

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**FRONTLINE  
NEGOTIATIONS**

CENTRE OF COMPETENCE ON  
HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATION



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JOËLLE GERMANIER,  
CCHN DIRECTOR

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the end of 2023, the Centre of Competence of Humanitarian Negotiation (CCHN) is celebrating seven years of impactful leadership in the domain of frontline humanitarian negotiations.

Throughout the year, the global humanitarian landscape was severely impacted by ongoing and emergent crises, hampering efforts to deliver assistance and protection. Preliminary statistics demonstrate an alarming increase in attacks against aid workers and fatalities, while administrative and bureaucratic impediments – including visa restrictions and limitations on the movement of goods and personnel – constrained operations and hindered the quality of access.

Due to these challenges, requests for guidance, advice and capacity building in humanitarian negotiations continued to rise over the course of the year. The CCHN's unique methodology, built on the extensive knowledge and practices of a global network of humanitarian negotiation experts, saw an increase in demand due to its practicality. The evolving situation and its complexities compelled us to develop and deliver a wide range of learning modules, workshops, and support services.

*The year marked another phase of consolidation and deepening of relationships with our partner agencies. We not only worked closely with the CCHN's founding and strategic partners – the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the UN World Food Programme – but also developed fruitful collaborations with additional humanitarian organisations, donor agencies, networks, and institutions.*

During 2023, more than 1,700 humanitarian professionals expanded their expertise through intensive, immersive learning activities – including some specifically designed to provide seasoned professionals with the advanced negotiation skills necessary for handling complex humanitarian scenarios. Other humanitarian professionals, who had previously joined the community of practice of frontline negotiators, were further supported through advanced or thematic trainings, tailored guidance, support mechanisms, and other peer learning opportunities.

Seven years on, the CCHN's total reach extends to more than 7,000 professionals across upwards of 400 organisations and 150 countries. Their engagement via the community of practice not only reinforces the commitment to ongoing learning and professional growth for individuals but also strengthens negotiation skills building efforts for the sector at large.

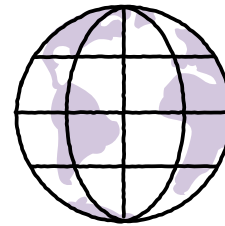
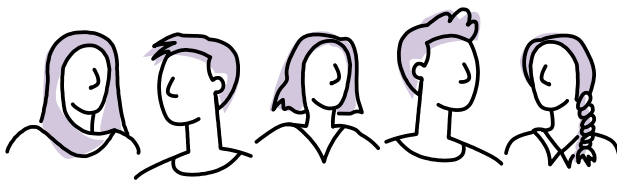
Reflecting on my second year as Director of the CCHN, I am filled with anticipation for what lies ahead, especially as we approach the 10th anniversary of our initial negotiation methodology – the Naivasha grid – in 2024: a milestone that once again highlights CCHN's establishment as a long-standing hub of expertise in the humanitarian negotiation domain.

I would like to share my deepest gratitude towards our strategic partners, donors, and the entire CCHN community for their unwavering commitment and contribution to the advancement of frontline negotiations as a professional domain.

Joëlle Germanier,  
CCHN Director

## A THRIVING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

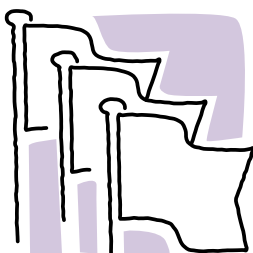
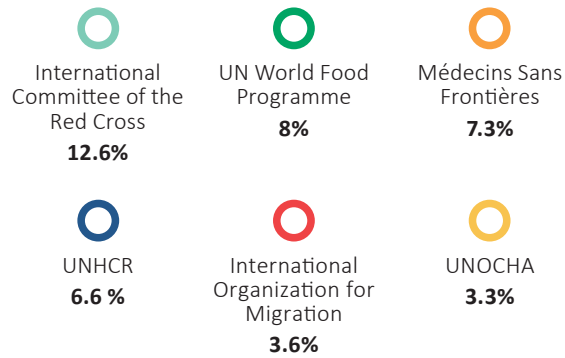
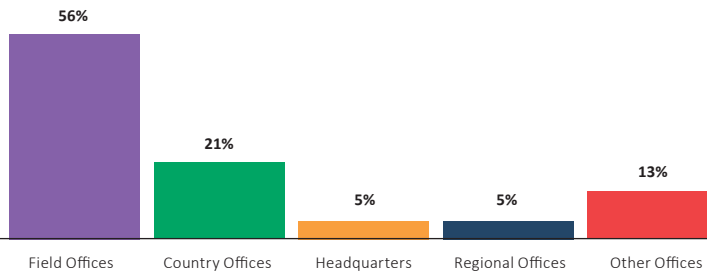
The CCHN is home to a large and continuously growing community of humanitarian negotiators, who benefit from a range of learning activities. Once these professionals complete one of our foundational workshops, they gain access to additional opportunities to develop their negotiation skills while exchanging with colleagues facing similar challenges.



**7,023** humanitarian professionals as of December 2023

150+ COUNTRIES

THESE PROFESSIONALS ARE BASED IN



42% ARE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

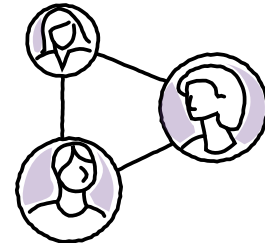
58% ARE NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS



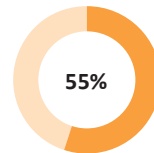


## WELCOMING NEW COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN 2023

**1,700+** *Humanitarian professionals joined the CCHN community in 2023*



FROM **104** COUNTRIES

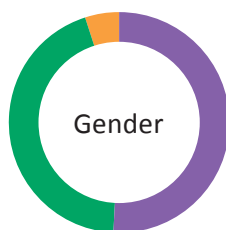


**55%** ARE NATIONAL STAFF IN THEIR COUNTRY OF WORK

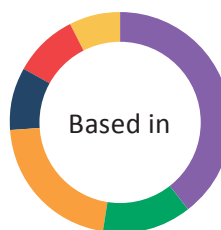
**3,600** *humanitarian professionals were supported in 2023*

**2,030**  
CURRENT MEMBERS PARTICIPATED IN A CCHN EVENT

**1,570**  
CURRENT MEMBERS PARTICIPATED IN AN ADVANCED ACTIVITY



Male **51%**  
Female **44%**  
Other gender / no response **5%**



Africa **39.5%**  
Asia **13%**  
Europe **21.4%**  
Latin America and the Caribbean **9.3%**  
Middle East and North Africa **9.3%**  
Other regions / no information **7.5%**

*Of those professionals who participated in a CCHN workshop for the first time...*



