Council of the European Union

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU humanitarian action in a shifting global order' - Council conclusions (9 November 2026)

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU humanitarian action in a shifting global order' as approved at the 4206th meeting of the Council on 9 November 2026.

ANNEX

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
ON THE JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL 'DEFENDING VALUES, DRIVING REFORM, DELIVERING IMPACT: THE EU HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN A SHIFTING GLOBAL ORDER'

1. The Council welcomes the new Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the EU's humanitarian action in a shifting global order[1], structured under three Pillars: 1) Protect, 2) Perform, and 3) Partner; and takes note of the accompanying Staff Working Documents[2]. The Council expresses concern at the growing number, duration and complexity of humanitarian crises in recent years resulting in hundreds of millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

2. The Council underlines the importance of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid[3] and of Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid[4]. At a time when the global humanitarian funding landscape remains under severe pressure, and humanitarian assistance is increasingly politicised, the Council welcomes the European Union's ambition to remain a reliable and predictable donor. The EU and its Member States, as the world's leading humanitarian donor, remain resolutely committed to defending International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and to providing needs-based, people-centred humanitarian assistance, underpinned by the fundamental principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence; and to save lives, protect crisis-affected persons and preserve human dignity in the most severe crises.

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1 9828/26
2 9828/26 ADD1, 9828/26 ADD 2, 9828/26 ADD 3
3 OJ C 25, 30.1.2008, p. 1.
4 OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, p. 1.

3. The Council highlights the pivotal role of local and national authorities, together with international and national non-governmental organisations and local humanitarian actors, in coordinating, delivering, and sustaining effective humanitarian assistance in their own contexts by leveraging local knowledge, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that aid reaches affected communities efficiently and equitably.

4. In addition, the Council highlights the essential coordinating and implementing role of the United Nations in responding to humanitarian crises[5] and highlights the Global Humanitarian Overview as a common reference for needs-based humanitarian decision-making by the EU and its Member States. The Council underscores the necessity for the timely and inclusive implementation and delivery of the Humanitarian Reset, and the UN80 and Grand Bargain reform processes, as the basis for a more effective, resilient and accountable humanitarian system.

5. On the Protect Pillar, the Council welcomes the intention to fully leverage the EU's humanitarian, political, economic, security and diplomatic instruments to help prevent, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, while preserving a principled approach. The Council endorses the strong focus on a Team Europe approach in boosting coordinated EU-led humanitarian diplomacy in support of multilateral humanitarian efforts. The Team Europe approach should draw on the respective strengths of the EU and its Member States and be implemented through increased coordination with EU Special Representatives, EU special envoys and heads of mission, and where appropriate through the appointment of humanitarian diplomacy focal points.

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6. The Council recalls the obligation to respect and ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances[6]. The Council stresses the importance of placing the promotion of IHL compliance at the heart of the EU's external action[7]. In this regard, the Council reaffirms that EU humanitarian diplomacy plays a critical role in protecting humanitarian space, including by promoting full, safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, and advocating for the protection of all civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel. Furthermore, the Council welcomes the work of the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to IHL[8].

7. The Council expresses grave concern at the alarming and systemic rise in, and increasing normalisation of, IHL violations and recalls the need to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action, in line with 2024 Council conclusions on protection in humanitarian settings[9]. The EU is alarmed by the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, including drones and autonomous weapons systems and the impact of such use on civilians and civilian objects. The Council reiterates that all parties to armed conflicts must take all necessary precautionary measures to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects during conflict; bear the primary obligation to meet the needs of the population under their control; and States and parties to armed conflicts must respect their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief. The Council also acknowledges the challenges posed by disinformation and information manipulation in undermining respect for IHL and in increasing the risks to humanitarian and medical personnel.

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6 14487/19, as established in common Art. 1 of the four Geneva Conventions

7 As expressed in the EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with IHL 04_hr_guidelines_humanitarian_en_0.pdf

8 https://www.icrc.org/en/global-initiative-international-humanitarian-law

9 9736/24

8. The EU remains strongly committed to the fight against impunity for the most serious international crimes and recalls that, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, all States have the obligation to investigate, and if appropriate, prosecute or extradite the suspects of grave breaches of IHL. The Council reiterates its unwavering support to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for its crucial role in the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole. The Council encourages international cooperation on the investigation and prosecution of international crimes and emphasises the importance of bringing justice to all victims.

9. The Council remains committed to improving the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and welcomes the enhanced efforts outlined in the Communication, including the permanent establishment of the Protect Aid Workers mechanism. The Council recalls that the EU and its Member States have supported the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel[7].

10. The Council stresses its commitment to use EU humanitarian assistance to better address the needs of persons in the most vulnerable situations, and those most at risk of discrimination, including multiple and intersecting forms. The Council recognises that children, including those with additional vulnerabilities, are disproportionately affected and face particularly severe protection risks during crises. The Council recalls the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict[10] as the EU's policy framework on protecting children affected by conflict. The Council also notes the specific vulnerabilities which persons with disabilities have, and the barriers they face in accessing humanitarian aid, underlining their meaningful participation in the entire humanitarian program cycle. The Council reaffirms that mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) need to be an integral component of preparedness, response and recovery activities, across sectors.

[10] EEAS-EU-Guidelines-CAAC.pdf

11. The Council expresses alarm at the rise in verified cases of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, with women and girls disproportionately impacted. The Council recalls that sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, may constitute either war crimes or crimes against humanity under international law. The Council reaffirms its commitment to support efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including through the work of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies[11].The Council encourages the Commission and EU Member States to actively work to promote gender equality, including support to women's rights organisations. The Council further encourages the Commission and Member States to meet the protection needs of all women, men, girls and boys by implementing flexible, adaptive, conflict and gender-responsive approaches in line with the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security[12] and the Council conclusions on Women, Peace and Security[13] and takes note of the Gender Action Plan III of the European Commission and the High Representative[14].

12. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences, and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to, their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.

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11 Call to Action - Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies | Join the Fight Against GBV in Crises

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13 14716/22 and 15086/18

14 13343/20

13. The Council strongly condemns the use of starvation as a method of warfare and reaffirms its commitment to addressing food insecurity and malnutrition. The Council stresses the need to deliver life-saving food assistance, together with access to clean drinking water, to support the functioning of local food systems and markets where feasible, thereby contributing to helping communities build resilience and better withstand future shocks.

14. The Council reiterates its commitment to mitigate to the maximum extent any potential unintended negative impacts of EU restrictive measures on principled humanitarian action. It underlines the importance of ensuring the consistent inclusion of humanitarian exemptions in EU restrictive measures regimes, and ensuring that an effective framework is in place for the use of such exemptions by humanitarian organisations. The Council will continue to consider the inclusion of serious IHL violations as grounds for listings in EU autonomous sanctions regimes.

15. The Council recognises the importance of complementarity of humanitarian actors to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. The Council underlines the critical role of international and national non-governmental organisations and local humanitarian actors as frontline responders and humanitarian partners, especially in hard-to-reach areas. In this regard, the Council recalls the Grand Bargain commitments, especially those on localisation and flexible financing. The Council highlights that local communities and national NGOs are some of the most effective actors to drive response and recovery efforts and should take the lead in decisions and processes that affect them. The Council supports the commitment to empower local communities and local actors and stresses that this must translate into Accountability to Affected People (AAP) frameworks. The Council endorses the Commission's new Localisation Roadmap, including delivering 25% of EU humanitarian funding by 2027 as directly as possible to local and national actors, including women-led and refugee-led organisations and organisations of persons with disabilities, and supporting efforts for more localised, area-based coordination structures including civil society organisations and local government.

16. The Council recognises the unique role of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as a key pillar of the global humanitarian system and encourages continued cooperation between the EU, the Movement and other humanitarian partners to strengthen a coordinated, effective and locally led humanitarian response.

17. Similarly, the Council acknowledges the importance of working with host governments where possible and with due regard to humanitarian principles, including in countries facing protracted displacement. The Council underlines that equal partnerships with adequate support are the basis for transitioning from parallel humanitarian systems to inclusive and sustainable access to national social services and opportunities for self-reliance and durable solutions. These are vital elements in improving access to basic social, economic and legal rights and ensuring effective aid.

18. On the Perform Pillar, the Council recognises humanitarian supply chains as strategic enablers of humanitarian action, especially where local markets or cash delivery have ceased to function. The Council welcomes the Humanitarian Leadership Group on Supply Chain (HLGSC) and other related initiatives that promote a supply chain model that is more collaborative, locally-led, gender-responsive and environmentally sustainable[15]. In a constrained funding environment, the Council stresses the need to reduce duplication and maximise cost-effectiveness and cooperation, from procurement to last-mile delivery. This requires more frequent use of joint procurement, pooled logistical resources, data sharing and interoperable systems, while making greater use of existing humanitarian hubs and logistics capacities.

[15] In line with the principles of the Humanitarian aid donors' declaration on climate and environment - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.

