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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**on an Integrated Approach to Fragility**

*Accompanying the document*

**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE  
COUNCIL**

**Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU's humanitarian action in a  
shifting global order**

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## Introduction

Globally, fragility is on the rise, fuelling insecurity and disrupting development progress worldwide. Around 2 billion people – 25% of the global population – live in highly fragile situations which are also home to 72% of those living in extreme poverty. By 2040, over 90% of the world's extreme poor are expected to live in highly or extremely fragile situations <sup>(1)</sup>. Today, the vast majority of the 239 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid already live in such situations <sup>(2)</sup>. About 117.3 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide as of mid-2025 due to conflict, persecution, violence or human rights violations. Children and young people are among the most affected: 27% lack education, jobs or training, and they make up 40% of all forcibly displaced people <sup>(3)</sup>. Fragility also disproportionately affects groups in situations of vulnerability, who often face compounded and intersecting forms of discrimination and barriers to accessing protection and basic services. Almost 40% of the highly and extremely fragile situations are characterised by conflict. In addition, over 75% of contexts with high or extreme levels of fragility, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is stagnating or reversing <sup>(4)</sup> while official development assistance (ODA) worldwide is projected to decline further <sup>(5)</sup>.

In this **increasingly polarised geopolitical landscape**, competing actors instrumentalise fragility, making the world less safe. This endangers global norms, including human rights and international humanitarian law. Fragility also threatens international security and stability, affects access to basic services and livelihoods, disrupts markets, supply chains and economic security and exacerbates displacement and migration problems. Addressing the causes of fragility is therefore both an act of solidarity and an urgent and strategic necessity for both the EU and the world.

The European Union is uniquely placed to leverage its political, economic, security and diplomatic tools in support of peace, stability and resilience in fragile situations. To effectively address the evolving geopolitical realities and multidimensional aspects of fragility, the EU must recalibrate its engagement and optimise its strategies in order to remain a reliable partner and have a greater impact, by responding to the needs of local populations and doing what is required to achieve the EU's strategic objectives.

This Commission Staff Working Document (SWD) accompanies the Joint Communication 'Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU's humanitarian action in a shifting global order' <sup>(6)</sup>, which describes the key features of the **EU's integrated approach to fragility** and its implementation. The integrated approach focuses on addressing the causes of fragility – particularly in highly and extremely fragile situations – by strengthening resilience, stability, peace and sustainable development, while continuing to respond to immediate humanitarian needs. The Staff Working Document operationalises this approach, which reflects EU's strategic objectives, interests, values and principles, as stated in the Joint Communication. It also outlines a Team Europe approach to fragility, and ways of strengthening collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, notably international financial

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*, 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2026-enesfr>.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *Global Trends*, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>.

<sup>4</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> OECD, *Cuts in official development assistance: OECD projections for 2025 and the near term*. OECD Policy Briefs, No. 26, 2025, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8c530629-en>.

<sup>6</sup> JOIN (2026) 25

institutions (IFIs), the private sector, local actors and civil society, the UN, non-governmental organisations and other partners.

The integrated approach draws on existing EU policy commitments, Council conclusions and European Parliament texts, as well as past implementation experience, lessons learnt and feedback from extensive dialogues with stakeholders and partners <sup>(7)</sup>.

## 1. Navigating fragility: unpacking complex vulnerabilities

This section explains the complexities of fragile situations, outlining their key characteristics and impacts, which are the result of deeply interconnected causes and effects.

### 1.1. Key characteristics of fragility

The EU's integrated approach to fragility, as presented and defined in the Joint Communication, is based on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD's) definition of and framework for analysing fragility <sup>(8)</sup>. The OECD framework focuses on the capacity of a community, system or state to anticipate, mitigate and manage risks, vulnerabilities and emerging threats, as well as the impact of crises such as armed conflict or natural hazards.

**Fragility is multidimensional.** It is commonly analysed in terms of six dimensions – economic, human, environmental, political, security and societal – requiring context-specific and differentiated approaches <sup>(9)</sup>.

**Fragility is not confined to country level.** It can also emerge at regional level, or in cross-border and subnational settings. **Pockets of fragility** are often characterised by acute poverty, environmental fragility and localised violence <sup>(10)</sup>. However, they are often overlooked as national economic growth continues to rise <sup>(11)</sup>.

**Fragility is not synonymous with armed conflict.** However, highly fragile situations are very often characterised by conflict or risk of tipping over into it. Today, the number of armed conflicts is at its highest since the end of the Cold War <sup>(12)</sup>. According to the OECD, of the 61 situations characterised by high and extreme fragility, 24 are characterised by armed conflict and eight are in a state of war <sup>(13)</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> These include, among others, the Commission's Communication *The EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles*, COM (2021) 110 final, the Commission's Joint Communication *The Global Gateway*, JOIN (2021) 30 final, the Council conclusions *Strengthening resilience in partner countries through EU external action*, (EUCO 11777/25), the Council conclusions *Addressing the humanitarian funding gap*, (EUCO 9598/23), and the Council conclusions *The EU's renewed partnership with least developed countries*, (EUCO 9336/22), as well as the European Parliament's resolution on *Humanitarian aid in a time of polycrisis – reaffirming our principles for a more effective and ambitious response to humanitarian crises*, (2025/2085 (INI)), Joint Communication *The Pact for the Mediterranean. One Sea, One Pact, One Future*; JOIN(2025)26 final. On implementation experience, for instance, *Commission Staff Working Document Evaluation: Comprehensive evaluation of the European Commission's humanitarian aid 2017-2022*, SWD (2026) 63 final.

<sup>8</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267213-en>.

<sup>9</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>, pp. 22, 50.

<sup>10</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank Group, *Fragility, Conflict, and Violence in Middle-income Countries*. Washington, D.C., 2022, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099648312122229402>.

<sup>12</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2025*, Sydney, 2025.

<sup>13</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>, p. 12.

