

Strategy

2022+

actalliance eu

4

Who we are and what we aim for

6

What sets us apart

8

Context

Global trends | European external action policies and funding

12

Challenges and opportunities

How our strategy informs ACT Alliance EU's choices

14

Development policy and practice

18

Humanitarian policy and practice

21

Transversal objectives

23

Graphical representation of strategy

25

How we work

Contents

Who we are and what we aim for



ACT Alliance EU is a network of European church-based humanitarian and development agencies whose purpose is:

Purpose

to influence EU policy and practice regarding development and humanitarian aid policies and related issues, in order to provide sustainable benefits to and improvements in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice around the world.

The ACT Alliance EU network is part of the global ACT Alliance, the largest global coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and affiliated organisations working together in over 125 countries in humanitarian aid, development cooperation and advocacy. ACT Alliance EU has more than thirty years of experience in evidence-based EU advocacy and policy work. Joining with ACT Alliance enhances our combined impact, with messaging resonating across all continents, at the European Union and at the United Nations.

ACT Alliance EU's vision is:

Vision

for people in all their diversity to live in dignity in a sustainable world and just and equitable societies where human rights are fulfilled.

We are an EU facing advocacy network. As such the long-term impact we aim for is:

Long-term impact

that European external relations, humanitarian aid and development cooperation policies and practice at institutional and at civil society level are rights-based, equitable and people & community centred and contribute to human security and dignity for all.

What sets us apart



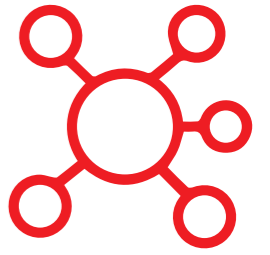
ACT Alliance EU uniquely combines a respected policy and advocacy voice in Brussels with grassroots perspectives and the leverage of ACT Alliance and ecumenical bodies towards the UN and regional intergovernmental bodies such as the African Union. Our more than 30-year evidence-based advocacy means we are heard in Brussels. Our members' long-term partnerships and our connectedness to ACT Alliance members in other regions and continents provide a length and breadth which few others have. The diversity of perspectives and knowledge which our members bring, allow us to collaborate beyond the secretariat's own expertise thereby ensuring ACT Alliance EU becomes a platform for its members.

Our advocacy emphasises the importance of a diverse civil society engaged locally, nationally, regionally and globally in humanitarian and development processes, of shifting ownership of those processes to local and national actors, and of de-colonising the aid system and re-balancing power relations.

We believe that development cooperation and humanitarian programming are at their most effective and sustainable when owned by and rooted with local actors and communities.

As a network of progressive faith-based organisations we can provide a unique perspective on areas where religion intersects with and shapes development and humanitarian outcomes, and on the value and implementation of faith-sensitive approaches in relief and development.

Context



Global trends

We live in an age of remarkable societal and technological progress and change, set against a backdrop of crisis, instability and conflict. Power is shifting away from the West. Globally we witness rising nationalism, competition for resources, markets and influence. The rules-based world order is under pressure, and multilateralism is waning at a time when it is most needed – in a world shaped by interlinked challenges of environmental degradation, climate events, pandemics, conflicts and unprecedented levels of refugees and displaced people.

We witness a global backlash against gender equality, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and human rights infringements particularly on women, girls and LGBTQI persons. These trends, which often use religious language, are at play also within the EU.

Climate change and environmental degradation are no longer a looming crisis, but an acute emergency reflected in weather events of unparalleled severity and frequency, in increased human vulnerability, in food insecurity,

in conflict over land and resources. They present an existential threat. Furthermore, human insecurity and humanitarian needs have increased due to internationalized conflicts, a rise in non-state violence and forced displacement.

