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Implementation Plan of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

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1. Introduction

The humanitarian landscape has been particularly challenging for several years with sharply rising needs due to conflicts, protracted crises and disasters that are increasingly hard to meet through traditional resources and channels. From the point of view of donors, this global context, more than ever, calls for more principled, effective and accountable humanitarian action within a holistic framework that links humanitarian and development efforts from prevention through emergency response to long-term development. It also necessitates more effective solutions for streamlined cooperation and coordination amongst an increasing number of stakeholders.

Since its endorsement on 18 December 2007 by the Presidents of the European Commission (the Commission), the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, the **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**¹ (the Consensus) has been the **key political reference document** on the European Union's approach to humanitarian aid. It sets out why, how and when the EU acts and foresees compliance with a range of directly applicable commitments by the EU and its Member States to be observed at all times. Going beyond these commitments, in order to strengthen the implementation of the Consensus, a **comprehensive Action Plan** was agreed **for the period 2008–2013**².

The **Consensus** has thus played an important **role in creating a vision of best practice for principled humanitarian action** by providing an internationally unique, forward-looking and common framework for EU actors. It has set out high-standard commitments and has shaped policy development and humanitarian aid approaches both at the European and Member State level. Through the first Action Plan, which aimed at the comprehensive implementation of the Consensus through the parallel pursuit of a wide range of actions, its implementation received a boost.

For example, it triggered the establishment of Council's Working Group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) and facilitated headquarter level information sharing. The consistency between the Union's humanitarian aid policy and that of the EU Member States has also improved. At the EU level the Commission has been leading with the development and implementation of thematic policy guidance and has been promoting best practice initiatives such as evidence-based assistance through needs assessments supported by strengthened risk analysis and evaluation methodology. Coherence between various policy fields has improved through strengthened civil-military coordination and increasing cooperation with development actors along the formulation of resilience and disaster risk reduction policies. At the international level, the Commission coordinated with Member States to develop common strategic positions in various fora and support a range of good practice initiatives.

The **2010 Mid-Term Review of the Action Plan**³ confirmed good overall progress. However, it also identified scope for further action. In particular the need for consolidating collective efforts and strengthening individual donor commitment as well as greater burden-sharing, pooling of information and expertise, and a clearer division of labour were highlighted as prerequisites for improving overall EU humanitarian aid. It was also recognised that the Consensus would need to be more explicitly acknowledged and implemented in EU and Member State donor practice.

¹ OJ C 25, 30.1.2008, p. 1.

² European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid – Action Plan. SEC(2008) 1991.

³ The mid-term review of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid Action Plan - implementing effective, principled EU humanitarian action. SEC(2010) 1505 final.

The **2014 Evaluation on the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid** (the Evaluation)⁴ echoed these conclusions and, among its recommendations, urged for the development of a new implementation scheme focusing on a specific set of common actions. Furthermore, Member States, the European Parliament and implementing partners have also requested the elaboration of a follow-up implementation plan as a successor to Action Plan 2008–2013.

2. Rationale and scope

Under Article 214 (6) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) the Commission can take any useful initiative to promote coordination between actions of the Union and its Member States. The present Implementation Plan of the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid intends to renew and implement the commitment of the EU and its Member States to pursue humanitarian action in accordance with the principles enshrined in and the framework established by the Consensus. It builds on progress achieved under the Action Plan 2008–2013 and takes into consideration the findings of the Evaluation and comments provided by Member States and partners during the consultation process. The Implementation Plan is rather EU-centric: it addresses the priorities at the EU and Member State level. The priorities identified aim in the first place to improve the overall effectiveness and accountability of EU humanitarian action and cooperation at EU level. Yet, the Implementation Plan has not been conceived in a vacuum. It reflects ideas flagged and prioritised by Member States and the European Commission in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) process, notably at the European regional consultation in Budapest. Accordingly, it is consistent with and complements at operational level the Commission Communication "Towards the World Humanitarian Summit - A global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action" adopted on 2 September 2015⁵. In essence, the Implementation Plan contains priorities and actions that the EU and its Member States hold essential for the implementation of the Consensus *per se* irrespective of the outcome of the future WHS, yet it also supports the preparations for and follow-up to the WHS process.

The Implementation Plan focuses on a limited set of collective efforts in order to achieve incremental changes across the EU and its Member States in areas that could underpin a more effective and better coordinated EU humanitarian action. It also takes into consideration the following principles:

- The Implementation Plan is to guide the Commission, in coordination with Member States, in the roll-out of specific actions and to demonstrate that the EU and its Member States deliver on their promises as a result of efficient coordination and a common approach. As such, the Implementation Plan is without prejudice to the continuous implementation of commitments enshrined in the Consensus such as those relating to the humanitarian principles and to the use of civil protection resources and military assets in response to humanitarian situations. In addition, the Commission, in coordination with Member States, strives to act in accordance with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD)⁶ and with consideration to the Core Humanitarian Standard⁷.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2014/european_consensus_main_en.pdf

⁵ COM(2015) 419 final and SWD(2015) 166 final.

⁶ <http://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html>

⁷ <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

- The successful achievement of actions under the Implementation Plan is conditional upon the individual and collective engagement of the Commission and the Member States. Its implementation is therefore a joint responsibility.
- It is to be noted, however, that the group of Member States is not monolithic: there is considerable diversity in profiles in terms of implementing partners, strategies, capacities and available resources. The Implementation Plan embraces the view that while not all Member States can contribute to or carry out the actions in exactly the same manner, all can and should do so, to the best of their capacity.

3. Priorities

The annexed Implementation Plan sets out in detail three priority areas that have emerged from consultations:

1. Upholding humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law (IHL)
2. A stronger needs-based approach
3. Enhanced coordination and coherence

Actions in these priority areas introduced below have an added value for the effectiveness and consistency of actions of both the Commission and individual Member States in the field of humanitarian aid. Where relevant, actions are foreseen to be closely aligned to international processes.

In addition to the priority areas and respective actions, the Implementation Plan introduces the idea of testing its application in the field through country cases. Through such a case study, the three priority areas will be addressed from a practical angle thus providing opportunities for collective learning in different contexts.

Priority 1. Upholding humanitarian principles and IHL

The Commission, in coordination with Member States, stands ready to undertake actions to promote principled humanitarian action, the respect for IHL and the protection of humanitarian space by focussing both at the strategic – institutional – and operational levels.

At the strategic level, Member States are encouraged to provide dedicated input on humanitarian issues to a wider audience of specialised entities within the Council. Furthermore it is essential to capitalise on the strong political commitment behind the Consensus and expand public communication and advocacy on humanitarian concerns and the mandate of humanitarian action targeting in particular non-humanitarian actors such as foreign policy actors and the military at the national, EU and international level. In order to link strategic and operational levels, it is suggested that Commission and Member States hold regular exchanges on their respective experiences with upholding principles in certain contexts, the challenges they have faced and best practices they could identify. These discussions should also serve to produce recommendations for joint uptakes of lessons learned.

Maintaining a principled approach is regarded as fundamental for reaching populations in need and ensuring that people in need have access to aid. Therefore, the Commission, in coordination with Member States, will continue to better adhere to principled humanitarian action and ensure that their humanitarian action is separate from political, economic, military or other objectives. They also

undertake to work more closely with implementing partners to enhance the knowledge and ability of Member States' and EU staff to promote access in humanitarian contexts. Protection must be put more at the centre of humanitarian action. The Commission, in coordination with Member States, is therefore set to more actively promote and support protection-related initiatives.

Priority 2. A stronger needs-based approach

As humanitarian needs are on the rise and the humanitarian system is increasingly overstretched, it is ever more important to reach those most in need with assistance. Aid effectiveness has therefore become a top concern for the EU and its Member States. Improved evidence base and better informed decisions are key to enhancing the effectiveness, quality and accountability of overall EU humanitarian aid. The Implementation Plan thus prioritises efforts that enhance the needs-based approach through strengthening the evidence base of decision-making and resource allocation, including through the development and promotion of innovative solutions such as Index for Risk Management (INFORM) and global multi-risk early warning systems⁸. Efforts also focus on the EU-wide mapping and uptake of a selected set of existing best practices, methodologies and tools for decision-making and resource allocation. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, work under this priority is closely linked with, and builds upon work already ongoing under various work streams of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.

In addition, as an expression of commitment towards greater transparency, the Commission, in coordination with Member States will focus on establishing systematic and regular sharing of information and best practices as well as improved strategic cooperation in their work related to humanitarian effectiveness. Specific actions to improve data gathering and sharing involve the streamlining of financing data-recording in relevant IT platforms for both humanitarian aid and civil protection in order to improve automatic real-time data availability on EU and Member State assistance. This is especially relevant for coordinated EU preparations for the WHS and will also be instrumental for improved coordination between humanitarian aid and civil protection. EU-level efforts are also expected to feed into relevant international endeavours such as the development of a comprehensive dashboard for humanitarian effectiveness.

Accountability and quality of aid are priority considerations. Accordingly, the Commission and the Member States have agreed to undertake the identification and promotion of a set of core harmonised key results indicators and support relevant international initiatives in order to better measure whether assistance truly responds to needs and with the desired impact. The endorsement and promotion of the Core Humanitarian Standard will be supported across the EU.

Last but not least, it is recognised that effectiveness could be enhanced through the simplification of administrative procedures in order to lessen burdens on implementing partners and free up capacities for core business. The Commission, in coordination with Member States, intends to jointly map procedures and best practices and identify a core set of harmonised requirements in an effort to collectively simplify procedures. This is however without prejudice to distinct legal obligations that Member States have towards their constituencies.

