EVALUATION
OF UNHCR ACTIVITIES FUNDED BY ECHO
IN SERBIA, KOSOVO, ZAMBIA AND GUINEA

SYNTHESIS REPORT

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ANNEXES

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[1] Linking Relief to Rehabilitation and Development

Acknowledgements

Whilst conducted independently, the field visit made full use of the facilities and support offered by and gratefully accepted from ECHO and UNHCR field offices and staff. During the briefing and debriefing meetings organised in Brussels and in Geneva, essential background information and orientation were readily provided both by the European Commission (Desk Officers of ECHO-1, 2 and 4 in Brussels, EC Delegation in Geneva) and by the UNHCR (European Institutions Unit at the Brussels Regional Office, Evaluation & Policy Analysis and Donors Relations Units in Geneva). The ECHO Evaluation Advisor's office similarly provided a valuable support throughout the project. The evaluation team would finally like to express its gratitude to all those –staff, partners, beneficiaries and external actors- who kindly gave their time and contribution.

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A.1.   THE EVALUATION

Evaluated countries/entities: Serbia, Kosovo, Zambia and Guinea
Dates of evaluation: 16/08 – 18/10/2001 (field visits)
Consultants names: Michel Van Bruaene, Mike Atkinson

The objective of the evaluation was to assess the set up and impact of the UNHCR programmes in four country case studies and to see the part played in them by the ECHO contribution. From these individual studies, conclusions had to be drawn on how ECHO and UNHCR should work together in the future, both generally and in the specific programmes examined, and how ECHO could support UNHCR in its core mandate and key functions.
The methodology of the evaluation reflected the above objectives and the case study structure. The evaluation was divided in four typical phases. Every finding and recommendation had to be clearly supported by facts and had to reflect some kind of recurrent pattern to be found either in individual project assessments or through cross-checked discussions with various knowledgeable actors. The evaluation therefore focused mainly on the 1999 and 2000 projects, for which most of the relevant actors could still be found and lessons learned were already available.

A.2.   KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A.2.1. POLICY LEVEL

Remark: since the main objective of the evaluation was to make practical recommendations on how to improve the existing co-operation between ECHO and UNHCR, the whole assessment framework was automatically shifted to a lower degree. The actual 'Policy' is to be found in the high-level negotiations currently being held between EC and UN, and to which this evaluation has no access. Consequently, the 'Policy' level (below) is really to be placed at the strategic level, hence the focus on strategic partnership.

The **Strategic Partnership** found by the evaluation in Kosovo[2], and which is already the subject of a high-level programming dialogue between ECHO and UNHCR, seems to be a *valid platform for future co-operation.*
However, to be effective such a partnership (a) must present a practical *added value* to both partners, and (b) requires efficient <u>tools</u>. It also requires some additional effort by both organisations to fully clarify their images, and to avoid some outstanding confusion between donor and agency.

(a) **Added value for ECHO**: UNHCR needs to be perceived by ECHO as a 'quality partner' that ensures value for money and impact in key humanitarian activities. A prerequisite is therefore to analyse the strengths and weaknesses, to take optimum advantages of the first and contribute to improve the latter without detrimental consequences. The present management systems of UNHCR have clear limitations when compared to many NGOs, mainly in their lack of capacity to manage smaller-scale projects with suitable accountability (cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness) and transparency (required reporting format). At the opposite, UNHCR has also comparative advantages: large resources which authorise co-ordination, a statute to facilitate

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[2] Another strategic partnership between UN agencies, EC (represented by ECHO) and USAID/ BPRM is being considered for West Africa.

access to national authorities, longer-term multi-sector programmes which aim at durable solutions and ultimate impact, and the international mandate of protection for refugees. Co-operation framework (FPA) and funding patterns (see below) need therefore to be adapted. In addition, some specific measures may be considered to further streamline UNHCR procedures and management systems. For its part, UNHCR must pursue its programme of reforms and increase transparency, accountability and cost-effectiveness in order to improve donors' confidence. UNHCR may also increasingly be seen as a useful contributor to the definition of ECHO Global Plans and guidelines.

Added value for UNHCR: ECHO needs to become a more predictable donor, which can contribute to secure adequate levels of funding on jointly agreed priority programmes for the duration required to define exit strategy and engage durable solutions in connection with LRRD. ECHO may also contribute to the definition of country strategies through the exchange of policy/high-level or practical operational information from its network of experts and partners.

(b) **Tools** adapted to both field and Headquarters issues, with some safety overlapping:
- **At field level**:   -Joint country/regional seminars for better mutual understanding
                        -'G-7' meetings between key field players
                        -Contract monitoring plans
                        -Arbitration mechanism at field level
                        -(Timely) LRRD facilitation mechanism
                        -Evaluations (real-time, auto-evaluation, mid-term, etc.)
- **At HQ level**:   -regular/reciprocal explanatory workshops for better mutual understanding
                     -Joint training sessions, e.g. in security or log frames matters
                     -Exchange of strategic documents (Global Plans and Country Plans)
                     -Regular strategic dialogue meetings
                     -Arbitration mechanism at headquarters level
                     -Announcement of ECHO commitments to ExCom meeting.
                     -Evaluations (joint/ combined, shared results, etc.)

A.2.2.   STRATEGY

The proposed strategy is based on the following findings collected by the evaluation.

(a) **Definitions**. The first of the two main functions entrusted to UNHCR by its founding Statute is the *protection* of refugees, the second one being to promote *durable solutions* to their problems (below). The term of protection originally covered a range of *legal measures* such as regularisation of status, access to employment, etc. In the face of events, the key function of *co-ordinating* material assistance to refugees rapidly became a part of the more dynamic field mandate of UNHCR, though it was never formally added to the Statute. Increasingly protracted and complex situations further led to the direct involvement of the agency in a wider range of *care and maintenance* (C&M) activities, which were not often found to be of a cost-effective, comparative advantage nature. To many actors, this last development contributed to blur limits of protection and best practice in co-ordination. *For clarity reasons, this report will therefore use the restricted original definition of legal protection, sometimes extended to necessary physical protection.*

(b) **Protection** is the first stated objective of UNHCR in all four countries. Appropriate measures have been taken (registrations in Serbia, Zambia and Guinea, protection of minority enclaves in Kosovo)–although these are sometimes applied quite belatedly (Guinea, Zambia) or either are facing heavy local political constraints (Guinea). The share of resources devoted to protection, however, is not always commensurate to the objectives (32 protection staff in Geneva, 4% of budget in Zambia in 2001), and these facts do not clearly appear in UNHCR official reports.

ECHO has provided adequate financial support to core protection activities in Serbia and Kosovo. It is also planning to do so in Guinea (a specific strategy for that country needs to be defined), though not (yet ?) in Zambia. *The present support of ECHO to core protection activities must be maintained and developed through systematic strategic dialogue.*

(c) **Co-ordination**. Despite the fact that the overall co-ordination role –a crucial element of humanitarian operations- has been attributed to OCHA[3] in the UN system, a clear finding from all four countries at the field level was that only UNHCR had the capacity (resources, network of offices, political clout) to effectively co-ordinate major activities in favour of refugees. *Field co-ordination is only a 'vehicle', whose added value comes from the quality of the participation offered by those concerned.* Co-ordination of humanitarian aid amounts to a delicate balance between skill, authority and motivation, to be established among partners not sub-contractors. The implementation of co-ordination by UNHCR is often criticised to various degrees (Guinea, Zambia), *though never the need for the co-ordinating function itself.* Examples of good practice could be found in Kosovo, or in the interim co-ordination carried out by the UNHCR Emergency Teams in Guinea during their intervention at the beginning of 2001, which was highly appreciated. As a general rule, all humanitarian actors (implementing partners, other agencies, donors) clearly expressed the wish that UNHCR should be able to improve its ability to co-ordinate. The international recognition and the neutral/diplomatic status of a UN agency also provide important advantages in (some) politically difficult situations. In Serbia, the co-ordination umbrella of UNHCR was instrumental in ensuring the import of humanitarian goods in the country during the Milosevic regime, as well as protection to its implementing partners. However, its status also places the agency in the often uncomfortable role of 'buffer' between the requirements of transparency and accountability of ECHO, and poorly organised or corrupt national implementing counterparts. In all four countries, national counterparts were extremely under-resourced. It was noted that in Guinea and Zambia, the co-ordination authority of UNHCR has been undermined by some ECHO direct partners. *The co-ordination capacity of UNHCR needs to be protected and/or supported by ECHO.*

(d) **Care & Maintenance (C&M)**. Direct implementation or programming of C&M activities by UNHCR is arguably the most controversial among the four key functions -except when C&M entails a decisive advantage such as access or protection against rogue local authorities, or the possibility to fund valuable non-EU and local partners. C&M often takes by far the largest share in UNHCR country budgets (50% of the 2001 Zambia budget, not including transport and logistics). Nevertheless, its effectiveness is made very vulnerable by negative factors such as lack of own qualified technical field staff, sudden budget cuts or weakness of implementing partners. Monitoring of national/institutional counterparts can be a difficult task (Serbia, Guinea). Some partners would mainly operate with junior field staff and would not display necessary expertise or use lessons learned. UNHCR seems to lack corrective tools. Cost indicators, when available, are not used in any systematic manner (Zambia). As a result, when cost-effectiveness indicators of UNHCR C&M could –very tentatively- be compared to corresponding ratios of ECHO direct partners, these were found to be very different according to the local management quality, ranging from reasonably more cost-effective (Zambia) to the exact reverse (Guinea)[4]. A *culture of cost-effectiveness needs to be developed in humanitarian C&M, to which ECHO could valuably contribute.* UNHCR management systems have recently been upgraded (though not as much as originally planned) to better target results and impact of programmes. Nevertheless, a number of key procedures are still cumbersome (CAPs, ExCom…) and some outdated software were not

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2 OCHA structure is often weak, and is usually not present at field level (not being an agency). OCHA has no authority by itself: it is supposed to work as support for a Humanitarian Co-ordinator, which has only occurred in a few large crises. This can also be refused by national authorities (Guinea).

4 This remark raises a number of side issues, *i.a.* the tools available to UNHCR to monitor weak partners, but also the ability of ECHO to fund the appropriate type of direct partners in C&M situations.

replaced (FMIS). The new UNHCR Unified Budget does not allow the electronic tracing of funds on a smaller scale than the 'caseload/project', which amounts to a multi-sector annual programme in ECHO terminology[5]. The flexibility to modify budget items within such projects has been optimised for impact reasons, *which is bound to conflict with the ECHO much stricter rules.*
Due to its structural weaknesses, the UNHCR is increasingly facing the 'competition' of bilateral organisations and some large international NGOs in the search for C&M funding. It was also found in Guinea that UNHCR had sometimes difficulties to conciliate the functions of co-ordination (to all actors) and direct C&M programming with some of them only.

(e) **Durable Solutions**. The systematic emphasis on the longer-term search for durable solutions is a key advantage of UNHCR as a 'quality partner' for the Commission, as compared to the often short-term views of NGOs. Durable solutions are however only partially relevant to ECHO mandate (hence the focus on direct impact activities only). Durable solutions are also usually quite costly (Serbia, Kosovo). A coherent dynamic process to implement parallel exit strategies (LRRD for ECHO and durable solutions for UNHCR) needs to be investigated and supported.

A.2.3. MEANS and RESOURCES

Means and resources need to be adapted to achieve optimum impact in the framework of UNHCR core mandate and key functions, and to implement the proposed strategy. They also need to be used with the necessary flexibility to take present limitations into account. They are presented below by order of their importance to the opinion of the evaluation.

(a) **Human Resources.** The quality of staff is generally the key to successful projects. Although humanitarian commitment is still very present in all four countries visited, UNHCR has problems to find enough qualified staff willing to work in difficult field conditions, in low visibility crises (Guinea, Zambia). Mainly due to budget cuts, there is also increasingly a lack of 'new blood' in UNHCR –to which the current JPO (Junior Programme Officers) and UNV (UN Volunteers) programmes are only a partial answer. To adequately reinforce its field presence in Zambia, UNHCR had to take 'painful' strategic options and decided to close seven offices elsewhere. The issue of Guinea is even more complex. UNHCR has recently begun to streamline its contractual and posting procedures, though the human resources department has still only a limited array of 'balanced' incentives to encourage qualified international staff to apply for assignments in difficult countries rather than for higher-profile situations with better career prospects. The efficiency and effectiveness of the Emergency Teams intervention in Guinea in early 2001 were excellent, though these teams are by essence short-term (being 'on loan' from other programmes). They cannot by themselves have an impact on longer-term situations. External consultants are contracted only for specific, short-term purposes.

❖ *ECHO can contribute to alleviate programme staffing problems to a certain extent, by continuing to fund key field positions (protection, co-ordination staff, etc) according to prior ad hoc discussed needs and agreed fee rates.*
❖ *ECHO could envisage the secondment to UNHCR of NOHA graduates, in an 'European JPO Programme'.*

It was found in Kosovo that *better reciprocal knowledge* of institutional strengths and weaknesses, internal procedures, expectations, etc.. is one of the keys to better co-operation at field level.

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[5] This difference in terminology provides an interesting indicator of the respective management capacities. A 'project' is usually defined as *the smallest operational element which can be planned, financed and implemented as a separate unit in a larger programme'.* The current ability of UNHCR to follow 'projects' is clearly much more limited than ECHO's, and stops at a level consistent with ECHO 'programmes'.

❖ *Joint training of ECHO and UNHCR staff is highly advisable in matters such as log frames (there is a considerable need for such in both organisations) and security (see also Co-ordination below). Presentation workshops on ECHO and UNHCR need to be organised on a (more) regular basis at both HQs. More joint seminars (Ohrid type) should be organised at field level.*

(b) **Reporting.** Reporting was by far the most conflicting issue between ECHO and UNHCR. It was found in all four countries that UNHCR reporting to ECHO was either late, lacking added value, or absent. The evaluation found few UNHCR project reports to ECHO which could be favourably compared to the direct partners' average. Some reports were considerably substandard (accommodation in collective centres in Serbia for the year 2000); others were never delivered (Zambia, Guinea). To many UNHCR field staff, the ECHO specific reporting format seems to represent a duplication of their work (since they are already bound to produce comprehensive monthly reports and mid-term reviews). The purpose of the ECHO reporting seems sometimes unclear to them and the requirements are not within the usual capacities of the management systems. The levels of (project-based) detailed information required by ECHO are often difficult to collect and compile, when ECHO funding is not clearly linked to a (complete) sub-agreement or to a specific activity. ECHO increasing emphasis on effectiveness and cost-effectiveness is bound to collide with the 'empty' effectiveness still to be found in many UNHCR projects (i.e. results not related to quantified objectives), which seems often due to lack of staff and weak implementing partners. A better understanding of ECHO expectations could be found in many of those UNHCR staff who had the opportunity to attend the joint regional seminars, though this did not solve the problem of work duplication. The above positions are not readily acceptable to ECHO, since most other partner agencies do not appear to have such constraints, and many NGOs would devote considerable time and efforts to produce quality reports, in accordance with required format. *To most NGOs, the direct benefit of their reporting is clear – being a precondition for further funding- whereas to the evaluators opinion, the present decentralisation process of UNHCR has not been implemented down to its final logical step, i.e. fund-raising awareness at field level.*

However, the standard internal reports produced on a monthly basis by UNHCR country and sub-offices ('sitreps') were found to be of good quality –when the evaluation was unofficially allowed access to some copies. Mid-term (six-monthly) reviews of programmes were similarly very valuable (Zambia).

The annual UNHCR Global Report did not make any direct reference to ECHO in the four country sections. It essentially appears to be a collective fund-collecting tool designed to address the many donors who do not have the capacity (or the political will) to identify priorities and to monitor them, and who are satisfied to see their contributions being disseminated among numerous humanitarian activities. An exception was found in the details about the 'Kosovo Women Initiative' (KWI) programme, though the donor (USAID) was not mentioned as such.

❖ *ECHO should make an optimum use of the significant existing reporting capacity of UNHCR. A most practical way would be to copy the parts of the sitreps (e.g. the 'Programme' section) relevant to ECHO contributions, accompanied by straight copies of the concerned implementing partners reports for activities or sub-agreements funded in totality or in majority by ECHO.*
❖ *Where this capacity does not appear to reach the expected level, ECHO could assist in upgrading the reporting standards, which would benefit to both organisations (and to other donors). Whenever advisable –and not detrimental to the flexibility necessary for impact- cost-effectiveness indicators could be jointly defined for C&M programmes, by specifically funded short-term technical experts and specialised economists.*
❖ *There is a need for a more compatible log frame approach between ECHO matrix and UNHCR Operations Management System (OMS) to avoid detrimental duplication. If a compatible log frame could be achieved using common indicators, it could ideally be used for the monthly (or quarterly) reporting needs of both organisations.*
❖ *The Global Report does not appear to be the appropriate tool to ensure visibility for ECHO. One limited option would be to present in a suitable position the 'Top Ten' list of donors (already discussed between UNHCR and*

ECHO). An integrated long-term programme with a specific and clearly understandable designation could be another option, although this could hardly fit into ECHO's mandate.

(c) **Monitoring.** Pending the above mentioned compatibility between newly introduced log frames, it was found that the output of UNHCR monitoring was often poorly reflected in reporting, thus affecting the monitoring role of ECHO which could not rely on reports as the basic monitoring instrument (Serbia). *The essence of partnership is reflected and revealed through the monitoring relationship.* The way in which ECHO monitors UNHCR and how UNHCR responds to this, are key indicators of the quality and nature of what partnership means to both organisations.

