



HUMANITARIAN AID AND CIVIL PROTECTION

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Evaluation of the European Commission's Humanitarian Action in the Shelter Sector

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Executive Summary



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The opinions expressed in this document represent the views of the authors,
which are not necessarily shared by the European Commission.

A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A.1) Background

- Sheltering the victims of disasters and performing some urgent rehabilitation has always been a core humanitarian activity to mitigate mortality and morbidity, and provide access. Sheltering combines however a number of key challenges: it is highly resource intensive, costly, lengthy and technically complex. The urban context has recently added a further dimension to the shelter exercise.
- Since the UN Humanitarian Reform of 2005, the responsibility for coordination of shelter interventions when clusters are activated has been assumed by the Emergency Shelter Cluster – now called the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC) - co-led by UNHCR and IFRC. Numerous shelter activities are also taking place in situations where the cluster system is not activated.
- Nevertheless, the development of shelter response at a level comparable to some other clusters (e.g. WASH or Logistics) has been constrained by a number of limiting factors. Shelter has grown dramatically in importance, relative to other humanitarian sectors, in part as a result of high-profile response e.g. after the Indian Ocean Tsunami and in Haiti. This trend is likely to continue in responses to crises that increasingly happen in urban contexts. The relations between the Cluster and the wider shelter sector, as well as the GSC coordination among two agencies with strong mandates have not always been optimum. Technicality and high costs are not conducive either to LRRD with development donors or under-resourced local authorities.

A.2) Objectives and methodology of the evaluation

- ECHO has not previously carried out any specific evaluation in the shelter sector. As stated in the ToR (Annex I), the main objectives of the evaluation were “to identify the main issues in global humanitarian shelter provision, including bottlenecks; and to identify where DG ECHO would have a comparative advantage in helping to address these issues”.
- The methodological approach has been based on a set of five main evaluation questions (EQs), which have been used as a basis for chapters B.2.1 to B.2.5 of the present report. EQs have successively assessed issues of overall and specific challenges, effectiveness, added value and efficiency – including cost-effectiveness.
- The scope of the evaluation was quite extensive and covered the period from 2005 to 2012, as well as shelter and closely related activities in every context (conflicts or natural disasters, DRR, emergency and more durable shelters, LRRD) and geographical areas. Data was to be collected from desk review, interviews, some field case studies and an online survey. A detailed description of the methodology can be found in chapter B.1.3 and in Annexes II to III, and VI.
- Some constraints were found in the lists of shelter-related projects (Annex IV and Annex V). For the first five years, the lists had to be collected manually. From 2010 onwards, the accuracy of the HOPE database depends on the partners filling in appropriately their Single Form (SF), which may be a challenge in the case of e.g. large multi-sector grants.

A.3) Main Findings and Conclusions

Institutional level

Challenges

- The positive perception of ECHO institutional added values (respect of humanitarian principles, large funding capacities, and potential linkages with other EU instruments) is mitigated in the shelter sector by a lack of dedicated technical expertise, relative to other fields, which is partly due to imposed resource limitations.

