

HUMANITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (HIP) - GREAT LAKES¹

The full implementation of this version of the HIP is conditional upon the approval of the transfer by the Budgetary Authorities.

AMOUNT: EUR 110 683 339

The present Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) was prepared on the basis of financing decision ECHO/WWD/BUD/2024/01000 (Worldwide Decision) and the related General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid (Operational Priorities). The purpose of the HIP and its annexes² is to serve as a communication tool from DG ECHO³ to its partners and assist them in the preparation of their proposals. The provisions of the Worldwide Decision and the General Conditions of the Agreement with the European Commission shall take precedence over the provisions in this document.

While this HIP covers the five countries **Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania**, it focuses in particular on the humanitarian needs (a) triggered by the conflict in the **DRC** (b) of the **Burundian (and increasingly Congolese) refugees** in the region, as well as refugee returns back to Burundi. For both crises, humanitarian needs (caused by conflict and natural hazards) are assessed to be very high and so is the vulnerability of the crisis-affected populations. The situation in DRC and that of the Burundi refugees are both categorised as forgotten crises.

0. MAJOR CHANGES SINCE THE PREVIOUS VERSION OF THE HIP

First modification as of 04/07/2024⁴

Since the publication of the first version of this HIP in the last quarter of 2023, the humanitarian situation in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** has further deteriorated. In particular the M23 crisis in eastern DRC has continued to intensify since the beginning of the year 2024, with unprecedented large-scale fighting taking place mostly in North Kivu but also increasingly in South Kivu between the M23 rebels (supported by Rwanda), and the Congolese army FARDC, supported by various militias (“Wazalendo” groups), the UN mission MONUSCO, Burundian and SADC troops. This large-scale fighting with more and more sophisticated weaponry such as artillery and air strikes has resulted in new waves of displacement, particularly in- and around Goma, in Rutshuru and Masisi territories but also in South Kivu (Minova and Kalehe territory), as well as regular shelling of IDP sites and other civilian targets. More than 940 000 people have been newly displaced since the beginning of the year alone. Many of the displaced live in highly precarious and inhumane conditions and face multiple needs, including food, water and sanitation, healthcare, and shelter. Another consequence of the conflict is an uptick in disease outbreaks, in particular Mpox and cholera. Furthermore, massive protection needs remain unaddressed, amidst an ever-escalating sexual and gender-based violence crisis. The conflict in Ituri Province has persisted but the situation deteriorated significantly with the M23 crisis (and the security vacuum left by the FARDC). Inter-communal violence accelerated with deadly and large-scale attacks against civilians, schools and health structures forcing thousands of people to displace and severely impacting

¹ The Great Lakes region in this HIP covers the following five countries: Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania.

² Technical annex and thematic policies annex

³ Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)

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the access to land and to basic services. The humanitarian situation is becoming increasingly critical with an estimated 1.6 million people displaced in the Province. Djugu remains the epicentre of the crisis. In Mai Ndombe, the worsening crisis and the security response by authorities and the FARDC have exacerbated protection risks for the population.

In order to respond to these massive additional humanitarian needs not foreseen when the initial HIP allocation was decided, the European Commission has mobilised an additional EUR 35 million for the humanitarian response to the crisis in the DRC from the European Union's Emergency Aid Reserve. This additional funding will serve to respond to the most acute needs caused by the latest escalation of conflict and alleviate human suffering. Further specifications are provided in the Humanitarian Implementation Plan Technical Annex.

This modification is also intended to transfer EUR 5 933 339 to be allocated to the IFRC pilot Programmatic Partnership action '*Accelerating local action in humanitarian and health crises*'.

1. CONTEXT

Humanitarian crises in the Great Lakes region are mainly caused by violent conflict due to geopolitical and domestic reasons, increasingly with inter-ethnic dimensions. These crises are compounded by poor governance and corruption, structural poverty, insufficient development, and related service provision, as well as a high infectious disease potential.

Against this backdrop, crisis-affected people in the fragile states of the region⁵ generally lack livelihood opportunities and often live in extreme poverty. Access to basic social services is inadequate, especially in the **DRC**, and to a lesser extent in **Burundi** and the **Republic of the Congo**.

The **DRC**, although endowed with vast natural resources, including some of world's most important mineral reserves, and home to the second largest tropical forest on earth, remains a fragile, low-income country. More than 70% of Congolese citizens live in extreme poverty⁶. The humanitarian situation is complex and has drastically worsened throughout 2022 and 2023 due to the conflict and insecurity in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. There were 6.1 million internally displaced people in the DRC in mid-2023, 93% of whom sheltered by host families⁷, placing a significant burden on the already very scarce resources of those households.

In North Kivu, fighting between the M23 armed group supported by Rwanda and the Congolese army FARDC (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*) and associated armed groups, displaced more than 1.1 million people since the violence re-erupted in March 2022, with the majority displaced since the end of 2022. Nearly 600 000 people live in precarious conditions in and around Goma (capital of North Kivu), receiving insufficient levels of humanitarian assistance. The conflict in North Kivu has caused insecurity in other provinces to increase. Various non-state armed groups exploit the security vacuum left by the shifting of FARDC troops to fight against M23. In Ituri province for example, fighting against and

⁵ Out of 179 countries assessed in the Fragile States Index 2023 by the Fund for Peace, the **DRC** was considered the 4th most fragile country in the world, **Burundi** was ranked the 20th and the **Republic of the Congo** the 28th, **Rwanda** the 44th and **Tanzania** the 65th most fragile state globally.

⁶ 69.7% live below the income poverty line per the HDI (<https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI/COD.pdf>)

⁷ OCHA, August 2023 (<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/republique-democratique-du-congo-personnes-deplacees-interne-et-retournees-juillet-2023>)

between non-state armed groups continues at an ever-increasing scale, with many of these armed groups directly targeting the civilian populations of other ethnic communities in their attacks.

Peace initiatives and peacekeeping operation (PKO) deployments have had, so far, a mixed result. While a ceasefire of sorts has held for a few months in North Kivu in 2023, there is no lasting peace in sight and fighting and generalised insecurity continue to trigger vast and repeated displacements. The impact of violence on civilians is a major concern with systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including targeted attacks against civilians and high levels of gender-based violence (GBV). Sexual violence and exploitation has reached unprecedented levels, particularly around Goma, where women and girls have been forced to engage in various forms of survival sex due to inexistent livelihood possibilities. All this is taking place in a context of absolute impunity, because of an ill-functioning justice system, the high-cost implications for survivors to bring their perpetrators to justice, and an underperforming legal system put under pressure by the security degradation.

