

actalliance eu



Annual Report 2023

Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
AU	African Union
CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
CoS	Church of Sweden
CS (O)	Civil Society (Organisation)
CSEM	Civil Society Engagement Mechanism
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
EU	European Union
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAP III	European Union Gender Action Plan III
GSP	Generalised Scheme of Preferences
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VOICE	Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies

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Front cover images

Left: Small farmers in Malawi shifted to drought resistant millet crop to face climate change (Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance)

Centre: GOPA DERD employee with child (GOPA-DERD Media and Communications)

Right: Destroyed building in Gaza (ACT Alliance media bank; DSPR Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches)

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Director's letter

I am honoured to present to you the ACT Alliance EU Annual Report for 2023. Responding to the unprecedented challenges of 2023, ACT Alliance EU served as a critical advocate and influencer in the humanitarian and development sector, focusing on enhancing localisation, strengthening civil society engagement, and reshaping donor-NGO dynamics.

We live in an interconnected world. Geopolitical dynamics, including ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Gaza and their fallout, underscore our interconnectedness, for better but also for worse in exacerbating the suffering of millions. Our interconnectedness highlights the imperative of making concerted, shared efforts that transcend borders and ideologies. Amidst a backdrop of poverty, food insecurity, tension, and conflict, compounded by the confluence of climate change and man-made and natural disasters, the need for global solidarity and cooperation is urgent. Instead, the world is becoming increasingly polarised, inequality is increasing, authoritarianism is rising, human rights increasingly challenged. A prevailing zero-sum game mentality undermines the spirit of collaboration which our times demand.

For such collaboration, changes at the macro and the micro level are needed: from a decolonised multilateral system fit for this age, inter-regional

cooperation such as between the AU and EU based on a true partnership of equals, and the voices and engagement, at all levels, of civil society.

In the face of unprecedented challenges, local and national civil society and NGOs are frequently the linchpins of community resilience and of change. By leveraging local insights and fostering grassroots mobilisation, they can ensure that the voices and actions of affected populations, and of those closest to them, play a central role in discussions regarding response and recovery. This inclusive approach is crucial for shaping and implementing crisis response strategies, and for facilitating long-term recovery efforts. Many are extremely experienced organisations operating at the same level, if not with greater efficiency and effectiveness, as their international counterparts. Their pivotal role in linking global ambitions to local realities makes them indispensable in driving sustainable, appropriate solutions. Their lack of access to donor funding and the lack of progress to address this is hard to justify, not least in the light of global emergencies. Advocacy for localisation and civil society space is thus a key element of ACT Alliance EU's strategy and work.

Our advocacy influenced ECHO's Localisation Guidance, which now prioritises proposals that foster partnerships with local and national NGOs. In parallel, ACT Alliance EU,

played a key role in advancing a Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for the AU-EU partnership, shaping discussions on CS participation with EU and AU officials and working closely with the ACT Alliance Nairobi office to ensure a unified and impactful approach across the Alliance. These initiatives underscore our commitment to amplifying the voices of civil society and ensuring they are heard at the highest levels of decision-making.

Towards the end of 2023, we put in place a visibility and communications plan to amplify and enhance the reach of our advocacy efforts. This strategic move is designed to support our core mission, ensuring that our work and the voices we represent gain the visibility they deserve in a crowded landscape.

In parallel to our work on localisation and the role of civil society in humanitarian and development programming, we have facilitated our members to engage with the European Union on their particular areas of interest and concern. We have adopted an approach which builds on specific member experience and expertise, facilitating, introducing, and providing a launchpad for members. We have also arranged a number of informal meetings between our members' heads of advocacy and EU officials, enabling meaningful exchange on topics such as gender intersectionality and social protection.

Looking forward, we remain dedicated to strengthening our partnerships and deepening our impact, guided by the voices and needs of those we serve. I encourage you to read on.

Floris Faber

ACT Alliance EU Representative

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:

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:

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:

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.

Human dignity & justice for all

Shifting Power and Decision Making



Some 2023 highlights

January

We contributed to an NGO consultation on ECHO localisation guidance draft

March

We co-organised (with the Brussels informal faith-based network) and moderated a panel discussion on the EU Global Gateway at the European Parliament

We coordinated EU stakeholder meetings with ACT EU members and local partners at the European Humanitarian Forum

We co-organised an UNRWA exchange with Adam Bouloukos, field director for the West Bank

May

We led debrief and next steps planning with ACT Alliance humanitarian directors following localisation focus group discussions

With ACT CoS we met DG INTPA and the Belgian MFA to advocate on EU's support for social protection

We ran a joint webinar with Caritas Europa and CIDSE to increase our members' interest for the DAC Recommendation

July

We engaged with MEPs to secure a principled and rights-based EP Recommendation on relations with the Palestinian Authority

September

We informed our members on concerns with EU development funding at a joint webinar with Caritas Europa and EU-Cord

November

The Spanish Presidency invited us to present our views on CS participation in the EU-OACPS Samoa Agreement to EU member states

At the Autumn PAG meeting we ran an advocacy session with DG INTPA and the Belgian MFA on Social protection

We participated in a high-level panel on innovative and flexible funding hosted by Slovak Aid in Bratislava

We co-chaired a briefing on the deteriorating situation in Israel and the West Bank including East Jerusalem

February

We were invited by the Swedish presidency to speak at the away-day of the Council's ACP working party

April

We contributed experience of ACT EU and local partners of implementing triple nexus approaches to addressing food insecurity in conflict contexts for DG INTPA research

June

We organised an on-line exchange with DG INTPA and ECHO on intersectionality and transformative gender approaches in implementing GAP III

At its first annual meeting we contributed to shaping the Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network's work plan on civic space

We co-organised an event at the European Parliament on settler violence

August

The second half of 2023 saw us begin work as a VOICE Board member

October

We represented CONCORD at the High-Level Global Gateway Forum

We raised advocacy points at High level event at UKMIS with Belgian Director General & UK Minister of State for Development and Africa

We moderated a webinar on EU aid in Palestine: financialising development solutions under occupation

December

We participated in the EU annual structured dialogue meeting on the implementation of the EU's Gender Action Plan III

We launched the ACT Alliance EU Visibility and Communications plan, amplifying our advocacy

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.

Civil Society voiced the need to support agroecology and small-scale farmers at the AU-EU ministerial meeting on agriculture in June.

With Act CoS and BfdW we held two advocacy sessions on social protection with DG INTPA and the Belgian MFA.

We influenced the text of an EP resolution on EC support to access education on which the EC will have to take action in 2024.

Implementation of the Global Gateway Initiative in Africa

Two years have passed since the launch of the EU Global Gateway, yet most initiatives are just getting underway. These efforts focus on enhancing EU investments, both public and private, in various sectors such as energy, transportation, green transition, digitalisation, healthcare, research, and education. Collaborating with CONCORD, Eurodad, CAN Europe, Counterbalance, and other FBO networks, we advocated for greater transparency and accountability in the [execution of the Global Gateway](#) and the associated Team Europe approach.

In October, DG INTPA established a Civil Society platform for the Global Gateway. However, it only partially addressed the call from civil society for transparency and information. Shortly after, DG INTPA convened the inaugural High-level Global Gateway Forum, bringing together ministers and officials from Member States and partner countries. Floris Faber, representing ACT Alliance EU, was among the few civil society representatives at the Forum, participating on behalf of CONCORD.

Implementation is still in its early stages, and there is a lack of information, making it challenging for civil society to assess the developmental impact of the Global Gateway in partner countries. Nonetheless, we contributed to the preparatory work for a study commissioned by CONCORD on the

impact of the Global Gateway on combating inequalities, based on case studies to be finalised in 2024.

One perceived drawback of the Global Gateway is the European Commission's reduced engagement in community-centred human development programmes. This concern is shared by civil society and some thematic staff members in DG INTPA. It stems from a top-down imposition of Global Gateway priorities and modalities in EC country and regional programmes.

Through our analysis and discussions with thematic staff, we concluded that social protection, healthcare systems, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), access to primary education, agroecology, support for small-scale farmers and women's organisations are not receiving sufficient attention in current EC development programmes. A detailed CONCORD study found that current EU partnership practices and funding mechanisms no longer enable CSOs to effectively contribute to all EU international cooperation programmes.

In a joint webinar with Caritas Europa and EU-Cord, we briefed our members on the main trends related to new EC priorities and cooperation modalities, and their impact on CS funding.

Advocating for increased EU support for universal social protection

In 2023, one of our key advocacy objectives was to secure more EU support for social protection systems across EC programmes and the EU's involvement in global discussions and initiatives. During our dialogue with the thematic unit for social protection within DG INTPA, we agreed on the importance of the EU defending social protection floors and universal social protection systems at international level. However, we acknowledged that these goals are not currently among the EC's top priorities. Hence, we emphasised the importance of the EC playing a significant role in the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Social Protection in Africa, due to be launched under the Belgian presidency in 2024.

