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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency/General Secretariat of the Council  
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To: Delegations

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Subject: Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU  
Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA)  
Indicative Work Programme  
1 July - 31 December 2026

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Following the COHAFA Directors' meeting on 7 July 2026, delegations will find in annex the indicative work programme of the Irish Presidency for the COHAFA Working Party for the second semester of 2026.

 INDICATIVE WORK PROGRAMME

# **Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA)**

Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU

1 July – 31 December 2026





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## Introduction

### The Irish Presidency

The Irish Presidency will focus on the three interlocking pillars of competitiveness, values and security. The Presidency will work intensively on proposals within each pillar, as well as on priorities that span all three, including our ongoing support for Ukraine and our global engagement. Ireland will work to strengthen and stabilise the EU's relationships with neighbours and with partners around the world. Progressing agreement on a new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which equips the EU to address the challenges of the future, while also building on our current strengths, will be a central focus.

Our Presidency priorities in relation to the EU's external action will cover a range of issues across all three pillars, including an ambitious trade agenda, security in all its dimensions, and values as the bedrock on which our competitiveness and security is built. A core priority will be to strengthen the EU's role as a principled global actor, reaffirming support for multilateralism and the international legal order, including promoting international humanitarian law (IHL) human rights and gender equality. The Presidency will work to enhance the Union's unwavering support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's illegal war of aggression, maintain EU support for lasting peace and security in the Middle East, and pursue ongoing processes of EU enlargement.

### Context

Humanitarian needs remain alarmingly high, while donor funding to respond has significantly reduced, and long-established systems of international cooperation and action are under immense pressure. As a result of the proliferation and prolongation of conflict, the intensifying impacts of climate change and extreme-weather events, and the compounding effects of chronic extreme poverty and recurrent economic shocks, needs are rising faster than in decades. Drastically insufficient funding has resulted in challenging prioritisation exercises, with just 87 million people targeted for assistance in 2026 out of 239 million in need according to the 2026 Global Humanitarian Overview, the majority living in fragile and conflict-affected settings. IHL exists to limit the inhumanity of war, yet its protective power is increasingly disregarded, while the humanitarian principles are also under attack. In parallel, overall official development assistance (ODA) is falling, undermining engagement that contributes to building resilience and reducing humanitarian need.

Amidst these challenges, the recently published Joint Communication on Humanitarian Action reaffirms the EU's commitment to remain a principled, reliable and needs-based donor in the face of intense pressure confronting the global aid system. Across its three pillars, the Joint Communication outlines a robust EU vision for humanitarian engagement which reaches those most in need while adapting its way of working to maximise effectiveness and impact and supporting the necessary changes that will make the international humanitarian system more resilient. Furthermore, the Joint Communication provides an essential policy framework for the EU as it transitions to the next MFF. The Irish Presidency welcomes the Joint Communication and will build upon key elements and commitments contained therein over



the coming six months. A key focus for the Irish Presidency will be agreeing ambitious Council Conclusions in response to the Communication, which will be negotiated in COHAFA.

The Irish Presidency will focus on the role of the EU and its Member States as the world's largest humanitarian actor. Ireland will provide a platform for strategic discussions on the role of the EU in the future of humanitarian assistance at a time when the global context for humanitarian action and wider ODA is shifting radically. During the six months of the Presidency, negotiations on the new Global Europe Instrument will move forward, while major multilateral processes will continue to advance, including the Humanitarian Reset, the reform of the UN system through UN80, review of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), follow through on the 2025 Seville Commitment on Financing for Development and discussions on the future of the Grand Bargain. These are important opportunities for the EU and its Member States to lead and shape actions that will determine the future of ODA.

The Irish Presidency will also be the start of a new 18-month Presidency Trio with Lithuania and Greece. Trio priorities for COHAFA have been developed collaboratively and are aligned with the Irish Presidency priorities presented here.

### **Priorities Overview**

The Irish Presidency will steer focused and forward-looking discussions on principled and needs-based humanitarian action, reflecting the need for greater collaboration and coherence in the face of immense uncertainty and change. In line with Ireland's overall Presidency priorities, discussions in COHAFA will engage our global shared commitment on reaching the furthest behind first, while prioritising discussion on reducing humanitarian need in the longer term, and strengthening the Team Europe approach. This will include a focus on protection and humanitarian diplomacy, climate-smart humanitarian action, as well as food and nutrition security. These priorities will be framed against ongoing discussions on the future of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance and will ensure a particular focus on the most severe crises, whether neglected or more visible.