The DRC hosts the *'Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo'* (MONUSCO), which is mandated, inter alia, to protect civilians under threat of physical violence. While the mission has been only partly successful in executing its mandate and is lacking credibility in the eyes of many Congolese, it nevertheless plays an important role in the protection of civilians (protection by presence), as well as in the field of human rights, the fight against impunity, and in logistics (including for enabling physical humanitarian access). However, the mission is preparing its progressive withdrawal following a request by the DRC's government. Should the withdrawal be finalised, it will leave an enormous gap on many levels. Meanwhile, other regional actors such as the East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Angola have deployed or intend to deploy troops to the DRC. The FARDC have contracted private military security companies to support them, and acquired equipment including drones, further increasing the number of weapon bearers in North Kivu. Civil-military coordination remains of utmost importance in this context to ensure that IHL principles be known and respected, civilians are protected, and deconfliction increased. As the MONUSCO mission is preparing to leave, a new paradigm related to the *protection by presence* will need to be defined as the objectives of the different international contingents are not established on the same principles and do not have the same objectives.

Against this backdrop, there is general agreement that the humanitarian situation will continue to worsen towards the end of 2023 and into 2024 due inter alia to the general insecurity, the presence and operation of numerous armed groups (often community-based auto-defence groups) operating with impunity, the increasing number of arms and new recruits that are widely available, and the increasingly ethnic dimension of the crisis. On top of this, general elections due to take place in December 2023 contribute to belligerent narratives which have the potential to further increase tensions and violence.

Since 2022, armed violence has also afflicted the Mai-Ndombe province in western DRC. Fuelled by conflict over land, customary laws and taxes, the violence has spread to neighbouring Kwango and Kwilu provinces, and to the outskirts of DRC's capital, Kinshasa. The absence of meaningful and lasting solutions to customary royalties, land tenure and accountability for past atrocities are exposing communities to more and more deadly cycles of violence and reprisals. According to local authorities, more than 161 000 people have fled their villages since June 2022. Return is not imminent for those living in precarious conditions in collective displacement centres and with host families. Humanitarian aid is limited in those

areas and needs are insufficiently covered, especially in the areas of Health/Nutrition, Protection (GBV/Child protection), and Education.

In the Great Lakes region overall, the situation in **Burundi** seems to be more conducive to refugee returns since the 2020 elections. However, the absorption capacity for sustainable reintegration of returnees remains insufficient, and there are serious human rights concerns. Many refugees who left because of the violence and repression in the context of the 2015 elections, have now returned. As of 31 July 2023, 302 716 Burundian refugees remain registered in the four countries of asylum (Tanzania, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda). UNHCR has repatriated 214 543 people. Since 2022 however, the return trend has slowed down considerably, and more and more returnees have chosen to go back again to Tanzania (no official figures for this trend).

The **Congo River basin**, the second largest tropical forest in the world, is already affected by climate change, and overextraction of natural resources, causing rapid deforestation. The east of the DRC is subject to tectonic activity and volcanic eruptions, as well as flash floods and landslides. The DRC and the Republic of the Congo lack early warning and response systems to prevent and respond to natural disasters. In Burundi, 80% of internal displacements are caused by natural disasters. Landslides, droughts, and floods are the main causes. The waters of Lake Tanganyika have risen to 776.5 metres, above the historical average of 772.7 meters, causing frequent flooding. The national response to natural disasters still needs support to respond to and anticipate multi-hazards.

The region, particularly the **DRC**, is also affected by **recurrent epidemics** and emerging diseases, the control of which remains challenging due to weak health systems, insecurity and inefficiencies in health alert and response mechanisms.

It is widely expected that the political and humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region will deteriorate in 2024. Despite renewed international engagement⁸, the root causes of the violence in eastern **DRC** remain, and the refugee and IDP situation in the region is likely to continue or even worsen. While the voluntary repatriation process of Burundian refugees is expected to continue in 2024, more and more Congolese are now seeking refuge abroad mainly due to the war in the Kivu provinces. In total, the Great Lakes region hosts around one million refugees in mid-2023.⁹

The **DRC** is structurally food insecure, importing more than 80% of its food needs. The agricultural sector is under-invested and under-developed (only 10% of arable land is utilised). This results in approximately 26 million people being food insecure (IPC 3+), which is the highest single country number in the world.

May-June 2023 estimates	Burundi	DRC	RoC	Rwanda	Tanzania
INFORM Risk Index (0-10)¹⁰	5.9	7.8	5.0	4.5	5.8
Hazard and Exposure	4.7	7.4	2.8	3.0	5.7
Vulnerability	6.5	7.9	6.0	5.9	5.5

⁸ At EU level, a new EU strategy for the Great Lakes, as well as a Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) to address violence in eastern DRC were adopted in late 2022 and early 2023.

⁹ 1 028 584 in the Regional Congolese Refugee Plan

¹⁰ INFORM Risk is a global, open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk>

Lack of Coping Capacity	3.8	8.1	7.6	5.0	6.1
INFORM Severity Index (0-5)¹¹	3.5	4.5	2.3	2.4	2.6
Impact of the crisis	3.9	4.5	2.9	2.5	3.2
Condition of people affected	3.4	4.5	2.0	2.4	2.8
Complexity of the crisis	3.3	4.4	2.3	2.3	2.0
Number of People in Need	2.5M ⁱ	26 400 000 ¹²	134 000	126 000	1 237 000
Human Development Index (0-1)	0.426	0.479	0.571	0.534	0.579
Total Population¹³	13.2 m	108.5 m	5.8 m	14 m	67 m

2. HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

2.1. People in need of humanitarian assistance:

Sources ¹⁴	DRC	Burundi	Tanzania	Rwanda	Republic of Congo
Registered refugees/ asylum seekers	524,121	115,000/ 1,384	216.324 / 39.135	118.066 / 10.556	71,571
IDPs	6,100,000	-	-	-	26,875
Severely food insecure people (IPC 3+) ¹⁵	25,800,000	1,156,000	205.000	-	-
Acutely malnourished children under 5y	2,600,000	528.000	-	6.427	-
Protection needs (GBV; children out of school)	9,200,000	236.000/ 114.000 / 189.000	-	20.000	-

2.1.1. Refugees and asylum seekers

Recurrent crises in the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic have led to multiple waves of refugees. Most of them live in camps, except in the **DRC**, where many settled in local Congolese communities. Refugee camps in the Great Lakes are mainly managed by UNHCR. Most refugees depend fully on humanitarian aid, with exceptions in the **DRC**, **Rwanda** and in the **Republic of the Congo**, where limited – and largely informal – livelihood options exist. The low level of funding in response to refugees’ needs in recent years and the absence or limited presence of long-term programmes have led to cuts in basic services and food rations in several camps and locations. In 2023, WFP for example had to reduce the rations distributed to refugees in camps in Tanzania and in Burundi to 50%, which is causing higher rates of malnutrition, exposes women and children to protection risks when leaving the camps to look for food and causes additional conflicts with the host community. In addition, the recent arrival of growing numbers of Congolese refugees fleeing violence in eastern DRC

¹¹ The INFORM Severity Index is a way to objectively measure and compare the severity of humanitarian crises and disasters globally. <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Severity>

¹² HNO 2023 <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/republique-democratique-du-congo-apercu-des-besoins-humanitaires-2023-janvier-2023>

¹³ World Bank data, 2022/23

¹⁴ Sources: Refugees: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Other: Humanitarian Response Plans for Burundi and the DRC. RoC – IDPs: International Displacement Monitoring Centre.

