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#### COVER NOTE

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| To:              | Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union                                                                                                   |
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**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE  
COUNCIL**

**Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU's humanitarian action in a  
shifting global order**

{SWD(2026) 312 final} - {SWD(2026) 313 final} - {SWD(2026) 314 final}

## Introduction

**Humanitarian aid** <sup>(1)</sup> **saves lives, alleviates suffering and reflects the European Union's founding values of humanity, peace and solidarity.** Since 1992, the EU has remained committed to provide humanitarian aid in line with international humanitarian principles of **humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence**, as enshrined in Article 214(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Regulation on Humanitarian Aid (1996) <sup>(2)</sup> and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2007) <sup>(3)</sup>. While not an objective in itself, humanitarian assistance also strengthens human security and the protection of human rights and helps mitigate wider regional and global consequences of conflicts and disasters, thereby supporting a **more secure and stable global environment** in line with the EU's core values and interests <sup>(4)</sup>.

Today, **the global humanitarian system is at breaking point.** Proliferation of conflicts and climate-related disasters are driving humanitarian needs to record levels, while financial resources and operational space are shrinking. Conflicts and natural hazards affect more people and countries than ever since the end of the Cold War <sup>(5)</sup>. There are currently **around 130 conflicts worldwide**, more than double the number just 15 years ago <sup>(6)</sup> – and they account for around 70% of global humanitarian needs. In parallel, **climate change and environmental degradation** are increasing the frequency of natural hazards, disproportionately impacting the most fragile contexts where communities are least able to cope. This leads to displacement, food insecurity, water scarcity, epidemic outbreaks and the collapse of livelihoods, undermining development gains and increasing global instability.

As a result, **humanitarian needs are rising.** The number of people forcibly displaced or seeking asylum has doubled over the past decade, reaching 117.3 million in 2025 <sup>(7)</sup>. Around 20% of all **children** worldwide – around half a billion – are living in or fleeing conflict zones. **Sexual and gender-based violence**, including conflict-related sexual violence, continues to rise and the number of people experiencing acute hunger is reaching catastrophic levels <sup>(8)</sup>. The UN estimates that in 2026, 239 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance – up from 31 million in 2006.

**Humanitarian actors struggle to address this wave of growing needs and operate in increasingly dangerous and difficult conditions.** International humanitarian law is being disregarded, while accountability of the perpetrators remains limited. Humanitarian actors are often being denied access to deliver aid, facing increasing insecurity, administrative obstructions, levies and political interference that delay, divert or condition assistance. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian personnel have grown exponentially and attacks against

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<sup>1</sup> 'Humanitarian aid' and 'humanitarian assistance' are used interchangeably in this document.

<sup>2</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 concerning humanitarian aid.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Declaration on the European consensus on humanitarian aid. Official Journal of the European Union, 2008/C 25/01, 30 January 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Article 3(5) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU)

<sup>5</sup> European Commission: Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre, 'INFORM Severity Facts and Figures'. Joint Research Centre, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Severity/Severity-Facts-Figures>.

<sup>6</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Appeal 2026: Overview*, Geneva, 2026, <https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/ICRC-Appeals-2026-Overview.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), *Mid-Year Trends 2025*, Copenhagen, 2025, [www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/mid-year-trends-report-2025.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/mid-year-trends-report-2025.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Global Network Against Food Crises, *2026 Global report on food crises*, Rome, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd9424en>.

health facilities doubled between 2023 and 2024 <sup>(9)</sup>. **Vulnerable and marginalised groups** at risk of discrimination are disproportionately affected, while efforts to ensure inclusion, accessibility, and gender-sensitive humanitarian responses are increasingly challenged. Moreover, a surge in disinformation is undermining humanitarian action <sup>(10)</sup>.

In the last year, the system has been put under additional strain due to major policy decisions and drastic **funding cuts**, notably by the United States and some other major donors. This has forced humanitarian organisations to dramatically prioritise operations, reaching only a fraction of those in need <sup>(11)</sup>. In addition, assistance is increasingly influenced by political or ideological considerations rather than guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity and impartiality, undermining the foundations that underpin the international humanitarian system.

These developments make the reform of the multilateral humanitarian system both urgent and unavoidable. The **UN Humanitarian Reset**, launched in March 2025, seeks to strengthen collective humanitarian action, boost efficiency, shift power and resources closer to crises-affected populations and protect principled action. As a leading and principled partner, the EU is resolutely supporting these efforts for a more resilient humanitarian system, fit for the future. Moreover, the EU will continue to champion the **multilateral system**, support the United Nations Charter and the UN80 Initiative as the broader UN reform process, to ensure the UN remains effective, cost-efficient and responsive <sup>(12)</sup>.

**Together, the EU and its Member States remain reliable and predictable donors, providing the largest share of global humanitarian funding (34% in 2025)** <sup>(13)</sup>. The EU will continue to provide needs-based, inclusive and non-discriminatory assistance <sup>(14)</sup> to save lives and preserve human dignity. The support will continue to be delivered through its long-standing humanitarian partners, in particular the UN, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and international non-governmental organisations, drawing on their respective strengths.

At the same time, the EU is rapidly adapting to shifting realities and positioning itself as a driver of reform. It aims to do so in a collective, **Team Europe approach** <sup>(15)</sup>, increasing EU impact along **three core pillars** <sup>(16)</sup> to provide concrete solutions and deliver principled, high-quality aid and protection to millions of people in need:

1. **Protect:** Upholding humanitarian principles, defending international humanitarian law and ensuring that humanitarian organisations can operate effectively, by developing a

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<sup>9</sup> Humanitarian Outcomes, *Aid Worker Security Report 2025 – Defenceless: Aid worker security amid the humanitarian funding collapse*, London, 2025, [https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/AWSR\\_2025](https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/AWSR_2025).

