



*Estonia – UK co-chair of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative*

*2023-2025*

## **GHD High Level Meeting, 11 December**

### **CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY**

The High-Level meeting (HLM) of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative was held in New York on 11 December. It was the first HLM held under the Estonia-UK co-chair. The thematic focus of the HLM was the role of climate adaptation finance in addressing humanitarian needs, building on discussions that took place at the Expert-Level meeting in October. There was also an agenda item on the 20-year review of the GHD, which was presented by **Sorcha O'Callaghan**, Director, Humanitarian Policy Group, **Sophia Swithern**, Project Lead at ODI, and **Ed Schenkenberg**, Chief Executive of HERE Geneva. The final session of the agenda focused on global risks and coordination. The external speakers were **Robert Mardini**, Director-General of ICRC and **Valerie Guarnieri**, Assistant Executive Director for Programme and Policy Development, WFP - both offering their perspective on how current and future geopolitical challenges are impacting global humanitarian needs.

**GHD Attendees:** Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, EU, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of South Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States of America.

#### **1. The role of climate adaptation finance in addressing climate drivers of humanitarian needs: follow-up and shared messages**

There was a brief recap of the key messages and outcomes of the Expert Level meeting (ELM) in October. The shared messages document, an agreed action arising from the ELM and shared prior to the meeting, was introduced. It was noted that the purpose of the document was to support coherent donor messaging on this thematic issue.

Participants welcomed the document and expressed an openness to using the GHD to develop these types of products. It was acknowledged that climate and humanitarian action is being discussed in multiple fora, and that the GHD can play a role in encouraging coherent and consistent messaging across donors to help leverage more funding for the most fragile contexts. This document would be helpful in this regard, and there was broad support for the messages in it. Some suggestions were put forward to strengthen the document, including:

- referencing Anticipatory Action and the new CERF climate account;
- incorporating more inclusive language and strengthening the references to gender;

- reflecting the importance of Early Warning for All; and
- considering whether some of the messages could be more assertive.

The co-chairs took on the action of revising the document based on the suggestions that were made. A final version would be shared with the GHD membership alongside a proposed list of meetings/events in 2024 where the messages could be deployed. Donors were encouraged to use the document to complement and build on their own messaging.

- **Action:** GHD co-chairs to circulate a revised shared messages document along with a proposed list of meetings/events in 2024.

## 2. GHD 20-year review

ODI and HERE presented the initial findings and recommendations of the GHD 20-year review. They highlighted that during the 20 years since the establishment of GHD, there have been big changes in the humanitarian landscape, whereas the GHD has remained largely unchanged. The survey they conducted as part of the review showed that there is appetite and demand for change among members. The membership, which brings together a diverse range of donors, have a range of views about what the group should be doing, and different levels of ambition in this regard.

In members' views, the added value of the GHD is that it is a principles-based, like-minded, informal donor only group, not limited in its discussions to one organisation in particular but the humanitarian system as a whole. The survey showed that there is absolutely no desire for GHD to become a heavy bureaucratic system. 60% of GHD members had said there should be a stronger focus on the GHD principles. There were many voices also calling for the GHD to play a role in encouraging and coordinating collective action amongst donors.

Recommendations were presented by ODI/HERE under five areas of focus (i) clarifying the purpose of the GHD; (ii) agreeing focus areas for the GHD; (iii) reinvigorating the relationship with the principles; (iv) added value and relationship with other fora; and (v) improving effectiveness. It was suggested that to stay relevant, the GHD should consider focussing on 'heavy', donor-centric, shared, unaddressed issues. A 20-anniversary 'tidy-up' and reaffirmation of the principles could be considered. As membership has grown and become more diverse, the group could also encourage more active participation of this membership.

In the discussion following the presentation, many participants expressed that the GHD and its principles are still very relevant today, and that greater emphasis should be placed on making more use of the principles. Many participants were in agreement that the principles could be refreshed and reaffirmed. There was broad support for identifying and focussing on topics that are not discussed in other forums and increasing the level of ambition of the group, but not at the cost of formalising structures and/or losing members. The development of the shared messages had proved to be a good outcome of the climate finance discussion and could be replicated for other thematic issues. There was appetite for building links with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and a brief discussion followed on possible topics for discussion and how GHD engagement with the IASC could be configured. Participants were encouraged to feed in any further views after the meeting to help inform an options paper on IASC engagement. During the discussion, some participants were of the opinion that the GHD has lost influence and is no longer relevant. There was also a suggestion to include the pros and cons of the different recommendations in the final report.