**Fragility is increasingly expanding beyond low-income countries.** More middle-income (34) than low-income countries (26) are experiencing high and extreme fragility, as a result of, among other things, conflict spillover, subnational violence, weak institutions and debt distress. ‘Estranged’, ‘constrained’ or ‘complex’ situations (<sup>14</sup>) are particularly challenging, due to deep levels of fragility and the fact that political relations between the ruling authorities and the EU and other international partners are extremely difficult and complex.

### Key terms

**Fragility:** The combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Fragility can lead to negative outcomes including violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, humanitarian crises or other emergencies (<sup>15</sup>).

**Resilience:** The ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks (<sup>16</sup>).

## 1.2. Main drivers and consequences of fragility

Fragile situations are often characterised by cycles of instability and vulnerability. Highly and extremely fragile situations and communities are characterised by particular challenges in terms of **access to basic services**, such as education, healthcare, food security, clean water, sanitation and social protection. Limited access to these vital services worsens poverty and aggravates humanitarian needs. Fragility also undermines progress towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, food and nutrition insecurity both fuel and result from systemic fragility. Nearly 300 million people suffered from acute hunger in 2024, and lived in areas where violence destroys food systems, mass displacement strips away livelihoods and collapsing infrastructure traps populations in cycles of hunger and instability. This puts immense pressure on the people affected and on their governments.

Fragility is associated with **democratic backsliding**. Over 50% of highly fragile countries became more autocratic between 2019 and 2023 (<sup>17</sup>), further concentrating power, fuelling corruption and undermining state effectiveness. The erosion of trust enables exploitation by non-state groups and leaves room for organised crime and terrorism, threatening local and global security. The rise of autocracies in fragile situations further undermines human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and the rule of law, thus threatening the EU’s partnerships with these countries.

**Political and economic fragility** often go hand in hand, creating vicious cycles that lead to instability, low investment and high inflation. Weak institutions and rising public debt heighten the risks for private sector investments, reducing fiscal revenue and driving up borrowing costs

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<sup>14</sup> Within the context of this Staff Working Document, the Commission considers this to include countries in which the ruling authorities have unconstitutionally obtained or retained power; states under comprehensive international sanctions for serious human rights abuses, acts of external aggression or egregious levels of political corruption; transitional situations, in which national authorities are internationally recognized as an interim measure pending the establishment of, or return to, constitutional order; and contested electoral situations.

<sup>15</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267213-en>, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> COM (2012) 586 final.

<sup>17</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>, p. 59.

on financial markets. Lack of access to basic services, unemployment and inequality result in adverse coping mechanisms such as irregular migration, child labour, and child and forced marriage, and increase the risk of sexual and gender-based violence against women and LGBTIQ+ persons, or radicalisation as well as disability discrimination and exclusion. In areas such as the Sahel, terrorism and radicalisation are fuelled by entrenched poverty, governance deficits, corruption and the lack of economic opportunities for young people. Illicit mining and flows of raw materials such as gold and cobalt also play a role in determining the political economy of fragility and conflict, while geopolitical competition intensifies fragility. Regional powers and armed groups exploit conflict-affected areas, polarising competition and jeopardising access to critical resources and supply chains, while using them for their own financing. Highly fragile contexts are particularly susceptible to the impacts of cybersecurity threats, the proliferation of information manipulation, including disinformation, transnational crime and various types of trafficking.

**Environmental degradation and climate change increase fragility.** Climate change in particular multiplies risks, while intensifying conflicts over resources. The majority of countries most vulnerable to climate change also face high levels of fragility or conflict<sup>(18)</sup>. Many of these contexts also face catastrophic shocks and slow-onset events leading to biodiversity loss, epidemics, increased water scarcity, drought, food insecurity, migration and forced displacement, increasing competition and conflicts over limited natural resources. Demographic pressures and poorly managed urbanisation further exacerbate instability. Rapid urbanisation in fragile regions leads to overcrowded slums, poor services and infrastructure, and hotspots for social unrest and organised crime, while aggravating inequalities and health-related crises.

**Conflict and post-conflict situations exacerbate fragility, mutually reinforcing each other.** Prolonged violence disrupts essential services, displaces populations and creates insecurity, fractures social cohesion, creating fertile ground for further instability and cycles of violence. In countries such as Somalia, unresolved conflicts amplify fragility, with weak state capacity and limited access to resources fuelling grievances and recruitment by armed groups, particularly of young people. Subnational conflicts in middle-income countries have also led to twice as many deaths as those in low-income countries over the last decade<sup>(19)</sup>. They have also led to an increase in the number of persons with disabilities.

**Fragility and forced displacement form yet another self-perpetuating cycle.** Over half of the world's refugees come from extremely fragile countries such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Syria and Sudan, while 64% are hosted in fragile situations. At the same time, affected host communities have to contend with strained resources, social tensions and deepened fragility, hampering their ability to integrate and support displaced populations. Up to 70% of asylum seekers in the EU come from fragile situations.

The consequences of fragility are therefore multiple, for affected populations, partner countries and the EU. Crises around the world cause immense suffering, trigger displacement and undermine political and economic security, including for the EU.

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<sup>18</sup> World Bank Group, *Empowering Fragile States*, Washington, D.C., 2024, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/4d9f3d42dedc0bb5eb452fbf887ec0c5-0410012024/related/Empowering-Fragile-States.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank Group, *Fragility, Conflict, and Violence in Middle-income Countries*. Washington, D.C., 2022, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099648312122229402>.

## 2. Addressing fragility: current EU priorities, policies and lessons learnt

### 2.1. The EU's main objectives in fragile situations

As the Joint Communication reiterates, the EU remains firmly committed to helping people in need, as well as preserving peace, preventing conflicts and strengthening international security. It aims to reduce human suffering and to tackle the causes of fragility in order to end poverty, dependency on aid and climate-related vulnerability and support sustainable development. It promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law, gender equality, inclusion, youth empowerment and an enabling environment for civil society and strengthens human security.

