



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

NEGLECTED CRISES: FROM COMMITMENTS TO ACTIONS

VOICE-LA COORDINADORA
ROUNDTABLE IN MADRID

25 SEPTEMBER 2023



SUMMARY

This paper is a summary of the main ideas discussed during the event and does not necessarily reflect the speakers' or the VOICE network's opinions.

During the round table, the dire humanitarian situation of neglected crises was discussed. Participants shared reflections on how these could be meaningfully addressed. The event looked at the funding imbalances and the need to expand the donor base; the role of local actors, notably feminist and women-led organisations, and the need to ensure multi-sectoral responses with different actors through a nexus approach.

The meeting, co-organised by VOICE and La Coordinadora under the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, gathered around 60 people and welcomed a variety of experts from DG ECHO, the European Parliament, the European External Action Service, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation, FAO, the Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action (IECAH), the Feminist Humanitarian Network with a representative from Belize, as well as humanitarian aid NGOs like Plan International Spain, Educo - member of the ChildFund Alliance, Acción contra el Hambre and Oxfam International.

Sandra Ferrer, Humanitarian Board Member of La Coordinadora, and Dominic Crowley, VOICE President, opened the round table by shedding light on neglected crises and the importance of political will to revert the neglect. Afterwards, Cristina Gutiérrez Hernández, Director for Humanitarian Affairs at AECID, outlined the priorities of the Spanish Presidency, which include the triple nexus approach, the gender perspective in humanitarian action, humanitarian diplomacy, and Anticipatory Action.



Panel I: Funding – the need to address the funding imbalances and to expand the donor base, looking ahead to the European Humanitarian Forum 2024

In September 2023, the [Global Humanitarian Overview](#) required \$55.5 billion to assist 248 million of the 363 million people in need. Despite this critical humanitarian situation, funding is not keeping pace with these needs. Only 30% of the global humanitarian appeal was covered. The funding gap between needs and resources available has never been so wide. This chronic underfunding leaves more people vulnerable to shocks and stresses. The European humanitarian budget line accounts for slightly less than 1% of the current multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027. On top of this, the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve - a second source of funding for humanitarian aid in the MFF - has a budget of around €1.2 billion, of which only 26% is reserved for sudden onset crises outside of Europe. At the EU Member States (MS) level, only three MS were among the top 10 humanitarian donors in 2022.

In May 2023, the Council of the EU adopted [conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap](#). As stated in the document “The Council reaffirms the collective commitment of the EU to provide at least 0.7% of collective GNI as ODA by 2030, and encourages its Member States to continue their efforts to close the humanitarian funding gap by contributing at a level commensurate with their financial means, and ensuring that an appropriate share, for example, 10%, of their ODA is devoted to humanitarian action, based on existing humanitarian needs”. In line with this, Spain recently approved a new Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity Law introducing a legal commitment to allocating 0.7% of GNI to ODA by 2030, of which 10% will be earmarked for humanitarian aid. To get ready to track it properly, studies aimed at supporting Spain to best track humanitarian funding are ongoing.

The significant funding gap creates a need for prioritisation, and consequently an unequal shortfall. Figures show a certain funding imbalance between crises, with El Salvador, Venezuela, and Guatemala being the crises whose financial needs were the least covered in 2022.



Panel I: Funding – the need to address the funding imbalances and to expand the donor base, looking ahead to the European Humanitarian Forum 2024

“Protracted and forgotten crises” is one of the priorities of the current TRIO - Spain, Belgium, and Hungary - of the Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). Therefore, speakers were invited to reflect on how Spain could use its presidency to encourage other MS to step up their efforts in humanitarian aid and how the issue of protracted and forgotten crises will be further addressed. The DG ECHO’s allocation of at least 15% of its initial annual humanitarian budget to forgotten crises was brought up as a possible example to be taken on board by MS. As the next edition of the European Humanitarian Forum (EHF), co-hosted by DG ECHO and Belgium, will take place in 18-19 March 2024, speakers also exchanged about the opportunity that this forum provides to move the discussion forward, including the aspect of expanding the donor base.

