

Brussels, 11th March 2026

How Many More? Nutrition Must Remain at the Centre of EU Humanitarian Action

Dear Commissioner Lahbib,

In the context of the EU's desire to reform the global humanitarian aid system, the European Commission will present a Communication on humanitarian aid in the second quarter of this year. Nutritional assistance is an integral part of effective humanitarian aid, yet we are witnessing unprecedented nutritional crises, particularly in fragile countries, without an adequate international response. Their causes are well documented: armed conflict, climate change, forced displacement of populations and the collapse of essential services.

Nearly 70 percent of acutely food-insecure people lived in fragile or conflict-affected countries in 2025.¹ In these settings, vulnerable populations are disproportionately and systematically affected, as gender inequalities compound food insecurity and restrict access to care. In Gaza, malnutrition among women and children has worsened at an alarming rate, with 16% of children under five are currently affected by acute malnutrition.² This high prevalence is also driven by prolonged food deprivation, severe micronutrient deficiencies, the collapse of health and nutrition systems, lack of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and surging disease outbreaks.

There is overwhelming evidence that restoring nutritional care in humanitarian settings can rapidly and measurably improve crisis-affected contexts: improving nutrition, particularly in fragile settings, is key to improving child and maternal survival and ending preventable child deaths.

Investing in nutritional care in humanitarian settings not only reduces child mortality but also significantly improves maternal survival, as the nutritional status of women directly determines child survival, making women's health and nutrition a priority³. Evidence suggests that nutrition interventions generate a "multiplier effect": healthier women raise healthier children, contributing to stronger human capital, social cohesion, and more resilient economies.⁴ In fragile and conflict-affected settings, nutrition is therefore both a life-saving intervention and a foundation for recovery and sustainable development.

At the same time, humanitarian financing is in a free fall. Current budgetary trajectories across the European continent raise serious concerns and risk undermining the European Union's collective credibility as a principled humanitarian actor. This funding retreat has disrupted proven life-saving

¹ 'A Global Food Crisis', WFP, last visited on 05 February 2026

² Horino, Masako et al. 'Assessment of malnutrition in preschool-aged children by mid-upper arm circumference in the Gaza Strip (January 2024–August 2025): a longitudinal, cross-sectional, surveillance study.' *The Lancet*, Volume 406, Issue 10514, 1993 – 2002, UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

³ 2025 Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC), Food Security Information Network, 2025)

⁴ 2025 Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC).

programmes, weakened global and local data surveillance systems, and undermined early warning and forecasting capabilities.

For the first time in five years, reported official development assistance from OECD DAC members has dramatically decreased to 7.1%, causing a 9.6% decline in humanitarian aid. 2024 preliminary estimates from the OECD CRS, WHO, WB and the Global Burden in Disease Study show that this could affect 22.6 million additional deaths across all ages by 2030, including 5.4 million children under five.

This crisis is even more unbearable because we know that solutions work:

- When humanitarian access is restored and ensured, rates of malnutrition rapidly decrease.
- Hunger is rising due to political choices and funding shortfall - not a lack of evidence or tools.
- Fragility and malnutrition reinforce each other, demanding integrated responses.
- By institutionalising and adequately funding women-led organizations and women's rights organisations as essential frontline responders in crisis settings, including through increased direct, flexible, and multi-year funding, humanitarian actors can enable women's meaningful leadership, in gender-responsive nutrition responses, leveraging their trusted community presence, contextual expertise, and capacity to deliver timely, equitable and sustainable solutions to malnutrition in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- Prevention matters: early interventions, food security, breastfeeding support, and sustained investment save lives and reduce future humanitarian needs.
- Access to and treatment supply are lifesaving: nutritional interventions such as ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF), achieve recovery rates of close to 90% at an average 45€ per child, according to UNICEF. They are lifesaving and one of the most cost-effective humanitarian responses available. Yet unpredictable financing is increasingly disrupting nutrition supply chains, undermining the availability of RUTF and other specialised foods, and distorting planning and narrowing coverage despite rising needs. Sustained, predictable multi-year funding, strengthened coordination and transparent data-sharing are therefore essential to safeguard continuity of care and protect nutrition outcomes in crises.

Commissioner Lahbib, increased EU leadership is urgently needed. The upcoming European Commission's Humanitarian Communication can and should signal a turning point. As this approaches, sufficient, predictable, and targeted funding to prevent avoidable crises and save lives, coupled with the renewal of solid, proven policy frameworks such as the EU Nutrition Action Plan and Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus, is indispensable.

Furthermore, the EU must, in alignment with the Council Conclusions of December 16th 2024, step up global support to nutrition (including in a Team Europe approach) by placing nutrition unequivocally at the heart of EU humanitarian policy, including in the upcoming Communication.

We stand ready to support the Commission in ensuring that nutrition remains a cornerstone of effective humanitarian response.

Yours sincerely,

CARE International

Global Health Advocates

Médecins du Monde

Save the Children

