

POSITION PAPER

From Evidence to Action

VOICE Recommendations for a Stronger EU Approach to Fragility and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

Contexts presenting a high degree of fragility are becoming increasingly prevalent across today's crises, where conflict, climate shocks, economic instability and restricted civic space intersect, placing millions of people at risk and reversing development gains. As humanitarian needs continue to grow faster than available resources, the EU's role as a principled humanitarian and development actor becomes even more critical.

In this evolving context, the European Union has increasingly acknowledged the need for more coherent and coordinated approaches that bridge humanitarian, development and peace efforts, while preserving humanitarian principles and ensuring responses remain people-centred and context-specific. Looking ahead, the EU is developing a new integrated approach to fragility, expected to be adopted mid-2026. This represents a key political moment to shape how the EU will engage in fragile settings, sustain long-term commitment and better link short-term responses with structural resilience-building.

This document brings together VOICE members' recommendations on the EU integrated approach to fragility, which alongside [evidence](#) of existing EU and Member State commitments, VOICE publications, and concrete members' case studies, demonstrates that the EU already possesses a strong political basis and growing operational experience to shape a meaningful integrated approach. The task now is to ensure that upcoming EU policies build on these foundations, remain anchored in humanitarian principles, and translate ambition into real impact for people living in fragile and crisis-affected contexts.

VOICE calls on the EU to develop an integrated approach to fragility that should:

1. Prioritise a people-centred approach.
2. Be grounded in local realities and enhance coordination with local actors and civil society organisations.
3. Apply the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP) as the default approach.
4. Ensure long-term and flexible commitment to fragility.
5. Safeguard humanitarian principles.
6. Strengthen collaboration across humanitarian, development, peace and climate sectors.
7. Promote coordination between EU services and Member States.
8. Address Dis-/Misinformation and its impact on humanitarian and development action.

1. Prioritise a people-centred approach

A people-centred approach ensures that humanitarian, development, and peace interventions are context-specific and sustainable, while safeguarding the humanitarian principles.

- Engage affected communities and support civil society organisations systematically to ensure tailored programmes and context-specific interventions that reach those in need.
- Mainstream protection, gender and inclusion across all interventions. Programming should be participatory and rooted in the perspectives, risks, and capacities of affected populations.

- Focus on those living in the most vulnerable conditions, including women and children, who bear disproportionate impacts of crises. Guaranteeing access to social protection, education, healthcare and nutrition not only addresses urgent needs but also supports longer-term peace, resilience, and sustainable development.

2. Be grounded in local realities and enhance coordination with local actors and civil society organisations

Grounding EU action in local realities ensures sustainability, and meaningful impact, while recognising civil society as a strategic partner.

- Integrate local perspectives in the design of the EU's approach to fragility through inclusive consultations reflecting the diversity of actors and context-specific dynamics.
- Embed power-sharing in decision-making, allowing local priorities to guide engagement.
- Recognise civil society as a strategic partner, creating space for meaningful participation in decision-making.
- Acknowledge that civil society serves as an effective, enduring and trusted partner for the EU, especially in countries where direct budget support to governments is not possible, or where state capacity, legitimacy and public service delivery are limited.
- Support for locally led initiatives empowers civil society at national, regional, and community levels.
- Develop tailored strategies in contexts with limited political dialogue to maintain engagement and ensure civil society remains active and protected.

3. Apply the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP) as the default approach

EU programming should connect emergency response with development and peacebuilding actions that address structural causes of vulnerability.

- Mainstream conflict sensitivity across all programmes, investing in local peace processes, social cohesion, and meaningful community participation.
- Draw lessons from the Sahel and Lake Chad region to highlight the added value of Nexus approach and the critical role of national authorities in its effective implementation.
- Invest in local authorities' technical and institutional capacities to enable sustainable leadership while upholding humanitarian space and principles.

4. Ensure long-term and flexible commitment to fragility

Long-term and flexible engagement allows the EU to respond effectively to evolving crises, safeguard humanitarian principles, and support resilience.

- Maintain and deepen engagement in contexts facing fragility, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings and where cooperation with the national government is no longer an option.
- Prioritise people-centred approaches that enhance access to child protection, social protection, food, education, and healthcare systems that can anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from shocks while reinforcing local resilience.
- Provide flexible support through civil society, women's organisations, and grassroots actors to ensure aid reaches affected populations without unintended political legitimisation.
- Strengthen conflict analysis and monitoring to rapidly adjust actions and financing in response to changing needs.
- Ensure flexible funding through humanitarian, development and climate funding mechanisms, or unearmarked funding including crisis modifiers.
- Invest in anticipatory action and early warning systems to reduce the scale of potential humanitarian needs in fragile contexts where the humanitarian situation is already dire, and the impact of hazards is even more devastating.
- Do not link humanitarian, development and peace funding to migration management, border control, or military spending, to preserve the focus on supporting marginalised communities.
- Demonstrate greater flexibility and trust toward INGOs, particularly regarding compliance rules, co-funding requirements, and project duration.

5. Safeguard humanitarian principles

Upholding humanitarian principles is essential in fragile contexts.

- Safeguard humanitarian principles across all EU engagement to ensure that aid reaches those most in need, without political influence.

6. Strengthen collaboration across humanitarian, development, peace and climate sectors

Collaboration across sectors ensures coherent, adaptive, and crisis-responsive actions.

- Strengthen the role of EU Delegations to lead context-sensitive prioritisation based on real-time conflict analysis, structured engagement with local actors, and early warning systems.
- Draw lessons from multi-country programmes and Trust Funds to inform future interventions to enhance impact in fragile contexts.

7. Promote coordination between EU services and Member States

Effective coordination strengthens the EU's collective impact while safeguarding humanitarian principles.

- Improve HDP nexus coordination, particularly under the Team Europe approach at Brussels and country levels.
- This coordination should respect humanitarian principles and prioritise the rights and needs of affected populations over short-term political interests.
- Strengthen humanitarian diplomacy to ensure access and respect for International Humanitarian Law, while promoting a regional approach and enhancing multi-donor coordination.

8. Address Dis-/Misinformation and its impact on humanitarian and development action

Addressing misinformation preserves trust, protects communities, and ensures effective aid delivery.

- Monitor the rapidly evolving information landscapes, including AI-generated content, which pose challenges in fragile contexts.
- Support local media and community radios as trusted sources of information.
- Engage with trusted journalists and local media to address false narratives and strengthen community confidence.

This document reflects the views of the members of the VOICE Resilience-Nexus Working Group, providing the humanitarian NGO perspective on the European approach to resilience, climate change, and implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

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