



### **About the Author:**

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Sofia Armeni's mission is to monitor and advocate for human rights. She graduated from the bachelor of European Languages and Cultures in 2025, specializing in European politics. During her minor she focused on development studies and migration, pushing her to pursue her goal of defending migrant's rights by starting a pre-master's program in International Law and Human Rights.

### **About the publication:**

#### **3 Main Points:**



How should the humanitarian sector adapt to the funding cuts of USAID -- differentiate funding, cooperate with locals more, and more flexibility -- dependency relationships are dangerous and new (flexible) mechanisms must be put in place

**Highlight Sentence:**

*“A stronger awareness has been growing on the need to dismantle dependency relationships between recipients, IOs, and donors, to avoid financial vacuums once an actor decides to step out.”*

**Definition:**

dependency mechanisms refer to a relationship between a donor country and a recipient country that make the latter dependent on the former.

***The Humanitarian Congress in Berlin: Breaking Down Structures of Dependency***

The Humanitarian Congress in Berlin opened engaging debates, with the participation of key actors in the humanitarian sector, such as the CEO of The New Humanitarian Dr. Tamman Aloudat, General Coordinator of Medecins Du Monde in Ukraine Sandrine Chopin, and Head of the Legal Division of the ICRC Dr. Cordula Droege. The overarching theme of the event was how the humanitarian sector has changed throughout the years, contextualising its development in light of changing norms, shifting powers, and the increasing digitalisation of modern society.

***Dependency in Humanitarian Aid***

One major event that stood out was the restructuring of USAID and its consequences on the humanitarian sector, given that the U.S. has historically been the biggest donor. The reduction of USAID operations by the Trump administration has created massive gaps in the sector, which has historically strongly relied on U.S. funding. As a consequence, many field operations had to close and crucial funding made transportation and the delivery of crucial goods extremely difficult, posing serious obstacles to the allocation of valuable resources. Although this loss has and will keep having a negative impact on humanitarian aid, it sheds light on the urgency to change the system and dismantle the relationship of dependency between NGOs



and the U.S. as well as between NGOs and aid recipients. The dependency link that creates a high level of reliance between these three actors (recipients, NGOs, and single donors) should be minimised in order to avoid a domino effect once stakeholders decide to cut funds.

### ***Building a More Adaptive and Locally Driven Humanitarian System***

Several speakers described the humanitarian sector as a living, active, and dynamic ecosystem that continuously adapts, rather than a static, structured framework. As global crises evolve, humanitarian actors must continuously adapt in order to respond effectively to emergencies. Mahmood Hamada, Laura Rodriguez, and Modi Baburu, discussed what steps have to be taken in order to prevent a situation like this from happening again. First, the funding system must be changed. Pool funds would allow for more diversification in the funding process and reduce reliance on one single actor. Additionally, a flexible funding design, stepping away from rigid portfolios to a more dynamic and adaptive approach, would avoid wasting funds on issues that are no longer as pressing as other problems. As mentioned before, the humanitarian system must be dynamic and adaptive.

Secondly, to break dependency mechanisms, it is crucial that IOs don't replace local sectors or clusters. Humanitarian aid should be used as a tool to strengthen and empower local sectors such as the local healthcare system, not as a way to replace it. Doing the opposite would cause deep structural issues that would result in a crisis once the mandate of international organisations is over. Locals must become active participants rather than mere recipients of aid. This concept has been discussed in existing literature and already applied. However, it needs to be implemented further in order to strengthen the autonomy and resilience of countries receiving aid. As Dr. Hassan Zahid sharply pointed out, top-down approaches are the best way to burn resources, which should be discussed instead with local actors, who are experiencing crises first-hand.

Overall, this is merely an example of the many developments that are occurring in the world today and that are shaping strategies in the humanitarian sector. A stronger awareness has been growing on the need to dismantle dependency relationships between recipients, IOs, and donors, to avoid financial vacuums once



an actor decides to step out. It is worth noting however, that while these developments have created awareness on what steps need to be taken to strengthen the field, as the world keeps changing, there will be many more technological advancements, changing political dynamics, and crises that the sector will have to adapt to. To mention an example, the increasing digitalisation of our society has been shaping the humanitarian sector as well, as social media is becoming a tool to both empower international organisations and spread their message, but also as a weapon for governments to openly criticise and spread disinformation about humanitarian aid. Hence, as mentioned by multiple panel speakers, the main takeaway of the Humanitarian Congress is the importance of adopting new strategies to keep up with a world that is continuously changing.

### ***A Multipolar Future for Humanitarian Action***

Having said that, relationships between stakeholders will inevitably have to shift, especially after the reduction of U.S. humanitarian funding. Despite the many ideas advanced, namely pool funds and local participation, it is impossible to ignore the fact that a substantial portion of funding has been dissolved, and this gap will somehow have to be bridged. This raises the question of whether a new country will take a leading role in humanitarian aid or whether the system will become multipolar and permanently move away from reliance on major single donors.