

# The Future of Development Cooperation: Civil Society's Ambition for Ireland's EU Presidency

June 2026

**dóchas**



Funded by  
the European Union

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## Contact details

Dóchas, Suite 8, Olympic House,  
Pleasants Street, Dublin 8

Phone: 01 405 3801

Facebook: @dochasnetwork

LinkedIn: Dochasnetwork

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# Introduction

The world is facing a period of profound instability. Escalating conflicts, geopolitical fragmentation,<sup>1</sup> and worsening humanitarian crises have resulted in more than 250 million people in need.<sup>2</sup>

Once distant, these challenges are increasingly closer to Europe. Russia's war against Ukraine, instability in the Middle East and the Sahel, rising forced displacement, and growing food, energy, and climate insecurity have fundamentally reshaped the European political landscape. Calls for a stronger and more coherent European Union (EU) role in addressing global instability have since intensified. Security and protection against global crises are now leading concerns for EU citizens, with 68% calling for a stronger European role in responding to international instability.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrently, the international development and humanitarian system is under increasing strain. Humanitarian needs are at record levels, while Official Development Assistance (ODA) budgets are coming under growing pressure.<sup>4</sup> Across Europe, development cooperation is increasingly framed through geopolitical, migration, and security lenses, raising concerns that long-standing commitments to poverty eradication, human development, and sustainable development are being diluted.

Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, commencing on 1 July 2026, thus comes at a critical moment. Irish development and humanitarian organisations have a vision of Ireland as a 'Model Power'<sup>5</sup>: a country that leads through its values, strengthens international cooperation at a time of fragmentation, and uses its influence to build a fairer, more resilient world. This is an opportunity for Ireland to champion a distinctive approach to EU external action – one grounded in human rights, multilateralism, solidarity, and international partnerships, reflecting the principles of its 'Better World Policy'<sup>6</sup> for international development. At a time when negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and the Global Europe Instrument (GEI) within that, will determine the EU's long-term external priorities and financing architecture, Ireland can leverage its reputation as an honest broker and principled partner in ensuring that EU external action remains values based, poverty focused, and grounded in respect for international law.

Alignment with existing EU policies and legislation, most notably the European Consensus on Development and Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which establishes poverty eradication as the primary objective of EU development cooperation, must be ensured. This includes protecting the integrity of ODA, strengthening support for fragile and conflict-affected contexts, advancing gender equality and climate action, and ensuring that EU international partnerships contribute to long-term resilience, peace, and sustainable development.

The Presidency also provides an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of civic space, democratic participation, and meaningful engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs). They are essential partners in delivering effective and accountable development cooperation and humanitarian action.

This paper, prepared by Dóchas, reflects the perspectives of Irish development and humanitarian organisations, as well as thousands of civil society organisations represented through European networks, including CONCORD Europe (the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation), VOICE (European humanitarian NGO network promoting efficient and effective humanitarian action worldwide), and the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO). It provides concrete recommendations to the Irish Government for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. These are based on the result of extensive consultations, on a substantive body of evidence, robust data analysis, as well as Irish and EU long-term policies and international commitments.

This paper outlines the overarching strategic principles that should guide Ireland's leadership during its 8th Presidency of the European Council through a set of practical recommendations that address policy priorities, financing, communication strategies, and engagement with civil society organisations.

## The Presidency Should:

**01.** Champion a values-based EU external action agenda reaffirming the principles of the European Consensus for Development, rooted in poverty eradication, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality, and meaningful partnership with civil society.

**02.** Safeguard 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.

**03.** 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.

**04.** Place food security and nutrition as strategic EU priorities, through renewed political leadership, sustainable financing, and support for resilient and equitable food systems.

**05.** Advance a just and equitable EU climate agenda by increasing adaptation and loss-and-damage financing, supporting a fair transition away from fossil fuels, and prioritising the needs of vulnerable communities.

<sup>1</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The armed conflict survey 2025*:

<https://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-survey/2025/armed-conflict-survey-2025/editors-introduction/>

<sup>2</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Global Humanitarian Overview 2026', 08 December 2025 (<https://humanitarianaction.info/>).