❖ *Specific attention should be given to the issue of monitoring in the ECHO – UNHCR contracts, following the procedure detailed in chapter B.9.2 (appraisal, contract monitoring plan, monitoring). Appropriate monitoring experience should be considered when recruiting staff, and training should be organised on the use of indicators.*

(d) **Co-operation Framework**. ECHO should better adapt its FPA to use the UNHCR 'working tool' to the best of its existing institutional and structural abilities –and subsequent comparative advantages, which are different from those of NGOs. The FPA should duly take into account existing limitations and make optimum use of the advantages: regular reporting, recently improved monitoring formats, capacity to focus on longer-term impact and durable solutions, etc. ECHO should therefore concentrate funding on activities with optimum added value:

❖ *Core mandate of protection (registration, legal protection, etc.) and durable solutions with direct impact (repatriation…)*
❖ *Field co-ordination of activities in favour of refugees (funding of staff, avoiding to undermine authority, funding of a 'critical mass' of value-added care & maintenance activities –see also below).*
❖ *Multi-sector and/or longer-term care and maintenance programmes in specific circumstances, e.g. when (i) there is a need of access to beneficiaries and protection of partners through a UN umbrella, or (ii) a need of using valuable non-EU or local partners who would appropriately contribute to impact; (iii) when favourable cost-effectiveness can be established, or (iv) when no direct ECHO partners specialised in C&M are available. A very tentative cost-effectiveness assessment in Zambia tended to show that some average UNHCR C&M activities could favourably be compared to ECHO direct funding to (emergency-oriented, hence expensive) partners.*
❖ *In the above cases, ECHO should consider two main options: (i) funding a share of a multi-sector annual 'caseload' programme, and accept the procedures applied by UNHCR, including budget flexibility and reporting format. (ii) Funding of specific activities (e.g. to target some LRRD prospects with other EC Services), in which case complete sub-agreements should preferably be funded to provide optimum transparency and accountability.*
❖ *Disaster preparedness activities (Emergency Teams database), and contingency stockpiles, as appropriate.*

As already stated under A.2.1, UNHCR needs to pursue its efforts to reform its management systems towards increased accountability (more accurate budget control and tracing of earmarked funds, cost-effectiveness indicators) and transparency (better reporting, effectiveness linked to prior objectives, and thorough analysis of positive and negative outcomes).
ECHO could also better adapt its *contractual budget structure* to UNHCR mandate and core functions. Problems due to conflicting procedures (e.g. flexibility to amend budget items) must be solved. ECHO budget items should be divided into headings of Protection, Co-ordination, C&M (sectors) and those durable solutions compatible with ECHO mandate. They should include provisions for relevant staff positions. Protection budget could clearly mention key activities (with direct impact) such as registration, information, legal assistance, and repatriation. Whenever possible, strategic ('G-7') discussions should take place on funding of predictable C&M activities by ECHO, though their timing should be coherent with UNHCR programming and budgeting timetable.

(e) **Co-ordination**. Additional measures to support and promote this core function of UNHCR should also contribute to avoid that UNHCR co-ordination authority be undermined by direct partners who might sometimes have conflicting agendas:

❖ *Ensure that the co-ordinating structure is provided with complete and transparent information regarding all ECHO funding to every partner working on the concerned 'caseload'.*
❖ *A pre-requisite for ECHO direct partners to sign an MoU with UNHCR regarding co-ordination.*
❖ *In the field of security, ECHO should systematically promote codes of conduct for partners, as well as joint security training for all ECHO and partner staff working in Phase 3 & 4 risk areas.*
❖ *Suggest to some ECHO direct partners to seek a 'critical/minimum mass' of funding from UNHCR (20% ?).*

(f) **Evaluations**. ECHO should also protect and support the UNHCR growing capacity to carry out independent evaluations. UNHCR has developed strategic plans to commit 0,5% of its total annual budget on evaluation activities by 2004 (3,25 mill. US$ at present level). As it had been demonstrated by the UNHCR external evaluation of the 1999 Kosovo crisis[6], this capacity is one of the guarantees that situations can effectively be analysed by UNHCR, and that lessons can be learned and disseminated in the organisation. *Audits* from HQ were also strongly suggested as a 'protection' by UNHCR staff in Guinea, to impose from the outside necessary changes against overwhelming pressures from local authorities.

❖ *Provisions for such missions should be included with flexibility in contract budgets.*

(g) **LRRD /Durable Solutions.** ECHO should further develop the '*facilitation*' which was adequately performed in Kosovo and Guinea between some partners and EU Delegations or longer-term EC Services. Timely linkages beyond the limits of ECHO humanitarian mandate must be established to ensure necessary sustainability and impact, including in the capacity building of key national counterparts and in the social-related sectors.

❖ *Identification and preliminary LRRD contacts need to be initiated as early as possible in the C&M process. A prerequisite is however to take such opportunities at the appropriate time in the DG Development or Relex programming cycles (e.g. identification missions or the drafting of their TORs).*

(h) **Registration** exercises are a prerequisite for the effective implementation of UNHCR core functions of protection and durable solutions. Registration of refugees has been consistently funded by ECHO (except in Zambia). However, the portable field registration kits donated during the Kosovo crisis are not compatible anymore, their operational capacity is increasingly reduced (e.g. printing of ID cards). This already led to potentially damaging delays in Guinea.

❖ *ECHO should support the longer-term efforts of UNHCR to set up an integrated and performing global registration system for refugees and should examine the new 'Profile' registration project. Should this be advisable, co-funding by all interested donors would be mandatory, considering the very high cost of the system.*

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[6] 'The Kosovo refugee crisis, and independent evaluation of UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response' ref. EPAU/2000/001, dated February 2000.

B. MAIN REPORT

B.1.   <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

B.1.1.   <u>Objectives</u>

The overall objectives of the evaluation (see Annex A, Terms of Reference) were as follows: 'to assess the set up and impact of the UNHCR programmes in FRY (Serbia), Kosovo, Guinea and Zambia and to see the part played in them by the ECHO contribution'. From these individual studies, conclusions had to be drawn on how ECHO and UNHCR should work together in the future, both generally and in the specific programmes examined, and how ECHO could support UNHCR in their core mandate.

B.1.2.   <u>Methodology</u>

The evaluation team was made up of two consultants, who were instructed to travel together to all four countries/entities: Michel Van Bruaene (Team Leader) and Michael Atkinson. The consultants have equally shared the assessment tasks according to their own specific backgrounds and expertise.
The methodology of the various country evaluations reflected the above objectives and the case study structure. The evaluation was divided in four phases : (i) briefing and desk study in Brussels, followed by orientation meetings in Geneva. (ii) Field visits, which took place as follows: Serbia from 16 to 27 August 2001, Kosovo between 28/08 and 06/09, Zambia from 24/09 to 05/10, and finally Guinea from 08 to 18 October 2001. (iii) Preparation of country reports and (iv) drafting of overall synthesis report. All draft reports would be shared with UNHCR, reviewed and commented by both organisations. The sequence of chapters in this report follows as closely as possible the 'desired results' stated in point 2.3 of the ToR, and the order in which the country sections are presented reflects the chronology of the field visits.

Considering the high level of interest granted to the project by the stakeholders, every finding and recommendation needed to be clearly supported by facts, and had to reflect some kind of recurrent pattern to be found either in individual project assessments (see synthesis sheets annexed to each country reports) or through cross-checked discussions with various knowledgeable actors (see Annex B). The evaluation therefore focused mainly on the projects implemented between 1999 and 2001, for which most of the relevant actors could still be found and lessons learned were readily available. There were some constraints. In the case of Guinea for example, most of the UNHCR activities funded by ECHO in 1999 and 2000 had dissolved or had been destroyed by the fighting that started in September 2000. Finally, in Serbia, Zambia and in Guinea, no contract had yet been signed between ECHO and UNHCR for 2001 when the field visits took place.

B.2.   <u>OVERALL VIEW OF THE FOUR PROGRAMMES</u>

B.2.1.   <u>Key Comparative Figures</u>

The objective of this chapter is to compare the importance of the respective budget shares for both organisations, for each country or entity. The figures below reflect the significance of Serbia, Kosovo and Zambia for both organisations.
They also outline the specific mutual importance of the partnership in such a situation, in the perspective of some global figures:

1) the overall budget share of UNHCR among ECHO partners world-wide amounted to 10,5% in 1999 and 9,5% in 2000, and
2) the overall contribution of ECHO (to be added to other EC Services) among UNHCR donors was 9,3% in 1999 (10,5% for EC), and 4,7% in 2000 (5,5% for EC).

The table 1 shows highly disproportionate levels of respective importance in the *Guinea* country budgets for 1999 and early 2000 (difference of **33,9 %**) between UNHCR and its key donor ECHO. Ratios are usually much more balanced (average differences of **3,7 %** in Serbia and **7 %** in Kosovo, on larger budgets. This underlines several issues detailed in the country report, including the lack of understanding of the importance of ECHO's potential value as a strategic partner and a committed donor. All these issues point out at the need for deep structural reforms of UNHCR in Guinea.
In *Zambia*, ECHO was only aiming at a short-term intervention to face the 1999 refugee influx.

Amounts in thousands of Euro or US$ *Table 1*

Year	KOSOVO		SERBIA		ZAMBIA		GUINEA	
	ECHO budget/ % to HCR	HCR Budget/ % from ECHO	ECHO budget/ % to HCR	HCR budget/ % from ECHO	ECHO budget/ % to HCR	HCR budget/ % from ECHO	ECHO budget/ % to HCR	HCR budget/ % from ECHO
1999	111.700 E / 19,6%	77.399 $ / 25,7%	75.130 E / 20,7%	61.846 $ / 22,9%	1.500 E / 100 %	6.758 $ / 20,2%	3.638 E / 32,9%	33.662 $ / 3,2 %
2000	28.840 E / 18,2%	46.366 $ / 10,3%	50.450 E / 20,2%	61.560 $ / 15,1%	4.205 E / 45,2%	12.596 $ / 13,7%	4.015 E / 43,6 %	28.734 $ / 5,5 %
2001	14.000 E / 35,7%	27.723 $ / 16,4%	45.300 E* / 5,3%	44.675 $ / 4,9%	0	13.692 $ /	4.345 E (7.345 E ?)	32.536 $ (?)

The exchange rate has been roughly calculated at 1,1 Euro for 1 US$

The UNHCR figures include all operations and administrative/support costs. The budget for Serbia could not be dissociated from Montenegro.

B.2.2. Relevance and Impact

Serbia

All projects assessed were found to be relevant to the protection and assistance mandate of UNHCR, and to the humanitarian mandate of ECHO. Projects funded by ECHO through UNHCR in 1999 and 2000 were also fully relevant to identified priorities. ECHO-funded registrations indicated approx. 377.000 refugees and 187.000 IDPs. Among them, only those 29.000 refugees and IDPs who were accommodated in the 387 collective centres were clearly identifiable. The remaining 95% were living in private accommodations. General assistance and heating fuel for the winter season were therefore logically focused on collective centres. However, although collective centres might appear as easily identifiable and quantifiable objectives, they were not always the most vulnerable any more. The poorest among those living in private accommodations have been hit harder than those who were relatively 'protected' in collective centres and did not have to pay rents.

The impact was generally positive, with some variations. Impact of *repatriation* to BiH was good (according to available background information 67.445 minority returns to BiH were achieved in 2000 -an increase of 64,5% over 1999), though Croatia was still very difficult. A specialised partner mentioned that only 'approximately 1.000 refugees'[7] had been successfully (?) resettled in Croatia from Serbia in 3-4 years. The presentation and launching of the 'New Bridges' TV series (24 shows

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[7] UNHCR comments: " the latest figure on organised return is approx. 8,000 returnees with direct UNHCR assistance"

of 30 minutes each) seemed very promising, and should help the refugees to make their own decision with optimum information in hand.

Community services activities were at the end of their useful humanitarian life. The defined overall objectives of psychological and social support have been achieved, even though the project has created and reinforced dependency on external donor aid for the beneficiaries but also for the local implementing NGOs. The impact of *IGPs* (income generating projects) was very different according to the background of the beneficiaries, and the quality of the management of the collective centre[8].

The ultimate impact of projects targeting vulnerable people living in collective centres and specialised institutions needs to be re-assessed. The projects focused on the 'here and now' of helping to make peoples lives in the collective centres more bearable. There is little evidence to suggest that beneficiaries are other than passive recipients of a protection/care & maintenance project, the impact of which should be viewed not in the context of whether the planned inputs were achieved, but in connectedness to the impact of collective centres on peoples lives as a whole, and in relation to durable solutions for the beneficiaries, which are likely to be integration/local settlement.

Kosovo

All projects assessed were found to be relevant to the protection and assistance mandate of UNHCR, and to the humanitarian mandate of ECHO. The objectives stated respectively in the UNHCR Global Report and in the ECHO Global plan reflect also a significant coherence of approaches. ECHO has duly focused its funding on activities 'with direct impact'. The figures further reflect the considerable mutual importance of the relations over the last three years: roughly one fourth of the overall ECHO budget for Kosovo was funded through UNHCR. The share of ECHO contributions in the local UNHCR budget is equally significant. The situation of ethnic Albanians inside Kosovo has now considerably improved. However, various ethnic Minorities are still at risk and an estimated 130,000 persons have to face daily harassment, violence and intimidation. The projects aimed at providing general protection, freedom of movement, free legal assistance and counselling to minorities-at-risk, displaced persons, refugees and returnees with a view to finding and implementing durable solutions and smooth transition to UNMIK services, while supporting efforts to develop a sustainable multi-ethnic society.

The impact of activities funded through UNHCR seemed generally quite positive, though still limited by ethnic hatred. The *Bus Shuttle* has certainly contributed to build up a certain sense of confidence among Minorities in enclaves in the short and medium terms, though it has completely failed to attract mixed passengers. The humanitarian impact of *Fresh Food distribution* is even more obvious: the 279 Serbian persons-at-risk spread among Pristina have been protected throughout the worst of the crisis. They are now slowly returning to social life. The impact of *Legal Assistance* needs to be judged in relation to durable solutions and not in the short term on the basis of numbers of consultations, beneficiaries etc. For example, out of an estimated 20,000 property rights cases in Kosovo, only 45 have so far reportedly been resolved. Thus whilst legal aid will undoubtedly play a role in the provision of durable solutions and the transition to normalisation in Kosovo, it is likely to be both slow and costly. In other cases (*Food Transition*), although 'the objective was fully achieved' (interim report 2001), the figures available appear rather unreliable and the actual impact is almost impossible to evaluate. There were also some valuable indirect impacts in the *capacity building of local NGOs*, and one negative impact: the value of the humanitarian food basket seemed more attractive to large families than the UNMIK social welfare assistance package. Finally, it must be noted that the longer-term *political impact* of some of the protection projects (Fresh Food, Bus Shuttle) is likely to be even higher than their direct humanitarian impact (as a proof to Serbia that effective protection was indeed provided to the remainees).

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[8] see DRC report on ECHO-funded IGPs in Kosovo, -Prolog 2000

Zambia

The main declared objectives of UNHCR in the Global Report 2000 were coherent with its mandate. The first three priorities duly focused on protection, preparedness and solutions while the other objectives were targeting much wider and longer-term/durable impacts relevant to LRRD objectives, which could hardly be supported as such by the ECHO mandate. However, the objective of ECHO in Zambia was limited to a short-term intervention in favour the latest influx of refugees and did not consider at first any perspective of longer-term co-operation or exit strategy.
In that framework, relevant UNHCR activities were duly supported by ECHO in 2000, such as multi-sector care and maintenance, co-ordination and field protection of refugees. ECHO promptly reacted to an UNHCR initiative by directly funding partners to set up a second camp in Kala to accommodate steadily growing numbers of RDC refugees (see also below). The intended co-operation with WFP was also supported by ECHO (1 million Euro in 2000).

The figures of table 1 show the difference between UNHCR and ECHO strategies for 2001. Zambia has clearly been identified as a priority for UNHCR contribution to the regional stability (the budget has been increased, and 21 new staff posts have been assigned to Zambia, partly by closing 7 offices in Africa), whereas ECHO can be seen to phase out completely. This confirms that UNHCR and ECHO did not share the same analysis of the current situation and future needs, and any possible strategic discussion was furthermore probably disrupted by the weak structural presence of ECHO in Zambia (the expert is based in Tanzania).

Guinea

The main objectives listed in the UNHCR 'Global Report 2000' had been drafted before the rebel attacks. In January 2001, the «UNHCR Operations Strategy for the Sierra Leonean and Liberian Refugees in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia» issued new objectives, relevant to the emergency phase. These objectives outlined some of the limitations faced by the UNHCR mandate in Guinea. There was for example no mention of local integration, rejected by the government as a durable solution. A later document, the UNHCR Regional Strategy Paper of June 2001 additionally considered the issue of contingency plans and emergency preparedness measures to meet the deteriorating situation in Liberia. However, these were not based on worst case assumptions, e.g. should the lack of reconciliation prevent an early and massive repatriation to Sierra Leone, or should the conflict with Liberia burst into Guinea itself. Finally, the UNHCR Representative in Conakry mentioned limited, realistic objectives for the second half of 2001: (i) to complete the registration in the camps. (ii) To improve living conditions in the camps (care and maintenance or C&M). (iii) To facilitate and promote voluntary repatriation (longer-term objective, to be continued in 2003), especially in the light of the elections scheduled for May 2002 in Sierra Leone. Discussions were held between UNHCR and ECHO, and a Funding Decision of 3 mill. Euro for 2001 was prepared. At the time of the evaluation, various delays were still postponing the signature of the contract.

