

Internal Displacement in the Context of Hyper Prioritisation

The drastic funding cuts undertaken by the major donors in 2025 have forced the humanitarian sector into ‘hyper prioritisation’, resulting into its retreat from all activities deemed as non-essential to ensuring immediate survival. This first volume in our series on ‘Internal Displacement in a Changing World Order’ considers the far-reaching consequences that such ‘hyper prioritisation’ carries for the lives of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in humanitarian crises. The analysis shows that, besides already costing lives, hyper prioritisation risks pushing more people into starvation, disease, missed educational opportunities, and shattered livelihoods, thus eroding IDPs’ prospects to embark on the path towards self-reliance and solutions. It concludes by suggesting the need for humanitarian action to be guided, not by the dehumanising exercise of hyper prioritisation, but by the existing clear evidence showing the powerful potential of community-led responses.

17 March 2026

Ana Mosneaga

Massive funding cuts to official development assistance (ODA) in 2025 have led to what has been referred to as [‘a seismic contraction in global humanitarian action’](#). It is [well-understood](#) that internal displacement cannot be resolved through humanitarian means alone. Nonetheless, in many displacement situations, humanitarian assistance continues to be the default – and often the only – response. The impacts of funding cuts on the humanitarian sector are thus part and parcel to understanding the positioning of internal displacement in the context of a changing world order. This piece examines the consequences that the current ‘hyper prioritisation’ of humanitarian assistance, instigated by the funding cuts, carry for the lives of the internally displaced persons (IDPs). Besides

immediate impacts, it also considers the mid- to long-term consequences for addressing internal displacement globally.

Humanitarian response in an era of chronic underfunding

The contraction of humanitarian action did not begin in 2025. It has been gradually progressing over the past years as part of [‘prioritisation’ and ‘boundary setting’](#) in an attempt to limit the scope of assistance to those in most acute need against the backdrop of the ever-widening gap between the sheer scale of humanitarian needs and funds available. What was new in 2025 was the extent of the fundings cuts undertaken by the major donors while humanitarian needs continued to soar driven by conflict, displacement, climate change, food insecurity, as well as poverty and inequality.

The hardest blow came from the abrupt [suspension of US foreign assistance](#), which amounted to [43% of public international humanitarian assistance in 2024](#), by the Trump administration in January 2025. In many cases, the initial suspension turned into [subsequent termination](#) of US-funded assistance and services with widespread consequences in many parts of the world. The shockwave sent by the termination of US funding was compounded by the [ODA cuts announced by the main European donors](#) – including France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

The funding cuts reflect shifting conditions in the main donor countries. Once promoted as an instrument of soft power, in recent years ODA has been scapegoated by [populist groups and governments](#) relying on their support as a wasteful spending at the expense of other domestic priorities. Effective deployment of this rhetoric has resulted in a decrease of public support for foreign assistance and a proliferation of [‘donor-centred transactional narratives prioritising donors geopolitical and economic interests’](#). This means whatever ODA funding remains available gets allocated to high-visibility crises deemed to be strategically important, while acute emergencies in non-strategic locations get defunded. A chronically low-profile issue in itself, internal displacement (despite a [spell of heightened international attention](#) in the past few

years) risks being completely left behind in this context of intensifying funding cuts.

The immediate impacts

According to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Tom Fletcher, these unprecedented funding cuts have forced the humanitarian sector '[into a triage of humanitarian survival](#)'. The triage came about through 'hyper prioritisation' of humanitarian response efforts around the globe, undertaken as part of the wider '[humanitarian reset](#)' – a process of on-going reforms that intends to overhaul the humanitarian system to make it [fit for the new \(funding\) landscape](#). In numerical terms, hyper prioritisation meant that the scope of the [coordinated humanitarian appeal for 2025](#), which was already only targeting the acute needs of 178 million people out of the total 300 million considered to be in need of assistance, was further tightened to target the most life-threatening needs of 114 million people. In practice, this led to humanitarian actors barely providing the most basic forms of assistance. Hyper prioritisation was even more evident in the [Global Humanitarian Overview \(GHO\) 2026](#): while projecting that 239 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2026, its hyper-prioritised objective only aims to reach 87 million. This is the [smallest number of people targeted](#) by UN-coordinated humanitarian appeals in the last decade.

The tremendous downscaling of the humanitarian sector carries immediate impact for the lives of crises-affected people whose survival rely on emergency assistance. Given that today's humanitarian crises are characterised by large-scale and often protracted displacements and that IDPs accounted for [58% of all those displaced](#) by conflict and violence as of June 2025, IDPs have been among the hardest affected by the funding cuts. Sharp [reduction in rations or termination of food and nutrition assistance](#) has already increased hunger and malnutrition rates among the most vulnerable IDPs, in countries such as Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, Sudan, and South Sudan where many people are already facing emergency or even catastrophic levels of food insecurity. In some contexts, the ability to provide food assistance has

been so severely curtailed that the [UN World Food Programme](#) concluded that ‘in a hyper-prioritized planning scenario, [...] agencies should avoid providing assistance that addresses a tiny fraction of needs’ since ‘such low amounts of assistance create tensions at the community level’.