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament Eurobarometer, 'EP Spring 2025 survey', 03 September 2025 (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3572>).

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data', 09 April 2026 ([www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html](http://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html)).

<sup>5</sup> Dóchas, 'Humanitarian and development sector launches "Ireland as a Model Power"', 10 June 2026 (<https://dochas.ie/humanitarian-and-development-sector-launch-ireland-as-a-model-power/>).

<sup>6</sup> Government of Ireland, 'Irish Aid, Better World Policy' ([www.ireland.ie/en/global-ireland-strategies/irelands-policy-for-international-development/](http://www.ireland.ie/en/global-ireland-strategies/irelands-policy-for-international-development/)).

# 01

## Values-Based Leadership in Partnership with Civil Society Organisations

Ireland's approach during its EU Presidency should reflect the principles enshrined in its 'A Better World' policy, and its long-standing foreign policy commitment to respond to the 'furthest behind first'. At a time when EU external action is increasingly shaped by geopolitical and economic interests through initiatives such as the Global Gateway Strategy, Ireland should champion strong values-based leadership to safeguard the EU's commitments to poverty eradication, ending hunger and malnutrition, protecting civic space, promoting human rights, advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality, climate action, and peacebuilding.

These concerns are reflected in the proposed Global Europe Instrument (GEI) regulation, which omits any direct reference to the European Union European Consensus on Development.<sup>7</sup> As a result, there is a risk that the EU's longstanding development commitments are further diluted within the EU's external action framework. These core principles are critical in a fragmented, volatile geopolitical space. The next GEI should also avoid further linking development funding to migration and security objectives, as this risks undermining development effectiveness. This is a reductive approach that ignores the complex social and economic processes that shape migration and forced displacement.

Global Gateway reflects a shift in EU external action towards large-scale infrastructure investment, private sector mobilisation, and increased use of financial instruments such as guarantees and blended finance. This approach aims to close the financing gaps in infrastructure, but raises concerns that sustainable development priorities may be subordinated to the EU's geopolitical and economic interests. The 360-degree approach that underpins the strategy, while promising, has not progressed from conceptual ambition to concrete, measurable, and accountable implementation.<sup>8</sup> Members of the European Parliament, in their first report on this strategy, echoed key civil society concerns on how Global Gateway has been designed and implemented, citing a lack of transparency and democratic accountability.<sup>9</sup>

Championing a competitiveness agenda that is grounded in the EU's core values, including policy coherence for development, human rights, and environmental protection, is critical to avoid undermining the EU's international commitments and global credibility. This necessitates a rights-based approach to policy development, comprising effective and substantive consultation with impacted

stakeholders throughout all stages of the legislative process, including workers, communities, and civil society organisations.

Particular attention should be paid to the promotion of full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities in all spheres of social, economic, political, and public life, as they contribute to more resilient, peaceful, and inclusive societies.<sup>10</sup> This entails going beyond symbolic engagement and creating structured, impactful opportunities for these voices to influence EU policies and the work of the Council. In this context, the next iteration of the EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan and Gender Action Plan IV should take centre stage in policy development to maximise coherence. In doing so, Ireland can help shape a model of competitiveness that is both economically resilient and aligned with the EU's broader social and global responsibilities.

Civil society across Europe and globally is under severe pressure. Civic space is shrinking, with some countries actively working towards limiting CSO participation. Mis- and dis-information aimed at civil society are rife, increasing social fragmentation.

*Civil society plays a vital role in providing long-term development and humanitarian assistance. It also plays a critical role in advocating for human rights and good governance. Ireland has a strong and vibrant civil society dedicated to global development and humanitarian response. Supporting civil society is a hallmark of Ireland's development cooperation. Ireland is committed to ensuring that civil society space is strong, diverse and resilient. Empowerment of local civil society promotes an enabling environment for good governance, transparency, and democratic accountability.<sup>11</sup>*

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is therefore needed now more than ever to champion the critical role of civil society and encourage global solidarity. Implementation of the EU Civil Society Strategy's external dimension (across EU Member States, EU institutions, and in the EU's external action, including in the Global Gateway Strategy) is key. The EU must use all the tools at its disposal to respond positively to global trends by showcasing the value of a thriving, vibrant, and well-resourced civic space.