In collaboration with experts from ACT Church of Sweden (ACT CoS) and Brot für die Welt (BfdW), we engaged in open and constructive discussions with the social protection unit in DG INTPA, as well as with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the cooperation agency ENABEL, which spearheaded the TEI. We advocated for continued involvement of DG INTPA in

social protection matters and encouraged building upon past collaborations with civil society organisations (CSOs). Drawing from an analysis of EC programmes in African countries conducted by ACT CoS, we submitted concrete recommendations to DG INTPA on enhancing support for social protection systems in the reviewed NDICI country, regional, and global programmes.

During an advocacy session on social protection held at our Policy and Advocacy group meeting in November, ACT CoS and BfdW offered recommendations to DG INTPA and the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the role civil society could play in the TEI, as well as on the contributions expected from the EU and its Member States to international initiatives on social protection.

"I enjoyed the discussion on support to universal social protection systems in November. It was a stimulating and productive exchange of ideas. I look forward to continuing our discussions and collaborating on this important topic."

*Nadia Flécheux,
Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Universal child-benefit programmes are a key element of social protection.
Credit: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance



Turning EC priorities for education and youth into access and opportunities for all

In collaboration with Finn Church Aid (FCA) and other CSOs, we maintained regular engagement with DG INTPA staff focusing on education and youth. Our advocacy centred on promoting inclusive access to and the quality of education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes in Africa. In 2023, our efforts were concentrated on influencing the resolution titled [EU development cooperation to enhance access to education and training in developing countries](#), which was adopted by the European Parliament in December.

We actively influenced the resolution text through discussions with the shadow rapporteurs of the Greens and Socialists & Democrats in the Development Committee. The final resolution reflects our key demands, including:

- ▶ A stronger emphasis on addressing social and gender inequalities.
- ▶ Recognizing the importance of engaging with civil society and local faith-based organisations.

- ▶ Highlighting the significance of TVET for youth employment.
- ▶ Addressing the financing gap in education.
- ▶ Monitoring the involvement of the private sector to prevent the commercialisation of educational services.

Our recommendations to adopt an external action implementation strategy for the EC's 10% spending target on education and to align with the outcomes of the UN Transforming Education Summit were also incorporated into the resolution. Additionally, we influenced the wording regarding education in emergencies and in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus, including references to the Safe Schools Declaration and the Comprehensive School Safety Framework of June 2022.

The European Commission has three months to respond to the resolution and outline its plan of action or, provide justification if it decides not to take action.

Scaling up EU support for agroecology, local food systems, and small-scale farmers

We actively contributed to amplifying civil society voices and positions advocating for the support of agroecology and small-scale farmers. We were pleased to see that these voices were being heard and taken into consideration at the AU-EU ministerial meeting on agriculture held on June

30th. Collaborating with other CONCORD members, African farmers' organisations, and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) engaged in joint civil society advocacy since the AU-EU Summit of February 2022, we collectively drafted a joint civil society statement. This statement was presented at the ministerial

meeting, reflecting our shared concerns and recommendations.

Moreover, we played a pivotal role in drafting comprehensive [CONCORD recommendations for Food and Agriculture](#) in the AU-EU partnership. These recommendations were directed towards DG INTPA, DG AGRI, and EU Member States, aiming to influence policies and actions in support of agroecology and small-scale farmers.

In addition to our advocacy efforts at high-level meetings, we engaged in consultations organised by DG INTPA's Africa department on the EC's annual action plans for the Sub-Saharan regional program. Our advocacy included pushing for a strong priority focus on the green transition, particularly within the agriculture sector. Notably, the Sub-Saharan Africa multi-annual program incorporates promising projects centred on agroecology and more sustainable agricultural and pastoral systems.

We capitalised on the extensive programming expertise of HEKS/EPER and DanChurchAid in addressing food insecurity through locally led approaches that integrate humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actions. Drawing on their experiences in Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Kenya, we provided significant input to a consultation organised by VOICE members for DG INTPA's study on how various actors implement a triple nexus response to address food security.



Small farmers in Malawi shifted to drought resistant millet crop to face climate change.
Credit: Paul Jeffrey/ ACT Alliance

The approaches of both organisations (HEKS/EPER and DanChurchAid) are rooted in conflict analysis and based on the leadership and engagement of local civil society and key local humanitarian, development and peacebuilding stakeholders. Asserting the importance of locally led response and dialogue mechanisms engaging key stakeholders at local, provincial and national levels provided unique and important insights for the study consultants. As a result, the consultants committed to expanding the scope of their study beyond UN agencies and large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to include local and regional civil society networks with a significant stake in food security outcomes.

However, despite these efforts, institutional engagement with local civil society in framing and implementing the triple nexus approach remains severely limited. We will persist in advocating for more inclusive and representative engagement of CSOs in these processes.

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.

In 2023 there were 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.

