



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing 85 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs. www.ngovoice.org

VOICE recommendations: Council Conclusions on the EU's Strategic approach to resilience

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These recommendations are built on previous consultations led among VOICE members, including the workshop organised in cooperation with the European Commission in February 2017, as well as on the work of the network ahead of the elaboration of the EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises.

1. Strategic approach to resilience and the EU's international commitments

VOICE underlines that the strategic approach to resilience is an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its seriousness and determination to meet the commitments taken under the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) - Agenda for Humanity, the 2030 Agenda and 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement. That is also why the strategic approach to resilience must keep a global scope.

2. People and community based resilience:

VOICE appeals to the Council to emphasise a community based approach to resilience and to recall that the 2012 Communication on resilience and the 2013 related Action Plan remain valid and core policy frameworks from which the strategic approach to resilience (in a broader sense) derives. They both capture the transformative aspect of resilience which is important to reflect in the implementation of the Agenda for Humanity and the commitment to leave no one behind, paying attention to the most vulnerable / at risk populations and groups.

Moreover, humanitarian NGOs stress that state resilience and community resilience are two very different concepts. While reiterating that people and communities must remain the core targets and stakeholders in building resilience, VOICE underlines that when enlarging resilience to state resilience, the focus should be on inclusive governance. Indeed, governance strategies that support citizens to actively engage with power holders and empowerment of communities, taking into account women's participation, ultimately lead to investments, services and supportive policies that correspond with their needs. Such strategies contribute to building community based resilience and greater preparedness for future crises, which naturally contributes to societal resilience (notably thanks to capacity building action to local actors) and thus to state resilience. However, successful support to resilience should not be translated as a means by which communities in crises are expected to bear more of a burden.

3. The need for a context-specific approach:

VOICE stresses that in the implementation of the EU's strategic approach to resilience, a context specific approach must be adopted. It means that all actors must contribute to resilience building wherever and whenever possible, without undermining their respective objectives and mandates. VOICE encourages the EU to set specific targets for cooperation among actors within the development humanitarian nexus while maintaining needs-based humanitarian decision-making and operations. Moreover, this resilience approach needs to remain flexible and adapted if the context changes.

4. Clear roles and mandates towards complementarity and coordination of actions:

VOICE urges the Council to ask the Commission and the European External Action Service to define clear mandates for the different stakeholders encompassed by the Joint Communication more clearly, underlining their expected contribution to resilience building. During crises, clear roles must also be defined, according to the context, as basis for better complementarity and coordination of actions,

and it is crucial for safeguarding the principled and needs based delivery of humanitarian aid, and avoid putting humanitarian workers at risk.

5. Humanitarian principles and the EU's integrated approach:

VOICE recalls that humanitarian principles are enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (article 214) and that the EU has committed to them in the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, in the EU's WHS commitments and in the Comprehensive Approach to conflicts and crises. The EU's Integrated Approach to conflicts and crises, the new level of ambition for the Common Security and Defence Policy and the focus on decreasing migration pressure on Europe, will give a strategic importance to resilience. VOICE calls on Member States to make sure that in this context, the humanitarian principles will be further emphasised and that clear actions will be planned to uphold them. Humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool.

6. Resilience and the EU funding architecture:

VOICE asks the Council to initiate concrete steps to translate the commitment to a longer term vision into the EU aid funding architecture. The EU funding mechanisms must match the ambition of the Joint Communication. A longer term funding cycle should be promoted, including for humanitarian aid, with multi-year programming and multi-year funding options in protracted crises, while offering more flexibility for implementing actors to adapt quickly to changing circumstances on the ground, for example through crisis modifiers. Funding flexibility should remain an operational flexibility, enabled according to the needs of crisis affected populations and not only to donors' political concerns.

7. The role of NGOs:

VOICE calls on the Council to acknowledge more explicitly the role of NGOs especially in humanitarian assistance, development aid, and disaster risk reduction. Local, national and international NGOs, should be an integral part of resilience decision-making given their proximity to affected populations, their experience and expertise developed at community level working on resilience over the past years. They represent a great asset for multi-stakeholder risk assessments and vulnerability and capacity/strengths analyses.

8. From risk assessment and early warning to early action

VOICE asks the member states to ensure that early warning leads to early action for the whole range of potential crises. This relates not only to climatic extremes but also in anticipation of violence and potential conflict, infectious diseases and pandemics, as well as economic crisis. The EU must be committed to responding to early warning with early action including in the case of slow onset crises. More systematic environmental, climate and risk assessment must indeed be included to identify and promote adaptive and mitigating measures. In this regard, the full implementation of the Sendai Framework Action Plan represents a substantial part of EU's contribution to strengthened resilience.

9. The implementation challenge:

VOICE encourages the Council to consider the 10 guiding considerations in the annex to the Joint Communication as a starting point for the implementation / operationalisation of the Strategic approach to resilience. The resilience agenda should primarily be led by development services and actors considering the long term approach and the global scope.