<sup>10</sup> 2026 Annual Disaster Report by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

<sup>11</sup> The humanitarian appeal for 2026 comes to USD 23 billion for life-saving aid for 87 million of the total 239 million people in need.

<sup>12</sup> European Council, 'European Council Meeting Conclusions', EUCO 1/26, Brussels, 19 March 2026.

<sup>13</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Humanitarian aid contributions', *Financial tracking service*, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://fts.unocha.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> Food and nutrition, health, shelter, water and sanitation (WASH), protection and education in emergencies, while ensuring gender, age and disability mainstreaming and conflict sensitivity, see European Commission: DG ECHO, 'Thematic Policies Annex', [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2026/thematic\\_policies\\_annex\\_2026.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2026/thematic_policies_annex_2026.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Team Europe consists of the EU, the 27 EU Member States, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The Team Europe approach focuses on cooperation and coordination among these entities to increase the effectiveness and impact of their external actions.

<sup>16</sup> These pillars of action were identified following thorough consultations with stakeholders. A call for evidence was conducted between December 2025 and January 2026, resulting in 55 contributions. Details are available here: European Commission website, 'Communication on humanitarian aid', [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16012-Communication-on-humanitarian-aid\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16012-Communication-on-humanitarian-aid_en)

strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy, protecting aid workers and civilians and placing affected people at the heart of the response.

2. **Perform:** Strengthening cost-effective and resilient delivery of humanitarian aid by reforming supply chains, maximising the value of the EU humanitarian funding and supporting systemic functions that enable humanitarian aid delivery.
3. **Partner:** Working more closely with development, peace and diplomatic actors along the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus, strengthen partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs) and the private sector to address fragility, increase resilience and disaster preparedness, promote durable solutions and hence reduce humanitarian needs and support of the EU's strategic objectives.

This Joint Communication outlines the EU's strategic priorities and key actions across these three pillars. Three accompanying **Staff Working Documents** further develop the work on the following central aspects of the Joint Communication: A strategic approach to EU humanitarian diplomacy <sup>(17)</sup>; Humanitarian Supply Chains <sup>(18)</sup> and an Integrated Approach to Fragility <sup>(19)</sup>.

## 1. Protect: people, principles and safe humanitarian action

When the basic principles of humanity are being contested, the EU stands firm in its commitment to protect international humanitarian law, humanitarian principles, humanitarian personnel and, first and foremost, affected people. The current context calls for a **new strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy**, one that defends humanitarian space and principles while bolstering people-centred, safe, and inclusive humanitarian assistance.

### 1.1. Stepping up humanitarian diplomacy

In a global context marked by a high number of conflicts and increasingly challenged multilateral institutions, determined action to defend international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian space has never been more urgent. Therefore, the EU will **increase the effectiveness of its humanitarian diplomacy, leveraging humanitarian, political, economic, security or diplomatic instruments**. Official EU representatives will engage decision-makers, parties to armed conflicts and their sponsors or influencers, to help prevent, mitigate and resolve humanitarian crises, improve parties' compliance with international humanitarian law and foster greater alignment with international humanitarian principles and objectives.

**EU humanitarian diplomacy** is grounded on the following **key principles and values**:

- it is an **integral part of the EU's external action and foreign policy** and is reflected systematically in its diplomatic interventions and negotiations;
- it adheres to the humanitarian principles of **humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence**, making every effort to avoid unintended harm. It should also be conflict-sensitive, gender-sensitive and situationally aware;
- it aims to maximise **EU coordination** and a **Team Europe approach**, leveraging the distinct mandates of EU Special Representatives and relevant Special Envoys, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, the Commission, the High Representative and Member States, while systematically integrating real-time insights, including those gained from the EU's presence on the ground;

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<sup>17</sup> SWD 2026 (312)

<sup>18</sup> SWD 2026 (314)

<sup>19</sup> SWD 2026 (313)

- it ensures meaningful involvement and participation of **local organisations and community voices**, including organisations representing women, persons with disabilities, the older persons, youth LGBTIQ+ persons, persons belonging to minorities, and other vulnerable groups at risk of discrimination. It places the specific needs and vulnerabilities of populations affected by conflict at the centre through a differentiated and inclusive approach;
- it builds on **strategic alliances with organisations and donors** committed to improving the operational coordination of humanitarian diplomacy and achieving common humanitarian objectives. This includes regional and bilateral partnerships, participation in multilateral forums, and support to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the implementation of its Global initiative on IHL <sup>(20)</sup>;
- it adapts to **specific contexts and circumstances**, is grounded in rigorous evidence, including through regular contact with key humanitarian actors, and is carried out publicly or discreetly.

While humanitarian diplomacy may serve a wide range of humanitarian outcomes, its focus is on a number of **key thematic priorities**:

- preventing violations of, and supporting compliance with, **international humanitarian law and human rights law** and promoting strong **accountability**;
- upholding support for the **protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure during armed conflict**, with a particular focus on the people most at risk. This includes taking into account the needs of specific groups, such as persons with disabilities <sup>(21)</sup>;
- using all available instruments to **prevent and end grave violations against children**, protect their rights and wellbeing, and promote the **right to education** and quality learning, **in conflict zones**. This includes encouraging countries to endorse international instruments and commitments concerning the protection of conflict-affected children;
- in light of widespread restrictions of humanitarian access, **defending and expanding humanitarian space and preventing humanitarian action from being politicised**, including by countering disinformation. This includes facilitating the removal of bureaucratic impediments, addressing security restrictions, and other actions to allow all humanitarian actors to operate;
- ensuring the **safety of humanitarian and medical staff**, including accountability for attacks targeting them;
- preventing, mitigating and responding to **sexual and gender-based violence** in emergencies and conflicts;
- considering humanitarian priorities in **peace-building, mediation and conflict resolution efforts**.

