

Brussels, 29 May 2026
(OR. en)

9828/26
ADD 1

COHAFA 45
DEVGEN 89
CONUN 95
COJUR 29
FIN 762
PROCIV 112
CSDP/PSDC 343
SUSTDEV 42
RELEX 732

COVER NOTE

From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director

date of receipt: 28 May 2026

To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

No. Cion doc.: SWD(2026) 312 final

Subject: JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT - A strategic approach to EU humanitarian diplomacy accompanying the document JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL - Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU's humanitarian action in a shifting global order

Delegations will find attached document SWD(2026) 312 final.

Encl.: SWD(2026) 312 final



HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
SECURITY POLICY

Brussels, 27.5.2026
SWD(2026) 312 final

JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

a strategic approach to EU humanitarian diplomacy

Accompanying the document

**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE
COUNCIL**

**Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU's humanitarian action in a
shifting global order**

{JOIN(2026) 25 final} - {SWD(2026) 313 final} - {SWD(2026) 314 final}

Introduction: A (humanitarian) world in disarray: the case for diplomatic tools to address humanitarian challenges

International law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, provides a comprehensive framework for the protection of civilians in conflicts and crises. Yet humanitarian organisations are witnessing alarming developments ⁽¹⁾. Around 70% of humanitarian needs now arise out of armed conflicts which have become more intense, harder to solve and more protracted.

The high number of conflicts is coupled with severe violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. These include attacks on civilians, the destruction of homes, hospitals, schools, water systems, energy infrastructure and the natural environment, forced disappearances, the deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war, grave violations of children's rights, and sexual and gender-based violence. Widespread dehumanising narratives as well as information manipulation, including disinformation, further erode respect for international humanitarian law and the perception of humanitarian action. Indiscriminate bombings of civilians further undermine trust in countries' capacity and willingness to protect human rights and dignity. The use of drones and AI-enabled targeting systems is also increasingly reshaping modern warfare, with severe consequences for civilian populations. Moreover, there is a disproportionate and intersecting impact of conflicts on women, children, and other persons in situations of vulnerability who often face compounded barriers to protection, assistance and participation.

Accessing people in need of humanitarian aid is a key challenge across conflicts, particularly due to political considerations or conflict dynamics. Such limitations include restrictions on movement, bureaucratic and administrative impediments, and the instrumentalisation of aid for strategic, military or political purposes. Beyond the targeting of civilians that are the beneficiaries of aid, there is a disturbing practice of deliberate targeting of aid workers, who are essential for delivering principled aid. The surge in attacks against humanitarian and medical staff, with over 380 humanitarian workers reportedly killed in 2024 ⁽²⁾, poignantly illustrates an environment where international humanitarian law and the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian action are increasingly being undermined.

As part of its diplomatic engagement, and in keeping with its foundational Treaties, the EU has long been committed to promoting the principles of the United Nations Charter, ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, and safeguarding principled humanitarian action. Humanitarian diplomacy is thus an essential component of the EU's toolbox. In a global context of protracted conflicts and increasingly challenged multilateral institutions, obstacles to humanitarian action also require political solutions. Diplomatic engagement can prevent conflict escalation, ensure or restore humanitarian access, support dialogue, facilitate ceasefires and find political solutions to wars or other outbursts of violence. It also promotes awareness of and respect for international humanitarian law, reducing the harm to civilian populations and advocating for accountability for violations. In this context, the EU's humanitarian diplomacy is defined as follows:

EU humanitarian diplomacy is the use of humanitarian, political, economic, security or

¹ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *ICRC president: Humanity is failing under our collective watch*, statement 19.06.2025, <https://www.icrc.org/en/statement/icrc-president-humanity-failing-under-our-collective-watch>, and ICRC, *Annual Report 2024 Overview*, June 2025, <https://library.icrc.org/library/docs/DOC/icrc-annual-report-2024-overview.pdf>.

² Humanitarian Outcomes, *Aid Worker Security Report – Figures at a Glance 2025*, August 2025, <https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/publications/figures-glance-2025>.

diplomatic instruments by official EU representatives to engage decision-makers, parties to armed conflicts and their sponsors or influencers, help prevent, mitigate and resolve humanitarian crises, to improve compliance with international humanitarian law (including by granting humanitarian actors rapid and unimpeded access) and support greater alignment with international humanitarian principles and objectives, as defined by the humanitarian community and in the interest of people in need.

Humanitarian diplomacy is at the heart of the EU's external action and foreign policy. It goes hand in hand with EU diplomatic engagement to support dialogue and contribute to mediation and peacebuilding efforts.

In line with the Joint Communication *'Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU humanitarian action in a shifting global order'*⁽³⁾, this joint Staff Working Document further outlines the EU's new strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy. It also sets out how the EU will adapt its diplomatic engagement to evolving conflict dynamics, use the full range of tools and channels at its disposal, strengthen coordination and increase impact by joining forces, including through a Team Europe approach. The joint Staff Working Document aims to develop further actions that address civilian harm and make humanitarian operations worldwide more effective. Whilst the focus is on humanitarian needs arising from human-made disasters, humanitarian diplomacy may address all types of crises, including those caused by natural hazards.