¹⁵ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). Phase 3 represents ‘crisis level’ and 4 ‘emergency’. Phase 5 is the highest level and represents ‘famine’.

has exacerbated the already unserviceable level of humanitarian needs in Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania.

The **DRC** and **Rwanda** have developed refugee responses in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, granting freedom of movement to refugees, giving them access to national social services and supporting wherever possible the goal of self-reliance.

For the more than half a million refugees in the **DRC**, mainly from Rwanda, Burundi, Central African Republic and South Sudan, the quality of the refugee response is insufficient and access to basic services limited. However, unless a new wave of refugees occurs, long-term solutions are preferred for addressing their needs and those of host communities.

Rwanda currently hosts around 80 000 refugees from the DRC (recent and old cases from the 1990s, in 5 camps) and around 48 000 refugees from Burundi, many of whom live in Mahama camp¹⁶. While they have the right to work and freedom of movement, livelihood opportunities remain limited. Access to core protection services exists, but GBV risks and child protection remain of concern also linked to the ration cuts. Rwanda remains committed to the protection of refugees on its territory and reiterated its readiness to facilitate the safe and dignified return of those who choose to repatriate in collaboration with UNHCR and relevant governments. Monitoring of these returns is essential to ensure protection and respect of the tripartite agreements. Since November 2022, over 10 000 Congolese asylum seekers fleeing the M23 conflict have been welcomed in Nkamira and Kijote Transit centres and Mahama Camp.

Burundi hosts more than 100 000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from the DRC, in camps and often for many years. While urban refugees can move around the country with little impediment, camp-based refugees are required to obtain a “billet de sortie” (exit permit) prior to leaving the camp. Similarly, there are restrictions on access to the labour market, access to finance and basic social services, which are the most challenging obstacles to their economic integration and self-reliance. In addition, since the start of the “M23 crisis” in the DRC, many Congolese have been fleeing violent clashes in North and South Kivu and seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, including Burundi. This has created additional needs in terms of access to food, WASH, shelter, and healthcare, which national authorities and international organisations are struggling to meet.

In **Tanzania**, around 254 294 refugees were hosted mainly in camps in the Kigoma region by end of July 2023, the majority from Burundi (144 138) but also from the DRC (approx. 88 140) and other countries. Tanzania stopped granting *prima facie* refugee status to Burundians in 2017. It also stopped registering new asylum seekers and withdrew from the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in 2018. The country applies a strict encampment policy and imposes a restrictive livelihood environment, while promoting the repatriation of Burundian refugees. A tripartite agreement on voluntary repatriation between Tanzania, Burundi and UNHCR entered into force in September 2017. In May 2023, the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees in Tanzania decided to move from facilitation to promotion of voluntary repatriation to increase the numbers of Burundians returning to their country of origin. The recent crisis in North and South Kivu has led to a new influx of 12 800 Congolese refugees as of August 2023. Despite the situation in their country of origin, these refugees are not granted *prima facie* status.

¹⁶ A further around 35 000 Burundian refugees have returned since 2017.

The **Republic of Congo** hosts more than 70 000 refugees mainly from Central African Republic and the DRC (most recent ones fleeing the Mai-Ndombe crisis) and provides them to some extent with access to farming and fishing opportunities.

2.1.2. Returnees

The numbers of refugees repatriated to **Burundi** slowed down in 2022 and 2023: while more than 30 000 refugees repatriated from Tanzania to Burundi in 2021 alone, just over 5 800 had repatriated during 2022, and approximately 6 980 by end of July 2023. This substantial decrease has mainly been due to the many challenges returnees face regarding reintegration and limited livelihood options, but also remaining protection concerns. An increase in secondary displacement of returnees inside Burundi has been observed since 2021.

2.1.3. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

With a total of 6.1 million displaced as of July 2023, an increase from 5.2 million in 2022, the **DRC** has the highest number of IDPs on the African continent. Some have been displaced for years, but the recent escalation of violence has caused a new wave of displacements, often recurrent. Overall, in the four eastern provinces close to one person out of every four is currently displaced. In North Kivu, nearly 600 000 people are living in inhumane, crowded conditions in and around the provincial capital of Goma, with insufficient humanitarian assistance and are subjected to violence and massive protection violations, including rapes, sexual exploitation, and other forms of GBV. In Ituri, continued inter-communal conflicts and a proliferation of armed groups operating with total impunity are causing further displacements. Newly displaced populations need immediate and comprehensive multi-sector assistance, including protection with a particular focus on GBV and child protection risks.

Burundi counts around 106 698 persons affected by natural hazards, of whom 12 850 were displaced in 2022. Natural hazards are responsible for 89% of all displacements.

2.1.4. Populations affected by food insecurity and under-nutrition

Food insecurity and undernutrition are widespread and chronic (with frequent episodes of acute spikes) in the region linked to multiple root causes. They are particularly alarming in the **DRC** and, to a lesser extent, in **Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania**.

A staggering 25.8 million people¹⁷ in the **DRC** are highly food insecure (IPC 3+). Agricultural productivity is low in the DRC and the country relies heavily on imports. A nutritious diet is unaffordable for half the population (WFP). The recent devaluation of the Congolese Franc, inflation, insecurity, structural poverty, poor infrastructure and governance that limit agricultural and economic activities in rural areas, agricultural pests and livestock diseases, forced displacement, climate change, as well as recurrent epidemics, contribute to the alarming rates of food insecurity. In addition, the lack of appropriate and accessible or affordable health care, high prevalence of childhood diseases, lack of access to clean water, poor hygiene conditions, poor infant and young child feeding practices and acute food insecurity have dramatic consequences: an estimated 2.6 million children under 5 years of age suffer from acute malnutrition.

In **Burundi**, a combination of recurrent climatic hazards, associated displacement, structural poverty, lack of access to health/nutrition services, global inflation, cost of fuel, inadequate access to land, weak economic opportunities and an overall low resilience of the population

¹⁷ Food Insecurity Projection for the DRC, May 2023 (<https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156354/?iso3=COD>)

are factors contributing to food insecurity. In 2023, about 1.2¹⁸ million people are expected to need food assistance (IPC 3+). At the same time, more than half of the children under the age of 5 are chronically malnourished.

2.2. Description of the most acute humanitarian needs

2.2.1. Protection

The humanitarian crisis in the **DRC** is essentially a protection crisis. Conflict and violence in the east expose civilian populations to human rights and IHL violations and protection risks. The *État de siège*, in place in North Kivu and Ituri provinces since May 2021, has failed to effectively protect the civilian population. Despite troop deployments of various origins and institutions (FARDC, MONUSCO, EAC, SADC) to eastern DRC, protection incidents affecting civilians have risen sharply. There is a real risk that protection issues will increase, particularly in terms of security of the IDP sites after the possible departure of MONUSCO.