We succeeded in influencing the position of the EC and the EP on the MFF review to preserve EU budget for development and humanitarian aid.

With our member Brot für die Welt, we coordinated CS advocacy on the migration conditionality in the review of the EU Scheme of (trade) Preferences.

Collectively, CS had an impact on the final text of the Directive on Corporate Due diligence through close work with the European Parliament.

Member States put migration before development and humanitarian aid in the MFF review

2023 was an important milestone for EU finance with the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial framework. The decision-making authority lies with the European Council, which adopts the multiannual EU budget unanimously which makes it challenging to influence even for the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP).

To address this challenge, we collaborated with a coalition of CSOs to closely monitor and influence the review process. Together, we formulated key demands aimed at safeguarding the external action budget and replenishing funding reserves for development, addressing global challenges, and responding to humanitarian crises. These demands were successfully incorporated into the EC proposal published in June 2023 and the report adopted by the EP in October. However, disappointingly, they were not included in the final proposal presented by Charles Michel, President of the European Council, at the December meeting where European leaders aimed to reach agreement on the mid-term review.

Due to a veto by Hungary regarding aid to Ukraine, the decision was postponed to February 1, 2024. Despite advocacy efforts by CSOs, including our joint [open letter](#) signed by 63 co-signatories, the deal was ultimately confirmed. This agreement will significantly

reduce new funding for external action that was proposed by the EC with EP support, and rather prioritise spending for migration management both within and outside Europe. To finance this, a combination of new funding and the reallocation of existing funds away from development programmes, among others, will be employed.

Additionally, the deal includes a €50 billion envelope for Ukraine, allocated through a new Ukraine Facility independent of the external action budget. The EP played a key role as a co-legislator on the Facility's regulation and supported our main advocacy point to shift all bilateral aid to Ukraine, including Macro Financial Assistance and loans, from the NDICI budget to the new Facility. Furthermore, EP amendments to the regulation emphasise a human-centred approach, the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and the role of Civil Society.

DanChurchAid (DCA) taken in Derna following storms which led to the bursting of two dams causing massive damage and loss of life. The reduction to external action financing under the MFF revision comes at a time funding gaps are impacting the capacity of organisations to address the ongoing and increasing large-scale disasters & development challenges globally.



Impact of EU migration policies on trade preferences and development aid

The EU's efforts to curb migration have had a significant impact on both trade preferences and development aid policies. One notable example is the legislative review of the [regulation](#) governing trading relations between the EU and many developing countries. This reform aimed to promote commitments to human and labour rights by trading partners, with provisions allowing CSOs to monitor implementation.

However, negotiations on the reform were stalled due to disagreements between the European Parliament (EP) and the Council over a new obligation for partner countries to cooperate on migrants' readmission and return. In response, Brot für die Welt (BfdW) played a leading role in convening CS exchanges and coordination efforts. ACT EU joined forces with 20 other organisations to endorse a [public letter](#) addressing the proposed reform, targeting the EU Council, the European Commission (EC), and the EP. Despite the EP's opposition to the new migration conditionality, the co-legislators were unable to reach an

agreement before the end of 2023, likely leading to the extension of the current Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) regulation.

We maintained our contribution to the CSO DAC Reference Group's advocacy on the criteria for ODA-eligibility of migration-related activities. The group published a [reaction](#) to the new [ODA reporting directives](#) and discussed it with the DAC Secretariat in March. ACT EU also endorsed a [joint CS reaction](#) in relation to the OECD-DAC directive on how to account for refugee costs in donor countries. These costs, which do not benefit development programmes in partner countries, represent a growing share of ODA. In many European countries, the increase of ODA observed in 2022 is attributable to domestic spending for welcoming and accommodating Ukrainian refugees. In certain cases, these costs were made at the expense of development and humanitarian programmes.



SPOTLIGHT

EU Directive on Corporate Due Diligence

In December 2023, after lengthy negotiations, the European Parliament and the Council reached a compromise on a new and unprecedented Directive on Corporate Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence. This is a major achievement and even if the final compromise contains certain loopholes, the core of the legislation is preserved, and if adopted, the Directive will still be effective.

ACT EU was part of the broad CS campaign which monitored and influenced the adoption of the new EU Directive on Sustainable Corporate Due Diligence. The campaign succeeded in influencing the position of the European Parliament which was a main actor in this process. The directive is key to ensure that EU companies respect and implement their human rights and environmental obligations and contribute to curbing climate change inside and outside Europe. The EP was strong on many key CS demands but had to make many compromises to reach an agreement. Despite general member states support for the final text agreed with the Parliament, the adoption of the directive by the Council was put in jeopardy by Germany, France and Italy and a few others. The Council's approval was only obtained in March 2024 after drastically reducing the number of companies who would have to comply.

