

## STATEMENT

# From commitments to principled implementation?

## VOICE Reaction to the Joint Communication on Humanitarian Aid

June 2026

VOICE welcomes the recently adopted [Joint Communication on Humanitarian Aid](#) as a timely and politically significant initiative to strengthen EU humanitarian action in response to escalating global needs and shrinking humanitarian space. The Communication sends a strong political signal by reaffirming the EU's commitment to humanitarian principles, international humanitarian law (IHL), and the [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#). It also recognises several challenges consistently highlighted by VOICE, including widespread violations of IHL, the reduction of humanitarian space and access, and the increasing pressure on humanitarian response capacities.

At the same time, the Communication raises a number of important questions that will need to be carefully addressed during implementation. It reflects a tension between a strong commitment to safeguarding principled humanitarian action and an ambition to align humanitarian action more closely with broader EU strategic and external policy objectives. In this context, the Communication does not sufficiently recognise the strategic role of NGOs as frontline humanitarian actors, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Greater clarity would also be welcome on how the EU intends to maintain its commitment to civil society organisations as it broadens its engagement with other actors in humanitarian action.

VOICE urges the EU to translate political commitments into concrete safeguards and operational practices that preserve the principled and needs-based nature of humanitarian action.

**VOICE calls on the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament to reflect the following priorities in their responses to the Communication and encourages the European Commission to integrate them throughout the implementation process:**

1. Safeguard humanitarian principles, humanitarian space, and humanitarian diplomacy from instrumentalisation
2. Partner with and recognise NGOs as well as national and local actors as strategic humanitarian partners, especially in fragile contexts
3. Ensure humanitarian reform strengthens principled action through genuine simplification
4. Protect and increase principled institutional humanitarian funding
5. Address fragility without compromising humanitarian principles

### **1. Safeguard humanitarian principles, humanitarian space, and humanitarian diplomacy from instrumentalisation**

VOICE supports the strong focus on humanitarian diplomacy. In a context of widespread violations of IHL, impunity, and increasing access and bureaucratic constraints, the EU's political and diplomatic influence can play a critical role in safeguarding humanitarian space, promoting compliance with IHL, protecting civilians, and ensuring humanitarian access.

The Communication reflects a clear ambition to position humanitarian diplomacy more centrally within EU external action and highlights the importance of evidence-based, context-specific diplomacy. While this may strengthen the EU's ability to advocate for humanitarian access and respect for IHL, the closer integration of humanitarian action into broader EU strategic and security frameworks risks blurring the lines between humanitarian, political, and stabilisation objectives, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. To preserve humanitarian access, impartiality, and trust, humanitarian action must remain firmly guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Humanitarian diplomacy should likewise remain distinct from foreign policy, economic, and security agendas, and be adequately resourced to support principled humanitarian action.

This includes consistently condemning attacks on civilians, humanitarian personnel, and civilian infrastructure, particularly schools as well as health and medical facilities. It also requires addressing the operational barriers created by sanctions and bank de-risking practices, as well as ensuring the consistent implementation of humanitarian exemptions in EU and Member State sanctions and counter-terrorism frameworks. The EU should make full use of the expertise of NGOs to inform its understanding of operational contexts and ensure the meaningful participation of humanitarian NGOs, alongside local and national actors, in humanitarian diplomacy efforts and the development of humanitarian policy.

## **2. Partner with and recognise NGOs as well as national and local actors as strategic humanitarian partners, especially in fragile contexts**

VOICE welcomes the Communication's recognition of affected communities as first responders, its emphasis on accountability to affected populations, and its support for localisation through more equitable partnerships and stronger engagement of local actors in international policy and decision-making. We also support its emphasis on flexible funding, including multi-year funding, anticipatory action, and softly earmarked or unearmarked funding. In addition, we appreciate its focus on key protection priorities, namely child protection, education in emergencies, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights - although the reference to "rights" appears to be missing from the text - as well as the SHIELD initiative, whose implementation should be closely monitored.

However, while international NGOs are recognised in the Communication as longstanding EU humanitarian partners, their role as strategic humanitarian actors appears underemphasised compared to the prominence given to Team Europe approaches, international financial institutions, diplomatic instruments, and private sector actors. NGOs, whether international, national or local, are often among the few actors able to operate in highly insecure and hard-to-reach areas, thanks to their expertise, agility, access, and trusted relationships with affected communities. Their meaningful involvement in the design and implementation of future reforms is therefore essential. The EU should recognise that effective humanitarian action depends on a diverse ecosystem of partners, each bringing complementary strengths. Efforts to support innovative approaches - such as pooled funding, private sector partnerships, and harmonised modalities - are valuable but must strengthen, rather than replace, this diversity of partnership models.

