



## European Humanitarian Forum 18-19 March 2024

### Co-Hosts Statement by the European Commission and the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

#### Funding gap and prioritisation – Forgotten crises and fragile humanitarian environments

1. The European Commission and Belgium, in its capacity as Presidency of the Council of the European Union, co-hosted the third edition of the European Humanitarian Forum on 18 and 19 March 2024 in Brussels. The Forum offered a platform to explore **durable, efficient and effective solutions to contemporary humanitarian challenges** and highlighted European action and initiatives. The event gathered almost 5 000 participants, out of whom nearly 1 400 in-person, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders from the humanitarian community and beyond, including from the EU and its Member States, countries affected by crises, major donors and humanitarian partner organisations.
2. The Forum took place in a context of **changing geopolitical realities, increasing complexity and extraordinarily high humanitarian needs**. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the ongoing conflict which followed the horrendous Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 are a stark reminder of unprecedented challenges to the respect of International Humanitarian Law today. It also emphasises the importance of ensuring unhindered humanitarian access, protection of all civilians in conflict and safety of humanitarian workers as imperative under International Humanitarian Law. In this context, the Co-Hosts launched a Call for Action for Palestinian children affected by the conflict in Gaza.
3. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has been ongoing for over two years, causing loss of life and massive destruction of critical infrastructure. In the meantime, one of the biggest displacement crises worldwide is ongoing in Sudan. Many other humanitarian crises lack the necessary political or media attention. Moreover, the frequency and intensity of disasters linked to climate change continue to increase. Those disasters and conflicts continue to affect women, girls, children and persons with disabilities disproportionately. The United Nations estimate that **globally about 300 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2024**.
4. Principled, effective and innovative humanitarian action is needed more than ever, carried out in strong partnership between all relevant actors. With global humanitarian needs at unprecedented levels, the gap between needs and available resources globally continues to expand. In this context, the **EU and its Member States reaffirmed at the Forum their roles as leading humanitarian actors** by announcing initial humanitarian funding of EUR 7.7 billion for 2024.

#### **The EU and its Member States continue delivering**

5. The EU and its Member States continue focusing on **tackling soaring humanitarian needs by mobilising resources, improving performance and reducing needs**. Together, the EU and its Member States provided more humanitarian aid in 2023 than ever before.
6. On 22 May 2023, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted **Council Conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap**. In particular, the Council reaffirmed the collective commitment



of the EU to provide at least 0.7% of collective Gross National Income as Official Development Assistance by 2030, and encouraged its Member States “to continue their efforts to close the humanitarian funding gap by contributing at a level commensurate with their financial means, and ensuring that an appropriate share, for example 10%, of their ODA is devoted to humanitarian action, on the basis of existing humanitarian needs.”

7. In its resolution of 23 November 2023 titled “How to build an innovative humanitarian aid strategy”, the **European Parliament** shed a spotlight on current and forgotten crises and called on EU Member States to create roadmaps for gradually increasing humanitarian aid to meet the target formulated in the Council Conclusions.
8. Equally, the EU and Member States continue taking action in **addressing conflict and preserving humanitarian space**, not least with the aim to enable safe and efficient humanitarian action in conflict areas. This includes the situation in the Middle East, in relation to which EU Heads of State and Government expressed their gravest concern for the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and called for continued, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

#### Tackling the humanitarian funding gap

9. The Forum took stock, illustrated progress and collected best practices in **addressing the humanitarian funding gap comprehensively**, namely by increasing and broadening the resource base for humanitarian action, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system, not least by recognising the value of quality funding, i.e. multi-year and flexible funding, increasing synergies and reducing humanitarian needs.
10. The participants discussed how to **mobilise additional humanitarian funding globally and achieve a more balanced funding structure** to address growing humanitarian challenges, including through innovative funding modalities with special emphasis on strategic supply chains, private investment and accountability to affected communities. More private investments in humanitarian contexts were encouraged, drawing on the lessons learnt compiled by the European Commission.
11. The Forum explored the avenue to make more **climate finance** available for the most climate-vulnerable countries and communities affected by violence and conflict to build stronger **community resilience** in fragile contexts.
12. The Forum encouraged the creation of equitable partnerships and meaningful participation of **local and national actors** throughout the humanitarian response cycle, especially for groups representing marginalised people, people with disabilities and women’s groups and organisations. Strategic **supply chains and logistics** in line with localisation and digitalisation were identified as major contributions to delivering humanitarian aid more efficiently. Humanitarian partners and the EU committed to increasing their logistical cooperation to pool resources and optimise interoperability via joint supply chain initiatives.

#### Working in forgotten crises and fragile humanitarian environments

13. Many protracted crises continue without much international attention. This third edition of the Forum aimed to draw attention specifically to those crises that are forgotten and **often chronically underfunded** and to advocate for qualitative, flexible funding to allow for a needs-based approach. For example, discussions took place on innovative solutions to sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Also, other so-called



forgotten crises were addressed, such as the Rohingya refugee crisis or the situation in the Central Sahel.

14. The contexts of challenging governance and political instability pose risks not only for humanitarian assistance. Forum participants called for strong government ownership and increased **burden-sharing among humanitarian-development-peace actors enhanced coordination, programming and financing** in protracted crises.
15. The Forum called for effective long-term humanitarian-development nexus solutions much needed to reduce humanitarian needs in fragile, conflict affected and protracted crisis settings and addressed the current calls for **reform of the humanitarian system** and need to make it future proof.
16. The Forum highlighted the **centrality of protection** and the complementarity of approaches regarding protection activities in humanitarian settings. Any activity carried out by humanitarian actors, even when protection is not part of their mandate, is to ensure the maximisation of its protective impact through a prioritisation of safety and dignity and avoiding doing harm, ensuring meaningful access to humanitarian assistance and goods and services essential to the survival and well-being of populations, ensuring accountability for protection and ensuring participation and empowerment of affected populations. The EU and its Member States remain committed to increase funding specifically dedicated to all types of qualitative targeted protection interventions to mitigate and reduce risks based on context specific protection analysis as well as to develop capacities and support activities in areas like mine action, gender-based violence, child protection or legal assistance.
17. The Forum addressed the key issues of **compliance with International Humanitarian Law** in today's armed conflicts. To better support humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy on International Humanitarian Law, the Forum highlighted a new initiative that aims to provide decision-makers, humanitarian aid organisations and other stakeholders with analysis on current armed conflicts and related International Humanitarian Law violations. The EU remains engaged to streamline the approach of humanitarian exemptions in sanction regimes.
18. The Forum equally underlined the importance of strong **media coverage** of neglected crises in a competing media environment. Access for and protection of journalists, solid information flows and visibility for the action of the EU and its Member States and humanitarian partners are crucial for effective collaboration of the humanitarian community and media actors.

#### **The European Humanitarian Forum: the way ahead**

19. The European Humanitarian Forum has become the annual platform to gather the international humanitarian community to explore and address global humanitarian issues in a cross-sectoral context and jointly bring forward innovative, sustainable, and effective solutions.
20. The Forum's next edition will be co-hosted by the European Commission and the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU in Brussels in the first half of 2025.

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