19. A new model should prioritise local procurement, preparedness and anticipatory action, ensuring actors have prepositioned stocks, long-term service agreements, and coordination protocols before crises strike. The Council invites the Commission and EU Member States to advance donor harmonisation on compliance requirements, as well as funding for specific supply chain reform initiatives. The Council also encourages the EU and its Member States to pursue joint operations where feasible.

20. The Council further recognises the importance of digitalisation, reliable and disaggregated data collection and sharing and interoperable systems across the humanitarian system to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of humanitarian action. The Council underlines that digital solutions should be developed and deployed in a responsible, inclusive and human-centred manner, with due regard to data protection and responsible data governance.

21. The Council welcomes the proposal to scale-up transformative modalities, including by increasing the share of multi-year, softly earmarked and unearmarked funding and further simplifying grant management, and invites EU Member States to prioritise quality funding. The Council particularly welcomes proposals to increase humanitarian financing through the full range of pooled funds, while recognising the importance of core funding, and endorses the promotion of a Team Europe approach. The Council emphasises that scaling-up pooled funds should be accompanied by proportionate governance, transparency and accountability mechanisms and increased efforts to share risks more equitably, ensuring that funding effectively reaches the best placed actors, including those operating in hard-to-reach areas. The Council reconfirms that multi-purpose cash assistance can improve a range of humanitarian outcomes while supporting local economies and strengthening resilience, and can contribute to a more effective, cost-efficient and people-centred humanitarian response. Cash-based assistance should be the preferred response modality when possible and relevant. The Council encourages the Commission and EU Member States to harmonise donor requirements and procedures, particularly with regard to due diligence, compliance, audit and reporting, and to strengthen information-sharing, with a view to reducing duplication.

22. On the Partner Pillar, recalling the Council conclusions on strengthening resilience in partner countries through EU external action[16], and in line with the Council conclusions on a coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes[17], the Council welcomes the newly elaborated vision for an EU integrated approach to fragility. The Council emphasises the importance of integrated, context-specific, human-rights based, conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches that address fragility, strengthen resilience and support sustainable peace and development. The integrated approach to fragility must incorporate strengthened, systematic engagement with civil society, including women-led and women's rights organisations, youth and organisations of persons with disabilities, while also maintaining, to the greatest extent possible, dialogue with national, regional and local authorities. The Council further reiterates the importance of enhancing social protection systems and ensuring equitable access to basic services as key enablers of resilience, social cohesion and long-term stability.

23. The Council highlights the need to prioritise and strengthen coordination within the Commission and partner with relevant stakeholders, such as the European Investment Bank, the World Bank and other international financial institutions, where appropriate. The Council highlights Team Europe as a valuable platform for political coordination, shared analysis, collective positioning and joint implementation among EU actors, particularly in fragile contexts.

24. Noting that effective humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus implementation requires multilateral reform and an empowered UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator system, the Council reaffirms that the EU stands ready to engage with partners in driving forward UN reform, towards a more effective, cost-efficient and responsive UN system, capable of delivering effectively across the three pillars of the HDP nexus through coherent approaches tailored to local contexts.

16 11777/25
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25. The Council underlines the importance of remaining engaged in highly and extremely fragile contexts, especially in situations affected by protracted or under-addressed crises and in politically complex settings, including areas controlled by non-state armed groups, through flexible, adaptive and conflict-sensitive approaches guided by the principle of "do no harm".

26. Recalling the Council conclusions on a coherent approach to fragility[18] and the Council conclusions on Global Gateway[19], the Council reiterates the potential in fragile settings of Global Gateway, the EU's worldwide investment strategy, to mobilise public and private resources to bridge the global investment gap across the digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research sectors. It should appropriately complement the other dedicated approaches and tools for fragile settings, through a comprehensive 360-degree approach, combining transformative infrastructure with enabling environment reforms; reflecting the importance of fostering mutually beneficial partnerships that contribute both to the sustainable development and resilience of partner countries, including in fragile contexts and least developed countries, and to the strategic interests of the Union.

27. The Council reiterates that climate change and environmental degradation are growing drivers of humanitarian need, causing displacement, food insecurity, malnutrition, water scarcity, weakened infrastructure and resilience, and the collapse of livelihoods. The Council reaffirms the EU's commitment to supporting more intentional, forward-looking, risk-informed, and climate-smart humanitarian action and calls for the implementation of the Humanitarian Aid Donors' Declaration on Climate and the Environment. It underscores the importance of approaches that support vulnerable communities to take anticipatory action to adapt to climate and environmental shocks in the short- to medium-term and targeted initiatives that lay the foundations for longer-term resilience.

