



# 2026 EMERGENCY WATCHLIST



## Overview of recommendations for the European Union and Member States

1. **Reinvest in diplomacy and peacemaking, restore respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and guarantee safe access for humanitarian aid**, including by engaging further with emerging powers to build broader, more creative coalitions for peace; by increasing coordination between EU humanitarian and diplomatic arms, as well as between country and headquarter levels; and by ensuring structured NGO engagement to inform humanitarian diplomacy efforts.
2. **Prioritise aid funding to maximise impact and sustainability**, by increasing significantly the share of EU ODA going to fragile and conflict-affected states, and by reinforcing the connections between humanitarian and development interventions.
2. **Invest in proven, high-impact solutions**, including by continuing to champion and scaling up cash assistance, preventing health risks to children through immunisation, and consolidating efforts to prevent and treat malnutrition.
4. **Transform partnerships to unlock impact**, by protecting and strengthening the EU's partnerships with INGOs, NNGOs and local actors – including by partnering with NGOs for delivery in settings with de facto authorities to maximise the EU's ability to provide aid even when budget support is not an option.
5. **Protect people who face the greatest risks in conflict**, by ensuring that protection issues are systematically placed at the center of regional strategies, supported by dedicated and predictable, flexible, multi-year funding.
6. **Build resilience against climate shocks**, by directing more climate adaptation finance to FCAS and by allocating a minimum of 5% of the EU humanitarian budget to anticipatory action (AA), ensuring AA funding is accessible to local and national NGOs, and investing further in innovative approaches to AA.
7. **Defend the rights of refugees and displaced people**, by recommitting to international refugee protections, expanding safe pathways, and rejecting aid conditionality.



# Full recommendations for the European Union and Member States

## 1. Reinvest in diplomacy and peacemaking, restore respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and guarantee safe access for humanitarian aid.

- **Give far greater weight to IHL, access and civilian protection** as part of the full range of the EU's diplomatic relations with third countries, from economic and trade negotiations to human rights dialogues and structured partnerships.
- **Increase coordination between EU humanitarian and diplomatic arms, and between country and headquarters levels.** Close coordination between EUSR/the EEAS/Heads of Delegations and ECHO has yielded positive results. Such coordination should be expanded and made more systemic, and should involve:
  - Clear roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms between country/regional level and headquarters, as well as between policy/humanitarian and geographic/diplomatic units, to conduct and inform humanitarian diplomacy, with clear communication lines between field-level and high-level officials connected to the operational contexts.
  - Coordination mechanisms between the EU and EU Member States – across and between their humanitarian and diplomatic arms, for more concerted engagements.
  - Maintaining the EU's extensive footprint in fragile and conflict-affected settings through Delegations, and ensuring the number of cooperation staff is not reduced in these Delegations, as they play a critical role in understanding and informing EU engagements in these settings, and in ensuring they contribute to long-term stability.
- **Invest further in efforts** to understand the influence of emerging powers in today's conflicts and to engage with them effectively to build broader, more creative coalitions for peace, including if they support conflict parties.
- **Increase structured engagement with NGOs to inform humanitarian diplomacy efforts.** It is essential to ensure that humanitarian diplomacy efforts are grounded in the operational experiences of humanitarian actors, and to ensure that humanitarian partners, including INGOs, NNGOs and local actors directly inform humanitarian diplomacy efforts and negotiation processes. At the same time, NGOs would benefit from receiving EU and EU Member State feedback on ongoing engagements. This structured engagement should involve:
  - Having coordination mechanisms between the EU, EU Member States and NGOs to inform humanitarian diplomacy efforts such as regular meetings of the type that ECHO and the EUSR for the Great Lakes region started organising in 2025 on the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among other examples. A bottom-up approach should be favoured to ensure humanitarian partners in all their diversity are able to meaningfully inform high-level engagements.
  - Involving NGOs/local actors as directly as possible in negotiations, including by having them brief diplomats on IHL violations, access challenges and protection issues ahead of meetings with conflict parties or with their sponsors.
  - Holding regular strategic meetings between the EU, EU Member States and NGOs to discuss overall humanitarian diplomacy efforts and structures, and how to enhance ways of working together and partners' respective contributions to these efforts.
- **Continue to engage diplomatically to maintain responses to fragility even in settings under the control of de facto authorities.** Open and principled engagement with all levels of local authority and/or line ministries, including those who maintain security, is paramount for ensuring safe access and building trust – whilst firewalling humanitarian diplomacy efforts from political objectives.