1. An EU humanitarian diplomacy grounded in principles and values

As the Joint Communication outlines, the EU's humanitarian diplomacy is guided by the key EU values and principles of diplomatic engagement. These include respect for human dignity, the provision of life-saving assistance, protection of and accountability for all individuals affected by crises, and a commitment to upholding a rules-based multilateral order.

1.1. Key principles

- **Humanitarian diplomacy is an integral part of the EU's external action and foreign policy.** Humanitarian concerns must be systematically reflected in EU diplomatic negotiations, international agreements, regional, multilateral and bilateral dialogues, and during dialogues on human rights. A comprehensive approach ensures alignment between humanitarian objectives and broader diplomatic interventions. It also ensures consistent messaging and shared decision-making processes.
- **Adhering to international humanitarian principles and avoiding doing harm.** Humanitarian diplomacy is guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Maintaining a principled approach is essential for avoiding the instrumentalisation of aid and counteracting situations that compromise humanitarian efforts, also within the scope of the EU's external action.
- Humanitarian diplomatic engagement must be conflict-sensitive, gender-sensitive and situationally aware. It should be carefully calibrated to avoid unintended negative consequences, such as misplaced messaging that could undermine credibility or restrict access to affected populations.
- **Strengthening EU coordination and a Team Europe approach.** Humanitarian diplomacy works best and is most consistent when key stakeholders work in a concerted way, reinforcing each other's messages. To increase the impact of EU humanitarian diplomacy, cohesive internal coordination is essential. This involves leveraging the

³ JOIN (2026) 25

distinct mandates of EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) and relevant Special Envoys, Commission departments, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and EU Member States through a Team Europe approach. The process should systematically integrate real-time field-level insights, including those provided by EU Delegations and field offices of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), with EU Delegations at international organisation acting as coordination hubs for EU cooperation with the UN.

- **Meaningful involvement of local organisations and community voices.** The inclusion of voices and expertise from conflict- or disaster-affected populations is crucial for humanitarian diplomacy. This includes investing in relations with local leaders, civil society and influencers – including women and youth – incorporating community-driven negotiations into high-level diplomacy, when appropriate and in line with a ‘do-no-harm’ approach, and supporting the expertise of local partners and community-led protection and advocacy. Efforts should ensure the inclusive and safe participation of underrepresented groups, addressing barriers to their meaningful engagement.
- **Building on partnerships and effective alliances.** EU humanitarian diplomacy strategically leverages regional and bilateral partnerships, as well as the EU’s combined weight, to better address the global conflict situations and promote common humanitarian objectives. Joint engagement facilitates delivering the right message from the appropriate actor, with strategies tailored to each situation.
- **Ensuring a situation-specific and evidence-based response.** There is no one-size-fits-all for humanitarian diplomacy. The EU’s humanitarian diplomatic engagement is tailored to each context in order to effectively respond to evolving conflict or disaster dynamics and the challenges faced by affected populations and humanitarian actors. Depending on the situation and objectives, humanitarian diplomacy may be carried out publicly or discreetly, depending on circumstances. Visibility requires cautious risk management and should be weighed against the value of discreet diplomacy, as political statements in a humanitarian context can lead to the politicisation of aid, undermine the neutrality of humanitarian action, put operators and beneficiaries in jeopardy, fuel polarisation and thereby reduce humanitarian access.
- EU humanitarian diplomacy must be grounded in rigorous, evidence-based situational analysis, including an in-depth understanding of conflict dynamics, and ensure that the appropriate actors are engaged in delivering the correct messages. It is essential to maintain regular contact with key humanitarian organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their International Federation, United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), international non-governmental organisations, and local organisations. This ensures that EU humanitarian diplomacy remains aligned with operational realities and focused on the needs of conflict-affected populations.
- **Differentiated approach and inclusion.** This includes a commitment to equality, non-discrimination and accessibility, in line with the EU’s obligations under international human rights law. Humanitarian diplomacy needs to adopt an inclusive and intersectional approach, addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of conflict- or disaster-affected populations and recognising the compounded risks faced by women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, refugees, internally displaced people, LGBTIQ+ persons, and individuals from

marginalised communities.