Ratification of the 2009 Kampala Convention for the protection and assistance of IDPs is not yet concluded in the DRC. IHL violations including gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, child recruitment, targeted attacks against civilians, physical violence, murder, abduction, torture, attacks on health structures and schools and looting have considerably increased since last year and need an increased focus. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2023 estimates show a total target population for protection of 5.7 million people, while at least 3.9 million children need child protection services and 7.6 million people, many of whom are children, are in need of assistance as regards gender-based violence (GBV). A further deterioration of the security context must be expected in eastern DRC in late 2023/2024, further increasing protection risks, especially in the areas of GBV and Child Protection.

In **Burundi**, concerns over human rights violations are frequent, in a context of political polarisation causing an increase of social tensions and exposure to protection risks.

The asylum space for Burundians in the refugee camps in **Tanzania** remains of significant concern. Authorities are entering a phase of “promotion” of return, despite indications that returnees increasingly face integration challenges.

2.2.2. Food assistance, food security & livelihoods

In the **DRC**, **25.8 million** people are estimated to be severely food insecure in 2023 (IPC 3+, of these 3.4 million people are estimated to be in IPC phase 4), linked most prominently to the protracted conflict in Eastern DRC and in Mai-Ndombe and subsequent large internal displacements. The lack of food leads to the use of negative coping mechanisms by the displaced and the most vulnerable people.

In **Burundi**, food insecurity remains a structural problem due to the same underlying factors with 1.2 million people projected to be acutely food insecure between June and September 2023.

In **Tanzania**, the number of refugees hosted in camps keeps increasing. Combined with funding shortfalls, this situation has led to a 50% cut in food rations in June 2023. As refugees are not allowed to engage in livelihood activities, they increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms to supplement their meagre rations.

¹⁸ Food Insecurity Projection for Burundi, May 2023 (<https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156379/?iso3=BDI>)

In **Rwanda**, due to funding shortfalls, no cash assistance for food or other basic items will be available to refugees from October 2023 onwards. This raises the spectre of negative coping mechanisms and possible insecurity among camp-based populations.

2.2.3. Health

The Great Lakes region, and especially the **DRC**, is prone to outbreaks of infectious diseases such as vector-borne diseases (malaria, plague, etc.), viral haemorrhagic fevers (yellow fever, Ebola, dengue, etc.), as well as measles, cholera, typhoid, Mpox, meningitis, polio, etc. The main reasons are overall poverty and inequity, prevailing natural conditions and climate change, but also rapid urbanisation, poor access to quality healthcare as well as safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and increasingly the destruction of the natural habitat - all of which are exacerbated by ongoing humanitarian crises.

The functionality of the **DRC**'s health system is highly variable across the country, depending on available resources in the community as well as support provided by development and humanitarian actors. Often, access to quality health-services remains limited and comes at a high cost for those most in need. Even in areas with better functioning systems such as parts of eastern **DRC**, health services are disrupted due to looting and destruction, supply chain disruptions, overburdening of services due to population displacement, lack of access, departure of healthcare workers, etc.

In case of shocks, whether displacement, violence or high impact disease outbreaks, additional services and resources are needed to deal with excess morbidity and mortality: scaling up existing services as they deal with increasing caseloads of infections such as malaria, deliveries and vaccinations as well as providing mental health and psycho-social services, GBV or war surgery services. However, in general, all these services are of limited availability in the health system.

While the risk for high impact disease outbreaks is somewhat lower for those affected by the **Burundi** crisis, both in **Burundi** and in **refugee camps in neighbouring countries**, communicable disease outbreaks have occurred in the past. A long-term investment in health systems is needed with built-in surge capacities and improved infection control measures as well as improved mental health and psychosocial services.

2.2.4. Nutrition

In the **DRC**, malnutrition remains the most important risk factor contributing to death and disability as well as to the vulnerability towards various epidemics, such as measles. In 2023, the nutrition cluster targeted 4 out of 13 million persons for support against acute malnutrition (children under 5, pregnant and lactating women and people living with HIV/TB). Serious gaps in access to treatment are chronically reported.

In **Burundi**, the nutritional situation among children under the age of 5 has deteriorated over the past years. More than half of the children younger than 5 are chronically malnourished. Poor access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities, a high level of food insecurity and a minimum dietary diversity contribute to the increased levels of acute malnutrition, while high levels of infectious diseases are key drivers.

2.2.5. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

In the **DRC**, access to water supplies, basic sanitation and basic means to adopt adequate personal hygiene practices are largely insufficient. Due to insecurity and conflicts, there is a lack of WASH infrastructure as well as a lack of maintenance or management measures, that

hinder the availability of water in sufficient quantity and quality. SPHERE standards are rarely met and often the cost of access to water remains a constraint for displaced people and host population. Such a situation creates even higher public health risks in a context of high population displacement and causes the spreading of waterborne diseases, including cholera.

WASH needs remain important for refugees in **Tanzania**, mainly in terms of school facilities and household latrines (in the context of camp consolidation).

2.2.6. Shelter and non-food-items (NFI)

In the region, and in particular in the **DRC**, people displaced for years coexist with others newly displaced, most of them suffering from multiple displacements.

During their displacements, the IDPs flee to collective centres, IDPs sites and camps as well as host families. Overcrowding in such places lead frequently to protection risks, including GBV and spread of epidemics, while the loss of most of their essential basic household items prevents them from being able to cook, to sleep in safe and dignified conditions and to carry and store water.

2.2.7. Education in Emergencies (EiE)

Displacement and conflict in the **DRC** have significantly affected the rights of children in the **Great Lakes**, including their access to education. 4 million children aged 6 to 11 are out of school in the DRC, exposing them to protection risks in the immediate term and negatively impacting on their development and their life chances in the long run. The cost for education and the lack of civil documentation often prevents children from accessing the education system, while the lack of training for teachers and teaching materials has a negative impact on the quality of education. Gender-based discrimination also significantly hamper girls' access to schools.

In the **DRC**, the policy of free primary level education aims at guaranteeing access to school for all has also led to school saturation. Due to insecurity, many schools are no longer functional, because they have been looted, totally or partially destroyed, or because children and/or teachers have fled. In displacement areas, displaced children are often out of school and when they have the opportunity to join schools, these are overcrowded, teachers are overworked and sanitation facilities are insufficient. Schools are also frequently used by IDPs as shelter or occupied by armed actors, in breach of the "safe school" declaration ratified by the country. Children are often traumatised and psychologically distressed by their exposure to violence and displacement.

2.2.8. Disaster preparedness

All countries in the Great Lakes region are prone to both natural-hazard and human-induced disasters. Coping capacities of communities and authorities are quickly overwhelmed. Moreover, investment in disaster preparedness and emergency response is generally weak due to conflicting priorities, political instability and lack of interest and long-term vision.

