



Internally Displaced Persons camp between Samangan and Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan

THE HUMANITARIAN RESET

From Crisis Mode to Realignment: Impulses for the Humanitarian Reset

The Humanitarian Reset—announced by UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher in March 2025—refers to a far-reaching reform project for the international humanitarian system. It aims to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector in the face of an unprecedented funding crisis and to ensure its continued existence. This process represents an important opportunity to implement long-overdue reforms and create a fair, efficient, and effective humanitarian system capable of meeting the challenges of the future. Nevertheless, the process must be transparent and participatory and put local and national humanitarian actors at the center—the very same actors on whose shoulders a future-proof and effective humanitarian system must rest.

PARALLEL REFORM PROCESSES

Discussions about the need for an optimized and more effective humanitarian system have been going on for some time. The **Grand Bargain**, initiated at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, for example, is an agreement between humanitarian donors and aid organizations that aims to make humanitarian assistance more efficient, transparent, and local through measures including simplified bureaucracy, more direct funding of local actors, and better collaboration.

In parallel to the Humanitarian Reset, the **UN80** process—a reform initiative launched by UN Secretary-General António Guterres on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the United Nations—has been underway since March 2025. It aims to make the UN more efficient, agile, and effective, and it also includes plans for reform in the humanitarian sector. On September 18, Guterres presented the first points of the **New Humanitarian Compact**¹, aimed at

more efficient cooperation among the UN organizations and programs relevant to the humanitarian sector (OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, WHO, etc.)², including a reduction in bureaucracy, shared services and infrastructure, and coordinated humanitarian diplomacy. The reform plans within the framework of the Humanitarian Reset find echo in Guterres’s six-point plan but are overall much more concrete and, additionally, include actors outside the UN system, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee³, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and three large NGO networks.

WHAT CHANGES ARE PLANNED?

Even before the dismantling of USAID and the US withdrawal from large parts of the UN system, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) Fletcher had commissioned two high-level experts to draw up concrete reform proposals at the end of 2024⁴. These are being incorporated into the proposals for the Humanitarian Reset. The first phase, from March to June 2025, announced a simplification of **structures** and the **transfer of powers to the countries**.⁵ On June 19, Fletcher presented further steps. Beyond the “hyperprioritization” of the Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) with a focus on the 114 million people whose lives are most at risk⁶, plans include strengthening the role of humanitarian coordinators in the countries of operation while increasing flexibility in the set-up of the necessary coordination structures (e.g. the Cluster System versus area-based solutions). Fletcher also advocates a significant **increase in funding for country-specific funds** (i.e. country-based pooled funds; CBPFs), whose resources are also to be used to support local **humanitarian actors to a much greater extent**.⁷

1 UN80 INITIATIVE: *Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver*

2 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, World Food Program, United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, High Commissioner for Refugees and International Organization for Migration

3 The *Inter-Agency Standing Committee* is an international coordination body with the aim of coordinating strategies, setting common standards, and making quick, coordinated decisions in the event of a crisis.

4 Jan Egeland, former ERC and Eminent Person in the negotiations for the second phase of the Grand Bargain, and Joice Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

5 *The Humanitarian Reset - ERC letter to IASC Principals*

6 This year’s Global Humanitarian Overview identifies a total of 305 million people as needing assistance.

7 *UN Relief Chief pushes for humanitarian system “even more rooted in the communities we serve” (19 June 2025) | OCHA*

ASSESSMENTS BY WELTHUNGERHILFE

As a champion of the anticipatory action and localization approaches, and as a signatory to the Grand Bargain, Welthungerhilfe supports and advocates for the **need to reform** the humanitarian system. We therefore welcome the current opportunity to make the international humanitarian system fit for purpose and to influence the ongoing reform processes to jointly shape a fair, effective, and efficient humanitarian system.

Nevertheless, even drastic efficiency gains cannot compensate for the immense funding gaps in a system that was already underfunded before the US withdrawal. It is therefore essential to provide the international humanitarian system with **sufficient funding**. Unfortunately, the German government is following the international trend of cutbacks. The humanitarian budget for 2025 has been cut by more than 50%, and despite promises to the contrary, there are no signs of a renewed increase in the 2026 budget so far.

There is also widespread criticism of **the lack of transparency and opportunities for participation** in the Humanitarian Reset. So far, the process has been largely dominated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and has focused on established coordination bodies. Other actors, such as local and national actors, have had only limited opportunities to participate. This poses a high risk, as the very actors on whose shoulders a sustainable, effective humanitarian system must rest in the future are not being sufficiently involved in its design.



“The humanitarian reset is an opportunity to make localization more efficient. It must open up more space for coordination structures involving local actors and reduce the complex hyperstructure of the humanitarian coordination system so that project participants can be reached more quickly. Approaches like Survivor- and Community-led Response and Anticipatory Action must be at the heart of the reset. As part of our active participation in the process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our network of over 500 Congolese local and national non-governmental organizations emphasized the need for close coordination of crises response, a cluster structure open to local actors, and the consolidation of redundant structures.”

