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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

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Subject: Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU  
Work Programme  
Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA)  
1 January – 30 June 2026

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Delegations will find in annex the work programme of the Cyprus Presidency for the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) from 1 January to 30 June 2026.

**CYPRUS PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU**

**WORK PROGRAMME**

**WORKING PARTY ON HUMANITARIAN AID AND FOOD AID (COHAFA)**

**1 JANUARY – 30 JUNE 2026**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1. The global humanitarian landscape continues to worsen in scale, complexity and duration. Many regions across the world face overlapping crises driven by armed conflict, climate-induced disasters, economic instability, food insecurity and forced displacement. According to the 2026 Global Humanitarian Overview, an estimated 239 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, with 135 million people targeted for humanitarian support in 2026. Humanitarian response plans and appeals require approximately USD 33 billion, of which USD 23 billion is prioritised for the most urgent needs. At the same time, the humanitarian funding gap has grown to record levels, surpassing USD 25 billion and marking a persistent mismatch between escalating needs and limited global resources. These dynamics underscore the urgent need for more principled, more effective and more efficient humanitarian action, as well as deeper international cooperation.
2. The European Union and its Member States collectively remain the largest humanitarian donor in the world, providing nearly 40% of the global humanitarian funding. The EU's contribution reflects not only financial engagement but a longstanding commitment to upholding humanitarian principles, supporting multilateral action and promoting international humanitarian law. In this context, the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union will work to reinforce the EU's leadership role while ensuring that humanitarian discussions within the Council remain timely, coordinated and reflective of the global environment.

3. Operating within the framework of the Trio Presidency of Poland, Denmark and Cyprus (January 2025 – June 2026), the Cyprus Presidency will ensure continuity of priorities while also strengthening the Council’s engagement on issues of strategic importance. Building upon the strong foundations laid by the Danish Presidency, Cyprus will carry forward the work on the Humanitarian Reset, recognising its value as a transformative and forward-looking process designed to strengthen the efficiency, inclusiveness and accountability of the international humanitarian system. The Presidency will seek to ensure that the EU’s collective stance on the Reset, as a transformative initiative to strengthen efficiency, localisation, accountability to affected populations, and multi-risk informed humanitarian action, is coherently represented and that Member States remain engaged in shaping its direction.
4. The Cyprus Presidency will prioritise a balanced approach between areas of thematic focus and regional considerations, reflecting both the EU’s strategic interests and the evolving needs of populations affected by crises. Particular emphasis will be placed on regions facing acute and multi-layered humanitarian pressures, including the Middle East, Africa, Ukraine and Small Island Developing States, while care will be taken to ensure that attention is also given to forgotten and protracted crises that often receive limited visibility.
5. The Presidency will also reinforce discussions on resilience, including climate resilience, food security, climate-related shocks, the effectiveness of humanitarian financing and the efficient use of limited resources, and will encourage an evidenced-based approach to multi-risk analysis, disaster preparedness and anticipatory action. These issues lie at the intersection of emergency response and the humanitarian development-peace (HDP) nexus, and their inclusion reflects a broader understanding that sustained progress requires addressing the root causes of fragility and strengthen resilience by enhancing the capacity of communities to withstand recurrent crises.

6. Against this background, the Cyprus Presidency will structure its humanitarian priorities under four main pillars:
- a) protection and access under international humanitarian law,
  - b) safeguarding humanitarian multilateralism,
  - c) anticipatory action and preparedness, and
  - d) geographical priorities.

## 2. **MAIN PRIORITIES**

### A. **PROTECTION AND ACCESS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

7. Upholding international humanitarian law (IHL) remains a central pillar of the EU's humanitarian engagement. Despite the clear and binding obligations under IHL, violations continue to occur in numerous conflict settings, including indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including children, and on aid workers, systematic gender-based violence, and the obstruction of humanitarian access to, and the destruction of essential infrastructure and related services, such as healthcare facilities, schools, water systems and energy installations. These violations not only exacerbate human suffering but undermine the very conditions needed for an effective humanitarian response.
8. The Cyprus Presidency will work to advance the EU's collective advocacy on the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and the protection of aid workers and critical infrastructure, reinforcing the need for parties to conflict to comply fully with IHL obligations.
9. The Presidency will support continued exchanges with humanitarian organisations on practical measures to strengthen civilian protection, including through operational guidance, training and the use of humanitarian diplomacy, bearing in mind that humanitarian diplomacy will also be part of the upcoming Commission Communication on humanitarian aid.

