

actalliance eu



Annual Report 2022

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
CS	Civil Society
DG	Directorate-General
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
EEAS	European External Action Service
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
GAP	European Union Gender Action Plan III
GSP	Generalised Scheme of Preferences
HRDN	Human Rights and Democracy Network
MIPs	Multi-annual indicative programmes
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
OACPS	Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States
SCLR	Survivor — and community-led response
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VOICE	Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies

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Front cover images

Left: Aberash Hilu buys seedlings to plant in degraded farmland (Mahedere Yemoanfilm/ACT)

Right: Arrival of Ukrainian refugees at the Polish-Ukrainian border crossing Medyka (Frank Schultze / Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe)

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Director's letter

2022 has seen many transitions in our work as well as the policy and geopolitical landscape. In May our General Assembly adopted a new strategy, one which sets out the red thread in our work and ambitions: the centrality of a diverse civil society engaged locally, nationally, regionally and globally in humanitarian and development processes, the importance of shifting ownership of those processes to local and national actors, of decolonising the aid system and rebalancing power relations. The strategy sets out new and revisited areas for the secretariat and the network, with increased focus on gender, the human rights-based approach, on digitalisation and on the humanitarian — development — peace nexus. Over the year, we have explored how to integrate these issues into our work.

The strategy on the following page encourages exploration and transition regarding how the secretariat works with members. This is resulting in focused exchange and collaboration, in an increased use of our members' reports and studies in our advocacy as well as in our facilitating direct contacts between our members' experts and EU officials.

The EU's policy, practice and relations in external action — including humanitarian aid and development cooperation — underwent enormous transition. Sadly, the war on the European continent continues, with tragic consequences for the people of Ukraine and Russia, and significant ramifications for the world as a whole. Rising food and fuel prices have affected people living in poverty, particularly in the Global South, exacerbating food shortages and hunger. The war has increased competition for influence in developing countries, with higher political pressure on EU external action, the Africa-EU partnership, and the EU budget. It became clear that the humanitarian and development budgets would

be insufficient to meet the needs of Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees while maintaining the level of investment elsewhere. The EU and Member States' ODA and peace and security budgets were under pressure, with serious risks of diversion and relocation.

Forging joint and coherent political, diplomatic and economic responses to the new geopolitical landscape by the 27 EU Member States outweighed other key issues on the Commission and the Council's work agendas throughout the year. The EU diplomatic service was challenged to maintain good relationships with its traditional partners, and to defuse worries and misinformation on the impact of EU sanctions on energy, food supplies and rocketing prices. The EU responded by launching its Global Gateway strategy, putting geopolitical interests at the forefront of EU external action and development cooperation.

In this challenging context, we have strived through our work to maintain what's good in EU humanitarian aid and development cooperation while pushing for what we believe could be better. As you read on, may I challenge you to follow the thread of our strategy: how our activities and engagement have promoted the centrality of a diverse civil society who are engaged from local to global levels and the shift of ownership to local and national actors. In this way we work towards a more sustainable and effective approach to humanitarian and development work. We are proud to present the impact and results of our work in this annual report and remain committed to this vision for a more equitable and sustainable future.

Thank you for your support.

Floris Faber

ACT Alliance EU Representative

Human dignity & justice for all

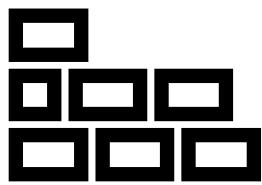
Shifting Power and Decision Making



in 2022

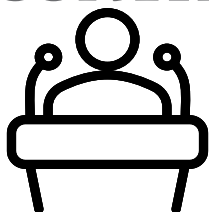
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...had
171 
direct advocacy
communications
with policymakers



contributed to
21 POLICY
MAKING
PROCESSES

CO-HOSTED
SPOKE AT
CONTRIBUTED TO



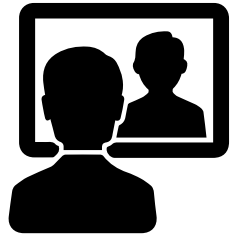
51 events

met
policymakers

134 times



CIVIL SOCIETY
NETWORKS



256 times

published
& co-published



23

56
media
products

(TWEETS BLOGS
PRESS RELEASES
WEBSITE UPDATES)



statements
policy papers
joint letters
& briefings

Highlights from our 2022

January

Participated in the CONCORD webinar that led to the adoption of a joint Africa-EU civil society declaration ahead of the AU-EU Summit.

March

Attended the European Humanitarian Forum to connect with EU stakeholders and the NGO community on localisation, nexus and the Ukraine response.

May

ACT Alliance EU Strategy 2022+ was adopted at the General Assembly held in Brussels.

Organised a round table discussion on the Ukraine crisis, exploring implications & lessons for the EU's humanitarian and development aid partnerships.

Attended the Paris Civil Society conference on AU-EU Partnership.

July

Met with DG Intpa, DG HOME, EEAS on migration in follow up to the AU-EU summit.

October

Held a workshop for members on restrictive measures and protection against smear campaigns.

December

Moderated a thematic session on intersectionality in the EU Annual Structured Dialogue on Gender Action Plan.

February

Met with DG ECHO on Localisation guidance.

Held a session on “Migration as a force for development” at the AU-EU CS Forum.

Published our event report on the migration-development nexus webinar from October 2021.

April

Met with Diakonia Sweden and ACT Church of Sweden in Stockholm to consolidate our positioning on proposed ODA cuts due to the war in Ukraine.

June

Took part in a meeting with the EP Socialists and Democrats (S&D) political group to discuss NDICI scrutiny.

September

Organised Team retreat: we worked on our short-term strategic planning for transversal work and developed synergies with the work of the global ACT Alliance.

November

Held an advocacy event at PAG on food security and climate nexus.

Co-organised a workshop on the triple nexus and peace aimed at facilitating practioner sharing and learning. This was the last in a series of three workshops.

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.

Objective:

The EU supports sustainable and transformative change

We work to ensure that the EU cooperation programmes support sustainable and transformative social, economic and environmental changes led by local actors and communities. This year we made progress on several fronts to support this objective.

We influenced the European Parliament's position on the 2023 EU budget with improvements regarding the food and climate crisis in Sub Saharan Africa, humanitarian aid, gender equality, sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), social protection and Civil Society (CS).

We established a content-based dialogue with thematic desks in DG INTPA on education, social protection and food security. This allowed us to spotlight our members' evidence on the realities and good practice at a local level.

The Global Gateway Strategy

In December 2021, the EU launched its Global Gateway strategy to put EU geopolitical ambitions and interests at forefront of its international partnerships. The Strategy's aim is to leverage EU and MS public and private investments worth €300 billion in energy and transport, the green transition, digitalisation, health, research and education. Through the Team Europe approach — which combines resources of the EU, Member States and their Development Finance Institutions — the EU also aims to enhance its collective financial and political leverage for greater impact, influence and visibility. At the end of 2022, 168 **Team Europe Initiatives** (TEIs) at global, regional and country levels were in the making in a wide range of sectors.

This transition to a more assertive and joined-up EU development cooperation model is not without consequences for

the EU's priorities and programmes. As a result, many critical questions have been asked and discussions held throughout the year. We notably questioned the focus of EU aid implementation by EU member-states agencies to the detriment of other traditional partners such as partner countries, the UN organisations and NGOs. We are concerned about the transparency and accountability of the TEIs and how far they align with development effectiveness principles. This includes democratic ownership of recipient countries, the untying of aid, and the role of Civil Society (CS) at design, implementation and monitoring stages. While the EU increasingly recognises and supports CS as a 'political' partner and an asset for Human Rights and Democracy, the role of CSOs and NGOs in EU development programmes risks becoming marginal. Our work on behalf of our



Holy Trinity Peace Village support the Kuron region, where residents are vulnerable to cattle raiding and child abduction. The work of the organisation involves peace and reconciliation, infrastructure reconstruction and cash grants to women for livelihoods. (Paul Jeffrey for ACT Alliance; Norwegian Church Aid support local organisation Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron, South Sudan)

members and partners is to make sure that does not happen.

We examined the way these new approaches are reflected in practice in the EU budget and European Commission (EC) programmes and action plans. We succeeded in improving 2023 budget allocations and spending priorities in key areas.

Part of our work is to identify general trends in EU support to human development and gender equality, financial modalities and the types of actors involved. We are constantly looking for opportunities for CS to contribute. This year we analysed EC annual action documents together with CONCORD members. We will use this analysis to inform our future advocacy on the mid-term review of the Global Europe instrument and 2024-2027 programming process.

In the current context of multiple crises, the EU remains a prominent donor for social sectors and food security. We continued to engage with EC thematic desks on education, social protection and food security to inform and share concerns and recommendations. In November, we discussed the EU's response to the current food crisis with DG INTPA and ECHO's officials in the light of Christian Aid's report [Ripping off the Band aid](#). It is a good way to bring our members' evidence on what works at a community and local level to the attention of DG INTPA thematic desks who are keen to get concrete examples. Our aim is that these inputs are considered in the strategic guidance, programming and implementation by EU country Delegations. At ECHO level, we aim to provide further evidence and examples on how to engage with communities and grassroots organisations in addition to the stronger and more visible national NGOs.

Africa-EU Summit and Joint Vision for 2030

Our aim is to ensure effective and genuine autonomous avenues for Civil Society and ACT Alliance members' participation and influence on Africa-EU cooperation at all levels.

We adopted a joint strong Africa-EU Civil Society declaration ahead of the AU-EU Summit in February.

We positively influenced the human development components of the AU-EU Joint Vision for 2030 and convinced the EU of the necessity to create more structured and permanent mechanisms for Civil Society participation in the partnership.

The AU-EU Summit took place in February and was preceded by an Africa-Europe Civil Society Forum where we organised a well-attended workshop on migration together

with ACT Alliance Nairobi office and Caritas Europa and Africa. The main outcome of the Forum was a strong [CS declaration](#) signed



Students receive graduation certificates from ministers engaged with the TVET programme. (Finn Church Aid)

by more than 180 organisations from both continents.

Extract from The Civil Society Declaration

CS participation is crucial to ensure that cooperation between the AU and EU promotes joint priorities, that flagship initiatives resonate with local realities and possible existing solutions, and that no one is left behind. As it is, the EU continues to disregard African Union priorities as set out in the Agenda 2063, cherry-picking those elements which suit it. The EU, despite its commitment to forge a people-centred partnership, does not appear to be putting people first. For its part, the AU's policy decision-making could benefit from more inclusive and transparent dialogue with civil society and people's organisations.

At political level, the Summit resulted in the adoption of **A Joint Vision for 2030** and in the announcement of an Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package aimed

at leveraging EUR 150 billion. It focuses on big infrastructure investments for the green and digital transition but also includes sustainable food system, health and youth and education components.

Education is prominent in the Global Gateway package for Africa, which is an important achievement, especially if we consider the limited place that education had in original EU plans. It includes a **regional Teacher programme** and a focus on quality basic education and technical and vocational training (TVET) which has the potential to improve access to and quality of education at all levels. Together with Finn Church Aid (FCA) and other specialised NGOs, we shared concrete recommendations with the cabinet of Commissioner Urpilainen and the European Commission (EC) as well as the EU External Action Service (EEAS) thematic desks. Our aim was to make sure that this potential will materialise and that CSOs could contribute. An ongoing dialogue has been established with DG INTPA that will continue in 2023.

To influence the design of social protection support in EU regional and country programmes, we sent [our briefing paper](#) and ACT Church of Sweden [paper](#) on social protection and gender to specialised staff in DG INTPA and the EEAS. We are pleased to see that a regional Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa is under preparation and that it aligns with several of our recommendations on strengthening national social protection systems and integrating a gender-sensitive approach.