- The Humanitarian Aid Regulation provisions are comprehensive and can be interpreted in order to cover very nearly the whole spectrum of shelter activities from preparedness to emergency response and rehabilitation/ early reconstruction. Potential limitations appear in the adjective of “short-term” for rehabilitation and reconstruction – which lacks clarity, in the lack of reference to environmental and ethical challenges, settlements (see below), and early legal assistance.
- Shelter and rehabilitation activities are distributed in the ECHO SF among five main sectors, including Shelter and NFIs. Although this segmentation has pros and cons, it has not been found detrimental to efficiency and effectiveness – which may partly be due to the flexibility generally applied by the ECHO staff.
- However, attaching NFIs to a single sector is misleading, as some of these can be related to shelters (e.g. household items), while others should rather be linked to WASH or protection.
- Shelters are not only an individual or household issue but must also integrate the coping strategy of settlements: as all societies do, those affected by disasters, whether they are displaced or not, rely in part upon their communities for protection, livelihoods and coping with emergencies.
- The institutional settings of the GSC remain complex. As in other sectors, shelter operates within three different contexts and coordination mechanisms: (i) where clusters are activated, usually in larger emergencies; (ii) where they are not activated and the response is predominantly for refugees; and (iii) where they are not activated, which is the largest group in terms of grants awarded by ECHO. There is little global support to development of the latter two contexts and little indication to all stakeholders of how they interrelate, when an emergency spans more than one context.
- The dual GSC leadership is designed around mandated specificities and related interests, and lacks the more integrated and longer-term approach achieved e.g. by UNICEF for the WASH Cluster.
- UNHCR leads the Cluster in conflict situations where there are IDPs, whereas in refugee situations the core mandate of UNHCR takes precedence over the cluster system. However, when ensuring coordination in the framework of refugee crises (as assessed in some of the case studies), UNHCR does not seem to apply consistently the good practice developed by the GSC and other clusters.
- In natural disasters, IFRC is committed to act as the ‘convenor’ of the Cluster at global level, pledging to coordinate at operational level. IFRC however does not assume the responsibility of ‘provider of last resort’ - common to other cluster leads within the UN family - which may leave some open gaps beyond emergency response.
- Both co-leads have benefited from large ECHO thematic funds for capacity building over the period evaluated. Beyond GSC, the broad shelter sector however still requires support and training, as a community of practice. The Cluster co-leads see their responsibility as limited to coordination within activated Cluster responses, and prefer to distinguish strictly between the sector and Cluster.
- As a result, coordination between GSC members, the shelter sector, and other clusters has been lacking. Other key weaknesses for the GSC and the sector in general are to be found in planning; the lack of a comprehensive and broadly accepted terminology with corresponding typology of activities, cost-effectiveness and indicators for measuring impact; or the lack of opportunities for Cluster participants to engage in important technical discussions, with each other or with other clusters (see also strategic level).

Trends

- Significant progress was however noted recently within GSC in the recent development of its Strategy, SAG (Strategic Advisory Group), Thematic Priorities and Working Groups, which ECHO was instrumental in stimulating. The Cluster SAG, formed in 2012, comprises key international actors and has recognised the need to better engage external stakeholders. This approach was noted in the new GCS Strategy for 2013-2017, which is supported by DG ECHO.

Strategic level

Challenges

- The appropriate strategic development of humanitarian shelter stakeholders (institutions, field workers, consultants) that provide the majority of shelter experience and capacity, is possible only if the global community of practice is recognised and supported with common resources, linking them at every level with practical opportunities to collaborate and achieve consensus.
- In this context, DG ECHO feels that such communities of practice have a role to play to influence global clusters and are arguably more influential inside (by joining the GSC and other clusters) than if they stay on the margins. Donors should therefore avoid creating/funding parallel sector platforms, and focus on the global needs of humanitarian reform.
- Other options include supporting clusters to: (i) engage and support sectors programmatically, such as through knowledge management, training and the development of consensus guidance, tools and resources; (ii) support existing and new national and regional communities of practice for shelter, and linking them into a network; and (iii) support `horizontal` inter-cluster and inter-sector resources, such as in knowledge management and training, promoting communication between communities of practice.
- At the level of donors, due to the segmented approach both externally (between donors) and internally (between humanitarian aid and development), there are still gaps left by restricted funding and government policies. Partly due to the above and to the limited opportunities for engagement currently offered by the GSC, there is a need for large donors to the sector to engage even more in strategic discussions, to ensure that policies and resources better complement each other. A point in case is preparedness for future large urban disasters, in which a better coordination with other experienced donors would be required.
- Due to the relatively recent recognition of its importance, shelter activities are poorly supported with guidance, with significant gaps ranging from developing and maintaining plans or strategies to core activities such as repair and reconstruction.
- Other key outstanding issues at the strategic level concern: (i) the lack of funding for preparedness and DRR; (ii) the lack of LRRD/exit strategy with development donors and national actors; (iii) participation of affected and host communities; (iv) the need to promote integrated and flexible approaches for optimum effectiveness, where shelter is combined with e.g. WASH, livelihoods, cash or legal assistance, according to needs; (v) due in part to the lack of particular shelter expertise and guidance, a somewhat excessive focus on emergency short-term solutions, which rapidly tend to become quite costly compared to some transitional shelter solutions (some types of T-shelter, temporary rehabilitation, repairs) that can reach a lifetime of 3 to 10 years and more.