10. Ensuring humanitarian access remains one of the most pressing challenges in crises worldwide. Delays, bureaucratic and administrative impediments, insecurity and targeted interference continue to impede the delivery of life-saving assistance. The Cyprus Presidency will promote discussions on strategies to secure safe, unhindered and sustained access to affected populations, including the potential for coordinated EU engagement to address access constraints. Humanitarian diplomacy will feature prominently as an instrument for negotiating corridors, facilitating cross-line operations and protecting humanitarian personnel.
11. The Presidency will also highlight the importance of protecting humanitarian workers, as targeted attacks on aid personnel have reached some of the highest levels globally in decades. Strengthening operational security, supporting risk-mitigation measures and promoting accountability for attacks on humanitarian staff will be key elements of the Presidency's approach. The Cyprus Presidency will support the further operationalisation of the pillars of DG ECHO's Protect Aid Workers programme.
12. As access challenges persist and needs grow, the Presidency will underline the importance of flexible and efficient humanitarian financing, maintaining a model that is capable of responding to the scale and complexity of today's crises by means of modern supply chains and by ensuring that limited resources are directed where they are most needed, to achieve the greatest impact. Flexible funding modalities enable partners to adapt rapidly to evolving conditions, maintain continuity of operations and strengthen overall response effectiveness, including by investing in preparedness and anticipatory systems, which improve access outcomes and reduce operational risks.

## **B. SAFEGUARDING HUMANITARIAN MULTILATERALISM**

13. A strong, principled and rules-based multilateral humanitarian system remains essential for addressing global humanitarian challenges. The United Nations and its associated agencies, along with the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and national and international non-governmental organisations, continue to serve as the cornerstone of humanitarian action, while the EU and its Member States play a leading role both politically and financially. The Cyprus Presidency will work to safeguard this system and to reinforce the EU's contribution to collective multilateral efforts.
14. The Humanitarian Reset, alongside the overall reform dynamics of the UN80 initiative, offers a critical opportunity to shape the future of humanitarian action, and the Cyprus Presidency will ensure that the Reset remains a visible and substantive part of the Council's agenda. The Presidency will support reflection on how the EU can best contribute to ongoing reforms that aim to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and inclusiveness of the humanitarian system. The Presidency will follow up on the implementation of the common messages on the Reset developed under the Danish Presidency.
15. Within this framework of the UN80 initiative and the Humanitarian Reset, the Cyprus Presidency will contribute to the implementation of the conclusions of the High-Level Conference on the Humanitarian Supply Chain on 10 December 2025.
16. Ensuring that EU positions remain firmly anchored in humanitarian principles and needs-based approaches, and that they are coherent, coordinated and effectively communicated in multilateral fora, will remain a key focus. The Cyprus Presidency will promote stronger coordination between Member States, the European Commission and humanitarian partners, as well as under the Team Europe approach, recognising that coherent engagement enhances the EU's influence and leadership within the global humanitarian system. The Presidency will encourage exchanges on how Team Europe can support principled humanitarian action, advance protection needs and strengthen resilience, including climate resilience, in fragile contexts through coordinated humanitarian, development and peace responses thus the systematic operationalisation of nexus-related interventions, with strong support for localisation and locally led action.

17. In line with the Council conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap (2023), the Presidency will encourage Member States to continue their efforts to close the humanitarian funding gap (commitment to provide at least 0.7% of collective gross national income as official development assistance (ODA) by 2030, with an indicative 10% of Member States' ODA devoted to humanitarian action), and support discussions on innovative and effective humanitarian financing, including multi-year funding, and pre-arranged financing instruments which will allow the EU and its partners to respond more efficiently to growing humanitarian needs and anticipate predictable shocks to reduce their impact. Given the persistent funding gap and compounding global crises, the effective prioritisation and strategic allocation of limited resources will remain central themes in COHAFA's work.
18. The Presidency would welcome updates on the discussions within the Ad hoc Working Party on the Multiannual Financial Framework (AHWP MFF) – Global Europe Instrument on external financial instruments under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), ensuring that instruments related to humanitarian action under the Global Europe pillar remain fit for purpose in addressing current global challenges and continue to support the EU's strategic humanitarian priorities.

**C. ANTICIPATORY ACTION AND PREPAREDNESS**

19. The increasing frequency and intensity of climate-related shocks, combined with protracted conflicts and economic instability, have underscored the need for a humanitarian system that is not only reactive but also capable of anticipating and mitigating crises before they escalate, through multisector and multi-risk analysis, strengthened local early-warning systems, and alignment with national preparedness capacities.
20. Anticipatory action and disaster preparedness offer a critical tool in this regard, enabling humanitarian actors to respond earlier, more efficiently, and often at a significantly lower cost than traditional emergency interventions. The Cyprus Presidency will place strong emphasis on this issue, recognising its relevance both for immediate lifesaving interventions and for promoting resilience within fragile settings, in line with the HDP nexus where appropriate.