#### **Key actions**

The Commission, in cooperation with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, within the exercise of its functions, and, where appropriate, with the support of EU Special Representatives <sup>(22)</sup>, will:

<sup>20</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), ‘Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law’, <https://www.icrc.org/en/global-initiative-international-humanitarian-law>.

<sup>21</sup> In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

<sup>22</sup> EEAS, ‘EU Special Representatives’, European Union website, 12 September 2025, accessed 30 April 2026, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-special-representatives\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-special-representatives_en).



- **strengthen institutional cohesion for effective humanitarian diplomacy**
  - boost the EU's capacity for **coordinated humanitarian diplomacy** through a strategic approach, developed around the key objectives and principles set out above and adapted to the specific situation of each crisis. This entails strengthening institutional mechanisms for coordination, regular internal dialogue, as well as joint planning, monitoring and evaluation processes. Such coordination will be facilitated, where appropriate, by humanitarian diplomacy focal points, within existing resources;
  - strengthen the **Team Europe approach** on humanitarian diplomacy through strategic coordination with EU Member States. This entails developing common messages and proposing joint actions in key crisis situations where violations of international humanitarian law and restricted access are present.
- **leverage diplomatic tools for maximum impact**
  - champion efforts to **advocate against violations of international humanitarian law and restrictions on humanitarian access** in political and security dialogues, human rights dialogues and diplomatic demarches between EU representatives and countries or stakeholders involved in or impacted by conflict;
  - reinforce **strategic communication** efforts and strengthen the tools of humanitarian diplomacy, while countering information manipulation;
  - facilitate the development of **shared assessments and advocacy messages** by humanitarian partners and the diplomatic community regarding complex humanitarian contexts, including through a dedicated donor group on humanitarian diplomacy and access;
  - strengthen **strategic alliances with key states and multilateral organisations** and reinforce support for the UN's role in humanitarian diplomacy, including within the UN80 process, Humanitarian Reset and the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law.
- **invest in the sustainability of EU humanitarian diplomacy**
  - launch a **training programme** to improve the skills and knowledge of EU diplomats and other staff in the field of humanitarian diplomacy;
  - **financially support humanitarian diplomacy** to strengthen the tools available to humanitarian actors to support humanitarian diplomacy. This includes local actors' capacity to negotiate the necessary humanitarian access and the collection and analysis of reliable data on violations of international humanitarian law that are essential for supporting fact-based diplomacy, countering information manipulation, including disinformation, and promoting accountability.

## **1.2. Protection of humanitarian personnel**

**Violence against humanitarian workers has reached unprecedented levels.** In 2025, 334 persons were killed, 192 injured, 109 kidnapped and 45 unlawfully arrested <sup>(23)</sup>, the vast majority of whom were national staff members. Information manipulation, including disinformation, as well as hate speech targeting humanitarian organisations and medical personnel are on the rise <sup>(24)</sup>, often escalating into access restrictions and security threats on the ground. In some cases, humanitarian personnel and organisations are criminalised and face

<sup>23</sup> Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2025 – Defenseless: Aid worker security amid the humanitarian funding collapse, London, 2025, [https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/AWSR\\_2025](https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/AWSR_2025)

<sup>24</sup> UN Resolution 2730 (2024) Adopted by the Security Council at its 9634th meeting, on 24 May 2024, p 3 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4049572>

**prosecution, detention or legal impediments.** Efforts to protect humanitarian personnel are also impacted by the growing funding gap. Guaranteeing the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and ensuring awareness of duty of care responsibilities have never been more critical.

**The EU is a committed advocate for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel,** as highlighted by its leadership on the annual UN General Assembly resolution on the protection of humanitarian and UN personnel. The EU and its Member States made corresponding commitments at the 34<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and have joined the Australian initiative <sup>(25)</sup> to strengthen the protection of humanitarian personnel.

**The EU will step up its commitment to strengthen protection and security in humanitarian operations.** To prevent security incidents, the EU will use humanitarian diplomacy tools as outlined in the previous section to persuade host governments or de facto authorities to provide guarantees of safe passage. The EU will also invest in **capacity building and training** in security risk management and in increasing humanitarian organisations' awareness of duty of care responsibilities, including through dedicated funding and support to the development of common minimum-security standards.

The EU will also promote **better operational security coordination and cooperation** among humanitarian organisations, through platforms such as Saving Lives Together (SLT) <sup>(26)</sup>. It will advocate for UN, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and civil society partners to bolster their security capacities, pool their resources and develop joint initiatives, including on risk assessment and contingency planning.

Where it has not been possible to mitigate threats, the well-being and recovery of humanitarian personnel are a key priority. The Protect Aid Workers (PAW) mechanism <sup>(27)</sup> provides financial and psychological support for staff who have experienced a critical incident while on duty.

The EU also stands ready to act on newer threats to humanitarian organisations and civilians and is constantly reviewing and modernising its own capacity to monitor, detect and respond to **information manipulation**, including **disinformation**, supporting its humanitarian partners in their efforts to guarantee the integrity of information.

