

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RAISE

THE BAR

A blueprint for EU leadership

in a world of escalating crises



**INTERNATIONAL
RESCUE
COMMITTEE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the last European elections in 2019, the world has changed dramatically. The number of people in humanitarian need has more than doubled to nearly 300 million.¹ Displacement has soared by almost 40% to 110 million.² And the global population facing acute food insecurity has risen by 160% to almost 350 million.³ For many people across the globe, this is the worst of times.

It is crystal clear that the approach and actions of the international community, including the EU, has not kept pace with this rapidly escalating level of humanitarian need. The communities that the IRC works with across the globe have borne witness to this dangerous disconnect, and we have learned abundant lessons from them on what needs to change.

Today's humanitarian context is characterised by three key drivers: **conflict, climate change and economic crises**. This deadly brew is **converging with particular strength in a handful of regions and states, including the Sahel, Somalia, and Sudan, to create a new geography of crisis**. The people caught in its midst are being increasingly left behind. As the IRC's **2024 Emergency Watchlist** reveals, just 20 countries are now home to 86% of the global population in humanitarian need. Meanwhile, the global humanitarian funding gap hit a record high of \$32.5 billion in 2023. The international community must overhaul the way it responds to these three intersecting drivers.

Firstly, the **nature of conflicts is changing and becoming increasingly protracted**. Conflicts are spilling across borders and becoming internationalised, while conflict actors are fragmenting. As a result of these trends, civilians are caught between states and armed groups,

and wars are fought for longer - without regard for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) or respect for humanitarian access, which is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who need it most.

Secondly, **climate change is a "threat multiplier"**, amplifying the risks, cracks and inequalities that already exist in fragile states or those affected by conflict. The World Bank estimates that up to an additional 135 million people could be pushed into poverty by 2030 due to climate change.⁴

Thirdly, **economic turmoil is plunging people into extreme poverty**, as states struggle to recover from the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and fallout of the war in Ukraine, which drove up fuel and food prices in many fragile and conflict-affected countries, particularly in East Africa. The global rise of interest rates on loans has made borrowing more expensive, resulting in many countries that were already affected by fragility and conflict racking up significant debts.

1. See: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfrsp>

2. Displacement is projected to soar by almost 65% to 130 million in 2024.

3. In 2019, 79.5 million people were displaced. In 2024, it is projected to reach 130.8 million. The percentual increase is 64.52%; see <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfrsp> In 2019, 135 million were acutely food insecure. the percentual increase is 159.3%; see: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises>

4. See: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2021/09/climate-change-and-inequality-guivarch-mejean-taconet#:~:text=The%20evidence%20is%20mounting%3A%20a,2030%20because%20of%20climate%20change>

They now have fewer resources to spend on vital services including healthcare, education and climate resilience, feeding into the same vicious cycle that forced them to borrow in the first place.

And, as ever, **women and girls are bearing the brunt of these interlocking crises.**

They represent almost three in four of the global population facing chronic hunger, yet face disproportionately high barriers to accessing humanitarian support, legal and safe work, and education. Women and girls are also at heightened risk of sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse, with up to 70% of women in some crisis contexts reporting experiences of gender-based violence.⁵ Despite these grave risks, women and girls' perspectives, needs and concerns are often overlooked when planning a humanitarian response, and in longer-term resilience and development work.

Meanwhile, despite more than **110 million people globally now being displaced from their homes**, almost all of whom remain in the global south, most EU states are failing to meet their pledges for refugee resettlement, and safe pathways for people seeking asylum are shrinking. As Europe hardens its borders, the IRC and partners have seen systematic violations of the fundamental rights of people seeking safety, including pushbacks and denial of access to asylum. It is clear these 'border security' policies are not meeting their stated objective of establishing greater order at the border nor reducing the level of people smuggling. The need for a safe, orderly and humane European response to asylum and migration has never been greater.

With whole regions and countries at risk of being left behind, serious questions must be raised as to if – and how – the EU will be able to meaningfully advance the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The EU has the means and the influence to tackle these global challenges. But if it is to serve its own ambitions, and reach more communities in humanitarian need, the EU will need to fundamentally rethink its ways of working.

It is time to take a fresh approach. In the context of the European elections, the IRC's agenda for change demonstrates seven ways the EU can redefine its response to a world of uncertainty and compounding crises:

NO. 1

Focus on fragile and conflict-affected states, taking a 'people first' approach to delivery.

NO. 2

Harness humanitarian action for long-term development impact.