Complex crises are growing. As conflicts become persistent and widespread, demographic patterns change including rapid urbanisation and population growth, income inequality deepens, and people already in vulnerable conditions are subject to increased hazards due to climate change. Increasingly complex crisis contexts and state fragility pose challenges for humanitarian response and development cooperation and the division between them is increasingly inadequate. Of concern are also the increasing violations of international humanitarian law and the ongoing lack of accountability for violations.

Globally, including in Europe, there are challenges to human rights and international humanitarian law and refugee law, democratic values and institutions and a rules-based

world order, and an increase in authoritarianism. Conversely though, there have been more expressions of opposition to authoritarian rule, poor public services, corruption, and growing disparities.

A mere eight years remain to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals, already off track before COVID-19 emerged. Progress had been made in poverty reduction, maternal and child health, access to electricity, and gender equality, but not enough to achieve the goals by 2030. In areas including inequality, lowering carbon emissions and tackling hunger, progress had either stalled or reversed.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the fallout from the measures to control it, exacerbating structural determinants of poverty and vulnerability, have significantly set back the attainment of the SDGs. Furthermore, the pandemic has revealed the depth of vulnerabilities and inequalities in relation to age, class, race, and gender. Pre-existing inequalities in access to education, health, land, and water have increased. New inequalities created by the digital gap and inequitable vaccine distribution

have come to the forefront. Restriction of fundamental rights due to emergency measures and laws have made it harder for citizens to be heard and have access to their human rights. People in situations of poverty, those suffering from marginalisation and discrimination and without adequate social protection have been hit hardest. A strong global commitment to the SDGs will be needed to reverse this trend.

As we write, war is being waged in Ukraine. Immediate impacts are visible: many have died, millions are displaced, civilian infrastructure including medical facilities have been destroyed. Already we see rising food prices impacting on food security globally especially for those most vulnerable. Less clear are the longer-term ramifications: a potential new Cold War which could affect other conflicts including humanitarian access; money diverted away from long term development or climate action towards militarisation; further challenges to multilateralism and diplomacy. But we can anticipate an acceleration and exacerbation of the dynamics set out in the paragraphs above.

European external action policies and funding

At its inception, von der Leyen's Commission formulated bold aspirational and inspiring promises: a European Green Deal and climate neutrality by 2050; making the 2020s Europe's Digital Decade; a stronger, geopolitical and more assertive Europe, effective in defending its interests, protecting its citizens and its values while standing up for an open, rules-based multilateral order. The EU has the ambition to promote its values, including on human rights, democracy and gender equality. It is a global front-runner in promoting gender equality as a key political objective of its external action and common foreign and security policy. The EU also has ambition to work on defence, counter-terrorism and crisis response and, through its new European Peace Facility, to enable the financing of actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) that have military or defence implications. These ambitions require more joined-up efforts between EU institutions and with Member State capitals which have a growing influence on the EU's external action and development cooperation priorities and sometimes strongly diverging views on key issues such as human rights, gender equality, EU sanctions and aid conditionality.

The Commission is called to play an increasing role in a global context marked by more and more intertwined relations between economic and security policies. Many of the Commission's traditional single-market-related policies, such

as trade, investment, competition, technology or finance, are de facto becoming more strategic and security-related. This could reshape the EU's external action in the years to come. It presents new challenges for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development and a higher risk of instrumentalisation of aid across the triple nexus. Influencing the EU's ambitions as a global actor to make sure that human rights and sustainable development objectives continue to prevail in the EU's external action and that ODA levels are sustained will require coordinated advocacy between the Member State and European levels. Several dynamics associated with the Ukraine conflict amplify the need for such advocacy. The intertwining of economic, finance and security are apparent. Pledges to increase military spending in Europe will result in pressure to reduce expenditure elsewhere. Money for the reception of an anticipated 5 million Ukrainian refugees will need to be found. ODA could be an easy target for both these. And crisis on the EU's borders could draw the EU's attention and funding away from less proximate crises.