In addition, the Communication's approach to localisation remains too focused on funding targets and capacity strengthening, without sufficiently addressing the structural barriers that Global South NGOs continue to face in accessing EU funding and engaging in policy dialogue in global and regional policy fora. As highlighted in [VOICE's position paper](#), localisation should be understood as a broader shift in power, resources, and decision-making. This requires greater investment in co-design, simplified compliance requirements, risk-sharing and systematic monitoring of partnership quality. The EU should therefore elevate localisation as a central and more ambitious objective of its humanitarian reform agenda.

## **3. Ensure humanitarian reform strengthens principled action through genuine simplification**

In line with long-standing VOICE advocacy, VOICE welcomes efforts to improve efficiency, simplify procedures, and strengthen coordination across the humanitarian system, including reforms on supply chains and harmonised donor requirements.

However, to deliver operational benefits, these reforms must be centred on the needs and priorities of those most at risk of exclusion, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, as well as go beyond life-saving assistance to strengthen the resilience of affected people over time. Reforms must be developed in genuine partnership with humanitarian actors and must not be driven solely by cost-efficiency considerations or lead to increased administrative burden, reduced partner diversity, or over-centralisation. Emerging proposals on data sharing, digitalisation, and AI require strong safeguards to ensure they support, rather than undermine, principled, quality and accountable humanitarian action.

The EU must ensure that simplification goes beyond digital tools and addresses structural issues such as multiple audits, eligibility rules, indirect cost coverage, risk-sharing, and security-related costs. It should safeguard the diversity of partners and prevent the creation of new barriers, the proliferation of new requirements, disproportionate control and compliance mechanisms, exclusion risks, or protection risks for affected populations linked to data and AI systems. Genuine simplification will allow partners to focus more resources on effective, principled humanitarian action and reach more communities in need.

## **4. Protect and increase principled institutional humanitarian funding**

Engagement with the private sector and development finance institutions can bring valuable expertise, innovation, and logistics capacity, and blended finance may complement humanitarian action in specific contexts. NGOs have significant experience in working with these actors and tools across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus, as well as in supporting local private sector actors, with whom the EU should engage more systematically.

However, this engagement cannot replace predictable, needs-based, and principled institutional funding. It must also be guided by clear humanitarian safeguards, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where private finance has limited reach and impact.

VOICE regrets the absence of stronger EU political commitments to safeguard and increase institutional humanitarian funding at a time of unprecedented global needs, and sustained pressure on donor budgets. The Communication makes no reference, for instance, to the [Council Conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap](#), in which the Council reaffirms the collective commitment of the EU to provide at least 0.7% of collective Gross National Income as Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2030 and encourages Member States to allocate an appropriate share - such as 10% - of ODA to humanitarian action. Reaffirming and operationalising these commitments is not only a response to current funding shortfalls. It is essential to preserving a predictable, multilateral humanitarian system and to ensuring that EU values are reflected in credible and sustained actions.

In the context of ongoing negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), this debate is particularly timely. The EU must strengthen the protection and level of humanitarian funding and safeguard the humanitarian budget from political reallocation or instrumentalisation.

## 5. Address fragility without compromising humanitarian principles

VOICE welcomes the recognition that fragility is multidimensional, as well as the EU's commitment to remain engaged in highly and extremely fragile contexts, including complex or politically estranged environments. We appreciate the emphasis on ensuring that such engagement is context-specific, conflict-sensitive, and grounded in a do-no-harm principle. VOICE further notes positively the Communication's efforts to strengthen coordination on fragility through the establishment of fragility frameworks, the designation of fragility focal points in EU Delegations and DG ECHO offices, and more regular exchanges with implementing partners and civil society.

However, such engagement must remain guided exclusively by humanitarian needs and principles, rather than by alignment with broader EU strategic, security and migration objectives. Moreover, while coordination efforts are welcome, the Communication does not fully clarify the division of mandates, budgets, and responsibilities among EU actors. The increasing emphasis on fragility frameworks and the Team Europe approach requires more clarity in terms of clear safeguards to preserve humanitarian mandates, as well as decision-making and operational independence.

The EU must sustain development cooperation to help prevent escalating humanitarian needs and support recovery. It should ensure a clear separation of mandates between DG ECHO, DG INTPA, DG MENA, the EEAS, and Member States, and guarantee the meaningful participation of humanitarian NGOs and local actors in the development and implementation of fragility frameworks. Enhanced coordination and planning across Commission services are essential to ensure that people in vulnerable situations in fragile contexts continue to receive timely and appropriate support.

**VOICE stands ready to support the Council, the European Parliament, and the European Commission in ensuring that the Communication is translated into a strong, principled, and operationally effective framework, including through annual progress reporting to track implementation.**

**This is an opportunity in a critical time to reinforce the EU's global leadership in promoting principled humanitarian action, provided that safeguards are strengthened, NGOs are recognised as key strategic partners, and reforms are jointly designed with humanitarian actors, both international and local.**

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[www.VOICEeu.org](http://www.VOICEeu.org)

VOICE asbl ■ Rue Royale 71 ■ 1000 Brussels ■ Belgium  
Company number: BE0475213787 ■ RPM Brussels

