

# Key Priorities for the EU in the future

24.06.2019

## OUR FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

HUMANITY

IMPARTIALITY

NEUTRALITY

INDEPENDENCE

VOLUNTARY SERVICE

UNITY

UNIVERSALITY

### Red Cross EU Office recommendations towards EU decision-makers

As we enter a new legislative term at EU level, the Red Cross EU Office has developed these recommendations highlighting our key priorities for the future of the Union. These recommendations intend to guide and inform EU decision-makers taking up their mandate in the European Parliament and the European Commission for the next five years.

The Red Cross EU Office is a membership office in Brussels, which represents the views and interests of the 28 National Red Cross Societies in the EU, the Norwegian Red Cross, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Together, we develop and voice common positions and recommendations towards the EU and Member States based on our long-term and varied experience in supporting the dignity and wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in society. We also analyse European developments that could impact the implementation of our members' work and support them to implement joint projects with EU funding.

In collaboration with their national authorities as independent auxiliaries<sup>(1)</sup> to the government in the humanitarian field, National Red Cross Societies in the EU support people in need through their employees and networks of community-based volunteers. Coupled with their practical expertise that span from disaster relief and risk reduction, to healthcare and social assistance programmes, they are uniquely placed to actively contribute to evidence-based dialogue on EU policies and practices. The IFRC provides the added value of a global perspective and longstanding experience in carrying

out relief operations, combined with development work to strengthen the capacities of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world.

These recommendations are based on the Red Cross Red Crescent's expertise in working with and for people in need both inside and outside the EU. They reflect our principled approach to preventing and alleviating human suffering. Our aim is to promote EU policies and programmes in the areas of **social inclusion, migration and asylum, sustainable development, and disasters and crises**, that effectively contribute to supporting the dignity and wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in society.



Italian Red Cross volunteers assisting people without shelter on the streets of Rome, January 2019.

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1. See: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/what-we-do/promoting-principles-and-values/policy-and-diplomacy/the-auxiliary-role/>

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

National Red Cross Societies are in contact with vulnerable people daily, responding to their needs and helping them to live in dignity. Across the EU, volunteers and staff run a range of services to support those at risk of marginalisation. Activities span from providing food and material assistance, and organising social events and initiatives, to managing shelters for homeless people and victims of domestic violence, or facilitating access to employment. The EU can be an important driving force in improving the lives of vulnerable people, reinforcing efforts at national and local levels, and supporting increased access to health and care services. However, the Red Cross believes that the current focus of EU social policies on employment and access to the labour market, overlooks the complex nature of social exclusion in the EU.

To help people living with hardship and disadvantage to take part in society, EU decision-makers should:

### **Duly consider the varied needs of vulnerable people in the design and implementation of EU social legislation, policies, and programmes.**

Among the 500 million people living in the EU, 112 million are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. However, they do not constitute a homogeneous group. Some of them are employed, but still experience poverty. Similarly, children, older people, and those living with material deprivation can

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be far away from the labour market, falling outside the scope of employment-related measures. Policies that are preoccupied with employment and access to the labour market are therefore inadequate in responding to their needs.

EU social policies should not only prioritise employment-related measures, but must also address the needs of vulnerable people who are excluded from the world of work or facing in-work poverty. Many groups, such as ex-prisoners, people with mental health problems, and homeless people, are often overlooked by EU policy makers. Concrete action is needed to implement the 20 principles<sup>(2)</sup> of the European Pillar of Social Rights in a coherent way. We also urge EU decision-makers to take a proactive role in monitoring the implementation of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 to ensure that future EU programmes effectively boost local and national social inclusion initiatives.

### **Support increased access to high-quality and affordable social services.**

By assisting vulnerable groups and responding to their needs, local and national social services are key to addressing social exclusion. However, they currently suffer from a lack of funding and investment. In parallel, growing poverty and an ageing population in the EU are increasing demand for care and health services. Investing in high-quality and affordable social services would not only contribute to social cohesion and healthier societies but would also create jobs and make the EU's economy more stable and inclusive.