## Key Recommendations

- Reaffirm poverty eradication as the central objective of EU development cooperation under Article 208, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and strengthen policy coherence for development across EU policymaking.
- Enshrine the founding principles of the European Consensus for Development in the EU external action agenda and the GEI regulation.
- Strengthen transparency and democratic oversight by enhancing Council, European Parliament, and civil society scrutiny of Global Gateway and ensuring implementation of its 360-degree approach. Reaffirm the institutional roles set out in Article 209, TFEU, and uphold the 'Do No Significant Harm' principle.
- Promote the systematic application of the 'Leave No One Behind' principle through rights-based and participatory approaches, including the leadership of women, persons with disabilities, children, and their representative organisations. Ensure their meaningful, resourced participation in the Irish Presidency's Council events and Council conclusions.
- Resist proposals that would condition development cooperation on migration containment objectives during MFF and GEI negotiations
- Advocate for a balanced approach to the 'Omnibus' proposals, ensuring that competitiveness and simplification objectives are pursued without compromising core human rights and environmental standards.
- Champion a strong, renewed EU Gender Action Plan and Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan (post-2027) with clear targets and indicators to measure progress.
- Promote the strong implementation of the EU Civil Society Strategy in EU Member States and globally. Champion the establishment of clear implementation benchmarks, monitoring mechanisms, and regular reporting on the Strategy's implementation by Member States and EU institutions.
- Recognise civil society's role as an effective implementer of strategies and initiatives such as Global Gateway by embedding them in all policy development phases. Promote CSOs' added value in EU projects, in Irish-led Council meetings and communications.
- Promote dedicated and accessible funding for civil society organisations in the Global Europe Instrument. Promote the best practices of Ireland's innovative funding approach to empowerment of CSOs.<sup>12</sup>
- Preserve funding for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship via the Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme in the Global Europe Instrument.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, EU Partnerships, 'European Consensus on Development', 2017 ([https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/european-consensus-development\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/european-consensus-development_en)).

<sup>8</sup> CONCORD, 'Rounding out the EU's Global Gateway: 360 Degrees for Human Development', 03 June 2026 (<https://concordeurope.org/resource/rounding-out-the-eus-global-gateway-360-degrees-for-human-development/>).

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament, 'Report on Global Gateway – past impacts and future orientation', 05 March 2026 ([www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2026-0045\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2026-0045_EN.html)).

<sup>10</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusion, A coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes', 18 May 2026 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9285-2026-INIT/en/pdf>).

<sup>11</sup> Irish Aid, 'Civil Society' ([www.ireland.ie/en/irish-aid/who-we-work-with/civil-society/](http://www.ireland.ie/en/irish-aid/who-we-work-with/civil-society/)).

<sup>12</sup> OECD, 'Ireland's innovative funding empowers civil society partners', 7 September 2023 ([www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-cooperation-tips-tools-insights-practices\\_be69e0cf-en/ireland-s-innovative-funding-empowers-civil-society-partners\\_d39e1c25-en.html](http://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-cooperation-tips-tools-insights-practices_be69e0cf-en/ireland-s-innovative-funding-empowers-civil-society-partners_d39e1c25-en.html)).

# 02

## An Ambitious, People and Planet-Focused Budget for the Global Europe Instrument

The GEI is the EU's most effective tool for advancing stability, prosperity, human rights, and partnership-driven international cooperation. By supporting the development of resilient economies and communities, development cooperation is an investment in a safer and more prosperous world, in new markets, in global influence, and in long-term partnerships.

