The UN Secretary-General will convene a global humanitarian summit to map out a new humanitarian approach that is more effective and inclusive, and more representative of the needs and challenges of our rapidly changing world.

Humanitarianism in a rapidly changing world

The UN General Assembly established the current international humanitarian system 25 years ago. But since then, the landscape of humanitarian action has changed significantly. Trends such as climate change, rapid population growth, and shifting political and ideological approaches are increasing the demand for humanitarian action. Therefore, a more efficient and effective humanitarian approach is needed.

The number and nature of actors involved in humanitarian response has also increased. Regional organizations, affected Governments and their neighbouring countries all have a more prominent role in emergency response. More middle-income countries are becoming donors, and their increasing capacity as first responders to emergencies means they are asking the international community for different types of expertise and support. The number of NGOs operating in major emergencies has grown remarkably, and militaries and the private sector are becoming increasingly involved in disaster response. New and emerging technologies mean that affected people can express their needs and interests quickly and with much more impact.

The summit will focus on four thematic areas that have been identified through consultations with Governments, humanitarian actors, communities and other partners. These areas will be refined as consultations continue leading up to the summit. They are: humanitarian effectiveness; reducing vulnerability and managing risks; transformation through innovation, and; serving the needs of people in conflict.
The Issues

Humanitarian effectiveness

International humanitarian organizations now support an average of 100 million people every year. But humanitarian action needs to be more effective to ensure that limited resources can continue to meet growing needs. To do this, we first need to develop a common understanding of what “effective” means, and from this create a set of industry-wide indicators. But these indicators will need to reflect the complexity of humanitarian work today. They should be built on a foundation of accountability to affected people and reflect a shared understanding of what humanitarian interventions need to achieve.

Reducing vulnerability, managing risk

The recent devastating food crises in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel revealed yet again the limitations of humanitarian response when it focuses only on short-term solutions. More cohesion is needed between humanitarian response and longer-term development efforts, along with more focus on understanding and tackling the root causes of vulnerability. The summit will identify new ways to reduce and manage risk so that we can build more resilient communities and reduce the need for continued or new humanitarian responses.

Transformation through innovation

The humanitarian system needs to change and improve. But for this to happen, humanitarians must look beyond their systems and processes and seek inspiration and innovation in new technologies and partners. This will enable them to identify new tools, products and services to respond to more complex humanitarian needs. A more dynamic approach to learning is also needed—one that leads to solutions that transform how humanitarian work is carried out.

Serving the needs of people in conflict

The scale, intensity and duration of armed conflicts, including the massive displacement of people, continue to create immense humanitarian needs. The overarching goal of humanitarians—to access and support all people affected by conflict regardless of their views, affiliations or creed—remains a critical challenge. The summit will identify new strategies to achieve this.

The road to the summit

To be a success, the summit needs to represent the widest possible range of perspectives. The UN will guide this consultative process, but the insights need to come from Governments, NGOs, the private sector and, most importantly, from people affected by humanitarian crises.

In the lead up to the summit, regional, global and online consultations will take place so that all stakeholders are heard and represented. OCHA encourages all of our partners to get involved and consider how they believe the global humanitarian agenda for the future should take shape.