

European Humanitarian Roundtables – South Findings and Recommendations

Ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), due to take place in May 2016, the Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA) and European Commission are organising a series of roundtables. The aim of these events is to present and discuss the core themes and priorities of the WHS process and the European Union's policy position towards the WHS. The events provide an opportunity for those affected by conflict, academics, practitioners, and youth involved in humanitarian action, as well as the broader humanitarian community, to make substantive contributions to the European Union's humanitarian policy and practice.

Each event will span two days. On the first day, experts will be divided into working groups to discuss specific themes from the perspective of the WHS report and the European Commission's position paper. On the second day, after a series of short presentations from NOHA, the European Commission and the WHS, representatives from the first day will present the results and recommendations from the previous day's discussions. At the end of each event, a document reflecting the views of the participants will be published. The aim is to provide concrete recommendations to the European Union and to the broader humanitarian community.

The Aix-en-Provence roundtable marked the beginning of the series of four events. It gathered a group of 29 experts from Cyprus, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy and Malta. The present document summarises the recommendations and findings of the experts. These will be used as a basis for discussion and will be built upon during the next roundtable event which will take place in Uppsala on the 16 and 17 February 2016.

All working group members agreed that any humanitarian effort must be backed up by political will, with State actors in particular generating the necessary political will to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

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S.1. Working group on access and subsidiarity

The working group highlighted the importance of the European Union's principled approach and the up-keeping of such an approach throughout its policy document. The following recommendations were made:

S.1.1: Ensure that crisis affected people have access to humanitarian aid rather than focus only on access of humanitarian actors.

S.1.2: Emphasise the link between protection and access to make sure humanitarian assistance is effective.

S.1.3: Ensure that the security and protection of both crisis-affected people and humanitarian organisations are a priority, over and above the presence of organisations in "dangerous" areas. Donors should be ready to provide support to make sure that the actors working in dangerous areas have adequate expertise and means. In this regard, the European Union should advocate more for states to fulfil their obligations to ensure a safe environment.

S.1.4: Remove bureaucratic obstacles to enable humanitarian organisations to work more effectively, including through accessing funds.

S.1.5: Regarding counter-terrorism, the European Union's position should be more explicit concerning how to deal with this issue. This affects humanitarian aid and especially local actors. In line with the UN Secretary General, states should "ensure that counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency measures do not inhibit humanitarian action and provide for necessary exemptions."

S.1.6: Local actors play a crucial role in a fast, cost-effective and culturally appropriate response; but diversity and complementarity of all actors (international, national and local) should be acknowledged, as should be the importance of partnerships and the expression of solidarity.

S.1.7: In order to operationalise subsidiarity and provide local actors with the means and capacity they require, concrete steps must be taken to facilitate their inclusion in the humanitarian system. This implies establishing mechanisms that are accessible to them and providing specific funding mechanisms. It also implies ensuring they can meaningfully participate in coordination mechanisms, including the coordination cluster system.

These recommendations were based upon input from and agreed to by the following group members:

Sophie Borel, NOHA, Facilitator

Véronique de Geoffroy, Groupe URD

John Gera, SOS Malta

Anne Héry, Handicap International

Takis Neophytou, Red Cross Cyprus

Alain Robyns, Caritas Luxembourg

Dina Vardaramatou, Praksis

S.2. Working group on humanitarian action and development

S.2.1. Rules and procedures:

S.2.1.a: Donors should approach a country with one common strategy including humanitarian and development funding when required.

S.2.1.b: To address a lack of flexibility, there is a need for simplification of bureaucracy, financial requirements, and donor conditionality.

S.2.1.c: In specific regard to the European Commission, development funding should become as flexible as humanitarian funding, in order to better cover gaps between humanitarian and development projects.

S.2.2. Prevention and preparedness:

S.2.2.a: In the build up to the World Humanitarian Summit, it is necessary to place a stronger emphasis on the role of disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and conflict prevention through joint processes between humanitarian and development actors.