The Presidency offers an important avenue to protect and shape the future funding and long-term trajectory of development cooperation in the EU. The Commission's GEI proposal currently lacks clear financial commitments for human development, gender equality, the climate, and biodiversity. Minimum spending targets for fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) and least developed countries (LDCs) are also absent, even though they help safeguard needs-based allocations from political or economic prioritisation. An increased focus on flexibility risks undermining predictability for partner countries. The EU's previous experience of blended finance and guarantees – namely that they have been driven by profitability and have consistently underperformed in addressing the most pressing development and climate needs, particularly in least developed countries and fragile contexts – is largely ignored. This, together with the Global Gateway strategy, risks aid being diverted towards commercially viable projects rather than poverty-focused actions. There is a risk of development becoming one objective among many, rather than the guiding principle for allocation and implementation.<sup>13</sup>

The performance framework is a key tool shaping how EU spending is assessed and understood. However, this tool is overly focused on outputs and short-term results rather than long-term development impact.<sup>14</sup> It does not sufficiently reflect core external action priorities, such as human development, gender equality, social protection, and civil society support. This limits the Framework's ability to meaningfully capture progress on poverty reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To be effective, it needs to better integrate external action realities, strengthen impact-oriented and qualitative indicators, improve data disaggregation, and ensure stronger democratic oversight. It must also avoid excessive complexity, which risks turning it into a compliance-focused exercise rather than an instrument truly targeting development.

Additional flexibility has been introduced for the European Commission to adjust priorities through delegated acts. While this allows adaptation to emerging needs or corrections, it also shifts significant elements of the Performance Framework into an area where the Council and the European Parliament have limited day-to-day oversight. As such, the architecture of indicators and coefficients should be recognised as a political rather than a technical decision.

## Key Recommendations

- Safeguard the €200.3 billion budget, or 10% of the total MFF, for the GEI as the bare minimum for the EU to be a credible global player.
- Maintain the future Global Europe Instrument's Development Assistance Committee (DAC)-ability at 93% at least. Uphold transparency and oversight by rejecting provisions that allow the GEI's ODA target to be adjusted without control during the budget cycle.
- Establish minimum spending targets for fragile and conflict-affected states and least developed countries (LDCs), countering proposals on aid conditionality, and balancing flexibility with predictability for partner countries.
- Reinstate cross-cutting spending targets, dedicating at least 20% of the GEI budget to human development (essential social services, including health, education, and social protection), 50% for climate and biodiversity spending, and 85% to projects promoting gender equality.
- Allocate 80% of the GEI's geographic and global pillars to programmable actions to keep sustainable development, peace, and poverty reduction central. Reserve the remaining 20% for non-programmable needs: humanitarian aid, unforeseen conflicts and crises, and opportunities to build community resilience and peace.
- Allocate at least 15% of programmable funding under the Global Europe Instrument for implementation by CSOs, ensuring predictable and dedicated resources in EU external action.
- Maintain grants as the primary modality, in particular in highly and extremely fragile contexts, given their role in promoting risk-sharing, localisation, and access.
- Set a binding ceiling on the share of ODA channelled through blended finance operations – including (investment) grants, guarantees, and loan components – to preserve space for other modalities such as budget support and non-blended grants.
- Reform the GEI performance framework to measure long-term development impact rather than short-term outputs, including through stronger indicators on poverty reduction, with the systematic use of the inequality marker, human development, gender equality, and civil society support, backed by robust democratic oversight of the Council and European Parliament.
- The MFF should safeguard the additionality and transparency of climate finance, ensuring that meeting climate objectives does not dilute support for broader development needs.

<sup>13</sup> CONCORD, Action Aid and Eurodad report, 'Blended finance and the illusion of development' (<https://concordeurope.org/resource/blended-finance-and-the-illusion-of-development/>).

<sup>14</sup> European Parliament, 'Briefing: Performance framework for the 2028–2034 MFF', 28 January 2026 ([www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/BUDG\\_BRI\(2026\)783967](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/BUDG_BRI(2026)783967)).

# 03 A Focus on Fragility

Development cooperation is a central pillar of EU efforts to address fragility, promote peace, and uphold the rule of law. It strengthens the role of international institutions, recognising their importance for global stability and, in turn, for Europe's own prosperity and security.

EU citizens consistently support humanitarian aid and EU engagement in partner countries. The Irish public has remained steadfast in its support for ODA over the past six years, grounded in a strong values-based approach, with 71% of Irish people believing that Ireland has a role to play in promoting peace and stability worldwide.<sup>15</sup> This further reinforces the case for an Irish EU Presidency that promotes soft power grounded in humanitarianism, peacebuilding, and aid.

In its Council Conclusion of 18 May 2026, the Council reaffirmed the importance of prioritising 'a coherent approach to fragility' across all EU external action instruments.<sup>16</sup> This priority should be truly reflected in the GEI, reinforced by human rights and context-specific and conflict-sensitive approaches.

Given the escalating global humanitarian needs, and the EU's established role as a leading humanitarian donor, it is crucial that the new Multiannual Financial Framework explicitly safeguards humanitarian funding, particularly in light of the growing number of people living in crisis-affected areas – currently estimated at 252 million worldwide.<sup>17</sup> Increased flexibility within the instrument must not lead to the politicisation of humanitarian action or to a reduction in funding over the long term. The GEI's humanitarian budget must promote quality funding, localisation, and accountability to affected people, including through predictable, flexible, and multi-year funding.

The new Joint Communication on Humanitarian Aid<sup>18</sup> sets the EU on a renewed strategic direction. It reconciles the EU's strengthened commitments to humanitarian principles, international humanitarian law, and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid with the current realities of a humanitarian system that is increasingly under strain. With rising needs and shrinking resources driving discussions on new efficiency and delivery models, the inclusion of flexible and multi-year funding, localisation, and continued engagement in fragile and high-risk contexts is welcome. However, a key aspect is missing from this Joint Communication: to maintain the neutrality, independence, and impartiality of

EU humanitarian action, it cannot be included under the EU's broader external policy frameworks.

The Irish Presidency presents an opportunity to facilitate exchanges among Member States on the operationalisation of the Communication on Humanitarian Aid and to showcase good practices in delivering effective, principled, and people-centred humanitarian responses. It should use this opportunity to reinforce a humanitarian approach that remains neutral, impartial, and independent, and is not subordinated to wider political objectives.

Effectively addressing fragility requires moving beyond short-term approaches. Allocating continuous resources in conflict prevention, inclusive governance, social protection systems, anticipatory action, climate resilience, and equitable access to essential services is key. A strengthened GEI must operationalise the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) nexus in a way that reinforces – rather than dilutes – long-term sustainable development objectives. It also needs to ensure robust support for principled humanitarian action and sustained peacebuilding efforts.

Ireland should use the opportunity of its Presidency to build more consensus among Member States for effective joint EU diplomatic action, using all tools available to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts and ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law. This includes ensuring forgotten crises<sup>19</sup> are prioritised on the EU Foreign Affairs Council and relevant working parties.

In the Middle East, in particular in Gaza, as well as in Sudan, the humanitarian situation remains dire. It is essential that the Irish Presidency is used to build greater consensus at the Member State and EU levels, and to push for meaningful, concrete action in response to the humanitarian crises and deteriorating political context.

The Sahel should also remain firmly on the EU agenda, with time allocated in the Council to find an agreement on the renewed Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, aiming to unlock vital development funding and continue to support human development and humanitarian diplomacy in this fragile region. The experience of Irish development and humanitarian organisations implementing health, education, and livelihoods programmes in the Central Sahel illustrates that even under very fragile conditions, it is possible for EU-supported programming to strengthen resilience and human development in the region.

## Key Recommendations

- Champion principled humanitarian action that remains neutral, impartial, and independent, while safeguarding respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, and ensuring that humanitarian assistance is not subordinated to broader political objectives.
- Position development cooperation as a central pillar of the EU's approach to fragility by addressing the root causes of conflict through human development, promoting peace, upholding the rule of law, and strengthening local civil society. Ensure continuity and predictability of development funding in FCAS, with particular attention to neglected crises.
- Safeguard a dedicated, ring-fenced humanitarian action budget line in the GEI with a minimum of €25 billion. This must be earmarked and allocated based on needs.
- Keep the Emergency Aid Reserve (EAR) with a minimum annual amount of €600 million for external action to ensure timely and flexible responses to emerging crises.
- Include a spending target of 0.20% of gross national income to LDCs, due to the significant overlap between LDCs and fragile and conflict-affected states.
- Advance efforts to uphold international law and institutions for accountability, including through the Council's Working Party on Public International Law (COJUR), as well as the Global International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Initiative.<sup>20</sup>
- Advance the renewed Integrated Strategy for the Sahel to ensure sustained EU funding and political engagement, maintaining long-term support for vulnerable populations, local civil society, and essential services.
- Strengthen humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus coordination across different council working groups, such as the Foreign Affairs Council, MAMA, COAFR, COHAFA, and CODEV.
- Promote and encourage European Commission inter-service coherence in the operationalisation of the new Communication on Humanitarian Aid, including structured consultation between DG INTPA, DG MENA, DG ECHO, and the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) regarding programming and adjusting actions in fragile and conflict-affected settings, ensuring the links between preventive actions, crisis response, and longer-term resilience building.
- Advance a 'prevention first' approach across EU external action, by making conflict sensitivity and regularly updated conflict analysis mandatory for all programmes, including through the reintroduction of conflict sensitivity provisions in the GEI. Systematically integrate anticipatory action, early warning systems, and preparedness measures to better connect humanitarian and development responses and reduce future needs.

