

European Humanitarian Roundtables – North 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 spans two days. On the first day, experts are divided into working groups to discuss specific themes from the perspective of the WHS reports 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 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 is published. The aim is to provide concrete recommendations to the European Union and to the broader humanitarian community.

The Uppsala roundtable marked the second in a series of four events, preceded by the roundtable in Aix-en-Provence held on the 3 and 4 of February. The 23 experts who gathered in Uppsala represented a plethora of stakeholders from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania. They were able to discuss and build upon the recommendations from the working groups in Aix-en-Provence which represented the first glances into the gaps and shortcomings of current policy prescriptions toward the World Humanitarian Summit, as well as emphasised the topics in the European Commission's position paper that could be expanded upon.

The present document summarises the recommendations and findings of the experts who met in Uppsala. These will be used as a basis for discussion and will be built upon during the next roundtable event which will take place in Warsaw on the 1 and 2 March 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.

*The signatures on the document do not reflect the full number of participants, but instead those who have already been willing to professionally endorse the recommendations they have made. The names of further participants will be added as they confirm the recommendations.

The information and views set out in this publication are those of the participants in the working groups at the Humanitarian roundtables and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

N.1. Working group on access and subsidiarity

The group reiterated its support for the EHR South working group's findings and the focus on and support for people-centred aid and local humanitarian actors. The EHR North working group added the following:

N.1.1. Gender as a cross-cutting issue: Gender as a cross-cutting issue should be given meaningful attention in all discussions on humanitarian access and subsidiarity. Women, men, girls and boys should have equal access to humanitarian aid as well as equal protection and participation in all humanitarian response.

N.1.2. For European Union actors: The working group reiterated the need for political commitment from the EC/EU and for accountability on EU-post-WHS-Action-Plan and endorsed recommendations S.1.3 and S.1.4, while emphasising the need for streamlining and simplifying administrative requirements.

N.1.3. Increased support for local and/or national actors: The working group supported S.1.7 and added that there is a need to track the level of funding to local and national partners through the implementing organisations in accordance with IATI standards. Furthermore, increasing the support for local and national actors should come through a commitment to a measurable and proportional increase in funding for local actors. Examples of measures to ensure such increases were provided as follows:

- Exploring further expansion of pooled funding outside the UN as a mean to ensure that funding reaches a more diverse set of actors.
- Reiterating the Commission's push for opening up IASC and UN country teams for further diversification and to ensure UN leadership accountability to this.
- Re/Committing to the Principles of Partnership (POP) and investing in local capacity in preparation and response.
- Exploring implementing similar agreement models between local partners and aid organisations as between aid organisations and donors, with an emphasis on overheads and business models.
- Highlighting that the development of the 'Grand Bargain' should not come at the cost of diversity in the humanitarian system.
- Reiterating that accountability is broader than effectiveness, referring to relevant quality and accountability standards.

N.1.4. Ensuring access and protection for aid workers, especially local and national actors: It was underscored that there should be equal political and diplomatic attention given to targeted attacks against all aid workers, be they local, national or international. Beyond this, the working group supported rS.1.5 and added that donors and member states should review their counter terrorism provisions and legal political frameworks so that humanitarian efforts of impartial, local, national and international NGOs are supported. It was also emphasised that donors need to prioritise their commitment to the humanitarian imperative, support and encourage local actors' action in hard to reach areas, including when that might conflict with national sovereignty. In line with recommendation 4, the working group suggested that there is a need for decreased bureaucratic obstacles in having access, i.e. visa regulations, customs.

N.1.5 Ensuring impartial and needs-based aid: The working group expanded upon S.1.1 by adding that donors need to accept that there can be higher implicit costs in ensuring marginalised populations access to aid. Likewise, actors should reaffirm their commitment to impartial and needs-based aid in the face of higher costs.

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

Celia Cranfield, VOICE

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies

Nils Carstensen, DanChurchAid & Local to Global Protection

Arne Naess-Holm, Norwegian Church Aid

Will Wright, NOHA, Facilitator

N.2. Working group on maintaining public support for humanitarian action

The working group considered ways to maintain or strengthen public support for humanitarian action in a time of retrenchment, “compassion fatigue,” and hardened attitudes toward refugees in many parts of Europe by pondering the possible contributions of NGOs, churches, activist groups, state agencies and media organisations.

N.2.1: Transformative and inspired leadership by individuals and social movements can create, strengthen or crystallise public sentiments of empathy and generosity. Journalists, including photographers, may sometimes achieve the same effect. EU leaders at all levels should be ready to recognise and support such humanising leadership where it appears.

N.2.2: Several enduring issues undermine the EU's credibility as a humanitarian actor: arms sales, the militarisation of external European borders, unethical profit-seeking, and the attempt to get Turkey and North African countries to do the dirty work of stopping potential asylum-claimants before they come anywhere near Europe's borders. EU leaders at all levels should openly acknowledge these ethical contradictions.