1.2. Thematic priorities of EU humanitarian diplomacy

In line with EU values and priorities and as outlined in the Joint Communication, the EU's efforts should focus on the following **thematic priorities**:

- (1) **Promote compliance with United Nations Charter principles and particularly with international humanitarian law.** Respect for international law in general, and particularly with international humanitarian law, is critical for ensuring the protection of civilians affected by conflicts. This is also a long-standing EU commitment, as highlighted in the EU Guidelines on Promoting Compliance with IHL ⁽⁴⁾ and the EU's consolidated pledges at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent ⁽⁵⁾, and as evidenced by the EU's support for the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law ⁽⁶⁾. EU humanitarian diplomacy aims to prevent international humanitarian law violations, support compliance with international humanitarian law and respect for human rights law and promotes a strong accountability framework. This includes advocating for compliance with international humanitarian law throughout the EU's diplomatic engagements with state and non-state actors, and advocating for political, diplomatic and normative strategies to hold perpetrators accountable.
- (2) **Protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.** Civilians, especially the most vulnerable, are forced to endure the catastrophic consequences of armed conflict. More than 100 000 civilians were killed in armed conflicts in 2025 ⁽⁷⁾. Densely populated towns and cities have become chief battlegrounds. Civilians are regularly targeted, sometimes systematically and deliberately. Starvation and rape are increasingly used as weapons of war. Civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, water and energy infrastructure, is often destroyed, leaving millions without life-saving services, damaging the environment, and causing widespread displacement.

The EU humanitarian diplomacy strategy will continue to support the protection of civilians and their livelihoods during armed conflict, with a particular focus on those most at risk. In diplomatic engagements or mediation efforts with parties to a conflict or influential stakeholders in this field, EU institutions' departments should consistently advocate for the protection of civilians and access to essential humanitarian assistance. This requires an inclusive approach that takes into account the diversity of civilian populations and recognises that exposure to harm and specific needs are influenced by age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, migration status and other identity markers. Particular attention should be given to ensuring accessibility of services, infrastructure and

⁴ Updated European Union Guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL), Official Journal of the EU, C 303, 15.12.2009, pp. 12-17).

⁵ Pledges on (1) *Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) through its promotion, dissemination and implementation*; (2) *Ratification and Endorsement of IHL instruments*; (3) *Fighting impunity of serious violations of IHL and other core international crimes at the national and international level*, available at the website of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies/International Committee of the Red Cross, <https://rcrcconference.org/about/pledges/>.

⁶ ICRC, *Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law*, <https://www.icrc.org/en/global-initiative-international-humanitarian-law>.

⁷ Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, *War Watch – IHL in Focus Report, 1 July 2024 to 31 December 2025*, 2.02.2026, <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/WarWATCH-IHL-in-Focus-Report-2024-25.pdf>.

information, including for persons with disabilities and older persons, in line with universal design principles and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Commission services and the EEAS should also support efforts to clarify, strengthen and promote the legal and policy frameworks for the protection of civilians and to counter narratives that portray civilian harm as unavoidable or acceptable in modern warfare.

- **Protect children in armed conflict.** In times of conflict, children are invariably among the most vulnerable. They represent a disproportionate percentage of civilian casualties, both in terms of immediate deaths and serious injuries, and long-term impacts. Children with disabilities are particularly at risk of exclusion and barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and essential services, and require targeted attention. However, focusing on children's best interests, alongside those of other vulnerable groups (including their access to services and protection), can offer compelling arguments for initiating de-escalation and stabilisation. Even in deeply polarised conflicts, parties may find common ground on children's access to healthcare, nutrition, education and safety. This shared concern can be leveraged to create practical opportunities to step up mediation efforts, facilitate access negotiations, deliver ceasefire dividends or establish local protection arrangements that benefit wider civilian populations. It can also help de-escalate tension in specific contexts.

EU humanitarian diplomacy aims to better protect children by encouraging countries to endorse international instruments and commitments concerning the protection of conflict-affected children. Based on the EU guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict⁽⁸⁾, EU humanitarian diplomacy aims to prevent and end grave violations against children's rights by advocating for child-centric interpretations of international humanitarian law and child-sensitive frameworks for military and humanitarian operations. The Commission services and the EEAS continue to promote the right to education and quality learning in conflict zones and to ensure humanitarian access in the interests of serving children's needs.

- **Enable humanitarian access.** The fact that humanitarian access is being refused and politicised is a major concern. Some parties to conflicts refuse civilian access to life-saving assistance or refuse humanitarian actors' access to civilians in need as a bargaining chip to advance political and military agendas, thereby weaponising humanitarian aid and breaching the obligations of parties to a conflict under international humanitarian law. In line with the EU's pledge on Unblocking and facilitating humanitarian access⁽⁹⁾, EU humanitarian diplomacy aims to defend and expand the humanitarian space. This includes engaging with host governments at various levels, parties to conflicts (including non-state armed groups) or their external backers to preserve, enable or restore humanitarian access, prevent humanitarian action from being politicised and to ensure that humanitarian principles are respected. It also entails facilitating the removal of bureaucratic and administrative impediments, addressing security restrictions, countering narratives that undermine humanitarian presence, including disinformation, and advocating for the protection of humanitarian space, including through humanitarian exemptions and derogations in sanctions and

⁸ European External Action Service, *EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict*, 24.06.2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-guidelines-children-and-armed-conflict-2024_en.

⁹ See pledge on *Unblocking and facilitating humanitarian access*, available at the website of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies/International Committee of the Red Cross, <https://rcrcconference.org/about/pledges/>.

counter-terrorism measures.