The EU is determined to increase the efficiency, impact, visibility and leverage their external policies in fragile situations. It recognises that long-term, strategic intervention in fragile situations is essential for building resilience, anticipating crises, preventing conflicts, and ensuring sustainable peace, stability and security. Moving beyond donor-beneficiary relationships, the EU will pursue more equal and long-term partnerships to address shared priorities.

### 2.2. Existing EU efforts to intervene, and tools for intervening, in fragile situations

The EU plays a major part in addressing fragility through its long-standing humanitarian and development support, peace and stabilisation efforts. The EU also has a comprehensive toolbox for addressing fragility, which includes political dialogue, diplomatic tools, the provision of the full range of financial and technical support – encompassing grants, financial contributions, macroeconomic assistance, and trade – and support for ensuring security through the deployment of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.

#### 2.2.1. *EU development cooperation and international partnerships*

The Commission addresses sustainable development and global challenges through **international partnerships that promote values and interests**, supporting peace, prosperity, sustainable growth, stability and resilience in partner countries and the EU. A diverse set of financial modalities tailored and combined to address specific needs allows for impactful interventions. These include grants, budget support (such as state and resilience building contracts), EU trust funds <sup>(20)</sup>, as well as loans, guarantees and blended finance.

The **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE) Regulation**, including the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), promotes public and private investments worldwide. It applies a human rights-based approach and contributes to Official Development Assistance and to the reduction of inequalities.

The NDICI-GE country and regional programmes have played a crucial role in addressing fragility, including in crisis-affected countries. For example, the Peaceful and Resilient Borderlands programmes prevent instability and mitigate the impacts of conflict in fragile border areas across Africa, targeting West Africa, including the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes and Southern Africa.

Country programmes and Team Europe initiatives under NDICI-GE have operationalised the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus across different regions, with good practices

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<sup>20</sup> Such as the European Union Trust Fund for stability and addressing the causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF for Africa).

identified in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mozambique, the Philippines, Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen. The resilience component of the NDICI's rapid response pillar has been an additional tool for responding in situations affected by high levels of fragility (for example Pakistan, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, South Sudan and the Central African Republic).

Technical assistance and thematic support programmes are also essential for building the capacity of civil society organisations and partner countries' authorities, by helping to create enabling environments. The Commission further addresses fragility through its various multilateral engagements. Regarding health, for example, the Commission is a major financial contributor to Gavi, the Global Fund, the World Health Organisation Universal Health Coverage Partnership, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and the Pandemic Fund, all of which tailor their approaches to fragile situations.

The **Global Gateway strategy** reflects a change in the Commission's approach to international partnerships. Since its launch in 2021, it has mobilised over EUR 300 billion in investments. In line with the 2030 Agenda, it serves the needs of partner countries with EU strategic interests, advancing the EU's geopolitical role. Learning from previous interventions, the initiative now also addresses the specific needs of fragile situations. Its 360° approach integrates democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean initiatives, security focused investments, and investments catalysing the private sector to create an enabling environment for EU investments and business opportunities, particularly in fragile situations where risks are higher and state capacities weaker. Global Gateway investments in countries affected by fragility need to be context- and conflict-sensitive and adhere to the 'do no harm' principle, by supporting collaboration with civil society, local communities and the private sector to strengthen governance and promote peace. They therefore link long-term, sustainable infrastructure and economic development with broader EU objectives related to prevention, peacebuilding and resilience in fragile situations. In two thirds of fragile situations and about half of all situations with extremely high levels of fragility, Global Gateway investments are used to address the causes of fragility.

### *2.2.2. EU humanitarian aid*

EU humanitarian aid is delivered according to **humanitarian principles**. Funding is non-programmable and allocated annually, while projects may last several years. Priorities for every situation are identified in Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs) and funding is disbursed through a pool of strictly vetted humanitarian organisations <sup>(21)</sup>.

Each Humanitarian Implementation Plan identifies areas and sectors where the humanitarian-development-peace nexus has the most potential. It also includes a Disaster Preparedness budget line. To track progress, the Commission introduced the Resilience Marker to assess the level of sustainability in interventions. As a result, a great majority of funded interventions integrate resilience considerations, including systematic analysis of structural risks and vulnerabilities, the strengthening of local preparedness, as well as stronger linkages between humanitarian activities and development interventions.

The Commission has been scaling up multiannual financing which, in protracted conflict situations, has strong potential to facilitate nexus collaboration with people and organisations

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<sup>21</sup> The overview of DG ECHO partners and the process of certification is explained here: European Commission, 'Working with DG ECHO as an NGO partner 2021-2027', European Commission website, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/humanitarian-partnership-2021-2027/how-to-become-a-partner>.

involved in development and peace. Prioritising actions that are conducive to equitable partnerships with, and capacity building of, local actors also helps strengthen sustainability and community-based resilience. As outlined in the Joint Communication, the Commission intends to make greater use of transformative modalities, such as flexible and multiannual funding with clear exit strategies, cash assistance, anticipatory action, innovative blended finance, digital tools, country-based pooled funds, area-based coordination and support for local actors, to strengthen predictability, increase efficiency and help design transitions to more systemic actions.

Where conditions call for **transition to long-term development interventions** and to facilitate exit strategies, the Commission supports more sustainable interventions. This can include legal assistance regarding housing, land and property rights, support for primary health structures and education, food and livelihood systems, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure. Catalytic funding that mobilises funding from development banks and the private sector has been tested, particularly for technical assistance to international finance and private investment initiatives <sup>(22)</sup>. Links between the humanitarian response and social protection systems have also been successfully developed in several cases, to enable social protection systems to better respond to shocks and support the populations affected <sup>(23)</sup>.