Priority 3. Enhanced coordination and coherence

Strengthened coordination and a more joint-up approach are fundamental to enhancing effectiveness and strengthening the overall clout of the EU as a humanitarian actor at the international level.

⁸ INFORM is a global, open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters (<http://www.inform-index.org/>).

In international discussions and processes, the Union should speak with one voice and a coherent external representation should be ensured with Member States. Therefore, common understanding and the formulation of humanitarian advocacy messages on crises or thematic issues relevant to humanitarian aid should be enhanced. Furthermore, systematic methods will be developed to channel or present these messages to relevant States, EU and international stakeholders.

Collective work on promoting, where relevant, cooperation and synergies between humanitarian actors and civil protection is further enhanced in order to achieve more systematic and context-specific coordination at the EU level. Joint efforts involve the development of structured coordination and information-sharing modalities between humanitarian action and civil protection both at headquarters and in the field.

Close cooperation with humanitarian actors in the United Nations system should continue and build on lessons learned from recent major crises, including the Ebola public health emergency. Furthermore, strengthening cooperation with non-DAC donors⁹, regional organisations, the private sector, charities and foundations should be at the heart of humanitarian action in the future. Therefore, the Commission, in coordination with Member States, should develop a more strategic approach to foster information-sharing, the exchange of best practices and collective learning by all actors involved.

The Implementation Plan foresees progress towards improved coordination and strengthened policy and operational cooperation between humanitarian, development, climate action and disaster risk management actors, including on resilience. This entails more regular strategic, policy and operational exchanges, including on joint analysis and planning, prioritising and funding, between all these actors both at EU and at national level. Discussions should also extend to innovative financing mechanisms that can ensure a more effective transition from humanitarian aid to sustainable development. Coordination with development, climate action and disaster risk management actors shall be strengthened from prevention and disaster risk reduction, through to emergency preparedness and response, all the way to transition to long-term development.

The Consensus in Action: Country cases

The Implementation Plan features country case studies in order to guide the implementation of actions at the operational level, enhance engagement and showcase the practical impact of the implementation of the Consensus. Collective work on country cases in a focused way, based on activities established for each case, is also expected to generate best practices and lessons learned in order to inform strategy and policy development, as well as operational coordination in the given countries and, possibly, in others as well.

During the timeframe of the Implementation Plan, the Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO) foresees to work together with Member States on minimum one and maximum three jointly identified country cases. The country cases should focus on the three priority areas, e.g. cooperation and advocacy on principled humanitarian action, including protection and access, a stronger needs-based approach; coordination, including resilience and linking humanitarian and development actors. The cases will cover countries in which a large variety of Member States is present, in order to ensure collective engagement and the roll-out of the

⁹ Donors that are not members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

widest possible range of actions at the operational level. In addition, the country cases should cover various contexts (e.g. natural disasters, manmade and forgotten crises) in order to increase the range of information and lessons gathered during the exercise.

4. Implementation and reporting

The Commission coordinates the joint implementation of the Implementation Plan with Member States.

The Implementation Plan is not a deliverable for the WHS. Nevertheless, its timeframe is adjusted to the WHS context in that it corresponds to the run-up and immediate follow-up to the WHS, lasting maximum 18 months following its endorsement. As such, the Implementation Plan has a transitional scope: ensuing follow-up on the implementation of the Consensus will fold into the reflections on, and follow-up to the outcome of the WHS.

The Commission assumes an oversight role during the timeframe of the Implementation Plan, with the support of the Presidency and a Task Force that Member States can join on a voluntary basis. The Presidency ensures that the momentum is kept throughout the implementation process by organising dedicated exchanges in COHAFA and monitoring the reporting exercise. The Task Force is in charge of the operational coordination of the implementation through a lead 'champion' for every priority (or action).

Reporting shall consist of updates on progress by the Commission and Member States once per each Presidency. At the end of its duration, a final report on the implementation of the Consensus under the present Implementation Plan will be prepared.

Annex 1. Implementation Plan of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