Mid 2021 the EU adopted a new financial instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe). This instrument gives the EU the means to strengthen its relationships with partner countries. It allows the EU to be bolder about

protecting its interests and promoting its values through development cooperation. The NDICI-Global Europe budget allocations reflect the EU's prioritisation of its neighbouring regions and Africa with more than 80% of its geographic envelope allocated to these two regions.

Financial investments and blended finance now form an important dimension of EU development cooperation. The NDICI-Global Europe instrument includes architecture for significant external investment: the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) and the External Action Guarantee (EAG).

The European Commission and EU Member States are working more closely in programming and implementing ODA. The so-called Team Europe approach which appeared in the context of Covid-19 has been extended to development programming. Its joint EU-Member State programming approach is likely to play a significant role in the coming years. Coordinating and joining up our advocacy in Member State capitals and Brussels will be important.

Within the European NGO community there are concerns about the continued diversity of the humanitarian ecosystem. The EU faces pressure to cut administrative burdens and scale up funding for consortia management led by high-capacity NGOs. The high compliance expected of ECHO's NGO partners has important implications for partnership with local actors.

And a new all-of-EU 'one size fits all' contracting, reporting and auditing approach is less adapted to the needs of humanitarian and development. Furthermore, tightening restrictions due to counter terrorism measures and sanctioning regimes, as well as undermining humanitarian space, are barriers to strengthening and scaling up locally led response. The lack of harmonisation in donor counter terrorism measures and burdensome reporting requirements limit the possibilities for INGOs to partner with local organisations and hamper community-led responses. Advocacy promoting the need for a diversity of humanitarian actors, and for simplified and accessible reporting and auditing processes will be crucial, including for moving toward an equal footing for local civil society actors and first responders. That said, the EU continues its leading role in the Grand Bargain in the short term, presenting an entry point for advocacy in support of localisation. In addition, central to this round of the Grand Bargain is greater recognition of the need to mainstream gender justice: ECHO will need to mainstream the GAP III in related programming and policies to strengthen support to women- and youth-led organisations.

The promising uptake at EU level of the European Green Deal by ECHO and INTPA provides ample opportunity to define and mobilise financing and programmatic policies and guidance for locally led adaptation, anticipatory action and reduction of loss and damage.

Challenges and opportunities



In these challenging times ACT Alliance EU is well-placed to make a difference. Churches, civil society and movements are at the forefront of creating a more just and equal world. Through our members' faith and value-based foundation, church constituencies, connection to civil society in Europe and in countries of operation, our global connectedness and influence through and with ACT Alliance, our work with other faith actors, collective engagement with policy makers and political stakeholders, and our respected voice in the EU, we are uniquely placed to work towards our vision: for people in all their diversity to live in dignity in a sustainable world and just and equitable societies where human rights are fulfilled.

How our strategy informs ACT Alliance EU's choices

This strategy takes as its starting point the global ACT Alliance strategy. It bases itself on the above global trends and longer-term EU developments, on the identity and uniqueness of the ACT EU network and secretariat, and the wishes of its members as expressed at its 2021 General Assembly. The scope of work this offers is broad and ambitious, as set out in the sections which follow. To narrow down the specific areas of work into achievable work plans, the secretariat will undertake an annual or biennial process with members and the ACT Alliance Global Advocacy Manager. This operationalisation of the strategy will be informed by EU processes, priorities, plans, activities, points of entry and opportunities for engagement. It will adhere to ACT Alliance's policies, commitments and standards, including those on a rights-based approach, do no harm principles, and gender.

In line with our members' request we will seek a balance between strict adherence to work-plans and flexibility on engaging with arising issues. Where it becomes necessary to make choices we will seek our members' guidance, through our working groups and in particular the Policy and Advocacy Group (PAG).

This aims to be a longer-term strategy, without a defined end date. We will therefore from time to time evaluate its relevance on a schedule to be agreed with the PAG.