**96.8%**

RATED THE QUALITY OF WORKSHOP CONTENT AS 4 OVER 5 OR HIGHER



**99.1%**

FOUND THE CCHN METHODOLOGY USEFUL OR VERY USEFUL



**99.1%**

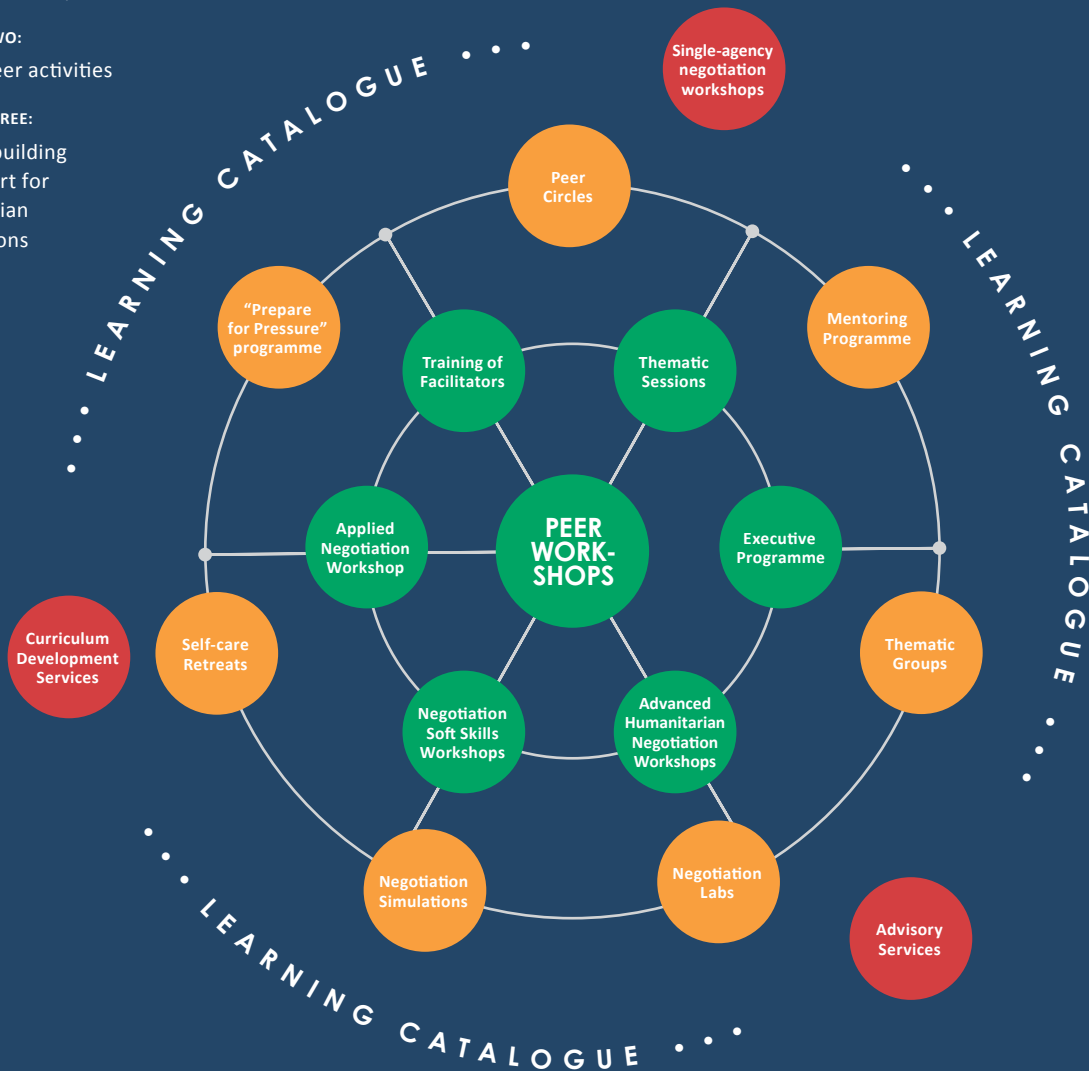
WOULD RECOMMEND CCHN WORKSHOPS TO THEIR COLLEAGUES

## Learning Catalogue

**PART ONE:**  
Individual capacity building workshops

**PART TWO:**  
Peer-to-peer activities

**PART THREE:**  
Capacity-building and support for humanitarian organisations



## Helping humanitarians learn and share negotiation practices

During 2023, the CCHN delivered:

64	6	13	20	27	35	6	7
FOUNDATIONAL NEGOTIATION WORKSHOPS	ADVANCED NEGOTIATION WORKSHOPS	TRAININGS OF FACILITATORS	THEMATIC AND EXPERT SESSIONS ON SPECIFIC NEGOTIATION CHALLENGES	PEER EXCHANGES ON SPECIFIC CONTEXTS OR NEGOTIATION CHALLENGES	PEER EXCHANGES ON PRESSURE MANAGEMENT AND MENTORING	WORKSHOPS FOR SENIOR MANAGERS	WORKSHOPS ON PRESSURE MANAGEMENT
1,708	86	188	527	663	145	100	129



## OUR PEER LEARNING OFFER

### Overview of activities

Once again in 2023, the CCHN provided humanitarian workers with a wide range of services from advice and guidance on specific negotiation issues to negotiation capacity-building for organizations and staff on the ground.

Virtually all of our activities are based on the sharing of practices: participants apply negotiation tools and strategies to real-life scenarios, whether by discussing bilaterally, in small groups, or under the guidance of experts and facilitators. All exchanges take place in a safe and confidential set-up.

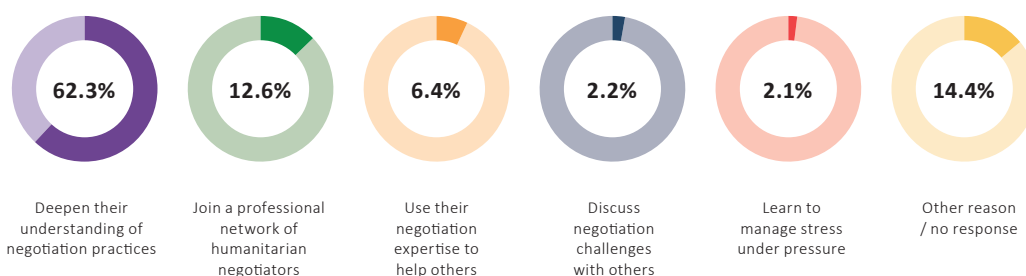


**ACQUIRING THE SKILLS TO DEAL WITH NEGOTIATION IN THE FIELD IS NOT ONLY NECESSARY; IT PREPARES YOU AND GIVES YOU THE TOOLS NOT TO FAIL IN THE ATTEMPT. I KNOW THAT I STILL HAVE A LOT TO LEARN AND THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH WE WORK ARE VERY DYNAMIC AND DIFFICULT. I JUST HOPE TO CONTINUE HAVING SUCH ENRICHING SPACES LIKE THIS ONE. THANK YOU VERY MUCH, CCHN!**

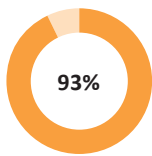
– Lisette Yuberly Joya Omaña  
Operations Lead, World Vision Colombia

After attending a CCHN workshop in May, a participant commented: “I think this course has opened our eyes to view negotiations as a part of our everyday life”. Photo: Saudi Red Crescent

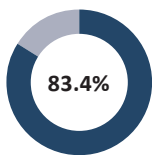
In 2023, our participants’ main reason to attend a CCHN negotiation workshop was to...



**Among those who participated in a CCHN workshop for the first time in 2023...**



Rated the quality of facilitation as 4 over 5 of higher



Expressed an interest in attending a Training of Facilitators

### Developing advanced negotiations skills

Building on its foundational trainings, the CCHN provides advanced negotiation skills building opportunities through two initiatives: a three-day Advanced Humanitarian Negotiation Workshop and a wide range of thematic modules or expert sessions on complex negotiation issues.

The advanced workshop allows humanitarian professionals to deepen their specialised skills to plan, manage and evaluate complex humanitarian negotiations. Trained practitioners are able to delve more deeply into the behavioural aspects of negotiation and lead their teams through the process.

Recognising that not every negotiation is the same and the level of complexity varies based on contexts and counterparts, the CCHN understands that negotiating with private military companies, with gangs, in an environment of misinformation/ disinformation requires tailored expertise. The CCHN therefore regularly offers modules, expert sessions and peer to peer learning opportunities around specific challenges.