N.2.3: Governments should realise and proactively commit to supporting humanitarian ideals and humanitarian actors. Beyond the cross-cutting issue of committing their political will to help alleviate suffering, governments have a crucial role to play in supporting continued dialogue on humanitarian issues inside Europe. Awareness raising of what humanitarian action is and the importance of humanitarian principles, should be supported through government action.

N.2.4: Non-traditional humanitarian stakeholders, like European civil society organisations, especially Diaspora organisations and academic institutions, should be supported in their role in maintaining public awareness and support for humanitarian actors and action. These actors on the margin of what is traditionally considered the humanitarian sector have an important role to play in fundraising, public support, public awareness of humanitarianism and its ideals as well as combatting misinformation around humanitarian action abroad and in Europe. Such actors should be encouraged to continue their work and be financially supported, especially in the region of Central and Eastern Europe where humanitarian action is not broadly supported or well known.

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

Zaida Catalan, Gender Expert

Caroline Edelstam, Harald Edelstam Foundation

Maria Gabrielsen-Jumbert, Peace Research Institute Oslo

Joost Herman, NOHA and University of Groningen

Brian Palmer, University of Uppsala, Facilitator

Jwa Said, Syrian Diaspora Member and Student

Andreas Zetterlund, International Aid Services

Karolis Žibas, Diversity Development Group

N.3. Working group on protection in urban settings

N.3.1. Sustainable development goals: Link the Communication to the SDGs that provide an already agreed upon and solid framework. This is of additional relevance for indicators and targets. Specifically, SDG 11 is relevant for the issue of protection in urban settings.

N.3.2. Research: There is a need to establish an applied research programme and define research priorities to address issues specific to protection in urban settings, e.g. the issue of vulnerability dynamics and fragility in urban settings. Humanitarian stakeholders across sectors should develop quantitative and qualitative methodologies as well as conceptual frameworks with the purpose of documenting and gaining experience and knowledge to create new solutions and to strengthen mechanisms of protection in urban settings. This can be strengthened in Action area 4 Recommendation 1.

N.3.3. The camp mind-set/paradigm: As many stakeholders are interspersed among host communities, humanitarian actors should recognise the complexities of urban settings and move beyond the camp mind-set. Conventional knowledge and working assumptions that are based on decades of camp work in rural areas cannot be applied as such in urban settings.

N.3.4. Reaching target demographics: The humanitarian community should follow a holistic approach in delivery of humanitarian aid in urban settings. Focusing on specific populations while excluding others can exacerbate existing tensions and undermine social cohesion. The humanitarian sector should move away from a narrow classification of beneficiaries and towards a needs based approach regardless of status.

N.3.5. Land tenure: Humanitarian crises in urban settings often add to the burden of an already fragile and conflict-prone land tenure system. This puts the most vulnerable such as refugees, IDPs or inhabitants of informal settlements at risk of forced eviction and other human rights violations. Humanitarian and development actors should work with local and national governments to improve tenure security by ensuring their programmes, including temporary shelter response, strengthens the recognition of informal land tenure and provides security and predictability to both dwellers and owners.

N.3.6. Infrastructure: In urban settings essential services such as water, sanitation, and power are often provided by plants that are big in size and technically complex. Such plants, often old, require high-levels of maintenance and their break-down would have large-scale humanitarian consequences. Thus, humanitarian and development actors should work with local and national governments to focus on maintaining and strengthening existing infrastructure. Protection and securitisation of infrastructure such as water, electricity and sewage plants should be paramount, especially in urban settings.

N.3.7. Access: Humanitarian and development actors should work with local and national governments to systematically develop guidelines to facilitate safe access to the labour market in order to protect refugees/ IDPs from exploitation. Furthermore, they should work with local and national governments to improve equal-to-all access to social services such as education and health care. Discriminatory access to essential services is likely to heighten tensions in inflammable urban settings.

N.3.8. Urban violence: Fire-arms violence represents a large-scale humanitarian crisis that is largely neglected. The international community needs to pay much more attention to effective arms control in order to prevent and alleviate the human suffering that is caused by Small Arms and Light Weapons. There is a need for better coordination with the 2001 UN Program of Action on Small Arms. Beyond this, the newly adopted Arms Trade Treaty represents an opportunity for better arms control for the international community with regards to humanitarian action. This coordination means enhancing capacity at local level regarding arms control for the prevention of armed violence in the urban context. National legislation, customs, stockpile management and other mechanisms must be taken into account. The role of civil society in the urban context for the prevention of armed violence needs to be highlighted as well as violence against exposed groups.

N.3.9. Integration of protection: The humanitarian community should endeavour to include livelihood and social and cultural integrations into protection strategies and strengthen the integration of protection as highlighted in Action Area 3, Recommendation 1, especially in contexts of urban settings.