We sent our recommendations on migration and mobility to key policy makers ahead of the Summit. These were produced during the

two webinars on migration that we organised in 2021 together with Caritas Europa and Caritas Africa. We succeeded in raising their interest for an enhanced Africa-EU dialogue on issues related to the development-migration nexus and intra-Africa mobility. This included legal pathways for safe and regular migration, brain drain, remittances and role of diaspora as well as climate-induced displacement. Despite this, evidence from EU migration related programmes and TEIs in Africa and from bilateral migration partnerships shows no change of direction and the focus remains on border management, returns and readmission.



SPOTLIGHT

Civil Society in the Africa-EU Partnership

We have been advocating for meaningful Civil Society (CS) participation in the Africa-EU partnership since its inception in 2007. Together with CONCORD and other CSOs active on the issue, we convinced Commissioner Urpilainen and senior officials in DG INTPA that a more structured and institutional approach to civil society participation was necessary. A self-nominated CS task force with participants from both continents was established early September to prepare the terms of reference for a CS 'mechanism' inside the Africa-EU partnership. In parallel, DG INTPA contracted the Open Government unit of the OECD to conduct a study on open and transparent mechanisms for structured consultation with stakeholders in the EU-OACPS partnership. We contributed to both processes and facilitated the involvement of the ACT Alliance Nairobi office. In addition to establishing structured spaces for consultation and dialogue with CS, both studies recommend creating an open CS platform (offline and online) as a collaborative space in which CSOs and individuals could access information, discuss and coordinate common positions and channel their inputs to authorities. The two processes should conclude and probably converge in 2023.

Our aim is to ensure these processes lead to concrete outcomes offering effective and genuine autonomous avenues for CS and ACT Alliance members' participation and influence on Africa-EU cooperation at all levels.

Objective:

The EU is a responsible and accountable international actor and development partner

A key focus of our work is to keep the EU institutions accountable to their obligations, commitments and responsibilities as a global actor and a development partner.

2022 has provided several opportunities to influence EU's legal and policy framework to make it coherent with human rights and development objectives. We have highlighted three processes which are contributing to this goal.

Due diligence legislation: a unique opportunity to increase business accountability

For the past two years, EU institutions have been engaged in the process of adopting an EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence. A strong directive with enforcement provisions will be key to hold EU based companies accountable for their impact on human rights, the environment and climate. For local populations and activists, it could represent their main avenue to access decision making and justice. This is both a challenge and a great opportunity. It is challenging because Civil Society (CS)

advocacy efforts face strong resistance from certain governments and MEPs who are subject to considerable corporate lobbying. By joining forces with other Civil Society actors, we amplify our voices and our influence on this important Directive. This is why ACT Alliance EU joined the new CS campaign **Justice is Everybody's Business** launched in September 2022. As part of the joint effort, we sent our recommendations to the rapporteur for opinion of the European Parliament (EP) Development committee.

The campaign's work will intensify in 2023 to influence the EP final position and the subsequent negotiations between the EP and the Council. If no directive is adopted before

the EP election in June 2024, there is a high risk that this important Directive will be buried by the next legislature.

Mid-term review of the Human Rights and Democracy action plan

In 2023, the EU will review its 2020-2024 [Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#). The Action Plan is the main framework for EU's action and support to the promotion of human rights and democracy worldwide. It includes a range of policies, tools and political and financial instruments at EU's disposal to pursue its objectives. In December 2022, we responded to an EEAS request for CS views

and concrete inputs focusing on the Action Plan design, content and usefulness. Our response provided recommendations on civic space, gender, migration, digital rights, and the role of faith-based organisations (FBOs). We will continue to influence this process in 2023 as it will ultimately lead to the preparation and adoption of the next action plan.

ODA and migration

This year we continued to collaborate with the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Civil Society Reference Group on ODA and migration. In 2020, the DAC Secretariat was mandated to develop a set of eligibility criteria that can be used to help donors assess whether a migration-related activity can be reported as ODA. Our work supports advocacy efforts to influence these criteria.

Clear and more defined criteria on migration will strengthen the integrity, the transparency and development-focus of ODA and ensure that ODA spent on migration-related activities does no harm to the rights and safety of people on the move. The criteria will also reduce the risk of ODA diversion from donors to further externalise their own borders or advance their domestic migration policy objectives.

After two years of joint advocacy efforts, we have seen some good results from our previous

[submission](#) and our recent [recommendations](#), which are reflected in the published ODA reporting directives. The directives include clear criteria against the diversion of ODA for activities conceived to restrict migration, that put at risk the human rights of people on the move and that are not aligned with applicable international law and frameworks on migration.

Sadly, not all our recommendations on returns and reintegration were integrated. We are concerned that the wording at times remains vague which may lead to arbitrary decisions by donors. Despite a tight timeframe, together with our members we sent a letter addressed to national representatives of the DAC members and Secretariat highlighting our key messages on the integrity of ODA and the importance of CS involvement in the process.

Objective:

Promote and defend human rights and civic space

To increase the impact of our human rights and civic space work, we regularly operate as part of the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and CONCORD.

We take part in HRDN's dialogue with DG INTPA on the implementation of their new Human Rights and Democracy programme. It is a good source of information for our members and offers opportunities to share experiences. The ACT Alliance EU funding group members provided concrete inputs to an EC study on ways to mitigate the impact of foreign agent laws, counter terrorism laws and banking restrictions on the transfer of funds to local human rights defenders and CSOs in difficult environments. In the same vein, ACT Alliance EU organised an online seminar for its members on coping with restrictive measures in EU funding regulations and contracts, and how to react to defamation campaigns.

Through the CONCORD Civil Society Power group's meetings with DG INTPA CS unit,

we gathered useful insights for our members on upcoming funding opportunities and EU delegations' roadmaps for engagement with CS. The group drafted a short paper — [7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making](#) — to encourage a shift towards more meaningful, inclusive and safe CS engagement across all EU institutions.