- **Address conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.** Conflicts and crises make structural gender inequalities worse and intensify gender-based violence. Conflict-related sexual violence rose sharply in 2024 ⁽¹⁰⁾, increasing by 25% compared to the previous year. Sexual violence is categorically proscribed internationally and may constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, the crime of torture, or an element in slavery or even genocide. Accordingly, EU humanitarian diplomacy will prioritise the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in emergencies, as stated in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the 2026 EU Gender Equality Strategy ⁽¹¹⁾, and LGBTIQ+ Strategy ⁽¹²⁾.
- **Protect humanitarian staff and volunteer staff.** Violence against humanitarian staff has escalated dramatically: 2024 was the deadliest year ever recorded. From 2022 to 2024, the number of major attacks on humanitarian staff worldwide almost doubled from 444 to 816 ⁽¹³⁾. National and locally recruited humanitarian staff and volunteers are particularly vulnerable and deliberately targeted, including women and staff from marginalised communities, who may face additional risks of discrimination or targeted violence. The EU is a steadfast advocate for the safety and security of humanitarian staff. This is demonstrated through continued and strengthened EU leadership on the annual UN General Assembly resolution on the protection of humanitarian and UN staff, and through support for the Protect Aid Workers initiative. The EU's humanitarian diplomacy aims to ensure that the safety of humanitarian and medical staff, including accountability for attacks targeting them, remains a priority in diplomatic engagement and in negotiations with parties to a conflict, their sponsors and other decision-makers. The EU's humanitarian diplomacy should also build on evidence-based protection policies, supported by robust, disaggregated data collection on incidents, and such protection policies will be consistently raised in bilateral discussions and multilateral forums. The EU will continue to reinforce these commitments, for example through its association to the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel ⁽¹⁴⁾.
- **Link conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding.** Robust conflict analysis is central to effective humanitarian diplomacy, enabling more informed, timely, and impactful engagement. Peace mediation covers a wide range of activities, from mediating between leaders of parties to a conflict and facilitating community dialogues to supporting local ceasefire negotiations. The EEAS Peace Mediation Guidelines ⁽¹⁵⁾, updated and expanded in 2023, accompany the EU Concept on Peace Mediation and provide guidance on how to operationalise EU peace mediation, including in relation to the role and contributions of young peacebuilders. It is essential not to link humanitarian issues to political or security discussions, and even less to make such

¹⁰ United Nations, *Annual Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence*, 27.08. 2025, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/digital-library/reports/sg-reports/>.

¹¹ *Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030*, [COM/2026/113 final](#)

¹² *Union of Equality - LGBTIQ+ Strategy 2026-2030*, [COM/2025/725 final](#)

¹³ Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB), *Aid Worker Security Report – Figures at a Glance 2025*, August 2025, <https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/publications/figures-glance-2025>.

¹⁴ Minister for Foreign Affairs Australia, *Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel*, 22.09.2025, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/declaration-protection-humanitarian-personnel>.

¹⁵ European External Action Service, *Peace Mediation Guidelines*, 24.05.24, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eeas-peace-mediation-guidelines_en.

discussions conditional on their being resolved, but engaging in dialogue that includes both humanitarian and political objectives does not compromise core humanitarian principles. On the contrary, placing humanitarian priorities at the centre of peacebuilding efforts ensures that compliance with international humanitarian law, including humanitarian access, is not sidelined in favour of other priorities. Negotiations, outreach, and mediation processes can lead to increased humanitarian access or humanitarian pauses, and/or clarify arrangements for delivery, security guarantees, and monitoring. Conversely, humanitarian priorities can also serve as the starting point for confidence-building measures and engaging in dialogue with armed groups or national defence forces, and may pave the way for negotiations and mediation on ceasefire arrangements and more durable peace agreements.

2. The EU's existing instruments and commitments to humanitarian diplomacy

EU humanitarian diplomacy is a shared endeavour. EU actors engage with a broad range of interlocutors – including state and non-state actors, whether it be parties to a conflict, decision-makers or other actors of influence to promote the achievement of humanitarian objectives.

The EU uses a **wide range of measures** to support humanitarian outcomes. These include political and diplomatic engagement, operational activities, and working with independent media in the EU and in relevant regions.

- **Strategic communication and public advocacy**, including high-level media statements, social media posts or active participation in high-level events, are important ways of drawing more attention to humanitarian crises, mobilising support for humanitarian access and exerting pressure for international humanitarian law compliance. They can also generate public and normative accountability towards international humanitarian law. The EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights uses well balanced internal and external communication on international humanitarian law.

In 2025 the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commissioner for Crisis Management issued a large number of statements, often in immediate response to particular events, calling on parties to a conflict to respect international humanitarian law and condemning violations⁽¹⁶⁾. In August 2025, following yet another large-scale Russian attack in Ukraine, the High Representative strongly condemned Russia's ongoing assaults on civilians and civilian infrastructure and underlined the disregard for international law and grave international humanitarian law violations, calling for accountability.