The **DRC** is home to multiple natural and man-made hazards ranging from volcanic and tectonic activities to flooding and landslides, a high recurrence of disease outbreaks, and on-going internal conflicts resulting in protracted and short-term displacement as well as humanitarian needs.

In **Burundi**, around 75 000 people were internally displaced in 2023 mainly because of recurrent floods, landslides and other natural disasters. Such disasters are expected to increase with climate change.

It is important to build in-country capacity to respond to low- and medium-scale disasters, to strengthen local actors' disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, to develop and operationalise community-based contingency planning and to strengthen first line community capacity for early warning and action.

Floods in the **Republic of the Congo** in recent years highlighted the authorities' lack of preparedness and capacity to respond. The damage and destruction caused by recurrent flooding leads to displacement, rising food insecurity, reduced water quality and an increase of water-borne diseases.

Weather-related disasters and floods in Rwanda in particular in 2023 caused 60 fatalities, destroyed over 1 205 homes and damaged 5 000 acres of land across Rwanda. The Government is expecting major floods in the last quarter 2023, and is actively preparing for this, as well as a multiannual plan for disaster preparedness, based on the 2023 experience.

3. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND COORDINATION

3.1. National / local response and involvement

National and local authorities in the **DRC** lack sufficient capacity and structures to address the root causes of the humanitarian crises. Local coordination systems do not provide adequate decision platforms and lack efficiency.

The highest management system for coordination and streamlining of the humanitarian action is the CNCH (*Cadre National de Concertation Humanitaire*). This platform has been reactivated in July 2023 with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity (MASAH). The focus of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is to build up a stronger relationship with the MASAH and to work towards a more meaningful and effective involvement of the Government in the humanitarian action.

Efforts to address the root causes of the multiple multi-causal crises are limited. Government expenditure on social services and physical infrastructure remains very low compared to the huge scale of needs and the size of the DRC. Setting up a national plan of universal health coverage and free primary education are part of the government's priorities in the DRC, but without secured funding so far. An effective decentralisation remains an important bottleneck in emergency response.

The country has no functioning disaster management body, only a poorly functioning civil protection mechanism. Disaster preparedness activities are not prioritised, resulting in missed opportunities to prepare and strengthen local capacity and resilience.

While the **Republic of the Congo** is prone to natural-hazard and manmade disasters, it lacks basic infrastructure, social services and a working system to manage natural or man-made disasters, rendering its population extremely vulnerable to any disaster. A national strategy and action plan for the prevention and reduction of risks was developed but has not been fully implemented due to lack of technical expertise and financial resources.

In **Burundi**, disaster preparedness needs to strengthen a risk-informed approach and adequate multi-hazard early warning and early response mechanisms to enhance the capacity to prepare for, anticipate and respond to a crisis. The country has introduced reforms to deal with disease outbreaks (decentralisation).

3.2. International Humanitarian Response

Due to the scale of humanitarian needs, the lack of funding and the diversity of partners present on the ground, strong and reliable humanitarian coordination is necessary. A concerted sharing of information, in particular data, as well as active and dedicated participation in coordination forums, including clusters, should guide the type of humanitarian response in compliance with standards.

Coordination and advocacy are key to address the protracted complex emergencies affecting the Great Lakes and protect humanitarian space. Moreover, due to the regional nature of some of the displacement, the need to further strengthen cross-country and regional coordination and analysis remains relevant.

Out of 26.4 million Congolese identified as needing assistance, the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for the **DRC** targets the 10 million most vulnerable people and required USD 2.25 billion. 33.5% of the funding requirement were met on 29 August 2023.¹⁹ Due to the sharp increase in unmet humanitarian needs in 2023, a system-wide scale-up was declared in June 2023. The response is led by a Humanitarian Coordinator – who is also the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and UN Resident Coordinator – and his Deputy. The humanitarian coordination system includes a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) of which the European Commission (DG ECHO) is a member. Inter-cluster coordination consists of nine clusters. Donor coordination includes the European Commission, EU Member States and other donors such as Canada, Norway, Switzerland, the UK and the USA. The NGO Forum covers over 100 international aid organisations, while CONAFAHD (*Conseil National des Fora des ONG Humanitaires et de Développement de la RDC*) is the main coordination platform for national NGOs.

The UN works as an integrated mission in the DRC. MONUSCO engages in direct military interventions against non-state armed actors in close collaboration with the FARDC (while members of the latter are also identified as human rights' and IHL violators²⁰). The complex nature of the conflict in the DRC and the presence of many military groups and Non-State Armed Groups with different mandates and objectives puts the humanitarian community in a critical situation. A clear distinction is needed between independent humanitarian aid and the instruments for political stabilisation as well as a solid civil-military coordination and clear respect of civil-military guidelines. Concerted efforts of humanitarian actors to advocate for principled actions are vital, to ensure access to conflict-affected populations, and to build a positive understanding of humanitarian actions and principles, as well as of International Humanitarian Law. Advocacy and engagement with development actors to cover gaps and plan more sustainable investments is crucial to enable humanitarians to focus on emergency needs.

In **Burundi**, the presence of OCHA has led to a better coordination of the humanitarian actors in situ. The 2023 Burundi HRP (revised mid-June) required USD 237.2 million, targeting 2.7 million most vulnerable people. The HRP has been recently revised to reflect the deterioration of the food security and health/nutrition situation. UNHCR's regional approach to Burundian returnees is strongly focusing on durable solutions to allow the sustainable reintegration.

¹⁹ Financial Tracking System (FTS) by UN OCHA. HRP funding requirements do not include appeals by the ICRC and MSF.

²⁰ See reporting by the UN Joint Human Rights Office of MONUSCO and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Several development programmes for returnees are being launched, which will help to operationalise the nexus between humanitarian and development actors.

There is no HRP for the **Republic of the Congo** nor for **Rwanda** and **Tanzania**, but the latter two are included in the Burundi Regional Refugee Response Plan.

3.3. Operational constraints in terms of:

1) Access/humanitarian space:

Restricted **access**, due to insecurity and/or administrative requirements by authorities, as well as context-specific difficulties, such as remoteness and logistical challenges, are major constraints in the region, especially in the **DRC and, to a lesser extent, in Burundi, the Republic of the Congo and Tanzania**. This may be amplified with the possible progressive withdrawal of MONUSCO in the DRC.

In the **DRC**, the severity of security incidents increased by 18% in 2022 compared to 2021 (56% compared to 2020). The first quarter of 2023 saw the highest level of incidents against humanitarians since 2018. Civilians and aid workers are victims of attacks and kidnapping for ransom. Political instability, military operations, the planned retreat of MONUSCO but also repeated attacks or retaliation on local populations increase safety, security and protection risks and jeopardise physical access. This reinforces the need for enhanced and coordinated safety and security awareness, as well as strictly neutral, impartial, and independent actions.