The cuts in food assistance came alongside discontinuation of essential health services as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. This situation has already resulted in the [loss of life](#) and is predicted to further [increase morbidity and mortality rates](#) in the years to come. According to [the World Health Organisation survey](#) conducted in March 2025, funding cuts led to severe disruptions in critical health services and reduced access to such services in approximately 70% of low- and middle-income countries. As of June 2025, humanitarian [WASH was the least funded sector](#) with only 6% of its 2025 funding needs covered. In Somalia, this meant that [300,000 people](#), primarily IDPs displaced by conflict and disasters and members of their host communities, lost access to safe water and were facing the spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera, while health facilities were rapidly [shutting down](#).

Humanitarian protection services have also been severely disrupted at a time when record numbers of people face life-threatening risks arising from the widespread violations of international law. According to the Global Protection Cluster, [395 million people in 23 countries](#) faced severe protection risks as of October 2025, with civilians in DRC, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine facing the most extreme situations characterised by indiscriminate attacks, abductions, movement restrictions, gender-based violence, denial of services, lack of legal identity, explosive ordnance contamination, and psychosocial distress and traumas. Services aimed at preventing gender-based violence and addressing the needs of survivors have been particularly heavily affected, with [UN Women reporting](#) more than 40% of organisations providing such services having to significantly reduce or stop essential services such as shelters, legal aid, psychosocial, and healthcare support. In [North Kivu state of DRC](#), rape, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence continue to be endemic and have been increasing in and around IDP sites. These

sites struggle to absorb new waves of displacements driven by resurgence of violence, while many survivors no longer have access even to the most basic forms of medical and psychosocial support due to funding shortfalls.

The lasting consequences

The full-scale impact of the humanitarian funding emergency is yet to be revealed, but it is already clear that many IDPs will be facing multiple lasting consequences in the medium and longer term.

The impact on education is a case in point. In most humanitarian crises, displaced children's access to education is severely limited by insecurity, economic hardship, and/or lack of relevant documentation. Today, it is being further compromised by defunding of education sector in humanitarian settings. The [UN Children's Fund](#) estimated that, in the light of the announced cuts to ODA, '6 million more children risk being out of school by end of 2026, 30 per cent of them in humanitarian settings'. It also noted that crisis-affected countries such as the Central African Republic, Haiti, Somalia, and Palestine 'could lose education ODA equivalent to over 10 per cent of their public education budget' – a loss that will have colossal ramifications for both present and future generations in these countries. Since places of learning also serve as [spaces that help children](#) to 'process trauma, maintain routine, and imagine a future beyond the immediate', humanitarian practitioners warn that deprioritising education puts the very prospect for 'sustained recovery, peace, and human dignity' at stake.

These prospects are also threatened by the termination of livelihood support programmes that seek to assist IDPs on the path to self-reliance and solutions. While livelihoods (together with education) are recognised to be important for [stabilising and protecting crisis-affected communities](#), they and other '[activities related to recovery, solutions and resilience initiatives](#)' were among the first to be cut in the context of hyper prioritisation in 2025.

The [drastic reduction](#) of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) across the humanitarian sector is further contributing to the erosion of the little sense of agency that many IDPs were able to (re)gain through this assistance modality. As a more efficient and effective form of assistance that enables affected people to exercise a degree of choice and thus preserve their dignity more than traditional in-kind assistance, CVA has rapidly gained foothold over the past decade and at its peak in 2022 it amounted to [23.9%](#) of total humanitarian assistance. However, its share dropped consecutively in 2023 and 2024, and it is projected to steeply decline in 2025 due to funding cuts. For example, in Somalia CVA was only able to reach [29% of its target population in 2025](#), and saw many displaced families left without support resorting to harmful coping strategies such as [skipping meals, withdrawing children from school, and engaging in distress migration](#).

On a more systematic level, existing [humanitarian coordination, analysis, and information management](#) structures are being defunded and dismantled. Albeit with [several faults](#), these structures served as important forums for generating data and evidence for response and advocacy. However, the funding cuts meant that many practitioners engaged in coordination lost their jobs. A [collective statement by 89 NGOs](#) published on the occasion of GHO2026 release underlined how 'loss of thousands of staff across the sector directly impacts communities' by resulting in 'less capacity to coordinate, and to assess and meet the needs of people requiring assistance'. In Yemen, this led to [suspension of the Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) (a set of data collection and analysis tools and processes to monitor population displacements) in March 2025, thus compromising the ability of humanitarian actors to assess and respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of [4.8 million IDPs](#).

More fundamentally, a massive reduction in operations, presence, and services is eroding the trust and legitimacy of the humanitarian sector as a whole. Globally, [at least 12,000 staff saw their contracts terminated](#) with national and local organisations most severely affected, despite [constituting the backbone](#) of response in the most insecure and hard-to-reach contexts. The fact that many programmes had to be abruptly

terminated have led to confusions and feelings of abandonment among the affected communities. This has left local responders, many of whom were themselves displaced and experiencing the impacts of crises first-hand, in difficult positions as they were [met with distrust](#) from their community members and local authorities.