### Training workshop facilitators

Most of the CCHN's negotiation workshops would not be possible without the support of facilitators, experienced humanitarian professionals who volunteer their own time and knowledge to help colleagues become more skilled negotiators.

CCHN facilitators must have successfully completed a "Training of Facilitators": a workshop in which they review the CCHN negotiation methodology and develop specific skills and techniques to support other humanitarians' learning through peer approaches.

Throughout 2023, the CCHN organised 13 Trainings of Facilitators (five of which took place online and eight in person), onboarding some 200 new community facilitators from around the world. This brought the total number of CCHN facilitators to over 950.

During the same year, the CCHN also delivered nine in-person Training of Host Facilitators. These workshops equipped committed community members with the necessary skills and knowledge to independently organise their own negotiation workshops, something which becomes particularly relevant in hard-to-reach areas that CCHN staff is otherwise unable to access.



Most of our workshops rely on the precious support of trained facilitators, who dedicate their own time and expertise in supporting their colleagues' negotiation skills building. Photo: CCHN

**THE MORE YOU FACILITATE, THE MORE YOU LEARN ABOUT THE TOOLS. IT HELPS YOU PREPARE FOR NEGOTIATIONS. IF I HAD ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO GIVE, IT WOULD BE TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO JOIN THE CCHN COMMUNITY AND BECOME FACILITATORS.**

– Labemba Brigitte Ouoba,  
Project manager, Association pour le Développement des Communautés Villageoises, Burkina Faso





**During 2023,  
the CCHN  
trained...**

**1,570**

PROFESSIONALS  
WITH ADVANCED  
SKILLS

**188**

NEW WORKSHOP  
FACILITATORS

**100**

SENIOR  
HUMANITARIAN  
LEADERS

### Building the capacity of senior humanitarian leaders

After successfully piloting a negotiation curriculum tailored to the needs of humanitarians in leadership positions, in 2023 the CCHN scaled its offering and helped build the capacity of senior leaders by partnering with the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI). Collectively, these activities benefited 100 senior humanitarians.

In partnership with ICVA, the CCHN delivered high-level negotiation and influencing training in complex environments – focusing on how to structure, support and execute effective negotiations and leverage the humanitarian system. Participants were able to explore collaborative approaches and common positions and a clear outlook of contextual dilemmas.

Collaborating with GELI and the European University Institute, the CCHN delivered the first three instances of a senior leadership programme in Panama City, Amman and Nairobi; additional ones were scheduled to take place in Dakar and Bangkok in early 2024. Each six-week programme featured a combination of online sessions and in-person workshops.



**Panos Moutzis**

UN Assistant Secretary General and Executive Director of the Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI)

Today kicks off the highly anticipated GELI Negotiations for Senior Leaders training (...). Designed exclusively for senior leaders from UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, this program promises to be a game-changer in leadership development.

### Providing advisory support

In a sector which deals with life-saving needs, professionals often feel an urgent need for negotiated solutions. In high-stakes situations where investing in long-term capacity building is not the most pragmatic approach, the CCHN steps in to provide expert and confidential guidance tailored to the problem-set at hand.

Throughout 2023, the CCHN assisted different agencies focusing on humanitarian access and negotiation strategies as well as teams confronted with specific negotiation dilemmas in challenging environments such as Sudan or Somalia.

Recognising the critical role that States play in humanitarian diplomacy, in 2023 the CCHN expanded its advisory support to governmental and diplomatic staff engaged in negotiation efforts pertinent to humanitarian issues.



Senior humanitarian leaders gathered in Panama for the first instance of the negotiation workshop jointly organised by GELI, the European University Institute (EUI) and the CCHN. Photo: EUI

### Researching, analysing, and sharing insights on humanitarian negotiations



The CCHN actively engages in operational research to document, analyse, and disseminate knowledge on current and historical negotiation practices. This ongoing process is critical to our practice-based methods.

In 2023, the CCHN conducted research on a range of topics including negotiations with gangs and criminal groups, pressure management in high-stakes negotiations, the role of community negotiators (including the families of missing persons), issues of legitimacy and diversity in the composition of negotiation teams, negotiations in the framework of disasters, and much more. Find additional information as to our findings in the following pages.

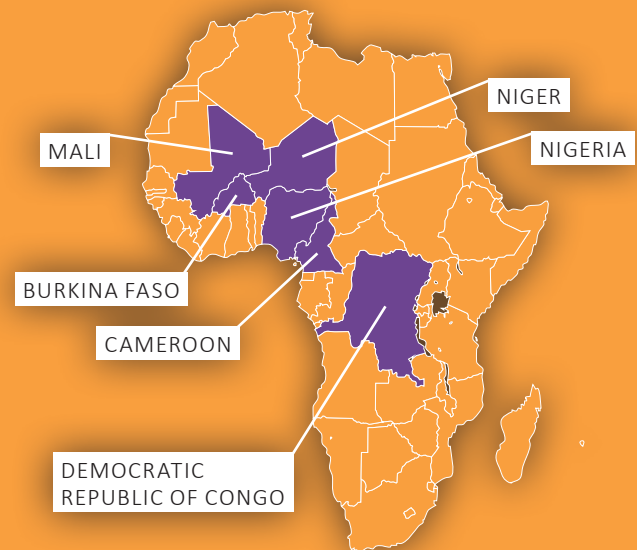


UNHCR

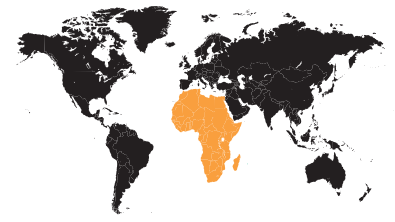
**HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATION SKILLS AND TOOLS ARE MORE THAN IMPORTANT IN CAMEROON (...). CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CCHN FOR BRINGING TO ACTUALITY SUCH AN ESSENTIAL PROGRAM.**

— Forghab Prince  
 Managing Director – Development & Emergency Relief Initiative, Cameroon

Most of the professionals trained in 2023 were based in...

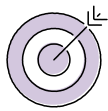






## Africa

Priority focus areas in the region include



PROTECTION NEGOTIATIONS

NEGOTIATIONS WITH ARMED AND DESIGNATED GROUPS

ACCESS NEGOTIATIONS

In 2023, the African continent faced escalating humanitarian challenges. Particularly in the Central Sahel and Sudan, access to affected populations became increasingly problematic; humanitarian workers faced severe restrictions due to the targeting of personnel and assets, administrative and bureaucratic hurdles, extractive behaviour of counterparts and armed groups controlling access.

Restrictions imposed by authorities limited humanitarian operations, making it difficult to reach those in urgent need of assistance. While the situation impacted all humanitarian actors and operations, national and local organisations or smaller NGOs disproportionately bore the brunt.

In response to this critical situation, the CCHN increased targeted efforts in the African region by facilitating an even wider range of workshops, sessions, and other learning and exchanging opportunities in the most high-stakes contexts with a particular focus on local and national agencies and staff.