- **Invest further in building the capacity of humanitarian actors to negotiate and engage with conflict parties** in a way that is safe, sustainable, and produces quality humanitarian access.

## 2. **Prioritise aid funding to maximise impact and sustainability.**

- **Increase significantly the share of EU ODA going to fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS)**, with the aim of moving from the [16% for 2024](#) to a target of 60%, as needs and extreme poverty are increasingly concentrated in these settings. This should be accompanied by continued efforts to bring in new sources of finance, investment, and funding to the aid system.
- **Reinforce the connections and coordination between development and humanitarian interventions** - in order to leverage maximum impact and complementarity of EU funding and interventions - including through the forthcoming Communication on Humanitarian Aid and associated Staff Working Document on fragility, and through the Global Europe instrument under the 2028-2034 MFF. Such measures will enable the EU to continue to support interventions across sectors to respond to needs, build resilience, and address the root causes of fragility, including in the most complex settings. This should involve systematising joint assessment and planning efforts (e.g. conflict analysis, needs assessments) involving ECHO, INTPA, MENA, FPI and the EEAS, in coordination with NGOs (including through inclusive coordination platforms), to ensure development, climate and peacebuilding/social cohesion interventions are well connected to humanitarian actions.
- In the next MFF (2028-2034), **maintain the proposed €200bn** for the EU's external action budget, with **€25bn ringfenced** for humanitarian action.

## 3. **Invest in proven, high-impact solutions.**

- **Scale up cash assistance.** ECHO has played a leading and commendable role in supporting cash assistance. In line with its reaffirmed commitment to cash assistance as a core modality of humanitarian response, the EU should increase the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA). It is a proven, dignified and cost-effective way to help people in crisis, allowing them to buy what they need while supporting local markets. It improves food security and helps recipients invest in livelihoods and avoid debt or selling assets.
- **Prevent health risks to children.** The EU should strengthen collaboration between its development and humanitarian arms to ensure its health interventions have access to the hardest-to-reach communities. By working with humanitarians to develop models that ensure doses and funding are provided to frontline actors like community health workers who can reach people outside of government control, we can ensure children, who would otherwise have been excluded from this lifesaving intervention, are protected from debilitating diseases.
- **Treat child malnutrition.** The EU should [simplify the system](#) for diagnosing and treating malnutrition so that humanitarians can dramatically expand the number of children reached.
- **Scale up flexible support to innovation in humanitarian response.** The IRC is committed to shaping and scaling programme models that deliver the greatest impacts at the lowest cost. Our theory of change is to identify and optimise the most promising models and then scale these models through our own programmes as well as civil society, governments and the private sector. In the current funding context, there is an opportunity for ECHO to deliver maximum impact with scarce resources by scaling up its excellent existing efforts to invest in innovative projects and by supporting large-scale, multi-regional projects – both through the Enhanced Response Capacity (ERC) and beyond.



#### 4. Transform partnerships to unlock impact.

- **Protect and strengthen the EU's partnerships with CSOs (including INGOs, NNGOs and local responders, including WLOs) across its humanitarian and development financing.** This will allow the EU to maximise its impact in FCAS and flexibly respond to crises for both short-term relief and long-term impact. To achieve this objective, in the next MFF, the EU should:
  - Maintain dedicated resources for CSOs by allocating 15% of the geographic and global pillars for direct implementation by CSOs.
  - Expand direct, simplified, and flexible development funding for local CSOs by introducing more accessible small-grant schemes with streamlined eligibility and compliance requirements to reduce administrative burdens.
  - Support women-led organisations (WLOs) and women's rights organisations (WROs) by further diversifying funding allocations, including explicitly feminist funds, and committing to measurable targets to increase the amount of funding they receive in FCAS.
  - Maintain the requirement for development programming to be conflict-sensitive and based on conflict analysis, and ensure that conflict analysis processes systematically involve consulting CSOs.
- **Pursue partnerships with NGOs and other actors that maximise the EU's ability to provide aid in countries with de facto authorities and in non-government controlled areas.** For this purpose, the EU should:
  - Systematically identify – in country action plans or action documents – relevant civil society partners and other partners that would be able to contribute to delivering and supporting the proposed actions through different channels, to which the EU may be able to shift (some of) its funding, in case it has to suspend its financial support to the national government.
  - Revise Article 241 of the EU financial regulation applicable to the general budget of the Union to stipulate that when the conditions for the provision of budget support to third countries are no longer fulfilled (particularly when a partner government “breaches an obligation relating to respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law”), the EU may not only suspend its budget support funding but also reallocate it to other implementing partners in the same country, while maintaining the same objectives. The EU and Member States should seize the opportunity of the upcoming Humanitarian Communication and of the next Multiannual Financial Framework to increase the flexibility with which the EU can make rapid adaptations to delivery approaches in complex settings and institutionalise this practice.
- **Within the context of the Humanitarian Reset, support calls to devolve power to strong local, national and international NGOs as the default,** unless there is a clear added value in the UN taking a leading role. This helps ensure that the role of INGOs in the future of the humanitarian system – as critical interlocutors and vehicles on the path towards localisation and leaders in effective aid delivery – is not overlooked. Meanwhile, the UN would reinforce its role as a convener and coordinator.