An important aspect of our work is to promote our members' reports and activities related to civic space at EU level. This year we promoted Bread for the World's report on civic space [Digitalisation and civic space: Chances and Challenges](#). We also promoted Christian Aid's report and webinar on [How COVID shrank Civic Space](#).

Online civic space and human rights

We influenced the EU inter-institutional Declaration on digital rights and principles by strengthening the language on gender equality, civic space and a people-centered approach.

In 2022, we linked our work on civic space and the protection of human rights with the risks and opportunities brought by digital technologies. We rapidly acquired expertise in the EU development agenda on digitalisation and raised our profile in the Brussels NGO space and towards EU officials on the protection of civic space and human rights online.

Together with CONCORD, we concentrated our advocacy on the **EU inter-institutional Declaration on Digital Principles and Rights**. This Declaration frames the EU common vision on digital transformation, which is one of the EC's five priorities. It will serve as a reference point and guide for policymakers and business to ensure that people's rights are at the centre and protected in a digital world. The application of digital principles and rights also has the potential to affect the EU's external relations with partner countries.

In March, we produced a **policy brief** on five key priorities that strengthened the European Commission's proposal on the Declaration. Our messaging on the digital transformation addresses the gender digital divide, ensuring democratic civil society participation online and articulating a people-centred approach.

We also contributed to influencing the **Terms of Reference** of a dedicated Civil Society Advisory Body in the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub. The D4D Hub is a multi-stakeholder platform led by EU Member States that promotes new partnerships on digital transformation between the EU and partner countries — including African countries. This Body is a structured mechanism for civil society engagement to indirectly influence the policy direction of the EU and member states on digital transformation. It will also provide the space for CS to showcase their work, experiences and best practices and build capacity in the digital field.

OECD DAC recommendation

This year we influenced the discussion and guidance on the implementation of the OECD DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development and Humanitarian Aid. The Recommendation is a legal instrument applying to all its signatories including the EU. We collaborated with the global ACT Alliance Community of Practice on Rights and Development and with the Civil Society (CS) reference group to the DAC. We contributed to

CS position papers and to consultation meetings with the DAC and with DG INTPA. At DAC's request we commented on the draft version of their Toolkit on Funding to Local Actors. The toolkit will guide donors in implementing the OECD DAC Recommendation. This is where our work on civic space and on localisation converge to promote a shift towards local partners' leadership at both donors' and NGOs' levels.

Objective:

The EU supports equitable partnerships and local leadership

We have continued our work to ensure that localisation is firmly on the EU agenda. The humanitarian sector and ECHO leadership have claimed localisation as one of its key priorities.

We have been part of this story of amplification and have contributed significantly to advocacy efforts.

The independence and articulacy of L/NGO platforms at country level is improving and our engagement with those platforms to connect and amplify their voice is increasing.

New commitments by ECHO for its role and that of its partners to increase their in-country engagements with L/NGOs, with consideration for the specific barriers to women-led and representative organisations.

Efforts to shift power for greater local leadership and equitable partnerships are at a watershed moment. Although this is positive, we anticipate many pitfalls due to the highly competitive and restrictive nature of donor

funding which tends to foster the shrinking diversity of Civil Society (CS). Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that commitments to the role of local actors are substantial and meaningful. We want to see progress



*SCLR group facilitated by YMCA Jerusalem which generated marked results for women's leadership.
(Nils Carstensen / Local2Global Protection)*

towards the prioritisation of local leadership wherever possible and equity in partnerships undertaken as a matter of justice and fair power relations. But we are delighted to see the question shift from if to how we can progress these goals.

In 2022, we finalised the ACT Alliance EU policy guidance on localisation. This guidance articulates our common vision and scoping for locally led action, complementarity, and

equity in international — local/national CSO partnerships and consortia. We sowed new seeds of collaboration, supporting local and national CSOs to strengthen their synergies with each other and with international CSOs through coordination platforms (see example of our engagement with DCA Mali). We partnered with these platforms to facilitate strategic spaces for influence with the EU and other donors as well as to consolidate collective messaging.



SPOTLIGHT

Engagement in Mali and the Sahel shapes ACT Alliance EU priorities for 2023

In 2022, the ACT Alliance EU humanitarian policy officer supported the launch phase of a DCA-ICVA programme aimed at partnering with L/N CSO efforts to address the ongoing barriers to their just access to and leadership in the humanitarian system. Priorities covered coordination, capacities and advocacy and a specific focus on the barriers and existing opportunities for women and youth-led L/N CSOs.

Mali and the wider region in the last decade saw humanitarian needs and insecurity rapidly spike with multiple overlapping crises. Yet despite a rich history of civil society engagement in development action and efforts to adapt competencies and capacities to respond across the triple nexus, self-help groups and local and national CSOs still find themselves drastically underfunded and reliant on sub-granting partnership models.¹ Internal divisions and conflict of interest with politics and business have also periodically affected major local/national CSO coordination networks and organisations.

Initial workshops and discussions with local/national CSOs, many of whom are facilitators of women and youth self-help groups in Mali, resulted in simple and cogent lessons. On the one hand survivor and community self-help action, supported and facilitated by local/national CSO and multiple coordination networks, continue to operate providing first and ongoing essential response in contexts of reducing humanitarian access and harder to reach populations. On the other, efforts are needed to strengthen collective positioning vis-à-vis funding access, opportunities to build organisational capacities and advocacy power.

And at sub-national and national level, there are strong local and national CSO platforms ensuring that the conversation with donors and international organisations is alive and led by L/N CSOs collectively.

Those L/N CSO platforms are also addressing internal coordination:

"We must build synergies and clearly define the end goal: we have a plethora of coordination networks and pressure on grassroots civil society to professionalise. What is our end goal? To multiply this panoply or to better coordinate and support both informal and formal response for the time it is needed?"