Operational level

Comparative advantages of DG ECHO

- At this level also, ECHO is perceived positively, due to its field presence and knowledge, timeliness, results-oriented approach, and consistent support to coordination platforms. Limitations can most frequently be found in a perceived risk of lack of continued funding from year to year, while facing protracted or recurrent crises and long shelter processes. Despite provisions of the EU Consensus, LRRD is still not optimum.

Other issues

- Operational issues, none particular to ECHO, have also been identified in the shelter sector, including: (i) training at all levels; (ii) implementation capacity of international actors, with too great a dependence upon a limited pool of consultants; (iii) ignorance of the informal sector in which most recipients usually operate, and of the private sector; (iv) implementing partners using mostly indicators of outputs rather than outcomes, and the effects of better shelter on mortality

and morbidity that are not measured; (v) due to the poor legal frameworks of many developing countries, Housing, Land and Property (HLP) is a key protection factor for facilitating return and resilience when facing e.g. occupation of properties or poor resettlements locations.

A.4) Key Recommendations

Institutional level

Overall Sector

- The level of understanding by all stakeholders of the shelter sector needs to be increased, through advocacy and training/ capacity building, and by the funding of these activities (e.g. through ERC) for the benefit of all sector actors.
- In particular, the different interpretations need to be resolved within ECHO and GSC co-leads over whether or not the Cluster is responsible for supporting the all sector stakeholders sector in its broader programmatic needs, as a community of practice. Engagement with the sector is mentioned in GSC thematic priorities, however full responsibility is not mentioned, nor is any indication offered currently as to how the GSC seeks to proceed with engagement.
- Support to the sector through the GSC may contribute additionally to bridging between the different coordination mechanisms used to support humanitarian operations in all sectors. As in other sectors, shelter and settlement activities are coordinated using different mechanisms in non-clustered, clustered and refugee contexts.
- ECHO must therefore consider how best to support each coordination mechanism, and the coordination between coordination mechanisms. Supporting the sector may, for example, be through common knowledge management, a common approach to developing and maintaining strategies and the development of consensus good practice and support tools and resources.

Donors coordination fora

- Further to the suggestion of the Technical Advisory Group of OFDA, more DRR planning and conceptualisation – in particular for future large urban disasters – should be considered between key international donors, e.g. through the OCHA donors' forum or a GSC Thematic Group.
- There is also a need to continue trying to engage into GHD new non-traditional donors who provide large shelter funding, and to harmonise the western approach to accountability with the Muslim values of Zakat.

DG ECHO

- In a possible revision of the ECHO typology of sectors, shelters should be closely associated with settlements, the predominant coping strategy of communities, following in such the lessons from the field and good practices already adopted by SPHERE and key stakeholders.
- NFIs should be considered as a cross-cutting issue (as it is the case for rehabilitation) and should become subsectors under Shelter (and Settlements), WASH and Protection.
- ECHO should reinforce the dedicated in-house technical expertise on shelter issues, taking into account the current limitation of resources. The actual, primarily WASH experts could e.g. be enhanced (upon training, etc.) into “WATHAB” specialists. Training and guidance should also be available to all field Technical Advisors.
- In parallel, in the framework of the FPA partnership measures, a “technical reference working group” could be set up that would integrate specialised technical skills on shelter from DG ECHO and the most professionally involved FPA or FAFA partners. The working group could e.g. gather to discuss ad hoc issues of engineering, standards, indicators or cost-effectiveness.
- To tackle the lack of specific references in the Regulation to some newly identified challenges (environment, ethical materials, and settlements), there would be a need for further interpretation of “protection” in the upcoming policy.