Preserving **humanitarian space depends on the** acceptance by communities, weapon bearers and authorities, and on the delivery of humanitarian assistance based on independently assessed and verified **needs, as well as a conflict-sensitive and ‘do no harm’ approach**. In that respect, coordinated advocacy efforts for the respect of humanitarian space, principles and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as well as dialogue with all parties needs to be pursued and IHL dissemination ensured.

In addition, humanitarian organisations working in the Great Lakes regularly face administrative hurdles to do their job, such as obstacles to import supplies and equipment, obtain visas or work permits and/or recruit international staff for the humanitarian response.

Finally, logistic impediments are particularly severe in the DRC. There are very few paved roads or cleared waterways; many aircraft and airport infrastructures are in appalling conditions, and most of the flight companies not reliable. Logistics are crucial to implement aid projects, but there is also an important cost factor, requiring adequate attention, capacity and a proper strategy. In this context, the European Union Humanitarian Aid Flight (EUHAF – formerly “ECHO Flight”) as well as two series of European Union Humanitarian Air Bridge flights in 2023 with full charters from Europe provided essential humanitarian air services in the **DRC**.

In **Burundi**, administrative requirements impact on humanitarian access and space. However, an increased collaboration with national authorities has been noted since the lifting of appropriate measures under article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement in February 2022. Monitoring of access to basic services by returnees as well as potential violations of their rights should be carefully monitored in order to maintain a protective/conducive environment in areas of return.

In **Tanzania**, the shrinking of the humanitarian space (including access issues to refugee camps for international staff) as well as the restriction of movement (for refugees) by authorities remains a serious concern for the quality of service delivery. The strict encampment policies

continue to negatively impact living conditions of refugees, who continue to be exposed to protection risks and a dire economic situation.

2) Partners (presence, capacity), including absorption capacity on the ground:

DG ECHO has an extensive partner network, guaranteeing a sufficient absorption capacity, in most of the countries of the Great Lakes' region, in particular in the DRC. This group of partners ensures high quality of programmes, with adequate implementing capacities (financial and human resources) as well as openness to support the capacity-building of local humanitarian non-governmental partner organisations, when possible. Local actors also play an important part in disaster preparedness.

3) Other:

The costs of operating in the DRC are very high, linked to access challenges, high insecurity, the vastness of the country and lack of adequate transport infrastructure, as well as risk of fraud.

The risk of instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid is extremely high, particularly in the context of the M23 crisis. This non-state armed group has set up some basic elements of an administration, with the aim of legitimising its presence and exerting continued influence over occupied territories. It only allows certain sectoral interventions in the territories under its control. At the same time, the DRC's authorities do not authorise food aid deliveries into these territories, due to the lack of food in the camps in and around Goma.

In addition, humanitarian organisations operate in a context where corruption, fraud and sexual exploitation and abuse are widespread, and must take adequate prevention and control measures, in relation with the anti-fraud minimum engagements validated by the Humanitarian Country Team in February 2021.

The delivery of humanitarian assistance through cash in the DRC can address some of the operational challenges faced in providing humanitarian assistance in the DRC, but with the appropriate risk management mechanisms in place, including do-no-harm. Beneficiary modality preferences should systematically be assessed, and context and market analysis included.

4. HUMANITARIAN - DEVELOPMENT – PEACE NEXUS

Complementarity between peace and security, humanitarian and development policies and interventions, following a nexus approach, allows to link urgent relief with longer-term and sustainable solutions, in a people-centred and rights-based way. This approach must be addressed and implemented in full respect of the humanitarian principles – humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence – and abide by the principle of 'do no harm'. It needs to be done by delivering practical solutions through dedicated and enhanced coordination, in a pragmatic but principled approach and simultaneously aiming at crisis response, stabilisation and early recovery.

Nexus opportunities in the DRC

The humanitarian-development-peace nexus is not systematically operationalised, despite increased efforts by the EU and other actors. Poor governance, lack of political engagement, a very low national budget and the poor capacity of social services are serious obstacles for a nexus approach and durable solutions to the ongoing crises in the DRC. Considering these challenges, the nexus approach needs to be adapted to the context, to secure longer-term

commitment and work towards a more sustained delivery of basic services and a peaceful environment for crises-affected populations to return to.

Congolese authorities and the UN country team (and other stakeholders) have identified Kasai, Tanganyika and Ituri provinces as focus areas for a nexus approach, with Tanganyika being the “pilot province” for sustainable solutions for IDPs. DG ECHO continues to focus on the eastern part of the country, in particular conflict-affected provinces (mainly Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu).²¹

DG INTPA²² is managing the 2021-27 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for the DRC that aims at fostering stabilisation, reinforcing public institutions and consolidating the social contract, reducing inequalities and preserve biodiversity and global public goods. The three priority areas are: (i) governance, peace, and security; (ii) human development; (iii) alliance for sustainable development. EUR 424 million are allocated until 2024. The current MIP is undergoing a mid-term review.

The cooperation between DGs ECHO and INTPA and EEAS follows a comprehensive approach, especially in Eastern DRC. DG INTPA plans development interventions for the 2023-2025 period in the health sector in Ituri and North Kivu²³ and in the education and vocational training sector in North and South Kivu.²⁴ Given DG ECHO’s ongoing support to health and nutrition as well as education in emergencies’ (EiE) projects in these provinces, further advances in a nexus implementation should be made including for opportunities establishing a continuum of care in protection, especially regarding GBV, while reaching out to authorities at local, provincial and national level to work towards a phased-in ownership of authorities.

In this context, DGs ECHO, INTPA, FPI²⁵ and the European External Action Service (EEAS) are looking into ways to identify geographical areas of convergence in Eastern DRC that allow to create synergies between their respective programmes to improve the resilience of the population. Ituri and North Kivu provinces (without excluding other provinces) would need to continue benefitting from a focus of humanitarian, development, and stabilisation projects, in the sectors of health (including SGBV and MHPSS responses) and education. These should be carefully selected, based on a profound needs analysis, feasibility considerations and the geographical scope of current actions or planned for the coming years by ECHO, INTPA, FPI, and EEAS in order to promote a continuity of services in the different sectors. This should also include dialogue and cooperation with other EU and non-EU donors.

The root causes of the conflict and humanitarian crisis in the DRC ultimately need to be addressed politically. Joint initiatives – also at Team Europe level – are therefore important. At EU level, the EEAS is overseeing the implementation of the new EU Strategy for the Great Lakes, as well as a Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) to address the root causes

²¹ This geographical focus does not apply to DG ECHO’s support for emergency responses to high impact communicable disease outbreaks.

²² The European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA).

²³ The DG INTPA annual action plan 2023 includes the action “*Unis pour la santé*” with a budget of EUR 35 million to support the health sector, focusing on the quality of care and the access to care for the most vulnerable. It will also target the determinants of health (e.g. birth registration).