There is little to be said regarding the few remaining traces of impact of past UNHCR activities funded by ECHO in Guinea, except that targeted refugees seem to have benefited rather poorly from projects implemented by local partners (Health services in Guéckédou).
The already stated weaknesses of UNHCR in Guinea – lack of strategy, lack of transparency in the choice of partners –especially local ones-, lack of accountability in results, lack of analysis of lessons learned and lack of capacity to improve mechanisms –especially when UNHCR was faced with conflicting agendas by local authorities- provided very strong constraints for impact.
This is still essentially the situation in Guinea today, after the departure of the Emergency Teams. Most UNHCR-operated projects lack efficiency and effectiveness; there would be no added value for ECHO in these circumstances to fund UNHCR care and maintenance activities without the latter undergoing first a comprehensive process of institutional (re)strengthening, in order to be able to use donors money with acceptable effectiveness.

Although the recent registration in the camps was not funded by ECHO (the intention was disrupted by various delays), there is a risk of <u>negative impact</u> which could have consequences on ECHO-funded activities. Should the high expectations of the registration among the 58.000 refugees in camps not be rapidly met as promised by UNHCR, riots might erupt and authorities might decide to take decisive actions to prevent what could be seen as a danger to the national stability.

B.3.   CO-ORDINATION FUNCTION

B.3.1.   Co-ordination: Concept

The assessment of co-ordination would first require an agreement on what precisely co-ordination is supposed to be. It would be useful to repeat here the very appropriate definition provided by the UNHCR field office in *Pristina, Kosovo*:

> Co-ordination is only a 'vehicle', whose added value comes from the quality of the participation offered by those concerned. Co-ordination of humanitarian aid amounts to a delicate balance between authority and motivation, to be established among partners not sub-contractors. Binding contractual provisions or instructions from a donor or a lead field agency have therefore strong limitations. Authority can be enforced by 'political' clout and/or by direct control over a critical mass of projects and budget in a given sector. It does not necessarily require 100% programming by UNHCR.
> In order to take part willingly and pro-actively in a co-ordination exercise, all actors (donors, agencies, international and local NGOs, local institutional counterparts and authorities) need to be adequately motivated. They have to find some specific interest or added value in it, since all of them have their own agendas and objectives, which is only to be expected. The added value can be found (among others) in guidance and guidelines, quality information, maps and statistics, networking, contacts with institutions and national counterparts, sectoral co-ordination...

Co-ordination as such is not a part of the UNHCR original legal Statute, though as a 'tradition' or 'consensus' it rapidly became a part of its more dynamic field mandate. Successful co-ordination is at least as much a question of personality as of procedures or mandate, and requires considerable public relation skills. Co-ordination is also clearly an operational task, the performance of which requires considerable resources in time and staff. A co-ordinator is bound to become automatically involved in a considerable amount of implementation details which are likely to distract him/her from the overall objectives of effectiveness and impact.

To the opinion of the evaluators, field co-ordination is a task to be typically carried out by a major implementing agency with adequate human resources and field presence, and UNHCR is often the only organisation with such resources. The much more limited field resources of a donor, even a pro-active one such as ECHO, should be focused on the preparation of Global Plans and on appropriate contract monitoring. The only exception could be dictated by emergency, when 'somebody has to do it' (Serbia, Chapter B.3.3).

B.3.2.   Co-ordination within the UN Family

OCHA (the Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Aid) is not a UN agency, but is led by the Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs and depends directly from the UN Secretariat-General. Its main task is to ensure the overall coherence, to liaise with donors, to provide information, and also to identify gaps. Another task is to provide a secretariat for the 'Humanitarian Co-ordinator'. A key

lesson learned from the 1999 Kosovo crisis has indeed been to upgrade the former 'Lead Field Agency' co-ordinating task, which was often implemented by UNHCR, into a more powerful Humanitarian Co-ordinator. A reason was that the mandate of UNHCR, restricted to refugees, may not be appropriate to co-ordinate crises which may also concern vast caseloads of IDPs. Under the new UN organisation, the UN Secretary General has the authority to specifically request UNHCR to take responsibility of IDPs in a crisis, if appropriate. When OCHA is operating alone however, its co-ordination capacity is likely to be weaker, though this is often compensated by quality of staff.

Serbia

OCHA was in a position to adequately perform its task. Some crucial activities in the collective centres (e.g. water & sanitation) could not be entirely covered by UNHCR due to budget cuts. OCHA identified this gap and helped to find other solutions. ICRC was given the 'operational lead' for IDPs in Serbia (except for registration). The third vulnerable group of social cases, which is rapidly growing, has apparently no 'operational leader' yet, the Ministry for Social Affairs being under-resourced.
The usual field co-operation agreement between UNHCR and WFP is duly planned until 2003, and UNDP is still in the process of sending identification/programming teams throughout the country, though it seems short of funds and UNHCR has not been adequately informed so far about its intentions. Relations with UNICEF, which is taking over some of the psycho-social/community services programmes, are reportedly good.

Kosovo

In Kosovo the two successive Humanitarian Co-ordinators (formerly also Head of UNMIK Pillar I) were both UNHCR representatives. Co-ordination of humanitarian activities since the return of the refugees after the 1999 war, has been one of the strongest 'added-values' of UNHCR in Kosovo, and it has worked remarkably well. The second Co-ordinator (since July 2000) also combined the wider political and diplomatic role of Special Envoy of the UNHCR for FRY/Kosovo and fYROM.

OCHA has organised since 1999 bi-weekly inter-agency co-ordination meetings for the UN. There are usually 12 participants (HCR, WFP, FAO, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNDP, etc...). The main issues are about relevance and updates on the situation.

Zambia

The UN humanitarian structure is relatively weak in Zambia –the main focus is on development, and OCHA is not present in the country. However, at the beginning of 2001 the new UNHCR Representative has taken the lead of the Joint Strategic Planning for 2001/2002, which concerns all UN agencies present in Zambia (UNDP, WHO, UNAIDS, WFP, ILO, FAO, UNICEF and UNFPA). This planning focuses on exit strategy (LRRD, durable solutions, and contingency plans).
The usual field co-operation agreement between UNHCR and WFP is implemented and joint country assessments are performed, though there have been significant and recurrent shortages in the WFP food pipeline which tended to create some camp management problems for UNHCR. However, UNHCR confirmed that improving food supply to Zambia had recently been identified as a priority by WFP. A new experienced Resident-Representative had been assigned to the country, and additional WFP staff would also be sent to Zambia.

Guinea

The arrival of OCHA in Guinea is still recent (January 2001) and the number of staff is limited: the Deputy Country Director is assisted by CAP, Information, and Database international experts.

OCHA also has national staff to deal with communication with the government, external relations, and administrative matters. The institutional position of OCHA is weak: Guinean authorities have reportedly refused the nomination of a UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator whom OCHA is usually tasked to support. OCHA has nevertheless developed a clear perception of the respective strengths and weaknesses of UN agencies in Guinea (especially UNHCR and WFP), and could play a pro-active and positive role in trying to solve some of the current issues. OCHA is also much willing to play a more active role in the concerted approach of all actors to the humanitarian and development problems of the country, a strategy supported by ECHO. It has already succeeded in reconciling UNHCR and WFP figures for refugees and IDPs in the new CAP 2002.

WFP can be seen as an example of good practice for UN agencies in Guinea. The agency has 169 staff in Guinea, 13 of whose are international staff, five sub-offices, and a country office in Conakry. WFP has successfully reorganised during the last six months and has succeeded in becoming considerably more efficient by attracting enough qualified international staff with field experience in difficult countries. WFP staff could be assigned for up to 2 years in Guinea, which is long enough to avoid turnover effect and achieve impact. There are few or no problems of pipeline/ supply and significant buffer stocks (mid-October, the current stocks were sufficient until end of January 2002).

B.3.3.   Co-ordination with ECHO and Other Donors

Serbia

The strategic co-ordination set up in Kosovo (see below) between the key humanitarian actors was not repeated in Serbia. Institutional arbitration mechanisms would have been useful. The only other donor 'pro-active' on the ground is the Canadian development agency CIDA, though the German co-operation has also earmarked funds for Serbia. All other funds made available to UNHCR by its various donors are non-earmarked.

In central/southern Serbia, the international community took a considerable time to respond to the new situation created in the aftermath of the outflow of IDPs from Kosovo. Most Serbian IDPs arrived in the area between August and October 1999. Many NGOs soon followed, and ECHO reopened its regional office in Nis in September 1999. There had been a UNHCR Field Office in Kraljevo since 1994, but it had been mostly evacuated by international staff during the war with NATO. Consequently during three months, ECHO initiated co-ordination meetings alone, 'because somebody had to do it'. These were large meetings, with up to 70 partner representatives attending. A more appropriate sectoral co-ordination was finally put in place, with the UNHCR dealing with the shelter sector, WFP with food, WHO with health, and IFRC with psycho-social activities.

Kosovo

A specific and highly successful feature of the Kosovo situation was the restricted co-ordination established since the beginning of the crisis between the three most important humanitarian actors present: UNHCR, ECHO and OFDA. Agencies and donor(s) alike agreed to meet on a regular, though rather informal, basis for very practical, up-to-the-point discussions. The effectiveness of these meetings (of the 'G-7' type) was 'considerable' and much appreciated by all. In Kosovo, ECHO became a full partner (strategic, not operational) of UNHCR in the field -and the reverse was also true- and could contribute to the definition of the country strategy of UNHCR. Fruitful discussions on Global plans and Country Plans took place. *As for co-ordination, a real partnership can only derive from mutual interest and added value, not from formal contractual, administrative and financial relationships.*

The current Humanitarian Co-ordinator stressed the utility of such meetings as an example of good practice to be disseminated whenever possible, though their impact depends in a large measure from the quality of the personalities and their professional understanding of the others' institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Zambia

The assessment of activities and of future planning clearly outlined a number of strengths and weaknesses in the co-ordination of UNHCR and ECHO in Zambia. Relevant UNHCR activities were duly supported by ECHO in 2000, such as (i) multi-sector care and maintenance in the refugee camps, (ii) the co-ordination role of UNHCR by the above and by direct funding of Programme and field officers, and (iii) the protection of refugees also by funding a field officer, some communication equipment, and –not optimally- by the 'security' item of the budget.

As stated above, ECHO decided at the end of 2000 to directly fund a partner (MSF/H) to set up a second camp in Kala to accommodate steadily growing numbers of RDC refugees. UNHCR had reportedly been prevented to take appropriate actions by the lack of flexibility of its own procedures: the budget for the year 2000 had mostly been spent already, a 'special appeal' is a ponderous procedure, and the lack of clear 'emergency' situation (refugees were coming in small groups and not in an influx) did not allow to use the corresponding measures and funds.

However, the weakness of the ECHO structural presence in the country appeared in the fact that the essential activity of registration, plainly relevant to the UNHCR core mandate of Protection was neither discussed with- nor consequently funded by- ECHO. As from September 2000, an agreement was reached between UNHCR and the government of Zambia regarding the legal status of refugees, and the registration of the urban caseload was prepared as a 'test case' before a much larger registration exercise of camp populations.

A more permanent ECHO presence could also have been translated into better co-operation on the following issues: (i) pro-active measures to reinforce UNHCR presence in Zambia, whose poor performance had been strongly criticised in 2000 by some ECHO direct partners. (ii) Joint definition of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness indicators for care and maintenance, taking into consideration the national policy. (iii) Timely LRRD facilitation with the EU Delegation regarding road rehabilitation around refugee camps, security, capacity building of national counterpart structures, etc.

Guinea

Effectiveness of co-ordination by UNHCR has been criticised by most partners and donors for as long as written records could be found in Guinea, that is since 1998. UNHCR is described at the same time as weak and authoritarian, more prone to side with local authorities than to support its implementing partners. The co-ordination is indeed impeded by considerable internal constraints, essentially the well-known turnover or lack of qualified staff. The real willingness of UNHCR management to improve the situation, though, has also been restricted by compelling external factors – such as a big lack of confidence by many partners- which would be hard to mend under the best of circumstances.

However, all humanitarian actors would just as clearly like to see UNHCR perform better, since there is simply no alternative to the agency's role in a difficult humanitarian situation. Donors and partners have repeatedly tried to provide various support to improve UNHCR capacity in the country, with little success. The excellent co-ordination atmosphere put in place by UNHCR Emergency Teams during the first quarter of 2001 similarly left Guinea with them.

It is clearly not in the interest of anyone to further weaken the structure and the position of UNHCR, especially since the regional situation in West Africa is far from being stabilised. Imaginative and flexible solutions must be found, and arbitration mechanisms must be set up in a spirit of strategic partnership. In the meantime, it needs also to be realised that UNHCR in Guinea is not in a position to respond to requirements with the same level of efficiency that can be expected elsewhere.

Co-ordination of care and maintenance activities by UNHCR have been consistently supported by ECHO in Guinea until the attacks of September 2000, including by funding several staff positions at

the request of UNHCR[9]. Table 1 above shows that UNHCR received 32,9 % of ECHO funding in 1999, and up to 43,6 % in 2000. After the attacks, however, it rapidly appeared that UNHCR could not ensure any more a sufficient coverage of NGO activities in the region of Guéckédou (as already stated, UNHCR had to operate in difficult conditions, with restricted staff) and asked ECHO to fund partners directly to meet the needs of the beneficiaries. Relations with partners improved dramatically with the arrival of the excellent Emergency Teams, co-ordination meetings (twice a week) were short and effective. For their 2001 programme, UNHCR again requested a financial contribution from ECHO of 3.000.000 Euro to support basic care and maintenance activities in four of the six new refugee camps. Though a Funding Decision had been accordingly prepared by ECHO, various delays had prevented its application until the field visit of the evaluation.

According to the UNHCR funding and programming cycle, a joint strategy for 2002 (if any) should already have been discussed and almost finalised at this stage.

B.3.4. Co-ordination with Implementing Partners

Serbia

It may be of interest to note that some implementing partners which had the opportunity to work for both UNHCR and ECHO in Serbia provided the following comparison:
UNHCR (i) is more flexible, less administrative than ECHO. ECHO has no local authority, which for example complicated considerably its tendering procedures ('document 14'). (ii) UNHCR staff rates are also higher (e.g. ECHO would be prepared to pay 2-300 Euro for a driver, while UNHCR would allow up to 650 US$ for the same).
However, (iii) ECHO projects are wider in scope than UNHCR (strictly limited to refugees), and are therefore more interesting professionally speaking, and (iv) ECHO contractual budget is not likely to be suddenly cut down with damaging consequences.

Kosovo

Despite the fact that many of the large European NGOs have been used by UNHCR and by ECHO (OXFAM, DRC, Solidarités, ACTED, PU, CARE, CAD, AAH, Caritas Belgium), -and sometimes have been simultaneously funded by ECHO both directly and indirectly through UNHCR (ACTED, CAD, AAH), no duplication or confusion were reported. ECHO took great care to avoid simultaneous funding in the same sectors and the situation did not create any co-ordination problems, although it also prevented the evaluation from 'assessing the relative cost per item where these are channelled via UNHCR or directly through the same partners' (TOR point 2.3).

Co-ordination, however, needs not to be mixed up with direct programming of care and maintenance by UNHCR. The impact of some of the projects assessed (especially the 'continuation' ones in 2001 and the Temporary Community Shelters - TCS) would not have been adversely affected by a direct agreement with ECHO, and staff costs would have been considerably lower . The added value for ECHO was that its direct partners would not be left without support after the planned phasing out.

Zambia

Regular co-ordination meetings are usually held every two weeks in Lusaka, although UNHCR readily admitted that the current staff turnover had heavily disrupted this planning during the past six

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[9] Request by UNHCR Head of Donors Relations to ECHO 1 dated 22 June 1999

weeks. Meetings are generally appreciated, though reportedly sometimes 'lack creativity' and are not always effectively chaired. Co-ordination is indeed a difficult task.

In the RDC refugee camps, weekly co-ordination meetings are organised with the elected refugee leaders in each camp, followed by meetings with all implementing partners. Overall monthly meetings on care and maintenance are also organised at the Sub-Office of Kawambwa. Furthermore, co-ordination meetings are organised every 2-3 months between UNHCR, the refugee camp committees, and the provincial/ national authorities. However, to the exception of MSF, *the partners have only junior and mostly inexperienced local staff in the camps*. Refugees employed (against incentives) in a number of sectors such as Health, Water and Sanitation are generally far more knowledgeable. IFRC was not to be seen in Mwange, and CARE does not send its expatriates to the North. There is no local cost-control and no room for initiative by local staff, whose turnover is very high (CARE had six different project managers since 1999) due to appalling living conditions.

It appears that the local UNHCR is largely unable to improve the situation despite regular reports and complaints, and does not seem to have appropriate corrective tools –except negotiation. The above situation partly explains why cost-effectiveness indicators –supposed to be defined in common by Sub-Office and partners- have not been put in place.

UNHCR also stressed the fact that *co-ordination requires information flows from all parties*, and that there was still a recurrent lack of information in Zambia regarding projects and funding of various partners in some of the key sectors which they were supposed to co-ordinate. To date, only USAID has pledged to provide complete and regular information to UNHCR about every funding granted in Zambia. Such a measure seems to be fully relevant with Strategic Partnership.