- To clarify in the upcoming policy the definition of “short term” rehabilitation and reconstruction, to be aligned on the actual lifetime of transitional or semi-permanent shelters already funded by DG ECHO.

Strategic level

DG ECHO

- Currently, there is no commonly-agreed way for the sector to develop and maintain strategies, and there is no commonly-agreed open source sector shelter and settlement training, including national level training and modular technical training for continuing professional development. ECHO should support the development of both, encouraging the GSC to recognise existing resources and approaches, e.g. the new open source sector training planned by USAID OFDA.
- When there is an impasse between humanitarian approaches and the policy of a host government, ECHO needs to engage and work with some more “political muscle”. The Commission, i.e. at the Commissioner level but also importantly with the involvement of DEVCO, should consider as soon as possible engaging more with the UN system and/or local government in order to enact effective shelter and settlement strategies, and ultimately facilitate LRRD or exit strategies.
- Consideration should be given by ECHO to supporting UNHCR in reviewing its coordination structures, in the light of progress made in the IASC cluster approach, with particular emphasis upon a partnership approach, independent coordination capacities and joint appeals processes. ECHO should either support reform within UNHCR of its coordination and strategic planning mechanisms, or it should fund implementing and operational partners directly in order to give them voice.
- All humanitarian response is coordinated through three coordination mechanisms: (i) non-clustered response (ad hoc UN-led, +/- 50% of ECHO grants in the concerned period); (ii) clustered response (led by IFRC and UNHCR, 41%); and (iii) responses for refugees (UNHCR led, 9%). There has been almost no discussion with the shelter sector over coordination in non-clustered and refugee coordination contexts, similar to the discussions held within the GSC over clustered coordination. Such discussions should be encouraged and supported by ECHO.
- Outputs should include: (i) ensuring that all sector stakeholders understand each coordination mechanism, including the characteristics that distinguish them from each other; and (ii) how coordination should occur when more than one coordination mechanism needs to coordinate with others. In addition, ECHO should discuss further with the IASC how best to maintain coordination mechanisms between responses – e.g. in the context of frequent natural disasters.
- ECHO should maintain, for optimum effectiveness and resilience purposes, its flexibility in supporting integrated multi-sector approaches in which shelter is a major component.
- Common strategic information management should also be integrated and involve among others: baseline data, such as tracking displacement; livelihoods data, provided e.g. by the EMMA¹ toolkit; household profiling, such as that achieved through the REACH initiative; and specific technical surveys, such as of building damage.
- The upcoming ECHO Shelter guidelines should consider the following strategic issues: (i) as victims are increasingly urban and seek to stay near their damaged housing, as early as natural disasters or conflict situations allow more support should be devoted to early self-repair and reconstruction efforts; (ii) the overall objective of resilience should also comprise support to livelihoods and the local economy, as much as permitted in the ECHO mandate; (iii) initiating HLP as early as possible, even though it is likely to last well beyond ECHO's intervention timeframe; (iv) as feasible within the intervention timeframe, ECHO should engage where relevant with local authorities who are involved in DRR and LRRD and respect principles of humanity and impartiality, without direct funding as per mandate. In parallel, ECHO should

¹ <http://emma-toolkit.org/about-emma/>

continue supporting partners who are working with such national actors on transitional and durable shelter, and support their advocacy on HLP, planning or relocation.

- In parallel, ECHO should consider funding the development of policies and guidelines related to topics such as: (i) the use of shelter as part of peace and reconciliation activities; (ii) camp planning, e.g. in the framework of supporting the CCCM Cluster; or (iii) cross-cutting environmental factors e.g. protection of local resources, the use of local material or innovative technologies, and rehabilitation of camp sites.

Operational level

Overall Sector

- Beyond the current indicator guidelines which are only a “1st step”, GSC and its partners should continue developing shelter-related indicators - SMART as much as feasible but also qualitative or linked to perception – to better capture e.g. outcomes of activities, elements of morbidity and mortality – despite attribution problems –, or “adequacy” (above basic emergency SPHERE indicators, and used by UNRWA) to ensure minimum well-being in very protracted situations.