²⁴ The DG INTPA annual action plan 2022 includes the action “*Unis pour l’éducation*” with a budget of EUR 19 million and a focus on the return and maintained presence of children in schools in areas affected by crisis, in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the DG INTPA action plan “*unis pour l’éducation et l’emploi*”, 2023-2025, with a budget of EUR 30 million focussing on vocational training.

²⁵ The European Commission’s Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI).

of violence and lack of stability in eastern DRC. The EU committed in its recent Strategy on the Great Lakes to “continue to provide humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable and crisis-affected populations, including for the region’s many IDPs and refugees, whilst seeking to foster durable solutions for these populations”.

Nexus opportunities in the Burundi regional crisis context (Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania)

Nexus opportunities will focus on durable solutions for refugees and returnees in the context of the “*EU regional project to provide durable solutions for the Burundian refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region*”, implemented through DG INTPA and with a budget of EUR 40 million, financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). Benefitting countries are **Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania** and **Uganda**. The specific objective of the regional project is to address the protection and long-term needs and support durable solutions for forcibly displaced populations – refugees, returnees and IDPs and their host communities. The action aims at providing regional comprehensive and multi-sectoral sustainable response to the Burundian refugee crisis following a nexus approach combining humanitarian, development and peace and security components in the Great Lakes Region. Synergies with the health, education and resilience programmes, implemented under the national MIP, will also be sought.

DG INTPA will also be implementing two new regional initiatives for the Great Lakes, with which nexus opportunities will be sought: the first one focusing on forced displacement (EUR 45 million) and the second one on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Displacement in the Tanganyika region (EUR 50 million). The first regional Action provides support to the pursuit of protection assistance and durable solutions to protracted forced displacement. The Action will target displaced populations and refugees: IDPs and refugee returnees in DRC, and DRC refugees hosted in neighbouring countries (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania). The assistance will include targeted protection and durable solutions for refugees, IDPs and host communities; institutional capacity building for local authorities on IDPs/refugees management and contingency planning; and support to voluntary return in safety and dignity when the conditions allow. The second regional action aims to prevent and manage the risks affecting communities exposed to climate change, with a focus on climate-induced displacement in the Lake Tanganyika basin areas spanning across the border areas of DRC, Burundi, Tanzania.

5. ENVISAGED DG ECHO RESPONSE STRATEGY AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF HUMANITARIAN AID INTERVENTIONS

5.1. Envisaged DG ECHO response

5.1.1 Priorities

The Great Lakes’ region is affected by extreme structural poverty as well as acute humanitarian crises, especially in the DRC. Given the limited funding availability compared to identified needs, the response funded under this HIP will focus only on new and most severe humanitarian needs. In the humanitarian response, a strict geographic prioritisation will be made and, in the DRC, only interventions in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika, as well

as Mai-Ndombe, will in principle be eligible for funding²⁶. Furthermore, interventions in areas controlled by armed groups such as M23-controlled territories must be based upon demonstrated compliance with humanitarian principles and the do no harm principle, as well as a sound contextual, conflict and risk analysis and coordinated with other humanitarian actors intervening in those areas.

DG ECHO-funded humanitarian interventions should be based on a continued focus on life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable – those affected by recent conflicts and/or epidemics, natural-hazard induced disasters and/or new displacements – covering basic services through a multi-sectorial response. Such responses should also enhance the fast tracking and direct referrals system to other sectors through the standardisation/harmonisation of processes and methodologies, such as registration forms and data sharing agreements for interoperability.

The nature of the crises in the region requires an integrated approach, protection centred programming, protection/gender mainstreaming and a conflict sensitive approach (“do no harm”) to be applied in the strategic needs analysis and in all activities. DG ECHO is keen to support integrated Protection programming with multi-sectorial outcomes, including concrete Protection outcomes to improve the safe guarding of persons of concern. DG ECHO will pay attention to possible synergies with other ongoing activities implemented by the same partner or others, including development actors.

The analysis of needs is expected to be holistic and to follow a basic needs approach. A detailed multi-risk needs assessment should explain the response (sectors and modality of interventions). The added value of the response (e.g. in terms of reduction of excess morbidity and mortality) and comparative advantage of aid modalities needs to be documented throughout the response, when possible. A thorough risk analysis should be applied to all possible delivery modalities, followed by monitoring to ensure that the assistance has not exacerbated risks. For cash-based responses, preference will be given to interventions based on use of digital payments and innovative technologies, including the expansion of mobile money where technically and operationally feasible and practical.

Close field coordination with other humanitarian actors intervening in the same geographic area/camps/IDP sites is expected. This should, as a minimum, cover the coordination of the response in each location but should ideally also involve joint or shared needs assessments.

DG ECHO supports the coordination of the humanitarian response to the respective crises in the Great Lakes to maximise the impact and timeliness of the action. This includes civil-military coordination, operational coordination, and humanitarian advocacy in line with humanitarian principles. DG ECHO also supports organisations engaging in a contextualisation of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, refugee law and humanitarian standards to improve the situation of conflict-affected people. Given the volatile security context especially in the DRC, DG ECHO supports the provision of essential security coordination and information services that help to understand the operating environment and reduce the risks for humanitarian staff and operations.

In terms of response to gender-based violence, DG ECHO will prioritise actions that address the harmful effects of GBV in the DRC on populations at risk and survivors of GBV. Priority will be given to interventions in which GBV is responded to **holistically** (all four pillars: Pillar

²⁶ This focus does not exclude potential support to those affected by new, emerging conflicts and/or new displacements in other parts of the DRC.

1 Health, Pillar 2 MHPSS, Pillar 3 legal, and Pillar 4 socio-economic response) and as part of an **integrated response** to the humanitarian needs in the DRC. A strong **prevention component** to combat the prevalence of GBV is essential. Special attention will be paid to child-survivors of and children at risk of GBV as they are amongst the most vulnerable population groups and require integrated specialised response services. Working with adolescent survivors and those at risk will also be considered, ensuring that this often-overlooked group is part of a holistic approach to addressing and preventing GBV. Furthermore, all ECHO partners engaged in humanitarian action must demonstrate how they will ensure that their actions do not further contribute to GBV through solid GBV risk mitigation actions to be assessed at proposal stage and during monitoring.

DG ECHO will consider actions that respond to the needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAFAAG), including safe identification, referral, and reintegration. DG ECHO will carefully consider approaches that take into account the contextual dynamics of working with CAFAAGs to include the understanding that children and their families are individually and collectively impacted differently depending on their unique set of circumstances.

Specific attention is given to Education in Emergencies (EiE) for the most vulnerable children either displaced and/or conflict affected. The aim is to increase their access to primary education (formal and non-formal). The EiE response should target areas affected by humanitarian shocks and, when relevant, integrate the Nexus approach. Integrated EiE and child protection programming is strongly encouraged.

