

World Humanitarian Summit 2016

The first-ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), on 23 and 24 May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey, will bring together a panoply of representatives of world governments, business, and civil society, in order to find a way to improve humanitarian responses to increasingly challenging conditions. The May plenary is due to hear from the Commission and Council on the EU approach to the WHS.

The humanitarian system under pressure

On the eve of the WHS, a gloomy consensus prevails: the humanitarian system is [overwhelmed](#), and improving it is literally a matter of life and death for millions. Over recent years the system has indeed struggled, with only partial success, to cope with more frequent and protracted humanitarian crises that are affecting [a record number of people](#): in 2016, assistance is needed for over 89.3 million people in 37 countries; of these, nearly 60 million, half of them children, are displaced due to conflict. Unfortunately, if the present trends continue, a lot of that need will remain unmet. Indeed, despite the absolute increase in humanitarian spending, the gap between needs and the available resources grows each year. In 2014, overall global funding for humanitarian activities reached [US\\$24.5 billion](#); however, it is estimated that the funding gap has reached 40% overall. The shortfall is even higher in the five most [under-funded cases](#) (Gambia, Sahel region, Senegal, South Sudan and Djibouti).

In addition to the [funding gap](#), several other serious problems have been discussed during the two-year, UN-led WHS preparation process that has involved more than 15 000 people in a series of regional and thematic meetings and online discussion. Among the main issues that reform should address are: [coordination between multiple UN agencies](#) with overlapping responsibilities; integration of non-Western donors in the humanitarian system; better involvement of [local NGOs](#) in needs assessment and aid delivery; impact of counter-terrorism measures on humanitarian work (for example on transfers of funds); the need for innovative sources of financing; and access difficulties in conflict areas.

Summit agenda and working methods

The nearly 5 000 participants expected will include heads of state or government, representatives from crisis-affected communities, CEOs from the private sector, multilateral organisations, and international and national NGOs, representatives of youth, civil society, civil-military, and academia. A number of MEPs will form part of the EU delegation to the WHS. The summit will be structured around seven [high-level Leaders' Roundtables](#) (see below), open to all top stakeholders, reflecting the main challenges identified in the UN Secretary-General's February 2016 [Agenda for humanity](#), [15 Special Sessions](#) on the specific subjects that emerged during the [consultation process](#) and a [Leader Segment](#) – a plenary meeting reserved for heads of state or government.

1. Roundtable on 'Political Leadership to Prevent and End Conflict'
2. Roundtable 'Uphold the Norms that Safeguard Humanity' (strengthening compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law)
3. Roundtable on 'Leaving No One Behind: a Commitment to Address Forced Displacement'
4. Roundtable 'Women and Girls: Catalysing Action to Achieve Gender Equality'
5. Roundtable on 'Managing Risks and Crises Differently'
6. Roundtable on 'Changing People's Lives: From Delivering Aid to Ending Need'
7. Roundtable on 'Financing: Investing in Humanity'

The [Guidance for high-level Leaders' Roundtables and Special Sessions](#) specifies that in the different meetings, the participants will have an opportunity to align themselves with the [core commitments](#)



proposed to each roundtable, or offer substantive additional concrete policy, operational, legislative or financial commitments that will then be reflected in the 'Commitments to Action' outcome document.

EU position

The EU's priorities were set out in the [European Commission communication](#), 'Towards the World Humanitarian Summit: A global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action. In this document, from September 2015, concrete recommendations are [grouped](#) in seven action areas under two overall priorities.

Priority I : Principled humanitarian action:	Priority II :Effective humanitarian action
<p>1. Reaffirming humanitarian values (dignity, integrity and solidarity) and principles (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence) as necessary tools to reach a common goal of saving lives and ending human suffering.</p> <p>2. Ensuring access to assistance by engaging in dialogue with parties in conflict, the adoption of a suitable legal and policy framework and more aid delivery in remote and dangerous areas.</p> <p>3. Enhancing protection at core of humanitarian response in order to avoid discrimination, abuse or threat to lives, especially the most vulnerable groups such as women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly, in cooperation with the human rights community.</p>	<p>4. Consensus on the basics of humanitarian effectiveness that requires systematic and comprehensive data collection on needs, capacities and available funding, risk, quality and results of humanitarian actions and accountability to the affected population.</p> <p>5. Subsidiarity and solidarity by improving partnership with national, local and regional actors.</p> <p>6. Efficient and sufficient funding based on reformed and coordinated funding appeals and improved involvement of new donors (middle income countries, private donors)</p> <p>7. Partnership with the development community especially in protracted crisis.</p>

Welcoming the Commission communication, in December 2015 the [Council](#) confirmed the central EU focus on preserving the neutral, independent and impartial nature of humanitarian work, which should not be jeopardised by the necessary link between humanitarian and development financing and programming. A collective commitment to safeguarding humanitarian access and respect of international humanitarian law is much anticipated as one of key outcomes of WHS.

The European Parliament [resolution of 16 December 2015](#) on preparations for the WHS calls on the EU to promote the 'Global Consensus on Humanitarian Action', with humanitarian principles, obligations under international law and human rights-based protection at its core. Parliament emphasises that the commitments made at the WHS should be followed up, based on the five-year roadmap to be appended to the outcome document. The EP is also in favour of reforming the UN to help strengthen the international humanitarian infrastructure, and stresses the need to ensure coherence between various international frameworks (in particular the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [Paris Agreement](#) of the UN climate change conference (COP21), signed in New York on 22 April 2016).

What to expect?

While acknowledging the inclusiveness and openness of the consultation process, [some](#) observers are disappointed with the lack of coherence, focus and achievable targets in their outcomes. *Médecins sans Frontières* also [notes](#) the failure of the consultation process to go beyond technical solutions.

One of the main [challenges](#) at the WHS will indeed be to translate a long series of separate multi-stakeholder discussions on disparate topics into one coherent agenda to drive action. Although [the EU](#) has reiterated that it hopes to go beyond a compilation of commitments, to find a global shared understanding of humanitarian priorities, some are [afraid](#) that the current migration crisis Europe is facing may alter the EU focus for the WHS. Indeed, the 'refugee hosting deal' offering financial support for host countries and set of measures in order to help them resettle and integrate into host societies will be a hot topic at the WHS.

The scope of the WHS appears to be limited to a review of UN working methods. It is therefore unlikely to address the key issue of in-depth reforms to the outdated and inefficient UN response architecture.

As for the funding gap, the [High-level Panel on Humanitarian Financing's report](#) contains several innovative solutions to encourage contributions by new donors, such as a voluntary solidarity levy, use of Islamic social finance and measures to improve delivery. The challenge remains to implement those proposals, while preventing them from becoming a pretext for traditional donors not to increase their humanitarian assistance.