<sup>15</sup> Dóchas, 'Worldview quantitative survey 2025' (<https://dochas.ie/resources/worldview/waves/>).

<sup>16</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusion, A coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes', 18 May 2026 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9285-2026-INIT/en/pdf>).

<sup>17</sup> OCHA, 'Global Humanitarian Overview 2026', 08 December 2025 (<https://humanitarianaction.info/>).

<sup>18</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusion', 18 May 2026 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9285-2026-INIT/en/pdf>).

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), 'Forgotten crises' ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/needs-assessment/forgotten-crises\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/needs-assessment/forgotten-crises_en)).

<sup>20</sup> Humanity in war: A global initiative for humanitarian law <https://www.upholdhumanityinwar.org/>

# 04

## Champion Food Security and Nutrition as Foundational Pillars for Sustainable Growth & Prosperity

Ireland has long been recognised as a leader on global hunger and malnutrition, shaped by its own history and political commitment to reach the furthest behind. Ending hunger and reducing poverty are core pillars of Ireland's development cooperation, reflected in sustained investments in food security and nutrition.

Food security and nutrition are foundational pillars of sustainable growth, human development, and long-term stability. Global food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition have worsened significantly in recent years, with conflict and climate being the primary drivers of acute food insecurity and malnutrition for millions across the world. Each new crisis draws attention to vulnerabilities in how the world produces, distributes, and consumes food. Progress on reducing child stunting, wasting, anaemia, and low birth-weight has stalled, while funding shortfalls are widening the gap between needs and resources.

Conflict remains the primary driver of acute food insecurity and malnutrition for millions of people around the world, with famine emerging in both Gaza and Sudan in the same year. This is unprecedented.

In March 2026, the UN's World Food Programme reported that the number of people facing acute levels of hunger – levels that are life-threatening – could reach record numbers. An additional 45 million people could fall into acute food insecurity if the Middle East conflict does not end by June

2026, and if oil prices remain above US\$100 a barrel. This would add to the 318 million people around the world who are already acutely food insecure, representing a threefold increase over the past five years. Chronic undernutrition undermines human capital, costing the global economy an estimated US\$2.1 trillion annually, while every \$1 invested in nutrition yields a return of up to \$23.<sup>21</sup>

Under Hungary's European Council Presidency, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to global food security by aligning its strategies with international targets and preparing for the March 2025 Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit. Since then, the EU has pledged €6.5 billion toward the N4G initiative, while Ireland and Ethiopia successfully led a 37-nation resolution at the 78th World Health Assembly to extend global nutrition goals to 2030.

However, clearer programming targets, sustained investment into the next MFF, and more robust accountability systems are needed to ensure these commitments deliver measurable impact. As Ireland assumes the EU Council Presidency, it has a unique opportunity to steer the EU towards a renewed focus on food security and nutrition – particularly at a moment when global attention is slipping.

By driving a coherent, multisectoral, and evidence-based agenda, Ireland can help secure lasting EU leadership on food security and nutrition at a time when global needs are rising and other donors are retrenching.