#### Key actions

The Commission will:

- strengthen the **prevention of security incidents** by supporting capacity building and training programmes, in particular for local humanitarian personnel;
- spearhead the development of **common minimum-security standards** across the humanitarian community, ensuring that all humanitarian personnel, in particular local personnel, are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to operate safely;
- step up **operational support** for humanitarian personnel, including through increased security cooperation and coordination via platforms such as Saving Lives Together and by making sure that critical security data are more widely available;

<sup>25</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, 'Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel', 22 September 2025, accessed on 30 April 2026, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/declaration-protection-humanitarian-personnel>

<sup>26</sup> Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF), 'Saving Lives Together', GIFS website, London, 2026, accessed on 30 April 2026, <https://gisf.ngo/themes/coordination-for-hsrm/saving-lives-together/>

<sup>27</sup> Protect Aid Workers, 'Providing rapid support for aid workers at risk – A rapid-response mechanism for aid workers', Protect Aid Workers website, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://protectaidworkers.org/>



- **improve care** for victims and survivors of attacks on humanitarian personnel by turning the Protect Aid Workers mechanism into a global programme;
- ensure that partner organisations **combat sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, foster accountability and safe working environments for all staff**, including local staff, and promote initiatives to collect harmonised data to better understand such risks.

### **1.3. A people-centred, locally led, protection-driven and inclusive humanitarian response**

In every crisis, **community members are the first responders**. People and their local structures help one another through networks that start at home and often stretch across the globe. This aid is essential for people's survival. The EU's commitment to accountability to affected populations places communities affected by crises at the centre of the decisions and processes that impact them. Recognising affected people's coping capacities and diverse needs helps ensure that the assistance provided is relevant and sustainable.

Making the **participatory approach** a reality helps ensuring that assistance is channelled to affected communities in the most meaningful way and thereby helps build trust in the humanitarian system. The EU will provide stronger incentives to enable systematic **community-based engagement**. It will also support area-based coordination to address people's needs in a comprehensive manner, moving beyond sector-specific entry points towards a more integrated humanitarian response.

Local responders play a crucial role in humanitarian action. The **Commission's guidance of 2023 on promoting equitable partnerships with local responders** <sup>(28)</sup> initiated a positive trend in the sector. Significant progress has been achieved since then, raising the share of EU humanitarian funding to local actors from 6% to 11% by the end of 2024. In 2025, the Commission further strengthened its ambition with a **new localisation roadmap** committing to deliver 25% of its funding as directly as possible to local actors by 2027, in line with the EU Financial Regulation. The Commission will also look for opportunities to boost the capacity of local actors and their role in international decision-making bodies.

**Protection** helps ensure the safety, dignity and rights of people affected by crises. It is **central to the EU's humanitarian action**: all humanitarian actors need to engage in a coordinated way to reduce affected people's exposure to the risk of violence, deprivation and abuse.

Children are entitled to special protection under international human rights and humanitarian law. The dire situation of children affected by humanitarian crises, the unprecedented levels of violations against their integrity, wellbeing and rights (25% increase in recent years) <sup>(29)</sup>, and the lack of respect for the special protection to which they are entitled, call for specific attention. The EU is committed to **preventing, mitigating and reducing violence, abuse, neglect, and all other specific threats that children face in humanitarian contexts**, including by supporting education in emergencies <sup>(30)</sup>, and ensuring that children rights, including the best interests of the child, guide all humanitarian interventions.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission: DG ECHO, *Guidance Note: Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Settings*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2795/653711>.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations: Human Rights Council, 'Children in armed conflict – Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict', A/HRC/61/37, 23 December 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/37>.

<sup>30</sup> COM (2018) 304 final.

Equality considerations are often overlooked in crises. **Women and girls, alongside with LGBTIQ+ persons, continue to be those primarily affected by sexual and gender-based violence**, including conflict-related sexual violence. They are also at greater risk of forced marriage and trafficking in crises. **Persons with disabilities** are also disproportionately affected, encountering compounded barriers to accessing assistance. To address specific contexts and needs, adopting a survivor-centred approach is key, and the Commission will provide policy guidance on this matter. Vulnerable groups also provide a valuable contribution as first and local responders in humanitarian contexts and identifying their specific needs and priorities for additional support can increase the effectiveness of interventions.

Gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian projects are being undermined at an alarming rate, threatening vital progress for fostering equitable and prosperous societies. The EU will strengthen its **engagement on sexual and reproductive health and the fight against gender-based violence**, including by launching the SHIELD (Sexual and Reproductive Health in Emergencies and Life in Dignity) programme <sup>(31)</sup>. The EU will also champion advocacy on equality considerations in strategic discussions with other donors and in all relevant forums, including the governing bodies of UN agencies.

### Key actions

The Commission will:

- deliver **25% of its humanitarian funding** as directly as possible to **local actors** by 2027;
- support **decentralised coordination structures** that promote local leadership, in particular area-based coordination. Integrated, cross-sectoral planning should become the norm, with **strong referral mechanisms** to specialised services as required;
- systematically ensure that **affected communities are included in the design, delivery and monitoring of assistance** and strive to address their needs and aspirations;
- steer work towards **dismantling the remaining barriers for local responders** to play a greater role in humanitarian action through capacity strengthening and training, easing the administrative burden for local actors and expanding the funding to locally led humanitarian pooled funds;
- strengthen **advocacy and support for the protection sector**, including child protection, and continue to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action;
- increase its **support to people affected by sexual and reproductive health and fight against sexual and gender-based violence**, including conflict related sexual violence;
- update its **thematic policy document on gender** <sup>(32)</sup>.

## 2. Perform: Enhancing efficiency and boosting the cost-effectiveness of humanitarian action for greater impact

Against the background of **increasing needs and budgetary constraints**, maximum cost-effectiveness can only be achieved if affected communities, humanitarian actors and donors work together to build impactful responses to crises. There is considerable scope for reducing inefficiencies in the current funding model and the EU will incentivise change to this end. The

<sup>31</sup> COM (2026) 113 final, page 20-21

<sup>32</sup> European Commission, DG ECHO, Gender – Different Needs, Adapted Assistance, DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document n° 6, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2013, [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender\\_thematic\\_policy\\_document\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_thematic_policy_document_en.pdf).

