



VOICE (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies) is a network representing 86 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide, which are based in 19 European countries. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

Ensuring people's needs are at the heart of the nexus approach: a humanitarian NGO perspective

VOICE policy resolution 2018

VOICE welcomes the EU decision to pilot the humanitarian-development nexus in six countries. From a humanitarian NGO perspective, adopting a nexus approach is about offering the necessary operational flexibility to address people's humanitarian and development needs in protracted crises in a coordinated manner. Doing this at sub-regional level in six countries is a practical and context-specific approach that allows for learning and development. NGOs welcome the work by the EU's humanitarian and development departments and delegations on developing joint analysis, planning and assessment frameworks and action plans. Based on the experience of NGOs in the field so far, VOICE asks the EU to broaden the process and better include its partners.

In a foreign policy context increasingly driven by security and stabilisation concerns^[1], humanitarian NGOs welcome that the EU has confirmed important safeguards regarding the humanitarian principles referring to the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid^[2] as this counters the risk of instrumentalisation of the nexus for security purposes. In light of escalating needs, and rapidly evolving and intensifying conflicts, a principled humanitarian response is required. This is also true in the countries where the nexus approach is being piloted.

Successfully implementing the humanitarian-development nexus implies:

- ▶ ensuring people's needs are at the centre of the process, including through involvement of NGOs at field level
- ▶ more multi-year planning and funding in humanitarian activities and the systematic introduction of crisis modifiers in development activities
- ▶ conducting lessons-learned to ensure the further development of the nexus approach and a commitment to it in the long term
- ▶ using the opportunity to enhance a community resilience approach
- ▶ respecting and promoting IHL and humanitarian principles

Background

- ▶ **Ensuring people's needs are at the centre of assessment, analysis and action plans, including through the involvement of NGOs in the process at field level**

The EU institutions and member states will need to overcome cultural and institutional hurdles to achieve the nexus. An inclusive and localised approach to the nexus pilot countries is essential to delivering effective responses and ensuring that no one is left behind in protracted crises. The EU should seek to ensure that international and national NGOs are adequately involved in relevant nexus planning and programming to ensure that gaps are bridged. Given their field experience, NGOs can help provide critical community-based experience, a bottom-up approach and ensure people's needs are put at the centre.

[1] Including in the context of the UN's 'triple nexus' with a peace/security focus, the EU's Global Strategy, the EU integrated approach to conflicts and crises and the new EU focus on state resilience.

[2] Council conclusions on humanitarian development nexus (May 2017), Commission Communication on a strategic approach to resilience (June 2017), Council conclusions on Integrated approach to conflicts and crises (January 2018).

▶ **More multi-year planning and funding in EU humanitarian activities and the systematic introduction of crisis modifiers in EU development activities**

Implementing the nexus requires ensuring complementarity of development and humanitarian activities. Overall this requires a culture shift from the EU as a donor, towards more flexibility and risk-taking to support LRRD, community resilience, early recovery and reconstruction. NGOs have seen opportunities lost due to a lack of suitable instruments – the next MFF provides an opportunity to address this. Now that the policies are in place, the EU needs to translate the necessary operational flexibility in the right financial instruments and tools: more multi-year planning and funding in EU humanitarian activities, and the systematic introduction of crisis modifiers in EU development activities are first concrete elements the EU can introduce to allow its partners to effectively contribute to nexus implementation.

▶ **Conducting lessons-learned to ensure the further development of the nexus approach and a commitment to it in the long term through the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF - EU multiannual budgetary cycle)**

Defining action plans for each nexus pilot is a welcome step as it will help make them concrete and the EU accountable. Regular reviews should be undertaken to stimulate lessons learned exercises including between the different pilots, especially on the process of implementing the nexus and its impact. Former EU experience of working on LRRD (e.g. drought cycle management in Horn of Africa) can also provide useful elements into the design and monitoring of these action plans. Given the high interest and the momentum around the nexus, new pilots should be rapidly identified especially if the current ones do not make the expected progress. Commitment to the nexus approach and lessons-learned should be integrated into the aid instrument(s) under the next funding cycle and MFF.

▶ **Using the opportunity to enhance a community resilience approach**

People and communities must remain the core stakeholders in building resilience. Paying attention to the most vulnerable/at risk people and groups, building strategies to contribute to more community resilience through greater preparedness, and harnessing the transformative aspect of resilience are essential. This nexus pilot exercise offers a unique opportunity to develop prevention measures, enhance response capacity, support early recovery, build self-reliance and reduce risks at community level; delivering a community resilience approach and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals commitment to leave no one behind and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

▶ **Continuing to respect and promote IHL and the humanitarian principles**

The nexus approach is being applied primarily in fragile contexts where populations' access to humanitarian assistance and aid workers' security are often threatened and where protection needs are high. NGOs thus recall the need for context-specificity of the nexus approach and strongly encourage the EU to stay committed to ensuring an enabling environment for frontline responders to deliver impartial humanitarian aid where it is needed. In line with the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the management and delivery of humanitarian aid must remain principled, unconditional and based on assessed needs. Recognising that NGOs need to be able to maintain independence and neutrality, the EU and member states' foreign relations strategies, policies and action plans must fully respect the principled nature of humanitarian aid, and define clear actions to ensure respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). They must continue in their efforts to raise awareness of the need to respect IHL and address their own actions' impact on respect for IHL (e.g. responsibilities in terms of facilitation of hostilities through the sale of arms).