21. In recent years, preparedness and anticipatory action have proven effective in reducing losses associated with drought, floods, epidemics and climate-induced displacement. Early-warning models, pre-agreed triggers and pre-arranged financing have made it possible to act ahead of predictable shocks, reducing humanitarian needs and supporting more dignified coping strategies. Nevertheless, anticipatory approaches remain underutilised and are often limited to pilot countries or specific hazards.
22. The Presidency will therefore promote discussions on how the EU can further scale up anticipatory action, support the development of risk-informed programming, and strengthen coordination between key partners such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and International NGOs, ensuring they work in a coordinated manner with national and local authorities wherever feasible, use common models and triggers, and develop joint anticipatory action frameworks, while strengthening local capacity for sustained preparedness. Similarly, attention will be given to reinforcing coordination on stockpiling approaches and to exploring options for joint procurement and shared warehousing around the globe.
23. The Cyprus Presidency will also encourage exchanges on innovative humanitarian financing tools that facilitate earlier action, including forecast-based and pre-arranged financing, crisis modifiers and multi-hazard contingency planning. The efficiency gains of acting early – particularly in food security, WASH, shelter, nutrition and health – will be highlighted as a way to ensure the effective use of limited humanitarian resources.
24. Greater coherence between humanitarian response and resilience-building activities under the HDP nexus will be promoted where relevant, given that strengthening national and local capacities contributes significantly to reducing risk and improving community preparedness, and that this in turn contributes to protecting development gains.

25. Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are among the most vulnerable to extreme weather events and rising sea levels, will be a particular focus under this priority. The Presidency will promote exchanges on how to better support SIDS through tailored preparedness and disaster risk reduction mechanisms, including alignment with regional early-warning systems and investment in local actors' preparedness capacity, as set out in the EU's 2021 disaster preparedness guidance note. Attention will also be given to regions in protracted crisis – such as parts of sub-Saharan Africa – where slow-onset shocks like drought increasingly intersect with conflict and displacement.
26. The Presidency will seek to ensure that anticipatory action remains closely tied to principled humanitarian action, supporting rather than replacing response efforts. By promoting evidence-based approaches, multi-risk-informed planning and predictive analytics, the Cyprus Presidency aims to enhance the EU's collective ability to mitigate humanitarian impacts before they fully manifest, while ensuring that such tools respect humanitarian principles and maintain the focus on the most vulnerable.

#### **D. GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITIES**

27. The Cyprus Presidency will adopt a needs-based and principled approach to geographical priorities, focusing on regions facing acute, complex and often overlapping humanitarian crises. The Presidency will give particular attention to the Middle East, Ukraine, Africa, and SIDS, recognising both their strategic relevance and the scale of the humanitarian need. The Presidency also acknowledges the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean as a region of significant humanitarian concern, owing to its proximity to major crises and its role as a transit and host area for displaced populations.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

28. The situation in the Middle East remains one of the EU's most urgent humanitarian priorities. The ongoing crisis in Gaza has caused unprecedented levels of civilian suffering, severe food insecurity and the near-total collapse of essential services, particularly access to water, healthcare and shelter. Ensuring full, safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access will continue to be a central concern, alongside supporting efforts to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian operations in an extremely challenging environment.
29. The Cyprus Presidency will continue to promote coordinated EU engagement in line with relevant European Council conclusions and will support exchanges with UN agencies and humanitarian partners on how best to address both immediate needs and the broader protection environment.
30. The Presidency will also continue to monitor the humanitarian situation in the wider region, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon, where deteriorating socio-economic conditions and political fragility continue to affect vulnerable populations. Given Cyprus's geographic proximity to the region, the Presidency remains deeply aware of the cross-regional implications of instability in the Middle East, including displacement, food insecurity and the strain placed on national systems.

## **UKRAINE**

31. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continues to generate massive humanitarian needs, with millions of people displaced, widespread damage to infrastructure, and persistent threats to civilian safety. The Cyprus Presidency will keep Ukraine regularly on COHAFA agenda, supporting the EU's ongoing engagement in providing life-saving assistance, protection services, winterisation support and mine-action measures. Particular attention will be given to addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

32. The Presidency will support exchanges on how humanitarian assistance can be effectively coordinated with resilience and recovery efforts under the HDP nexus, in line with the EU's broader strategic engagement. Given the scale of the crisis and the continued attacks on energy, water and health infrastructure, the Presidency will underline the importance of flexible humanitarian funding to ensure rapid adaptation to evolving conditions.

