How to build an innovative humanitarian aid strategy: spotlight on current and forgotten crises

2023/2000(INI) - 31/10/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Development adopted the own-initiative report by Carlos ZORRINHO (S&D, PT) on how to build an innovative humanitarian aid strategy: spotlight on current and forgotten crises.

Humanitarian needs are at an all-time high and are growing at an unprecedented speed, with 339 million people estimated to be in need in 2023 compared to 274 million in 2022. The gap between global humanitarian needs and the resources allocated to meet them continues to widen. The EU, together with its Member States and the United States account for the vast majority of global funding for humanitarian aid. The EU's humanitarian budget for 2023 has been set at EUR 1.7 billion, which is far from sufficient to continue keeping up with the EU's commitments as one of the world's leading donors. There are striking imbalances in funding between humanitarian appeals, reflecting the fact that more crises are being forgotten.

The report stated that there is no universally agreed official definition of a 'forgotten crisis'. The term 'forgotten crisis' is often used to describe humanitarian crises that receive limited attention and media coverage, are often overshadowed by other emergencies or ongoing conflicts, or that fail to generate an international response despite the severity of the situation and its impact on affected populations. The Commission allocates at least 15 % of its initial annual humanitarian budget to forgotten crises and has led by example in ensuring there is no diversion of aid in the light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Innovative structural solutions are needed to address global humanitarian challenges and ensure that the humanitarian system is more agile, prepared for and responsive to humanitarian crises. These solutions should focus the following:

Funding

Members urgently called on the Commission and the Member States to substantially increase their humanitarian aid budgets – without compromising their development budgets – to respond to humanitarian needs, which are at a record high. They reiterated their call on the Member States to allocate a fixed share of 0.7 % of their gross national incomes to official development assistance (ODA). They called on the Member States to set ambitious targets and create roadmaps for gradually increasing ODA to meet the final target of 10 %.

The report called for the revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) to include a substantial increase in the humanitarian aid budget to match the new humanitarian landscape and needs, including the specific needs of women and girls. Members are concerned that the funds earmarked for external crises under the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (SEAR) were already exhausted in the first quarter of 2023. In this regard, they suggested splitting the SEAR into two separate parts, reflecting the internal and external dimensions, and equipping each part with adequate funding. Parliament and the Council are called on to substantially increase the humanitarian aid instrument in the context of the 2024 annual budget.

The committee underlined the important role of civil society, humanitarian organisations and local partners in identifying needs and delivering humanitarian aid directly to those in need.

The triple nexus

The report noted that the triple nexus is key to addressing the underlying causes and context-specific needs in complex and protracted crises and to building resilience to future crises. It is stressed that poverty, conflict, instability and forced displacement are closely related phenomena that must be addressed in a coherent and comprehensive manner. Members insisted on more nexus-specific funding, transparency, visibility, coordination and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders when applying the triple nexus approach, including through better involvement of local actors.

People-centred approach

While stressing the importance of building human resilience by enhancingprotection, Members called for efforts to enhance local and sustainable agricultural and food production by promoting agro-ecological methods and sustainable fisheries to increase food availability and prevent dependence on external supplies in times of humanitarian crises. They highlighted the role and importance of local formal and informal civil society organisations in the humanitarian response.

Enabling environment

The Commission is called on to:

- develop a humanitarian diplomacy strategy together with the Member States, ensuring a more systematic and coordinated approach to humanitarian diplomacy;

- establish a European Centre for Humanitarian Research and Innovation, bringing together experts from academia and practitioners to foster innovation in the humanitarian sector, notably on access to new sources of finance.

Role of media

The report underlined the critical role of media in raising awareness of crises and generating public support for crisis response. Media organisations should not abandon coverage of conflicts, even if they are deemed ‘prolonged’ 'or ‘forgotten’, as continued reporting is essential for keeping the international community informed, maintaining pressure on relevant stakeholders and supporting efforts towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding.