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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Spanish Presidency's Work Programme for the Working Party on
Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA)

1 July – 31 December 2023

On behalf of the Presidency, delegations will find in annex the work programme of the Spanish Presidency for the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) from 1 July to 31 December 2023.

**SPANISH PRESIDENCY'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR
THE WORKING PARTY ON HUMANITARIAN AID AND FOOD AID (COHAFA)**

1 JULY – 31 DECEMBER 2023

1. The humanitarian situation worldwide remains demanding and complex, with many people in need of urgent assistance and protection, and major challenges to overcome in mobilising the necessary resources to meet this exponential increase in needs.
2. The Spanish Presidency of COHAFA is a great opportunity to contribute to more effective and better funded humanitarian action, complementing the work of our predecessors. In that spirit, we will continue the work of past presidencies, hoping to achieve a perfect link between the Swedish and Belgian terms.
3. In an effort to strengthen alliances and reinforce cooperation, this programme has been developed with the participation of our partners, taking into account their main concerns. It also aims to enhance coordination among Council working groups and with other institutions, since the main humanitarian challenges are intertwined with other fields of action and a comprehensive approach is needed to tackle today's global crises.
4. Supported by the objectives of the Commission's 2021 'Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles' and the subsequent 2021 Council conclusions, as well as the Council conclusions of 22 May 2023 on addressing the humanitarian funding gap, the Spanish Presidency will concentrate its efforts on interrelated topics such as enabling a better understanding of the triple nexus, with a particular focus on the peace pillar, fostering the gender perspective, protecting civilians, pushing to bridge the financing gap, and encouraging the mainstreaming of environmental and climate considerations in humanitarian action. The nexus will be considered an overarching theme and localisation will be mainstreamed throughout the programme.

5. All of this will be done while paying attention both to new emergencies and protracted and forgotten crises. Among others, Ukraine, Venezuela, Haiti and the food security situation worldwide will be on the agenda.

I. TRIPLE NEXUS: THE CHALLENGE OF EFFECTIVELY INCORPORATING THE PEACE PILLAR

6. Since the adoption of the OECD Development Assistance Committee's Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in 2019, significant efforts have been made to implement it, with great interest from Member States and the EU. However, despite important progress made by humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors, challenges persist in terms of strengthening links to the peace pillar, and achieving concrete results in a coordinated manner among the three components with common pre-defined outcomes rather than merely a sum of actions from each sector.
7. Building on the work of the EU institutions and previous presidencies, the Spanish Presidency will seek to address these challenges by focusing on reflections and best practices that help us, inter alia, to achieve effective peacebuilding within societies, particularly in protracted crisis contexts. As indicated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, taking this approach, particularly at local level (contributing to localisation, a key objective of the Grand Bargain), could create more opportunities and enable vulnerable populations to receive planned assistance.
8. Building on the role of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation as both a humanitarian and a development agency, the Spanish Presidency will also try to strengthen the link with development actors to exploit synergies and identify best practices and opportunities for coordinated action in nexus contexts.

II. GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

9. In recent years, the international community has made significant efforts to raise awareness about the differentiated impact of humanitarian crises (conflicts, disasters, population displacement, epidemics, etc.) on women and girls, but also men and boys and persons of other gender identities. OCHA, the European Commission, Member States, and international and local NGOs have developed manuals, guidelines, established specific bodies, and launched collective advocacy initiatives for gender responsive programming in humanitarian action. The World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016 affirmed that gender equality, respect for the human rights of women and girls, and their empowerment in political, humanitarian, and development spheres are a universal responsibility.
10. However, it is evident that greater efforts are still needed from all humanitarian actors to mainstream a gender perspective with a transformative approach and an intersectional perspective, as well as to respect sexual diversity within the humanitarian architecture. This includes addressing the specific needs and interests of women and girls as well as men and boys and persons of other gender identities, with particular attention to the prevention, mitigation, and response to all forms of gender-based violence and the sexual and reproductive rights of women as well as to ensuring access to the full package of sexual and reproductive health services.
11. During the Spanish Presidency, there will be a focus on current challenges in this field, highlighting good practices for the prevention, response, and eradication of gender-based violence in different situations faced by women and girls in humanitarian contexts, including armed conflicts, displacement and refugee situations. In line with the EU's third Gender Action Plan, the Spanish Presidency will prioritise new measures to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian action, and to ensure universal and equal access to sexual and reproductive health services. It will also address the need to empower women and women's and feminist organisations, to ensure their full and active participation in the entire humanitarian architecture and to finance their organisations and projects.

III. PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

12. The protection of civilians in armed conflicts has always been one of the main concerns of the international community in the humanitarian field. However, it becomes particularly relevant in a world where conflicts have taken on a new scale and where the rules of International Humanitarian Law are being increasingly neglected.
13. Despite the efforts made by the international community, there are still many pending challenges on the agenda for the protection of civilians that require greater attention and resources from donors:
 - Protection of children: children in armed conflicts are victims of constant violations of their rights. Each year, thousands of children are victims of the six grave violations identified by the UN: killing and maiming; recruitment as soldiers; sexual violence; abduction; attacks against schools or hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access. The Spanish Presidency will pay particular attention to access to education in emergency situations and the protection of school facilities in accordance with the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and the guidelines to prevent the military use of schools and universities.
 - Protection of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs): in a context of an unprecedented increase in the number of refugees and IDPs worldwide, people who are forced to leave their homes due to armed conflicts and natural disasters often face challenges such as the lack of housing, food, water and sanitation, or access to health services. The donor community needs to advance the protection of the rights of refugees and IDPs by improving their access to basic services and promoting sustainable solutions for their relocation and reintegration.

- Protection of humanitarian workers: humanitarian workers providing assistance to civilians affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters face a range of risks, including violence, kidnapping, and murder. It is important to increase support for initiatives that enhance their protection, including advocacy, training, the provision of security equipment, and the implementation of measures to prevent violence against humanitarian workers and address accountability for the violations. Particular attention will be paid to healthcare workers and facilities, which, according to international law norms, deserve special protection.
14. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves all actors in the humanitarian field, including states, international organisations, and civil society. It is crucial to strengthen the implementation of international legal frameworks, such as international humanitarian law, and ensure accountability for violations. Additionally, sustained funding and political will are needed to effectively address the protection needs of civilians in armed conflicts.
 15. In the current context, threats against education and the right to food for the aforementioned groups are of particular concern. There is a need for decisive support for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2417 to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Likewise, we must promote respect for education in emergency situations and the work of actors such as the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack or the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.
 16. To achieve these objectives, we will build upon the outcomes of the European Humanitarian Forum 2023 and the knowledge gained from the adoption of Spain's first-ever Humanitarian Diplomacy Strategy, which includes the protection of civilians as one of its main pillars of action.

17. With all of this in mind, the Spanish Presidency, together with its trio partners, will begin exploring the development of a strategy at European level to inspire the actions of humanitarian diplomacy actors from all Member States and the European Union as a whole. This strategy will serve as a framework for promoting and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, promoting respect for international humanitarian law and, to the extent possible, prevent and resolve conflict.

IV. CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS, DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, AND ANTICIPATORY ACTION

18. The climate and environmental crises are growing drivers of humanitarian needs, in particular for vulnerable groups and displaced persons across the world. Following the significant progress made under previous presidencies, and recalling the Council conclusions on Disaster Risk Reduction in EU external action and on addressing the humanitarian funding gap, as well as the political declaration adopted following the midterm review of the UN Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the UNSG initiative ‘Early Warnings for All’, we must continue to focus on addressing climate and environmental risks and their consequences for humanitarian needs.
19. Against this backdrop, we will explore ways to further promote disaster preparedness and anticipatory action inter alia through increasing the allocation of funds directed towards these approaches.
20. We should also promote increased donor coordination in these areas and work to accelerate the implementation of the Donors’ Declaration on Climate and Environment.

21. This work must be carried out in close cooperation with development actors and climate actors in line with the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, in order to reinforce in particular the climate resilience of the most vulnerable communities, maximise synergies and impact, and ensure sustainability. Exchanging good practices, developing specific capacities (including in the area of immediate response) and forging better links between specialised actors can be key elements to reinforce prevention and preparedness against the backdrop of a changing risk landscape and an increasing frequency and intensity of disasters.