## **AFRICA**

33. The continent of Africa continues to host some of the world's most complex and underfunded crises, notably in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions. Conflict, climate shocks, displacement and food insecurity intersect across multiple regions, leaving millions in need of humanitarian assistance. The Cyprus Presidency will emphasise the importance of sustaining EU engagement in Africa, supporting emergency response, area-based approaches and, where possible, resilience and peace-building interventions under the HDP nexus.
34. Particular attention will be given to regions facing severe food insecurity, where climate-related droughts, flooding and conflict have contributed to malnutrition and population displacement. The Presidency will promote exchanges on how to address chronic underfunding in African crises and how to ensure that forgotten and protracted crises receive adequate attention within COHAFA.
35. In this context, the Cyprus Presidency will place particular emphasis on reinforcing the Team Europe approach, especially in light of the shrinking global humanitarian donor base and the growing pressure on available resources. Strengthened coordination among EU Member States, the EU and humanitarian partners will be essential in order to maximise impact, avoid duplication and ensure coherent prioritisation in response to escalating needs. The Presidency will promote exchanges on how Team Europe can enhance collective visibility, leverage comparative advantages and deliver more effective, more principled humanitarian assistance in highly fragile contexts. Such coordination will be particularly relevant in addressing large-scale food insecurity, displacement and climate-related shocks, where pooled efforts and shared analysis are becoming increasingly necessary to ensure efficient and timely responses under conditions of constrained funding.

## **SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)**

36. The Cyprus Presidency will maintain a strong focus on SIDS, recognising their acute vulnerability to climate-induced shocks, environmental degradation and economic fragility. Although often overlooked in global humanitarian discussions, SIDS face recurrent disasters that strain national systems and create cyclical humanitarian needs. Taking a nexus approach, the Presidency will explore ways to strengthen tailored humanitarian responses for SIDS, including disaster preparedness, with solid early-warning dissemination and community systems, anticipatory action and coordinated support for small-scale but high-impact emergencies. It will seek synergies with the Fund for responding to loss and damage in an effort to ensure the coherence and complementarity of funding.

## **EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

37. The Eastern Mediterranean remains an area of strategic importance for the EU's humanitarian engagement. As the closest EU region to several major crises, it continues to face pressure from displacement, irregular migration and regional instability. The Cyprus Presidency will ensure that humanitarian considerations related to the Eastern Mediterranean are reflected in COHAFA discussions, particularly regarding equitable access to basic services including primary healthcare, and protection and support for vulnerable populations in transit or in host communities.

### **3. WORKING METHODS AND COORDINATION**

- The Cyprus Presidency will organise COHAFA meetings primarily in a one-day format, with meetings starting in the morning and concluding in the afternoon.
- The Cyprus Presidency will ensure continuity and effectiveness in COHAFA's work by building on established working methods while remaining responsive to evolving humanitarian needs.

- In this context, the Presidency will continue the practice of inviting humanitarian experts, UN agencies, the ICRC, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders to provide briefings. Particular attention will be given to preserving an appropriate balance between presentations and interactive discussions.
- The Presidency will maintain a balanced programme combining thematic and geographical discussions.
- The Cyprus Presidency will consider organising joint meetings with other Council working parties.
- Given the evolving and unpredictable nature of humanitarian crises, the Cyprus Presidency may adjust the programme as necessary.

#### 4. **COHAFA MEETINGS CALENDAR**

21 January	COHAFA meeting, Brussels
18 February	COHAFA meeting, Brussels
18 March	COHAFA directors' level meeting, Brussels
15 April	Informal COHAFA VTC (tbc)
26-28 April	Joint COHAFA/CODEV-PI meeting, Cyprus
May	COHAFA (date tbc)
Early June	possible COHAFA/CODEV-PI/RELEX HQ field trip
17 June	COHAFA meeting, Brussels

## 5. **OTHER MEETINGS**

28 January	Presentation of the Presidency programme in the European Parliament Committee on Development (DEVE), Brussels
22-24 March	Informal EU Development DGs meeting, Nicosia
19 May	Foreign Affairs Council / Development, Brussels

## 6. **PROVISIONAL CALENDAR OF MAIN HUMANITARIAN EVENTS (JANUARY-JUNE 2026)**

29 January	Humanitarian Senior Officials' meeting on Ukraine, Brussels
24-27 February	WFP Executive Board First regular session, Rome
2-12 March	Humanitarian Network Partnership Week, Geneva
26 March	Humanitarian Senior Officials' meeting on Sudan, Brussels
17-19 June	ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, New York
22-26 June	WFP Executive Board Annual session, Rome

## 7. **PENDING MEETINGS**

Quarter 1	Yemen Donor Coordination meeting
Quarter 1	Protect Aid Workers – Community of Practice roundtable
Quarter 2	Humanitarian Senior Officials' meeting on Afghanistan
First half 2026	Ministerial Conference on Sudan

## 8. **CYPRUS PRESIDENCY COHAFA TEAM**

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COHAFA Chair	COHAFA Deputy Chair	Cyprus COHAFA Delegate
Mersilia Anastasiadou	Nicoleta Christoforou	Mary-Lynell Ioannidou