Development policy and practice

The change we seek to achieve

EU's international partnership agreements, development finance and EU's cooperation policies and practice enable and support transformative and sustainable social, economic, and environmental changes that are just, equitable, rights-based, led by local actors and communities and leave no one behind.

1 Holding the EU responsible and accountable as a global actor and a development partner

To pursue this objective, we monitor the EU policies and programmes impacting on the negotiation and implementation of the EU's agreements and joint action plans with partner countries, and we keep EU's institutions accountable to their obligations, commitments and responsibilities as a global actor and a development partner.

In doing so, we contribute to keeping the EU accountable to:

- ▶ the fulfilment and protection of Human Rights for all, across all policies and instruments, in line with international conventions, including by implementing the EU strategy and action plans on Human Rights and Democracy
- ▶ the Gender Action Plan III commitment to make EU engagement on gender justice,

including SRHR, more effective as a cross-cutting priority of EU external action. This requires a gender-transformative, rights-based and intersectional approach in all external policies, programmes and in EU international agreements

- ▶ its Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development obligation as per the EU Treaties, including by providing access to consultation, complaint and redress mechanisms to the populations affected in their rights and livelihoods by the EU's policies and programmes.
- ▶ its commitments and international standards relating to Financing for Development, ODA and Climate Finance targets and modalities as well as the Development Effectiveness principles

2 Enhancing EU and Member states support for sustainable and transformative social, economic and environmental changes led by local actors and communities

Our member organisations have historically been and remain at the forefront of fighting inequalities, defending and promoting human rights and providing social services and support to those living in the socio-economic margins. Building on that experience and on evidence from our member organisations' practice and research, we advocate to enhance EU and Member States' support, both in quantity and quality, for a people and community-centred sustainable development. We focus on the EU-Africa partnership and development cooperation which represent the biggest share of EC ODA and is a high priority for the EU in pursuing its economic, security and migration related interests.

In doing so, we aim at influencing the EU's policy making and development practice that have a direct impact on inequalities and human rights. Our aim is for the EU to:

- and empowerment as a principal objective
 - ▶ Promote the universality of human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural) and support actions, including by civil society, aiming at the protection of human rights defenders, reversing shrinking civic space, advancing corporate responsibility and due diligence, combatting impunity for human rights violations, enhancing indigenous and marginalised peoples' rights and tackling discrimination.
 - ▶ Support partner countries' investments in social protection for all, including social protection floors, and in sustainable and equitable health and education systems aiming at universal health coverage and quality education for all
 - ▶ Invest more resources in climate adaptation, loss and damage, decentralised renewable energy and agroecological approaches and shift towards supporting locally led initiatives and systems
 - ▶ Direct its business support and investments towards the local economy and small and medium-
- ▶ Realise the full potential of the EU's Gender Action Plan (GAPIII), including SRHR, and fulfil its commitment to integrate gender equality as a principal or significant objective in 85% of EU and Member States' ODA spending, with 5 % of these actions having gender equality and women's and girls' rights

sized enterprises, including small-scale farmers and women and young entrepreneurs

- ▶ Promote and support rights-based and safe migration and mobility schemes that contribute to socio-economic development in the countries of origin and destination
 - ▶ Support partner countries in mobilising the necessary resources to reach those objectives through fair taxation, fight against illicit financial flows, bilateral ODA, public
- ▶ Prevent the use of EU and Member States ODA for purposes furthering their own interests in areas such as migration, security or trade which may be counter-productive for reaching the core ODA objectives of sustainable development, eradicating poverty and fighting inequalities.

climate finance and global funds while ensuring EU funding reaches FBOs and other CSOs active at community level

Humanitarian policy and practice

The change we seek to achieve

The EU's humanitarian policies, partnerships and practice increase the sustainability, effectiveness and balance of the humanitarian architecture and assistance by recognising, embracing and reinforcing the respective strengths of a diverse and enabled local and international civil society.

