

STATEMENT

VOICE Reflections after the European Humanitarian Forum 2023

Humanitarian needs are at an all-time high. According to the latest [Global Humanitarian Overview 2023](#), 347.7 million people need humanitarian assistance. The number of people expected to be food insecure in 2023 has doubled since 2020, reaching a record level of 345.2 million people ([WFP](#)). The crises driving these needs are worsening: the number of conflicts has more than doubled in the decade to 2020 ([SOHS](#)); the number of climate-related disasters has increased annually since 2018 ([SOHS](#)); and crises are becoming more protracted.

In this dire context, the VOICE network welcomes the second edition of the [European Humanitarian Forum](#) (EHF), co-organised by the European Commission (DG ECHO) and the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, in raising awareness among key decision makers as to the acute nature of this deepening global crisis which can only be addressed through concerted political action. The Forum successfully highlighted the need to: increase the volume of quality funding to close the widening funding gap; enhance anticipatory action; move forward the localisation agenda; mitigate the impacts of sanctions regimes on humanitarian aid; and ensure respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

AMONG THESE ISSUES, THE VOICE NETWORK WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT THREE PRIORITY AREAS:

- Addressing the funding gap: from recognition to action
- Breaking the silos: Humanitarian aid alone cannot be the solution
- Preserving humanitarian space: the humanitarian principles must be championed and the impacts of sanctions regimes on humanitarian aid mitigated

1. Addressing the funding gap: from recognition to action

The chronic underfunding of humanitarian aid increasingly leaves crisis-affected people vulnerable to shocks and stresses. In 2022, only 55% of the UN GHO was covered, with a funding gap of \$23 billion ([ETS](#)). The EHF provided a necessary and valuable spotlight on this and successfully stressed political actors' responsibility to address it. The Forum suggested a common understanding on a way forward: the volume of humanitarian funding must significantly increase, and humanitarian aid efficiency and effectiveness must be improved through quality funding and enhanced localisation. While recognition of the necessity to increase both the quality and quantity of aid is welcome, VOICE calls for this recognition to be followed by specific actions.

The VOICE network encourages EU Member States (MS) to step up their efforts to increase their national humanitarian aid allocations, and to consider following Spain's example by introducing a legal commitment to allocating 0.7% of GNI to ODA by 2030, of which 10% will be earmarked for humanitarian aid. The Spanish decision again highlights that there is a way when there is political will.

In addition to increasing the volume of funding, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid is critical. Throughout the Forum and across a wide variety of issues, participants stressed the need to increase the volume of quality funding. VOICE supports these repeated calls and encourages the EU and its MS to provide multi-year, flexible, and un-earmarked funding.

In relation to repeated calls for the greater localisation of humanitarian responses that occurred throughout the EHF, and while VOICE welcomes the new DG ECHO Guidance note on the promotion of equitable partnerships, we call on the EU to identify ways to support INGOs to fulfil the ambitions set out in the document. DG ECHO should actively define its own contribution to a fairer sharing of risks, notably by seeking ways to increase the level of flexibility in compliance requirements. In addition, the financing of local and national partners' overhead costs, which is critical for a successful localisation of aid, should come on top of the 7% currently allocated by DG ECHO to its partners, either by increasing that percentage or by ensuring additional budget lines. Moreover, VOICE encourages EU MS to follow DG ECHO's example and develop their own localisation strategies, or by stepping up their existing localisation efforts in collaboration with their international, national and local partners.

2. Breaking the silos: Humanitarian aid alone cannot be the solution

The Forum's discussions highlighted how much humanitarian aid is only part of the solution to the current global crisis. The increased number and intensity of conflicts, the global food crisis, and climate change are among the main drivers of humanitarian needs. Preventing these crises from deepening further should be at the forefront of the international community's priorities, and humanitarians cannot be left alone in this.

VOICE recognises that the Forum is a key opportunity to break down silos and to bring together a diversity of actors. EHF 2023 shed light, across panels, on how much the nexus approach and anticipatory action are key to finding solutions. On this matter, while nexus programmes must always be implemented in line with humanitarian principles, VOICE recommends the EU and MS to explore ways to adapt their different financial frameworks and tools to enable a nexus approach. In addition, VOICE calls on the EU and its MS to increase climate finance aimed at building resilience. In this respect, VOICE appreciates that the Forum featured a follow-up on the [Climate and Environment Charter](#) and the [Humanitarian aid donors' declaration on climate and environment](#), a year after its launch. This represents a valuable example of moving forward with a collective agenda, including a certain degree of accountability on how donors and humanitarian organisations progress in the implementation of their commitments.

To reverse the trend of increasing humanitarian needs, strong collaboration among actors with diverse mandates must be scaled up. The Forum has an important convening power, and VOICE recommends that further efforts should be made to ensure the meaningful participation of development, climate, and private actors in the future, especially when it comes to discussions on the nexus or on innovative financing mechanisms.

3. Preserving humanitarian space: the humanitarian principles must be championed and the impacts of sanctions regimes on humanitarian aid mitigated

The humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are fundamental to all humanitarian action. The EHF, as an event bringing together humanitarian actors and political decision-makers, is an occasion to champion the principles and ensure that diverse actors understand the centrality of the principles for humanitarian aid responders. VOICE suggests that future EHF's should showcase how the EU and its MS uphold their commitments to principled humanitarian aid, notably by ensuring humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool, as stated in the [European Consensus on humanitarian aid](#) – reconfirmed in 2017 - and should not be used for accomplishing any objectives other than principled humanitarian ones. While the Forum's co-organisers stressed that the event is taking place amid "changing geopolitical realities", VOICE recalls that the politicisation of aid is a major threat to the safety of humanitarian workers and the communities that they serve.

On another note, throughout the Forum, the knock-on effects of sanctions on humanitarian aid were particularly highlighted. VOICE welcomes the collective recognition of the importance of ensuring that sanctions regimes do not impede the effective delivery of principled humanitarian aid, as stressed in the [co-hosts' statement](#). Following the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 2664, VOICE welcomes the Council's decision to introduce humanitarian exemptions in its mixed sanctions regimes and encourages the EU and its MS to adopt the same approach to their autonomous regimes.

The EHF 2023 confirmed the Forum's position as a key international gathering. It provided an important opportunity to raise political decision-makers' awareness of the record level of humanitarian needs and some potential ways to address them. However, awareness raising will not be sufficient to address the challenges the humanitarian sector faces. For the Forum to be deemed a success, it must trigger action and act as an inclusive and participative EU humanitarian aid sounding board.

VOICE stands ready to support the EU and Belgium in their reflection to onboard the concerns and solutions which were voiced throughout the Forum.

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