V. FINANCING GAP

22. On the basis of the 2021 Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action and the subsequent Council conclusions, EU Member States and the Commission have engaged in an ongoing dialogue on how to achieve additional and more balanced humanitarian funding within the EU and beyond.
23. On 22 May 2023, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted Council conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap, with specific commitments with regard to mobilising more resources, improving performance and reducing needs. Equally on 22 May 2023, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted an EU common approach on strategic outreach to emerging and potential humanitarian donors. The Council conclusions and the common approach provide for a number of concrete actions to be taken by EU Member States and the European Commission.
24. Spain intends to continue supporting these efforts to reduce the humanitarian funding gap from all possible angles. This includes, of course, broadening the donor base, deepening it by increasing contributions from traditional donors, exploring innovative financial models as well as improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our aid following, inter alia, the Grand Bargain 3.0 commitments.

25. Specifically, Spain will promote – in COHAFA – the implementation of the Council conclusions, including initiatives such as ‘Strengthening exchanges with emerging and potential donors, for example by inviting priority countries to sessions of the COHAFA, the European Humanitarian Forum (EHF), pledging conferences and other platforms for humanitarian dialogue’.
26. Spain will also facilitate – in COHAFA – an update on humanitarian funding priorities for 2023 on the basis of the existing table, listing EU Member States, their planned humanitarian aid for the current year (2023) and geographical and thematic priorities. Spain will also explore new innovative operational solutions to make humanitarian aid more efficient and will pay special attention, inter alia, to the Commission’s new Humanitarian Logistics Policy.
27. Finally, Spain’s recent legislative mandate to reach 0.7 % of Gross National Income for Official Development Assistance and 10 % of it for humanitarian action by 2030 can serve as inspiration for donors to set concrete targets following a participatory and inclusive process and to link additional financial resources to reforms to improve the way we work.

VI. GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITIES

28. The Spanish Presidency is committed to addressing the worst crises in the world. Among others, Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Haiti, or the food security situation will be part of our discussions both because of the rampant needs, their nexus implications, and their rapid development in recent months.
29. However, we must also put an emphasis on addressing forgotten and protracted crises that barely receive attention. In particular, many of the Latin American contexts are among the most underfunded and have the smallest donor base. With that in mind, the Presidency will organise a field trip to Colombia for COHAFA and CODEV-PI delegates.

VII. WORKING METHODS

30. The Spanish Presidency will maintain the established working methods, inviting various humanitarian experts to brief the working party. In an effort to foster the nexus, joint meetings with other working groups will be held. The Spanish Presidency may invite representatives from third countries in order to enhance coordination and encourage funding increases. Common messages will be updated when appropriate.
31. The Spanish Presidency will include a COHAFA/CODEV-PI trip to Colombia that will enable delegates to see the implementation of the main priorities of the programme, an informal directors meeting in Madrid, back to back with meetings of development agencies and European development banks, as well as a COHAFA/CODEV-PI informal delegates meeting in Madrid.

VIII. COHAFA RELEVANT MEETINGS

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| • COHAFA meeting | Brussels, 5-6 July |
| • Director-level informal COHAFA meeting back-to-back with development agencies and IFIs meeting | Madrid, 25-26 July |
| • COHAFA meeting | Brussels, 6-7 September |
| • Informal COHAFA/CODEV-PI meeting | Madrid, 26-28 September |
| • COHAFA meeting | Brussels, 4-5 October |
| • COHAFA meeting | Brussels, 8-9 November |
| • COHAFA/CODEV-PI field trip to Colombia | 4-8 December |
| • COHAFA meeting | Brussels, 19-20 December |

IX. INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF MAIN HUMANITARIAN EVENTS

- **September**

1 Third Formal Preparatory Meeting for the Global Refugee Forum, Geneva

13-14 UNHCR 88th Standing Committee

19-20 UNHCR Regional Consultations for Europe

- **October**

9-13 UNHCR 75th Executive Committee

10-12 Global Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action

18 third informal briefing on the Global Compact on Refugees (virtual)

- **November**

13-17 WFP Executive Board

17 fourth informal briefing on the Global Compact on Refugees, Geneva

- **December**

12 Advance day for side events, Global Refugee Forum

13-15 Global Refugee Forum

X. SPANISH COHAFA TEAM

COHAFA Chair: Cristina Gutierrez Hernández, Director of the Spanish Humanitarian Office

COHAFA Deputy Chair: Jesús Rogado Zuriaga, Sub-Director for Humanitarian Affairs

Spanish delegate to COHAFA: Alejandro Alvargonzález Largo

COHAFA contact at the Spanish PERMREP: Diego Gestoso Menéndez