### Activity highlights

- In the **Central Sahel** region, the CCHN organised a negotiation session for the Humanitarian Country Team in Niger, as well as its first French-language advanced workshop in Niamey. A learning event focusing on protection negotiations was held in Bamako, Mali; the CCHN further collaborated with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) to organise a workshop for senior NGO leaders in Burkina Faso.
- The CCHN significantly intensified efforts catering to practitioners in the **Horn of Africa**. In Sudan, these included negotiation workshops as well as guidance and support sessions for frontline negotiators. In support of the many access negotiation challenges, the CCHN also provided confidential negotiation support to the ICRC in Somalia.
- A collaboration with UNHCR and the Global Protection Cluster yielded one webinar and two workshops with a focus on the **protection of civilians** in armed conflict – respectively targeting professionals in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.
- The CCHN partnered with Save the Children to deliver a regional negotiation workshop and a Training of Facilitators aimed at humanitarian professionals in **East and Southern Africa**.
- Following the passing of the **United Nations Resolution 2664** – which provides exemptions to asset freezes under its sanctions regimes to encourage the timely and effective conduct of humanitarian activities – the CCHN Africa team conducted two expert sessions on humanitarian waivers for operations in areas controlled by designated groups, as well as two informal community gatherings which saw the participation of the head of the ICRC's Legal department.



In March, a Training of Facilitators organised in Nairobi, Kenya equipped humanitarian professionals with the skills to share their knowledge of negotiation tools with colleagues. Photo: CCHN

Photo far left: Throughout 2023, the CCHN invested considerably into providing dedicated skills building opportunities to female negotiators in the Africa region. Photo: CCHN



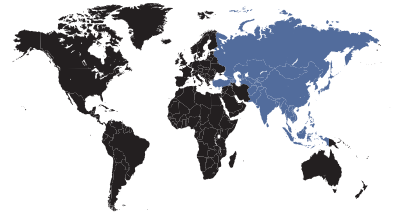
**CCHN WORKSHOPS ARE SOME OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WORKSHOPS FOR FRONTLINE HUMANITARIAN WORKERS. AND AS A COMMUNITY FACILITATOR, I FEEL I'M HONORED WHENEVER I GET A CHANCE TO FACILITATE.**

— Kya Mong Ching Marma Joy,  
Camp Manager, ACTED Bangladesh

Most of the professionals trained in 2023 were based in...

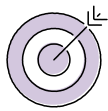






## Asia

Priority focus areas in the region include



NEGOTIATIONS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF DISASTERS

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY NEGOTIATORS

NEGOTIATING WITH DE-FACTO AUTHORITIES

In response to the severe limitations to humanitarian access and the threats to the security of humanitarian workers recorded in Asia throughout 2023, the CCHN worked to support the negotiation efforts of local humanitarian staff and community negotiators, including by conducting research on their practices.

To expand the effectiveness of its services, the CCHN consolidated its collaboration with humanitarian agencies which enjoy a solid presence on the ground.

### Activity highlights

- Community members based in **Myanmar** took the initiative of translating and adapting the CCHN negotiation tools into the Burmese language, allowing for more inclusivity and facilitating skills building for national staff.
- CCHN members in Asia adopted a proactive stance and independently delivered **community-led negotiation workshops**. In March, a workshop focusing on the protection of civilians was held in Cox's



**Ayoub Ayoub**  
Country Program Manager –  
Norwegian Red Cross, Libya

Behind closed doors or at a checkpoint of arms bearers, humanitarian workers meet with stakeholders to negotiate access. Humanitarian negotiation is an ongoing dialogue that requires an understanding of our own mission, mandate, values, red lines and competencies and most importantly recognizing the ones of our interlocutors.

The CCHN allows humanitarian negotiators to understand the underlying concepts in humanitarian negotiations and offers concrete tools and methods to plan and prepare negotiation processes. I was thrilled to engage as a facilitator in the recent online peer workshop on 19-21 April, with more than 50 participants from the Asia region.

Bazar, Bangladesh in collaboration with the Protection Sector. In July, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) hosted a community-led workshop in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan.

- In **Afghanistan**, IOM supported the delivery of two online workshops for members of the Humanitarian Access Group. The CCHN, in collaboration with UNWOMEN, delivered an online workshop focusing on women's organisations. Two-thirds of the participants were female negotiators.
- Throughout the year, the Asian CCHN community witnessed a steep rise in **digital engagement**. The dedicated section of "CCHN Connect" (the interactive platform reserved for exchanges among members) recorded a 200% increase in membership and participation.



*Image far left: A group of humanitarian professionals successfully completed their negotiation workshop in Bangkok, in May 2023. Photo: CCHN*

*In response to access limitations and threats to the security of humanitarian workers in Asia, the CCHN worked to build capacity and support the negotiation efforts of local humanitarian staff. Photo: CCHN*

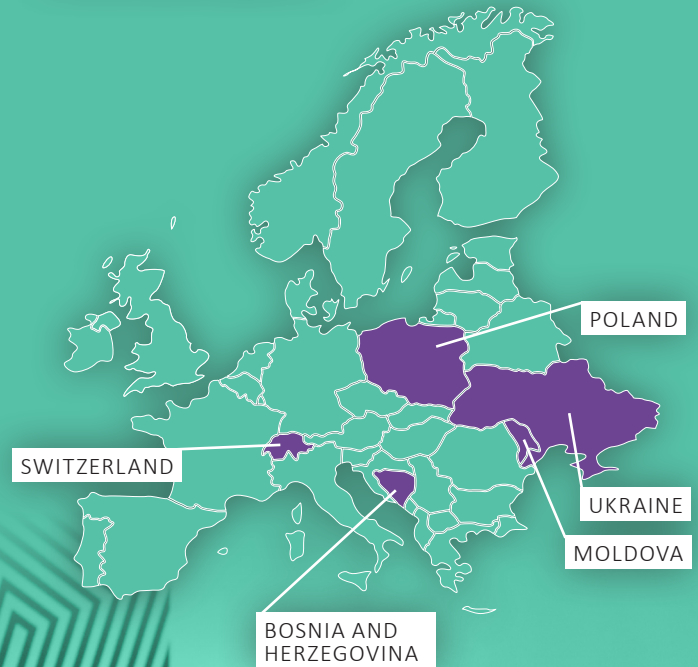


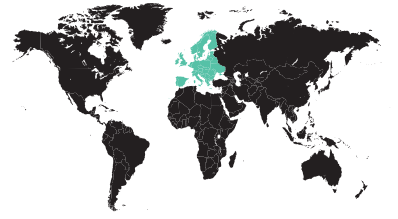


THERE IS SO MUCH AT STAKE IN HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATIONS, SO WE NEED TO PAUSE ONCE IN A WHILE TO REFLECT AND SHARE BEST PRACTICES.

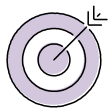
— Maria J. Kristensen  
Head of Delegation to Central & South-Eastern Europe, IFRC

Most of the professionals trained in 2023 were based in...





Priority focus areas in the region include



NEGOTIATING IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION MOVEMENTS AND DETENTION ISSUES

NEGOTIATING ACCESS TO OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

NEGOTIATING SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS AT SEA

## Europe

In response to the challenges generated by the ongoing conflict, the CCHN intensified efforts supporting humanitarian practitioners working in Ukraine and its surrounding region. As migrant departures from the Libyan and Tunisian coasts witnessed again a steep rise during the year, the CCHN also began investing additional resources into building the capacity of humanitarian professionals negotiating in the context of Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

### Activity highlights

- For the first time since the conflict outbreak, the CCHN was able to access Ukrainian territory to deliver two in-person negotiation workshops, respectively in Kyiv and Odesa. At the same time, the CCHN continued to work across **Ukraine and its neighbouring countries** by delivering trainings for professionals in Poland and Moldova, including one workshop focused on the role of negotiation “mandators” organised with UNHCR. The year saw a close and fruitful collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, which hosted

and supported the organisation of five events – made possible by committed CCHN workshop facilitators who helped translate all learning materials into both Russian and Ukrainian.