### *3.2.3. EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding*

The EU's role in **addressing the causes of conflict** is at the heart of a **preventive approach to fragility** and efforts to support sustainable peace. The EU's approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding covers a broad spectrum of activities at all stages of a conflict, from prevention to crisis management in order to contribute to sustainable peace. This includes tackling root causes, applying conflict sensitivity, focusing on prevention and early warning systems, ensuring inclusion of traditionally marginalised communities, enhancing the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the Youth, Peace and Security agendas and local ownership with institutional backing, when appropriate.

**Conflict prevention and early warning tools enable** the EU to identify risks associated with proposed actions, as well as appropriate mitigation measures. EU carries out conflict analysis systematically, and since 2020, Conflict Analysis screenings have been conducted in over 60 countries to meet the NDICI requirement for fragile and conflict-affected states and are part of a broad EU early warning system and conflict analysis toolkit <sup>(24)</sup>, providing for a conflict sensitive lens to the implementation of foreign policy tools.

The non-programmable NDICI-Global Europe Rapid Response Pillar on Crisis Response and Conflict Prevention has been instrumental in providing flexibility for the Commission's rapid response, with targeted peace and stability actions at local and regional levels. As an example, crisis response for Syria in 2025 allowed the EU to adapt to the new challenges and support the country in an evolving and volatile situation in the areas of mine action to facilitate the safe return of internally displaced people and refugees and the protection of civilians. The EU also

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<sup>22</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), *DG ECHO pilot initiative on blended finance for humanitarian aid – Lessons learned*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2795/36240>.

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), *Shock-responsive social safety nets*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2795/358856>.

<sup>24</sup> SWD (2023) 295 final.

engaged on dialogue to promote an inclusive political transition and strengthen independent media and counter misinformation.

Actions under the NDICI's thematic peace, stability and conflict prevention programme have empowered individuals and communities to build bridges across divides and strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations. They also made it possible for the Commission to work with regional and global actors on matters as diverse as cyber threats, radicalisation, terrorism and transnational organised crime.

**Peacebuilding encompasses a broad spectrum of interconnected activities**, ranging from high-level political engagement to grassroots initiatives. This includes support for political dialogue, diplomacy, judicial and security sector reforms, as well as peace mediation efforts. In Colombia, for example, the EU played a key role in implementing the 2016 peace agreement via the EU Trust Fund for Colombia, which aimed to reintegrate ex-combatants, revive rural economies, and strengthen governance. Additionally, the EU provides complementary support to transitional justice mechanisms to ensure justice remains an integral component of the broader peace process. In addition, the European Peace Facility (EPF) implements EU actions with security, military and defence implications under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) including assistance and equipment according to the needs of EU partners.

### 2.3. Main lessons learnt from recent EU engagements in fragile situations

Between 2021 and 2024, the EU's Official Development Assistance for situations with high or extreme levels of fragility remained broadly stable. However, its relative share in terms of overall EU ODA declined over the same period, from 35% to 26%, mainly due to increased support for Ukraine.

Between 2021 and 2024, the **Commission disbursed over EUR 11 billion of ODA to countries the OECD regarded as highly and extremely fragile**, split roughly equally between humanitarian and development funding. Regarding the latter, in addition to the EUR 5.3 billion that come from bilateral envelopes covering fragile countries, a significant proportion of funding for regional and global programmes also covers fragile situations.

The EU also strengthened the coherence of its engagement in line with the 2017 Council Conclusions on operationalising the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and identified **six pilot countries** (Chad, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda) to implement its approach. This was followed, later on, by its intervening in other fragile situations, with nexus collaboration frameworks established in Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Pakistan <sup>(25)</sup>.

These efforts were closely monitored, with studies and evaluations done to understand their impact <sup>(26)</sup>. **Key lessons learnt** include the following:

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<sup>25</sup> As a member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the EU is also committed to implementing the 2019 DAC Recommendation on the HDP nexus, which further consolidates its policy framework by introducing common principles and standards for joined-up analysis, planning and financing, emphasising joined-up prioritisation, prevention and risk-informed programming, and closer collaboration with national and local actors in support of humanitarian, development and peace efforts.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, ECDPM / Particip, *HDP Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities for its Implementation*, 2022, [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/eu-hdp-nexus-study-final-report-nov-2022\\_en.pdf](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/eu-hdp-nexus-study-final-report-nov-2022_en.pdf) ; Joint Research Centre, *From fragility to resilience through the lens of climate and mobility*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2026, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/4931905>.

- Taking the **multiple dimensions of fragility** as the strategic entry point for adopting context-specific responses has a greater impact, where humanitarian, political and programmatic approaches are aligned. The EU's principled humanitarian engagement is considered its key added value compared to other actors.
- The **implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus** still lacks consistency across all fragile situations. Systematic and joint analysis of risks, needs, vulnerabilities and structural causes of crisis and conflict, alongside complementary financing, needs to be strengthened. This includes ensuring that joint analyses inform intervention design and that clear frameworks for collaboration are put in place, including stronger integration of the peace component. The implementation of such frameworks in several pilot countries has produced tangible results, but upscaling efforts has often proven difficult. There is a pressing need for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach to reflect the expanding role of private sector development.
- **Flexible approaches** across various instruments can provide options for a swifter response to fast-evolving situations, ensuring a transition from humanitarian aid to development and peace actions. Attention must also be paid to **strategic, impactful and effective approaches** that prioritise long-term resilience, strengthen coordination, and ensure sustainable solutions to address the causes of fragility.
- Given the extent of EU engagement in fragile situations, the EU and EU Member States need to further strengthen coherence in Team Europe approaches. Beyond privileging a **Team Europe approach as a preferred delivery method**, the EU also needs to continue to seek alliances with other key actors, such as the UN and **strengthen its alliances** with international financial institutions.

### 3. Strengthening EU engagement in fragile situations – a strategic framework

#### 3.1. Foundations of EU engagement: strategic principles and priorities

As the Joint Communication and several other policy commitments <sup>(27)</sup> state, the EU's intervention in fragile situations is rooted in complementary values and interests. The promotion of **human rights, equality, the rule of law and the protection of the international rules-based order**, and the **EU's strategic objectives** are key principles guiding the EU's engagement in external action.