DG ECHO

- The upcoming Shelter guidelines should consider some operational issues, as relevant: (i) cash assistance to be sub-divided as feasible for accountability purposes among shelter/rental, food aid, etc.; (ii) LRRD actions to mitigate tensions with host populations through e.g. development support to local infrastructures; (iii) funding the most adapted channels for public information about shelter rehabilitation opportunities or legal assistance; (iv) QA at production plants and QC upon site installation for some costly and/or technically complex items, for optimum cost-effectiveness; (v) quality and cost-effectiveness assessments of innovative technologies; (vi) the use of “Universal Design” shelters with inclusive access for all, subject to local cultural adaptations of the design; (vii) better monitoring and repair kits to apply effectively the “Building Back Better” approach; and (viii) preparedness and prepositioning of materials for transitional shelters.

Positioning vis-à-vis emergency, transitional and durable shelters

GSC

- The GSC should initiate – with ECHO support – the definition of a broadly accepted and comprehensive terminology for post-emergency types of shelter for the displaced (transitional, temporary, semi-permanent) and settlement (camps, collective centres, self-settlement in rural and urban contexts). This approach should facilitate a corresponding terminology for those affected but not displaced, or returned, both for shelter (repairs, reconstruction, transitional, semi-permanent) and settlement (house owners, apartment tenants, land tenants), with indications of cost-effectiveness and lifetime.

DG ECHO

- Considering the protracted nature of many crises and the usual lack of LRRD, the higher initial investment cost of transitional shelter solutions must be divided by their expected number of useful years, to which must be added qualitative factors of life. This approach makes them in effect quite cost effective, as compared to short-term shelters that must be replaced regularly, and should be considered by ECHO whenever relevant.
- Such extended durability and periods of support would furthermore still correspond to the accepted definition of transitional or semi-permanent in most donor countries, although they would probably appear as permanent for many vulnerable recipients – offering one response to the LRRD problem.

A5) Summary Table

Main conclusions	Corresponding recommendations
Institutional level	
<p>Potential limitations in the Humanitarian Aid Regulation appear in the unclear adjective of “short-term” for rehabilitation and reconstruction and in the lack of reference to environmental and ethical challenges, settlements, or early legal assistance.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The concept of “Protection” needs to be further interpreted to cover new challenges in the upcoming ECHO policy. → “Short-term” needs to be clarified and aligned with the actual lifetime of transitional shelters (see below).
<p>Key added values and comparative advantages of ECHO are mitigated in the shelter sector by a certain lack of dedicated technical expertise, partly due to imposed resource limitations.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The current primarily WASH experts could be enhanced, upon training, etc., into “WATHAB” ones. → Training and guidance should be available to all TAs. → A FPA “technical reference working group” could be set up to integrate specialised technical skills from DG ECHO and professionally partners, to discuss ad hoc shelter issues.
<p>In the complex institutional settings of the GSC, where UNHCR leads the Cluster in conflict situations with IDPs and where its mandate takes precedence in refugee situations, the agency does not always seem to apply consistently the coordination practices learned by the GSC.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → ECHO should support UNHCR in upgrading its coordination mechanism for refugees, in the light of IASC cluster progress. → In non-cluster coordination settings and alternatively to supporting UNHCR coordination capacities, ECHO should consider funding implementing partners directly for coordination purposes, as well as the humanitarian community in reviewing and upgrading non-cluster coordination mechanisms. → When there is an impasse between humanitarian approaches and the policy of a host government, ECHO in coordination with DEVCO, should engage more with the UN system and/or local government to enact effective shelter and settlement strategies, and facilitate LRRD.
<p>Beyond GSC, the wider shelter sector still requires support and training as a community of practice. The Cluster co-leads see their responsibility as limited to coordination within activated Cluster responses. As a result, coordination between GSC, the shelter sector, and other clusters has been lacking. Key weaknesses can be found e.g. in planning, terminology, or opportunities for all to engage into technical discussions. Significant progress was however noted recently in the development of the GSC Strategy, SAG, etc.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → ECHO should continue supporting the GSC Strategy and SAG, together with the development of a consensus linking the sector, Cluster and other donors over shelter planning and training processes. This should be done in full coordination with the development of non-cluster and refugee planning and training processes.