- **Coordination in multilateral forums**. Coordination with partners (like-minded donors and other relevant parties) at multilateral forums, particularly in the UN system, contributes to reinforcing joint advocacy, passing coordinated public messages and showing political support for humanitarian resolutions. EU Delegations at international organisations, such as those in New York and Geneva, play a key role in coordinating common EU positions and advancing key priorities, including in relation to human rights and international humanitarian law.

¹⁶ Council of the European Union: General Secretariat of the Council, Working party on public international law (COJUR), *Report on the EU guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law – January 2024 - December 2024*, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2860/5554652>.

- **Diplomatic démarches.** EU diplomatic engagement on the ground, including at high level, also plays an important part in addressing humanitarian concerns with decision-makers and parties to a conflict, including armed groups or de facto administrative or governmental authorities. Field-level engagement and information sharing ensures that the EU's humanitarian diplomacy addresses the most relevant concerns and is supported by up-to-date conflict and political analyses.

In response to the escalating conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and dwindling resources, the EU Special Representative for the Great Lakes region and the European Commission launched a humanitarian diplomacy platform in May 2025. This platform brings together EU Member States, like-minded countries, stakeholders (including international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the UN) and EU Delegations, for evidence-based agenda-setting and impactful political messaging. The platform's recommendations have already informed EU efforts to secure humanitarian access and basic services delivery in non-government-controlled zones.

Commissioner Lahbib undertook a mission to the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda in February 2026, where she met with all parties to the conflict, advocated for the respect for international humanitarian law, and secured certain commitments from relevant authorities to facilitate humanitarian access. Ongoing monitoring and high-level engagement will help amplify messages and ensure accountability.

In July 2025, Gaza Humanitarian Aid Negotiations took place with the Israeli authorities, led by the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy represented by the EUSR for the Middle East Peace Process, to increase the level of humanitarian aid for Gaza as all border crossings were closed. At the time, the negotiations resulted in an understanding to increase aid delivery in six main areas, including humanitarian aid trucks' entry, the opening of all border crossing points, entry of fuel at scale, the security and safety of humanitarian workers, structural works on basic infrastructure and access for humanitarian workers.

At the end of 2025, due to the clashes and escalation of warfare between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the borders between the two countries were closed. Humanitarian cargo intended for Afghanistan was therefore stuck on the Pakistani side, with a backlog in Karachi port. Thanks to humanitarian diplomacy by the Commission and its partners, the Government of Pakistan created a humanitarian corridor for a limited period for the cargo to pass through.

- **Political and human rights dialogues and consultations.** The EU engages in regular structured diplomatic dialogues with third countries to promote EU foreign policy, strengthen partnerships and address global challenges (security, economic cooperation and human rights). Such dialogues can also address humanitarian diplomacy concerns, including the promotion of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law⁽¹⁷⁾. These dialogues can cover regional cooperation, such as summits with regional

¹⁷ European External Action Service, *Revised EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues with Partner/Third Countries*, 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/human_rights_dialogue_guidelines_0.pdf.

blocks, for example the African Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or Latin American and Caribbean States, or bilateral summits with countries such as Canada, China or the US. With African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP) countries, annual partnership dialogues provide a political platform to discuss bilateral, regional and global issues using a Team Europe approach. Promoting compliance with international humanitarian law is also a core task of the mandate of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights who can play a constructive role in unblocking challenging situations.

Formal human rights dialogues are conducted with around 60 partner countries and regional groupings worldwide, including with countries in Central Asia, South-East Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific or the Middle East. Exchanges can focus on a wide range of human rights topics covering civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and international humanitarian law matters where relevant.

- **Advancing humanitarian concerns through peace mediation and stabilisation.** Acknowledging the potential contribution of humanitarian action and mediation to peacebuilding, the EU is committed to supporting synergies between peace mediation, conflict prevention, stabilisation, and humanitarian efforts, while strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and improving humanitarian civil-military coordination. It engages in peace mediation as part of its foreign and preventive diplomacy, driven by its commitment to promoting international peace and security and upholding the principles and norms of international law, as outlined in the EU Concept on Peace Mediation ⁽¹⁸⁾. The EU has also developed a Concept on Stabilisation to ensure that support to communities is sequenced and delivered in a manner that underpins emerging peace processes, including, where appropriate, through humanitarian aid. Moreover, engaging in dialogue with parties to a conflict to address critical humanitarian concerns can lead to the establishment of dialogue channels that could be used by mediators to address security and political issues.

Since the armed conflict started in Sudan in April 2023, repeated attacks on critical infrastructure, such as water and electricity networks, hospitals, and treatment facilities, have had devastating humanitarian consequences, leading to severe shortages, collapsing health systems, and rapid population displacement. Under the leadership of the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, an initiative on the protection of critical infrastructure was launched, aiming to promote international humanitarian law through a concrete mechanism amidst the ongoing armed conflict. A draft Memorandum of Understanding, that is being discussed with both belligerents, reaffirms the prohibition of attacks against essential civilian infrastructure. The Memorandum of Understanding also establishes a humanitarian dialogue platform and a mechanism of international guarantors. As a result, a shared understanding has emerged on priority categories of infrastructure, marking the tangible building of trust in the absence of active peace talks.