In today's volatile geopolitical context, the EU is also strengthening **strategic partnerships** that advance shared interests. These include supporting global peace and stability, economic security and strategic autonomy, addressing irregular migration and forced displacement, promoting human development, respecting human rights, making citizens more secure, and promoting global public goods, climate resilience and gender equality.

This Staff Working Document focuses on highly and extremely fragile situations, as classified by the OECD <sup>(28)</sup>. In line with the Joint Communication, the Staff Working Document further develops the key principles of and priorities for the EU's engagement in these most fragile situations.

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<sup>27</sup> See footnote 7, page 3.

<sup>28</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>.

3.1.1. *Staying engaged, while ensuring context-specific and conflict-sensitive responses (do no harm)*

As a global actor, the EU continues to engage with all highly and extremely fragile situations by drawing on the wide array of tools it has at its disposal, including humanitarian aid, international partnerships, diplomacy, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and stabilisation tools, as well as civilian and military CSDP missions. The EU's engagement is **conflict-sensitive** and adheres to the 'do no harm' principle.

The EU's engagement in fragile situations aims to ensure a **flexible and adaptive approach** to address the causes of fragility, grounded in quality data, evidence-based context analysis and on-the-ground expertise, supported by modern technology and inclusive consultations. Using a **differentiated and context-specific approach**, the EU tailors its engagement to the needs of affected partner countries and their populations, while pursuing its own strategic interests. Principled and needs-based humanitarian assistance is delivered to people affected by conflicts and natural hazards regardless of a country's political situation.

**Remaining engaged in 'complex', 'estranged' and politically 'constrained' situations**, in line with EU interests, is a necessity, notably where disengagement leads to higher costs, the loss of development gains, and increased instability. Calibrated efforts continue to be made to better understand local dynamics, address grievances, build trust, and support diplomatic and political dialogues. Collaboration with local actors, including civil society organisations, young people, community leaders or women's rights and women-led organisations, is crucial for sustainable and conflict-sensitive interventions, especially where relations with governments are not conducive.

***Example: Implementing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in politically constrained situations***

Since the Taliban took over in 2021, all EU actions in **Afghanistan** have been guided by the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions of 2021 and 2023. These underline the EU's commitment to stand by the Afghan people, set out benchmarks for technical engagement, and reaffirm the continued delivery of assistance in a principled way, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women throughout the entire aid delivery process. As the Taliban regime remains unrecognised, all assistance is delivered through international and non-governmental organisations, without support for or legitimisation of the authorities.

Since 2021, the Commission has provided approximately EUR 1.9 billion in support to the people of Afghanistan, in the form of humanitarian assistance covering health, nutrition, water and sanitation, food security, cash for work and protection, in complementarity with basic needs and livelihoods assistance. The latter focuses on strengthening medium- to longer-term perspectives and improving access to income-generation opportunities, especially for women. This included enhancing access to markets and finance, strengthening value chains and ultimately contributing to socio-economic stability, social cohesion and climate resilience. Overall, assistance is delivered in a principled way, with a clear focus on the most vulnerable people, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, minorities, host communities, internally displaced people and the millions of Afghans recently forced to return from Iran and Pakistan.

To ensure strong coordination, Commission services and the EEAS have agreed on a nexus collaboration framework. The EU's presence in the country has enabled it to play a leading

coordination role among key stakeholders, including EU Member States, international donors, the UN and international financial institutions. It has also made it possible to maintain the space necessary to continue advocating for human rights, including women's and girls' rights, in technical engagement with the de facto authorities.

### 3.1.2. *Pursuing a multidimensional approach to resilience and sustainability*

As outlined in the Joint Communication, **addressing the causes of fragility** requires a multidimensional approach, taking into account societal, economic, political, security and environmental factors. This section elaborates on how all these factors feature in the overall EU response.

In fragile situations, the EU does not just respond, it also aims to transform the situation. It **strengthens the resilience** of people, communities, partner governments and institutions by (re)building capacities to anticipate, prevent, prepare for and mitigate crises, disasters and conflicts. Wherever feasible, it also prioritises **approaches with transformative potential** to support long-term sustainable development and peace to eradicate the causes of fragility. Central to this approach is maximising, wherever possible, the **ownership and political will** of partner governments. Local voices, especially women, young people, minorities, and marginalised groups, must be able to shape decisions that affect their lives.

Adopting a human rights-based approach, EU interventions prioritise **human development**, investing in human capital and building community resilience as a key entry point for further engagement. This includes ensuring access to inclusive and quality basic services such as education, health, food security, water and sanitation, nutrition and social protection, reaching those who need them most: women, children, young people and forcibly displaced people.

Recent, nascent political initiatives like the **Global Health Resilience Initiative** <sup>(29)</sup> aim to address the need to strengthen health systems, improve prevention, preparedness and response to health threats, diversify global supply chains of health products, support a more transparent and equitable global health architecture, and build societal resilience, including by fighting mis- and dis-information at the global, regional and country level. Against a backdrop of shifting geopolitical developments, the interlinked priorities underpinned by the Global Health Resilience Initiative show the way forward for a multidimensional approach to health resilience.

Without decent jobs and fair incomes, fragility deepens, making investment in **economic development** crucial for lifting people out of poverty. This includes supporting conditions for decent and stable livelihoods, income opportunities, inclusive economic growth, and reducing public debt and youth unemployment. In this context, Global Gateway investments link infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, skills and economic opportunities to enable countries to go from being aid-dependent to being self-sustaining economies. In many fragile situations, however, the main investment constraint is upstream, notably in the limited availability of bankable project pipelines and capable local partners, as well as enabling the development of policy and regulatory frameworks. Improving project preparation, technical assistance and institutional capacity is therefore critical for sustainable investment.