Main conclusions	Corresponding recommendations
<p>For all sectors (not only Shelter), currently three parallel coordination mechanisms are in use: cluster, non-cluster, and refugee. Non-cluster and refugee mechanisms are disproportionately under-developed at both operational and global levels, with minimal capacity developed for coordination between these mechanisms</p>	<p><u>For the Sector</u></p> <p>→ Support to the sector by ECHO is currently limited to coordination, through the GSC. The sector should also be supported in its programmatic needs, such as in developing and maintaining strategies, knowledge management and the development of consensus guidance. This additional support will also be helpful in helping the sector to be able to respond consistently across the three different coordination mechanisms currently in use in humanitarian response.</p>
Strategic level	
<p>A better coordination with other experienced donors would be required e.g. in the framework of DRR/ preparedness for future large urban crises.</p>	<p><u>For donors' coordination fora</u></p> <p>→ More DRR planning and conceptualisation with other key donors should be considered e.g. through the OCHA donors' forum or a GSC Thematic Group.</p> <p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <p>→ ECHO should continue trying to engage new non-traditional donors into GHD</p>
<p>The segmentation of shelter and rehabilitation activities in five main SF sectors has not been found detrimental to efficiency and effectiveness – due in part to the flexibility of ECHO staff. However, shelters must integrate the widely used coping strategy of settlements, and attaching NFIs to a single sector is misleading.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <p>→ In a possible revision of the ECHO typology of sectors, Shelters should be associated with Settlements.</p> <p>→ NFIs should be considered as a cross-cutting issue, to become subsectors under Shelter and Settlements, WASH and Protection.</p>
<p>Due to a number of factors (cost, complexity, and poor strategic and operational linkages) LRRD and exit strategies are often lacking for shelter activities with development donors and national actors.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <p>→ As feasible within the intervention timeframe, ECHO should link up with acceptable local authorities involved in DRR and LRRD, without directly funding them.</p> <p>→ In parallel, ECHO should continue supporting partners who are working with such government and local actors on transitional and durable shelters.</p>
Operational level	
<p>Due in part to the lack of shelter expertise and guidance, there is often too much a focus on emergency short-term solutions, which tend to become quite costly as they must be regularly replaced in a context of protracted crisis and lack of LRRD.</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <p>→ Cost-effectiveness of transitional shelters, if understood as incremental, must be compared with other options over an expected lifetime of 3 to 10 years. ECHO should support whenever relevant the higher investment cost of quality transitional shelters.</p> <p>→ ECHO should support the definition of a broadly accepted and comprehensive terminology for the sector. Transitional, temporary or semi-permanent shelters are e.g. in need of</p>

Main conclusions	Corresponding recommendations
	<p>corresponding typology definitions and indications of cost-effectiveness and lifetime.</p>
<p>In urban contexts, the majority of victims are tenants who seek to stay near their damaged assets; the most vulnerable of them are poorly supported, with minimal good practice identified</p>	<p><u>For ECHO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → More early support should be devoted to self-reconstruction and repair efforts, with emphasis on risk management. → HLP or ICLA should be initiated it as early as possible and linked with LRRD.
<p>Implementing partners use essentially indicators of outputs rather than outcomes, and the effects of better shelter on mortality and morbidity are not measured</p>	<p><u>For GSC and the sector</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Discussions should continue with GSC and FPA partners about the most adapted SMART outcome indicators for shelter. → Elements of morbidity and mortality – even though difficult to attribute to shelter alone - should be captured by qualitative indicators of outcome or perceived satisfaction, if SMART indicators are not applicable.