Panellist: Survivor and Community-led Response workshop December 2022

The challenge for action by international actors in the region is then clear: to support the creation of an enabling space for broad-based local CS with strong engagement and leadership of grassroots organisations, particularly those led by and representing women and youth in hardest to reach areas.

¹ See also [Oxfam's report](#) of the challenges facing local/national CSOs and community actors in neighbouring Burkina Faso as humanitarian needs have rapidly spiked, shifting the donor funding landscape from development to humanitarian.

ECHO Localisation Guidance consultation

And these seeds are bearing fruit. As the ECHO Localisation Guidance drafting process continues, we are seeing a positive shift towards prioritisation of implementation through partnerships and for increased visibility of the role of those partners. Of particular importance is the initial recognition in the draft of the urgency for fair coverage for the overheads of local and national NGOs.

For civil society and UN agency consultations for the Guidance, we consolidated collective priorities together with ACT Alliance EU partners, local and national CS platforms, the TOGETHER programme and Charter4Change Network. We collaborated to a) ensure ECHO prioritised local civil society actors' direct input into the consultation and b) to define our collective key messages and practical recommendations to ECHO. Building on our Localisation Policy Guidance, this resulted in concrete and detailed input which has been reflected throughout the draft Guidance and VOICE Network messaging. Of particular importance is the initial recognition in the

draft of the urgency for fair coverage for the overheads of local and national NGOs.

The Guidance provides scope for ECHO to support pooled funding models which facilitate greater flexibility and autonomy for local actors. But current commitments to pooled funding remain vague enough to justify a continued status quo in which direct and sustainable access to UN Country Based Pooled Funding is often limited for local actors. In this regard, we continue to raise awareness of localised financing models, including group cash transfers for survivor and community led response (sclr) and those of the Start Network.

Recognition of the gendered factors impacting local civil society engagement and positive outcomes for women's leadership of sclr needs strengthened. Together with VOICE members, we have called for stronger implementation and adherence to the implementation of ECHO's gender policies, including the GAP III through the Localisation Guidance and throughout programming.



SPOTLIGHT

Overheads: why it matters

Inequity in the coverage of overheads prevents local/national CSOs from being able to reach their desired impact as driven and focused organisations. Currently, overheads of implementing partners are not ordinarily covered by donors. Lack of overhead coverage undermines resources for capacities, staff retention and starkly, for security, evacuation and health coverage for staff on the front line of response in conflict areas:

“Once trained or mentored, staff of our organisations leave for international organisations that can provide longer-term job security and provide for training and insurance. We are actively engaged as cluster co-leads and members yet receive no financial support for the human resource costs this requires.”

Moussa Diallo, Director of AMSODE, Mali, and co-lead of the 2022 Localisation Forum

ACT Alliance EU and our CS partners have called strongly for equitable coverage of overheads. Leading by example, several ACT Alliance EU members already provide indirect costs for partners covering as much as 60%. Yet the onus of overheads sharing cannot be taken on entirely by international CSOs. Without corresponding support from donors, this is a strain on smaller CSOs.

An equally stark result of the lack of overheads provision is the inability of those local/national CSOs to cover security, evacuation and health insurance for staff, despite the extraordinary risks undertaken as those on the front line of response.

Some Member State donors have trialled means to cover partners' overheads more fairly: Danida is ensuring 7% matched overheads for its INGO partners and their local/national partners in-country through the project budget. We continue to press ECHO to revise their commitments: without systemic and consistent equity in funding of all implementing partners, injustice related to security, health and participation in coordination and governance will persist and deepen.

Objective:

The EU supports locally-led action on gender and climate justice

Climate emergency

As global food insecurity and other effects of the climate crises continued in 2022, ACT Alliance EU and members transitioned to better integrate and systematise our related operations and advocacy. The humanitarian

working group placed locally led climate and gender justice central to our strategy: seeking to leverage existing work of the global ACT Alliance and the network in both inter-connected and systemic work areas.

Our work helps local organisations to plan effectively and implement preventative measures to mitigate crisis. This year we carved space for bilateral and high-level engagement with stakeholders.

We contributed as a network to VOICE's reflections for the strategic direction of humanitarian advocacy for climate resilience and the growing number and scale of food security crises. This included a presentation by Diakonia Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) to propose advocacy focused on adaptation & early and anticipatory action and particularly the local mechanisms to implement this. Without coherent policy and practice on financing across humanitarian, development

and climate change, as well as the lack of coordinated early warning and forecasting systems for local actors, it is not possible for local organisations to plan effectively, resource and implement preventative measures to mitigate crises.

Through work with the global ACT Alliance and coalitions of faith-based and other civil society actors, our members continued to play an instrumental role at the UN Climate

Change Conference, COP27¹, in Egypt. In addition to advocacy on priority issues including mitigation, human rights and gender justice, the global ACT Alliance and its members evidenced the need for increased funding for adaptation and need for a funding mechanism to address climate induced loss and damage. ACT Alliance EU welcomed the COP27 decision to establish funding arrangements, including a specific fund to address loss and damage.

Anticipatory action

We created space to encourage policy coherence across climate, humanitarian and development sectors in relation to anticipatory action and loss and damage. Through these initial engagements with ECHO, INTPA and climate stakeholders, we urged the EU and its Member States to invest in long-term action for early warning systems, contingency planning and support

to financing and approaches to anticipatory action planning. This requires resisting the political trend toward reactive emergency response due to the compound fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine and climate change impacts.

Our engagements build on members' research and policy briefs engaging with considerations for collective engagement and respective responsibilities of the humanitarian, development and climate sectors².

"In short, without this kind of funding and planning across the continuum....there is no meaningful prevention ahead of foreseen crises & displacement therefore huge losses and damages will continue."

*Chris Ball, Humanitarian Advisor
DRR & Climate Change, Diakonie
Katastrophenhilfe*

Ensuring EU commitment on intersectionality in the EU Gender Action Plan III

Transitioning to our new strategy means a greater focus on gender equality in response to the backlash against women's and LGBTQI+ rights across and within countries.

