes, leading to growing similarities and convergence between the CH and the IPC, resulting in comparable analyses findings.

Conditionality

Conditionality means that recipients of support have to fulfil a condition (such as engaging in work) before receiving the assistance. Conditionalities may involve work, such as building community assets or engaging in environmental protection initiatives, or may be lighter, such as attending a clinic or school.

⁸⁹ See [Anticipation Hub](#) for more details.

⁹⁰ Cadre Harmonisé, see: <https://www.cadreharmonise.org/>.

Chronic food insecurity

Chronic food insecurity is a persistent inability to access adequate food and nutritional intake, either on a constant basis or on a periodic seasonal basis. Chronic hunger and malnutrition are associated with, among other underlying factors, structural poverty, low incomes, inadequate health and sanitation conditions, lack of education and the lack of empowerment of women.

Chronic malnutrition

Chronic malnutrition, with its main characteristic of stunting, is a slow, cumulative process, resulting from sustained, but sometimes subtle, nutrient and micronutrient deficiencies. Stunting is a failure to grow in stature, and occurs as a result of inadequate nutrition over a long time period, which is why it is also referred to as chronic malnutrition. Stunting is not a good indicator of growth failure in emergencies as it does not reflect recent changes; it requires a long-term response.

Climate change adaptation

Climate change adaptation refers to measures that reduce the negative consequences of current and projected climate change impacts, while taking advantage of potential new opportunities.

Crisis modifier (CM)

The term refers to a contingency fund or allocation that enables a rapid response to emerging crises within an ongoing crisis. It also refers to a specific result in DG ECHO's Single Form. CMs aim to improve the responsiveness and

flexibility of partners implementing humanitarian operations.

Emergency Livelihoods interventions

Interventions triggered by humanitarian needs that aim to facilitate access to food and meet basic needs (livelihood provision), restore assets (livelihood recovery/protection) and create new livelihood opportunities (LHH promotion/diversification) while stimulating economic recovery.

Food crisis

A food crisis is a humanitarian crisis arising from inadequate food consumption, poor food utilisation or high prevalence of acute undernutrition.

Food access

Food access refers to the extent to which resources can be used to obtain adequate and appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. It depends on income available to the household, on the distribution of income within the household, and on the price of food. Accessibility rests on physical access (such as the ability to fish or distance to markets), financial access (such as money, income or access to credit) and social access (such as social networks and family support).

Food assistance

Food assistance is any intervention that is designed to tackle food insecurity, its immediate causes, and its various negative consequences. Food assistance may involve the direct provision of food, but it may also utilise a wider range of tools, including the transfer or provision of relevant services, inputs or

commodities, cash or vouchers, skills or knowledge.

Food availability

Food availability refers to the extent to which sufficient quantities of adequate and appropriate food can be secured from household production, other domestic output, commercial imports or food aid.

Food security

Food security is when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (see footnote 3). At the World Summit on Food Security in 2009, this definition was reconfirmed and the concept was extended. Food security is now applied by reference to the four pillars of availability, access, utilisation and stability (see footnote 4). The summit's final declaration also stated that the nutritional dimension is integral to the concept of food security.

Food stability

Food stability refers to both macro- and micro-level food security, both of which should exist at all times.

Food system

This refers to the various elements and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, as well as the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes.

Food utilisation

Food utilisation is the physical use of food by an individual prior to consumption (including storage, and processing), and the body's biological use of food, its energy and its micronutrients, after consumption. The determinants of food utilisation are diverse, including access to water and adequate sanitation, access to cooking utensils, health status and disease burden, as well as knowledge within the household of food storage, the basic principles of nutrition, and proper childcare and child feeding practices.

Humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus

In contrast to the past concept of linking relief, rehabilitation and development, which was mainly perceived as a *sequential* process of exiting humanitarian action/handing it over to development partners, working in the HDP nexus implies collaboration across the spectrum *at any stage or phase* of an emergency, where both immediate humanitarian needs and the underlying structural deficiencies are addressed *simultaneously* through different actions and operators.

Humanitarian crisis

A humanitarian crisis is an event or series of events which represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area. A humanitarian crisis can have natural or man-made causes, can have a rapid or slow onset and can be of short or protracted duration.

Humanitarian food assistance

Humanitarian food assistance is food assistance that is provided to assist people affected by humanitarian crises.

Hunger

Hunger is an uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by insufficient food intake, specifically insufficient food energy consumption. Scientifically, hunger is referred to as food deprivation.

Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Conceptual Framework (IPC)

The IPC is a common global scale for gauging the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition. The IPC is increasingly seen as the international standard for classifying food insecurity and malnutrition, providing evidence-based situation analysis that allows for comparisons over time and space to inform strategic decision-making.

Localisation

DG ECHO understands localisation as making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary (see footnote 56), and strengthening international investment in and respect for the centrality of the role of local and national actors and the affected communities themselves, with the goal of increasing the reach, effectiveness, accountability and sustainability of locally led humanitarian action.

Malnutrition

Undernutrition results from deficiencies, excesses or imbalances of energy, protein and other nutrients. The

vast majority of malnourished individuals in the developing world experience **undernutrition** (a deficiency of energy, proteins, or vitamins and minerals), as opposed to **over-nutrition** (an excess of certain food components such as saturated fats and added sugars in combination with low levels of physical activity, normally resulting in obesity).

Emergency/Rapid response mechanisms (E/RRMs)

RRMs are usually contractual arrangements that DG ECHO puts in place with one or multiple partners in a given country to ensure that a network of humanitarian organisations can access sufficient personnel, and financial and material resources, to respond to recurring localised, small-scale emergencies as soon as possible after they occur. RRM may also be part of operational setups focusing on preparedness and pre-positioning of goods and staff capacity for a timely response.

Protracted crises

Protracted crises refer to situations in which a significant portion of a population is facing a heightened risk of death, disease and breakdown of their livelihoods. Common characteristics of protracted crises include prolonged humanitarian needs, recurrent shocks (including conflict, weak governance and/or the breakdown of local institutions), unsustainable livelihoods and the intersection of acute and chronic vulnerabilities.

Restriction

Where transfers (i.e. vouchers) are restricted, this means that recipients

can only use the transfer for specific commodities, usually accessed from specific vendors or shops.

Social protection

The EU defines (see footnote 54) social protection as policies and actions that:

- Enhance the capacity of all people, but notably poor and vulnerable groups, to escape from poverty, or avoid falling into poverty, and better manage risks and shocks; and
- Aim at providing a higher level of social security through income security and access to essential services (in particular, health and education) throughout active and inactive periods and periods of need throughout the life-cycle.

The most common types of social protection are the following:

- Labour market interventions are policies and programmes designed to promote employment, the efficient operation of labour markets, and the protection of workers.
- Social insurance mitigates risks associated with unemployment, ill health, disability, work-related injury and old age. It includes health

insurance and unemployment insurance.

- Social assistance consists of resources, either cash or in-kind, that are transferred to vulnerable individuals or households with no other means of adequate support, including single parents, the homeless, or the physically or mentally challenged.

Vulnerability

In its humanitarian protection policy, DG ECHO defines vulnerability as life circumstances (e.g. poverty, education) and/or discrimination based on physical or social characteristics (sex, disability, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) that reduce the ability to withstand adverse impacts from external stressors, such as those causing food insecurity or undernutrition. Vulnerability is not a fixed criterion attached to specific categories of people, and no one is born vulnerable per se. Those who are vulnerable to food insecurity may currently be able to maintain an acceptable food intake, but are at risk of becoming food insecure in the future if exposed to a shock.

Annex 2: Further details related to minimum environmental requirements

As detailed in the [Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#), DG ECHO's humanitarian food and livelihood assistance partners are currently required to:

- Prevent food waste by distributing culturally appropriate food and ensuring proper food storage, handling and expiration date management.
- Organise a solid waste management plan to collect and manage waste regularly from designated household- or settlement-level collection points.
- Promote, in collaboration with suppliers, sustainable food value chains, which minimise ecological damage, the depletion of resources and the production of solid waste, favour locally produced products, and discourage the use of single-use plastic items linked to packaging.
- Promote sustainable methods of consumption by favouring locally produced foods, supporting the self-reliance and self-sufficiency of affected people.
- Ensure the distribution of clean cooking energy and energy-efficient cooking stoves as standard items (through in-kind or cash-based interventions) and avoid establishing dependency on locally harvested biomass – or demonstrate that another project exists which is covering these needs. Give preference to clean cooking energy over firewood or other traditional solid fuels.
- Include potential environmental and climate impacts as part of the cash and voucher assistance risk and mitigation analysis.
- With regard to emergency livelihoods, DG ECHO requires the following:
 - Enhance the enabling environment for the economic inclusion of affected people, rather than developing parallel systems that may generate waste, damage ecosystems and have a limited impact.
 - Promote emergency livelihoods and income-generating activities that are resource-efficient. Ensure that environmental criteria are considered as part of sector selection when conducting value chain analysis and identifying viable income-generating activities. Assess whether items distributed to support emergency livelihoods will lead to over-exploitation or pollution of natural resources and identify whether more climate-friendly alternatives exist.
 - Ensure that inputs in agricultural programmes are sustainable and efficiently managed, including ensuring efficient water management and limiting the use of trucked water for emergency livestock management and planting new trees.
 - Avoid charcoal-making as a livelihood or income generation activity as

much as possible. Instead, favour alternative and more sustainable solutions that are context-relevant and disaster risk and conflict-sensitive.

- Avoid giving training that can lead to the over-extraction of natural resources or that is harmful to the environment. Instead, promote training focusing on environmentally positive activities or activities that diminish environmental impacts.
- Ensure emergency livelihoods and income-generating programmes that involve the use of natural resources (wood, water, soil, sand, etc.) include monitoring, to be undertaken by affected people, to ensure the

renewal capacity of the natural resources, to avoid contributing to shortages and over-exploitation of resources.

Promote environmentally sustainable job opportunities ('green jobs') in emergency livelihood programmes. If green jobs are not prioritised in emergency livelihoods or income generation projects, explain why other types of income-generating activities have been chosen. Ensure ongoing market assessment in order to map the potential for environmentally friendly businesses and an environmentally friendly economy.

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