N.3.10. Use of explosives in populated areas: The use of explosive weapons in urban areas cause significant civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects, as well as long-term harm to the civilian population, even when the target is a military objective. The significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects makes the use of explosive weapons in urban settings very likely to be illegal under IHL and exposes the civilian population to harmful consequences. In their dialogue with parties to conflicts, governments and humanitarian actors should advocate for refrained use of explosive weapons in urban settings. They should also support the effort led by the ICRC to document the legality of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

N.3.11. Divisions within humanitarian aid and development: In urban settings especially, actors should move away from exit strategy mentality and rather pursue a continuum approach, recognising that seamless transitions between short-term humanitarian response and development is in the best interest of the beneficiaries. This should be strengthened in Action Area 7 Recommendation 1 in the Communication.

N.3.12. Data access and integrity: Humanitarian and development actors must be aware of the sensitivity of confidential and anonymised data of the urban populations it serves. The potential for data leaks and misuse is high in these settings, with the potential for severe consequences. When promoting or implementing "broad IT platform" as mentioned in the Communication, special attention should be given to ensure data security, integrity and possible misuse, wrongful or not, and consider the ethical challenges that can arise with its creation.

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

Houria Bounouch, Belgian Red Cross

Peter Brune, IM Swedish Development Partner

Tania Dræbel, University of Copenhagen

Robert Ghosn, Belgian Red Cross, Facilitator

Keith Mattingly, Church of Sweden

N.4. Working group on forced and protracted displacement

N.4.1: We acknowledge that over the past decades, humanitarian principles and international law (IHL, IHRL, Refugee Law) have been compromised. On multiple occasions humanitarian aid has been instrumentalised and politicised, neglecting the needs of the most vulnerable. All humanitarian stakeholders have to be made accountable in adhering to their own commitments. A new accountability mechanism has to be developed and universally recognised in order to ensure compliance with humanitarian principles and international law. In doing so, we should emphasise the fact that saving lives is more important than political agendas.

N.4.2: Protracted displacement has to become part of the national development plans. The gap between Humanitarian Action and Development is a systematic issue that does not stem from the situation or people on the ground. As the nature of displacement in practice is a long-term problem, it requires engagement of international donors; this entails coordination mechanisms between and beyond clusters.

N.4.3: It is necessary to break down the silos between humanitarian and development funding, and to develop long term instruments in order to respond to the needs of beneficiaries in protracted crises. To achieve sustainable solutions, we have to develop smarter and more flexible tools that can be adjusted to the changing contexts and needs.

N.4.4: Joint needs assessment is desirable in order to save resources and enable efficient and adequate response to humanitarian needs. However, confidentiality of data and protection issues need to be addressed; likewise, the needs assessments should not be the basis for competitive processes applied by donors.

N.4.5: Right to dignity should be a guiding principle of the European policy towards the refugee and IDP phenomena. It is the states' responsibility to offer protection and effective integration mechanisms (e.g. access to education and the job market). Moreover, states have to ensure that the potential, capacity and experience of the displaced population are utilised. The women, men and children who face persecution and flee their homes should not be forced to risk their lives doing so; neither they should be seen as a burden. We urge the international community to develop safe ways and alternative pathways for refugees, allowing them to reach safety without unnecessary danger.

N.4.6: The inclusion of local actors in humanitarian action should be encouraged. However, conflict-related displacement poses particular demands on neutrality, or perceived neutrality, and requires a clear case by case assessment. Constantly increasing demands of administrative compliance and risk aversion are detrimental to the inclusion of local actors and prevent the use of their assets, for instance in increased outreach and access. Capacity-building of national actors must become a commitment of international players, and should be properly resourced. The dialogue with national actors needs to go beyond verbal assurances and praise, and requires above all honesty from all actors.

N.4.7: We acknowledge that the displacement of vulnerable populations can be caused by both violent conflicts and natural hazards. Development and humanitarian stakeholders have to increase investment in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to mitigate and prepare for these risks. By ensuring equal participation of children, youth and women in all activities, it will reduce their vulnerabilities and enhance their capacities, thus leading to a resilient society. In result, lives of many will be saved and the investments made in development will be secured.

N.4.8: Humanitarian actors should be held accountable to ensure that all humanitarian interventions are gender, age and culturally appropriate. Meaningful participation of women, men, girls and boys will safeguard their rights. Vulnerable groups' needs and capacities should be identified and acknowledged to secure their resilience, safety and dignity. It is of particular importance in the context of forced and protracted displacements.

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

Eija Alajarva, Finn Church Aid

Evita Čikute, Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Olivia Forseberg, Plan Sweden

Artur Malantowicz, NOHA, Facilitator

Štephan Maurer, Danish Refugee Council

Mona Strindberg, Uppsala United Nations Association