

Keynote Speech - Deputy DG Michael KÖHLER
19th edition Dubai International Humanitarian Aid & Development
(DIHAD)
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[Intro]

The 19th edition of the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid & Development is opening within a context of extreme events.

Crises -- not only for example the Russian war against Ukraine but also the worldwide food crisis resulting from the Russian war or the devastating earthquake in Türkiye and Syria-- are multiplying. We are confronted with increasing instability in the Middle East, Western and Eastern Africa. 103 million persons today are living in displacement.

2023 will set another **record high of humanitarian needs**, with 339 million people in need of assistance and protection. The UN estimates that USD 51.5 billion will be needed to meet the needs of the 230 million people most in need.

However, while the number of crises and humanitarian needs are growing globally, humanitarian budgets are under increased pressure and, in 2022, only 47% of funding needs were met – an enormous gap between needs and resources.

[Part 1 – Impact of climate change on humanitarian sector]

Climate change is a defining challenge of our times and is also one of the main drivers of humanitarian needs.

In times of conflict and war, addressing climate change may seem secondary.

However, there is a clear link between climate change and humanitarian needs. And, if we don't act now, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance due to climate-related disasters might double to 200 million by 2050 (according to the latest projections of the International Federation of the Red Cross).

Climate change results in more frequent, longer and larger disasters. The scale of the flooding in Pakistan, for example, is due to extreme monsoon rainfall, which itself is likely to have been increased by climate change.

The increase in humanitarian needs is also down to the “multiplier” effect, when consequences of climate change interact with pre-existing vulnerabilities and conflicts. This is the case of the unprecedented flooding in South Sudan and its consequences.

As we face an evolving risk landscape, we need to change our way to respond to crises and adapt to climate change.

In other words, we need a systemic shift. We need significant investments from all available sources of funding, particularly for the most exposed and fragile countries. And, at the same time, we need to consider longer-term perspectives and address the root causes of climate change.

[Part 2 – DG ECHO / How are we reacting/adapting our policies.]

Allow me to share with you my experience at the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, in this regard.

Humanitarian aid traditionally follows a “needs-based” approach. Accordingly, assistance is provided following assessment and analysis of needs in specific countries and crises.

This traditional approach is now increasingly complemented by a “risk-informed” approach, whereby actions are undertaken before the occurrence of specific events, in particular disasters. These actions include the development of forecasting technologies, stockpiling ahead of seasonal events, or use of social media channels and more traditional communications methods to alert at-risk communities before a flooding, as our Partners did last year in Bangladesh.

We are investing in having more humanitarian **stocks** available and pre-positioned for those sudden-onset crises. We are doing that with our new

European Humanitarian Response Capacity – delivering shelter items for Syria, both Northwest Syria and Government-Controlled Areas.

To support these activities, the European Commission (DG ECHO) has a dedicated Budget Line for **Disaster Preparedness**, that reached EUR 78 million in 2023. This allowed, for example, Rohingya refugee Safety Unit Volunteers we trained on firefighting to intervene in Kutupalong Balukhali refugee camps in Cox's Bazar soon after a devastating fire broke out early March.

Our commitment to scale up support to **anticipatory action** also forms an integral part of our strategy to adapt our response to climate change. There has been huge progress on anticipatory action in recent years and most of us on the donor side are stepping up funding for anticipatory action.

We also have a renewed focus to working on **clean energy** in displacement settings.

789 million people worldwide still have no access to electricity and 2.8 billion no access to clean cooking. Amongst them are refugees and other displaced people, often the world's most vulnerable populations.

A great example of this are solar phone shops being set up in refugee camps with our support. Moreover, clean energy has never been so affordable, meaning we can save money on our 'traditional' operations, so more resources can be directed to those in need.

[Part 3 – Part 1 (DG CLIMA) - Energy transition and climate change: link between climate change, growth and security + adaptation to climate change + COP 28]

Let's have a look at the longer-term picture. Science is unequivocal: the impact of climate change is just getting worse and fast, pushing the limits of human adaptability and **worsening threats to security and stability** everywhere.

Think about losses: every year Europe suffers about EUR 12 billion economic losses from climate-related extremes. In the MENA region, extreme weather

events **cost** more than USD150 billion annually, which is equivalent to more than 2.5% GDP for most countries in the region. No economy in the world can afford such events on a regular, massive scale.

What if – instead – we were to take action now?

The green transition agenda is driven by scientific evidence and economic logic. It is a fact that healthy natural ecosystems are a prerequisite for continued prosperity.

Climate risk reduction and mitigation measures, as well as investments in water security, renewable energies and energy efficiency, offer possible tracks for sustainable growth, enhanced resilience and improved security for all of us.

Take **adaptation** for example. Increasing climate resilience has a “triple dividend”: it helps avoid future human, natural and material losses; it generates economic benefits by reducing risks, increasing productivity, and stimulating innovation; and brings social, environmental and cultural benefits.

This is where we need to join forces. We need to work at all levels to advocate for the right policies, the right reforms and the right investments.

We need to look ahead and regain the momentum achieved in Glasgow working our way to COP28 in Dubai to speed up our collective ambition in the short window that science tells us to act.

From the EU side, we lead by example by making steady and encouraging progress with the completion of the comprehensive legislation to deliver on our own commitments and will take the necessary steps to update our Nationally Determined Contribution, once the Fit for 55 process is completed.

In Sharm el Sheikh we managed to open a new chapter on financing Loss and Damage. This must be targeted to the most vulnerable countries and reflect the financial realities of 2022, with sources going beyond the conventional donor base.

Tackling climate change will always require multiple solutions, tailored to specific needs. We know there is no one-size-fits-all response.

The effects of climate change are not limited to specific regions or countries. They are global, and they affect everyone, regardless of where they live.

The EU and the Gulf countries can collectively inspire a real change in the global agenda. To reduce risks, particularly for the most exposed and fragile countries. And to increase resilience, prioritising the needs of those who are disproportionately affected by climate change.

Humanitarian aid alone cannot respond to climate change. But, humanitarian aid can contribute to alleviate its effects.

We stand ready to work together and cooperate more closely to ensure the success of COP28.