We want the EU to accelerate progress on gender equality and to speak up against antifeminist narratives within EU Member States and at international negotiations.

¹ 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP27)

² See: Christian Aid: Ripping off the Band-aid Putting People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action (2022); DanChurchAid: Locally Led Adaptation A Call for Local Climate Action (2022).



ACT, LWF, Christian Aid and other faith groups held a media action at COP27 calling for gender justice to be mainstreamed in climate justice work, recognizing the impacts of climate change on women and girls in all their diversity and demanding their voices be heard and seats at the tables at all levels of climate change decision making. (Simon Chambers / ACT)

We created a space for diverse civil society to exchange and provide recommendations on intersectionality in the EU Annual Structured Dialogue on the Gender Action Plan III's implementation.

We leveraged members' resources on gender equality and civic space online to influence the EU position towards the Committee on the Status of Women 67³

Our 2022 gender work, together with CONCORD, focused on the importance of applying an intersectional approach in EU development cooperation policies through the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III). While the concept of intersectionality is widely embraced, understanding and application are limited. We contributed to a research project that

gathers best practices and lessons learnt on the application of the intersectional approach in a few chosen contexts. Building on this work with CONCORD, we co-organised a thematic session on intersectionality in the EU Annual Structured Dialogue in December. This was a key moment for EC representatives to inform civil society on progress on GAP III implementation. The session provided a space

³ The Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Every year representatives of Member States gather in New York to take stock of the progress on gender equality, identify challenges and agree on conclusions on defined priority themes.

for a diverse group of civil society to share experiences in applying intersectionality to their work, as well as an opportunity for them to shape recommendations to the EU and donors. The recommendations were widely reflected in the [report](#) of the Dialogue.

This work forms the backbone of a CONCORD advocacy tool to influence the mid-term evaluation due in 2023 on the progress and shortcomings in implementation of GAP III.

This year, we continued to act as a knowledge and information hub on EU processes related to gender equality. We took part in an open

CS consultation organised by the EU in preparing its position towards the 2023 UN Committee on the Status of Women 67. The theme is the role of innovation and digital technology in achieving gender equality. Our contribution to the consultation was based on members' resources on civic space, digitalisation and gender equality. Our input was also helpful to prepare the global ACT Alliance statement towards the CSW67. We will continue to support messages and advocacy work of the global ACT Alliance's Gender Justice Programme ahead of the Committee meeting.



SPOTLIGHT

Unpacking intersectionality

Concept: Intersectionality recognises that all oppression is linked. It is the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, age, class and gender which create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. An intersectional approach helps understand how different and unique forms of marginalisation are experienced and how they interact and reinforce each other in each context. In the EU Gender Action Plan III, intersectionality is one of the key principles for implementation, alongside the human rights-based and transformative approaches.

Why it matters: Intersectionality as an analytical tool is critical in addressing inequality. It seeks to fundamentally transform the structures, systems and processes that discriminate against people. It can help reveal how and where laws, policies and practices are inadequate or unhelpful, and where transformative change is needed. Participation of affected people representing different intersecting identities in decision making, programs and actions contributes to ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals are delivered for all, and a do-not-harm approach is respected.

Example of intersectionality on gender and religion: In Bangladesh, women and girls among religious and ethnic minorities face intersecting challenges associated with their gender and faith identity, including lack of access to decent work and public services. Older women and women with disabilities are especially challenged in access to public services. Understanding of the intersecting issues experienced by Bangladeshi women of religious minorities is critical for developing programs and actions that address their economic and political marginalisation and reduce levels of violence in the context of intercommunal conflict. Civil society organisations, including partners of Christian Aid, have worked in the region with an intersectional approach to support access and participation of the marginalised groups, challenge power imbalances within the community, and promote programmes in education to change attitudes to violence against women.

Christian Aid, Leave no Woman Behind: Lessons from Christian Aid's programmes in Asia and Middle East, August 2017

Triple nexus implementation

Triple nexus workshop series

We held a series of three webinars to engage with lessons learned in implementation of the triple nexus from our common perspective and identity as networks of faith-based organisations and the role of faith actors in implementing the triple nexus. EU-CORD, Caritas Europe and ACT Alliance EU members presented a wealth of experience and detail covering the peace pillar, engagement with local actors in planning and implementation as well as coordination and governance. The importance of multi-year flexible and adaptive nexus funding was discussed alongside the need to adapt organisational structures for implementation. We discussed the need for programming and MEAL tools to integrate conflict sensitivity, social cohesion and resilience with acute needs. Speakers emphasised the importance of both community-led approaches and peacebuilding as fundamental entry points for effective programming. As well as reinforcing the need for gendered analysis and gender justice to underpin all of this.

Similarly, Caritas Europa member organisations provided details of how they

and the wider sectors develop the necessary coordination and collaboration between actors, with specific consideration of the opportunities and blockages to local actor and faith actor engagement. Addressing issues related to civic space and to participation and leadership in governance spaces are two key challenges facing consistent engagement of local actors across the nexus.

These webinars are a useful space to not only discuss and seek understanding. They result in messaging and contextual experiences that are used by members in their internal operational discussions and external advocacy on triple nexus. The documentation of contextual programming and resulting messaging explored through the webinar series provides an excellent basis for us to suggest ways forward by EU networks.

“The single most practical and enriching presentation on the triple nexus in the many years I have worked on the issue.”

Workshop attendee (on presentations from Caritas Europa vis-à-vis local actor

Rapid response advocacy

Ukraine

In 2022, our response to Russia's attack on Ukraine centred on the fallout of the crisis for ODA funding to development and food security globally. Members engaged in strong advocacy vis-à-vis country-level donors as the Ukraine crisis precipitated drastic moves to divert ODA from development funding to financing reception of Ukrainian refugees domestically and to preserve aid funding in the medium to long term. Exchanges as a network enabled members to share critical developments and support messaging toward respective States and toward CONCORD at EU level. This contributed to strong action from civil society to hold respective ministries accountable and avert the moves to divert ODA to refugee reception.