Guinea

Overall co-ordination meetings are held at the UNHCR Sub Office on a weekly basis. These meetings usually follow weekly sectoral meetings, also co-ordinated by UNHCR technical sector specialists (when they are available). In the six camps where approx. 71.500 refugees are already living, inter-agency co-ordination meetings take place up to 3 times per week. These are co-ordinated by the Field Officer. The issues discussed are often of a very practical nature. *It is clear that, to the exception of UNHCR, no other organisation has the capacity, expertise or mandate to take on such a co-ordination role. This role is accepted by all NGO partners in the camps.*

A key element of the UNHCR co-ordination strategy is the introduction of an organisational structure in each camp whereby one of the implementing partners takes on the role of camp management. Whilst the camp management has defined responsibilities to take decisions related to the day to day running of the camp, it is not clear whether the camp management staff have the authority to carry out such decisions. In many cases, it appears that the camp management simply refers the issue to the UNHCR field staff. They are often by-passed by other partners, who raise issues directly with UNHCR. This can be an inefficient use of resources. One reason for this is that *the staff designated by the partner to take on the camp management role are not of sufficient seniority, experience and quality to be able to take decisions* – the senior staff being based at 60 or 90 Km in Kissidougou.

UNHCR is currently working with 23 partner organisations in the refugee camps. All of these receive direct or co-funded UNHCR support for their activities. In some of the camps, up to 14 different NGOs are currently working. Alongside programme costs, each partner organisation has 'administrative/support' costs, which are supported by UNHCR. Such a large number of partners clearly increases the administrative costs of the programme. The plan of UNHCR to reduce (a) the number of implementing partners by grouping sectors of activities together and (b) to replace, where possible, international NGOs by less costly, local ones, makes sense from the perspective of reducing overhead costs. However, it is not clear to the evaluators whether UNHCR themselves will be able to reduce their overhead costs and how they plan to do so, or how the proposals to group partners/use more local NGOs, will impinge on the programmes capacity to effectively achieve its

objectives. *No capacity analysis of local NGO implementing partners has been undertaken by UNHCR and it is not clear to the evaluators on what basis specific local NGOs have been selected as counterparts.* It will not come as a surprise to learn that the International NGOs have strong reservations about both the groupings strategy and the capacity of local NGOs as implementing partners. *Any initial budgetary savings from this strategy might be offset by inefficient and ineffective programme delivery.*

The situation in respect of the estimated 35.000 refugees currently located in the Languette[10] area is markedly different. UNHCR is not present in this region since there is a Phase 4 security rating still in operation. A number of (ECHO-funded) NGOs have returned to work in the Languette, and although there is some programme co-ordination by WFP and the CIO (Comité Inter-ONG), there is no strategic co-ordination by UNHCR. A major effect of this lack of involvement / co-ordination by UNHCR is that no protection activities are taking place in this area and that food security and health activities of NGOs are undertaken on an 'ad hoc' as opposed to systematic basis.

The Problem of the Lack of Confidence

Without exception, all the NGO implementing partners, with whom the evaluation mission spoke, were critical of the co-ordination role of UNHCR. They stressed the need for UNHCR to undertake the co-ordination role, though it lacked the expertise and resources to do so. Central to their criticisms were the following:

- lack of consultation and dialogue regarding both policy and operating issues.
- Competence and attitude of certain key UNHCR staff.
- Delays in programming and contractual decisions, which affect implementing partners.
- Rapid turnover of UNHCR staff.
- The issue of capacity and transparency of selection of local NGO partners of UNHCR.
- *UNHCR discrimination against NGOs which are not their direct implementing partners ('You are not a partner'), even though these NGOs are fully willing to co-operate and to co-ordinate.*
- Lack of co-ordination between UNHCR Branch Office and Sub Office, or even between various departments in the Sub Office.
- The fact that UNHCR was too close to the Guinean authorities, particularly in relation to security issues and to the government policy towards the Languette region, which effectively meant that UNHCR had temporarily 'traded off ' / relinquished their protection mandate.

UNHCR for its part spoke of difficulties with specific NGOs (supported directly by ECHO) who had their own agendas, were setting up their own co-ordinating structure and were undermining the co-ordinating role of the UNHCR; of the need to work with local NGOs and provide capacity building support where necessary. They evoked the need to improve the cost-effectiveness of their operation and the problem of the security rating of the Languette. UNHCR outlined that additional staff are to be recruited and that this would increase the co-ordination capacity.

This lack of confidence is further aggravated by the very difficult and insecure working environment in which both UNHCR and its partners have to operate. The tensions are projected onto the only available authority figure – UNHCR, who for its part would tend to become defensive, use power play through controlling funds, move closer to local authorities, incorporate the less critical local NGOs, etc. A *vicious circle* operates in which everything is interpreted within a climate of distrust and suspicion, which constantly reproduces itself. The significance of issues becomes out of proportion and *important issues such as security becomes blurred* as equal weighting is given to everything that is associated with the UNHCR – NGO relationship.

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[10] An tongue-shaped area of approx. 40 Km long by 20 Km wide to the West of Guéckédou, also called the 'Parrot's Beak'. This region is bordered on three sides by Sierra Leone and very close to Liberia.

There is clearly a need for a restoration of trust and confidence building in the relationship between UNHCR and the NGOs. International NGOs have a key role to play since crisis management needs international experience, and key security issues need to be re-assessed. The comparative advantage of local NGOs lies in the provision of basic care and maintenance services when the 'crisis' is over. A strategy to strengthen the co-ordination capacity of UNHCR needs to be identified and implemented. External support is likely to be required to develop and implement such a strategy. One option would be to appoint a NGO Liaison Officer. ECHO should consider supporting such a programme

Undermining of Co-ordination

Field co-ordination is a crucial element of success to any operation. To the opinion of the evaluators, ECHO needs to be fully aware of the fact that some of its key direct partners might be increasingly likely to enter into field conflicts with UNHCR co-ordination authority. Whereas such partners would obviously be aiming at optimum efficiency and effectiveness, their specific strategy or agenda might sometimes (Guinea, Zambia) lead them to take also very strong positions, distinct from other co-ordination framework actors in the face of political constraints. They might not hesitate to seek confrontation with un-cooperative local authorities -or with UNHCR if they estimate that the agency is not up to its task.

This situation can sometimes become detrimental to co-ordination and can undermine UNHCR authority as a co-ordinating body. More importantly, it can become detrimental to field security. ECHO should therefore take measures and set up arbitration mechanisms to support the co-ordination authority of UNHCR, such as:

- *To ensure that the co-ordinating structure is provided with complete and transparent information regarding all ECHO funding to every partner working on the concerned 'caseload'.*
- *A pre-requisite for ECHO direct partners to sign an MoU with UNHCR regarding co-ordination.*
- *In the field of security, ECHO should systematically promote codes of conduct for partners, as well as joint security training for all ECHO and partner staff working in Phase 3 & 4 risk areas. According to UNHCR, this seems to have happened in one instance only up to now.*
- *Possibly, to suggest to some ECHO direct partners to seek a 'critical / minimum mass' of funding from UNHCR (20 % ?).*

B.3.5.   Co-ordination with National Counterparts

In all the countries covered by the evaluation (Kosovo being an 'entity' under UN administration), *the UNHCR was obliged to work with considerably under-resourced national counterparts*, which strongly limits effectiveness of activities. This pattern outlines the facts that (i) refugees are usually not a priority in national policies, and (ii) significant capacity building efforts are needed *–to which the EC could better contribute-* to ensure longer-term durable solutions.

Serbia

During the Milosevic era, Agencies with an international mandate such as UNHCR benefited from appropriate diplomatic recognition, and were granted proper registration and importation licence, contrary to NGOs (which are still lacking proper status today).

Although relations with the SCR (Serbian Commissariat for Refugees) have considerably improved since October 2000, this organisation has undergone a protracted period of internal transition -which is still far from completed. The SCR was left without a Head between October 2000 and the beginning of March 2001, when a new Commissioner was finally nominated. At lower levels, most of the old staff is still in place, and the SCR repeatedly stated its lack of resources to manage almost 400

widely spread and very eclectic collective centres (with only 46 staff and a network of 'trustees' in every municipality). Levels of management and control were described to the evaluation by the SCR themselves as 'chaotic'. *The SCR was therefore obviously not in a position to deliver the transparency and accountability expected by ECHO in the contract for accommodation in collective centres. This matter does not seem to have been adequately clarified by UNHCR at project appraisal level.* The SCR is planning a number of important reforms, the first one being an appropriate legal mandate.

Zambia

The national counterpart of UNHCR is the Office of the Zambian Commissioner for Refugees (ZCR), which depends from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The ZCR is operating with very limited resources: the activities of the Commissioner himself, 6 Government Officers and 20 project staff have been allocated a budget of 40 million Kwatchas only (approx. 12.000 Euro) in 2001. The 27 staff are expected to monitor all three categories of refugees in Zambia, for an estimated total of more than *280.000* people. There is a considerable need for additional capacity building, and the ZCR is supported by the UNHCR with training and some office equipment. Some vehicles were also provided and are obviously much needed: the ZCR is currently setting up sub-offices in the remote refugee camps (where there is still no telephone line) in view of the upcoming registration exercise. The ZCR staff working on this key project (1 National Registration Officer with 1 assistant based in Lusaka, and 4 registration assistants assigned to the major camps) seem committed and efficient, and co-operation with UNHCR in this field seems excellent. Considering the very restricted scale of ZCR, the present level of monitoring by UNHCR seems appropriate and effective.

Guinea

The main national counterpart of UNHCR is the BNCR (Bureau National de Coordination pour les Réfugiés), a government body which is jointly responsible to the following administrations: Ministries of the Interior, of Social Affairs, Defence, Security, and Foreign Affairs.
The BNCR is structurally very weak: they have a central office in Conakry (the director and 3 assistants), and three regional offices (BCRs) in Kissidougou, Dabola and Nzérékoré (1 co-ordinator and 2 assistants each). Each office has received some equipment from UNHCR (car, radios, etc..), but their operational and budget-control capacity is still very limited. None of the partners could provide practical illustration of their utility. Regarding security matters, UNHCR similarly complained that the BCR does not act as it should as interface with the local authorities. With these very limited resources, BNCR has also to deal with an estimated 300.000 IDPs.

The BNCR furthermore includes since mid-1999 the 'Comité d'éligibilité' (Eligibility Committee) for the refugees (3 lawyers), and a 'Comité d'appel' (3 magistrates, not yet in place). These are the only official structures in charge of deciding about the status of an estimated 190.000 refugees, which is obviously inadequate. During the last 6 months, UNHCR protection statistics show that 310 positive decisions have been granted by the Committee (*i.e.* an average of 50 cases per month), while 20 applications were rejected and 1.215 cases are still pending. The BNCR stated that 'budgetary constraints do not allow for more', although UNHCR Protection department has plans to fill up the Committee to at least 20 fully trained members in a first stage. The BNCR reportedly agreed with UNHCR to grant refugee status to all of the 58.000 people already registered in the camps, on the basis of 'prima facie', although this was denied by the BNCR during a meeting with the evaluation.
It should be noted that OCHA has another national counterpart, the 'Service National d'Action Humanitaire' (SNAH). The SNAH was recently created (1,5 year ago) by presidential decree, reportedly to provide an overall co-ordination of humanitarian aid as opposed to the mandate of the BNCR which is limited to the refugees. However, SNAH has even less resources than BNCR, although it benefits from some institutional support from UNICEF.

To all of the partners met by the evaluation, the UNHCR is definitely not in a strong negotiating position with the Guinean authorities and is heavily criticised for accepting too easily their agenda. External support, including by strategic partnership, must be considered.

The considerable amount of lessons learned which must have been collected by UNHCR in the field of relations with local authorities and institutional counterparts should be put to optimum effect in specific guidelines.

B.4. USE OF ECHO FUNDS BY UNHCR

B.4.1. Background of Relations and Regional Issues

Serbia

Until the overthrow of the Milosevic regime in Octobre 2000, UNHCR and ECHO have had little alternative but to conduct parallel activities of care and maintenance in favour of an estimated 500.000 refugees from Bosnia and Croatia, without perspectives of transparency, durable solutions or LRRD (Linking Relief to Rehabilitation and Development). To these already huge figures were added 187.000 IDPs from Kosovo in 1999. The situation changed dramatically after the victory of the democratic parties in Serbia. Sanctions were immediately lifted, and the international community engaged in a massive plan for economic recovery. Humanitarian actors could at last start looking forward to normalisation of relations with neighbouring countries, a prerequisite for repatriation and resettlement. Transparency and accountability could also finally be targeted, reliable registrations carried out, and a gradual phasing out of their activities contemplated.

However, the sudden appearance of democracy did not *ipso facto* lead to the solution of humanitarian problems, far from that. The situation in the Southern Balkans is still unstable, and Croatia reluctant to open its borders to returnees. Furthermore, the expected LRRD of ECHO programmes with the EAR (European Agency for Reconstruction) has yet to materialise. The EAR initial programme focused on non-social sectors, though national economy and social services continued to deteriorate, increasing the numbers of vulnerable individuals reliant on international protection and relief. According to the UNHCR sub office in Kragujevac, the local rate of unemployment has reached 82%, against an average of 32-33% in the country. Many refugees and IDPs who are living in private accommodations have difficulties to pay their rents, and growing numbers are trying to find places in those collective centres that humanitarian aid is planning to close down.

Kosovo

Among the recent humanitarian crises, the level of co-operation achieved in Kosovo between ECHO and UNHCR can globally be described as a 'success story'. A number of reasons, which apparently combined skill but also luck were found by the evaluation:

- As from the beginning of the 1999 war and throughout the crisis, *the quality of the staff* was optimum. Independently from funded amounts, a programme can only be as good as the staff who implements it, and some of their best staff were committed to Kosovo by all major humanitarian organisations. This was also true for the EAR.
- An excellent *overall co-ordination* of humanitarian aid was achieved by UNMIK Pillar I, which also initiated in June 2000 a timely LRRD process with comprehensive UNMIK longer-term

programmes in the fields of general public services, social welfare, police and justice, reconstruction, etc., despite still considerable problems which require transitional support.

- The capacity for *self-reliance of the population* cannot be underestimated. The Kosovars had been trained to face dramatic situations for years and had fortunately developed the necessary skills, which were also based on a much more ancient way of living and of hoarding some resources. The fact that during the very harsh winter 1999-2000, not a single Kosovar seems to have died from lack of food, shelter or emergency health support, is probably as much due to the skill and dedication of the humanitarian actors as to the local resourcefulness.

- An unpredictable but essentially favourable timetable has simultaneously defied attempts at careful planning but has also considerably helped the overall process. The short war precluded any major ground offensive which would have caused considerably more destruction. The final overthrow of the Milosevic regime in October 2000 can only have a favourable impact on the discussions regarding the future status of Kosovo (under UN administration until June 2002).

Zambia

Zambia is widely perceived as an oasis of stability in the heart of troubled Central Africa, which deserves to be protected and preserved by donors. Many of the eight neighbours of this reasonably prosperous country have been, still are –or might be- falling into devastating crises.

A peace process led by President Chiluba of Zambia resulted in the signing of the Lusaka peace accords in 1999 between all parties involved in the RDC conflict. The country has also been a long-standing and generous host area for increasingly large numbers of refugees, now totalling approximately 280.000. UNHCR has been present in Zambia since 1964, to take care of the first large influx of 70.000 Angolan refugees.

In 1999, new outflows of refugees arrived in Zambia from Angola (15.000) and from South Kivu and Katanga in RDC. As a result, ECHO decided to support UNHCR activities in 1999 and in 2000 with two Funding Decisions of 1,5 million Euro each, specially dedicated to RDC refugees in Zambia. The new Angolan refugees were supported to a more limited extent (400.000 Euro) through the Decision 2000/06000, which also covered Namibia.

Creeping crises were prevailing in both Angola and RDC throughout 2001. Sporadic fighting continued in the South-Eastern corner of RDC, fuelled by a dire shortage of food (confirmed by WFP in RDC), which encourages looting. Significant movements of refugees towards the Zambian border have also been reported since July, which were translated by an increasing rate of new arrivals in the camp of Kala. The very poor nutritional situation combined with creeping insecurity in Katanga is expected to discourage refugees to return to their homes at least in the medium term.

Irregular numbers of Angolan refugees were also reported to cross the border every month, pushed by a new pending (or creeping) crisis.

Guinea

The UNHCR has ensured a continuous presence in Guinea since the early 1990s, to take care of a first wave of refugees from Sierra Leone (the 'old caseload', approx. 100.000 strong). These refugees were joined between March and August 1998 by a new caseload of approx. 210.000 people, who were seeking protection from the violent retreat of rebel elements (AFRC/RUF). Most of these refugees were settled along the border, and were especially concentrated in the 'Languette' area Despite earlier border clashes in 1999, the 'rebel' attacks of September 2000 caught the aid workers by surprise. The UNHCR in particular had been obviously unprepared and evacuated 'hastily' (see Chapter on Security below). During three months, UNHCR operated with limited personnel, and less accessible areas were not covered.

New violent attacks occurred on 06 December 2000 around the Languette and threw a massive outflow of refugees on the roads in panic. UNHCR subsequently declared that the agency was not in a position any more to perform its assigned mandate in southern Guinea, for security reasons. A strong reaction of donors to that statement led to an immediate combined action plan led by UNDP. Emergency Teams were mobilised during Christmas period and became fully operational in the field as from 04 January 2001, with remarkable efficiency.