#### 5. Protect people who face the greatest risks in conflict.

- **Continue to champion efforts that go beyond merely funding gender-responsive programming.** By supporting more transformative strategies, the EU can help drive progress towards gender equality through women's leadership and economic empowerment.
- **ECHO should, in accordance with its Guidance note on localisation, advance positive partnership practice in funding local WLOs,** for example through a dedicated percentage of the Programmatic Partnership for WLO empowerment. This could involve a dialogue with WLOs on whether an ECHO/INTPA



advisory group of WLO leaders would be appropriate, to ensure consistent consultation and meaningful involvement in programme design and decision-making. It could also ensure a direct link between WLOs and decision-making bodies, facilitating their access to information and opportunities.

- **Ensure protection (including preventing and responding to GBV) remains an important priority** in an environment where funding cuts have often led to the prioritisation of life-saving assistance.
- **Ensure that protection issues are systematically placed at the centre of regional strategies, supported by dedicated and predictable, flexible, multi-year funding.** This should cover monitoring, prevention, emergency response, and Nexus approaches, while prioritising survivor-centred services (e.g. GBV and child protection, psychosocial support, legal aid, medical care). Funding should also empower local actors, strengthen state capacity to deliver essential services, and support community-based protection, social cohesion, and resilience initiatives, with crisis modifiers systematically applied to bridge emergency response and long-term recovery.

## 6. Build resilience against climate shocks.

- **Scale up support to anticipatory action, and ensure this funding is accessible to local organisations and NGOs.** By investing further in anticipatory action, the EU can help to reduce losses and damages sustained by communities at the forefront of the climate crisis. To this end, the EU should allocate a minimum of 5% of its humanitarian budget to anticipatory action, in line with commitments made under the [Grand Bargain Caucus on anticipatory action](#), with a strategy for further expansion by 2030. Indeed, the EU needs to further scale anticipatory action interventions to [prevent](#) the worst impacts of climate shocks.
- **Invest further in innovative approaches to anticipatory action.** In contrast with the rigid ‘build and fuel’ model of anticipatory action, a ‘[follow the forecast](#)’ approach that combines long-range forecasts with rapid contingency planning allows for intervening and building resilience in advance where climate shocks are the most likely to hit vulnerable communities. Importantly, this requires flexible and diverse funding mechanisms that allow funds to be used wherever disaster may strike – instead of being tied to individual countries.
- **Fund climate adaptation in fragile states.** The EU should increase climate finance and ensure a significant portion is directed to fragile and conflict-affected states, which are the most vulnerable but receive the least support. The EU should set a target for these countries to receive 19% of all climate adaptation finance committed to developing countries.

## 7. Defend the rights of refugees and displaced people.

- **Recommit to international refugee protections.** The basic standards established by the Refugee Convention — that refugees should not be returned to countries where their lives are in danger—should not be controversial and should be defended. By adhering to and defending international refugee law, and particularly the right to asylum, the EU and its Member States can guarantee protections for those who require it.
- **Expand safe, legal pathways.** Punitive measures and enforcement have done little to address migration and only benefited smuggling networks. In contrast, safe pathways such as resettlement, humanitarian admissions and family reunion reduce dangerous journeys and save lives, promote responsibility sharing and enable safe and managed migration. With global resettlement commitments projected to decline precipitously, more host nations should step up and reverse the trend of declining support. The EU's Union Resettlement Framework is an opportunity for ambitious goals.



- **Reject aid conditionality.** Aid for vulnerable people should not be tied to their government's cooperation in migration management or return targets. Any potential cooperation with external partners on matters of migration and asylum must be firmly rooted in international human rights standards, ensuring that people on the move are treated with fairness and dignity. The externalisation of asylum and migration policies, which comes at a great human and financial cost, should be avoided and must not result in the erosion of protections for refugees in third countries. Truly mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries cannot rely primarily on reinforcing borders and containing people on the move. Instead, any partnership on migration needs to have refugee protection at its heart.