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19 10349/26

28. Recalling the Council conclusions on Disaster Risk Reduction in EU external action[20], and the outcome document of the Grand Bargain caucus on Scaling Up Anticipatory Action, the Council welcomes the shift from reactive crisis response to more proactive, risk-informed early and anticipatory action, and calls for firm commitment to scaled-up, dedicated, sustainable EU support, including to anticipatory action frameworks. The Council recognises the potential of innovative risk financing as one such method, underscoring the need for coordinated local and regional Disaster Risk Management frameworks and strengthened government ownership, through humanitarian and civil protection cooperation. The Council encourages the Commission and EU Member States to promote greater harmonisation of funding approaches and frameworks for anticipatory action, building on existing coordination mechanisms.

29. The Council reaffirms the importance of ensuring that EU Official Development Assistance (ODA) is adequately and transparently directed towards fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and of safeguarding progress towards the EU's collective ODA target for Least Developed Countries. The Council also recalls the Council conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap[21] and the commitment to provide at least 0.7% of collective GNI as ODA by 2030, and ensuring that an appropriate share, for example 10% of ODA is devoted to humanitarian action, on the basis of existing humanitarian need.

30. The Council recognises the importance of engaging with a range of actors in humanitarian settings to address humanitarian needs more comprehensively, leverage different approaches, and to bridge the humanitarian funding gap. In this regard, the Council strongly welcomes the ambition to mobilise additional resources to complement the ODA of the EU and its Member States and to work more closely in partnership with the private sector, philanthropic organisations and financial institutions in a responsible, accountable and transparent manner and in line with the humanitarian principles.

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31. The Council calls on the Commission and the High Representative to:

– Present a concrete roadmap for the implementation of the Joint Communication to the Council by November 2026, including on the key initiatives, commitments, and efforts to promote Team Europe coordination, and report on the implementation of the Joint Communication on an annual basis; this should include, among others, a focus on developing a strategic and coherent approach to humanitarian diplomacy, reporting progress towards the objective to channel at least two-third of humanitarian funding through transformative modalities, and in advancing the recommendations of the Humanitarian Leadership Group on Supply Chain and promoting ongoing reforms so the humanitarian supply chain effectively meets humanitarian needs;

– Report regularly to the Council on messaging in order to systematically integrate humanitarian diplomacy priorities, including IHL compliance and accountability, protection of all civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel and humanitarian access into the EU's bilateral, political, security and economic dialogue with third countries;

– Reinforce coordination across all strands of the Joint Communication among EU institutions and institutional actors, the EU Member States and other relevant humanitarian partners, including through the fragility frameworks in extremely fragile contexts; promote Team Europe efforts across all different dimensions, including policy coordination, joint messaging, and effective planning and operational alignment;

– Operationalise the EU Integrated Approach to Fragility, including through strengthened HDP nexus approaches, and reporting to the Council on progress achieved when relevant;

– Fully leverage the HDP nexus, including in contexts in transition and those not covered through hyper prioritised humanitarian response plans, to address the underlying drivers of fragility and protracted and multi-dimensional crises and to promote peacebuilding and peace mediation processes, while safeguarding principled humanitarian response;

– Use all the tools at their disposal, including development cooperation, diplomatic engagement, peacebuilding, mediation, security sector engagement and CSDP Missions and Operations, in close coordination with EU Member States to address the root causes of fragility and strengthen their support to peacebuilding, mediation and conflict prevention.

32. The Council calls on the Commission to:

– Report regularly to the Council on the humanitarian funding gap, funding shortfalls for the most underfunded or severe crises, and access constraints;

– Continue to position Team Europe as a stronger supporter of the humanitarian system through the Humanitarian Reset as part of the broader UN80 and reform agenda, in cooperation with relevant UN-agencies and NGO-partners focusing on increased effectiveness, localisation, shared solutions, predictable and flexible funding, simpler coordination arrangements, and better accountability to affected populations;

– Reduce structural barriers to direct EU funding for local actors including due diligence, eligibility, compliance costs, risk-sharing partnership quality and participation in policy dialogue, and integrate more ambitious targets and broader localisation efforts into future evaluations; consider further scaling-up funding as directly as possible to local and national actors beyond the 2027 benchmark and to inform actions after that date;

– Identify options to increase more flexible and predictable humanitarian financing, including via pooled funds and enter into new partnerships with the private sector, philanthropic foundations and financial institutions to better leverage the activities of those partners in humanitarian settings;

– Elaborate on proposals for concrete Team Europe initiatives to amplify the collective humanitarian action of the EU and its Member States.