



The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

27 May 2026

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Chairman, Deputies, Senators, thank you for the invitation to meet with you today to brief you on EU matters regarding Africa, development cooperation and the Multiannual Financial Framework.

Last July, we discussed the repercussions of development and humanitarian aid cuts, with the sudden dismantling of US Aid causing havoc and further exacerbating situations of great need, in the face of a proliferation of crises. Sadly, the situation has not improved. OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview indicates that

- more than [239 million people require humanitarian assistance globally](#)¹;
- over [117 million people are forcibly displaced](#) by conflict and violence²
- over 266 million people face acute food insecurity
- around [520 million children](#)³—more than one out of five children in the world—are living in or fleeing conflict zones.

Despite rising needs, development assistance is facing a downward spiral. The recently published OECD preliminary ODA data for 2025⁴ shows a drop by 23.1% of ODA, in real terms, compared to 2024. This is the largest annual contraction recorded in the history of ODA, bringing ODA levels back to where they stood in 2015, at the start of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. OECD's preliminary data also highlights that, in 2025, ODA to LDCs fell by 25.8% and to Sub-Saharan Africa by 26.3%. Humanitarian ODA, which was on a growing curve since 2020, has now contracted for the second consecutive year (from \$23.14 billion in 2024 to \$14.85 billion in 2025).

The EU - both its institutions and member states - is now the largest provider of ODA globally. However, there is a worrying trend that, for the 3rd consecutive year, EU Member States have cut their aid spending (17 EU Member States cut their ODA⁵.) These cuts will directly impact least developed countries (LDCs), and fragile and conflict states (FCAS).

¹ [OCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2026, December 2025:](#)

² [UNHCR, Mid Year Trends, November 2025](#)

³ [Save the Children, Stop the War on Children](#)

⁴ [A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data](#), OECD, April 2026

⁵ <https://concordeurope.org/2026/04/09/the-eu-sails-away-from-international-cooperation-with-the-biggest-aid-cuts-in-a-decade/>

We are also concerned about the paradigm shift we have been witnessing in terms of the EU's approach to international partnerships. The proposed new Global Europe Instrument (GEI) for the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), now contains a dual objective. It is now not only an instrument to foster partnerships that contribute to the sustainable development of partner countries, but also that contribute to the strategic interests of the Union. This signals a significant change in direction for the EU and International development.

Poverty reduction is no longer referenced in the objectives of the Global Europe Instrument. This does not align with Article 208 TFEU, which sets poverty reduction as the primary objective of EU development cooperation and frames it within the broader aim of sustainable development. Aid is now linked more explicitly to migration, trade and private investment. The instruments' emphasis on flexibility, raises serious concerns about reduced predictability, accountability, transparency and policy coherence with EU commitments.

The EU's Global Gateway Strategy, which aims to promote EU's values and interests abroad, is another area of concern. As large-scale projects roll out across Africa and elsewhere, primarily involving private finance and cross-border infrastructure, the question remains as to what this really means for people and communities on the ground. Civil society – principal partners in the delivering development cooperation programmes - is missing at the table in policy formulation and dialogue. The Commission's civil society and local actors' advisory platform has been left out of any governance or coordination mechanisms. Meanwhile the EU has been criticised by the European Court of Auditors and the European Parliament on the lack of oversight and accountability structures for the Global Gateway project. A more transparent and inclusive approach is needed, with multi-level governance accountability mechanisms, improved civil society engagement, and publicly-available results (methodology, evaluation and key performance indicators) of project selection and finance allocation.

This strategy is increasingly considered a principal vehicle for development cooperation; however, it needs to be acknowledged that it is not the best tool to provide for human development nor to reach the furthest behind - in line with 2030 commitments. A dedicated strategy is needed to address human development, just as it is to address the needs of conflict and fragile affected states.

What role can Ireland play?

Despite the global instability and volatility, Ireland has remained steadfast in its commitment to development cooperation, and to ODA spending that is principled and focused on poverty reduction. This is something that Minister Richmond reiterated at the Meeting of EU Development Ministers last week. It is important and essential that Ireland continues to be vocal and demonstrate this leadership across different EU Council Working Groups and Ministerial Meetings.

Ireland's EU presidency

In this context, Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes at a critical moment. Ireland is well placed to champion a distinctive approach to EU external action grounded in human rights, multilateralism, solidarity, and international partnerships, reflecting the principles of Ireland's "Better World" policy. The Presidency offers an opportunity to help shape the future direction of EU development cooperation and humanitarian action at a time when the EU's long-term external priorities and financing architecture will be shaped.

Placing values and the core of European policy will not only support enhanced policy coherence across European external action but also elevate and distinguish Ireland, and the European Union, as a reliable partner.

Our recommendations for the forthcoming EU Presidency:

- 1. Champion a values-based EU external action agenda including meaningful partnership with civil society.**
- 2. Secure an ambitious and accountable Global Europe Instrument that protects ODA integrity, prioritises human development and fragile contexts, and strengthens democratic oversight and civil society participation. This includes:**
 - Safeguarding the €200.3 billion budget, or 10% of the total MFF for GEI
 - Ringfencing €25 billion in humanitarian funding;
 - Restoring explicit references to poverty reduction, in alignment with the European Union's founding treaties;
 - Ensuring 93% of the GEI goes to ODA, with human development at its core;
 - Reinstating spending targets, including dedicated funding for civil society organisations; and for Fragile & conflict affected states.
- 3. Place conflict prevention, peacebuilding, principled humanitarian action, and respect for international law at the centre of the EU's response to global fragility and instability.**
- 4. Place food security and nutrition as strategic EU priorities through renewed political leadership, sustainable financing, and support for resilient and equitable food systems.**

And lastly, as COP 31 takes place during Ireland's Presidency, we should,
- 5. Advance a just and equitable EU climate agenda by increasing adaptation and loss- and-damage finance, supporting a fair transition away from fossil fuels, and prioritising the needs of vulnerable communities.**

We look forward to engaging with you on these issues during the next six months of Ireland's Presidency. Now is a key moment for Ireland to shape an EU external action agenda that reflects our values.