- **EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.** Through the 21

¹⁸ Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, *Concept on EU Peace Mediation*, 11.12.2020, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13951.en20.pdf>.

ongoing EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, the EU provides a central contribution to conflict prevention, crisis management and international peacekeeping. The missions provide the EU with a flexible operational tool to respond to complex international challenges and their operations contribute to promoting and advancing human security, the respect of and compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, and the protection of civilians in all conflict situations. Missions and operations promote human rights and gender equality and systematically mainstream a human right and gender perspective in all planning and activities. CSDP missions provide training on human rights and international humanitarian law and contribute to ensuring that actors deployed in zones experiencing humanitarian challenges are fully aware of their obligations under international and national law. CSDP missions are also involved in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and crisis response to military advice, capacity-building and post-conflict stabilisation. The EU CSDP missions and operations are included in the EU's objectives to deliver on Women, Peace and Security, Children and Armed Conflict and Youth, Peace and Security.

The European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine (EUAM) has given advice on legislative initiatives and amendments in compliance with international humanitarian law and strengthened the case-building capacities of prosecutors and investigators.

The EU Capacity Building Mission Sahel Mali (the EU civilian mission in Mali) has provided the Malian internal security forces assistance and strategic advice, including on human rights and international humanitarian law. In 2024, 168 training sessions were given to over 3 100 trainees.

- **Support Track 2 and Track 3 humanitarian diplomacy** ⁽¹⁹⁾. The EU supports indirect humanitarian engagement by other actors, including NGOs. These initiatives should complement or support formal diplomatic engagement, for example, by bringing in technical and specialised humanitarian expertise or maintaining communication channels, which can be restricted or entail political risks. This approach builds on partnerships with intermediaries to promote compliance with international humanitarian law, raise awareness among non-state armed groups, negotiate localised humanitarian access and build trust. While reducing political exposure, Track 2 or Track 3 diplomacy opens pathways to areas that might otherwise remain inaccessible and create entry points for formal negotiations and related EU mediation efforts (Track 1).

In several contexts, the EU has provided political, technical and financial support for the engagement of conflict-affected civilian stakeholders. At Track 2 level, the EU has worked on the protection of critical infrastructure in partnership with neutral humanitarian organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the Geneva Call.

At Track 3 levels, EU-supported dialogue with community leaders, armed

¹⁹ While Track 1 diplomacy refers to top leadership political engagement, Track 2 and 3 diplomacy refer to more indirect, non-official diplomatic engagement at different levels. Track 2 includes middle-range leadership: mid-level NGOs and government organisations, as well as leaders in sectors such as education, business, agriculture and health, serving important connections between the top and grassroots levels. Track 3 includes grassroots leadership: those involved in local communities, members of indigenous NGOs carrying out relief projects, health officials and refugee camp leaders, representing those most affected by a conflict's impact. See also: EEAS, *Peace Mediation Guidelines*, 24.05.24, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eeas-peace-mediation-guidelines_en.

groups, religious leaders and local representatives has helped to prevent conflicts from escalating, while building consensus around contentious issues. For example, humanitarian actors have worked with Islamic scholars and religious leaders to identify common ground between international humanitarian law and Islamic law, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of international humanitarian law in relevant contexts. One key outcome is the recognition of the prohibition of child recruitment under both international humanitarian law and Islamic law, strengthening advocacy to protect children in armed conflict. On this basis, in Mali and Nigeria, targeted initiatives have been implemented to prevent, and respond to, child recruitment by engaging authorities, weapon bearers and religious and community leaders.

- **Leveraging partnerships, alliances and coordination with non-EU actors.** EU coordination in response to a crisis – involving non-EU countries and donors, regional organisations, humanitarian coordinators, UN agencies, civil society, etc. – has helped to facilitate agreements or joint commitments that promote the achievement of shared humanitarian objectives, such as strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and respect for human rights. This includes supporting OCHA’s central role in humanitarian diplomacy and the new Collaborative Humanitarian Diplomacy Initiative of UN agencies. Bringing together diverse groups of donors, including cross-regional groups of countries, can also help solidify political messaging, strengthen field-based evidence, and boost credibility.

In the Joint Statement of the first EU-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit (16 October 2024), leaders emphasised the importance of adhering to international humanitarian law in various contexts, including in Gaza and Ukraine, as well as the importance of safeguarding humanitarian space, protecting civilians, as well as providing access to healthcare.

Building on the success of the EU-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit, the EU has also leveraged its bilateral partnerships with individual Gulf states. This resulted, for example, in the organisation of a joint EU-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia high-level event on humanitarian diplomacy in the Middle East, in the margins of the UN General Assembly high-level week in September 2025 and in the signature of an Administrative Arrangement between the Commission’s Emergency Response Coordination Centre and the GCC Regional Emergency Management Centre. Further cooperation will be explored under Strategic Partnership Agreements ⁽²⁰⁾.