Our analysis focused on the consequences of the crisis in relation to existing responses in countries including Syria, Lebanon and Afghanistan and to looming food crisis and famine in the Horn of Africa.

The ACT Alliance EU General Assembly provided a key moment in which together as CEOs and senior management of the network, we leveraged NCA's reporting [Aid Under Pressure](#) and messaging from across European States to development and humanitarian EU stakeholders. We called for action to safeguard the integrity of humanitarian and development funding, and for the EU to set a strong precedent for Member States in this regard.

Further dialogue between ACT Alliance EU members, INTPA and ECHO personnel in November addressing reflections of the Christian Aid research into the effects of the Ukraine crisis and climate events for food insecurity in East Africa, [Ripping off the Band Aid](#) provided in-depth reflections for the respective sectors. As the EU and its Member States face pressures to respond to increasing emergencies, we see that engagement and investment in resilience building, early and anticipatory funding and action are



Thousands of refugees from across Ukraine are desperately trying to get to safety in other countries as the war in Ukraine engulfs their home. ACT member Hungarian Interchurch Aid is working at the Hungary/Ukraine border to provide relief to refugees arriving there. Photo: HiA

increasingly side-lined: ACT Alliance EU's messaging was therefore positively received.

As we move into 2023, we echo the reflection of Hugo Slim during our annual General Assembly 2022: the Ukraine crisis is a moment to reassess the humanitarian model and scale up support to action by in-country civil society. Implementation at scale of the survivor and community led response by ACT

Alliance EU members is generating significant results for Ukrainian self-help groups and organisations to run their own response. Yet there are many lessons to learn for the sector as once again we have seen the international humanitarian system create parallel systems to existing civil society and government provision. Donor support to sclr models and shifting power is as urgent as ever.

Middle East

In 2022, the Palestinians suffered the highest number of fatalities in any year since 2006. Our work continued to raise awareness and put pressure on institutions, consulting with civil society and providing inputs for various ongoing processes.

We contributed to securing a principled position by member states rejecting the designation of seven Palestinian human rights and civil society organisations as “terrorist organisations”.

Together with Oxfam and CIDSE, we issued a statement calling on the EU to depart from statements of concern and to hold Israel accountable for international law violations.

Our concern for the communities following an escalation of demolitions in Area C was noted in Le Monde.

On 11 May, Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was **killed** in Jenin by the Israeli Defence Forces. ACT Alliance EU had recommended her nomination for the European Parliament's human rights Sakharov Prize, which was then backed by **43 MEPs**. Harassment and attacks on Palestinian civil society organisations further escalated, as well as settler violence and demolitions of Palestinian structures and humanitarian aid in the West Bank.

The outcome of the latest Israeli elections of November 2022 has been deeply worrying. While the settler violence, occupation policies and the above-mentioned developments advanced under the previous 'change' government, the **new government** again led by Benjamin Netanyahu holds openly racist, illiberal, pro-annexation views, and is likely to have severe implications for the Palestinians' struggle for their rights and self-determination.

At the same time, the reality of prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory and the unequal rights of Palestinians and Israelis were increasingly described in the context of apartheid. **Amnesty International** was the latest international organisation joining



(Jennifer Higgins / Silwan)

Human Rights Watch, Al Haq, B'Tselem and Yesh Din amongst others to describe the Israeli policies in these terms. UN Special Rapporteurs **Michael Lynk** and **Francesca Albanese** also embraced this language in 2022. Five former European Ministers — including Mogens Lykketoft, Erkki Tuomioja and Sayeeda Warsi — published an **op-ed** calling for acknowledgement of Israel's policies as amounting to the crime of apartheid.

EU-Israel Association Council

The European Union's response was underwhelming in 2022. The invasion of Ukraine took over the EU's agenda as a priority, and the political response highlighted double standards in its selective sanctioning of international law violations — including annexation. In addition, the EU's interest in cementing the EU-Israel relations in the context of the Ukraine crisis and securing a gas deal with Israel to boost

European energy security further sidelined human rights of the Palestinians from its agenda.

After four years, in December 2022 the European Parliament adopted a **resolution** on "The prospects of the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine". ACT Alliance EU engaged with various political groups to provide input for the resolution. While it was

welcome to have the issue back on the plenary agenda, the text of the resolution reflected the perceived growing political sensitivity in discussing the occupation and policymakers' fears of being accused of anti-Semitism for criticising Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The EU-Israel Association Council took place after ten years. It was met with criticism by civil society and **international** and **European** rights groups, as well as by **MEPs** for the EU's failure to demand accountability

for human rights and international law violations. ACT Alliance EU MEWG worked on influencing the **EU's joint position** ahead of the meeting to ensure inclusion of a strong focus on international law and human rights violations, with a view to raising them with the Israeli government. ACT Alliance EU, together with Oxfam and CIDSE, issued a **statement** ahead of the Association Council meeting, calling on the EU to depart from statements of concern and to hold Israel accountable for international law violations.

Shrinking space

In October 2021, the Israeli Ministry of Defence designated seven Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations as "terrorist organisations", including some ACT Alliance EU members' partners. In July 2022, nine EU member states funding the designated rights organisations issued a **statement** rejecting the allegations. We worked extensively on this issue and

contributed to securing a principled position by the member states.

However, harassment of the organisations continued to escalate. Several offices of those organisations were **raided** and their doors sealed, and directors of two of the organisations were **summoned for interrogation**. Salah Hamouri, a Palestinian-French lawyer in one of the designated



(Jennifer Higgins / Humsa al-Bqaia)

rights organisations Addameer, has been imprisoned without charge since March, and was **deported to France** in the middle of December, as he had his Jerusalem residency revoked by the Israeli government.