Humanitarian reform and reset bring opportunities to make urgent improvements in systems and synergies but also carry significant risks - for crisis-affected communities, and for multi-dimensional efforts to reduce humanitarian needs across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. These risks lie in the challenges of hyper-prioritisation, falling levels of ODA targeted to fragile and conflict affected contexts, and a growing gap between needs and resources. Ireland's priorities and work programme will recognise this and be underpinned by an acknowledgement of the immense and unique value that different partners and humanitarian actors contribute to the international humanitarian system - including the United Nations, international and national NGOs, other local and national actors, and the Red Cross Movement. The publication of the Joint Communication on Humanitarian Action brings opportunities to strengthen the approach of Team Europe, the world's largest provider of humanitarian funding. The Irish Presidency will dedicate space in COHAFA and support the exchange at the FAC-Development to advance coordination and coherence on humanitarian priorities, policies and funding.



## Priorities

### (a) Reducing Humanitarian Need

As conflicts become more protracted, and their impact more severe, populations are increasingly affected by the compounding impacts of violence and climate shocks and stresses. Climate change and conflict also hinder effective humanitarian responses, impact supply routes and increase vulnerability over time. The impact of chronic and sudden climate shocks on people's ability to withstand crises is increasingly severe, while levels of forced displacement have climbed to record levels. Reducing humanitarian need means immediate life-saving action is complemented with work to anticipate shocks, build resilience, prevent conflict and sustain peace, and address the root causes of crises and extreme fragility. The impact of the conflict in the Gulf on global food security and in particular Least Developed Countries (LDCs) will have an impact on humanitarian need in the coming months and years. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimate that 30 million people will be pushed into poverty as a result of higher fuel and fertilizer prices, while there is a high likelihood of severe 'El Niño' event in 2026-2027, causing floods and drought, with further consequences for crop production and food security globally.

The Joint Communication includes commitments to an integrated approach to fragility by staying engaged in fragile contexts, pursuing a multi-dimensional approach and strengthening Team Europe approaches and strategic partnerships. The Irish Presidency will seek to further this through a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, and renewed commitment to principled humanitarian action at the political level. Long-standing commitments to localise the humanitarian system have not yet delivered, in spite of the immense potential of locally-led action, and sustained political commitments to champion this agenda. Ireland will ensure an emphasis on local perspectives on reform and reset in COHAFA discussions, aimed at identifying concrete ways Team Europe can support national and local leadership in humanitarian coordination systems through more equitable partnerships and accountability to affected populations. This is critical if we are to meaningfully strengthen the impact and effectiveness of humanitarian action.

As the humanitarian system adapts to the new funding landscape, the Joint Communication presents an opportunity to advance a Team Europe Humanitarian Action that is more coherent and collaborative. Across a range of key areas, COHAFA discussions during Ireland's Presidency will explore concrete ways for Team Europe to ensure resources are most effectively deployed, and opportunities to deliver for crisis-affected communities are purposefully pursued. This will include showcasing the importance of high-quality partnerships, quality financing and good humanitarian donorship. Leveraging the ambition of the Joint Communication, the Irish Presidency will ensure a robust and ambitious Council response, identifying concrete actions to strengthen the foundations of a more integrated and impactful European humanitarian response. Discussion and dialogue with humanitarian responders will be central to identifying these actions.



## (b) Protection

The risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse intensifies during emergencies. The 2024 Council Conclusions on protection in humanitarian settings highlight the need to expand and reinforce responsive actions aimed at reducing the protection threats and needs in humanitarian contexts. Drastic funding cuts since then, compounded by backsliding on gender and inclusion gains, are hindering a response that truly supports the safety, dignity and rights of crisis-affected persons. In parallel, the failure to uphold IHL consistently and inclusively is driving a precipitous increase in protection needs. Widespread obstruction of humanitarian access in numerous conflicts around the world is matched by increasing harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, risking inter-generational trauma and long-lasting damage.

IHL remains an essential framework for mitigating the human cost of armed conflict. Protection is central to the EU's humanitarian action and is centrally reflected within the Joint Communication. Ireland shares the ambition of a "people-centred, locally led, protection-driven and inclusive humanitarian response". The Irish Presidency will prioritise discussions on protection and inclusive humanitarian action which accounts for different and intersecting vulnerabilities. In the face of falling funding, efforts to ensure humanitarian actors prioritise the most vulnerable and consider their particular needs are critical, in the context of the specific impact of conflict on women, girls, boys and men. This includes increasing resources to prevent and respond to the alarming rates and impact of sexual and gender-based violence. Ireland will prioritise the centrality of protection, in particular given the devastating and outsized impact that recent cuts in humanitarian funding has had upon protection services which remain critically – and disproportionately – under-funded. Women-Led Organisations are frequently the first and last responders in crises, and play a pivotal role in effective humanitarian action, particularly in preventing and responding to SGBV. Ireland will showcase how flexible, sustained investment in WLOs leads to more inclusive, effective, timely, sustainable and efficient humanitarian responses

## (c) Humanitarian Diplomacy

Effective humanitarian diplomacy can serve a wide range of humanitarian outcomes including supporting IHL compliance, defending humanitarian space and principles and ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. As conflicts exert an increasingly heavy toll on civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, there is a bigger role for diplomatic and political actors to play in addressing these challenges. As humanitarian diplomacy is increasingly reflected in the strategies, priorities and funding allocations of Member States, the newly published Joint Communication commits the EU to further leveraging its political and diplomatic instruments through more effective humanitarian diplomacy. The Irish Presidency welcomes this strong commitment to humanitarian diplomacy, as well as the useful guidance elaborated in the related Staff Working Document. Building on the Communication's call for a new strategic approach to this issue, the Irish Presidency will explore the possibility of an enhanced EU approach to Humanitarian Diplomacy, while safeguarding a principled approach to humanitarian action. In light of growing global levels of food and nutrition insecurity, and with conflict the main driver of hunger, the Irish Presidency will also explore the effective use of humanitarian diplomacy to enable better and more sustainable food and nutrition security outcomes.



Specific to the alarming levels of attacks on humanitarian personnel in crisis contexts, Ireland and the European Commission will co-host a major international conference on the Protection of Aid Workers to draw attention to the situation, platform the challenges and experiences of frontline responders, and examine progress made on commitments contained within the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel. The Irish Presidency will also ensure that Council discussions are focused on the challenges faced by frontline humanitarian responders, and the ways in which Team Europe can concretely support those impacted by extreme incidents.

#### (d) Climate-Smart Humanitarian Action

Climate change is an existential threat to humanity, driving increasingly severe variations in weather patterns, and a growing number of disasters and climate-related shocks. Extreme weather events such as storms, extreme heat, droughts and flooding are predicted to increase in the coming years, worsening existing vulnerabilities and risking hard won gains made in sustainable development especially in fragile settings. The climate crisis is also a health, nutrition and humanitarian crisis, having a disproportionate impact on lives of communities in the world's most climate-sensitive regions, compounding the effects of other drivers of humanitarian need, such as conflict. Crisis-affected communities in fragile contexts such as these are also vulnerable to falling levels of overall ODA.

There is now a significant body of evidence demonstrating that anticipatory action and disaster preparedness works, accompanied by a growing pool of best practice around climate-smart humanitarian action, maximising the use of scarce resources to target greater numbers of crisis-affected communities in a cost-efficient and effective manner. The Irish Presidency recognises the immense opportunities that lie in strengthening the use of climate-smart approaches in humanitarian action, including adaptation, early warning, disaster preparedness, anticipatory and early action, and innovative risk-based models that respond to climate-related hazards. There remains significant untapped potential for climate-smart humanitarian action to deliver for maximum impact, which can also contribute to building lasting resilience at community level and reducing humanitarian need in the medium/long term.

As the footprint of the global humanitarian system shrinks, and resources to sustain programming contract, the need to ensure limited funding goes as far as it can has never been greater. Pooled funds managed by a wide range of humanitarian partners are particularly important mechanisms to advance evidence-backed approaches to humanitarian action, including climate-smart responses and locally driven humanitarian action. The Irish Presidency will explore opportunities to advance coherent and coordinated humanitarian action that contributes to the Triple Nexus. The role of the private sector in advancing innovative solutions to humanitarian response will also be explored, including emerging technologies and digital approaches in humanitarian action. Relatedly, the Presidency may explore evolving workstreams around the greening of humanitarian aid and supply chain initiatives.