Until September 2000, the hospitality of the Guinean authorities towards the refugees had been extremely generous. However, the lack of good governance gradually became a major constraint for the international assistance to the country. Refugees were assimilated to rebels in official speeches, and were designated as scapegoats for most of the country woes. Worse, NGOs and agencies helping the refugees –including UNHCR- were accused of 'supporting the rebels' and of 'spying'. The UNHCR strongly protested on the occasion, though it is still generally criticised for 'co-ordinating too well' with authorities.

B.4.2.   Protection & Human Rights

The first of the two main functions entrusted to UNHCR by its founding Statute is the protection of refugees, the second one being to promote durable solutions to their problems (chap. B.10.1). The core mandate of protection originally covered a range of legal measures such as regularisation of status, access to employment, etc. In the face of events, however, the UNHCR rapidly took over the key function of co-ordinating material assistance to refugees, which was never formally added to its Statute. Increasingly protracted and complex situations further led to the direct involvement of the agency in a wider range of care and maintenance activities. The notion of protection gradually became all-encompassing and its limits blurred, which also became detrimental to effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. The present report will therefore define protection by its original legal objectives, sometimes extended to necessary physical protection.

A sensitive point for the protection mandate of UNHCR is the technical capacity of the agency to carry out registration exercises of refugees. The very poor methodology used in Guinea in 1998-99 (see below) was considerably upgraded by a hundred portable field registration kits donated by Microsoft during the 1999 Kosovo crisis. These kits are however gradually becoming outdated and non-compatible with existing systems.
UNHCR Operational Support services are therefore planning to set up the 'Project Profile', a global registration and population data management system and strategy. Profile is expected to have a major impact on efficiency and effectiveness, and is supposed to achieve significant savings for UNHCR and for WFP by *eg* avoiding double registrations and improving programming and operations costs. UNHCR is confident that cost-benefits should rapidly recover the considerable costs of Profile, roughly estimated at around 9 million US$ for the first three years -to which should be added some components such as the AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Information System).

Zambia

The deep concern expressed in January 2001 by some partners regarding 'the reservations of Zambia to the Geneva Convention' seems to have been properly addressed by UNHCR. The presence is being significantly reinforced by a regional Senior Protection Officer and by two additional Protection Officers who will soon be assigned to field duties in Northern and Western Zambia. The ZCR has also deployed field teams to the refugee camps.

In September 2000, following protracted discussions with the Zambian Government, the UNHCR Protection services were finally able to achieve significant progress against the restrictive policy

towards urban refugees and the reservations to article 26 of the 1951 Convention (freedom of movement). A law on refugees has been approved by the Cabinet and is being presented to the Parliament. Urban refugees (estimated at 15.000) and those already in the camps (approx. 135.000) will be jointly registered in complete co-operation between UNHCR and ZCR. The new Protection strategy aims at bridging a considerable gap –of which UNHCR is fully aware: no registration had ever been attempted for protection reasons on the 'old caseload' refugees, some of whom had been in Zambia for more than 30 years.

Protection, however, does not appear to be a high priority for the UNHCR Programming Department in Lusaka, which is still understaffed and much more preoccupied with the care and maintenance situation in the camps. The issue of the new registration exercise has not been raised in recent discussions with ECHO, and the budget of Protection activities – the core UNHCR mandate- apparently amounts to only 4% of the Zambian country budget for 2001. In comparison, 'care and maintenance' activities amount to 50% of the total country budget, and transport/logistics to a further 28%. 'Operational support', i.e. the cost of supporting administration to implementing partners projects by the Branch- and the Sub Offices, amounts to 18% of the country budget.

Guinea

Although the largest caseload of Sierra Leonean refugees had arrived in Guinea in mid-1998 (UNHCR had been present in the country since the early 1990s), basic measures to ensure the application of core protection mandate to these refugees were only carried out with effectiveness in 2001, under the pressure of events and of donors. Until the attacks of September 2000, a huge majority of the Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea (both old and new caseloads) were concentrated in villages and in approx. 60 camps in the Languette, most of them within 5 Km only of the border. After the second rebel attacks of December 2000, refugees were finally re-located to a safe distance from troubled border areas, and efficient methods of registration were used.

ECHO-funded registration exercises had been carried out in 1998 in the Guéckédou region and in 1999 in the smaller hosting area of Forecariah with very inappropriate methodology and equipment, which resulted in numerous duplications or in the registration of large numbers of Guinean citizens as refugees. At least 450.000 refugees (330.000 Sierra Leoneans, 120.000 Liberians) had been registered in Guinea in 1998 and 1999. The same figure was officially maintained in 2000 by UNHCR, although it was decided that only 200.000 refugees (190.000 Sierra Leoneans, 10.000 Liberians) with whom UNHCR had regular contact and who could be monitored, would receive material assistance. UNHCR admitted that they were unable to account for 160.000 Sierra Leonean refugees, and there is no explanation either as to the accuracy of the figure of 120.000 Liberian refugees. ECHO was one among several donors who expressed concern about this sudden drop in refugee numbers and stressed the need for transparency and accountability and for reliable and credible refugee figures in Guinea. The evaluation attempted a reconciliation (see table 3 of the Guinea country report) which produced the following figures: (i) 111.000 refugees registered in the camps, (ii) 60.000 returnees to Sierra Leone, (iii) an estimated 150-200.000 unaccounted /unregistered refugees in various cities and villages, including those still in the Languette and (iv) approx. 100.000 double or false registrations in 1998-99, which have now disappeared. ECHO reiterated its willingness to support UNHCR in conducting to provide a proper registration exercise.

New registration exercises were conducted in the camps in July 2001. Refugees were photographed and information was collected which can be used to provide a hard plastic, credit-card format ID whose design has already been agreed with the BNCR. They cards are bound to guarantee to the bearers the full protection of the 1951 and 1969 Conventions, including freedom of movement and right to work.

There is however some confusion on the part of the evaluators as to the current situation regarding the issuing of such cards. On the one hand, the BNCR director suggested that all refugees would have to be screened by the Committee of Eligibility before refugees status was confirmed – which would be an extremely lengthy process due the under-resourced nature of this committee, whilst UNHCR stated that all refugees over the age of 10 who had been registered would be automatically given the new ID card. Should the process become unduly protracted for various reasons, the security situation in the camps –already under close scrutiny by the police following recent violence- might deteriorate, and provoke a strong reaction from the Guinean authorities. Unfortunately, the evaluators were not able to cross-check this situation again with BNCR.

We recommend that ECHO monitor the situation since, according to UNHCR, all the procedures are in place (except 'negotiations' with BNCR regarding the tendering process) and the cards should be produced and distributed as soon as this last obstacle is overcome, hopefully within 2-3 months.

Another important protection issue in Guinea concerns the *remaining refugees in the Languette*. The UNHCR in Conakry and in Kissidougou repeatedly stressed that the Languette was not an 'area of concern' since those refugees who had remained there after the relocation of April-May 2001 had done so voluntarily. Refugees in the new camps and most NGOs question this position, stating that the time-frame and confusion involved in the re-location exercise, and the lack of accurate information about the new sites made it difficult for some 'old caseload' refugees to leave the Languette region. They had been settled there for more than 10 years, were used to insecurity, and were not prepared to travel 2.000 Km (through Conakry and Freetown) in unknown conditions to return to a village only 20 Km from their present location.

The figures collected by the evaluation from various implementing partners working in the area all seemed to agree on approx. 35.000 refugees in the Languette. Between 18 and 22.000 are still living in and around the old refugee camps, and approximately 10 to 15.000 are socially and economically 'integrated' in local villages, having often married Guinean citizens: the durable solution of official local integration would probably be an obvious choice for many of these people, although discussions on that subject have not yet started between UNHCR and the government.

Some of those living in the former camps have reportedly reconsidered their own exit strategies and would now wish to move to the new camps and be registered, although they seem to be 'blocked' in the area for various reasons (lack of money, suspected combatants, etc.). As a result of the Phase 4 security status, *UNHCR has been momentarily unable to ensure its protection mandate to refugees in the Languette region*, contrary to WFP and UNICEF. The protection department in Conakry confirmed its willingness to solve the issue, and a consultant has made an assessment mission. Options for a strategy include an information campaign, re-location of refugees to the new sites, repatriation, etc.

Information and advocacy in the camps, another key component of protection, has been praised by refugees and partners. A mass information campaign on repatriation is being conducted by the NGO 'Talking Drums'. Relations between new refugee camps and neighbouring villages have been qualified as 'cordial' in every case. This looks like a considerable achievement, considering that the living conditions of the local population are often lower than the SPHERE minimum standards applied in the camps. Numerous small-scale water and sanitation projects can be seen in the villages, mainly implemented by UNICEF. The UNHCR also did a commendable job of advocacy among the local population in Dabola, which had been opposed to the idea of a refugee camp in their midst.

International *Human Rights* watch organisations have regularly criticised the Guinean authorities, with reason. There is still no guaranteed freedom of movement or right to work. Refugees have been assimilated to 'rebels' in official speeches and are regularly harassed by police forces. The issue of Human Rights is also to be considered for those refugees who are currently trying to reach the UNHCR camps, and who are assimilated to combatants by the Guinean authorities. To the exception of children soldiers, UNHCR has been refused the opening of a special camp for them,

and the government has assumed full responsibility of the determination of their status and their treatment in the meantime, as it is entitled to do by the December 2000 guidelines.

Meanwhile, the UNHCR is essentially considering massive and rapid repatriation, which is also the preferred option of the Government of Guinea. Delays or problematic outcomes of elections would have harsh implications for the refugees in the camps, particularly if no progress had been made in respect of ID cards. It also appears that there is little probability of an early repatriation to Liberia for the 14.000 Liberian refugees in the camps around Nzérékore. Some would even consider a possible extension of the fighting between Liberian forces and ULIMO-K into Guinea itself.

B.4.3.   Political Advantage and Added Value

Serbia

- A key lesson learned from the Serbia case study is the role of *interface that UNHCR is mandated and able to play with national counterparts, in a difficult political situation*. The inability of ECHO to directly fund Government agencies –politically incorrect or not- with mandates for refugees such as the SCR (Serbian Commissariat for Refugees) under the Milosevic regime, illustrates the added - value of UNHCR as both a *'bridge' and 'buffer'* between ECHO and Government structures with humanitarian co-ordination mandates**.** A subsequent –though also crucial- issue is the limit of such an ability: transparency and accountability of the use of ECHO funds are at best problematic, and can be very difficult to streamline when the situation finally improves.
- Implementing partners working under the UNHCR programming and co-ordination umbrella were the only NGOs able to *import humanitarian goods* (such as fuel) during the Milosevic era, by using the UNHCR licence. They were also using UNHCR tendering procedures, which are easier to handle than ECHO's.
- Another comparative advantage of the co-ordination/direct programming of UNHCR in Serbia was the ability to *utilise value-added non-EU* (e.g. Japanese) *and local NGOs*. In community services and psycho-social sectors, the insistence by UNHCR to incorporate the mobile centres/network approach, added value to the projects. The involvement of local NGOs further increased the efficiency of the projects since their operating costs are considerably lower than those of international agencies.

Kosovo

In this field, the Kosovo situation can also be considered as an example of good practice. The comparative advantage (added value) of the co-ordination role of UNHCR, which also ensured more consistency in terms of approach by the implementing NGOs, is important:
- Whenever there were security risks and access issues involved, the UNHCR co-ordination and (at the beginning at least) the programming umbrella enabled the implementing partners *to work under the UN protection mandate*, which provided essential access to ethnic minority enclaves (contacts with local authorities, Bus Shuttles) and to isolated persons-at-risk (Fresh Food).
- The status of UNHCR implementing partner has also considerably facilitated *access to some of the relevant UNMIK structures* (e.g. the NGO CAD became a member of the Working Group for the creation of the UNMIK Social Welfare system).
- The UNHCR was usually the only ECHO partner in Kosovo with the *readily available resources* (financial, staff) and network of local offices necessary to perform an effective country-wide co-ordination of various implementing NGOs (e.g. in the Food Transition or Comprehensive

Services programmes). Most ECHO partners would simply not have the sufficient capacity to absorb and co-ordinate funding from different donors.

Zambia

The situation –or rather the different situations- found by the evaluation in Zambia reflect the problems of the past, and the potential future improvements. The key comparative advantage of UNHCR is also clearly illustrated, even *a contrario* when the agency is not performing as it should: *no other organisation or agency could possibly replace UNHCR in its essential role of co-ordination of humanitarian activities in favour of refugees, and of co-ordination with responsible national counterparts.* This role deserves support and protection. In spite of almost unavoidable tensions created by difficult field conditions and by the fact that NGOs tend to develop short-term views and are not always aware of 'higher politics', every concerned actor is aware that it would only benefit from an optimum efficiency of UNHCR co-ordinating. It is not in anybody's interest to weaken or undermine UNHCR in this role.

A potential added-value of UNHCR programming must also be considered: *cost indicators need to be co-ordinated with local government policies* in the sectors concerned (e.g. health costs, sanitation protocols…). UNHCR is in the appropriate position to co-ordinate such elements through their national counterparts, possibly with the assistance of *cost assessment missions funded by ECHO* and carried out by specialised economists (see also B.4.5. below). C&M needs to be considered as a *dynamic process* heading towards durable solutions and/or LRRD. In such a process, the use of cost-effectiveness indicators already integrated into the national policies can be a strong element of facilitation.

B.4.4. Delivery Mechanisms & Management Systems

Programme Cycle

The usual UNHCR care and maintenance programme cycle is longer than the ECHO one and operates following different deadlines, which *ipso facto* constitutes a potential source of lack of coherence. The first draft of the 'Country Operational Plan' for the coming year is expected to be sent to Geneva by UNHCR field offices as early as the end of March. The draft is again reviewed mid-September at field level. The final project description is completed by the end of October, or even early November. The plan is then re-assessed at HQ level (considering *inter alia* budget constraints) and a decision is usually taken before mid-December with a view to start the project on 01 January ('Letter of Instruction'). The normal duration of a project is 12 months, though this can be shortened through specific sub-agreements. An extension of up to 1 or 2 months may exceptionally be granted. Ex-post audits are systematically conducted.

The ECHO mandate was originally intended for emergency humanitarian operations (disasters), hence the typical duration of six months only. The contract duration can nevertheless be adapted to circumstances: it was for example also of 12 months in Kosovo and Zambia for the contracts with UNHCR. For the same reason, ECHO Global Plans are usually prepared according to needs rather than to annual deadlines. Except in the case of emergencies, the time needed to sign a Decision by the Commission can take as long as 2-3 months, to which must be added up to 2-3 months also for contract signature. The signature of contracts with UNHCR can prove to be particularly lengthy, although eligibility of expenditures can sometimes be granted with flexibility (Bus Shuttles).

However, when situations/crises become protracted (which is often the case), humanitarian aid generally becomes very much a seasonal, predictable activity, and the objectives/time constraints appear to be essentially the same for both organisations. ECHO would ideally need to start working on its Global Plans for winterisation in July/August (allowing for 2-3 months for the Decision, and

2-3 months for the contract preparation). Global Plans for spring/summer (shelter, agricultural inputs) need similarly to be prepared by November-December.

Timely exchange of information between ECHO and UNHCR about plans or decisions would reinforce the coherence of approaches. For example, should the relevant information from ECHO not be available to UNHCR field office by the end of October /early November latest, HQ in Geneva are bound to make a final decision regarding annual country budget without that knowledge. Current UNHCR management systems -especially financial ones- appear to have strong constraints and seem unable to modify the said budget at any later stage (except downwards, if expected contributions do not materialise). The only exception are emergency procedures, which are quite specific and distinct.

In 'care and maintenance' or protracted situations, improved coherence therefore appears possible and desirable although ECHO does not usually have precise indications about its upcoming budget before the beginning of the year itself. Indications about intended funding could nevertheless be provided (pending the adoption of ECHO's budget) at two levels: (i) in the field before the end of October, and (ii) at HQ level during the UNHCR ExCom meeting.

Unified Budget

The new OMS (Operations Management System) reporting format and the 'Unified Budget' have recently been introduced by UNHCR. The OMS is designed to assess the *impact* of a programme: in every sector or activity, objectives, planned achievements and measurable performance indicators are outlined in a log frame inspired format. The format was designed in 1998 on the basis of extensive comparisons made with log frames already used by various agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, DFID, GTZ, CARE…), and was first applied in late 1999. OMS tables have now been included throughout the management system, from the 'Letters of Instruction' sent by Geneva to the Branch Offices to the sub-agreements with the partners. The OMS is therefore bound to provide valuable information regarding the performance and quality of UNHCR programmes, and appears to be a significant improvement in the management capacity of the agency.

However, the very ambitious planned streamlining of financial and management structures, which was contemplating a complete system renewal had to be postponed by UNHCR. The financial management capacity of the system to track earmarked funds stops at the 'caseload/project' level (which is consistent with a multi-sector annual programme for ECHO) and *cannot electronically track selective funding to smaller-scale sectors or activities.* The outdated FMIS (Financial Management and Information System) has not been replaced, and a number of linkages need to be done manually, by cross-references.

Unified Budget and OMS frames have also only been used for the first time in the year 2000, and still need some further testing before their actual performance can be fully assessed. To the opinion of the evaluators, there are furthermore some open questions, such as:

- The actual usefulness of the system depends essentially on the quality of the performance indicators introduced in the system. Such indicators are often bound to be designed at the field level, by Sub Offices and implementing partners. Much depends therefore from the quality, training and experience of field staff.
- It is not yet completely clear how the qualitative assessment of OMS reporting will be reflected and used at the global reporting level in Geneva.
- It is not yet clear either how the possible shortcomings detected by OMS will effectively be addressed and corrected.
- Cost-effectiveness indicators and assessment can only be achieved by reconciling one by one distinct budget information from FMIS and performance indicators from OMS, which also requires training and experience, and time.

