

## *HERE-Geneva Statement of Strategic Intent*

November 2025

2025 has been a year like few others in the modern humanitarian landscape. Mega-size crises such as those in Sudan, Gaza, and Ukraine have continued to cause extreme human suffering while protracted crises, such as those in Haiti or Myanmar, have persisted unabated. At the same time, several donor governments reduced their aid budgets and humanitarian funding allocations.

For the humanitarian sector, the result is not only a financial crisis, but a crisis of legitimacy. Double standards in identifying war crimes and the growing trend of transactional multilateralism run counter to the long-rooted tradition of international cooperation based on our shared humanity. Adapting to this new reality will take time.

In this context, HERE-Geneva considers it prudent to take some time reflect on the ongoing changes and their implications for the organisation. Instead of developing a fully-fledged multi-year strategy in 2025, as initially intended, we will use 2026 as a year of strategic reflection and positioning. Over the year, we will aim to define the most effective path for HERE-Geneva to continue pursuing its mission. To this effect, our agenda in 2026 will be structured along four main strategic objectives.

### **1. Continuing to Bridge the Gap Between Policy and Humanitarian Practice**

If there is one conclusion of the independent review of 10 years of HERE's work that stands out, it is that our priorities and track record – rooted in humanitarian principles, protection, and accountability – remain deeply relevant.<sup>1</sup> At a time when several governments, as donors and/or as UN member states, further retreat from their international responsibilities, the gap that HERE aims to bridge is only getting wider. Our approach, anchored in fundamental human rights and humanitarian norms may appear as out of sync with reality, but this is not a reason to compromise on our values. On the contrary, it reinforces the relevance of our strategic focus. We remain clear in terms of what we aim to do. What requires renewed strategic thinking is the 'how' and 'with whom' – that is our approach and partnerships.

### **2. Setting Priorities in Relation to their Strategic Potential, including Expected Level of Influence**

The concept of "influence pathways" as presented and recommended in the 10-year review is helping HERE better understand where our research and analysis can have the greatest leverage. Whether we best generate this influence through studies we initiate or through commissioned work will continue to be a continuous consideration. It is clear, however, that leveraging our influence begins with the development of the concept note and continues through the formulation of recommendations and follow-up steps. One ongoing project, the review of principled humanitarian action in Ukraine, serves as an example of this. A donor representative has highlighted the potential relevance of our findings for their policies on localisation and donor coherence and coordination. This experience alongside our recent efforts in facilitating donor coordination, highlights that meaningful power for reform in the humanitarian sector rests in the hands of a relatively small group of Western donor governments. These donors provide roughly two-thirds of all humanitarian funding, even in this changing landscape.

While most of HERE's work has taken place downstream, at the implementation level, influencing sector reform requires us to engage more upstream - at the level of donor priorities and decision-making. Our goal for 2026 is to continue working with humanitarian donors as we began in the latter part of 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> HERE-Geneva, 10-year review, Executive Summary.

Moving forward, we will focus our engagement on meaningful humanitarian reform processes that are both visionary and grounded in practical realities. Despite widespread commitments to “locally-led aid”, many donor governments cannot, or will not, fund local civil society actors directly. At the same time, in a political environment where public support for international aid has declined, humanitarian aid still enjoys comparatively stronger backing than long-term development aid. Donor governments seek visibility for their humanitarian support.

Against this backdrop, most humanitarian reform initiatives remain either too aspirational - lacking a reality-check, like the locally led aid agenda - or they are too focused and narrowly tied to outdated structures, such as in the case of the humanitarian reset. This is where HERE can make a difference: by proposing pragmatic steps that bridge the gap between reality and vision. HERE’s vision is of a humanitarian community that is networked and grounded in comparative advantage and complementarity, building on the relative strengths of each actor.

### **3. Deepening Collaboration with Other Humanitarian Think-Tanks**

Collaboration with other humanitarian think-tanks has been an essential part of HERE’s practice since its creation. In recent months there has been a noticeable deepening of coordination efforts among four like-minded think-tanks, including HERE-Geneva. This development reflects not only the shrinking funding landscape, but also a shared conviction that the sector needs to make greater use of our evidence on what constitutes effective humanitarian action. HERE remains committed to this deeper collaboration, because we see mutual benefits. For larger evaluations or studies (of 100k USD and higher) we will join forces to maximise capacity and enhance quality. Together, we will also take a pro-active approach with donor governments and UN agencies and demonstrate our comparative advantage over large commercial evaluation firms. Together, we will advocate for necessary change in humanitarian evaluations, something the corporate sector cannot and will not do.

A common challenge shared by the four think-tanks is our limited engagement with research institutions based in the non-Western world. Again, this is something we will address together in a more strategic manner by sharing our contacts and jointly cultivating relationships with research institutions in the Global South.

### **4. Exploring New Avenues for HERE-Geneva**

In light of the rapidly evolving humanitarian environment, it is essential for HERE-Geneva to reflect not only on what we do, but also on how we are best organised to deliver impact. This exploration goes beyond cosmetic adjustments. It concerns how we preserve the strengths and benefits identified in the ten-year review while ensuring that our institutional setup strikes the right balance between achieving outcomes and managing administrative burdens and costs.

As part of this reflection, we will consider closer institutional collaboration - or even a merger - with another like-minded organisation. Over the past 16 months we have seen tangible benefits from being co-located with a partner organisation due to the complementarity between ACAPS and HERE. With ACAPS’ departure from Geneva, we are exploring other opportunities for strategic co-location. Any decision in this regard will be guided by strategic alignment, mission coherence, and the potential to enhance impact, rather than efficiency alone.

At the same time, HERE will continue to stay abreast of key innovations shaping the humanitarian sector, including the growing use of artificial intelligence in data analysis and operational decision-making. In the coming year, we will explore how to responsibly integrate such tools into our work where they can strengthen our analysis and learning.