## Key Recommendations

- Drive political leadership by integrating food security and nutrition priorities across relevant Council working groups and champion food security and nutrition as foundational to stability, peacebuilding, climate resilience, and long-term growth.
- Build and mobilise a coalition of EU food security and nutrition champions with like-minded Member States to collectively drive EU ambition.
- Champion an EU-wide commitment to restore the EU's strategic direction on nutrition with a renewed and extended EU Nutrition Action Plan beyond 2025, ensuring the next MFF embeds clear priorities, coherence across instruments, and measurable GEI-linked impact.
- Advocate for sustained and increased EU investment in food security and nutrition beyond 2027 in alignment with the EU's €6.5 billion N4G 2025 commitment.
- Ensure that nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions are protected and scaled in the next GEI, as well as prioritising agroecological principles, nutrition outcomes, and gender equality in food systems.

<sup>21</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), 'WFP projects food insecurity could reach record levels as a result of Middle East escalation', 17 March 2026 ([www.wfp.org/news/wfp-projects-food-insecurity-could-reach-record-levels-result-middle-east-escalation](https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-projects-food-insecurity-could-reach-record-levels-result-middle-east-escalation)).

# 05

## Sustain a Just and Equitable EU Climate Agenda

At a moment when climate ambition is increasingly being quelled, Ireland must play a decisive role in sustaining and advancing the EU's climate agenda. Recognised by LDCs and small island developing states (SIDS) as a trusted partner, Ireland has built strong credibility through its principled, grant-based climate finance. This leadership is also recognised through its offer to co-host the Second Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels with Tuvalu, in 2027.

Ireland should use its Presidency to facilitate an EU position in the lead up to the 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) that proposes stronger EU climate finance, both in scale and quality, while maintaining a clear focus on adaptation and loss and damage. Protecting vulnerable and marginalised populations and strengthening global partnerships must remain at the core of EU climate action.

In leading negotiations on the post-2030 climate framework, Ireland must work to ensure that adaptation finance and just transition principles are firmly embedded in EU law. This includes delivering on the Global Goal on Adaptation agreed at COP30 and urgently scaling up contributions to the critically under-funded Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), through public, grant-based financing.

While the EU recently adopted in March 2026<sup>22</sup> a legally binding 90% net emissions reduction target for 2040, including up to 5% reliance on international carbon credits, this introduces a limited but significant external dimension to EU climate ambition. It also raises important questions about environmental integrity, global carbon market governance, and the balance between domestic action and international mitigation.

Meanwhile, climate proofing EU and global agricultural food systems is essential for food and nutrition security, while meeting the Paris Agreement temperature goal. With the outcomes and future of the Sharm el-Sheikh Joint Work on the implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security (SSJWA) to be discussed at COP31 (in November 2026), Ireland and the EU must strive for conclusions that strengthen food and nutrition security. They must emphasise support, including climate and agricultural finance that is accessible to smallholder and women farmers, and that funds locally led adaptation, and recognise the importance of equitably transformative food systems to realising food and nutrition security under climate change.

Despite facing some of the most acute climate risks, FCAS often struggle to access climate finance, which continues to flow predominantly towards more stable, high-capacity environments. In 2022, for example, the ten most fragile states received less than 1% of total global adaptation financing.

## Key Recommendations

- Meet Ireland's own fair share of climate finance for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage, through public, grant-based finance that is new and additional to ODA.
- Increase support to Global South countries for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage, including through international climate finance.
- **Throughout the legislative process on the post EU-2030 framework:**
  - Ensure that the limited use of international carbon credits under the EU 2040 framework does not undermine environmental integrity or delay domestic decarbonisation. It should prioritise agreement on strict eligibility criteria for Article 6 credits, including robust safeguards against double counting, weak verification standards, and negative impacts on human rights and sustainable development in partner countries.
  - Embed adaptation finance, gender equality, and just transition principles in the EU post-2030 climate framework and legislation.
- **At COP31:**
  - Strengthen, through the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), the EU's climate finance contributions in both scale and quality, with a focus on adaptation and loss and damage.
  - Secure a strong COP31 outcome on climate action on agriculture and food security by addressing the agricultural climate finance gap and agreeing on the need for a higher profile for climate, agriculture, and food systems within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) post-COP28 programmatic context. It must support peace, security, and stability alongside climate resilience.

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, '2040 climate target', March 2026 ([https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2040-climate-target\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2040-climate-target_en)).