Climate change is a global challenge, with fragile countries on the frontlines. Building **climate resilience** and integrating disaster preparedness, anticipatory action and disaster risk management are critical for addressing the compounding impacts of climate change,

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<sup>29</sup> COM(2026) 197 final

environmental degradation and natural disasters in fragile situations. Commission services continue to invest in **anticipatory action, linking early warning and rapid response mechanisms**, to reduce the impacts of disasters while investing in climate adaptation, ecosystem restoration, provision of basic water infrastructure and quality water <sup>(30)</sup>, and inclusive access to climate finance. They also continue to promote actions which apply ‘climate resilience by design’, integrating climate considerations from the outset of their external engagements.

***Example: Climate resilience for displacement-affected communities in Sub-Saharan Africa (Team Europe Initiative RE2CLID)***

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Commission is addressing the compounded challenges of climate change, environmental degradation and forced displacement through the RE2CLID programme. It adopts a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach to building resilience among displacement-affected communities, living in areas at risk of natural hazards or other adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. By focusing on two high-risk regions – the Lake Tanganyika basin (DRC, Burundi and Tanzania) and the Southern Africa/South-West Indian Ocean cyclone basin (Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Comoros) – the programme aims to prevent, minimise and resolve climate-induced displacement while supporting disaster forecasts and management systems, sustainable natural resource management and resilience and self-reliance of affected communities. By being in line with African Union strategies, the EU Green Deal, and the Global Compact on Refugees, RE2CLID strengthens regional cooperation. It also contributes to the Team Europe Initiative on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in Africa.

The programme strengthens early warning systems, disaster risk management and natural resource governance by ensuring inclusive, gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive solutions. It supports climate-resilient livelihoods, such as agroecology, sustainable water management and ecosystem restoration, while improving access to basic services, social protection and sustainable solutions for displaced populations.

Fragility thrives where governance fails. The EU has a long track record of strengthening **human rights, democracy and the rule of law**, building on the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2027) and targeted actions in support of inclusive, transparent, independent and accountable public institutions. In this regard, capacities must be built at all levels, with civil society, women, young people, and businesses playing a critical role as leaders and agents of change. The Commission’s interventions balance capacity-building support for partner governments with support and **resilience-building measures for local structures and communities**.

Peace is not just the absence of war. To promote mutual trust, stability and peace in highly fragile situations and to prevent further conflict spillovers, the Commission’s interventions in other areas need to better link up with **conflict prevention, mediation, stabilisation, peacebuilding and security actions**. Extreme fragility is often linked to a weakened or non-existent social contract and distrust between groups, and frequently also between the population

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<sup>30</sup> Communication on European Water Resilience Strategy; COM(2025) 280 final

and the state. This requires dialogue, notably through local structures, and peacebuilding in all types of interventions, for instance through the EU's inclusive approach to peace mediation. Applying a 'do no harm' approach by mainstreaming conflict-sensitive disaster risk management and climate-proofing investments also mitigates the risks of natural resources-based conflicts and displacement. This also includes promoting international humanitarian law, including through humanitarian diplomacy <sup>(31)</sup>.

**Refugees, forcibly or internally displaced people and returnees** are among the most vulnerable groups. To build pathways out of poverty, the Commission advances the economic and financial inclusion of refugees and displaced people, supports refugee entrepreneurship, and promotes private investments in displacement-affected situations <sup>(32)</sup>. To this end, the Commission strengthens cooperation with the private sector and works closely with development finance institutions to help with the de-risking and tailoring private investments. Through humanitarian aid, it also supports displaced populations in accessing shelter, protection, food, healthcare and education, including through multi-purpose cash transfers, and strengthens cooperation with NGOs and UN agencies for local expertise and advocacy. The Commission also envisages supporting digital solutions, for instance for mobile remittances and e-documentation, to bridge gaps for forcibly displaced people, migrants and returnees. These can help maximising the positive impact of remittances, which contribute to peace and stability by reducing the appeal of violence, promoting investment and transmitting positive social norms. Lastly, the EU focuses on strategic partnerships with host governments to drive policy reforms on workers' rights, documentation and business registration, to create an enabling environment for investments and to remove barriers to financial inclusion.

***Example: A comprehensive response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan***

In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, Commission services have taken coordinated action, leveraging the respective instruments to obtain significant results. In **Jordan**, this means the transition from emergency aid to long-term development support through the implementation of the Joint Humanitarian and Development Framework (JHDF). This nexus approach makes it possible to increasingly direct EU funding towards building the resilience of the population and directly supporting Jordan's government. Looking ahead to the 2026-2027 period, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) has finalised the transition of its emergency education support to the Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG MENA), to enable the provision of comprehensive support in this sector. DG MENA will therefore continue its educational initiatives, focusing on system strengthening, including budgetary support, as part of the integration process. In line with the nexus approach, cash assistance is fully incorporated into DG MENA's social protection programmes, making them more sustainable. Civil documentation, making for better protection and enabling voluntary returns, and healthcare, including sexual and reproductive healthcare services in camps and urban settings, are areas where DG ECHO and DG MENA work in concert with each other, together with the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments. Through these targeted,

<sup>31</sup> *Joint Staff Working Document: A strategic approach to EU Humanitarian Diplomacy, SWD (2026) (312)*

<sup>32</sup> Successful examples of such types of engagement have been documented by the Joint Research Centre, *From fragility to resilience through the lens of climate and mobility*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2026, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/4931905>.

collaborative interventions, the EU continues to bring about lasting change for refugees and vulnerable populations.

### *3.1.3. Strengthening the Team Europe approach and strategic partnerships as part of a humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach*

In situations with high and extreme fragility, it is essential to **learn from past interventions in order to strengthen the humanitarian-development-peace nexus**. By better articulating complementary approaches and interventions, the EU, in line with a Team Europe approach, can effectively **anticipate, prepare for and respond to** crises by addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and the causes of fragility. Given the increasingly protracted nature of crises, this requires a calibrated approach, which can include scaling up structural development interventions, as well as peacebuilding and conflict prevention to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid.