We will continue to work on protecting Palestinian rights organisations from attacks and calling on the EU and the member states to demand from the Israeli government to rescind the designations. In absence of this, the Palestinian civil society will continue facing intimidation, harassment, shutdown, arrests, and imprisonment, preventing them from carrying out their important work.

At the EU level, the European Commission **lifted suspension of funding** to Al Haq and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR). This was in part achieved due to Al Haq's decision to launch legal proceedings against the Commission in Brussels, since the unsubstantiated freeze violated the EU's contractual obligations. As a result, the institution chose to close the case. We supported **Reclaim** in briefing EU officials in Jerusalem on procedural standards in the EU

system with a view to safeguarding space for civil society.

In this context it is worth noting that in 2022 the Commission also resumed aid funding to the Palestinian Authority after nearly a year of freezing more than 200 million EUR of EU aid funds. The freeze happened due to a disagreement over Palestinian school textbooks, which were claimed to promote violence and hate, despite a study funded by the Commission itself that **tempered** such allegations. We worked on raising the severe implications of the freeze with EU officials, including **termination of treatments** for around 500 cancer patients treated at East Jerusalem's Augusta Victoria Hospital.

Criminalization of civil society and rights organisations working on ending occupation and monitoring human rights violations, as well as defamation campaigns and problematic funding suspensions and investigations by the EU institutions and member states will remain high on the agenda of the MEWG.

Demolitions of EU aid

Demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian structures and donor aid in Area C of the West Bank escalated in 2022. According to **UN OCHA**, June 2022 was a record month in terms of demolition orders issued, particularly against EU-funded aid structures, with a total of 55 such structures placed at risk of demolition.

Since 2016, Israel has demolished EU-funded aid worth 2 255 620 EUR. In Ras al Tin area, 19 families comprising of around 120 people were forcibly transferred from their

homes in July 2022 with growing **settler violence** exacerbating the existing coercive environment.

On May 4, the Israeli High Court of Justice greenlighted forced evictions of around 1,150 Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills, designated as a 'Firing Zone 918'. Around **5000 Palestinians** are impacted by the 'firing zone' designation by the Israeli authorities applied to 20% of the West Bank.



(Jennifer Higgins / Humsa al-Bqaia)

The Masafer Yatta residents, including approximately 569 children, have been suffering from traumatic events and subjected to harassment and intimidation by the Israeli soldiers and settlers, and facing imminent risk of forcible transfer — a grave breach of international humanitarian law. Since then, at least 27 demolitions already took place in the area.

The lack of engagement by the EU on this was notable, especially considering past mobilisation around Khan al Ahmar village in Area C. We briefed policymakers on the situation of the Masafer Yatta communities and continued to raise the

issue of demolitions, including EU-funded humanitarian aid, to the attention of policymakers in meetings and together with local partners. We briefed officials on the EU-level policy discussions and options regarding compensation for the destroyed EU-funded aid, providing recommendations on what steps the EU can take to protect the communities. Several [parliamentary questions](#) were tabled calling for concrete action by the European Union.

Our concern for the communities was noted in [Le Monde](#) covering EU's inaction in this regard.

2022 finances

Membership contributions are our main source of income. We are most grateful to all our members for their continued financial support which is both generous and sustained.

Other income is largely reimbursement by the global ACT Alliance of expenses incurred on their behalf.

The 2022 accounts were audited by DGST and partners, Reviseurs d'entreprise of Brussels, Belgium.

	2022 €	2021 €
Income		
Member contributions	618 773	599 268
Other income	104 236	32 118
Total income	<u>723 009</u>	<u>631 386</u>
Expenses		
Human resources	635 639	548 258
Office costs	60 855	75 986
Communications	6 220	6 021
Travel & meetings costs	20 053	5 693
Advocacy activities	22 192	10 843
Administrative & other costs	22 321	34 229
Total expenses	<u>767 280</u>	<u>681 030</u>
Net surplus/(loss) for the year	(44 271)	(49 644)
Reserves at 1 January	425 377	475 021
Reserves at 31 December	<u>381 106</u>	<u>425 377</u>

Board, secretariat and advisory groups

Board and general assembly

Board membership from May 2022

Finn Church Aid — represented by Katri Suomi, Chair

DanChurchAid — represented by Jonas Vejsager Nøddekær, Deputy Chair

Bread for the World — represented by Martin Krieg, Treasurer

Diaconia ECCB-CRD — represented by Kristina Ambrožová, member

ACT Alliance — represented by Thorsten Göbel, observer

Departures from the Board

The following mandate ended in May 2022:

Bread for All — represented by Bernard DuPasquier

Observers

Permanent observer organisations to ACT Alliance EU are the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance.

The General Assembly met in person in Brussels in May 2022.

Advisory groups

Policy and Advocacy Group (PAG) met in person in Brussels (with hybrid options) in March 2022 and November 2022

Co-chairs in 2022 were Oli Pearce (Christian Aid) and Eva Ekelund (Act Church of Sweden)

Secretariat and staff

At the end of 2022, the secretariat was composed of the following staff:

Floris Faber, ACT Alliance EU Representative

Susie Wilkinson, Office Manager

Karine Sohet, Senior Policy Officer — EU Development Policy & Practice

Rebecca Venuto, Policy Officer — EU Development Policy & Practice

Ruth Watson, Policy Officer — EU Humanitarian Policy & Practice

Maria Grazia Serra, ACT Alliance EU Trainee — Civic Space and Human Rights

Changes and departures

Alexandra Gerasimčíková, Adviser, Middle East, left in early December 2022. A new adviser was appointed from January 2023

Brot
für die Welt

christian
aid

act
Svenska kyrkan

 **DCA**
actalliance

 **Diakonia**

Diakonie 
ACT Austria

Diakonie 
Českobratrské církve evangelické

FCA Finn Church Aid

 Hjálparstarf
kirkjunnar
ICELANDIC CHURCH AID

kerk
in actie

 **HEKS**
EPER

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