The Directive will provide access to justice and will enable impacted communities to win court cases on human rights grounds. Main loopholes concern the environmental normative scope and indigenous rights, as well as limitations in civil liability of companies and in due diligence of the financial sector.

Objective:

The EU promotes and defends human rights and civic space

ACT Alliance EU members have extensive experience advocating on civic space related both to humanitarian and development action: covering issues from participation and political leadership to the impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures.

In 2023, joining the dots between civic space, humanitarian access and space, and the implications for local actors rapidly became a priority in the humanitarian work of ACT Alliance EU.

ACT Alliance EU members are collaborating in pioneering policy research into humanitarian and civic space and its implications for localised response.

The CS platform for engagement in the AU-EU Partnership is taking shape and attracting a growing number of CSOs, including ACT Alliance members.

Through its participation in the TED network, ACT EU is influencing guidance for EU, Member states and their embassies and field offices on civic space and citizens' participation.

Research on civic and humanitarian space in fragile contexts

ACT Alliance EU member Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) has progressed on addressing the research and evidence gap by conducting policy research into the convergence of civic and humanitarian space in fragile context settings, and the implications for locally led response. ACT Alliance EU and its members have collaborated with NCA in the scoping stage, collectively informing the advocacy framing & objectives setting. Advocacy goals include informing risk sharing discussions, improving contextualised implementation of localisation commitments by clearly assessing civic and humanitarian space factors. This will inform ongoing NGO and donor engagement with the contextual dynamics impacting local and national actors.

We ended 2023 developing a strong proposal for advocacy engagement on the issue of civic and humanitarian space and its implications for locally led response, with specific focus also on women and [youth actors](#). We did so together with Diakonia Katastrophenhilfe, Caritas Europa and Action Aid Denmark. Although we were unsuccessful this year in holding an EU stakeholder discussion at the European Humanitarian Forum, we will continue our collaborative efforts to engage EU, Member States and civil society and connect them with issues and findings from respective experiences. With the support of a Civic Space trainee in ACT Alliance and ACT Alliance EU, we intend to connect learnings to the global ACT Alliance Civic Space and Humanitarian policy and operational work.

CS engagement mechanism in the EU partnership with Africa

Interest is growing in European and African CS for the establishment of an Africa-EU CS platform to ensure and promote a more structured and meaningful participation of CS in the AU-EU partnership.

ACT EU is a member of the CS ‘start-up group’ that drafted a proposal for a Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (CSEM) under the AU-EU partnership and terms of reference for a CS platform. We played a leading role during spring/summer 2023 covering for a staff gap in the CONCORD secretariat. ACT EU represented the start-up group in meetings with EU and AU commissions staff and with the EU and Africa’s Economic and Social Committees

(ECOSOC). In follow-up to these exchanges, in 2024, ACT EU will support the start-up group in reviewing the concept note for a CS engagement mechanism to streamline the proposal and address sensitive issues raised by our interlocutors.

In recognition of ACT EU’s longstanding involvement in discussions on CS participation in the EU partnership with African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries (ACP), we were invited twice, by the Swedish and the Spanish Presidencies, to meet EU members states. We presented our views on the role of CS in the Samoa (post-Cotonou) agreement to the ACP working party of the



SPOTLIGHT

Civic and humanitarian space for locally led response

“We need to have discussions on the sustainability of localisation: there are real difficulties facing national civil society in some countries. National and local legislation is difficult to manoeuvre and operate.”

ACT DRC member, Africa Region Localisation Focus Group Discussion 16/03/2023

In March 2023, ACT EU members engaged in the European Humanitarian Forum identified a disconnect between debates on humanitarian space on the one hand, and the new ECHO localisation guidelines on the other. At the Humanitarian Forum, ECHO released its Guidance Note on partnerships with local responders (see detailed discussion of the Guidance below). In initial analysis, ACT EU members and NGOs identified potentially far-reaching implications for L/NGOs.

Throughout the first quarter of 2023, focus group discussions with both national and international members of ACT Alliance underscored the need to connect the dots between civic space, humanitarian space & access, and localisation advocacy and operational commitments.

Members stated that donor and INGO operational and advocacy commitments to localisation must take account of drastic national and local legal and bureaucratic restrictions. For example, limitations to NGO registration and access to bank services, as well as increasing insecurity, is squeezing space in several Asian countries. On the other hand, many of the region’s countries enjoy a long history of vibrant civil society highly capable in leading the humanitarian response. The implications for independent local response and partnerships between larger international/national NGOs and local/community actors are therefore highly contextual.