EU has identified **three main priorities**: reforming the humanitarian supply chain, maximising the value of EU humanitarian funding and supporting collective enabling services.

## **2.1. Reforming Humanitarian Strategic Supply Chains**

Humanitarian supply chains are critical for humanitarian operations. They should ensure that communities in need receive the right relief items, of the right quality, at the right time, in the right location and at the right cost. However, the current supply chain model is no longer suited to the scale of the needs. Over time, humanitarian organisations have developed parallel, disconnected supply chains, leading to fragmentation and unnecessary duplication, for instance when they compete to procure the same relief items or operate separate fleets and warehouses. This reduces efficiency and effectiveness and ultimately lessens the impact of humanitarian aid.

To address these challenges, in 2024, the Commission launched the **Humanitarian Leadership Group on Supply Chain (HLGSC)**, bringing together donors, the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and academia. This group agreed on a shared vision for a **new humanitarian supply chain model** – a more collaborative and coherent network that boosts impact through the interdependent principles of better alignment, interoperability, and data exchange, as well as a more systematic use of joined-up platforms and operations. The overarching goal is a system that works better for people – delivering assistance faster and more predictably, and in ways that are more cost-efficient and strengthen local capacities and resilience, in line with the humanitarian principles.

The HLGSC drive for reform has been reflected in complementary initiatives, notably the UN joint initiative to establish a more integrated humanitarian supply chain system as part of the UN80 reform process or in the framework of G7. These efforts should be further pursued as they constitute a key building block of the overall reform of humanitarian supply chains. The Commission will continue to closely follow and encourage these processes.

Reforming and upgrading the supply chain model offers a significant opportunity for efficiency gains and unlocking resources for people in need. A paradigm shift is needed whereby supply chain functions should be recognised as strategic enablers of humanitarian impact. This whole-of-system process, centred around collaboration, pooling of resources and sharing of capacities, should address, in line with the HLGSC, the following interdependent issues:

- **procurement** needs to be integrated into operation design from the outset to improve efficiency, impact and financial management, notably through mutual recognition of procurement decisions and joint procurement between humanitarian organisations;
- **environmental sustainability** needs to be embedded in humanitarian action, along with a shift from short-term cost minimisation to long-term value optimisation, notably by reducing greenhouse gas emissions e.g. by favouring local renewable energy solutions, improving lifecycle assessments and green product specifications, responsible waste management, and supporting circular economy measures;
- **digital systems**, including AI solutions, need to become part of an interoperable ecosystem with governance frameworks based on common open standards, adapted to local capacities and accompanied by appropriate data protection safeguards;
- **preparedness** should become the norm, based on a common framework anchored in local capacities and actors' participation in planning, supported by forecasting and pre-positioning while ensuring the uptake and scaling of innovative solutions;
- **localisation of sustainable supply chains** requires international humanitarian actors to gradually transfer authority, resources and decision-making to local actors, while strengthening local markets.

Making this model a reality depends on several **enabling conditions**:

- integrating supply chain considerations into the strategic and operational decision-making of humanitarian organisations;
- strengthening collaboration among donors to promote better alignment of compliance and regulatory approaches, as well as funding priorities;
- fostering innovative financing mechanisms to secure long-term investments and recognising supply chain costs, including for digitalisation and the environment, as essential programme expenses;
- involving the private sector in co-designing and supporting the system-wide transformation; and
- further strengthening professionalisation to secure a highly skilled workforce.

The Commission will drive this process, working closely with the EU Member States and, where relevant, non-EU donors. It will also integrate the new supply chain model into the way its own humanitarian aid is managed and funded, providing clear guidance and appropriate support for its partners. The EU's field presence will also help to promote these efforts.

#### **Key actions**

The Commission will:

- launch a **Humanitarian Supply Chain Charter** – a voluntary, multi-stakeholder, collaborative framework – open for signature by humanitarian stakeholders, including donors, to speed up the implementation of the reform. The Charter will set out specific commitments and collective accountability, and it will be supported by a platform acting as a technical secretariat and coordination hub;
- allocate appropriate **financial resources** to support the implementation of the supply chain reform, including the work of the HLGSC, by gradually setting funding conditions for project selection. This will help humanitarian organisations operate more efficiently, unlocking resources to assist people in need. **Field-level implementation** will be promoted, starting with pilot countries;
- set up a **recognition framework** with clear eligibility criteria and minimum standards for **Humanitarian Procurement Centres** that partners and EU Member States may use for simpler and more efficient procurement;
- closely coordinate with EU Member States and non-EU donors to foster **administrative simplification, operational synergies** and the **alignment of funding priorities and financing modalities**.

## **2.2. Transformative humanitarian financing and simplification**

At a time when funding cuts are overstressing humanitarian actors, the EU as a responsible and committed humanitarian donor, must help in a way that incentivises **efficiency** and reduces **administrative burden**. The EU will continue to make full use of the flexibility afforded by its existing funding toolbox, including by using crisis modifiers <sup>(33)</sup> and Programmatic

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<sup>33</sup> The main goal of the crisis modifier is to allow for a rapid and effective response to emerging crises within the context of an ongoing humanitarian action. European Commission, DG ECHO Partners website, accessed 30 April 2026, [www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/actions-implementation/crisis-modifier](http://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/actions-implementation/crisis-modifier)

Partnerships <sup>(34)</sup>, and encouraging collaboration between partners and consortia. Besides this, transformative funding and intervention types that encourage efficiency, as described below, will be prioritised and scaled up.

Funding delivered through **local actors** empowers them and improves the timeliness, cost-efficiency, and sustainability of the response. Providing support through **anticipatory action** enables partners to act early, helping communities at risk before a shock, thereby reducing its impact, saving lives and livelihoods and supporting climate and environmental resilience.

