

STATEMENT

VOICE Statement ahead of the European Humanitarian Forum 2022

In 2022, even before the conflict that has erupted in Ukraine displaced millions, it was estimated that at least 274 million people would need humanitarian assistance and protection worldwide. Whether endangered by conflict, dispossessed by climate change and environmental degradation, or impacted by diseases such as Covid-19, one in 29 people will find themselves deprived, displaced, hungry, ill, or homeless this year ([Global Humanitarian Overview 2022](#)).

The European Humanitarian Forum is a unique opportunity to focus on these growing humanitarian needs, and for the European Union (EU) and its Member States (MS) to discuss, with all humanitarian stakeholders - including frontline responders - political and policy measures that could support and protect the most vulnerable and marginalised populations, and to identify solutions that will preserve humanitarian space and ensure the delivery of effective, efficient and principled humanitarian responses.

The conflict in Ukraine, has further increased humanitarian needs worldwide, and contributed to rising food prices and economic instability. While supporting the needs of the conflict-affected people of Ukraine, it is essential that the European donor community also stands by its commitments to support the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in many other parts of the world.

VOICE CALLS ON THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES TO USE THE EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN FORUM AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

- Recommit and further strengthen their commitment to principled humanitarian aid
- Review and adjust the approach of the EU towards counterterrorism and restrictive measures
- Strengthen collective efforts to achieve the Grand Bargain 2.0 commitments
- Confirm commitments to the effective implementation of humanitarian protection and IHL
- Set up clear and measurable commitments to build climate resilience and adjust financial support and policies on greening humanitarian aid
- Review progress on and recommit to the inclusion of gender considerations into humanitarian action and policies

- **Recommit and further strengthen their commitment to principled humanitarian aid**, as stated in the [European Consensus on humanitarian aid](#), and in the most recent [EC Communication on Humanitarian Action](#). The Forum should restate the commitment of MS to the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, and to restoring respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to ensure that aid reaches those who are most in need. While the nexus approach offers an opportunity to adopt an operational flexibility to address people's needs in protracted crises in a coordinated manner, the different roles and mandates of all actors involved need to be respected. In the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, the humanitarian mandate must be protected from politicisation and instrumentalisation. Humanitarian aid is neither a crisis management nor a foreign policy tool and should not be used for accomplishing any objectives other than saving lives and protecting people in a manner consistent with the humanitarian principles.

- **Review and adjust the approach of the EU towards counterterrorism and restrictive measures.** While VOICE welcomes the Forum session on bank de-risking, the overall impacts of counterterrorism and restrictive measures on humanitarian action (such as operational impediments, criminalisation of aid, higher security risks for aid workers, increased administrative and financial burden, etc.) must be sufficiently reflected at the policy-making level in the Forum's discussions. The MS must ensure that their sanctions regimes include humanitarian exemptions to enable NGOs to operate and support those in need. The Forum provides an opportunity for MS to commit to collective action, acknowledging and addressing the dire impacts of counterterrorism and restrictive measures on humanitarian aid.
- **Strengthen collective efforts to achieve the Grand Bargain (GB) 2.0 commitments.** The Forum offers a chance for MS and humanitarian NGOs to make progress on their GB 2.0 commitments. We strongly support the new EU ambition to move forward the localisation agenda and the commitment from DG ECHO to develop a Localisation Guidance document. However, many other topics which have been given primary importance in the GB 2.0 framework remain underrepresented in the Forum, notably quality funding, risk sharing and aid efficiency. High level discussions and decisions on those topics can trigger a significant improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid. Consequently, VOICE calls on the EU and its MS to reaffirm that their GB 2.0 commitments are key to addressing the funding gap, and to commit to making significant progress towards these objectives.
- **Confirm commitments to the effective implementation of humanitarian protection and IHL,** by all parties to conflicts, especially with regard to preventing and mitigating the impact of conflicts on civilian populations, for ensuring the right access of these population to essential goods and services, and the security of humanitarian aid workers.
- **Set up clear and measurable commitments to build climate resilience and adjust financial support and policies on greening humanitarian aid.** While acknowledging the climate crisis and its devastating effects on the most vulnerable and marginalised, the Forum must explore concrete climate actions to address the effects of climate change on humanitarian action. The focus should be on anticipatory actions, including Forecast-based Financing, and disaster risk reduction measures, the implementation of which needs to be financially supported.
- **Review progress on and recommit to the inclusion of gender considerations into humanitarian action and policies.** While VOICE welcomes the inclusion of a dedicated session on Gender Based Violence in the Forum, we believe that gender considerations should be mainstreamed into all sessions. The acute vulnerability of women and girls in situations of crisis should not be understood as a stand-alone topic, but as a cross-cutting issue. Local women-led organisations should be supported in strengthening their capacities and voices in international fora such as the Forum.

Principled humanitarian aid is vital to respond to the increasing level of needs. It must be supported by strong political will, and respect for IHL must be indisputable and consistently ensured. The Forum must lead to firm commitments by the EU and its MS to collectively step up their efforts to face the dire humanitarian crises worldwide – those currently on the radar and the neglected ones - by translating theoretical solutions into concrete actions.

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