#### ***Example: Implementing collaborative frameworks in Ethiopia***

In Ethiopia, the EU, together with EU Member States, have developed a Team Europe humanitarian-development-peace nexus collaboration framework to support integrated responses to humanitarian, development and peace challenges that lead to fragility and sustain cycles of recurrent needs.

With a test case in the Somali region, the collaboration framework outlines shared tools and objectives, including geographical humanitarian-development-peace nexus profiles and common monitoring systems that ensure mutual accountability. This humanitarian-development-peace nexus-informed territorial coordination model acts as a mechanism to translate resilience priorities into structured economic opportunities. Addressing persistent challenges regarding, for instance, the promotion of stability and the prevention of conflict, and unlocking the region's economic potential in terms of livestock, water resources and untapped value chains, the model provides the investment readiness that Global Gateway requires. This is done through the delineation of clear institutional roles to reduce fragmentation, strengthen coordination and territorial planning, and put in place predictable service systems that enable sequenced, long-term investments. Ultimately, the framework provides what is needed to shift from mere coordination towards structured, humanitarian-development-peace area-based delivery.

Addressing fragility therefore demands looking beyond public finance-based grants and into new, flexible financing models. The Commission is actively stepping up the use of **innovative and flexible financing mechanisms**, in a Team Europe approach, with a view to crowding in more private funding, while empowering the local private sector. By leveraging public funds to catalyse private capital – while ensuring clear, complementary roles – the Commission can embed investments and private-sector engagement in a more stable, reform-driven framework. Like other interventions, these need to be conflict-sensitive, support enhanced due diligence practices of the private sector and harness the knowledge and expertise of national and local stakeholders, including civil society organisations, in order to have an impact. Focus is also put

on models and approaches that make financial inclusion possible and empower the most vulnerable populations, such as people affected by humanitarian crises, internally displaced people or refugees, and priority groups such as young people and women, including as peace facilitators and mediators.

***Example: Innovative risk-sharing instruments***

**NASIRA (Plus)** shows how innovative risk-sharing instruments can support private sector development and financial inclusion in fragile situations. Through portfolio guarantees provided to local financial institutions by means of the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), it helps de-risk lending in environments where financial markets are often shallow and perceived risks high. Under the EFSD+, NASIRA has successfully strengthened the lending capacity of local financial intermediaries to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through a EUR 100 million guarantee, helping promote sustainable investments in partner countries and reaching underserved entrepreneurs in challenging market environments, before closing its investment period in 2024. Building on this success, NASIRA (Plus) (EUR 265 million) was launched under the EFSD+ with a geographical focus on Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern European Neighbourhood countries, Southern European Neighbourhood countries and Türkiye. Similarly, NASIRA (Plus) aims to provide portfolio guarantees to local private-sector financial institutions, leveraging private capital to expand access to finance for MSMEs with higher risk profiles, particularly those run by women, young people, migrants, marginalised groups, and rural businesses, including those operating in the least developed countries and in fragile situations. By de-risking lending to these vulnerable groups, NASIRA (Plus) supports private sector development, financial inclusion and economic resilience in fragile markets, paving the way for further innovative instruments.

In addition to **improving coordination with EU Member States**, in a Team Europe approach, the EU continues to **support partnerships** with international financial institutions (IFIs), including the European Investment Bank (EIB), civil society, the private sector, philanthropic organisations, and key organisations active in fragile situations such as the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and international non-governmental organisations. The EU also continues to deepen cooperation with regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In line with the Communication on a strategic partnership with the Gulf<sup>(33)</sup>, the EU is actively exploring avenues of triangular cooperation with the Gulf countries, in particular in fragile situations such as the Middle East or Afghanistan. A structured cooperation with Gulf countries will also be pursued under the Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA) to be negotiated.

### **3.2. Operationalising future engagement: smart and collaborative approaches**

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<sup>33</sup> JOIN(2022) 13 final

The EU's success in highly fragile situations depends on strong and clear operational processes, adequate human and financial resources, and agile coordination. This requires sustained investments in staff skills and up-to-date expertise for it to have a lasting impact. Given the dynamic and volatile nature of such environments, regular monitoring focused on results, continuous learning and adaptive review processes is crucial for ensuring timely, more efficient, more systematic and proportionate responses. In line with the Joint Communication, this section provides more detailed information on tools and methods that the Commission services and the EEAS will adopt to strengthen their impact in extremely fragile situations.

### *3.2.1. From analysis to action: joint context assessment and planning*

For situations characterised by high or extreme fragility, the EU can draw on a number of existing tools and working methods. **Joint analyses of political and socio-economic dynamics** highlight specific conflict risks and causes of conflict, including those driven by climate change. These analyses can be based on existing situation analyses and data, such as the Human Rights and Democracy Country analyses, Conflict Analysis Screening, Structural Country Assessments or other types of EU conflict analysis, complemented by dynamic foresight or scenario tools where necessary<sup>34</sup>. Needs assessments, resilience assessments, political economy analysis and security analyses, stabilisation and assessment plans or programme-specific conflict sensitivity assessments can also be used (<sup>35</sup>). Where appropriate, **subnational or cross-border fragile situations** can be taken into consideration, accounting for localised pockets of fragility within more stable national situations.

Joint analyses give a shared understanding of the situation to EU actors across the board, highlighting humanitarian needs, development opportunities and avenues for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. They also help to flag main risks and sensitivities relevant to the achievement of the EU's regional objectives.