Cost-Effectiveness

A recent DFID evaluation on UNHCR[11] noted (§ 32) that "while UNHCR sought value for money in provision of assistance, it did not have any formal systems in place at the field level to assess cost-effectiveness and value for money in service delivery". *UNHCR guidelines are indeed cautious in that respect. When they are made more specific, shortages of staff, inadequate management systems and weak partners would combine to further complicate the exercise.*

The 'Programme Management Handbook for UNHCR's Partners' pays due attention to the issue of cost-effectiveness[12]. Calculation of a budget must incorporate factors "such as number of units required and population figures to establish budgetary amounts at the Item/Sub-Item level"[13]. The Handbook further specifies that the "objective must be quantifiable, through the establishment of key activities, a timeframe and specific indicators which will measure performance against the previously agreed plan". Performance indicators are subsequently described according to nine different criteria, though it is commented that "Few indicators can, in reality, fulfil all these criteria (...) Not all elements of a project…will allow simple and/or quantitative measurement by indicators (…) Rather than trying to translate a complex concept into a restrictive indicator, a descriptive statement might be used…"[14] .

Considering the limitations of the current UNHCR management and reporting 'Unified Budget/ OMS' system, the calculation of a budget and even more of supporting cost-effectiveness indicators for care and maintenance requires considerable skill and experience from the Programming Officers. The next budget for a given sector or activity is therefore likely to be established on the basis of :
- Personal expertise and understanding of the needs, and the budget used for the previous year;
- Reports from UNHCR field staff (technical co-ordinators and assistants), when there is no shortage of such staff.
- Reports from implementing partners (when their field staff has the necessary technical and budget training, and local control) and from beneficiaries' representatives themselves.
- Expected budget contributions (or cuts) announced by donors to HQ (especially during the ExCom meeting in October), as compared to the funds available for the previous year.
- Expected co-funding from implementing partners themselves.
- A limited supply of cost-effectiveness indicators to be found in the Appendix A of the Handbook, *e.g.* drug kits (§ F.29.14, see also below), food and cooking fuel (§ A.96.15), vehicle maintenance (§ B.29.16), income-generating activities (§.23.15), etc.

Flexibility

A key concern for UNHCR is also that impact requires flexibility, and cost-indicators may not be allowed to become detrimental to flexibility. UNHCR would furthermore always be bound to be more impact-oriented (being an agency) than cost-oriented (not being a donor). According to UNHCR, the 'input-oriented' ECHO has regularly demonstrated a lack of flexibility, which makes UNHCR reluctant to be potentially 'trapped' by indicators. An example could be found in Zambia (see below chap. B.9.1). Such a practice tends to create confusion, and sometimes makes reporting to ECHO extremely difficult. As a comparison, it is worth mentioning that the flexibility allowed by Geneva to UNHCR country and sub offices has been considerably increased in recent years, for the sake of impact. The budget of items within a specific 'project' or 'caseload' can now be modified at will (amendments were previously limited to 10 % and then 15% of budget items), provided that:

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[11] UNHCR – Interim Strategy Paper, July 2000

[12] Section 3.3.3.1: 'the setting of objectives in any UNHCR assistance programme is a crucial step in ensuring that the assistance provided is appropriate, timely and cost effective'.

[13] Section 2.1.5.5

[14] Section 3.3.4.

- The budget modification does not 'empty the overall objective of the sector'.
- The budget is not increased.
- The budget is not reduced by more than 100.000 US$.
- The budget is not transferred to another caseload (e.g. funds could not be moved from Angolan to DRC refugees).

Current rules and expectations appear to be too dissimilar for compatibility (see also chapter B.9.1). This points out to the need to adapt the FPA. Indeed, if UNHCR wants to follow its own flexibility procedures, it seems bound to conflict with ECHO detailed requirements. Should ECHO decide to fund a (relatively) minor share of a multi-sector annual programme (or 'project' for UNHCR), it might be advisable to accept and apply the same level of flexibility as the agency. Such a 'project' corresponds to the total aid package in favour of a distinct refugee caseload, and to a 'Letter of Instruction' (ex. the Letter ref LS/402 concerns the RDC refugee caseload in the camps of Mwange and Kala). It must be understood that the present 'Unified Budget' of UNHCR can electronically select and follow expenditure at the sub-item level, but is unfortunately not capable to link this, electronically, to the earmarking of funds, i.e. on a smaller scale than the 'project'. To do so, UNHCR staff must proceed manually, which is understandably time-consuming. The Unified Budget is already itself the result of a significant improvement, which had been expected in the DFID evaluation report[15] The global changes also mentioned in the report however, have been put on hold since they were perceived as 'too ambitious' for the available resources. An alternative option for ECHO, should there be a need to focus with better transparency and accountability on a specific sector or activity (e.g. in the perspective of LRRD), would be to fund majority shares of such an activity, or better –the complete corresponding sub-agreement.

B.4.5. Cost Indicators

The TOR of the evaluation (point 2.3) were referring specifically to the assessment of 'the relative cost per item of delivering humanitarian aid where some is channelled via UNHCR and some directly through the *same* implementing partners'. Among the four country studies, no such case could be found. Where the same partners were simultaneously funded through UNHCR and by ECHO directly, both organisations took care to avoid using them in the same sector of activity, which would have been a recipe for confusion. The TOR also focused on the 'relative speed with which aid reaches the final beneficiaries'. The evaluation could find no example where the aid had not been delivered with all necessary and possible speed.

Cost-Efficiency

Cost-efficiency can be described as the cost of the organisation (*i.e.* of overheads) needed -or at least used- to implement an activity, as compared -whenever possible- to the number of beneficiaries concerned. As stated below, there is at this stage in the humanitarian sphere, a general lack of indicators to compare validly cost-benefits, including cost-efficiency, especially in post-emergency / care and maintenance phases(during emergency overheads are usually higher and the focus must be on human life). It must also be pointed out that, whereas cost-efficiency is a relatively clear-cut issue for NGOs, it usually is much more complex for large organisations or agencies, especially those that have an international mandate to protect and whose efficiency is obviously constrained by their own institutional requirements.

Cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness can be described as the grand total of budget or expenditures (including direct inputs for beneficiaries as well as overheads) needed to implement an activity, as compared -

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[15] §3.15 "By unifying the budget and linking expenditures to results and indicators of performance, UNHCR should be in a position to increase transparency and accountability which will improve donor confidence".

whenever possible- to the number of beneficiaries concerned. However, cost-effectiveness is not only a matter of dividing the budget by the number of beneficiaries. It is above all a question of comparing the figures obtained with other similar projects or indicators -which are either not properly disseminated or are entirely absent in humanitarian (care and maintenance) activities. *There is actually a need for a whole culture of cost-effectiveness in humanitarian assistance.*

Cost-effectiveness must be taken with flexibility: "the decision about…the level of detail (in a budget structure) is made by *the UNHCR Field Office and the implementing partner*". However, lessons must be learned and the system gradually improved: "…there is an expectation that budgets will become more precise and more detailed over the life of a project"[16].

Serbia

Considering the lack of available data when a comparison could theoretically be possible with similar projects implemented by other partners, the assessment of either cost/efficiency or cost/effectiveness of UNHCR activities was very difficult. The lack of information on the share of the overall sub-agreement budget funded by ECHO constitutes another major constraint, which points out to the funding of complete sub-agreements by ECHO, for the sake of transparency and accountability. The considerable potential usefulness of the new database which is being set up by ECHO Pristina is also thereby demonstrated. On the basis of the information available, cost-effectiveness figures for Serbia are nonetheless as follows:

table 2

Project	Budget	N° of beneficiaries	Cost-effectiveness
1999/07117 (registration)	400.000 Euro	187.129	2,14 Euro
2000/21053 (registration)	700.000 Euro	377.131 (?)	1,85 Euro
2000/21040 (heating fuel)	3.396.573 Euro	32.986	103 Euro[17]

The significant decrease in ECHO funding to UNHCR in 2001 partially reflects the lack of confidence created by the problems of accountability and transparency in the 'accommodation in collective centres' project subcontracted to the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees.

Kosovo

Considering the specific requirements of some of the Kosovo projects which could hardly be found anywhere else (door-to-door distribution of fresh food to isolated persons-at-risk), and also the lack of available data when this comparison could theoretically be possible with similar projects implemented by other partners (TCS, Temporary Community Shelters), the assessment of either cost/efficiency or cost/effectiveness of UNHCR activities was also very difficult.

A tentative cost-effectiveness comparison could be attempted between the TCS project in Kosovo (34 Euro/beneficiary/month) and the 'collective centres accommodation' programme in Serbia (34,5 Euro/beneficiary/month). The usefulness of the comparison is however very limited, since both activities were funded through UNHCR only. Although the scale, efficiency and effectiveness were vastly different, the costs are therefore almost comparable.

Zambia

Based on the figures that the evaluation was able to collect, a *very tentative* comparison of cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness was attempted between multi-sector projects funded either through UNHCR or directly by ECHO in the Northern camps. The validity of such a comparison is per force limited by the fact that both UNHCR and MSF probably had additional funding sources

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[16] Section 3.4.4.
[17] UNHCR figures.

beyond ECHO. It must also be emphasised that the UNHCR annual 2001 project was focused on *care and maintenance* activities in Mwange, in which sustainability and operation costs were important factors, whereas the MSF six-months intervention (Sep. 2000 – Mar. 2001) was targeting an *emergency* setting up of the refugee camp of Kala. Emergency rules (saving lives) are different, and costs are usually considerably higher.

This also points out to another key issue for ECHO: the need to use the adequate type of direct partner, since MSF – the only partner available in this case- is indeed heavily specialised in emergencies and cannot easily adapt its procedures to cost-effective care and maintenance. The comparison below is therefore favourable to UNHCR.

Table 3

	UNHCR/ RDC caseload[18]	**MSF(H)/ Kala[19]**
Total contract value, duration	3.215.000 Euro (not funded by ECHO), 12 months	360.000 Euro, 6 months
N° of beneficiaries	41.430 (in project description)	10.000 (at the time of proposal)
Amount & % of direct aid inputs	739.000 Euro 23 %	90.000 Euro 25 %
Amount & % of transport/logistics costs	1.029.000 Euro 32 %	36.000 Euro 10 %
Amount & % of staff and admin. Costs	370.000 Euro (UNHCR operational support) 11,5 %	205.200 Euro 57 %
Amount & % of other overhead/indirect costs	1.077.000 Euro (estimated[20] IP staff and overhead costs in sub-agreements) 33,5 %	32.400 Euro 9 %
Cost-efficiency ratio (on annual basis)	59,76 Euro/benef/year (w/transport) **34,93 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**	54,72 Euro/benef/year (w/transport) **47,52 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**
Cost-effectiveness ratio (on annual basis)	77,6 Euro/benef/year (w/transport) **52,76 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**	72 Euro/benef/year (w/transport) **64,8 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**

Remark: the exchange rate is calculated at 1,1 Euro for 1 US$.

Transport and logistics costs are also considered separately in some sections of the table above, since they are (1) not easily comparable, (2) very high and (3) partly relevant to both overheads and direct assistance to beneficiaries. Finally, both UNHCR and MSF have other funding sources than ECHO; the figures below do therefore not necessarily reflect the actual cost-effectiveness.

The study made in Zambia confirm that most of the agreed indicators used for humanitarian assistance mainly concern the *qualitative* impact and the level of success of an activity. It was also noted by the evaluation that the indications in the FMIS tables were sometimes either duplicated or lacking clarity (some of the 'measurable' indicators do not have attached measurement keys): there is obviously a need for additional training in their use. Considerable and confusing differences in unit costs and presentation between caseloads/camps/implementing partners point out to a lack of comparison capacity of the outdated FMIS system and also more simply to a lack of cost-effectiveness policy within UNHCR.

Coherent cost-effectiveness indicators would not only strengthen the care and maintenance process, but would also allow a more accurate budget preparation of upcoming operations, as well as reinforce the confidence of donors in the capacity of the agencies to effectively manage their activities. There would however be a clear need for specialised economists or technicians –such as e.g. health economist- to perform very short-term identification missions.

Guinea

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[18] UNHCR project 01/AB/ZAM/LS/402

[19] Contract ECHO/ZMB/254/2000/01001

[20] Tentative calculation made on the basis of 3 multi-sector sub-agreements signed in 2001 with various UNHCR implementing partners for care and maintenance in Zambia (not ECHO funded): the average of 'agency operational support' costs reached 38% of the total.

The table 4 below provides a tentative comparison of cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness indicators of the DPS project with direct partners contracts ECHO/TPS/210/2001/08001 (MSF/B) and ECHO/TPS/210/2001/08009 (MdM). Contrary to the more 'normal' circumstances of Zambia (above), it appeared *in the very poor working environment of Guinea that MSF and MdM, both much more emergency- than care & maintenance-oriented, were still both more cost-effective and more reliable than the local implementing partner favoured at the time by UNHCR.*

Table 4

	UNHCR/DPS	MSF	MdM
Total contract value, duration	385.000 Euro (out of which 180.946 funded by ECHO), 12 months	1.100.000 Euro (out of which 210.689 for health/ rehab.), 10 months	450.000 Euro (out of which 98.192 for health/ rehab.), 6 months
N° of beneficiaries	294.000 (initially) 85.400 (estim. Eval)	160.000 (proposal)	210.100 (interim report)
Amount & % of direct aid inputs	177.100 Euro 46 %	210.689 Euro 34,4 %	98.192 Euro 21,8 %
Amount & % of inter-national transport costs	-	71.250 Euro 11,6 %	47,500 Euro 10,6 %
Amount & % of staff and admin. Costs	200.200 Euro 52 %	254.136 Euro 41,5 %	204.986 Euro 45,6 %
Amount & % of other overhead/indirect costs	7.700 Euro (2 % of DPS) + 39.359 Euro (23% of UNHCR overhead –protec.)	76.648 Euro 12,5 %	99.321 Euro 22 %
Cost-efficiency ratio (on annual basis)	0,84 Euro/benef/year (initial) **2,90 Euro/benef/year (actual)**	3,01 Euro/benef/year (w/transport) **2,48 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**	3,35 Euro/benef/year (w/transport) **2,89 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**
Cost-effectiveness ratio (on annual basis)	1,44 Euro/benef/year (initial) **4,97 Euro/benef/year (actual)**	4,60 Euro/benef/year (w/transp) **4,06 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**	4,28 Euro/benef/year (w/tr.) **3,83 Euro/benef/year (no transport)**

B.4.6.   Security

Zambia

Security does not seem to be a major issue, at least in the North. The situation in both camps is reportedly quiet, despite the usual low-key ethnic disputes and a food riot that occurred in April due to late WFP deliveries. Adequate police stations have been built at the entrance of each camp, and are dutifully occupied. Two cars were provided by the UNHCR. Police officers seem committed to their task without large complementary 'incentives', which is a significant achievement in Zambia, where police salaries are among the lowest on the national scale (200.000 Kwachas, the average being around 500.000). The lessons learned by UNHCR from the 'Tanzania Security Package' seem to have been successfully applied. A 'Neighbourhood Watch' by refugee auxiliaries has been established in the camps and reports to the police. The 'President's Office' staff, the 'ears and eyes' of national security had reportedly left the area and were nowhere to be seen during the evaluation visit. Radio communications, a key element of security, were nonetheless still in short supply.

Guinea

Physical security has long been a major problem in Guinea, and the evaluation found out that this was still the case. During the rebel attacks of September 2000, the UNHCR was deeply shocked by the murder of their representative in the Macenta office on 17/09, which unfortunately occurred only 11 days after the loss of three other staff members in Timor. This event combined with communication and management problems, and prompted the Sub-Office of Guéckédou to evacuate immediately to Conakry. The withdrawal was qualified of 'hasty' by all external observers met by the evaluation, and is still today at the basis of a deep-rooted lack of trust in the UNHCR by NGOs. Most partners did not follow the second UNHCR evacuation from the area in December 2000.

Security is a very worrying issue in the area of Kissidougou, where most ECHO-funded partners are currently based. The city is full of uncontrolled ULIMO-K elements (opponents to Charles Taylor regime in Liberia backed by Guinea) and armed militias ('voluntary citizens' -or rather thugs who were promised to be integrated in the Army and now refuse to hand back their weapons). Unofficial roadblocks are frequent, and gunfire can be heard in the night. Several trucks and other equipment bearing the combined UNHCR and EU logos have been 'borrowed' by the Guinean army during the December fighting, and were never returned. There are still regular incidents along the border with Liberia, which is claiming the whole area, rich in diamonds. Unexpected violent riots can start at any time in the city and can target foreigners (e.g. MSF in mid-September). The UN Security Co-ordinator (working for UNDP) stressed the fact that too many NGO staff members in Kissidougou (who are often ECHO direct partners) lack proper experience and training.

The policy of very close relationship applied by UNHCR towards local authorities, especially regarding security and escort matters, has further deepened the lack of trust. UNHCR has agreed (arguably too soon and too easily) to pay a range of escort fees which are higher than those accepted by other UN Agencies such as WFP and UNICEF. The agency is strongly suggesting to all partners to follow their example and rate system.
Most partners had very negative reactions and argued that the contractual provisions of their own 'Conventions d'établissement' signed with the Guinean Ministère de l'Intérieur et de la Décentralisation do not foresee the payment of any such fees. This issue, however, needs further legal clarification.

It is clear to all those concerned, especially, that the risk of further security accidents in Kissidougou are high. It was proposed by UN Security Co-ordinator, ECHO and the EU Delegation to start urgently the discussion of a common 'code of conduct' (towards authorities, population, and among aid actors). This much needed code would cover matters such as the 'behaviour' of partners, and an harmonised position regarding escorts. It would also exert a concerted pressure on the authorities to clarify their security policy in border areas[21].

ECHO should strongly support such codes of conduct to complete standard FPA security provisions. Abiding by the Code should be a pre-requisite to ECHO funding in Phase 3 or 4 areas, together with adequate experience and/or security training of the partners.

B.5.   <u>VISIBILITY</u>

Both ECHO and UNHCR need and deserve visibility, for their own reasons though at an equal level. There is hardly a distinction to be made between donor and implementing agency, since the

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[21] As an emergency measure to improve the critical field security of partners, the UNHCR decided at the end of October 2001 to send to Kissidougou an experienced field security officer.

decision of a project has often been taken by UNHCR even before ECHO officially decides to support it as well.

ECHO Pristina has organised specific meetings to discuss visibility measures with UNHCR, and joint stickers have been produced. The impact of the Public Information assistant was recorded as 'very important' for the ECHO office, although the assignment came too late in the overall Kosovo crisis to be able to give to ECHO the place it deserves with regional funding of up to 378 million Euro since 1999. *Visibility was especially good when ECHO had been funding complete sub-agreements (or almost so), or at least distinct components in some sub-agreements (Bus shuttles, Fresh Food, Plementina TCS). On the contrary, when the ECHO funding was heavily diluted (Food transition), visibility and accountability were minimal.*

A recommendation would therefore be for ECHO to fund 100% of a sub-agreement, whenever appropriate. The above findings also confirm that visibility –or rather <u>communication</u>- is an issue that needs to be discussed at institutional, not field- level. In the framework of their visibility and communication policies, both organisations need also to pursue their effort of clarification of image. In Kosovo, the former stickers 'funded by UNHCR' have been appropriately replaced by new ones showing 'supported by UNHCR'. The § 3.3 of the 2001 sub-agreements still specifies that 'UNHCR visibility policy' must be followed, with UNHCR visibility stickers and press releases to indicate UNHCR as a <u>donor</u>, though subsequent meetings with ECHO have settled the issue. At the opposite, ECHO visit cards showing the title of 'programme <u>co-ordinator</u>' should also be avoided.

Despite these achievements at the field level, ECHO is not mentioned once as such in any of the relevant country sections of the UNHCR Global Report 2000 (the general EC contributions can be found in some summary financial tables), though for Kosovo, the operational EAR (European Agency for Reconstruction) is indeed listed under 'other partners'. The Global report appears to be a collective fund-raising tool to address the community of the many UNHCR donors, hence the difficulty to emphasise special links with some of them –as much as ECHO would definitely deserve to be considered as a strategic partner of UNHCR in Kosovo, and not simply as a donor among others. One relative exception could nonetheless be found in the 'Kosovo Women Initiative' (KWI) programme which was repeatedly detailed, although the donor (USAID, with 10 million US$ over 5 years) was not mentioned as such.

The Global Report does not appear to be the appropriate tool to ensure visibility for ECHO. One limited option would be to present in a suitable position the 'Top Ten' list of donors (already discussed between UNHCR and ECHO). An integrated long-term programme with a specific and clearly understandable designation could be another option, although this could hardly fit into ECHO's mandate.

In Serbia during the Milosevic area, and especially during the war with NATO over Kosovo, the overall visibility of most agencies, donors and NGOs has been kept low, for obvious reasons. This, however, does not explain why some UNHCR implementing partners working on ECHO-funded projects had not even been notified (CARE). It should also be noted that most UNHCR implementing partners are simply more interested by the impact of their project and are not acquainted with the administrative intricacies of donor-agency relations. They will duly follow any instruction given to them by the fund provider. In some other cases (project 2000/10064), a joint attempt at visibility was (probably) even counterproductive: the 'Europe Cares For You' communication campaign in collective centres filled with IDPs freshly expelled from Kosovo after the war with NATO did not appear appropriate to the evaluation.

There have been considerable improvements in 2001, though. Funded by the project 2000/21052 (repatriation), the Serbian TV information campaign 'New Bridges' (24 shows of 30 minutes each) appears as a model of shared visibility and communication.

B.6.   **HUMAN RESOURCES**

The quality of the staff is probably the most important factor of success in any operation or programme. The DFID evaluation on UNHCR (§ 3.15) pointed out to the staff issue and mentioned that "Changes made in the way staff are recruited, contracted, posted and promoted should improve staff morale both at headquarters and field level". UNHCR has in the meantime standardised contracting and posting procedures, which are also being reviewed on a continuous basis.

Several solutions can be considered by ECHO to support UNHCR to face staff problems:

- *As it has already been done in the past, to fund directly in budget items the number of staff necessary for protection and programming activities (following prior strategic discussions, and in accordance with agreed salary levels), or to support the Emergency Teams database. There are important issues to be considered by UNHCR, however: (i) The difficulties to find or recruit adequately qualified staff. (ii) A balance to be achieved between (a) monetary incentives for difficult positions –which have limitations, (b) appropriate opportunities for promotion in both high- or low-visibility crises, and (c) family issues. (iii) Clear limitations to the use of Emergency Teams: such staff are usually 'on loan' from other programmes and must be returned as rapidly as possible to avoid detrimental effects.*

- *To second NOHA graduates to UNHCR – which would also have the added value of increasing the percentage of European staff in the agency. A suggested option would be to initiate a "European JPO (Junior Programme officers) Programme" to that effect.*

- *To fund medium-term (2 years) external consultant contracts to fill in empty positions, either individually or by specialised or multi-sector implementation Units. In the current system, external consultants are only used by UNHCR for very specific purposes and short-term, fixed periods of time.*

- *To fund or co-finance joint short-term evaluation and audit missions, and identification /definition missions of cost-effectiveness indicators with specialised economists. The capacity to carry out independent evaluations is one of the guarantees that situations can effectively be analysed by UNHCR, and that lessons can be learned and disseminated in the organisation.*

Serbia

Approximately 20% of the 137 UNHCR staff currently working in Serbia and in Montenegro (both among local staff and expatriates) have themselves a refugee background, which makes them especially committed to their role. Many of the excellent local staff have also been working for UNHCR since the beginning of the crisis (1992 or 1993...). The same is true for ECHO.

The turnover rate of UNHCR staff seems (officially at least) reasonable, with contracts of 3 years for expatriates of categories A and B, and contracts of 2 years for categories C,D, and E.

Kosovo

The quality of the UNHCR staff assigned to Kosovo has been repeatedly described since the 1999 war as a major factor of the successful co-operation enjoyed with ECHO. *The staff had been quite experienced, and very knowledgeable regarding the institutional strengths and weaknesses of the other key humanitarian actors present. Joint regional seminars were organised, during which fruitful discussions took place and considerably contributed to clarify some issues* (e.g. what were the expectations of ECHO, and what the organisation could give in return).

At the time of the evaluation in September 2001, the UNHCR employs 144 staff in Kosovo (44 expatriates, 100 local) and is planning to continue to phase out gradually. In comparison, the ECHO office in Pristina had 12 staff until the end of the year (1 expatriate and 11 local staff). As from the beginning of 2002, the ECHO presence will be reduced to 3 local staff only, including one secretary.

It appears that the large number of UNHCR staff, even at this stage of the phasing out, is still sufficient to ensure a comprehensive network of local offices throughout the entity, as well as the required co-ordination and monitoring tasks. The number also clearly points out to the fact that the

phasing out of a field office is a considerably more complicated matter for UNHCR than for ECHO. Most UN expatriates have an employee status, and are entitled to re-assignment procedures, which are increasingly difficult to complete considering the current budgetary constraints.

Zambia

UNHCR staff problems in Zambia have created considerable tensions in the past with some partners, and also with ECHO. In the Angolan refugee camps, UNHCR was criticised in 2000 for its lack of presence and lack of appropriate strategy and protection. In the North, ECHO complained that some international staff positions funded in the contracts had not been actually filled in the field. The turnover rate among partners staff was similarly detrimental.
As a result, UNHCR decided at the beginning of 2001 to take decisive measures to reinforce its field presence up to the appropriate level. A number of important staff changes were made, and others are planned. 21 new postings were granted to Zambia (on top of the 99 already in place), with a view to reinforce field presence and technical capacities. This clearly corresponded to a strategic choice by UNHCR. They have indeed been obtained only after 'painful' decisions which resulted in the closing of 7 offices in other African countries, and subsequent savings of 21,4 mill. US$.

Guinea

The number of UNHCR staff working in Guinea is quite significant: there is a total of 46 international and 168 local staff in Conakry, in two Sub-Offices (Kissidougou and Nzérékoré), and in the Field Office of Dabola. The Sub-Office of Kissidougou alone accounts for 7 international and 70 local staff. However, the country has a poor reputation (both for very difficult working conditions and low profile assignments) and does not usually attract or retain for long periods enough qualified staff –who need furthermore to be fluent in French. As a consequence, the turnover rate of (good) UNHCR staff seems far too important, while some of the 'old hands' have obviously been there far longer than usual. One international staff member had been working in Kissidougou since 1994. Community Services in the Sub-Office will soon be left without supervision, both excellent international staff leaving for various reasons. The Protection department stated that the turnover of its own staff was simply too large to be able to cope with the Languette issue. Staff issues were reported as a major constraint by all partners and by ECHO. The UNHCR is fully aware of the situation –duly mentioned in the Global Report 2000- but does not seem to have the appropriate human resources management tools to solve the problem.

B.7.   EFFECTIVENESS

Serbia

The level of effectiveness appears to be quite different according to sectors, and has been negatively affected for the 1999 projects by the war. The post-October 2000 registration and repatriation projects can be seen as effective. Basic assistance and heating fuel activities are reasonably effective according to the reports and the field visits, although there was a lack of indicators in the project definition and reporting. However, one of the collective centres visited by the evaluation, the 'Planum' centre in Rakovica, a suburb of Belgrade raises a number of essential questions regarding the capacity of UNHCR to apply systematically international humanitarian indicators of vulnerability (including SPHERE) in matters such as site location or family living quarters, and to report shortcomings to ECHO. The Planum centre had been established since June 1996 on an abandoned construction/dumping site subject to flooding and various other health hazards. Short-term derelict

workers barracks have been used as long-term accommodation for up to 150 families (406 persons), whose common factor is the presence of *one or several heavy medical cases in each family*. This is also the reason for their location so close to the Belgrade hospitals. Those families are granted from 10 to 16 M2, with sometimes two families reportedly accommodated in the same surface. *Such issues were not to be found in the UNHCR report to ECHO, nor was any priority list established with clearly sub-standard collective centres, for urgent improvement or relocation.*

Kosovo

The capacity to assess effectiveness has been markedly improved from 2000 to 2001. When the objectives could be clearly stated, that is to say mostly in the 2001 activities (OMS log frames), the level of effectiveness achieved has been generally good considering the still important constraints in terms of security and expectations for the future (Bus Shuttle, Fresh Food, TCS, Legal Assistance).

Zambia

Despite the guidelines, the actual effectiveness applied by UNHCR appears often 'empty': stated results are seldom linked to quantifiable objectives, and cost-effectiveness indicators are frequently overlooked or ignored. UNHCR and their implementing partners are far from being an isolated case, however. *As a general rule, the evaluation found out that cost-effectiveness indicators are currently either not firmly established or not properly disseminated in the humanitarian world. There is actually a need for a whole culture of cost-effectiveness in humanitarian assistance, to which ECHO – who is gaining a reputation of 'bringing discipline' could effectively contribute.*

Guinea

An ex-post assessment of effectiveness and efficiency –even partial- of the Health component of project ECHO/TPS/210/1999/05002 (partner DPS -Direction Préfectorale de la Santé) provided indications of some of the problems faced by UNHCR in working with local implementing partners in Guinea. Effectiveness seemed poor. The project was actually a structural, longer-term assistance provided to a basically unsustainable local health system, rather than a contribution to the burden of the refugees on existing facilities. The ECHO FicheOp dated 01/01/2000 stated that "the health situation is not dramatic but there is evidence that the statistics on which this project is based are very poor indeed. A study shows that health programmes are about 30% effective. Also the clinics are short of medicines. Refugees complain of poor treatment in Guéckédou state hospital despite UNHCR payments". Overheads, salaries, complementary 'incentives' and social costs for no less than 432 staff (28 of whom were high-level fonctionnaires whose salaries had already been paid by the MoH) represented indeed 54% of the budget. UNHCR was not in a position to fulfil its customary role of organisational 'buffer' between the requirements of transparency and accountability of ECHO and the national institutions. The UNHCR was reportedly unable to terminate this contract, due to various pressures from local authorities.

B.8.   RESPONSE TO MAJOR AND SUDDEN CHANGES

Kosovo

The ability to respond to sudden changes is an important factor in the case of Kosovo, since the nature and requirements of this specific crisis have had since the beginning a tendency to change rapidly (sometimes too rapidly for the international aid to adapt properly). When the priority began

to shift early last year from emergency assistance to Majorities to protection of remaining Minorities, some UNHCR programmes (capacity building of Centres for Social Work) had to be adapted during the course of implementation, and this was done rather well (except for some discrepancies between the new project objectives and the final reporting).

The intended flexibility and scale of UNHCR emergency procedures must also be pointed out as one of the potential strongest points of the Agency. Although many UNHCR administrative mechanisms are more burdensome than ECHO's, in case of declared emergency by the HQ (there is no formal procedure and the time needed to do so can vary) the UNHCR Field Office has the necessary authority to mobilise on the spot the 'Emergency Operational Reserve' of up to 5 million US$.

Guinea

The UNHCR Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) methodologies and database of emergency teams set up as a lesson learned from the Kosovo crisis were utilised for the first time in Guinea, in the aftermath of the September 2000 rebel attacks.

As from 16 September (the day of the murder of the UNHCR representative in Macenta), a Task Force was set up in Geneva and maintained on an alert status. However, based on assurances by Guinean authorities that 'all was well', UNHCR locally decided to use only staff resources available in the region and not emergency teams from HQ, despite strong pleas from ECHO and BPRM in early October. Progress of the relocation plan for refugees was therefore very slow.

As a result of the renewed attacks in early December, the UNHCR had to perform another evacuation –from Kissidougou- which was not followed by many NGOs. The situation in the region appeared highly volatile: some areas were accessible to aid workers, while confused fighting still took place in others. The UNHCR Branch Office stated on 15 december 2000 that the organisation was not in a position any more to perform its assigned mandate, for security reasons. A strong reaction of donors to that statement led to an immediate combined action plan of UN agencies, led by UNDP. UNHCR Emergency Teams were mobilised during Christmas period and became fully operational in the field as from the very first days of January 2001. *Their professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness was highly appreciated by all actors interviewed by the evaluation.* Interventions of emergency teams can only be considered on the short term, however (the team members are usually 'on loan' from other programmes to which their prolonged absence could become detrimental). The improvements of the first quarter of 2001 gradually dissipated after the departure of the teams.

B.9.   REPORTING & MONITORING

B.9.1.   Reporting

In every case study, reporting was regarded as a conflicting issue. The evaluation found few UNHCR project reports to ECHO which could be favourably compared to the direct partners' average. To many UNHCR field staff, the ECHO specific reporting format seemed to represent a duplication of their work, the purpose of which was often unclear. To the evaluators opinion, the present decentralisation process of UNHCR has not been implemented down to its final logical step, i.e. fund-raising awareness at field level.

Serbia

Reporting was by far the weakest point of UNHCR relationship with ECHO in Serbia, despite recent reforms (OMS) –still to be fully assessed. There is a general lack of added value in the UNHCR reporting to ECHO, when compared to the corresponding partner reports to UNHCR (JEN, CARE). The four pages final narrative report on project 10064, 'accommodation in collective centres' was considerably sub-standard. This issue needs to be further investigated, since reports to

ECHO -especially final ones- are supposed to be checked by Senior Officers in the field, and further down the process by the UNHCR liaison office in Brussels. There are also variations in the quality of the reporting between different sectors (e.g. registration and accommodation in collective centres).

Kosovo

Improvements were introduced between 2000 and 2001 in reporting standards: UNHCR procedures also shifted from PMS - Project Management System- to OMS -Operations Management System. Training took place in February 2001 for the Kosovo field staff, and log frame-like matrices are included in every sub-agreement, with clear indicators. It is however still too early to assess results in the actual reporting. Up to now, however, all UNHCR projects of Fresh food, Food Transition, Legal assistance and CSW (Centre for Social Work) Capacity Building demonstrate a lack of quantifiable objectives or an inaccuracy in identified figures. It was also found that in 2000, when some performance indicators were contained in the UNHCR sub-agreements log frames, they were not appropriate to the objectives of the project, or that they were not addressed in the monitoring and reporting (CSW Capacity building).