# Glossary

Term	Definition
<b>Anticipatory action</b>	Early interventions taken before a predictable crisis occurs, using forecasts and risk analysis to reduce humanitarian impacts.
<b>Article 208, TFEU</b>	Provision of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union stating that poverty eradication is the primary objective of EU development cooperation.
<b>Article 209, TFEU</b>	Treaty provision establishing the roles of EU institutions in development cooperation programming and implementation.
<b>Blended finance</b>	The use of public funds alongside private investment to finance development projects, often through guarantees, loans, and grants.
<b>DAC-ability</b>	The extent to which spending qualifies as Official Development Assistance under Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee rules.
<b>DEAR programme</b>	<p>The EU's Development Education and Awareness Raising programme, supporting Global Citizenship Education and public engagement on development issues.</p> <p>DEAR website: <a href="https://dearprogramme.eu/">https://dearprogramme.eu/</a></p>
<b>Double counting</b>	The practice of counting the same financial contribution, expenditure, or development outcome more than once towards different targets or objectives. In the context of EU development and climate finance, concerns about double counting often arise when a single funding stream is reported simultaneously against multiple commitments (e.g. climate finance, migration-related spending, security objectives, or Official Development Assistance), potentially overstating the level of resources available for poverty reduction and sustainable development.
<b>Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle</b>	A requirement that policies and investments should not cause substantial environmental or social harm.
<b>Emergency Aid Reserve (EAR)</b>	A dedicated EU financial reserve used to respond rapidly to external crises and humanitarian emergencies.
<b>European Consensus on Development</b>	<p>The EU's overarching policy framework for development cooperation, centred on poverty eradication, human rights, and sustainable development.</p> <p>See: <a href="https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/policy-coherence-development_en">https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/policy-coherence-development_en</a></p>
<b>FCAS (fragile and conflict-affected states)</b>	Countries experiencing severe political instability, conflict, weak governance, or humanitarian crises.

<b>Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)</b>	An international climate finance mechanism designed to support countries suffering irreversible climate-related losses and damages.
<b>Gender Action Plan (GAP)</b>	The EU framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through external action and development cooperation.
<b>Global Citizenship Education (GCE)</b>	Education that promotes awareness of global challenges, solidarity, sustainability, and active citizenship.
<b>Global Europe Instrument (GEI)</b>	The proposed EU external financing instrument intended to support development cooperation, humanitarian aid, and international partnerships after 2027.
<b>Global Gateway</b>	The EU's international investment strategy focused on infrastructure, connectivity, trade, and sustainable partnerships with third countries.  See: <a href="https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway_en">https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway_en</a>
<b>Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) nexus</b>	An integrated approach that links humanitarian assistance, long-term development, and peacebuilding efforts.
<b>Least developed countries (LDCs)</b>	Countries identified by the United Nations as having the lowest levels of socioeconomic development and greatest structural vulnerabilities.
<b>Loss and Damage</b>	Climate-related harms that cannot be prevented through mitigation or adaptation, such as destroyed livelihoods, ecosystems, and infrastructure.
<b>Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)</b>	The EU's long-term budget framework that sets spending priorities and expenditure ceilings for multiple years. The next MFF currently being discussed is the EU budget for 2028–2033.  The MFF proposal: <a href="https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en">https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en</a>
<b>Performance Framework</b>	A system of indicators and metrics used by the EU to monitor and evaluate spending outcomes and development impact of its MFF.  The MFF Performance Framework proposal: <a href="https://commission.europa.eu/publications/budget-expenditure-tracking-and-performance-framework_en">https://commission.europa.eu/publications/budget-expenditure-tracking-and-performance-framework_en</a>
<b>Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)</b>	Ensuring that EU policies in areas such as trade, migration, agriculture, and climate support rather than undermine development objectives
<b>SIDS (small island developing states)</b>	Small island nations particularly vulnerable to climate change, sea-level rise, and environmental shocks.

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## Contact details

Dóchas, Suite 8, Olympic House,  
Pleasants Street, Dublin 8

Phone: 01 405 3801

Facebook: @dochasnetwork

Linkedin: Dochasnetwork

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Funded by  
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