### (e) Food and Nutrition Security

The global food and nutrition security situation has deteriorated in recent years, with progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) – Zero Hunger, in retreat. While conflict is the main driver of acute food insecurity, this trend has been compounded by recurrent global supply chain and price shocks over the past 6 years, impacting the availability and price of food and fertiliser in humanitarian contexts around the world. The 2026 Global Report on Food Crisis puts the number of people experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity at 266 million in 47 countries, with an estimated 25.5 million acutely malnourished in 23 countries around the world. Most recently, the impact of the war in Iran, and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has begun to affect global agricultural commodity markets, while humanitarian and development financing to food sectors in food crisis contexts declined to levels last observed in 2016–2017. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that an additional 45 million people are at risk of hunger if the crisis continues, the majority in Africa and Asia. Having been confirmed twice in 2025, a risk of famine remains in areas of Gaza, Sudan and South Sudan into 2026.

In line with Ireland's overarching Presidency priorities, and in the context of broader discussions on sustainable food systems transformation in CODEV-PI and RELEX HQ (Global Gateway) working parties, the Irish Presidency will foster discussions on food and nutrition security in crisis contexts, building on the 2024 Council Conclusion on stepping up Team Europe's support to global food security and nutrition.

### Geographical Priorities

In line with Ireland's principled and needs based approach to humanitarian action, the Irish Presidency will ensure a focus on the most severe and underfunded crises. Aligned with Ireland's overall Presidency Programme, this will include a sustained focus on Africa, as well as the devastating humanitarian crises in Ukraine, Palestine and Sudan. We will also continue to highlight and advocate for neglected crises such as Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan and Myanmar and facilitate discussions on the impact of reduced humanitarian funding and hyper-prioritisation. The Presidency will ensure dedicated space for consideration of new and deteriorating crises as they develop, as well as critical needs in nexus/recovery situations where there is a need for increased coordination with development and peace actors, such as in Syria and Somalia.

### Working Methods and Coordination

The Irish Presidency will maintain the established practice of inviting humanitarian experts to brief COHAFA, as well as organising joint sessions with other working parties if needed. The Irish Presidency may invite representatives of third countries in order to enhance coordination and donor outreach to address the humanitarian funding gap.

The Irish Presidency will update and develop COHAFA common messages on specific issues and geographic crises when appropriate, and common approaches will be developed where relevant.



The Irish Presidency will convene a joint COHAFA/CODEV-PI session in Brussels and explore collaboration with other working parties as appropriate – e.g. COAFR.

COHAFA meetings will start in the afternoon on the first day and finish at lunchtime on the second day. Meetings may be accompanied by side events.

Given the unpredictable nature of crises and global events, the Irish Presidency may amend its programme as necessary.

### Calendar and Events

#### (a) COHAFA Indicative Meeting Schedule (subject to change)

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>July</b><br>7 - 8                  | <b>COHAFA Directors Meeting Brussels</b>   |
| <b>August</b>                         | <b>No meetings</b>   |
| <b>September</b><br>7<br>8<br>23 - 24 | <b>COHAFA/CODEV-PI Joint Session (Afternoon)</b><br><b>COHAFA Meeting (Morning)</b><br><b>COHAFA Informal Meeting (Dublin)</b> |
| <b>October</b><br>13 - 14             | <b>COHAFA Meeting Brussels</b>   |
| <b>November</b><br>18 - 19            | <b>COHAFA Meeting Brussels</b>   |
| <b>December</b><br>14 - 15            | <b>COHAFA Meeting Brussels</b>   |

#### (b) High level events

- **Meeting of EU Director-Generals for development cooperation** – 9-10 September, Dublin
- **FAC Development (Informal)** – 8-9 October, Dublin
- **Protection of Aid Workers Conference**, 15-16 October, Brussels
- **FAC Development (Formal)** – 1 December, Brussels



(c) Provisional Calendar of Humanitarian Events (July – December 2026)

- *September*
  - o 22-28: UNGA High Level Week, New York
- *October*
  - o 12-16: 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee, Geneva
- *November*
  - o 16-20: 2<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of the WFP Executive Board, Rome
  - o TBC – Senior Officials Meeting on the Sahel and Lake Chad
- *December*
  - o 7: High Level Conference on Humanity in War (Global Initiative on IHL), Amman
  - o 9-11: 117<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOM Council, Geneva
- Dates TBC – Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs) on Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria

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Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh 2026  
Irish Presidency of the Council of  
the European Union 2026