**Cash assistance** has consistently shown to have a much higher cost-efficiency ratio than in-kind assistance, as it reaches more people with the same amount of funding, while addressing several sectoral needs. Affected people also prefer cash assistance as it recognises their agency, choice and dignity. Cash also supports the local economy, contributing to building long-term resilience. The EU will continue to prioritise multipurpose cash assistance and advocate for its use at system level.

Moving from annual funding to **multiyear contracts** improves the predictability of the response, brings efficiency gains and economies of scale and provides the opportunity for more strategic engagement with partner organisations. It also helps connect humanitarian timeframes with development and peace interventions and supports transitions to more systemic responses and eventual humanitarian exit. In protracted crises, multiyear funding should become default.

**Unearmarked or softly earmarked funding** allows for more flexible responses and provides more readily available options for partners to adapt to changing circumstances. In addition to increasing the scale of larger multi-donor or regional actions, the EU will also consider greater contributions to a wide range of pooled funds, such as country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) or the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), where these offer a comparative advantage. Compliance with humanitarian principles, well defined performance parameters, inclusive governance, robust oversight, control and accountability, contribution to localisation efforts, and EU visibility will also apply to contributions to such funds.

To ease administrative burden, the EU will look at ways to **simplify reporting requirements** for its partners, in line with international commitments and the EU's simplification agenda. This includes modernising the Commission's grant management by putting in place interoperable digital systems. This transition will enhance transparency and improve the traceability of EU funds, while safeguarding the operational flexibility.

#### Key actions

The Commission will:

- scale up the use of **transformative modalities** (flexible and predictable multiyear funding, cash assistance, a wide range of pooled funds, anticipatory action and support for local actors) to constitute **at least two thirds of its humanitarian funding**;
- substantially increase the share of **multiyear funding** in protracted crises;
- promote a Team Europe approach to **country-based pooled funds**, strengthening EU coordination in the CBPF governance forums for greater collective EU impact;

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<sup>34</sup> European Commission: DG ECHO, 'Working with DG ECHO programmatic partnership 2021-2027', European Commission website, accessed 30 April 2026, [www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/programmatic-partnership/programmatic-partnership](http://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/programmatic-partnership/programmatic-partnership)



- together with interested Member States, implement a **Common Donor Approach to cash assistance** <sup>(35)</sup> and advocate more for cash assistance as the default modality in humanitarian response;
- further simplify the **grant management architecture**.

### **2.3. Enabling principled humanitarian delivery through collaborative data initiatives**

**Collective services that enable humanitarian aid delivery** are paramount to ensuring effective, coordinated and high-quality aid based on evidence. The EU has traditionally supported many of the system-wide initiatives that advance this work, such as the INFORM tools <sup>(36)</sup>. In the face of severe cuts, which threatened the ability of these services to continue operating, the EU increased its investment in this area in 2025 by 50% to a total of EUR 150 million. It will remain committed to funding enabling services, including data and evidence, security and access <sup>(37)</sup>, logistics and coordination.

**Reliable data** is the bedrock of humanitarian response as it helps to identify needs and their severity and to measure impact. The current system of data gathering and analysis has been developed by many different actors, making it complex and difficult to navigate the data landscape. It is necessary to improve the disaggregation (by sex, age and disability), coverage, reliability and comparability of data, making it open source by default. By investing in data quality and interoperability and strengthening analytical and reporting tools, including by leveraging the ethical use of AI, earth observation and modelling tools (including relevant satellite services, such as the Copernicus programme), the EU will improve evidence-based decision-making and enable faster, more coordinated and effective responses across crises.

Sharing data on people receiving assistance and on service availability safely and responsibly among humanitarian organisations is essential. This practice has already led to significant cost savings <sup>(38)</sup> by preventing the duplication of assistance and gaps in response. Data sharing agreements between organisations remain, however, elusive and where they do exist on a global level, they are often not implemented on the ground.

The EU supports open-source technology, federated systems and decentralised governance. In recent years, it has supported several pilot projects on safe data sharing by means of vetted technologies. The EU will promote this trend and insist on safe data sharing, as it leads to a more transparent and coherent humanitarian response.

#### **Key actions**

The Commission will:

<sup>35</sup> CALP Network, ‘Common Donor Approach to Humanitarian Cash Assistance, CALP Network website, 25 September 2025, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://www.calpnetwork.org/publication/common-donor-approach-to-humanitarian-cash-assistance-2025/>

<sup>36</sup> INFORM is a set of tools developed by and for the humanitarian community for shared analysis based on vetted system-wide data. For more information, see European Commission: Joint Research Centre, ‘INFORM’, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/>.

<sup>37</sup> See Section 1.2. and 2.1.

<sup>38</sup> EUR 250 million saved in Ukraine, Ukraine Cash Working Group, ‘Ukraine CWG Data Management – Systems and Governance Assessment July 2025’, OCHA, 23 July 2025, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-cwg-data-management-systems-and-governance-assessment-report-july-2025> 250 million saved in Ukraine



- develop a new **global programme for multisectoral needs assessments**, fostering closer cooperation between actors and reducing fragmentation. This will ensure that key data on people's needs is **comparable** across contexts, **inclusive** and **accessible to all**;
- request the use of **safe data sharing agreements** between partners to reduce duplication and increase the effectiveness of the response. Safe data sharing between organisations will be included as a condition for funding;
- enhance the humanitarian aid sector's use of **Copernicus and INFORM** to guide humanitarian aid actions;
- continue to promote **interoperable digital systems** and common data standards across the humanitarian funding life cycle to reduce fragmentation and improve traceability.