1. Upholding humanitarian principles and IHL			
Actions	Results	Activities	Actors¹⁰
1.1 Engage in regular strategic discussions on principled humanitarian action and IHL to increase the visibility and understanding of the humanitarian mandate and enhance public communication and advocacy	Better understanding and respect of the mandate and <i>modus operandi</i> of humanitarian aid by non-humanitarian actors	Introduce regular exchanges among Member States (e.g. within COHAFa and with relevant thematic or geographic Council Working Groups) to discuss issues and contexts that entail challenges to the delivery of principled humanitarian aid. Promote the understanding of the humanitarian mandate at the political level and strengthen humanitarian advocacy anchored in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, in particular by targeting non-humanitarian actors at the national, EU and international level.	COM, MS ¹¹
1.2 Promote the knowledge of and respect for IHL and the humanitarian principles to improve access and enhance protection	Increased access through more consistent implementation and advocacy of principled humanitarian action at the field level. Increased focus on protection	Strengthen the knowledge and ability of MS and EU staff active in humanitarian contexts to promote access. Promote initiatives that disseminate and provide training on IHL and the humanitarian principles in order to strengthen protection-related efforts to actors active in humanitarian contexts.	COM, MS
2. A stronger needs-based approach			
Actions	Results	Activities	Actors
2.1 Improve evidence-based resource allocation including through developing vital data and analytic capacities and improving relevant IT platforms	Improved evidence-based strategic planning and preparedness and resource allocation at the EU level. Better targeted assistance to vulnerable groups through systematic and better quality data and information-sharing	Map resource allocation best practices and methodologies in the Commission and Member States (building on relevant GHD processes) followed by an EU-wide uptake of a set of identified best practices, methodologies or tools as relevant per donor profiles. Promote the development of innovative technologies and methods (such as INFORM and global multi-risk early warning systems) and their use within the Commission and Member States and by other humanitarian and development donors as a key commitment to improving risk analysis, early warning and evidence-based planning. Undertake more rigorous reporting in relevant IT platforms (EDRIS ¹² and CECIS ¹³) to improve transparency and automatic real-time data availability on EU and Member State assistance. At the same time, streamline data input requirements and recording procedures in EDRIS and CECIS, and promote	COM, MS

¹⁰ As in the case of Action Plan 2008–2013, the implementation of the actions should be pursued in close collaboration with humanitarian partners and other stakeholders.

¹¹ COM stands for the European Commission, MS stands for Member States.

¹² European Emergency Disaster Response Information System, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/hac/>

¹³ Common Emergency Communication and Information System, <http://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Open-Cecis>

		automatic data exchange and joint features between them and, possibly, with other relevant platforms (such as FTS ¹⁴ and ERCC ¹⁵ Portal).	
2.2 Move towards results-oriented humanitarian aid	Measurable impact/outcome of humanitarian aid and enhanced accountability	Based on existing indicators, identify and promote a set of core harmonised key results indicators within the Commission and Member States, and promote such efforts among other donors at relevant international fora (e.g. GHD). Promote the Core Humanitarian Standard.	COM, MS
2.3 Simplify administrative procedures	Lower administrative burden on partners	Map administrative, contracting and reporting procedures and best practices and identify and implement a core set of harmonised requirements within the Commission and Member States in order to simplify procedures and reduce the administrative burden for implementing partners.	COM, MS
3. Enhanced coordination and coherence			
Actions	Results	Activities	Actors
3.1 Systematise the formulation of humanitarian advocacy messages on issues of strategic relevance to EU humanitarian aid both at the EU level and internationally	The EU speaks with one voice in a way that respects the "in but out" approach to humanitarian aid	Consolidate the practice of formulating humanitarian advocacy messages on crises or thematic issues relevant to humanitarian aid by the Commission and Member States (e.g. in COHAFSA) and develop a systematic method to channel these in a timely manner to relevant bodies at national, EU and international level.	COM, MS
3.2 Further clarify and develop specific coordination mechanisms between humanitarian aid and civil protection	More effective, systematic and context-specific cooperation between humanitarian action and civil protection at the EU level under the UN-led overall coordination	Further clarify the role of the ERCC and UCPM ¹⁶ in relation to humanitarian aid and develop guidelines for structured coordination, information-sharing and decision-making modalities between humanitarian action and civil protection.	COM, MS
3.3 Engage strategically with non-DAC donors, regional organisations and the private sector	More effective and consistent involvement of a wider variety of actors active in humanitarian action in recognition of the changing humanitarian landscape	Develop a mechanism for a coordinated strategic approach with non-DAC donors, regional organisations and the private sector. It should focus <i>inter alia</i> on fostering a shared understanding of humanitarian principles.	COM, MS
3.4 Pursue and enhance coherence and coordination between humanitarian aid, development cooperation, climate action and risk disaster management	Enhanced and better streamlined linkages between humanitarian, development, climate action and disaster risk management actors at programme and instrument level	Establish and strengthen regular policy and operational exchanges, including on joint analysis, planning, prioritising and funding, between departments responsible for humanitarian aid, development cooperation, climate action both at national and EU level. Engage in strategic dialogue and sharing of best practices with a view to identifying synergies between humanitarian aid, development cooperation, climate change adaptation and disaster risk management in contexts ranging from pre-crisis all the way to transitions.	COM, MS

¹⁴ Financial Tracking Service, <https://fts.unocha.org/>

¹⁵ Emergency Response Coordination Centre, <http://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

¹⁶ Union Civil Protection Mechanism, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924.