- Following a request from Médecins Sans Frontières, the CCHN organised its first-ever negotiation workshop aimed at humanitarian practitioners working in **Search and Rescue** operations at sea. Held in Rome, Italy, the workshop saw the participation of professionals from several more organisations – including SOS Méditerranée, UNHCR and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – who benefited from the otherwise rare opportunity to interact and exchange practices in a safe and confidential way.
- The CCHN consolidated and formalised its ongoing collaboration with the **Central Tracing Agency**, the ICRC entity providing services around missing persons. Following research conducted at the beginning of the year, two online workshops were provided to families who negotiate while searching for their loved ones.
- In collaboration with the ICRC delegation in Paris, the CCHN delivered its first global negotiation workshop targeted to professionals working on **immigration and detention** issues across the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



The negotiation workshop held in Kyiv, Ukraine, in December 2023 was moved to an underground bunker following an airstrike. Photo: CCHN



**Miguel de la Huerja Rojo**  
Project Coordinator – Stichting Bootvluchteling

I met like-minded experienced colleagues working on emergency response to migration in Greece and the Balkans, and we shared our struggles and best practices when negotiating access to communities on the move. Thanks CCHN!

*Image far left: In October, the CCHN delivered its first-ever negotiation workshop targeting Search and Rescue professionals from multiple organisations. It was held in Rome in October. Photo: CCHN*





I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE SELECTED FOR THE ONLINE WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN NEGOTIATORS. THE SESSIONS WERE HELD ON GENEVA TIME, WHICH MEANT I HAD TO GET UP AT 2AM FOR THREE CONSECUTIVE DAYS. HOWEVER, I CAN ASSURE THAT THIS SACRIFICE WAS WELL WORTH IT.

— Djenny-Flore Bien Aimé,  
Humanitarian professional - Haiti

Most of the professionals trained in 2023 were based in...

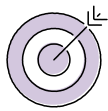






## Latin America and the Caribbean

Priority focus areas in the region include



NEGOTIATING WITH CRIMINAL GROUPS

ACCESS NEGOTIATIONS

NEGOTIATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION MOVEMENTS

Throughout 2023, Latin America and the Caribbean grappled with humanitarian access impediments, a surge in migration movements, and heightened tension due to the activities of guerrillas and criminal groups paired with the absence of solid governmental institutions. The CCHN focused its efforts on responding to the negotiation challenges emerging from this complex situation.

### Activity highlights

- Despite heightened tensions in the country and thanks to support from the World Food Programme, the CCHN was able to travel to **Haiti** during the month of April. CCHN staff provided advisory services and delivered three workshops, including one training of host facilitators which aimed to equip local professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to independently deliver additional learning activities.
- The CCHN released its report “**Humanitarian negotiation processes with gangs**” in



*Image far left: This workshop held in Bogotá, Colombia, gathered humanitarian practitioners from multiple agencies who came together to discuss strategic negotiation. Photo: CCHN*

*A negotiation workshop was organised in October in the Colombian city of Cúcuta, near the Venezuelan border – a key hub for displacement movements. Photo: CCHN*

English and Spanish. The report combines the findings emerged from more than 40 interviews conducted with experts across Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, and contains practical recommendations for humanitarian workers operating in the region.

- The CCHN delivered three negotiation workshops in **Colombia**. Two of these, which took place in Bogotá in May and October, resulted from collaborations with Médecins Sans Frontières and the World Food Programme respectively. The third, held in the city of Cúcuta near the Venezuelan border, had an emphasis on protection and was organised in the framework of a project managed by UNHCR and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). The activity saw the participation of the Global Protection Cluster and the Protection Cluster in the country.
- In March, CCHN community members independently held an online negotiation workshop aimed at humanitarian professionals in **Brazil**. The workshop, organised with support from the ICRC and UNHCR, aimed at expanding the community of practice in the country.

### Negotiation strategies to access and operate in gang-controlled areas

Released in June, the report “Humanitarian negotiation processes with gangs” is based on 42 research interviews with humanitarian workers, representatives of community-based organisations, researchers and government officials. The report contains a series of practice-based recommendations for humanitarians working in the context of gang violence. Read it on the CCHN website.

*“In the field, it is not always well regarded to name the ‘maras’ or gangs, because saying ‘gangs’ is scary and saying ‘mara’ offends. It is preferable to talk about the ‘muchachos’, which is an accepted term.”*

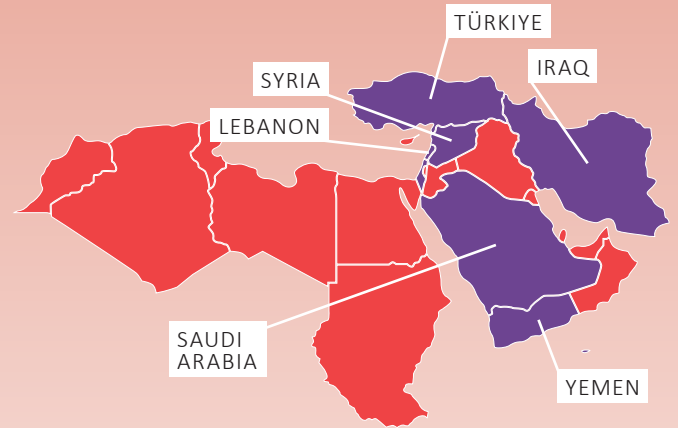
– Humanitarian worker in El Salvador

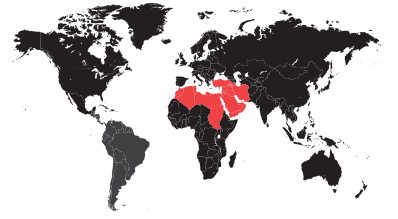


THE ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY NEGOTIATE IN STRESSFUL CIRCUMSTANCES IS A SKILL WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO EVERY HUMANITARIAN WORKER: FROM THE FIELD-BASED AID WORKER NEGOTIATING ACCESS ON THE FRONTLINE TO THE MANAGER IN HEADQUARTERS TALKING TO DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS.

— Zelar Saqr  
Associate Field Officer - UNHCR, Syria

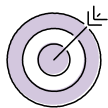
Most of the professionals trained in 2023 were based in...





## Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Priority focus areas in the region include



THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY NEGOTIATORS

NEGOTIATIONS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF DISASTERS

PROTECTION NEGOTIATIONS

In 2023, the humanitarian situation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – already complex due to ongoing conflicts and political unrest – was exacerbated by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake which hit the western border between Turkey and Syria in February and the high-intensity conflict in the Gaza strip.

The CCHN continued to be mindful to the challenges of humanitarian practitioners in the most critical contexts, while also placing a particular focus on community negotiators and those who negotiate in the aftermath of a disaster.

### Activity highlights

- In response to the situation in the **Occupied Palestinian Territories**, the CCHN provided a range of services to various stakeholders involved in negotiations. This included offering confidential advice and guidance to states and humanitarian organisations, assistance to those working on humanitarian protection issues, and support to our network of trained negotiators in the region.
- In March, the CCHN organised both a negotiation workshop and a thematic session focusing on negotiating return and durable solutions in Erbil, **Iraq**. Both events were hosted by the International Organization for Migration, with support from CCHN facilitators in the country.
- The CCHN supported ICRC staff in the MENA region through the delivery of a hybrid negotiation workshop focused on protection challenges. The Qatari Red Crescent hosted an advanced negotiation workshop and a thematic session aimed for National Societies of countries in the **Gulf Cooperation Council area**.
- The CCHN provided ad-hoc support to the World Food Programme in **Syria**, delivering

six days of workshop to staff and designing content based on the agency's needs.