ACT Alliance EU provides incisive and well-developed methodologies and evidence from long-term experience in partnering with and fostering the leadership of in-country civil society, emergent community-based groups and faith-based actors.¹ Our strategy for the coming years continues to inspire and respond to the ACT Alliance Global Strategy.

1 Enhancing the EU's strategic and programmatic support for locally led² and responsive humanitarian action, enabling its INGO partners to develop just and diverse partnerships with L/NNGOs and self-help groups.

Our efforts to progress transformative mechanisms for locally led humanitarian action pay specific attention to:

► **Simplification and shifting power:** Engaging in all external and internal processes to promote policies and programming frameworks which shift the power to and provide the flexibility and simplification necessary for engagement of and respectful, dignified and, above all, just partnerships with a diversity of local actors. While the EU faces pressure to restrict and narrow civil society engagement, we promote solutions and methodologies

for increased EU leadership in moving ownership of response to populations affected by crisis and enhancing strong partnerships with a diversity of actors representing those people.

► **Scaling up survivor and community led responses:** We continue to raise awareness of and address the budgetary and technical mechanisms in headquarter and field policy to provide scaled up support to the survivor and community led response methodology and similar citizen-led approaches of the network and partners.

¹ In addition to developing global strategic frameworks for localisation commitments with civil society networks and donors, the network hosts well-developed approaches to capacity sharing and mentoring for organisational strengthening and compliance standards. Efforts are increasingly focused on designing and implementing funding modalities for flexible response owned and led at local actor level.

² All expressions of the term 'local' are used to refer to informal and formal civil society and groups operating in crisis-affected countries where the EU and our members are operational. We recognise the highly racialised and problematic developments in usage of terminology related to localisation, which applied and interpreted incorrectly highlights Global South actors as 'local' in comparison 'international' Global Northern organisations. As presented in our Localisation Policy Guidance, our vision of locally led action is rooted in equitable power dynamics, justice and autonomy.

2 EU support to and reinforcement of equitable partnerships and local leadership is integrated throughout policy areas which address the major challenges facing the sector.

► **Gender justice and diversity:**

Promoting and evidencing the impact of localised response for fulfilling gender justice including SRHR and progressing toward diversity. EU and INGO policies and programming related to locally led response and access to funding, influence and capacities must enhance justice and counter-discrimination related to gender and all intersectional factors. In humanitarian policy, this means more focused attention to the gaps in current localisation policy related to gender justice and support to civil society led by and representing people marginalised on the basis of gender.

- **Climate justice:** Ensuring climate justice is mainstreamed throughout policy and programming for disaster management and resilience strengthening; promote uptake

of the principles of locally led equitable adaptation, and evidence and advocate measures for prevention of loss and damage. In addition, our advocacy in relation to climate justice evidences and highlights the changes required for strengthening local civil society's role in anticipatory action, early warning and forecasting systems, forecast-based action planning, pre-approved financing and timely coordination mechanisms. These areas are centred on prioritising the most at-risk communities for engagement in planning, participation and engaging with their capacities as first responders.

- **Crisis advocacy:** Our strategic priorities guide our crisis advocacy and — as detailed in the following section — address IHL violations and defend humanitarian space and diversity of civil society.

Transversal objectives



1 Promoting and defending human rights and civil society space and role in development and humanitarian aid

ACT Alliance EU and its members put people's perspectives and initiatives to enhance their wellbeing and to fulfil their rights at the centre of their work. As faith-based organisations, we have a responsibility and a history of engagement in raising sensitive issues in the defence of civic space, human rights and dignity. Therefore, ACT Alliance EU actively pushes the EU to promote and defend the human rights, civic space, enabling environment and funding which civil society organisations (CSOs), including faith-based organisations (FBOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and human and women's rights organisations need to lead the change towards just and equitable societies and sustainable development based on local solutions and actions.