Logical frameworks have limitations; they are only a tool, and not an automatic solution. There is also a general need for training on log frames among UNHCR, ECHO, and partners staff. Some tend to feel more comfortable with it (i.e. mostly the northern Europeans), which may look like a cultural issue. UNHCR Pristina stated frankly that the log frame 'was not favourite among partners'. It is also hardly applicable in emergency situations, though quite appropriate for care & maintenance. Furthermore, if a log frame is not properly done, it is rather useless. *There is a need for a common log frame approach and training between ECHO and UNHCR, to avoid different frames and duplication of work.*

Zambia

The final narrative and financial report on contract 2000/01001 (Northern camps) is dated from 20 July 2001 while the project was completed on 31/12/2000. The first and only 'interim' report was sent to ECHO on 08 March 2001 -to support a belated amendment request and after due reminding from ECHO, whereas contractual provisions stipulated quarterly reports as from March 2000. *Such provisions, however, were contested by a UNHCR letter sent with the signed contract, to the effect that 'it is not possible to enter into a contractual obligation to submit interim narrative and financial reports'…* The only report sent to date to ECHO regarding contract 2000/06003 (Western camps) is an interim financial sheet which is helplessly mixing ECHO contribution with overall UNHCR budget.

It is clear that these reports do not meet all ECHO requirements, nor do they compare favourably with some of the most professional partners reports. The same conclusion had already been drawn by the DFID evaluation report[22].

From the point of view of UNHCR, the Northern camps contract provided an example of ECHO's somewhat confusing expectations on reporting, which tend to conflict with UNHCR management and flexibility procedures. ECHO funded 20,1% of this multi-sector annual programme, and required reporting details consistent with limited and well-defined projects. UNHCR stated that, as it is authorised by its own procedures (see chap. B4.4. above), the originally intended use of (partially ECHO) funding had to be significantly modified in the course of implementation, for the sake of impact and for the immediate good of the beneficiaries. The magnitude of the task, the difficult working conditions and a lack of field staff resulted in the fact that UNHCR sometimes simply forgot to discuss the matter with ECHO, as they freely admitted. As it can easily be imagined, ex-post reporting according to ECHO specific format is no easy task in those conditions.

However, the remarkable openness and co-operation displayed to the evaluation by UNHCR in Zambia has also permitted to confirm that the 'normal' reports made by UNHCR (monthly sitreps, policy and strategy papers, mid-year review of programmes..) were of a very high standard. These

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[22] § 3.17: "UNHCR reports do not tend to provide any clear analysis on programme direction, such as whether strategies need any adjustment in the light of progress to date".

reports were timely made and demonstrated an excellent understanding of the situation as well as a directness of language which is very far from the 'half-truth' image of the agency.

It should be possible to agree on a standard of reporting which would avoid unnecessary duplication of work for UNHCR: according to the evaluation assessment of UNHCR 'sitreps' (situation reports), drafted on a monthly basis by UNHCR Sub-Offices from partners reports, synthesised in the Country Office, and dispatched to Geneva, some parts of these reports (the 'Programme' section) appear quite usable for ECHO purposes, provided that cost-effectiveness and other necessary indicators could be pre-defined and agreed as a valuable addition to both systems, if required. The evaluation would also suggest to join to these reports a full copy of the implementing partners reports – when these are largely funded by ECHO. The above provisions should be adapted into a revised FPA.

Guinea

There had been no reporting from UNHCR to ECHO either in 1999 (except one report on the smaller and fully closed Forecariah operation), or in 2000. This lack of documentation was a significant constraint for the evaluation.

B.9.2.   Monitoring

The essence of 'partnership' (in this case, ECHO – UNHCR partnership) is reflected and revealed through the monitoring relationship. The way in which ECHO 'monitors' UNHCR and how UNHCR responds to this monitoring by ECHO are key indicators of the quality and nature of what 'partnership' means to both organisations. The current UNHCR procedures do not allow an easy monitoring of activities, and UNHCR is facing considerable constraints whenever the agency staff wants to build up a comprehensive picture of a given situation. Due to cumbersome internal procedures and some outdated data systems (the FMIS was developed as from 1983, and introduced between 1987 and 1993; it is not Windows-compatible), a UNHCR Officer has to compile no less than four reports with different time frames:

- narrative report from the partner (following *i.a.* the OPS log frame tables)
- Financial (SPMR) report from the partner
- Non-expendable property report (vehicles and other equipment 'on loan' to the partner)
- The (new) staffing report.

These four views are sometimes very difficult to reconcile. Furthermore, some partners will use the system of 'lumpsums' in their FMIS report, which is a convenient way to deflect the need of cost-effectiveness indicators. It must be emphasised that FMIS, although rather old and cumbersome-looking, does allow considerable flexibility to those who know how to work with it –which is not always the case with junior implementing partners. Several cost-effectiveness indicators can be introduced in the FMIS cost control of a project (Zambia). In the African case studies, the evaluation found a good general awareness amongst UNHCR implementing partners of the issue of minimum (SPHERE) standards in humanitarian assistance. The situation was very different in the Balkans.

To improve the co-operation between ECHO and UNHCR, the evaluators recommend the following framework:

- The first stage in any project needs to be the *appraisal*. The project proposal, submitted by UNHCR, is appraised by ECHO. Expected outputs and appropriate indicators of achievement are confirmed. Since UNHCR is now using a type of logical framework (OMS) in both its project proposals to ECHO and its sub-partner agreements, outputs and indicators should be easier to identify and should be coherent with the new log frame matrix similarly developed by ECHO. If suitable outputs and indicators cannot be identified/confirmed, the project proposal should be returned to UNHCR for clarification or further information. If this is not forthcoming the project proposal should be **rejected**. *Effective monitoring can never be a substitute for effective appraisal – both are inter-related elements of the project cycle*

- The outputs and indicators form the basis of the second stage, the *'contract monitoring plan'*, which should be jointly discussed. An agreement needs to be reached as to what ECHO will monitor and what information is required in the UNHCR reports to ECHO. ECHO should request clear information as to how UNHCR is going to monitor their sub-agreements (financed / part-financed by ECHO) and how the results of this are to be incorporated into the respective UNHCR reports to ECHO.
- The third stage is the *monitoring* itself. There is first a need to clarify the roles, responsibilities and authorities in the monitoring relationship in relation to ECHO – UNHCR contracts i.e. to answer the questions "*who monitors who*?" and "*who monitors what*?" This requires a clarification of the following different types of monitoring: (i) contract monitoring; (ii) project implementation monitoring, and (iii) 'backstopping' (support to project implementation).

As the donor, ECHO contracts UNHCR to deliver specified outputs in return for specific financial inputs. These outputs are to be delivered within a specified time frame and within specified budgetary limits. These outputs should be specified in the project proposal on which the contract is based. Where UNHCR 'sub-contracts' implementing partners to deliver specified outputs within a specified time frame and specified budget, UNHCR monitors these sub-contracts.
The basic monitoring instrument is the report, which UNHCR is contractually obliged to deliver to ECHO. Upon receipt of the reports, ECHO should decide whether or not they wish to visit the projects to confirm that the outputs have been achieved as indicated in the report. It is the information (or lack of it) in the report, which determines whether or not ECHO decides to verify this through a visit to the project. *Joint monitoring visits should be encouraged.*

Serbia

Monitoring was an issue in Serbia between ECHO and UNHCR. The output of UNHCR monitoring was often poorly reflected in its reporting – thus affecting the monitoring role of ECHO since it could not rely on UNHCR reports as the basic monitoring instrument. There are no references to the issue of minimum humanitarian standards (SPHERE or local) in monitoring/final reports. As a consequence, the monitoring by ECHO tended to focus on the only indicators available *i.e.* the financial and material inputs and ECHO's visibility as opposed to humanitarian outputs, effects & impacts. There were also some indications of duplication in heating fuel and psycho-social projects and, to the opinion of the evaluators, some excessive micro-management. An ECHO 'unofficial' request dated 24/03/2000 required from every partner, either small NGO or UN agency, regular reporting on such details as registration plates for vehicles used by projects, names of users of mobile phones and their telephone numbers, etc., despite the fact that these items were considered as a lumpsum in the corresponding contracts. The clear lack of confidence in the SCR and the preoccupation with financial transparency resulted in that case in an ECHO monitoring style bordering on 'policing', which did not add value to the process.

Kosovo

Contrary to Serbia, monitoring was not an issue in Kosovo between ECHO and UNHCR. There were no duplication or temptation at micro-management. There was however the same general lack of awareness amongst UNHCR implementing partners of the issue of minimum (SPHERE) standards in humanitarian assistance. ECHO has acknowledged its awareness of its contract monitoring responsibilities, and an attempt to clarify the monitoring roles of ECHO and UNHCR through joint monitoring visits has been developed through the 'ECHO / UNHCR Co-operation for the Planning and Monitoring of Joint Activities in the Field'. This is a particularly useful document that may provide the basis for a better clarification of the monitoring roles, responsibilities and authorities of ECHO and UNHCR in relation to ECHO funded projects.

Zambia

Divergences between ECHO and UNHCR regarding the needs in the RDC refugee camps could clearly be perceived in the rejection by ECHO of two of the six sector amendments belatedly introduced by UNHCR only two days before the termination of contract ECHO/ZMB/210/2000/01001. Apart from the fact that this unfortunate schedule was bound to create confusion, it also points out both to a lack of prior discussions at field level, and possibly also to some duplication of the monitoring.

Guinea

The main caseload of refugees in the Kissidougou area of concern (58.000 in four camps) are located rather far away from the Sub-Office. The UNHCR staff need to drive every day 1 hour (60 Km) to reach Boréah , and 1 ½ hours (90 Km) for Kountaya and Télikoro, on poor dirt roads. An attempt to set up a Field Office in Albadaria, closer to the camps, reportedly failed due to repeated health problems and lack of decent living conditions (although local staff of the partners GTZ and IFRC is permanently present in the camps).

B.10. TOWARDS THE FUTURE

B.10.1. Durable Solutions

Serbia

Repatriation is, so far, the only durable solution which can be (partly, considering the time scale involved) funded by ECHO. Many refugees still seem to hesitate to opt firmly for that solution (the registration indicated approximately 30% of 'undecided'), and are probably waiting for better conditions.
The solution seemingly favoured by the government and by most refugees (according to the results of the registration) is the *local integration*. However, most activities included in this process cannot be funded by ECHO, since the durable solution in this case often means a massive housing programme and has a clear developmental character. It is also very costly and, at the moment, extremely slow. Furthermore, local integration must include the progressive phasing out of most collective centres whereas many of those refugees and IDPs accommodated privately or with host families are even now looking for shelter in the collective centres, being no longer able to support themselves (e.g. bread has recently increased by 50% and electricity by 80%).
A very limited quota of *resettlement in third countries* has been made available to UNHCR: 3.600 in 2001, and only an expected 1.500 in 2002.

Kosovo

A clear lesson learned from the various projects funded (e.g. Legal Assistance) is that projects which seek to provide durable solutions for refugees and IDPs are much more costly than basic care & maintenance or protection projects. ECHO can only intervene to a very limited extent, provided that direct impact can be expected.
Despite favourable signs, the situation is still not ripe for resettlements everywhere, even by Romas Ashkalias (Muslim, Albanian speakers): some have been killed recently. Massive returns of ethnic Serbs IDPs are definitely not yet to be envisaged.

Zambia

Repatriation could only be envisaged to both Angola and RD Congo when the political situation in these countries will have been suitably stabilised, which can only be contemplated on the medium term at the present stage. Creeping crises are still pushing steady numbers of refugees into Zambia.

Local integration may appear in the longer term as the preferred durable solution for many of the 'old caseload' refugees, who have settled in Zambia since the mid 1960s or early 1970s. Activities undertaken for this durable solution are generally not compatible with the ECHO mandate. They are also likely to be very protracted, since the current Zambian constitution does not yet allow the granting of citizenship to refugees. In the meantime, the Government has generously allocated more than 10.000 hectares of agricultural land to the 25.000 refugees of Mwange for income generating activities.

Resettlement in third countries typically concerns a relatively limited number of refugees, subject to quotas granted by interested countries. In the case of Zambia, UNHCR envisages approximately 500 possible resettlement cases mainly to Northern European countries (Sweden, the Netherlands, etc..), and essentially for family reunification purposes.

Guinea

The UNHCR strategy regarding durable solutions seems to be based (a) on relatively optimistic expectations of regional political stability, and (b) on the agenda of the Guinean government rather as on its own international mandate.

To this date, *repatriation* is the only durable solution officially envisaged. Government authorities would also like repatriation to be carried out as rapidly as the situation permits in Sierra Leone. The current political agenda foresees national elections in March 2002 (they seem now to have been postponed to May). Should the process be successfully conducted, UNHCR hopes to be able to start repatriation within 6 months after the end of the elections, *i.e.* by the end of 2002.

Some voluntary repatriation already took place to Sierra Leone, organised by UNHCR for a maximum of 250 refugees volunteers per week. This figure corresponds both to the capacity of the only boat transport available between Conakry and Freetown (roads are too broken down to be usable) and to current agreement with Sierra Leonean authorities.

Local integration in Guinea appears to be an obvious solution for a limited number of refugees, including a small identified 'urban caseload' and the estimated 10.000 - 15.000 people who have already settled economically and socially in the Languette, having married with Guinean citizens and founded families. These refugees have often been living in the area for more than 11 years, and would only need an official recognition of their status. Unfortunately, this recognition is not in accordance with the current government policy. UNHCR protection department has not been able to initiate fruitful discussions with the authorities on this issue. It should nevertheless be stated that refugees have also reportedly been able to obtain Guinean identity cards through various unofficial – though more expensive- ways.

Prospects of *resettlement in third countries* are subject to quotas made available by interested partner countries. These are not numerous in the case of Guinea (324 refugees could be resettled during the past 6 months).

B.10.2. LRRD

Serbia

All stakeholders confirm that without continued donor aid, care and maintenance projects in Serbia are not financially sustainable. Immediately after the October revolution, ECHO had clearly identified the need to start considering its own phasing out and to begin the planning of the LRRD process. However, the linkages already expected in the November 2000 Funding Decision have not taken place as yet, and ECHO has not been in a position to act as 'facilitator' in this transition between his former partners and the new EC donors. The initial EU programme of support to Serbia in 2001, implemented by the EAR (143,5 mill. Euro) will be essentially focused on the four sectors of Energy, Health, Agriculture and Enterprise Development /SME. The programme does not include any provision for the Social sector, hence for a 'safety net' which could be operated through the Ministry of Social Affairs, and under which some of the most valuable and sustainable ECHO- or UNHCR-funded operations would be placed (psycho-social assistance to the most vulnerable at their homes, special medical assistance...). The risks of a disastrous social gap are becoming an increasingly realistic perspective in Serbia.

Kosovo

The relatively smooth hand over of humanitarian activities to UNMIK services (despite numerous constraints and question marks) has been one of the greatest achievements of the international community in Kosovo, and the first successful example of LRRD known to the evaluation. However, it is still questionable if, and how effectively, projects which are currently providing humanitarian support to ethnic minority communities are embedded in these new institutional / LRRD arrangements in Kosovo. UNMIK should effectively monitor developments in order to ensure that such projects do not remain on the margins of development co-operation interventions in Kosovo.

Zambia

A strong potential for LRRD linkage seems to exist in Zambia -especially in the road rehabilitation sector, although this potential has not materialised to date. Access roads around the large refugee camps both in the North-East (Mwange) and in the South-West (Nangweshi) have been heavily damaged by the continuous traffic of supply trucks, especially during rainy seasons. The problem of access to the camps is therefore a growing concern for UNHCR and WFP. Furthermore, some of these roads are at the same time of key interest for local economy and population, which is an EDF funding prerequisite. The road leading to Nangweshi camp is also the main link between the Western and Southern provinces, and the 200Km road from the city of Kasama to Mwange camp was described as 'dreadful' by the Zambian Commissioner for Refugees.

UNHCR in particular has stressed that 'road infrastructure was a major area of concern', although it was also a 'non-core activity' which had to be 'outsourced'. 'Repair of these roads go beyond UNHCR financial means, and mandate'[23]. The agency has tried to address this issue by developing contacts with the embassies of the 12 key donor countries in Zambia. The UNHCR Representative stated that copies of all relevant documents were also dispatched to the EU Delegation, though for some reasons these efforts failed to identify the EC as the largest potential donor in this sector (a major component of the 9th EDF funds in Zambia are allocated to roads). A joint UNHCR-UNOPS pre-feasibility study on road rehabilitation similarly failed to arrange a meeting with the Delegation. *The above issue outlines the potentially important role of 'facilitator' that ECHO could play in such circumstances between its partners and rehabilitation or development Commission Services (a role that ECHO did effectively carry out in Guinea or in Kosovo), provided that contacts take place at the appropriate time in the DG DEV or RELEX identification and programming cycle. The lack of a more structured presence of ECHO in Zambia seems to have been detrimental to LRRD up to now.*

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[23] Joint Strategic Planning Meeting for 2001/2002

Guinea

The objective of EU LRRD in Guinea is poverty reduction, in association with the strategies developed by the World Bank and the IMF. Two main instruments were made available by DG Development: the *ex-article 255 "Assistance to Refugees" of Lomé IV*, and the *budget line B7-6000 "NGO Co-Financing"*. These possibilities are well known to those ECHO partners interested, since ECHO Conakry has been adequately acting as a '*facilitator*' in relevant contacts.

Longer-term 'post-refugee' measures are also contemplated by the BNCR, such as rehabilitation of forests and environment around the camps, infrastructures, capacity building.... The current political context in Guinea, however, is such that workable prospects of LRRD can only be contemplated subject to considerable improvements in regional and national stability, as well as in the attitude of the authorities towards donors.