- A **new collaboration** was established with the Doha-based Center of Conflict and Humanitarian Studies. A negotiation workshop in Beirut, Lebanon, provided the opportunity to consolidate the existing relationship with UNOCHA and the Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum.
- The CCHN began conducting research interviews with **negotiators working in disaster response**, and especially the local staff who plays a key role in managing operations in the early onset of a crisis.



In April, Mohammad Thaeer Allaw – CCHN Operations Manager for the Middle East and North Africa – was featured alongside Norwegian Refugee Council's chief Jan Egeland and humanitarian law expert Marco Sassóli in an episode of the 'Inside Geneva' podcast. Discussing aid dilemmas in the context of the Syria earthquake of February 2023, Allaw spoke about the challenge of striking a compromise to push operations forward in times of urgency while implementing principled humanitarian action.

**You can listen to the episode on [www.swissinfo.ch](http://www.swissinfo.ch), Apple Podcast or Spotify.**

*In Riyadh, the CCHN delivered a workshop for staff and volunteers of the Saudi Red Crescent in collaboration with the ICRC's GCC delegation. Photo: Saudi Red Crescent*



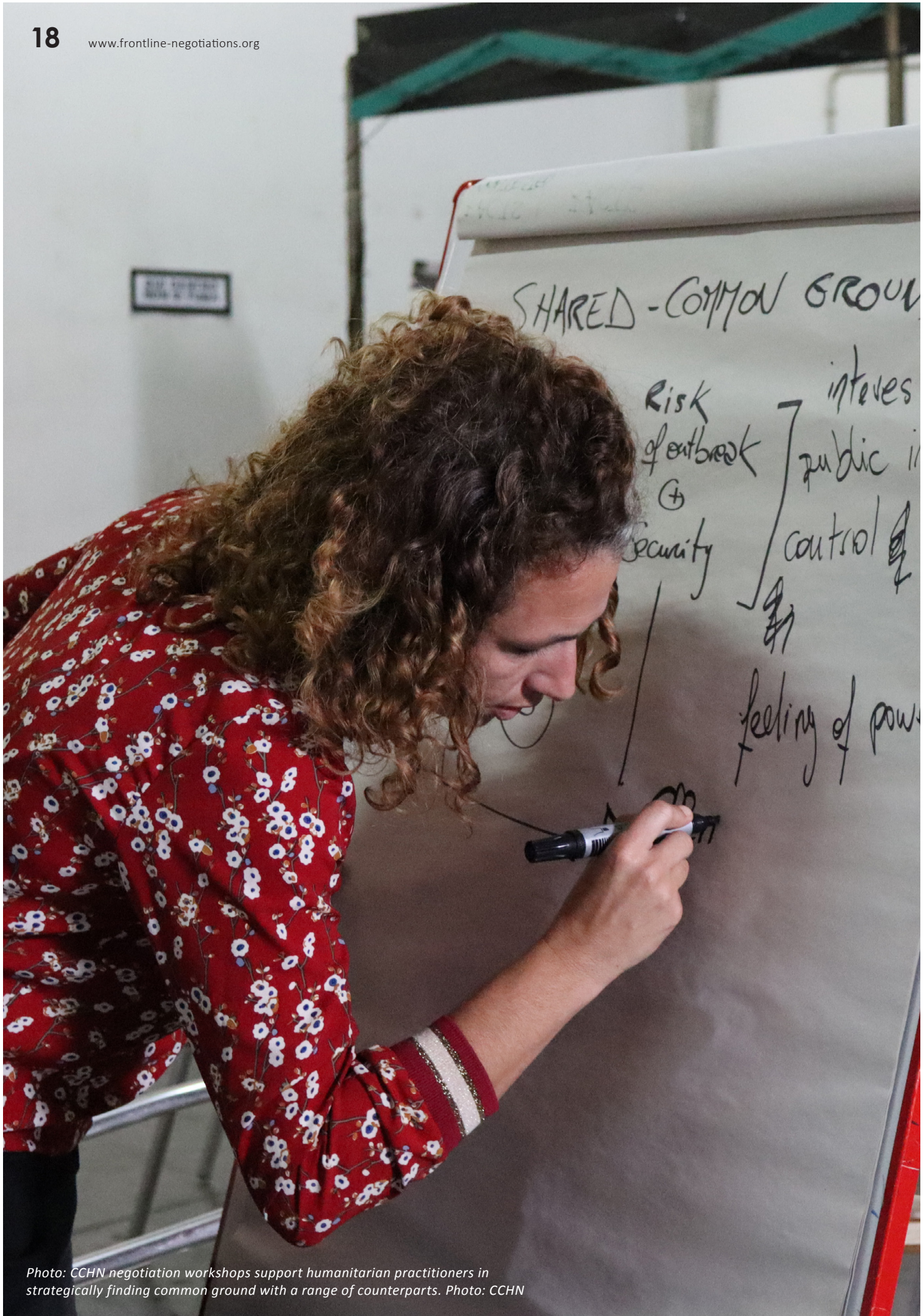
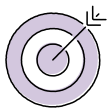


Photo: CCHN negotiation workshops support humanitarian practitioners in strategically finding common ground with a range of counterparts. Photo: CCHN



### Our focus areas for 2023 included



- ✓ PROTECTION NEGOTIATIONS
- ✓ NEGOTIATING HEALTH CARE IN CRISES
- ✓ HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY AS PART OF FRONTLINE NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES
- ✓ SUPPORTING WOMEN NEGOTIATORS
- ✓ OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND MISINFORMATION
- ✓ COMMUNITY NEGOTIATIONS: SUPPORTING FAMILIES LOOKING FOR THEIR LOVED ONES
- ✓ INTERPRETING IN HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATIONS
- ✓ PRESSURE MANAGEMENT AND MENTORING

## THE CCHN COMMUNITY ACROSS KEY THEMATIC AREAS

The following areas, which have been identified as priorities by the members of the CCHN community of practice and CCHN partners, constituted the CCHN's thematic focus in 2023.

### Protection negotiations

The CCHN activities placed significant emphasis on protection negotiations as a critical, cross-cutting topic across world regions. Collaborating with UNHCR on several projects, the CCHN delivered negotiation workshops with an emphasis on protection and worked with the Global Protection Cluster on the "Access that Protects" agenda.

In collaboration with the Global Protection Cluster and UNHCR, the CCHN organised workshops in Ethiopia, Colombia, Mali, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan while also starting a series of regular, informal online exchanges around the topic of protection negotiations.

In June, the CCHN partnered with Save the Children in organising a public event entitled "Ensuring Access that Protects Children" in the framework of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment in Geneva, while CCHN Deputy Director Rehan Zahid spoke about protection negotiation efforts during UNHCR's Protection of Civilians Week in New York.



*In June, CCHN Deputy Director Rehan Zahid spoke about protection negotiation efforts during UNHCR's Protection of Civilians Week in New York. Photo: United Nations*

**I FOUND IT EXTREMELY VALUABLE THAT A PROTECTION APPROACH HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE WORKSHOP. NOT ONLY DOES IT ADD VALUE, BUT IT ALSO ALLOWS FOR A BETTER GROUNDING OF THE TOOLS UNDER THIS APPROACH.**

– Erika Paola Mora Vega,  
Community Mobilization Officer,  
IRC Colombia

### Negotiating health care in crises

Based on research findings and on feedback received from the community of practice, the CCHN invested additional resources to scale up its capacity building activities targeted at healthcare personnel.