In doing so, our aim is for the EU and its Member States to:

- ▶ Establish structured and transparent mechanisms in the framework of EU partnership agreements and cooperation to ensure the effective participation of a diversity of CSOs at political, policy and implementation levels in line with the OECD DAC recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance¹
- ▶ Use their external action tools — including the EU sanction regime and its Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) — and their voice in the international community to flag and counter attacks on civic space and violations of Human Rights and IHL
- ▶ Ensure that new technologies are accessible to all and are harnessed to open the democratic space and reduce Human Rights violations, injustice and inequalities, rather than increase them
- ▶ Develop early warning and action systems on civic space and Human Rights protection that cover both formal and informal power structures and forms of repression leading to common and coherent political action and support to CSOs and Human Rights defenders by EU delegations and Member State embassies
- ▶ Ensure analysis at Delegation and ECHO Country Office level of shrinking civil society space and of the potential for increased ownership of humanitarian and development response by local actors in contexts of shrinking civil society space. This is likely to require close collaboration with relevant ACT forums.

- ▶ Ensure programme requirements and structures remain open to small and medium organisations as well as diverse CSO representation in key influencing spaces
- ▶ Support local and national CSOs through long-term and flexible funding and mutual capacity enhancement, allowing for local leadership in programming cycles and key governance spaces as well as sustainable change in society and the emergence of new forms of participation and activism and innovative cooperation models inside civil society
- ▶ Maintain and foster diversity in their partnerships with local and national NGOs and other CS actors including informal ones, ensuring that certification, auditing, programming and reporting requirements

are feasible to organisations of all sizes and enable diverse and fair partnerships within civil society

We also engage in internal and external dialogues and processes to shift the power towards local actors and partners and transform the current models of cooperation and partnerships into more equal and respectful relationships. This entails relationships and partnerships that overcome the imbalance of power, misinformation, prejudices, racism, age and gender-based discrimination and instead give a leading role to actors and communities we all aim to support. We will ensure that EU and Member State policy and programming for localised response and cooperation remains centred on this aim of de-colonising aid and shifting power, without instrumentalisation and reduction of civic space at any level.

2 Delivering on the Triple Nexus political commitment

By documenting and building evidence from our member experience on methodologies for applying a triple nexus approach which is led by local communities, our aim is for the EU to:

- ▶ Deliver on its Triple Nexus political commitment through context responsive integrated strategies and funding modalities that put human security and local communities at the core
- ▶ Frame joined-up humanitarian, development and peace approaches on

the basis of national and local actors' perspectives – with recognition of the specific role and perspectives of local faith actors - and supporting locally led response by FBOs and other CSOs

- ▶ Promote and support the role of CSOs, women and youth, in conflict prevention, mediation, transitional justice and peace building processes with which the EU is engaging

¹ <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021>

Human dignity & justice for all

Shifting Power and Decision Making



How we work



How we work together

In follow-up to member discussions and the 2021 General Assembly we are rethinking the ACT Alliance EU working structures and ways of working and examining how to best engage with Brussels networks and allies. We are doing so to reflect this strategy, for greater agility, and to facilitate greater but more focused collaboration between secretariat and members as well as amongst the membership.

Our core thematic areas are Development Policy & Practice and Humanitarian Policy & Practice. In addition, there is a possibility for so-called Special Projects. These have a specific thematic or geographic focus, and are of limited duration. They act in support of the overall strategy. Special Projects are funded separately from the core areas by members with a particular interest. The secretariat ensures synergies between our core areas and the Special Projects.

Visibility and communications

We will develop a visibility & communications plan early in the new strategic period. It will address the internal – within the network – and external visibility of ACT EU. This is in line with the 2021 General Assembly which agreed ACT EU work should ensure further strengthening of visibility at EU level.

The internal element will look to sharing information and updates within the ACT EU network, including from members, and how to make sure that advocacy information, opportunities and updates are shared well with all staff within the membership for whom it is also of relevance.

Information and communications technology

Our ICT will work in support of our strategy, in the realm of information sharing and visibility and communications and in support of agile working and working groups.