

Humanitarian Defunding and Emergency Preparedness

HDPI Round Table, 30 June 2026

Summary of Discussions

The HDPI Round Table (RT) brought together managers and experts from UN and non-UN organizations to examine the implications of defunding on emergency preparedness and to share strategic ways forward. A discussion paper was shared ahead of the meeting (*Humanitarian Defunding and Emergency Preparedness: A Perspective*).

Key considerations emerging from the discussion include:

The Impact of Defunding on Preparedness

- **Systemic Shift:** The severe funding crisis hitting the global humanitarian system since 2024 has deeply impacted emergency preparedness—a cornerstone of humanitarian action aimed at anticipating, managing, and mitigating risks for vulnerable populations.
- **Defunding Preparedness:** The crisis exposed the fragility of preparedness funding. Historically underfunded, this competence area suffered further losses due to internal hyper-prioritization, which shifted the systemic focus toward short-term emergency response.
- **Data and Capacity Gaps:** Reduced resources led to a contraction in data availability and early warning (EW) capacities at a time of increasing need. For instance, global food security analysis now suffers from unprecedented baseline information gaps in critical countries and regions.

Programmatic and Structural Challenges

- **Hyper-Prioritization:** This approach led to a sharp reduction of the operations to be supported, particularly focusing on IPC4 and 5 countries. Many other needy contexts and situations have been de facto dropped from the aid list, with a direct negative impact on the continuity of preparedness work.
- **Weakened Links:** Hyper-prioritization on pure life-saving impacts has also weakened the programmatic links between preparedness and related components, such as livelihood protection, community resilience, and capacity development. The humanitarian-peace-development nexus has been profoundly disrupted.
- **Siloed Technical Areas:** The crisis highlighted the unnecessary segmentation of distinct technical workstreams (e.g., early warning, emergency preparedness, and anticipatory action) at a time when integrated approaches are urgently needed.
- **Context-Specific Impact:** Resource contraction will hit each operational context differently, depending heavily on local dynamics and existing capacities. Ultimately, cutting preparedness, anticipatory action, protection systems, and local capacity building exposes communities to deeper crises and more expensive responses down the line.

- **Positive Baselines:** On a positive note, successful and replicable emergency preparedness models exist at the country and regional levels to build upon.

Strategic and Ethical Horizons

- **Ethics and Accountability:** Ethical considerations permeate this defunding context, as operational decisions directly will impact on the lives and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable people. Global solidarity must not become the casual victim of geo-political motivations and tactical moves. Accountability systems must be reinforced for both national actors and the international aid community.
- **Communication Gaps:** The humanitarian sector currently fails to effectively communicate the value of preparedness to donors. A stronger advocacy needs to be put in place highlighting return on investment, response speed, and cost-efficiency, while also stressing its key lifesaving dimension.
- **The "Survival Mode" Trap:** At the global level, there is a gap in setting coherent, system-wide strategies. The system has entered a reactive "survival mode" focused on short-term gains, hindering a reality-facing dialogue on the future of preparedness.
- **The Imminent Poly-Crisis:** Participants expressed concern over an imminent poly-crisis driven by overlapping local and global factors (conflicts and violence, the aid crunch, the socio-economic effects of the Hormuz crisis, reduced public health cooperation, and the onset of El Niño, among others). While early warning data (e.g., for El Niño) is largely available, this has not translated into global, system-wide focus. This situation requires urgent action.

Conclusion

There was a clear consensus that defunding preparedness poses systemic challenges. It severely reduces the global humanitarian community's capacity to operate effectively, efficiently, and in an anticipatory manner to support populations in need.

Concrete Recommendations for Follow-Up Action

- **Reinventing the Narrative:** Affirm a new, assertive narrative framing preparedness not as an optional investment, but as an integral part of life-saving action.
- **Immediate Risk Mapping:** Identify critical situations requiring immediate, coordinated anticipatory action, including El Niño and the global food, fertilizer, health, and protection crises escalated by the war on Iran and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Local Engagement:** Deepen strategic engagement, financial and operational collaboration with national and local governments and authorities, civil society and humanitarian actors.
- **Ring-Fenced Budgeting:** Explicitly cost and ring-fence preparedness work within Humanitarian Response Plans, mirroring the approach used for localization.
- **Strategic Consultations on future Preparedness systems and services:** Give impulse to strategic and technical consultations with and between key UN and non-UN actors, national and regional institutions, donors and private sector, to reimagine and reform the UN's role in preparedness,

with a view to adapting to ongoing global structural transformations, and developing the new generation of preparedness systems, services, strategies, capacities and coordination mechanisms.

- **Minimum Preparedness Floor:** Launch an inter-agency dialogue to work towards a "minimum preparedness floor" and a collective compact across UN agencies, NGOs, national and local institutions, and donors.
- **Streamline Governance of Preparedness mechanisms:** Revisit the role and modus operandi of key preparedness coordination mechanisms, including at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) level, to reduce redundancies and facilitate effective and accountable decision-making.