NO. 3

Save lives impacted by the climate and food security crises by investing in solutions that work.

NO. 4

Deploy innovative approaches to unlock new sources of finance.

NO. 5

Prioritise gender equality in crisis response and shift power and resources to women-led organisations.

NO. 6

Protect humanitarian and civilian space by consistently calling out violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and challenging impunity.

NO. 7

Ensure a safe, orderly and humane approach to asylum and migration.

The coming five years will be a test of the EU's commitment to humanitarian leadership – an opportunity to do more, do better, and truly raise the bar.

5. See: https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid_policy_report_on_the_frontline_catalysing_womens_leadership_in_humanitarian_action.pdf

ACTION AREA 1

FOCUS ON FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED STATES, TAKING A 'PEOPLE FIRST' APPROACH TO DELIVERY

NO. 1

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ **Commit half of all bilateral Official Development Aid (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected states**
- ✓ **Encourage EU states to spend at least 0.7% of their Gross National Income on ODA**
- ✓ **Invest in delivery models that work in the places with the greatest concentration of needs**
- ✓ **Support civil society organisations through scaled up 'people first' partnership models which help meet the challenges encountered in fragile and conflict settings**
- ✓ **Drive 'people first' reform within the wider humanitarian system**

ACTION AREA 2

HARNESS HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOR LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

NO. 2

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ **Establish a new jointly owned INTPA-ECHO-NEAR Resilience Fund**
- ✓ **Improve and scale up ECHO's Programmatic Partnership model**
- ✓ **Meet the agreed 30% increase in multi-year funding**
- ✓ **Maintain DG INTPA, ECHO and NEAR as separate entities**

ACTION AREA 3

SAVE LIVES IMPACTED BY THE CLIMATE AND FOOD SECURITY CRISES BY INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

NO. 3

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ **Set a target for adaptation financing to reach conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable countries**
- ✓ **Ensure that a minimum 5% of ECHO's budget is spent on anticipatory action**
- ✓ **Champion the use of Simplified Protocols as the default treatment for acute malnutrition**

ACTION AREA 4

DEPLOY INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO UNLOCK NEW SOURCES OF FINANCE

NO. 4

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ **Strengthen the EU's role in development finance and Member States' roles as shareholders to the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)**
- ✓ **Review the geographical allocation of concessional and non-concessional resources to free up funding to meet the needs of FCAS**
- ✓ **Advance innovations in sovereign debt restructuring**
- Increase commitments to the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA)**

ACTION AREA 5

PRIORITISE GENDER EQUALITY IN CRISIS RESPONSE AND SHIFT POWER AND RESOURCES TO WOMEN-LED ORGANISATIONS

NO. 5

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ **Include local women-led organisations (WLOs) in programme design and decision making**
- ✓ **Ring-fence dedicated funding for a Local Feminist Fund for WLOs**
- ✓ **Reform the funding architecture and partnership model to make funding accessible to WLOs**
- ✓ **Leverage the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III to tackle the global rollback on women's rights**

ACTION AREA 6

PROTECT THE HUMANITARIAN AND CIVILIAN SPACE BY CONSISTENTLY CALLING OUT VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL) AND CHALLENGING IMPUNITY

NO. 6

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ **Put accountability for IHL violations at the heart of EU humanitarian diplomacy efforts**
- ✓ **Engage with states and non-state actors to protect and promote humanitarian access**
- ✓ **Invest in efforts to improve data collection on humanitarian access to support collective EU action**

- ✓ Support the France-Mexico declaration to suspend the use of the UN Security Council veto in the case of mass atrocities
- ✓ Provide national and international NGOs with financial support and training so they can negotiate access on their own terms

ACTION AREA 7

ENSURE A SAFE, ORDERLY AND HUMANE APPROACH TO ASYLUM AND MIGRATION

NO. 7

Checklist for transformative EU action

- ✓ Establish and operationalise the Union Resettlement Framework
- ✓ Put Europe's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion into practice
- ✓ Ensure close oversight of the implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum to ensure fundamental rights are upheld throughout
- ✓ Press for substantial, efficient relocation through the Pact's solidarity mechanism
- ✓ Monitor any new facilities created for the purpose of screening or border procedures
- ✓ Develop durable options for transition out of the Temporary Protection (TP) regime for people displaced from Ukraine



INTERNATIONAL
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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and rebuild.

Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 50 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

Ingenuity, fortitude and optimism remain at the heart of who we are. We deliver lasting impact by providing healthcare, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls.