

European Humanitarian Forum

Forum humanitaire européen



21-23
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Co-Hosts Statement by the European Commission and the French Presidency of the Council of the EU

1. The EU, together with its Member States, has been among the world's leading humanitarian donors for several decades. However, humanitarian aid is increasingly facing an unprecedented set of challenges. In response, the European Commission and the French Presidency of the Council of the EU co-hosted the first European Humanitarian Forum, which took place in Brussels on 21-23 March 2022. The Forum has offered a European perspective to future humanitarian action by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders from the humanitarian community and beyond, including the EU and its Member States, major donors, signatories of the Call for Humanitarian Action, countries affected by crisis, and humanitarian partner organisations.
2. The Forum took place in the shadow of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, which has been creating a dire humanitarian situation in the country and spurring a massive outflow of displaced people, both within Ukraine and towards its neighbouring countries. Its impact on the world food security and nutrition are extremely alarming. In this regard, the European Commission and the French Presidency of the Council of the EU underlined the urgency of an immediate cessation of hostilities, the necessity of a strict compliance with international humanitarian law, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as the urgent necessity of a rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need in Ukraine.
3. The Forum highlighted the unprecedented level of humanitarian needs, with almost 300 million people around the world requiring humanitarian assistance in 2022 according to the United Nations while also taking into account the effects of the war in Ukraine. The Forum recalled the dramatic impact of climate change and the resurgence of international armed conflicts, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as key drivers of humanitarian needs. It highlighted the growing gap between humanitarian needs and the resources available globally, as well as the challenges facing humanitarian organisations on the ground, with basic norms and principles being tested as rarely before, making the delivery of aid more difficult and dangerous. The Forum underlined the need for the international community to better address rising needs and promote compliance with international humanitarian law.
4. The Forum highlighted the significant contribution that the EU and its Member States, working with their humanitarian partners, are making to humanitarian response. It looked at ways of further enhancing the impact of humanitarian response, building on the European Commission's Communication on "The EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles", the subsequent Council Conclusions, and the European Parliament resolution on new orientations for the EU's humanitarian action. The Forum also reiterated the Call for Humanitarian Action, co-launched by France and Germany in September 2019 and express the hope that other partners will join it.

Humanitarian space under threat – securing a better enabling environment for humanitarian action

5. Participants at the Forum noted with grave concern the prevalence of attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, as well as on humanitarian workers, sometimes purportedly, in a number of ongoing conflicts, and underlined the centrality and universality of International Humanitarian Law during conflicts. In view of these challenges, Participants committed to championing compliance with international humanitarian law, protection of education from attack as well as the safety and security of humanitarian workers, and promoting the Call for Humanitarian Action. As part of this effort, the European Commission is committed to support the strengthening of the monitoring of international humanitarian law through a global and comprehensive overview, while respecting the neutrality of humanitarian actors. Participants also encouraged States to develop national plans related to international humanitarian law, so as to develop its knowledge to a variety of actors.

Delivering better, leveraging innovation and strengthening local and international capacities

6. The Forum heard of the need for continuous efforts to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of aid. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global supply chains was felt in the humanitarian sector, recalling the need for an updated approach to humanitarian logistics. Participants reaffirmed the need for harnessing digital capacities to increase the opportunity to work together and share data, and ensuring a greener approach to the transport, storage and delivery of aid.

7. Also in this context, the Forum confirmed the need to further develop the European Humanitarian Response Capacity, building prepositioned emergency teams and stockpiles of emergency relief items in critical areas worldwide, and logistical support to operations in the form of a reinforced EU Humanitarian Air Bridge (or, where, needed and possible Humanitarian Land Bridge). The EHRC will enable the European Commission to intervene directly to fill critical gaps in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, in complementarity with existing instruments, in full respect of the humanitarian principles and showing more effective EU solidarity via a Team Europe approach.

8. Participants reaffirmed the vital importance of applying the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach systematically in bridging short-term interventions with durable long-term solutions in situations of fragility and conflict, and of addressing the root causes of conflicts and protracted crises. The Forum underlined that the focus on education in the triple nexus perspective is key to address children's needs and one of the essential contributions to prosperous societies.

9. The Forum listened to representatives of local humanitarian organisations who are usually the first responders to a crisis. In order to deliver fast, quality and cost-efficient assistance to people in need, more needs to be done to strengthen local capacities. These exchanges will serve as valuable input for one of the actions we have announced in the Communication on Humanitarian Action, which is to develop a 'guidance on the promotion of equal partnerships with local responders'. In the coming weeks a consultative process will

be launched with wide range of stakeholders on the future guidance building on the exchanges in the Forum.

Increase the resource base for humanitarian action and use resources efficiently

10. The Forum took stock of the dramatic gap between the funding needs for humanitarian action and the available resources. According to the UN and other partner organisations, more than € 40 billion is required to assist the most vulnerable people in need only in 2022. At the same time, the resource base for humanitarian action remains extremely narrow, with a small number of donors covering the near-totality of humanitarian funding. This is not sustainable. Participants at the Forum noted recent increases in some donors' humanitarian funding, but also emphasized the need for a greater effort to share the responsibility for humanitarian funding more broadly and equitably, and in line with capacities. Donors participating in the Forum agreed to step up engagement with new and emerging donors, including those who are still largely absent from the global humanitarian effort.

While stressing the need for a broader resource base for humanitarian action, the Forum further emphasized the need for sustained efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian response, including through innovative financing, flexible funding and multi-annual partnerships, as called for notably under the 'Grand Bargain'.

Humanitarian action responding to climate change and environmental degradation

11. The Forum recognised that climate change and environmental degradation are adding to humanitarian needs. In addition to increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters, climate change is increasingly amplifying conflict and displacement. Anticipatory approaches can help bolster the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate change and reduce humanitarian needs in the longer-term. Protecting people ahead of shocks offers a more dignified and more cost-effective approach to tackling the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

12. To this end, the Climate and Environment Charter for humanitarian organisations, initiated by the ICRC and the IFRC, as well as the Statement of Commitment on Climate by Humanitarian Organisations, were presented to the Forum. The EU's minimum environmental requirements for humanitarian partners, the "*Donor declaration on climate and environment*" complement this approach by promoting a humanitarian response system that prevents, prepares, anticipates and responds to climate and environmental challenges".

13. The European Humanitarian Forum will remain an annual feature in the humanitarian calendar, offering a platform for all donors and partners to discuss humanitarian issues, solutions and actions. The second edition will be co-hosted by the European Commission and the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU in Brussels in the first half of 2023.