EU decision-makers can take tangible steps to support social services and social service providers. Policy frameworks such as the European Semester should ease investments to develop accessible, high-quality, and affordable health and care services in all EU Member States. In the same way, the European Semester process should integrate and build on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

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2. See: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

## MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

The absence of an effective framework for safe and legal migration to the EU is contributing to irregular migration and pushing people to undertake increasingly perilous journeys<sup>(3)</sup>. Migrants are often among the most vulnerable people in our societies. However, the Red Cross is convinced of the many potential benefits of migration and the substantial contributions that migrants can make to society if they are adequately supported<sup>(4)</sup>. Regrettably, too many migrants across Europe currently lack access to basic services and to social and legal systems. We are also concerned to witness the grave humanitarian consequences of migrants' irregular administrative status, which jeopardises their fundamental rights and their ability to benefit from assistance, protection, and inclusion.

In order to better protect and support all migrants, we urge EU decision-makers to prioritise the following:

### **Uphold the dignity and rights of all migrants in EU migration, asylum, and border policies.**

Migrants' rights and their humanitarian needs are undermined by the EU's sustained emphasis on countering irregular migration. While it is important to address the humanitarian consequences of smuggling and trafficking, the disproportionate focus on border control and return measures has a detrimental effect on migrants' dignity and wellbeing.

EU border, migration, and asylum legislation should mainstream compliance with migrants' fundamental rights<sup>(5)</sup>. We call on EU decision-makers to defend the humanitarian space by ensuring that humanitarian activities targeting migrants, including those in an irregular situation, are supported and not sanctioned. In addition, EU legislation should ensure that detention is only ever used as a measure of last resort, and that vulnerable people are never detained<sup>(6)</sup>.

### **Guarantee effective access to international protection in the EU.**

Despite declining arrivals in the EU, the number of people dying on the journey is dramatically high because of the absence of safe legal routes to access protection. Those who do manage to reach the Union are confronted with uneven asylum law standards across Member States<sup>(7)</sup>.

The Common European Asylum System reform must be completed to make sure that every person in need of international protection has access to fair, transparent, accountable, and high-quality asylum procedures and reception facilities throughout the EU. Adequately contributing to global solidarity also urgently requires the implementation of effective family reunification schemes, and enhanced resettlement and humanitarian visa programmes<sup>(8)</sup>.

Ecuadorian Red Cross volunteers help migrants to keep in touch with their families by offering a free call service, Rumichaca, February 2019.

© Netherlands Red Cross / Arie Kievit



3. See: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/perilous-journeys-vulnerabilities-along-migratory-routes-to-the-eu>

4. See: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/moving-forward-together>

5. See: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/protecting-the-dignity-and-rights-of-migrants-in-an-irregular-situation-1>

6. RCEU, Detention and alternatives to detention, forthcoming.

7. See: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/reforming-the-common-european-asylum-system-in-a-spirit-of-humanity-and-solidarity>

8. See: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/legal-avenues-to-access-international-protection-in-the-eu>

## Address the needs of people on the move through EU external cooperation on migration.

Migration can be a win-win situation for both countries of origin and destination. Yet EU external action tends to increasingly focus on measures to prevent migration. Development and foreign affairs priorities are often influenced by third countries' collaboration in migration control, including through return and border management.

The Red Cross believes that the EU's approach to linking migration and development cooperation should aim to address the humanitarian needs and fundamental rights of migrants. Programmes which respond to the situation faced by migrants along the migratory trail must be supported financially and operationally.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Protracted crises, competition over scarce resources, population dynamics, and the growing effects of climate change, are just some of the factors making development cooperation work increasingly challenging. As inequalities continue to rise, devising and implementing effective long-term solutions that help build capacities and address underlying vulnerabilities is ever more important. The Red Cross believes that the EU can play a leading role in promoting sustainable development worldwide.

To strengthen resilience and contribute to tackling the root causes of global development challenges, EU decision-makers should:

## Engage Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in development policy processes.

In many countries, CSOs are seeing their access to decision-making processes diminish. This means that communities and individuals have limited opportunities to express their views and opinions, as well as to take responsible action to make themselves less vulnerable. CSOs help to ensure the best possible representation of all segments of the population and play a critical role in accompanying and supporting communities as they grapple with complex challenges. Enabling and enhancing their full

participation is therefore key to achieving sustainable development.

The EU should ensure meaningful CSO involvement in decision-making processes by including them in the identification of development priorities, the design of development strategies, and the execution of local and regional community planning. The EU should also increase its financial support for local CSOs, including National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to help empower communities to drive their development agendas.

Eva Turro Font with the Spanish Red Cross inspects the water source in a displacement centre in Ifapa, Mozambique, 2019.

© IFRC / Corrie Butler





Distribution of non food items to 45 households (315 people) in the Herat province, Afghanistan, April 2019.