At the request of Médecins Sans Frontières, the CCHN provided tailored guidance on setting institutional red lines and negotiating in the framework of bureaucratic and administrative impediments, and delivered a dedicated negotiation workshop in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.



*“We wanted this workshop to be organised by women, for women, because it was an opportunity to give women a place, for them to take the lead openly, to show their abilities. It was fantastic. I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the participants and their contributions. That’s how we can raise the level of humanitarian negotiations.”*

Mariama Sawadogo,  
Head of Mission, RCN  
Justice & Démocratie  
and organiser of the  
negotiation workshop  
dedicated to female  
negotiators

CCHN staff also delivered several thematic sessions as part of the World Health Organization’s “Leadership in Health Emergencies” course and collaborated with Médecins du Monde in the organisation of the first-ever multi-agency workshop centred around the topic. Another Spanish-language workshop was independently led by community members.

In November, the CCHN held a thematic session on healthcare in danger and de-escalation to prevent and manage violence in healthcare settings in partnership with the ICRC.

### **Humanitarian diplomacy as part of frontline negotiation strategies**

In today’s humanitarian landscape, humanitarian work and diplomacy are bound to intersect. Humanitarian and diplomatic actors increasingly share the same operational space, often at the risk of politicising humanitarian assistance. In this context, it becomes more and more important to leverage humanitarian diplomacy efforts as part of frontline humanitarian negotiation strategies.

In 2023, the CCHN conducted operational research to explore how diplomatic efforts around humanitarian issues can be better aligned with the strategic negotiation approaches of humanitarian actors.

This research is aimed at creating a synergy between the diplomatic and humanitarian fields to achieve more cohesive outcomes in negotiations. The findings of these research efforts will inform additional activities to be carried out in 2024.

### **Supporting women negotiators**

An effective negotiation team should be diverse in its composition. Women-inclusive negotiation teams bring a broader range of perspectives and strategic approaches and tend to ensure better negotiation outcomes. Despite this, the CCHN found that female negotiators have traditionally been underrepresented in frontline negotiations and their contributions remain overlooked. In 2023, the CCHN invested additional resources into helping female professionals strengthen their negotiation capacity while creating a safe space for exchanges across organisations.

In Afghanistan, the CCHN collaborated with UNWOMEN to deliver an online workshop focusing on women’s organisations; two-thirds of the participants were female negotiators. In October, CCHN facilitator Mariama Sawadogo took the lead in organising the first workshop tailored to the challenges of female humanitarian professionals. The workshop was extremely successful, receiving 350 applications in the first two days since the opening of registrations as well as very positive feedback from participants: all of them rated the CCHN methodology “useful” or “very useful”.

### **Operational communication and misinformation**

The CCHN continued offering negotiation skills-building opportunities to humanitarian practitioners working in operational communication, external relations or community outreach roles.

The thematic initiative is based on the understanding that these professionals are essential members of a negotiation team: as they monitor perceptions and counter the spread of false information, they play a key role in providing critical information to the negotiation process, facilitating their agency’s acceptance among local communities and ensuring a safe implementation of humanitarian response.



*An advanced workshop held in Beirut, Lebanon, allowed participants from the MENA region to delve more deeply into the strategic management of humanitarian negotiation processes. Photo: CCHN*





*“I’ve just been involved in a negotiation process in a rather complex and unstable context where the stakes are diverse, overlapping and intertwined. It’s a real challenge, but by applying the ‘negotiation iceberg’ tool, I feel much more confident and therefore more optimistic about tackling this process.”*

Vanessa Huig,  
Gender Specialist  
and participant in the  
CCHN workshop for  
women negotiators

**WHEN A COMMUNICATION EMERGENCY HAPPENS, EVERYTHING YOU DID BEFORE IS SEEN UNDER THE NEGATIVE LENS. DURING SUCH A MOMENT OF STRESS, LIKE THE BEGINNING OF A WAR, PEOPLE NEED TO GET INFORMATION FROM SOMEONE THEY TRUST. (...) THE SENSE OF TRUST AND PROXIMITY WE BUILD AS HUMAN BEINGS WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS, THAT’S NEGOTIATIONS. IT’S ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.**

– Andrii Kruglashov  
Political Advisor, ICRC, Ukraine

Throughout 2023, the CCHN delivered two negotiation workshops aimed at communication professionals – one of which, in Spanish, was targeted to Latin America and the Caribbean for the first time – and facilitated regular, informal online exchanges among practitioners. In December, the CCHN supported the delivery of an internal workshop for ICRC staff tackling misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in humanitarian operations.

### **Community negotiations: Supporting families looking for their loved ones**

Far from being just vulnerable individuals or ‘victims’, the families of people who went missing in the aftermath of conflict play a critical role in the search for their loved ones as frontline negotiators. As they interact with authorities, armed groups, religious leaders, communities and other families, they require solid negotiation skills and plenty of support in navigating emotionally charged situations.

In May, the CCHN’s collaboration with the ICRC’s Central Tracing Agency yielded two negotiation workshops catering specifically to the families of missing persons from across the globe. These one-of-a-kind workshops were held online in English and Spanish, with interpretation provided into Arabic, Bosnian, Georgian, Houssa, Portuguese and Tagalog.

For the 40 participants, who defined the experience “eye-opening” and “inspiring”, it was an opportunity to exchange similar challenges, learn how to approach counterparts, and discover tools to better structure their negotiation.

### **Interpreting in humanitarian negotiations**

When humanitarian workers don’t speak the language of their negotiation counterpart, they rely on national colleagues or professional interpreters to get the message across. As a result, these practitioners end up playing a leading role in the process and require a thorough understanding of the negotiation strategy in use.

In 2023, the CCHN carried on with its thematic work on interpreters in humanitarian context by organising monthly informal exchanges among professionals. Humanitarian practitioners discussed the way interpreters work with the rest of the negotiation team and created a learning module with a focus on clarifying roles and assumptions, building trust and designing a joint strategy.

Piloted in February and delivered in June, a thematic session with a focus on humanitarian practitioners working in the Middle East and North Africa allowed participants to practice the drafting of briefing points to support negotiators and interpreters while preparing for the negotiation process. In November, the CCHN also provided an opportunity to attend a simulation to put these skills to the test.

In May, the CCHN also spoke about negotiating with the help of interpreters as part of a panel organised in the framework of UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week.



### Supporting humanitarian professionals who negotiate in high-stakes environments

PREVIOUS RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE CCHN AMONG SOME 150 HUMANITARIANS FOUND THAT:

**90%**

HAD BEEN EXPOSED TO SOME KIND OF VIOLENT OR DANGEROUS SITUATION

**73%**

FELT LASTING CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS, SUCH AS INSOMNIA

**67%**

FELT THAT STRESS HAD A LASTING IMPACT ON THEIR WORK OR THEIR PERSONALITY

**72%**

HAD SOUGHT SOME SORT OF SUPPORT TO MANAGE STRESS

### Pressure management and mentoring

Negotiating in a high-stakes environment can take a toll on a team's mental health and ultimately deeply affect humanitarian operations. For this reason, for several years the CCHN has placed particular attention on helping negotiators develop resilience techniques while providing them with a safe and confidential environment where to discuss challenges and receive guidance.

Throughout 2023, seven "Prepare for Pressure" workshops were organised in different languages, including – for the first time – in Spanish; additionally, an online session on pressure management was delivered in the framework of a negotiation training for senior leaders held in partnership with the Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI). The CCHN started planning additional research around the mental health and pressure challenges faced by frontline negotiators on the ground to better respond to their needs.

