

10 YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID 10 ACHIEVEMENTS FROM AN NGO PERSPECTIVE

2017 marks the tenth anniversary of the 'European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid', the first comprehensive policy framework at EU level on humanitarian aid. It was signed in 2007 by the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the EU Member States. For European NGOs, the implementation of the Consensus has brought 10 main achievements, which together have improved European humanitarian aid.

A coherent approach to the EU's humanitarian aid guided by the humanitarian principles.

1. PROMOTION OF IHL AND THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

The Consensus has prompted EU Member States to make **greater efforts to promote International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the humanitarian principles**. All EU Member States have thus become members of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative.

2. NEEDS-BASED HUMANITARIAN AID

The Consensus articulates the EU's commitment to reach the most-vulnerable through **needs-based humanitarian assistance**. The Agenda for Humanity (2016) has given a greater emphasis to this approach through the principle of 'Leave no one behind'. This commitment has established a clear framework for relations with policy-makers and non-humanitarian actors.

3. THE EU POSITION IN THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

The European Commission and the EU Member States increasingly take **common strategic positions based on the solid foundation provided by the Consensus**. Thus, 7 of the 9 commitments made by the EU in the 2015 Implementation Plan of the Consensus were reiterated at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), showing the mobilisation of all European humanitarian actors, including NGOs.

4. POLICY CONSISTENCY AND COORDINATION

The Consensus has contributed to stronger **coordination between the EC and Member States, improving the consistency of EU humanitarian policy**. The large majority of EU Member States have included the Consensus in their national humanitarian strategies and policies. There has also been more formal and regular dialogue between NGOs and Member States.

5. THE ROLE OF CIVIL PROTECTION AND MILITARY IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The Consensus has clearly framed the use of the EU's civil protection and military assets. It emphasised that the use of **civil protection resources** should be **complementary to and coherent with humanitarian aid**, while remaining **exceptional in complex emergencies**. **Military assets** should be used only as a **last resort**, in support of humanitarian relief operations. The Consensus also helped create more opportunities for humanitarian-military dialogue and developed more awareness of related issues among Member States. EU military training now covers IHL.

A strong partnership with humanitarian NGOs for quality and effective humanitarian aid.

6. DIVERSITY IN PARTNERSHIP

The Consensus crucially acknowledges the essential role of NGOs in humanitarian response, while stressing the comparative advantages of all partners, the UN, the Red Cross, the ICRC and NGOs. Over the years, the EU and its partners have worked together around common values, developed complementarity in their humanitarian response and political support for humanitarian aid. The professionalism and field expertise of a diversity of NGOs is an essential dimension of the partnership, helping to respond to the diverse needs of crisis-affected populations.

7. QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF AID

The Consensus has paved the way for a number of quality initiatives which remain on the agenda today: promoting local response and accountability to crisis-affected populations, implementing the humanitarian-development nexus, reducing risk and vulnerabilities through enhanced preparedness (DRR), and integrating the gender dimension into humanitarian aid.

The Framework Partnership Agreement between ECHO (European Commission's Directorate General for civil protection and humanitarian aid operations) and NGOs contributes towards constantly improving the quality and effectiveness of European humanitarian aid. An important step towards increasing aid efficiency is reducing the administrative burden, something which the EU committed to through the Grand Bargain process.

The EU humanitarian architecture strengthened.

8. THE LISBON TREATY

The Consensus prepared the ground so that two years after its approval, the Lisbon Treaty became the first EU treaty to dedicate a separate article to humanitarian aid. This is a powerful and important legal reference for the safeguarding and promotion of principled humanitarian action both at EU and Member State-level.

9. COHAFA

The Consensus triggered the establishment of the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA), bridging the gap between EU and national policies while creating specific interlocutors for humanitarian NGOs. COHAFA facilitates the sharing of information and best practices between Member States and the European Commission (ECHO). The outcomes of COHAFA meetings are now fed into other Council bodies with the aim of influencing Council Conclusions.

10. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT STANDING RAPPORTEUR

In 2006, while the Consensus was being drafted, the European Parliament (EP) Committee on Development appointed a Standing Rapporteur on Humanitarian aid for the first time. The practice has been kept since then, helping the EP play a key role in promoting the Consensus and in monitoring the implementation of EU humanitarian aid, including through dialogue with NGOs. The EP has also regularly called for increased, more predictable and timely funding of humanitarian aid.

The Consensus has created a vision of principled humanitarian action, strengthened the EU humanitarian architecture, fostered a coherent EU approach, and enabled a strong partnership with humanitarian NGOs, improving the quality and effectiveness of European humanitarian aid. Today, with more than 141 million in-need worldwide and 65.6 million forcibly displaced, the Consensus is still relevant!

The EU and the Member States, by honouring their WHS commitments, should continue to actively implement the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.