Speakers:

- Carlos Afonso, Business Development Associate Director - Plan International Spain
- Alicia Daza, Researcher and Training Manager – IECAH
- Jesús Rogado Zuriaga, Head of Unit for Prevention and Evaluation - AECID
- Wolfgang Streiter, Team Leader for Inter-institutional Relations - DG ECHO Unit E.1
- Pieter Vermaerke, Director Humanitarian Aid and Transition - Belgian MFA

Moderator: Maria Groenewald, Director – VOICE



Key Highlights

- No country is neglected by accident. Neglect is a choice and is reversible if there is political will.
- Due to a lack of funding, there is a need to do more with less. Enhancing humanitarian aid efficiency, and effectiveness, working jointly with other actors in a nexus approach, investing more in crisis prevention, and advancing the localisation agenda are more crucial than ever.
- Traditional donors must increase their respective budgets to keep up with the steep rise in funding needs and effectively contribute to reducing the funding gap.
- Getting reliable data on humanitarian financing is important but also very complex.
- More coordination between COHAFA and other Working parties, especially the geographical ones, is key to addressing neglected crises and the issue of funding imbalances.
- The EHF will have a special focus on the funding gap and forgotten crises and should be used as a sounding board for advocacy.
- The role of the private sector in supporting humanitarian aid should be further explored.
- Funding should be flexible, not earmarked, and not restricted to a specific crisis. Ensuring quality funding is as important as providing additional funding.

Panel II: Localisation - the role of local actors, especially women, in humanitarian responses

Local and national actors are key frontline responders during and after emergencies. Over the past years, the international humanitarian community has been discussing intensively how to respond to the actual needs and commitments to localisation and to revise existing policies in the humanitarian sector accordingly.

During the EHF in March 2023, DG ECHO issued its [guidance note on promoting equitable partnerships with local responders in humanitarian settings](#), which summarises DG ECHO's position on localisation. This was developed within the framework of the existing financial regulation, which does not allow DG ECHO to transfer funds directly outside the EU Member States. The same applies to the Basque government, which has constraints in providing direct funding to local partners.

Bearing this in mind, speakers were invited to reflect on how to change the current dynamics, which barriers they see in the advancement of the localisation agenda and how to overcome these challenges. The importance of risk sharing and more flexibility with regard to donors' compliance requirements was embedded in the discussion. Panelists delved into the link between the feminist and gender approach in the humanitarian sector and the localisation agenda and specific recommendations on how to further incorporate the feminist and gender approach in the humanitarian sector were shared.

Speakers:

- Marco Aviotti, Policy Officer - DG ECHO Unit C.1
- Joan Burke, Feminist Humanitarian Network representative, Executive Director - Belize Family Life Association
- Pilar Diez Arregui, Humanitarian Desk Officer - Basque Agency for Development Cooperation
- Saskia Harmsen, Partnership & Local Humanitarian Leadership Lead – Oxfam

Moderator: Sandra Ferrer, Humanitarian Board Member – La Coordinadora

Key Highlights

- Feminist approach and localisation must be included in humanitarian responses.
- The humanitarian system must be re-designed to be inclusive as well as to shift power to the local organisations, which are at the forefront of responses to crises.
- Multi-year funding, simplified administrative requirements and standardised formats are needed to advance the localisation agenda.
- Partners' led consortium and feminist programming should be prioritised by donors when local actors cannot receive direct funding.
- Promoting women's leadership is the approach that should be prioritised in all stages of humanitarian action.
- INGOs cannot be the only ones bearing the costs and efforts of shifting the power to local organisations. There is a need for donors to set out meaningful commitments to decolonise policies and practices, to share resources, and provide funding directly to feminist and women-led local humanitarian actors.
- All actors and donors need to know more about the local responders, what the strengths and weaknesses of the local responder's system are, and how local actors connect.
- The role of local organisations should be reinforced, particularly through the sharing of knowledge and decision-making processes in programming.

Panel III: Nexus approach – a way to address neglected, protracted, complex crises

This panel explored the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach as a way to address the multifaceted nature of humanitarian crises. A special focus was given to the peace component, its challenges, and how to advance to concretely translate commitments into action. As the world is witnessing an increasing number of conflicts, climate change impacts, and economic shocks, that have driven more people into food insecurity and displacement, and fueled additional conflicts, the nexus approach is an opportunity to better address people's needs in protracted but also short-term crises. While the connection between humanitarian and development actors has often been considered quite natural, the inclusion of the peace component in the triple nexus has raised various concerns, especially from the humanitarian actors.