© Afghan Red Crescent Society / Meer

## **Adopt an integrated approach to development, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction.**

Failing to mitigate and to adapt to climate change will see increasingly frequent and extreme climate and weather-related risks. It is widely acknowledged that developing countries will be hit hardest, and that the most vulnerable communities will suffer most<sup>9)</sup>.

The EU should ensure an integrated and holistic approach to development, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction. Development projects need to be risk-informed, addressing any risks associated with disasters and climate change. We also urge the EU to boost efforts to ensure that its development programmes and policies do not increase greenhouse emissions. A 'Do No Harm' approach to climate change should be applied to all EU-funded projects and implementing partnerships, including those with the private sector.

## **Prioritise the most vulnerable in EU development policies and programmes.**

Inequality severely hampers individual and social human development. Older persons, people with disabilities, and poor and socially marginalised people who lack access to information, decision-making structures, resources, and social justice, are often left behind.

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We call on the EU to actively fight discrimination and inequality of opportunity, as well as to ensure that all groups have access to the resources and services offered by its development programmes and projects. Organisations receiving EU development financing should be encouraged

to step-up activities to promote social inclusion, focussing on the specific needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups. The EU should make sure that its systems and financing conditions are designed so that the funds can and do reach the most vulnerable.

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9. See: [https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201610/WDR\\_2016-FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201610/WDR_2016-FINAL_web.pdf)

## DISASTERS AND CRISES

Despite global advances in the reduction of disaster mortality, disasters arising from natural hazards continue to disproportionately impact the most risk-prone areas and the most vulnerable people. An estimated two billion people have been affected by disasters in the last ten years, over 95% of which were weather-related<sup>(10)</sup>. The Red Cross considers that the entire humanitarian sector must make a stronger commitment to meeting the most urgent needs. As the world's largest humanitarian aid donor, the EU has a critical role to play.

To better respond to current humanitarian needs, reduce vulnerabilities, and prevent future disasters, we ask EU decision-makers to prioritise the following:

### **Ensure EU humanitarian aid and civil protection assistance remain rooted in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.**

As the key framework for humanitarian action undertaken by the European Commission and EU Member States, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid<sup>(11)</sup> requires constant reaffirmation, including in the context of civil protection interventions outside the EU<sup>(12)</sup>. Today's crises are increasingly protracted and recurrent; often representing a complex mix of violent conflict, fragility, and migration, which can be aggravated by natural disasters, climate change, and environmental degradation.

While the EU explores more integrated ways to respond to these complex scenarios, it should actively support the preservation of humanitarian space at all levels by ensuring respect for principled action which follows the findings of independent needs assessments. Also, the use of civil protection resources must be needs-driven and focused on areas where it can add most value, without duplicating humanitarian aid efforts.

### **Strengthen preparedness for disaster response at all levels.**

Strengthening preparedness reduces vulnerability and increases the resilience of affected populations to better cope with adversity and return to normality as quickly as possible following a disaster. Without increased investment in risk reduction, anticipatory approaches, and community resilience, millions of vulnerable people will continue to be left behind. In addition, the efficiency of emergency responses and longer-term preparedness and recovery activities is often hampered by the absence of a strong legal basis for the national disaster risk management system.

The EU should support more systematic inclusion of disaster risk reduction measures at all levels, both inside and outside the EU. It should also invest in legal preparedness at the national level to ensure clarity in respective responsibilities, priority actions, resource-assignment, and coordination. Furthermore, adequate legal procedures must be in place to facilitate cross-border cooperation in emergencies.

### **Support and reinforce the role of local responders.**

Local disaster response is essential to saving lives and enabling communities to increase their resilience to emergencies, as recognised in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. However, the significant capacities and contributions of local and national humanitarian actors are not sufficiently reflected in their access to resources and decision-making processes. In 2017 for example, only 2.9% of international humanitarian assistance went directly to local and national responders<sup>(13)</sup>.

Local actors are uniquely positioned to link preparedness and response to longer-term recovery and sustainable development. In line with global commitments, the EU should increase the proportion of funds allocated to the sub-national and local levels, with a focus on building institutional capacities.



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10. See: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/10/B-WDR-2018-EN-LR.pdf>

11. See: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42008X0130\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42008X0130(01)&from=EN)

12. See: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/red-cross-societies-and-ifrc-secreteriat-relations-with-european-union-civil-protection-actors-for-international-activities>

13. See: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/10/B-WDR-2018-EN-LR.pdf>