- **Action:** GHD members to share views on GHD/IASC engagement – focusing on topics for discussion and configuration – with the GHD co-chairs **by 31 January**. Any feedback received will be incorporated into an options paper drafted by the co-chairs and shared with the GHD membership for further discussion in due course.
- **Action:** ODI/HERE to incorporate the discussion feedback in their finalisation of the review and its recommendations, including adding in the pros and cons of different options. GHD co-chairs to circulate the final review in March.

### 3. Global risks and coordination

The global risks and coordination discussion was opened by two external interventions – the first from Robert Mardini, Director-General of ICRC; the second from Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director for Programme and Policy Development, WFP - both offering their perspective on how current and future geopolitical challenges are impacting global humanitarian needs.

Robert Mardini spoke about the catastrophic situation in Gaza, by far the worst that ICRC has seen in many decades in the Occupied Territories. Gaza and Ukraine are two conflicts that have been attracting global attention and funding, and are to a certain extent taking attention from more than 100+ other armed conflicts across the globe. Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Myanmar, Sudan, for example, are all places devastated by decades of conflict made worse by climate change and COVID-19. All this exemplifies one of the main challenges: a prioritization of conflicts in the spotlight. The problem is not just of funding, the politicisation of aid is a huge challenge. There is also the growing negative impact of sanctions and counterterrorism measures on humanitarian aid. Mardini also highlighted a worrying upsurge observed in misinformation, disinformation and hate speech boosted by new technologies which adds operational challenges and security risks for humanitarian colleagues. While technology and data can be of tremendous support to humanitarians, it can also be a significant source of risk and harm. In conclusion, 2023 was a challenging year for ICRC and the whole humanitarian sector and it is also expected that in 2024 and beyond humanitarian needs will be increasing while budgets will be decreasing.

Valerie Guarnieri highlighted that 2023 was a record year for WFP in terms of reaching 160 million people and a record downscaling of programs. WFP is having to reduce operations quite drastically. In some countries, food aid needs to be reduced even for people in the catastrophe/famine phase of food insecurity. Geopolitical issues have an impact on food security at the local and national level, such as the crisis in Ukraine. The issue of risk of manipulation and aid diversion comes along with difficult operating environments. Ms Guarnieri's suggestion to donors was to increase flexibility in the context of reduced funding. Importance of local solutions can bring more efficiency, but local solutions will require a higher risk appetite.

**In the donor only discussion**, participants shared what regions they are most concerned about going into 2024. West Africa and the Sahel were named by a number of donors, also Gaza, Sudan, DRC, Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. There was an interest amongst participants to continue the conversation around prioritisation and coordination given the growing funding gap. Collective action is needed on this and the GHD could play a role in developing some common messages and/or joint asks of the system. There was also interest for the GHD to consider system-wide challenges relating to aid diversion and risk-sharing, with a view to sharing perspectives and approaches to learn from each other.

#### 4. Upcoming meetings

Belgium noted the European Humanitarian Forum, 18-19 March, as one of the next gatherings where donors will come together. The forum will focus on two themes – (i) Funding gap and prioritisation and (ii) Forgotten crises and fragile humanitarian environments.

#### 5. AOB and Next Steps

The UK raised the [online consultation](#) for a Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH) which is open until 9 February 2024 and will inform the final version of CAPSEAH ahead of its launch.

The co-chairs noted that during the first half of 2024, the focus will be on the second overarching theme – Humanitarian Space. More detail on the chosen thematic topic will be shared in due course. The next GHD Expert-Level meeting will be held in Geneva in April, date TBC. In closing, the co-chairs also flagged the issue of future co-chairship and welcomed early nominations from members.

- **Action:** Donors interested in taking on the co-chair function from June 2025 to reach out to Estonia and the UK.

#### Annexes

1. GHD 20-year review presentation