Over the years, several commitments have been set out to foster the nexus approach and to move this agenda forward, starting from the [Council conclusions on operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus](#) in 2017 to the [OECD DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#), to the [EC Communication "EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles"](#) in 2021. Recently, the challenge of effectively incorporating the peace pillar of the triple nexus has been included among the priorities of the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU in COHAFA. Based on the above, speakers exchanged first about the concept of the HDP nexus and the challenges this third pillar implies. Secondly, they looked at the programmatic approach and focused on the tools and frameworks that are or should be put in place to overcome these challenges. NGOs experiences in implementing nexus programmes and addressing the peace component from a humanitarian perspective triggered the initial reflections. The [VOICE Policy Resolution 2023 "World hunger is rising sharply: let's stop it NOW!"](#) and the [mid-year global report on food crises](#) provided additional food for thought to further reflect on the importance of joining forces with HDP actors and ensure multi-sectoral and inclusive approaches to address this global food crisis.



Panel III: Nexus approach – a way to address neglected, protracted, complex crises

For the second part of the panel, the new Spanish humanitarian diplomacy strategy, the recently published [EC study “HDP Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities for its Implementation”](#), the [EP initiative report “How to build an innovative humanitarian aid strategy: spotlight on current and forgotten crises”](#) were used as the baseline for the discussions.

The diversity of the speakers contributed to an enriching exchange. Despite the overall acknowledgment of the importance of the nexus, several challenges but also successful practical examples were reported.

Speakers:

- Melis Sandrine Alguadis, Policy Analyst, Peace, Partnerships and Crisis Management Division, EEAS
- Rosaria Arbore, Programmes Director - EDUCO, member of ChildFund Alliance
- Dervla Cleary, Team Leader, Strategic Positioning, Office of Emergencies and Resilience - FAO
- Christian Freres Kauer, Senior Expert, Manager Latin America and Caribbean, Humanitarian Action Office - AECID
- Vincent Stehli, Director of Operation - Acción contra el Hambre
- Carlos Zorrinho, European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Humanitarian Aid

Moderator: Francesca Giubilo, Senior Advocacy Officer – VOICE



Key Highlights

- Humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool – as stressed in the European consensus on HA.
- As humanitarian access has become further constrained in several conflict contexts, coordinating efforts among the three HDP actors, especially the peace component, is crucial to build trust and improve access.
- Data and analysis should be used to influence politics at national, regional and global level to implement nexus at a larger scale and convince donors of the cost-efficiency of nexus programmes.
- Each actor is different, in terms of mandate, principles, and financial instruments. However, rather than focusing on the differences among the three actors, there is a need to focus more on the added value of working together and to clarify the joint objectives.
- Several tools exist at the EU level to implement the nexus approach: the conflict analysis screening – now a legal obligation under Global Europe - regional integrated approach cluster, and new reporting requirements.
- There is a need to make better use of other existing tools: like crisis prevention modules, mediation, and humanitarian negotiations to ensure humanitarian corridors and exemptions.
- Despite some progress, the EU still lacks clarity in terms of definitions of the peace component.
- There is a need to have a local community leadership and to particularly involve women and children in decisions that concern their lives – as they are the most affected ones.

VOICE recommendations for the EU and/or its Member States:

- To meaningfully increase their humanitarian budgets, in accordance with the commitments made in the 2023 Council conclusions on addressing the humanitarian aid funding gap.
- To increase the EU humanitarian aid budget line to a minimum of €2.6 billion per year and ensure the SEAR remains available for sudden onset humanitarian crises outside of Europe throughout the entire year, until the end of the MFF.
- To foster investments in anticipatory actions for humanitarian assistance, reduce risks, build resilience, and support a better coexistence among different communities.
- To adapt financial frameworks and tools to a nexus approach in line with humanitarian principles and built on NGOs' experiences.
- To use COHAFA as a crisis prevention platform to ensure that crises worldwide get the same attention and that neglected crises are highlighted.
- To facilitate humanitarian access and ensure the protection of humanitarian space.
- To support European INGOs in advancing the EU localisation agenda by first ensuring that indirect costs of both INGOs and their local partners are sufficiently covered and second reducing the administrative burden with simplified due diligence processes.
- To develop national localisation strategies or scale up their existing ones, in close collaboration with their international, national, and local partners.
- To support programmes which are gender-sensitive and context-specific.
- To use the EHF as an opportunity to trigger action and act as an inclusive and participative EU humanitarian aid sounding board.

This event was co-organised by VOICE, the network of 89 European humanitarian NGOs, and La Coordinadora, the Spanish national platform of humanitarian and development CSOs.



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