Three key considerations for this work area are:

- Maintaining and expanding dialogue with communities and local actors. Enabling those communities to express needs is central to fostering both advocacy and an operational response that addresses the appropriate priorities.
- There is a research and evidence gap connecting civic, humanitarian space and how it shapes the opportunities and challenges facing local actors and INGO-L/NGO partnerships. Addressing this gap is important for an approach to implementing donor, INGO and NNGO localisation guidelines and toolkits informed by risk and opportunity.
- The humanitarian, development and peace communities need to be in dialogue as they seek to address barriers to locally led action and address their respective concerns around humanitarian and civic space.

Council where all EU member states are represented.

To support ACT Alliance members' advocacy towards the African Union, we regularly share

information on the AU-EU partnership and CS participation processes and opportunities with the ACT Alliance Nairobi office.

The TED Network

ACT EU is an active member of the TED Network established in the framework of the [Team Europe Democracy initiative](#) (TED).

The TED Network is a space for networking, exchange and learning for CSOs, think-tanks, research institutes and many EC and MS representatives who participate on an equal footing. We are part of the Civic Space working group chaired by the Finnish and Belgian MFAs.

The main purpose of the network is to collect and exchange good practice and develop guidance for EU, MS and their embassies and field offices. We contributed to the gathering of good practice with material produced by our members and by the ACT Alliance on inclusive citizen's participation and on civic space. The recommendations and guidance produced by consultants will be discussed and adopted in the first half of 2024.

Mid-term review of EU Human Rights & Democracy action plan

In collaboration with its members, ACT Alliance EU has developed recommendations for the mid-term review of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. These recommendations address various aspects, including offline and online civic space, gender equality (including sexual and reproductive health and rights), and corporate due diligence. We shared our

recommendations with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) during the consultation meeting for the review. The joint EC/EEAS working document published in June 2023 incorporates the key issues we highlighted, emphasising the need for special attention during the plan's implementation.



SPOTLIGHT

Foreign agents: The 'Defence of Democracy' package

The European Union's 'Defence of Democracy' package was conceived with positive intention: to fortify and safeguard democratic processes within the Union and to enhance the resilience of Europe's democratic institutions. However, alongside these commendable objectives, there are concerns about its potential repercussions on CSOs and their roles in democratic and legislative processes.

Core components of the package

The package focuses on enhancing electoral processes, cyber security, and civic participation. It also includes a proposed Directive on transparency of interest representation by third countries. The Directive would mirror so-called 'foreign interference laws' and raises serious concerns within civil society.

Civil Society's concerns

Over 230 civil society organisations have opposed the directive, fearing it could undermine Europe's role in protecting civil society and democracy globally. We are concerned that the 'foreign agent' component might unintentionally harm democratic principles by imposing undue restrictions on CSOs, as has been the case in several countries, and allow autocratic governments to 'weaponise' the legislation. To clamp down on these organisations by scrutinizing and publicly exposing their foreign funding sources, thereby undermining their credibility and operational capacity within the country.

A hypothetical threat? Impact of similar laws on CSOs

Laws regulating foreign influence in domestic affairs have historical precedents. Poor implementation can suppress free speech and civil liberties. Russia's 'foreign agent' law stigmatises and discredits NGOs, especially in human rights and environmental advocacy. India's Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) revoked licenses of NGOs like Amnesty International India, showing potential misuse. Similar laws have already appeared within the EU. One EU member, influenced by nationalism, enacted strict legislation targeting CSOs with foreign funding. These CSOs must register as "foreign-funded organisations," eroding public trust and support.

The environment for CSOs in Europe is becoming increasingly complex, influenced by political dynamics and regulatory changes. This challenging context underscores the need for policies that support rather than restrict CSOs and their important role in democratic processes.

Advocacy and response

Civil society groups have actively engaged in reshaping the directive, advocating for a more nuanced approach and postponing its publication for proper consultation and impact assessment. However, despite CS efforts, the draft directive tabled by the European Commission remains problematic. Further advocacy towards the EP and the Member States will be needed throughout the legislative process.

Objective:

The EU supports equitable partnerships and local leadership

We have continued our work to ensure that localisation is firmly on the EU agenda. This year saw excellent collaboration between ACT EU and the ACT Alliance resulting in clear joint priorities for progressing advocacy positioning on locally led response.

ECHO's Guidance Note on Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Settings demonstrated positive commitments to priorities and messaging of our NGO partners.

Together as members and the secretariat, ACT Alliance EU provided substantial revision to OECD DAC draft toolkit on shifting power in partnerships.

In 2023, we joined the VOICE Board, bringing positive and consistent advocacy for locally led response and the role of women-led and women's rights organisations.

Shifting power or shuffling forward? Tensions in EU engagement for locally led action

ECHO's Localisation Guidance released in 2023 signalled the impact of advocacy by NGOs in recent years: at EU level, ACT Alliance EU and its partners have played a



HEKs/EPER partner the [Reformed Church in Transcarpathia](#) runs a soup and bread distribution to senior citizens, people with disabilities, the Roma community, IDPs and reaching areas which no longer have access to food.

pivotal role. We saw both actionable and positive commitments including:

- ▶ supporting diverse civil society (and self-help groups).
- ▶ supporting the explicit prioritising of proposals which integrate partnership with local actors.
- ▶ investing in and supporting the role of women-led and women's rights organisations.
- ▶ increasing engagement by international donors and CS with local actors at all levels.

However, during the second edition of the European Humanitarian Forum and subsequent workshops, expectations were moderated, and clear boundaries were set regarding the commitments of ECHO and the broader EU.

Successes and constraints

We engaged, both bilaterally and together with the VOICE Humanitarian Partnerships Watch Group, with ECHO management responsible for implementation of the Guidance Note at policy and geographical levels. Discussions highlighted the competing tensions both in the EU and ECHO context between the pledged commitments and the constraints of institutional structures and legal frameworks. ECHO's NGO partners also identified both positive in-roads and fundamental constraints.

In 2023, we contributed to advocacy addressing some of those tensions. ECHO integrated ACT EU and partner NGO recommendations to incentivise capacity strengthening. This explicitly requires any capacity exchange with local and national actors to be responsive to the priorities set by those actors. The Guidance Note also seeks to incentivise fair coverage of overhead costs for local partners. While positive in principle, the Guidance lacked corresponding commitments

for ECHO and donors in resourcing this increased role and cost for NGOs.

Together with Brussels-based NGOs we engaged ECHO on these issues. This resulted in new commitments to expand and clarify the scope of programming & project funding available for capacity strengthening/sharing activities. We represented ACT members in the VOICE Humanitarian Partnerships Watch Group where we collectively monitored and engaged with ECHO on any positive or negative ramifications for proposals and programming.

We began to document ACT Alliance EU and partner NGO experiences of donor models for overheads which enables coverage of both the INGO core costs and those of partner L/NNGOs. This spurred collective focus at VOICE level among interested NGOs to build a medium to long-term strategic approach to engage with ECHO and the responsible departments of the Commission on the level of overheads. The challenges, however, are both to identify a single model which results in positive outcomes for NGOs of different cost structures and partnership modalities, and the currently intractable position of the EC on the percentage level for overheads coverage.

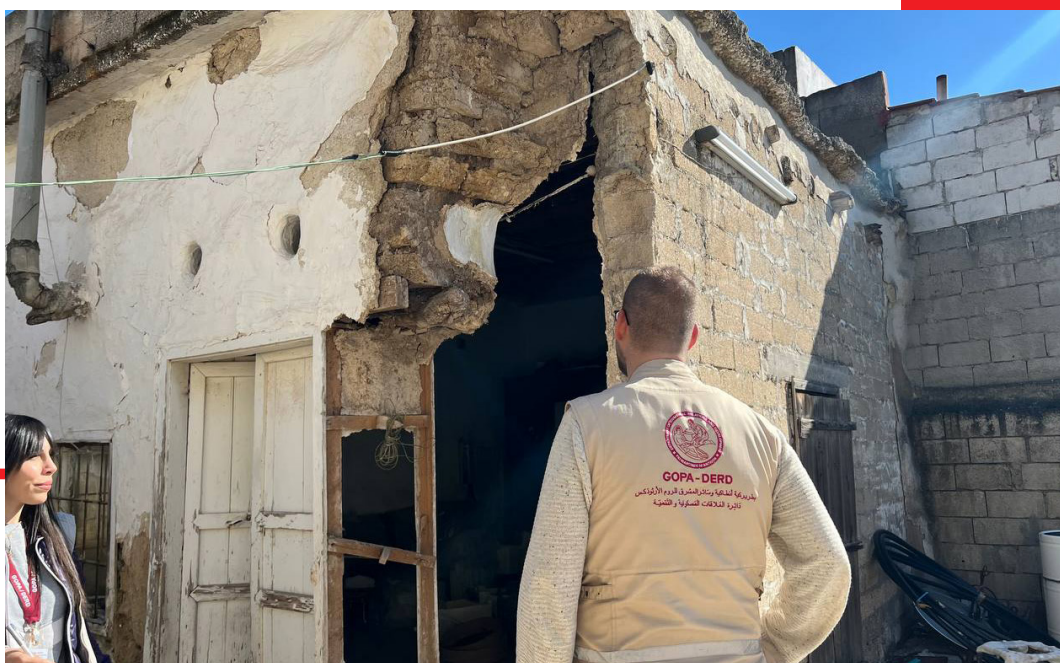
Working with NGO partners on localisation & gender

In 2023, we joined the VOICE Board, bringing positive and consistent advocacy for locally led response. We promoted diversity of civil society engagement at international and national levels. VOICE members welcomed the commitment to increase humanitarian advocacy in relation to gender advocacy and the role of women-led and women's representative organisations, who are overlooked in policy and investment.

