



A Europe that truly protects:

How EU decision makers can deliver a more effective response to forced displacement



In 2018, a record 70 million people were forced from their homes through a combination of conflict, climate change and extreme poverty. As the world's leading humanitarian donor, respected diplomatic power and home to millions of refugees and asylum-seekers, the EU is uniquely placed to provide a truly game-changing and rules-based response to both the causes and consequences of protracted crises. But to achieve this potential, a fundamental rethink of the EU's humanitarian, development and political action is needed. At this time of political transition, the new European Parliament and incoming European Commission should seize the opportunity to make this happen.

The IRC is a global humanitarian charity founded by Albert Einstein in the 1930s and now employing around 13,000 staff and 15,000 volunteers in forty countries. IRC evidence, gathered from our work in some of the most fragile and difficult contexts around the world shows that currently, EU asylum, migration, development and humanitarian policies are pulling in different directions: better alignment is needed in order to provide effective solutions to the reality of protracted crises. In order for the EU to unlock these opportunities, we call for:

A Europe that protects and empowers – Join up EU policies to ensure no one is left behind

- Align all policies across the EU's various funding and partnership agreements to drive towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals for conflict and crisis affected people and appoint a first Vice President responsible for the SDGs to ensure policy coherence and effective implementation.
- Under the next MFF, ensure that a greater proportion of humanitarian funding is provided on a multi-annual, flexible basis, and ensure development funding includes crisis affected populations and is aligned with national SDG implementation plans.
- Take a feminist approach to aid that generates systemic change and prioritises the protection needs of women and girls, eg. through increased, dedicated funding to tackle the problem in the Yemeni conflict.
- Effectively support refugees' self-reliance in host countries to minimise push factors for premature and involuntary refugee returns, including in Syria and Bangladesh.

A Europe that protects and empowers

Despite longstanding commitments to policy coherence for development, alignment between the EU's various external policies still remains insufficient, while commitments to build long term outcomes for crisis-affected populations are often deprioritised in favour of politically motivated security concerns. As a first step to change this, the EU should adopt the SDGs as the guiding principle to drive collective outcomes across the full range of the EU's external action, with a First Vice President fully empowered to drive effective and coordinated implementation. All policies should be advancing the attainment of the SDGs for conflict and crisis affected people, and their outcomes should be aligned to national SDG implementation plans and integrated into the European semester process. The next EU Migration Agenda, the Multi-Annual Financial Framework and the revision of the EU Trust Fund for Africa provide an opportunity for the EU to re-assess its priorities in line with the achievement of the SDGs and to shape comprehensive asylum and migration policies that truly protect people on the move, while fostering resilience in countries of origin, transit and destination.

EU-funded programmes implemented by humanitarian organisations have a critical role to play in delivering progress towards SDG targets in fragile states. But while the average crisis lasts ten years or more, the majority of humanitarian funding is provided in short term tranches. Unless more multi-year funding is made available, we will not be meeting the realities of current humanitarian crisis, and the longer term development indicators for these populations will remain tragically out of step with the rest of the world.

A Europe that protects and welcomes – Establish a fair, humane and predictable asylum system

- Demonstrate a commitment to responsibility sharing through resettlement by urgently adopting the Union Resettlement Framework and resettling at least 250,000 refugees by 2025.
- Provide principled policy guidance, sufficient funding and a positive narrative on refugee and asylum-seeker integration at home, including by evaluating and renewing the EU Action Plan on Integration.
- Agree a fair, humane and comprehensive system to share responsibility for people seeking international protection in Europe in full respect of fundamental rights.
- Reinstate a dedicated EU Search and Rescue capacity in the Mediterranean sea, alongside a predictable disembarkation system to ensure rescue vessels can dock in the nearest safe port.

A Europe that protects and leads – Recognise that humanitarian emergencies are a political emergency

- Deliver bold, ambitious, value-based diplomatic action that upholds International Humanitarian Law and the rules-based system, and protects civilians caught in conflict as well as civilian infrastructure.
- Lead by example and create balance in external policies by shifting away from a migration management focus in North Africa and the Sahel, towards an approach that focuses on human security, stabilisation, conflict resolution and resilience, while protecting people on the move.
- Facilitate humanitarian access by pushing all conflict parties in Yemen to minimise the impediments that undermine the speed and quality of the response, including through pressure at the UN Security Council.
- Revitalise commitments to support the humanitarian response inside Syria and in the region, and ensure the almost 12 million within Syria still in need of humanitarian assistance continue to receive it.

A Europe that protects and welcomes

People always have and always will move across borders - pushed out by violence, persecution and conflict or attracted elsewhere by work, study or family ties. With the right systems in place, migration can be managed in a way that brings benefits for both new arrivals and local communities. The void currently left by the lack of agreement around the reform of the Common European Asylum System is in no one's interest. With displacement remaining at a record high, global resettlement numbers continuing to fall and new arrivals in the EU down to pre-2014 levels, EU leaders should urgently revive negotiations to agree a fair, humane and predictable responsibility sharing system, reinstate a dedicated search and rescue function and open up safe and legal routes to protection. The EU should send a strong signal of international solidarity with refugee hosting countries by urgently adopting a protection-focused Union Resettlement Framework resettling at least 250,000 refugees by 2025, and making a collective pledge to this effect at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

Within the EU's borders, the European Commission should demonstrate principled leadership and act as an integration champion in EU law and policy making. As a first step, this must involve the evaluation and renewal of the 2016 Action Plan for the Integration of Third Country Nationals. EU funding remains the primary way for the EU to influence decision-making and policy at the national level, and it is therefore important that funding for inclusion caters to the needs and strengths of refugees and asylum-seekers.

A Europe that protects and leads

International rule-making and the practice of international institutions are currently experiencing an assault that should be understood as a political emergency, both domestically and abroad. By delivering bold, ambitious and value-based diplomatic action that protects civilians caught up in conflict situations, the EU can play a major role in addressing this crisis. Moreover, as the world's leading humanitarian aid donor, the EU has the potential to act as a global champion of the rules based system and make a real difference for the women, men and children displaced by conflict and disaster. The EU should also take the lead in supporting EU Member States sitting in the UNSC to form a more coordinated, ambitious and unified voting block that prioritizes conflict situations and champions action to address the drivers of humanitarian needs.

As a leading humanitarian and development donor, the EU should continue to support states hosting people fleeing conflicts - such as Jordan, Lebanon and Bangladesh - to provide a safe haven for refugees for as long as needed. Failure to effectively support refugees' protection and self-reliance in host countries risks creating additional push factors for refugees to return to places where their lives and safety would be at risk, thus undermining the voluntary nature of returns and further eroding durable solutions to protracted crises.