International humanitarian law advocacy has also been coordinated with Canada, Australia, the UK, Japan and the Republic of Korea in the context of consultations on human rights.

- **Providing resources to support humanitarian diplomacy.** The EU has a long-standing track record of providing financial support for initiatives that facilitate data-driven humanitarian diplomacy. In a context where narratives around armed conflicts are increasingly influenced or deliberately distorted by information manipulation and disinformation, these initiatives help diplomatic and humanitarian actors shape public

²⁰ Joint Communication on a “Strategic Partnership with the Gulf”, [JOIN/2022/13 final](#).

discourse and effectively influence the behaviour of duty bearers during armed conflict.

The EU supported the Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Centre to promote the use of international humanitarian law as a tool for advocacy and diplomacy. The Centre's international humanitarian law advisory helpdesk provides timely, evidence-based legal assessments, while the Stockholm Manual on Conducting International Humanitarian Law Assessments and Advocacy is a useful tool for formulating and conveying effective international humanitarian law messages. The EU also supports Save the Children Netherlands to lead efforts on advocacy for humanitarian access for children.

3. Stepping up EU humanitarian diplomacy in the current geopolitical context

In a context of growing geopolitical fragmentation, well-coordinated diplomatic initiatives have become all the more important. The multitude of EU stakeholders and tools offers many entry points and opportunities to advance humanitarian efforts. At the same time, more diplomatic stakeholders also require closer coordination to avoid divergent diplomatic initiatives that could overlap or undermine the expected outcome. Effective diplomatic efforts also require long-term commitment, alongside consistent follow-up monitoring of diplomatic initiatives and sustained engagement. In line with the Joint Communication, further efforts will be made to intensify humanitarian diplomacy.

3.1. Structures and processes – strengthening institutional cohesion for effective humanitarian diplomacy

In line with the Joint Communication, the EU's institutional coordination mechanisms will be further strengthened to support cohesive and effective humanitarian diplomatic engagement. This will strengthen the possibilities for operations on the ground to shape the EU's humanitarian diplomatic engagement. It will also ensure that diplomats have timely and accurate information to guide diplomatic actions. Coordination mechanisms will also ensure that humanitarian concerns shape political strategies, security dialogues and conflict mediation. Regular internal dialogues on humanitarian diplomacy should be convened to strengthen the link between humanitarian expertise on the ground and political actions. This includes regular coordination and information-sharing between EU institutions and their representatives at the field level to set humanitarian objectives and clarify their respective roles and responsibilities, and thus, ensure a unified voice across the EU's engagement.

- The EU will strengthen **internal coordination** between all relevant humanitarian and political actors at field level and headquarters to strengthen synergies between peace mediation, conflict prevention and humanitarian efforts.
- **Focal points on humanitarian diplomacy**, based on existing resources, may help coordinate diplomatic efforts in specific crises and bridge the gap between field operations and political strategy. At country or regional levels, and especially in active crises, the establishment of one, or a group of, designated humanitarian diplomacy focal point(s) at field level will be considered. These focal points from Commission services, the EEAS and Delegations should convene regular meetings with the diplomatic community or humanitarian partners to share analyses, set joint humanitarian diplomacy priorities, and prepare collective messaging and concerted actions (for example, by introducing a standing humanitarian session in Special Envoys' meetings, and holding consultations with humanitarian and diplomatic/political representatives). EU Member States' embassies should be closely involved in these efforts to maximise their potential impact.

- A **strengthened Team Europe** approach would further enhance the EU's leadership in the global humanitarian system. Commission services, the EEAS, EU Delegations and EUSR/CSDP missions will work in a coordinated manner with EU Member States to promote concerted diplomatic efforts, including the development of humanitarian strategies at field level, or when advocating for political support or steering consensus-building processes in the Council. Promoting a Team Europe approach in diplomatic engagements by EU Member States could improve concerted messaging on humanitarian aid.
- **Joint planning and embedding humanitarian diplomacy at political levels** ensures that humanitarian concerns are incorporated into diplomatic planning initiatives, for more consistent messaging. This also ensures that diplomatic efforts do not undermine the humanitarian space.
- **Monitoring and evaluating** the EU's diplomatic efforts should be integrated into existing workflows. Tracking milestones, as well as the outcomes of diplomatic initiatives is crucial for them to be sustainable, efficient and accountable. It also ensures that the EU's strategies are adapted and respond to developments on the ground. Feedback loops, debriefings and outcome mapping help build institutional knowledge and capacity by learning from past diplomatic actions and assessing which tools are effective and why.

3.2. Methods and tools – leveraging diplomatic tools for maximum impact

- The EU will actively advocate for incorporating discussions on violations of international humanitarian law and restrictions on humanitarian access into **Political and Security Dialogues, Human Rights Dialogues and diplomatic démarches** between EU representatives and countries or stakeholders involved in or impacted by conflict.
- The EU will improve its **strategic communication efforts and tools** to increase visibility and public engagement and address potential information manipulation and disinformation. To do this, it should embed strategic communication in the Political Frameworks for Crisis Approach (PFCAs) ⁽²¹⁾. By facilitating the sharing of relevant data based on a needs-driven approach, the services will more systematically promote transparent communication channels, enabling the dissemination of evidence-based narratives and coordinated, effective responses. These efforts will be supported by the existing regulatory framework, notably the Digital Services Act (DSA) ⁽²²⁾, and other applicable instruments, such as the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) toolbox ⁽²³⁾, to address the challenge, which will inform and guide efforts to mitigate information manipulation, including disinformation. As announced in the Democracy Shield ⁽²⁴⁾, the Commission services and the EEAS are developing actions, which will facilitate coordination among relevant authorities to ensure swift reactions to large-scale and potentially transnational information operations, including a DSA

²¹ PFCAs set out the conceptual framework for the EU's approach to a particular crisis. Building on an inclusive methodology, they describe a common understanding of a crisis and outline possible EU short- to long-term engagement strategies.

²² Regulation (EU) 2022/2065

²³ Information Integrity and Countering Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference (FIMI) website, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/information-integrity-and-countering-foreign-information-manipulation-interference-fimi_en.

²⁴ Joint Communication on the European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies, [JOIN\(2025\)791 final](#).

incidents and crisis protocol and the EU Blueprint to Counter FIMI and disinformation. By doing so, the EU will bolster its legitimacy and influence with key stakeholders, thereby enhancing its legal and strategic standing in crises. The Commission services and the EEAS will also use the EU's annual report on international humanitarian law as a way of conveying key assessments and messages relevant for humanitarian diplomacy.

- Reinforcing **strategic alliances with partners, key countries and multilateral organisations** is also key. Strategic alliances increase potential leverage, strengthen diplomatic ties and networks, and create potential entry points. This entails working with key horizontal partners (key third states, other regional organisations), both on the ground and within universal/multilateral circles or working more systematically with multilateral forums and UN agencies to increase influence, legitimacy and access in particularly difficult political environments. It also includes strengthened cooperation between EU Delegations and UN human rights presences on the ground in support of shared humanitarian objectives. Collaborative efforts increase pressure by aligning diplomatic messaging, joint agenda setting, and pooling political weight to achieve humanitarian outcomes. The Commission services and the EEAS will also support the humanitarian diplomacy work strand in the UN80 reform process, including protecting principled action as part of the UN Humanitarian Reset, and strengthen outreach to the supporters of parties to conflicts, where feasible, or to influential regional states or organisations, where this may be more effective. Increased support for the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law will also be envisaged.
- A **donor group** — grounded in a Team Europe approach but open to other like-minded donors — will be established under the joint leadership of the EU and any other interested donors to facilitate structured exchanges on key issues such as humanitarian diplomacy, access constraints, geographical priorities, funding allocations and political perspectives. The ultimate objective would be to improve the coherence and rationalisation of financial support, promote common approaches and, where appropriate, leverage political and diplomatic influence to iron out access-related difficulties. The Commission services and the EEAS also aim to improve the **dialogue with humanitarian partners on the ground** to shape diplomatic efforts. While respecting the neutrality of humanitarian workers, making room for dialogue (e.g. through targeted consultations, workshops) and promoting the flow of information supports diplomatic efforts to address the most urgent and fast-changing situations.

3.3. Investing in the sustainability of EU humanitarian diplomacy

The EU will further adapt its **training programmes** to systematically and comprehensively integrate humanitarian diplomacy and international humanitarian law into staff training. This will equip EU staff at all levels with the skills and understanding to effectively address humanitarian challenges and make links to conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding through diplomatic efforts.

The Commission services and the EEAS will also continue to **support to partners for mediation and humanitarian diplomacy initiatives**. Through targeted financial support, the Commission aims to empower programmes that bolster the advocacy for international humanitarian law compliance, improve negotiation and mediation capabilities, facilitate humanitarian access and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches communities in need effectively, and enhance understanding of the interplay between humanitarian and peace mediation. This includes supporting partners to develop and improve the tools and

capacities of humanitarian actors to engage in humanitarian diplomacy.

Conclusion

Effective humanitarian diplomacy requires bringing together humanitarian, political and diplomatic considerations, stakeholders and tools. This joint Staff Working Document underscores the EU's multifaceted approach to humanitarian diplomacy, based on humanitarian principles and a commitment to addressing humanitarian challenges in a rapidly changing world through cooperation and closer coordination, including in a Team Europe approach. This includes a strengthened commitment to equality, non-discrimination, disability inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that no one is left behind in humanitarian action. By promoting collaborative partnerships and improving institutional coordination and capacity building, the EU will be able to systematically integrate humanitarian considerations into its diplomatic endeavours. Through this new, strengthened integrated approach, EU humanitarian diplomacy will continue to uphold a rules-based multilateral order and to support needs-based, and principled humanitarian aid, while making progress on achieving shared global objectives amidst the complexities of current conflicts.