### 3. Partner: Harnessing alliances to support those in need

The extent of the humanitarian system's crisis cannot be addressed by humanitarian actors alone. The full spectrum of actions across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus must be used and the deepening of strategic alliances with a wide range of actors is needed to reduce increasing humanitarian needs and address crises in a sustainable manner. The Commission will focus on strengthening these ties through joint work on addressing fragility and increasing resilience, and by working more closely with a wider range of partners, such as the private sector. Deepening the impact of a Team Europe approach in this area is also crucial.

#### 3.1. Integrated approach to fragility

Globally, **fragility** <sup>(39)</sup> is on the rise, fuelling insecurity and disrupting development progress worldwide, with its spillover effects potentially affecting the EU's security and prosperity. Across key regions, fragility can be instrumentalised by hostile actors for geopolitical gain. Not addressing fragile contexts in a comprehensive way risks further undermining global norms, including human rights and IHL. Moreover, fragility threatens international peace, security and stability, impacts livelihoods and access to basic services, exacerbates existing vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, disrupts markets, supply chains and economic security, and exacerbates challenges linked to displacement and migration.

**Addressing the root causes of fragility** is therefore both an act of solidarity and an urgent and strategic necessity for the EU and the international community. The **EU's objectives** in those contexts include reducing human suffering and tackling the causes of fragility in order to end poverty, dependency on aid, climate-related vulnerability and supporting sustainable development. Furthermore, the EU promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law, gender equality, inclusion, youth empowerment and an enabling environment for civil society.

**Long-term, strategic interventions** in fragile situations are essential for building resilience, anticipating crises and disasters, preventing conflicts, and fostering sustainable peace, stability and security.

The EU and its Member States have been present in fragile contexts for decades and are uniquely positioned to leverage their comprehensive toolbox to **foster peace, stability and resilience**. The EU has been instrumental in supporting states' governing structures and economic growth and helping them achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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<sup>39</sup> Fragility is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks, OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>

At the same time, to address the **evolving geopolitical realities and multidimensional challenges of fragility** in an effective manner, the EU must recalibrate its interventions and optimise its strategies to remain a reliable partner while supporting those furthest behind and achieving greater impact. This Joint Communication therefore builds on existing tools to set out an **EU integrated approach to fragility** – a strategic framework for strengthening EU engagement in those contexts. It is guided by the following **principles and priorities**:

- **Staying engaged, while ensuring context-specific and conflict-sensitive responses (do no harm)**

The EU reaffirms its commitment to **stay engaged in all contexts affected by high and extremely high levels of fragility**, including those that are complex or politically estranged, in line with EU interests. This will be done through a flexible, adaptive and conflict-sensitive approach, tailoring engagement to the needs of affected partner countries and their populations in a differentiated approach, while pursuing the EU's own strategic objectives.

- **Pursuing a multidimensional approach to resilience and sustainability**

Addressing the causes of fragility requires a multidimensional approach that takes into account societal, economic, political, security and environmental factors. The EU will prioritise approaches with **transformative potential** to foster long-term sustainable development and peace. Drawing on its comprehensive toolbox, **thematic priorities** include, inter alia: a) human development and building resilience; b) economic development by fostering an enabling environment for investment and strengthening cooperation with international financial institutions; c) adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and water scarcity; d) strengthening human rights, democracy and the rule of law; as well as e) conflict prevention, mediation, stabilisation, peace-building and security. The focus will be on the groups in the most vulnerable situations, including women, children, and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, refugees, forcibly displaced people and returnees, and their financial inclusion.

- **Strengthening the Team Europe approach and Strategic Partnerships within a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach**

By strengthening the human-development-peace nexus, the EU will better articulate **complementary approaches and interventions**, to more effectively anticipate, prepare for, and respond to crises. Leveraging the flexibilities of the upcoming Global Europe Instrument, the EU will actively step up the use of **innovative and flexible financing mechanisms** to attract more private funding, while empowering the local private sector. It will also step up work with international financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank, and EU Member States' development banks to promote investments that enable economic resilience in fragile settings and the structural reduction of humanitarian needs.

In all these efforts, the EU will promote a **Team Europe approach**, which is essential for ensuring a visible, unified and coordinated stance to addressing fragility. The EU will also deepen coordination and cooperation with **other partners and actors**, including at local level, such as civil society, the private sector, and key organisations such as the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and regional organisations.

#### **Key actions**

The Commission, in cooperation with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, within the exercise of its functions, will implement an **EU integrated**

**approach to fragility** through **smarter and more collaborative approaches with a particular focus on extremely fragile contexts**. This includes:

- developing **joint analyses**, highlighting the understanding of local dynamics, specific risks and conflict and climate related drivers;
- developing **adaptable and agile fragility frameworks in all extremely fragile contexts**, based on prior experience and replacing the currently tested Nexus Collaboration Frameworks to ensure increased agility and building on relevant analytical frameworks. These will outline a common understanding of priorities and actions required across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to ensure more impactful engagement on the ground;
- seeking improved integration of humanitarian-development-peace actions through **sequenced, complementary, or joint funding** to maximise impact, including in rapidly evolving contexts; using all available flexibility procedures to facilitate adaptative response to crises;
- identifying **fragility focal points** in relevant EU Delegations and DG ECHO offices, based on existing resources, to support common understanding and drive the implementation of the approach at country level;
- organising regular **exchanges with key stakeholders**, such as implementing partners, central and local authorities, the UN, international financial institutions, and civil society, while continuing coordination with EU Member States;
- developing and **reinforcing partnerships with third countries and regional organisations** to address fragile contexts and ensure financial support, notably with the aim to ensure stability, security, and sustainable development, in the EU's neighbourhood and other strategic regions;
- stepping up coordination, in a **Team Europe approach**, within governing bodies of **multilateral organisations**;
- conducting **joint monitoring** more systematically and, where possible, in cooperation with EU Member States;
- organising **regular interservice updates** on implementation and achievements to track progress;
- strengthening targeted investment in **institutional capacities and knowledge management of EU staff** and ensure periodic review of progress/achievements;
- strengthening **strategic communication** to counter information manipulation, including disinformation, and, where relevant, hybrid threats;
- proposing an **independent evaluation** of results under this approach after three years.