Dr. De-Joseph Kakisingi, CONAFOHD, Network of Congolese NGOs

WELTHUNGERHILFE'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HUMANITARIAN RESET

1. The hyperprioritized GHO sends the wrong signals and delays solving the problem; it must be ensured that all those in need of assistance are attended to. The hyperprioritized Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) reduces the number of people targeted for assistance by focusing only on intersectoral severity levels 4 and 5. Of the 305 million people who, according to the GHO, need humanitarian assistance this year, only 190 million would have been eligible for assistance even if full funding had been available.⁸ The hyperprioritization, which now aims to provide assistance to only 114 million people, runs the risk of creating a new, **even lower baseline** and gives the impression that the humanitarian system has been operating on the basis of inflated figures. This is incorrect.

In addition, hyperprioritization creates **additional needs in the future**, especially when it comes to food security. If humanitarian assistance is only provided to people who are in emergency (IPC 4) or disaster situations (IPC 5) of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, this often means that people who are currently in the crisis phase (IPC 3, meaning extreme food scarcity), will sooner or later fall into IPC 4 or 5.

2. Reliable and impartial quality data must be secured as the basis for prioritizing humanitarian needs. Humanitarian figures such as those from the GHO are based on thorough needs assessments and analyses. It is important to emphasize that reliable and impartial quality data and services, such as FEWS NET and IPC, but also independent data, such as that provided by ACAPS or REACH⁹, are key factors for an effective humanitarian system and, as such, must be secured and adequately funded.

3. We need centralized information management to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian system. It is encouraging that the Humanitarian Reset includes plans for shared services, including more efficient information management. Currently, information is often collected and managed individually by clusters, which is inefficient and can lead to duplication. A centralized information management system would not only improve the implementation of **evidence-based humanitarian action** but also increase the often called-for **complementarity** of humanitarian organizations.

8 Global Humanitarian Overview 2025, July Update
9 FEWS NET (Famine Early Warning Systems Network), ACAPS (independent

analysis provider for humanitarian crises), and REACH (data and analysis initiative for humanitarian crises)

4. Coordination models must be area-based and context-dependent and involve local coordination structures. The ERC's proposal to give humanitarian coordinators, as the highest-ranking UN representatives in a crisis country, **greater powers** is a step in the right direction. Representatives of individual UN organizations are to be accountable to them in the future. Since coordination works best when adjusted to and embedded within local structures, decisions should also be made **jointly with local actors**, and an area-based approach should be applied so that specific geographical areas can be considered, integrated, and addressed in a cross-sectoral and context-dependent manner.

5. The humanitarian system must strengthen accountability to affected communities. Commitments and processes for accountability to affected people have long been promised, but the "participation revolution" called for in the Grand Bargain is still a long way off. Fletcher's proposal to make humanitarian coordinators accountable to affected people and communities is based on the correct assumptions that, in a people-centered humanitarian system, actions should be based on priorities and performance indicators should be set and monitored by the affected communities themselves.

6. Local and national actors should be specifically strengthened and country-based funds made fast, flexible, and accessible. The ERC's proposed increase in funding for country-specific pooled funds (50% of total humanitarian funding, of which 70% is in turn provided to local and national actors) represents a fundamental shift from existing funding schemes. To ensure that local and national actors have the necessary structures, knowledge, and capacities to absorb funding increases of this magnitude, they need **support in building organizational capacities**. This requires strong and trusting partnerships between these actors and INGOs, based on **complementarity and cooperation**, in terms of accountability, for example. In addition to reforming country-based funds, this means that INGOs, too, will have to play a crucial supporting and mediating role in the future.

As an existing part of the system, CBPFs play an essential role in the IASC's considerations regarding the humanitarian system of the future, but in order to fulfill this role, they must be **accountable, agile, accessible, and transparent**. In addition, other models, such as the Start Fund **or other funds managed by INGOs or national or local actors**, should also be considered in order to ensure the flexible financing of humanitarian assistance at the country level¹⁰.

7. Carefully analyze a reduced cluster system and avoid jeopardizing previous achievements. A lighter, more flexible Cluster System is to be saluted, and so is the merging of clusters and/or thematic working groups. They should be analyzed carefully, however, to ensure that the technical expertise of the clusters is retained when they are dissolved or merged. In addition, important achievements—such as progress in the area of gender-based violence, one of the few areas in which women-led organizations hold leadership positions—must be pursued in the context of mergers.

8. Anticipatory action must play an essential role in a future-proof humanitarian system. The ERC statement mentions anticipatory action only as one idea in the context of radical renewal. However, food crises caused by extreme weather events and conflicts are becoming increasingly predictable, and humanitarian actors, particularly the partners of the Global Food Security Cluster, have demonstrated the (cost-) efficiency of measures to mitigate the effects of predictable shocks. Anticipatory action saves lives, secures livelihoods, and builds resilience. It is therefore a more dignified form of humanitarian assistance. The expansion of forward-looking, locally based measures based on local knowledge is essential to make the humanitarian system more efficient and effective, especially in times of limited financial resources.

With these recommendations, Welthungerhilfe would like to contribute to the discussions and plans surrounding the Humanitarian Reset. We are happy to answer any questions, comments, or requests for further information.

¹⁰ [Global Start Fund | Start Network](#) and [Mapping NGO-led Pooled Funds - ICVA](#)

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