Beyond biological survival

The magnitude, gravity, and suddenness of funding cuts have been so severe, that humanitarian actors have been forced increasingly to leave even the most vulnerable IDPs without assistance through the process of hyper prioritisation. The shrinking funding and coverage in the supposedly prioritised sectors such as food, nutrition, health, WASH and protection shows that humanitarian actors are struggling to deliver even the most essential services for human survival. The defunding is even worse in sectors relegated into the non-essential category. The discontinuation of education and livelihood support programmes, together with the accelerated decline of CVA, means that IDPs are also being cut off from the few avenues through which they could regain some sense of agency and dignity. This makes it even more challenging for the millions of IDPs around the world to get on a path towards solutions than it already was before the funding cuts.

The humanitarian sector's retreat to just ensuring immediate survival (and being barely able to do even that) in the context of the current hyper prioritisation risks pushing people even more towards harmful coping strategies that will deepen suffering and despair. This retreat is happening despite [clear evidence from crises-affected communities](#) suggesting that 'even during acute crises, people [...] increasingly prioritise support that helps them make long-term plans and recover – returning to their homes, rebuilding, strengthening livelihoods'. It also fails to recognise powerful examples from contexts such as [Palestine](#) and [Sudan](#) showing that when displacement-affected communities are empowered with resources to directly address their needs, they devise responses that are far more relevant, nuanced, and humane – addressing diverse range of needs beyond mere biological survival.

Ultimately, this calls not for a hyper-prioritised humanitarian sector where '[cruel math of aid cuts](#)' dictates what is life-saving and for whom, but a humanitarian action that genuinely enables and complements community-led responses that are grounded in lived realities of the people.

Ana Mosneaga is a migration and displacement specialist with extensive experience in research, policy development, advocacy, and partnership building roles from NGOs, international organisations and academia. She currently works for a humanitarian NGO based in Denmark and is affiliated as a Senior Research Associate with Internal Displacement Research Programme at the RLI.

This topical paper is part of the special series on 'Internal Displacement in a Changing World Order', led by the [Internal Displacement Research Programme](#) at the RLI. The experts contributing to this series assess how rapid shifts in contemporary politics, plummeting levels of humanitarian aid and escalating global crises are impacting displacement-affected communities. The series ties into the launch in April 2026 of a 45-chapter "[Handbook of Internal Displacement](#)" that comprehensively addresses this issue.

Selected Bibliography

Abdullahi, S., Lilly, D., & Poole, L. 2025. *Reckoning and renewal: A future-ready humanitarian system*. Available:

<https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/reckoning-renewal-future-ready-humanit-system/>

CALP Network. 2025. *The Humanitarian Reset: Less Money – More Cash?* Available:

<https://www.calpnetwork.org/web-read/the-humanitarian-reset-less-money-more-cash/>

Community Led Initiatives Palestine Working Group & Local2Global Protection, 2024. *Community led Responses and Mutual Aid in Gaza*. Available:

<https://www.local2global.info/one-daily-hot-meal/>

Global Protection Cluster. 2025. *Global Protection Update: Protection in a Prioritised Humanitarian Response*. Available:

<https://globalprotectioncluster.org/publications/2347/reports/global-protection-update/global-protection-update-protection-prioritised>

Ground Truth Solutions. 2025. *What Crisis Affected Communities Need from a Humanitarian Reset: A Guide Based on Two Years of Conversations with People on the Front Lines of Crisis*. Available:

<https://www.groundtruthsolutions.org/library/what-crisis-affected-communities-need-from-a-humanitarian-reset>

International Council of Voluntary Agencies. 2025a. *Lives on the Line: The Human Impact of US Foreign Aid Shifts*. Available:

<https://www.icvanetwork.org/resource/lives-on-the-line-the-human-impact-of-us-foreign-aid-shifts/>

International Council of Voluntary Agencies. 2025b. *The IASC Humanitarian Reset examined: A strategic briefing for NGOs*. Available:

<https://www.icvanetwork.org/humanitarianreset/>

Nasir, R. & Carstensen, N. 2025. *Support for Mutual Aid in Three Central States in Sudan: Game Changing and Saving Lives*. Available:

https://www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP_sclr_mutual-aid_Sudan_2025_full_paper_NN.pdf

UN Children's Fund. 2025. *Education Aid Cuts: A Broken Promise to Children*. Available:

<https://www.unicef.org/documents/education-aid-cuts>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2025a. *A Hyper-Prioritised Global Humanitarian Overview 2025: The Cruel Math of Aid Cuts*. Available:

<https://humanitarianaction.info/document/hyper-prioritized-global-humanitarian-overview-2025-cruel-math-aid-cuts#page-title>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2025b. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*. Available:

<https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2026>

UN World Food Programme. 2025. *A Lifeline at Risk: Food Assistance at a Breaking Point*. Available: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/lifeline-risk-food-assistance-breaking-point>

World Health Organisation. 2025. *Responding to the health financing emergency: immediate measures and longer-term shifts*. Available:

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240117587>