### ***3.2. Working with the private sector and non-traditional actors in humanitarian response***

**Bridging the humanitarian funding gap** will require harnessing the resources, situational expertise and comparative advantages of a broader range of actors outside the traditional humanitarian field, including the **private sector, philanthropic organisations, a broader range of donors and the wider public**.

The **private sector** is an important partner that can bring technical expertise, innovation and access to technologies such as AI, as well as funding. It can contribute to durable solutions at local level by strengthening market resilience and creating economic opportunities for affected populations. In fragile settings, micro-enterprises, small businesses and the informal sector play a central role. They should be empowered to help build resilience in the long term.

As these frontline businesses are the most credit-constrained, incentives such as **de-risking instruments, technical assistance and improved investment data**, should be developed to encourage international and national finance providers to improve their access to capital. Building on several successful humanitarian blended finance pilot projects, the EU will continue to support such initiatives as part of its commitment to promoting durable solutions and enabling humanitarian actors to exit where conditions permit.

The EU will also lead the debate within the humanitarian sector on **scaling up private sector engagement in humanitarian and fragile contexts**. This includes addressing obstacles to access to finance and financial inclusion, as well as scaling up partnerships between private and humanitarian actors in areas such as logistics and technology or access to basic public services. **Data-driven AI technologies** are progressively transforming the humanitarian field. The EU will work with traditional partners and other actors to find ways to use AI to enhance humanitarian aid while reducing risks across the crisis cycle.

Besides private sector engagement, working with **non-traditional donors** and building on complementarities is important. The EU already has strong partnerships with many international actors, such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. It will now strategically identify areas for strengthened cooperation on humanitarian aid and disaster risk management.

Eurobarometer surveys have consistently revealed strong popular support for EU humanitarian assistance. In 2024, 91% of respondents considered it important that the EU funds humanitarian aid <sup>(40)</sup>. Such support cannot be taken for granted and may be undermined by a rising tide of information manipulation, including disinformation. The EU will continue to strengthen its **engagement with EU citizens** and transparently promote humanitarian action.

#### Key actions

The Commission will:

- develop, in cooperation with the World Economic Forum, a **global platform for engagement with the private sector** in humanitarian settings to discuss the investment environment, donorship and philanthropy, ethics and partnerships;
- scale up **funding for projects that support private sector involvement** in protracted humanitarian contexts, while coordinating these efforts with development actors;
- adopt a **policy framework for engagement of new donors and actors** in humanitarian responses. This framework will identify concrete areas and priority regions in which to cooperate with different actors;
- strengthen **engagement with EU citizens**, for example through communication campaigns or targeted ad hoc dialogues.

### 3.3. Delivering through a Team Europe approach

**Together, the EU and its Member States provide the largest share of humanitarian funding worldwide.** In line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, they share a firm commitment to humanitarian principles and needs-based assistance and to a multilateral, rules-

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<sup>40</sup> European Commission: DG COMM, *Special Eurobarometer 542 – EU humanitarian aid*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2795/369550>.

based system. In planning and operational terms, **stronger alignment** between the EU and its Member States would result in an even greater impact and amplify their collective voice.

In the current environment, where resources are scarce, the implementing partners supported by the EU and its Member States would benefit from **more harmonised donor requirements**, which would enable them to make considerable savings.

Hence, in complementarity to the Team Europe approach proposed throughout this Joint Communication, the EU will promote **harmonised and interoperable funding processes** at Team Europe level. Notably, a better digital alignment would make it possible to pool Team Europe resources in a more impactful and coherent way. It would also improve humanitarian outcomes and Team Europe visibility, while reducing the administrative burden on partners.

### Key actions

The Commission will:

- in complementarity with its simplification effort on grant management, significantly **simplify its non-regulatory requirements**, including its humanitarian policy guidelines and reporting requirements. These simplified procedures can serve as a common basis for Team Europe funding approaches;
- with the objective of being ready for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), work towards a **certification framework** for humanitarian NGOs that more EU Member States can cross-rely on, benefiting both EU Member States and partners;
- throughout the humanitarian funding life cycle and in the area of emergency response portfolios, explore with EU Member States **additional synergies, common approaches, shared modalities, and coordination structures** to pool EU resources in a more impactful way. This could include coordination of stockpiling initiatives and joint responses using ReliefEU;
- discuss with EU Member States options for development of a **common platform for submitting and sharing of harmonised funding proposals**, to be used as a **flexible one-stop shop** for submitting proposals which could be picked up by different Team Europe actors, depending on priorities;
- work with EU Member States to explore **shared digital reporting** frameworks.

### Conclusion

For decades, EU humanitarian action has proved its value by providing a principled, needs-based and predictable response. Many survivors of crises can testify to this. By helping to mitigate the effects of humanitarian crises and addressing fragility, it also contributes to a more secure and stable environment, including in the EU's wider neighbourhood. With this Joint Communication, the EU **reaffirms its commitment to solidarity with those in direct need**. The EU will continue to promote and defend principled humanitarian assistance and international humanitarian law in its external action and at international level. The EU aspires to **drive a positive change in humanitarian aid**, for the benefit of those affected and the overall humanitarian community, making it **more resilient, efficient and future proof**. To tackle the urgency of the current situation, the Commission, in close cooperation with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, where relevant, will move forward on the outlined actions with great resolve. It will take stock of the implementation of this Joint Communication in 2028.