DG ECHO will systematically address emergency preparedness and early response through a) flexibility tools embedded in other actions – including the use of “crisis modifiers” that partners are encouraged to develop and b) emergency/rapid response mechanisms (ERM/RRM) as standalone actions when no other solution is possible or in support of other actions (last resort principle) and c) disaster preparedness (DP) investments reinforcing local response capacities, and hence increasing resilience.

Given that logistics represents a very high proportion of humanitarian operational budgets, DG ECHO is keen to support a more efficient and effective response especially in the **DRC**, where access and logistics are particularly challenging. DG ECHO’s ‘Humanitarian Logistics Policy’ (also known as Humanitarian Strategic Supply Chain and Logistics – SSN) provides useful guidance.²⁷ The humanitarian response in the DRC already benefits from EU Humanitarian Aid Flight (EUHAF) air service and EUHAB operations. It is expected that the logistics situation will become even more challenging as a result of the possible withdrawal of MONUSCO. Therefore, DG ECHO may also support logistics results within larger humanitarian actions (e.g. for physical light rehabilitation of roads and bridges to enable physical humanitarian access) or support specific logistics actions with the above-mentioned objectives. DG ECHO may also envisage supporting strategic projects that embrace collaborative approaches and/or technology and/or environmental sustainability, e.g. common services and/or the digitalisation of supply chains.²⁸ The Commission and its partner organisations in the Great Lakes will also be able to draw upon the **European Humanitarian Response Capacity** (*see section 5.2.*), if an emergency situation requires it and if activated by the Commission.

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/humanitarian_logistics_thematic_policy_document_en.pdf

²⁸ For example, DG ECHO co-finances a two-year project for an online platform for humanitarian organisations to do joint procurement, including in the DRC.

The Great Lakes region is prone to communicable diseases. In the **DRC**, DG ECHO will support the emergency response to high impact communicable disease outbreaks. In addition, a strong linkage between the health sector and nutrition programmes will be encouraged. COVID-19 as well as recent Ebola and cholera outbreaks have highlighted the need for a multi-sectorial approach (beyond a pure health response) right from the start, and even before at preparedness stage.

In the context of the **Burundi refugee and return situation**, DG ECHO will continue its regional approach while encouraging and advocating for longer term solutions, working with development actors – in particular DG INTPA – to develop strategies to address protracted refugee situations and find durable solutions, and allowing refugees to work towards self-reliance. In **Burundi**, DG ECHO will focus mainly on protection activities, including for returnees. While advocacy for the voluntary character of any refugee return will be pursued, interventions in the context of this response should consider exit strategies and avenues for voluntary returns from DRC, Tanzania and Rwanda to Burundi as a priority.

Given the Great Lakes vulnerability to man-made and natural hazard-induced disasters, DG ECHO supports ongoing disaster preparedness (DP) actions in Burundi, the Republic of the Congo and the DRC and will provide additional funds in the DRC in 2024 to help overcome the lack of preparedness and response capacity due to the absence of early warning systems, disaster preparedness at all levels by enhancing such capacity of national and local stakeholders and first responders and other local actors.

For targeted preparedness actions particular attention will be paid to the principles laid down in the DG ECHO's Disaster Preparedness Guidance Note²⁹, which will form the basis for the assessment and selection of partners.

Humanitarian projects should aim at building resilience of local communities and to be well coordinated with relevant actions carried out in the development sphere. DG ECHO partners should strive to ensure this complementarity, including on funding.

Co-financing projects with the implementing agency or other donors contributing to the cost of the action should be the norm.

Consortia, including for example national and/or local NGOs, are welcomed, if they benefit the action. As part of the localisation agenda, implementation by local actors/partners when feasible and upon compliance with the ECHO localisation policy, and anti-fraud regulations, will be encouraged.

DG ECHO's minimum environmental requirements must be systematically applied to minimise the negative impact caused by the operations and reduce their environmental footprint.³⁰

5.1.2 Programmatic Partnerships

In the logic of multi-annual, strategic humanitarian projects, DG ECHO also supports Programmatic Partnerships and considers such an approach within the Great Lakes HIP if partner organisations – NGOs with a DG ECHO programmatic partnership certificate, UN agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent family and Member States' Specialised Agencies –

²⁹ [dg_echo_guidance_note_-_disaster_preparedness_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁰ Guidance on the operationalisation of the Minimum Environmental Requirements and Recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations:
https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/climate-change-and-environment_en

demonstrate the strategic and/or innovative character of the action and the added value being achieved through such a longer-term partnership, in particular in terms of efficiency and effectiveness gains as described in the Guidance to Partners – DG ECHO Programmatic Partnerships 2024. The longer-term horizon of a programmatic partnership is also beneficial for projects that not only include national/local partners (NGOs), but also strive to strengthen the capacity of the latter.

Furthermore, the health, education and protection (GBV) sectors in a geographical area also targeted by a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, such as the **DRC**'s Ituri and North Kivu province (without excluding other provinces), constitutes a relevant opportunity for programmatic partnerships (with a strong linkage between the health sector and nutrition programmes). Programmatic partnerships would also be considered for humanitarian action that aims at environmental sustainability in an innovative and more strategic (mainstreaming) way.

5.1.3. Multi-Year Funding

While DG ECHO receives an annual budget and most of the projects it funds are within that timeframe, the DG continues to support multi-year funding (with an initial funding allocation for 24 months or more) in case the partner demonstrates the efficiency gains and the operational logic of a longer-lasting project, as is for example already the case with EiE and disaster preparedness projects that usually run for (at least) two years. Similarly, protection actions that envisage a longer engagement to achieve protection outcomes may be considered, in particular in the context of the GBV response. DG ECHO may consider multi-year funding particularly for actions where integrated / multi-sectoral programmes that include a GBV component would benefit from a longer duration, i.e. where partners engage in pillar 3 and pillar 4 or on prevention.

Non Programmatic Partnership multi-year funding may also be considered for the health, education and protection (GBV) sectors in a geographical area also targeted by a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, such as the **DRC**'s Ituri and North Kivu province (without excluding other provinces), as well as for humanitarian action that aims at environmental sustainability in an innovative and more strategic (mainstreaming) way.

5.2. Other DG ECHO interventions

The Emergency Toolbox HIP may be drawn upon for the prevention of, and response to, outbreaks of Epidemics. Under the Emergency Toolbox HIP, the Small-Scale Response, Acute Large Emergency Response Tool (ALERT) and Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) instruments may also provide funding options.

Activities under this HIP might be complemented by the activation of the European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC). The EHRC is a DG ECHO led global initiative, aiming at supporting humanitarian partners for the delivery of humanitarian assistance with a gap-filling approach. Under the EHRC the Commission has at its disposal several tools that can be activated in case of sudden onset disasters, e.g., a series of Common Logistics Services (including air operations, warehousing services, last-mile ground transportation, etc.), stockpiling of emergency items and deployment of humanitarian expertise.