S.2.2.b: Development actors should take a more proactive role in the above stated joint process.

S.2.2.c: Local actors should be the main beneficiaries of capacity building activities undertaken by the humanitarian and development communities.

S.2.3. People-centred approach and community involvement:

S.2.3.a: There is a need for empowerment of local governments and civil societies and, where possible, their inclusion in determining the process and transition of humanitarian and development activities.

S.2.3.b: Local associations and institutions should be promoted to participate in risk assessments and in drafting joint short-, medium-, and long-term strategies.

S.2.3.c: Both humanitarian and development actors should involve local communities in mid-term and final evaluations of processes.

S.2.4. Knowledge management and sharing:

S.2.4.a: Instead of building new joint platforms between humanitarian and development actors, there is a need for investment in combining and coordinating platforms on risk assessment to ensure better and more uniform understandings of current information and tools.

S.2.4.b: The European Commission should promote the use of common standards at a global level.

S.2.4.c: There is a need for the promotion of further involvement of a broader number of actors, especially local academic institutions, in risk assessment and analysis.

S.2.4.d: There is a need for easier and more streamlined procedures to research, access, share, and integrate lessons learned in both humanitarian and development activities.

S.2.5. Challenges in protracted conflict situations:

S.2.5.a: There is a clear need for greater involvement of development actors in protracted crises, especially in situations in which generations are displaced or at risk and need access to education and capacity building services better provided by development actors.

S.2.5.b: Development and humanitarian action should be people-centred and more focus should be given to protection.

These recommendations were based upon input from and agreed to by the following group members:

Khelil Aitout, Fondation Mérieux

Maria Cavatore, Prospective Cooperation

Erika Conti, Italian National Civil Protection Service

Paolo Dieci, International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP)

Laurence Lochu-Louineau, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development (MAEDI)

Nicole Sarsero, Maltese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Kathrin Schick, VOICE

George-André Simon, Roma Tre University

Will Wright, NOHA, Facilitator

S.3. Working group on protection in urban settings

S.3.1: The European Commission's position should reflect more on the root causes of humanitarian emergencies, which in the case of urban settings is a lost opportunity. Building upon accumulated knowledge is vital.

S.3.2: Even the suggestion of top-down reasoning is to be avoided. Although stressing the necessity of local capacity and highlighting the principle of subsidiarity, wordings the Commission chose under the heading 'A global partnership on the basis of humanitarian effectiveness' (Action Area 4 in the full document [COM (2015) 419] final where it is stated that 'Effective humanitarian action requires reliable disaggregated information on needs and available capacities, including non-traditional actors if they make a relevant contribution' could be avoided).

S.3.3: Addressing vulnerabilities in urban settings and ensuring humanitarian action is not (as the document seems to suggest) a phenomenon of the global south only; the global north undergoes levels of vulnerability that need to be responded to, both in urban settings and impoverished regions bearing the brunt of changing climate patterns, land degradation and economic deprivation as a result of ongoing economic and financial globalisation.

S.3.4: Humanitarian action in urban settings often materialises in circumstances of violence not addressed properly by the sovereign authorities (or denied). The international community of states should investigate whether an extension of IHL to be applicable in situations of endemic structural urban violence is possible.

S.3.5: A re-assessment of capacity of the stakeholders in humanitarianism in urban settings is crucial to delivering the necessary tools and capacities. A critical assessment of existing mechanisms, which in the recommendations are mentioned for 'simple' implementation, is needed: the transformative agenda for improved collective action (Action Area 4); the underlying mechanisms of donors demanding transparency and accountability to a level that hinders humanitarian effectiveness; what has been the added benefit of the merger between DG ECHO and Civil Protection into DG Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and what is the extent to which urban humanitarianism has benefitted from the capacity influx of civil protection in terms of response patterns?

S.3.6: Ultimately, effective urban humanitarianism hinges upon governments and their subsidiaries to take contingency planning seriously.