**Adaptable and agile fragility frameworks** will be developed for all extremely fragile situations, based on prior experiences with and replacing currently tested nexus collaboration frameworks to ensure increased agility. Building on relevant analytical work, these frameworks will establish a common understanding among the Commission services and EEAS of priorities and actions required across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus spectrum for more impactful engagement on the ground. They will provide useful input for the Commission's interventions. They will also inform the EU's political, economic and security dialogues with the countries concerned. To ensure they remain relevant to the situations at hand, they will be reviewed periodically or if the situation changes significantly. This will also feed into conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, as well as the EU's political dialogue with the countries concerned, to better leverage its engagement with its partners.

These fragility frameworks will consist of:

- the consolidation of existing EU analyses and needs assessments and country and regional strategies to help establish a common understanding among EU Delegations, DG ECHO field offices and all relevant Commission services and the EEAS. This will increase coherence and complementarity, while ensuring better coordination;

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<sup>34</sup> For more information on these, see SWD (2023) 295 final.

<sup>35</sup> A good example is the Gaza Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment, a joint assessment effort by the EU, UN, and World Bank. It evaluates damages, economic losses, and recovery needs across sectors, guiding both early recovery and long-term reconstruction in Gaza.

- periodic review (or ad-hoc in case of significant changes) to ensure situational relevance.

The EU and EU Member States will seek improved **integration of humanitarian-development-peace actions** through sequenced, complementary or joint funding to maximise impact. **Crisis modifiers** will continue to be embedded in humanitarian responses. Using all the available **flexibility** in procedures will facilitate immediate, adaptive responses to crises. Adequate decision procedures can also be put in place to quickly react to situations of transitions from conflict, paving the way for humanitarian exit strategies.

The EU will continue to consistently include **EU Member States** in analytical work, share results with them and encourage them to join the EU in scaling up implementation to strengthen policy coherence, financial impact and efficiency. The EU will also leverage its deep contextual expertise to better inform, help reduce and where possible break down barriers preventing the European private sector or investment partners from engaging in these settings in a conflict-sensitive way.

### *3.2.2. Coherence and coordination: strengthening internal and external partnerships*

Existing or, where needed, dedicated coordination structures and platforms for dialogue will guide the process at country level (or where relevant at subnational level), linking all EU actors present in each situation. EU Delegations are at the centre of these coordination efforts and will strengthen cooperation and synergies with DG ECHO field offices, including in politically estranged situations. The Commission services and EEAS will identify **focal points for fragility**, based on existing resources, in relevant EU Delegations, and in ECHO field offices.

At country level, Heads of Delegation and senior delegation staff could regularly organise structured exchanges with EU Member States to share context analyses, coordinate ongoing activities in a Team Europe approach and discuss recommendations regarding priority measures. Heads of CSDP missions could also contribute if appropriate. Without prejudice to humanitarian principles, DG ECHO field offices will be associated with and contribute to these discussions. In conflict settings with fewer staff present on the ground, alternative models of coordination, with a larger role for regional units or for headquarters can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Coordination with EU Member States will continue to be complemented by **regular exchanges with key stakeholders**, such as implementing partners, central and local authorities, the United Nations, and civil society. In line with EU priorities, a special focus will be on young people and women and people with disabilities. Existing networks and consultation mechanisms, such as civil society roadmaps, youth sounding boards and Youth Policy Dialogues, ensure inclusive, actionable dialogue. Closer cooperation among different implementing partners to ensure complementarity and synergies in their response will continue to be encouraged.

The EU will also develop and reinforce **partnerships with third countries and regional organisations** to address fragile contexts and ensure financial support notably with the aim to ensure stability, security and sustainable development in the EU's neighbourhood and other strategic regions.

Building on the 2021 Joint Communication *Strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism* <sup>(36)</sup>, the EU will continue **to strengthen coordination, in a Team Europe approach, within the governing bodies of multilateral institutions**, such as international development banks, international financial institutions, and other international organisations

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<sup>36</sup> JOIN (2021) 3 final.

and global funds to increase the coherence of approaches in highly and extremely fragile situations.

### *3.2.3. Adaptive management: monitoring progress, learning and accountability*

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning will ensure a relevant and effective response, making it possible to adjust approaches based on evidence, including on the basis of potential exit strategies. To ensure that EU engagement remains responsive and effective in highly volatile situations, **joint monitoring**, and, where possible, in close cooperation with EU Member States, needs to be done more systematically, so that adaptations take place in good time.

A strong focus on results and adaptive learning will enable the EU to refine its mix of instruments, assess progress in addressing the causes of fragility, and uphold the ‘do no harm’ principle. Building on existing coordination efforts, progress will be tracked through **regular interservice updates on implementation and achievements** with all relevant services at the appropriate level. Strategic national, regional and HQ discussions with relevant stakeholders, such as EU Member States, UN agencies, partner governments, civil society and business sector representatives, on shared priorities in extremely fragile situations, will help to further improve coherence and complementarity and make strategic adjustments possible.

### *3.2.4. Ensuring long-term impact: sustainability and institutional capacity*

To strengthen the EU’s long-term impact in fragile situations, targeted investments in strong institutional capacities and knowledge management are essential. This includes **empowering and supporting staff** in EU delegations, DG ECHO field offices and EU headquarters, by informing them of the specificities of fragile situations, such as conflict sensitivity, humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches, and situation-specific analysis, intervention design and monitoring.

The EU continues to leverage its existing network of EU Delegations and DG ECHO field offices, alongside closer collaboration with EU Member States and implementing partners, to improve fragility-related interventions. EU Delegations, DG ECHO field offices and, where necessary, partners, will be able to benefit from **tailored, on-demand support** on fragility-related topics, including on joint analysis and designing conflict-sensitive interventions. This support will be provided through peer learning, staff training, on-demand expert assistance, and better knowledge sharing, beginning with EU Member States, especially when modalities change.

**Strategic communication** and narrative development will also be prioritised to counter information manipulation, including disinformation and where relevant, hybrid threats while strengthening the value of EU partnerships and promoting the EU’s core principles, with EU Delegations playing a key role in promoting innovative approaches to tackle this challenge.

The Commission will propose an independent **evaluation** of results under this approach after three years.