At the same time, the CCHN continued growing its mentoring program, which puts frontline negotiators in touch with experienced colleagues willing to provide support and guidance in a confidential way. Three online events were organised to train new mentors, while professionals already taking part in this initiative met regularly online to exchange experiences and practice their skills. Training materials were translated into Spanish to ensure the programme remains inclusive.



**WE ALWAYS THINK WE KNOW IT ALL IN LIFE, UNTIL WE REALIZE THAT WHAT WE DEEM TRIVIAL CAN COST US DEARLY ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS. AS A MEMBER OF THE CCHN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE, IT WAS A GREAT PLEASURE TO TAKE PART IN THIS SESSION ON HOW TO MANAGE PRESSURE IN FRONTLINE NEGOTIATIONS. IT'S IMPORTANT FOR ALL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS TO FAMILIARISE WITH THE TOOLS THAT EXIST TO PERFECT THEIR SKILLS WHEN PREPARING FOR NEGOTIATIONS IN THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD.**

– Fonkeing Fotabong  
Abuse prevention facilitator,  
Médecins Sans Frontières, Cameroon



### Discussing pressure management at the Museum

In April, the CCHN was invited by the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva to organise an event focusing on pressure management in humanitarian operations.

Held in the framework of the museum's 'mental health' theme year, the event featured a collective listening of an excerpt from the CCHN's podcast series "Frontline Negotiators" followed by a conversation between Maria Soledad Rueda, ICRC Operations Coordinator, and Francesca Giulia Mereu, leadership coach and CCHN consultant.



**84,768**

PEOPLE VISITED  
THE CCHN WEBSITE



**13,200**

FOLLOWED THE  
CCHN ON LINKEDIN



**15,000**

SUBSCRIBERS RECEIVED  
CCHN NEWSLETTERS

## COMMUNICATION

### Demonstrating impact through storytelling

Through its community members, the CCHN has access to a wealth of stories highlighting how the CCHN negotiation methodology and community of practice supports humanitarian operations on a daily basis.

In recent years, the CCHN began exploring storytelling through podcasting as a tool for humanitarian professionals to share their expertise and encourage additional learning by launching its first-ever podcast, “Frontline Negotiators: Stories from the Field”. The podcast is available on Amazon Music, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast and Spotify, as well as on the CCHN website.

To replicate the success of the first podcast season, a second series of 11 episodes became available starting in September 2023, with stories told by practitioners from a variety of humanitarian agencies and geographic contexts. Season 2 episodes were collectively streamed 3,380 times in the last three months of 2023 alone, while the entire series recorded around 8,500 listens since inception.

The CCHN also began systematically conducting interviews to gather information on the way community members apply negotiation tools and learnings in their day-to-day operations. This ongoing effort is producing a growing archive of practices and testimonials, painting the picture of a thriving community of practice which greatly benefits from negotiation skills development and mutual exchanges.



**Essie Opoka**  
Training and Capacity Specialist –  
International Rescue Committee

When I was frontline field staff in Cameroon, the government told us we couldn’t talk to non-state armed groups present in the country. It was after becoming part of the CCHN community that I realised I had found a safe space, a family, where I could share my challenges with other humanitarians and craft solutions together.

Thanks to the CCHN tools and planning our negotiations strategically, we were able to reach more populations, expand our operation and build acceptance by different actors. Finally, we reached more people who needed our support in that area.

### Digital community engagement

The CCHN Communication department works to disseminate negotiation tools and learning in a variety of forms and across different platforms.

In 2023, the CCHN website recorded 152,884 visits by 84,768 users. The most popular blog piece of the year, “How to manage (mis) information in humanitarian operations”, received 1,518 views.

Social networks continued to witness extremely positive growth, with a +43.8% follower increase on LinkedIn (reaching a 13,200-strong audience), a 21.2% follower increase on Facebook and an 8.4% follower increase on Twitter.

1,445 new members joined the CCHN’s community-powered interactive forum, “CCHN Connect”, which reached a total of 7,030 contributors. About 17% of members actively contributed to the CCHN community by creating a post, messaging, commenting, answering a question, RSVPing to an event, voting on a poll, cheering a post, or sharing.

Throughout 2023, the CCHN Communication department sent a monthly newsletter in English, French and Spanish to over 15,000 subscribers. Both the newsletters’ average open rate (39.3%) and click-through rate (14.2%) were above the sector’s average.

*In March, the CCHN was present at the European Humanitarian Forum organised in Brussels by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Photo: CCHN*







THE CCHN IS EXTREMELY GRATEFUL TO DAVID BEASLEY, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME, WHO STEPPED DOWN FROM OUR GOVERNING BOARD IN APRIL 2023 AT THE END OF A LONG WFP TENURE.

## GOVERNANCE

The CCHN is administratively hosted by the ICRC. Its governing board is composed of four representatives of the CCHN's founding agencies, a negotiation expert, and three members of the community of practice who act in their personal capacity. Board members are selected being mindful of diversity in terms of gender, professional background and humanitarian perspectives.

### In 2023, the CCHN governing board was composed of:

- Peter Maurer, President of the board (ad personam)

### Representatives of humanitarian agencies contributing to the CCHN:

- Stephen Cornish – Director General, Médecins Sans Frontières Switzerland
- Filippo Grandi – High Commissioner, UNHCR
- Robert Mardini – Director General, International Committee of the Red Cross
- Carl Skau – Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer, World Food Programme

### Members of the CCHN community of practice (ad personam):

- Hanalia Ferhan
- Esther Opoka
- Dr Apostolos Veizis

### Recognised negotiation experts (ad personam):

- Michael Møller



*The CCHN governing board is composed of representatives of its four founding agencies, a negotiation expert, and three members of the community of practice. Photo: CCHN*

## FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

In 2023, the CCHN focused on diversifying its sources of funding, deepening existing relationships and onboarding new partners. The CCHN secured funding through multi-year agreements as well as in-kind contributions from strategic partners, government donors and special projects. Collaborations with local partners supported the implementation of the CCHN's programmes across regions.

### Sources of funding

- Strategic partners (ICRC, MSF Switzerland, UNHCR, UN World Food Programme)
- Institutional Donors (Governments of Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland)
- Other funding sources (local partners, in-kind support for field implementation)

HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATORS ARE ONE OF THE BEST TOOLS TO GAIN ACCESS TO THOSE IN NEED. (...) LET ME THANK YOU FOR THE ESSENTIAL WORK YOU ARE DOING: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE DEPENDS ON IT.

– H.E. Ambassador Deike Potzel, Director General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, Peace Building and Humanitarian Assistance – German Federal Foreign Office

## ABOUT THE CENTRE OF COMPETENCE ON HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATION

Founded in 2016, the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation (CCHN) is a joint initiative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières Switzerland, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the United Nations World Food Programme.

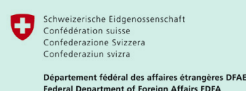
Our aim is to facilitate the capture, analysis, and sharing of experiences and practices around humanitarian negotiation and to provide a space for dialogue across organisations. At the core of our activities is the CCHN community of practice, a global community of humanitarian practitioners working at the frontlines of humanitarian action.



The CCHN is kindly supported by:



THE GOVERNMENT  
OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG  
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs







**FRONTLINE  
NEGOTIATIONS**  
CENTRE OF COMPETENCE ON  
HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATION

Centre of Competence on  
Humanitarian Negotiation

Domaine "La Pastorale"  
106 Route de Ferney  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

info@frontline-negotiations.org  
frontline-negotiations.org

f @FrontlineNegotiations  
t @Frontline\_Nego  
in @Frontline-Negotiations