S.3.7: Ultimately, urban humanitarianism requires out of the box thinking for getting to grips with the highly diverse and continuously changing social power settings in urban areas. The inclusion of urban planning specialist and social geographers, but also the for-profit sector is mandatory; for their inclusion a win-win situation needs to be created (research benefits; tax exemption).

S.3.8: Aid in urban settings is both a short and longer term complex process of beginning to create dignity and livelihoods for people. It must be communicated much more clearly to the donors that 100% of monies provided cannot go (as many donors nowadays seem to demand) directly to humanitarian aid; the donors need to realise that strict earmarking of donations for humanitarian purposes in urban settings tends to discriminate against the people already living for long periods in slum areas; it needs to be clear that donations are for improving subhuman urban situations, not for a specific group in those circumstances; donors need to accept that their funding can or should be intertwined with input from for-profit organisations that out of business interest are willing to invest in vocational training in urbanised areas to create opportunities for economic activity and thus livelihoods.

S.3.9: The role of academia/research networks should be highlighted more, especially in view of the call and need for more reliable, disaggregated data. Academia/research networks can deliver this input through research that should be conducted on the basis of a meaningful participation that puts people at the heart of humanitarian action.

These recommendations were based upon input from and agreed to by the following group members:

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Snezhana Ilieva, Sofia University

Antoine Peigney, Red Cross France

Maria Pisani, University of Malta

Svoboda Tosheva, South Western University Blagoevgrad

S.4. Working group on forced and protracted displacement

S.4.1: With regard to challenges to the definitions and categorisation of displaced peoples, it is paramount for humanitarians to continue activities based upon need and the principle of impartiality. While the sheer number of cases makes action difficult, assistance and operational protection must be provided based upon needs rather than on the basis of the legal status of displaced people. This should be reaffirmed as the ethical base of humanitarian actions and not exclusively as an operational tool. While doing that, specific rights to protection must be guaranteed.

S.4.2: The working group highlighted the need to ensure fundamental rights of concerned peoples by advocating for stricter adherence to international humanitarian, human rights, maritime, and refugee law. Furthermore, it was stated that existing mechanisms should work towards better compliance with international law, as States and other actors are too often in breach of international or regional bodies of law.

S.4.3: Despite challenges in countries hosting large refugee populations, the group stressed the need for continued action. More practical measures should be taken in order to ensure safe trips to boat people on their way to Europe. Furthermore, all actors should work to raise awareness on the importance of hosting forcibly and protractedly displaced people and support hosting communities. This should be emphasised, as was stated in the debate, by pushing not for burden sharing but responsibility sharing.

S.4.4: As crises of displacement are on the rise and are likely to be protracted, there is a further need for long-term solutions and for actors to address root causes. Poverty, climate change, war, violent extremism and demography issues are among the root causes of forced and protracted displacement. This means that humanitarian actors should be more engaged in advocacy with peace-building, development, private and political actors. Furthermore, political coordination and coherence amongst humanitarian stakeholders should be improved.

S.4.5: The working group highlighted the global impact of mixed migration flows and displacement on international stability and the response capacity of both, governments and the international community, and called for all actors to broaden their approach to migration issues with a global landscape in mind. This was underlined by calling for understanding that political decisions in today's globalised world can induce massive flows of migration and therefore responsibility to ensure safety and security for those in migration falls on everyone's shoulders (citizens and their representatives). A further need to sensitise populations and political actors to the impact of crises on global stability and to promote the principles of humanity and solidarity was identified.

S.4.6: To address protracted crises, the working group recommended the need for a set of tools to be developed to serve as long term solutions in protracted crises and stressed the importance of predictability of funding and multi-annual frameworks in achieving this. Finding durable solutions (that is, return, integration, resettlement) was also highlighted.

These recommendations were based upon input from and agreed to by the following group members:

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Marie-José Domestici-Met, NOHA and Aix-Marseille University, Facilitator

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