Through this position, we are proposing viable strategic commitments to advocacy on localisation which reflect the diverse membership of VOICE. This is especially important for the longer-term strategic advocacy required to address the current impasses related to EU coverage of overheads, direct funding for informal and formal actors at national and local levels and developing the necessary joint learnings between humanitarian and development departments.

GOPA DERD employee looking at destruction in Syria following the earthquake.

*Photo: GOPA-
DERD Media and
Communications*



Shifting power in partnerships

ACT EU is an active member of the DAC CS Reference Group working on the implementation of the OECD DAC Recommendation on enabling civil society in development and humanitarian aid.

ACT EU, Caritas Europa and CIDSE co-organised a webinar in May to raise awareness on the DAC Recommendation amongst their members and to encourage them to fill a survey assessing the implementation of the Recommendation by donors. We contributed to the survey with an input on implementation by the EC. The outcomes of the survey were presented at the DAC CS Days in June.

The DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society publishes toolkits to promote the implementation of the DAC Recommendation

by its members – ODA providers. In 2023, they worked on the ‘Shifting power in partnerships’ Toolkit. ACT EU and its members contributed by sending detailed comments on the draft and co-signing a joint commentary with the DAC CS Reference Group. There will be another opportunity to comment on a second version of the toolkit in 2024.

The CS Reference Group organised an in-depth discussion amongst a small group of INGOs on their understanding and experience with the notion of shifting power towards locally-led development. Michael Mosselmans (Christian Aid Head of Humanitarian Division) took part in the discussion. The highlights were also shared with the DAC.

Locally led response and equitable partnerships in ACT Alliance

At the centre of collaboration with the global ACT Alliance in 2023 has been supporting dialogue and broad-based engagement to foreground L/NGO and partners’ perspectives. We jointly organised focus group discussions throughout early 2023 for each geographic region where ACT is operational. We prioritised a methodology which centred on listening and responding as far as possible to the diverse membership of the Alliance. This diversity, among others, includes geography, size, type of engagement with churches and church networks and partnership model.

ACT Alliance EU supported the development and monitoring & evaluation of the focus group discussions (FGDs). We jointly worked with ACT members’ humanitarian representatives and directors to translate the priorities raised during the FGDs to shape ACT’s operational and advocacy agenda moving forward. This includes increasing peer to peer efforts among members to strengthen accountability to minimum humanitarian standards; advocating for accountability towards affected populations; and supporting and advocating for donor support to survivor and community-led humanitarian response.

The focus group discussions generated further engagement among members at country and regional level to contextualise and advance on commitments to locally led response. ACT

Colombia, for example, engaged national and international members in discussions on viable collective commitments at provincial and national levels.



SPOTLIGHT

Navigating the contradictions of the international localisation agenda

ACT Alliance EU and members, together with national and international partner networks such as Charter4Change, have contributed to 'localisation' soaring up the international humanitarian agenda. This is a great result but easily becomes detached from the core purpose and intentions of supporting diverse civil society in countries affected by crisis and addressing disproportionate barriers in the humanitarian system facing local and national actors. Listening and engaging is especially important at this juncture. As international organisations and policy stakeholders vie for leadership on localisation, its framing and commitments, it is crucial that we maintain focus on the most effective way of responding to the needs of affected populations.

ACT members agreed on the importance of focusing efforts to enhance the involvement of local and national non-governmental organisations (L/NNGOs) within the humanitarian system. This must be considered in the light of global economic inequalities, which hinder resource mobilisation, foster aid dependency, and promote overly professionalised NGO models. Our network's initiatives should align with our broader advocacy goals, addressing both humanitarian and development challenges. Most importantly, we must renew our commitment to decolonizing aid and combating racism.

For ACT Alliance members engaged in the focus group discussions on locally led action in 2023, this involved a shift towards much greater recognition that local NGOs are experts, often with significant operational and advocacy experience. The vision is bottom up, beginning with affected individuals and communities. International donors and NGOs need to look at how to adapt policies by learning from local organisations. The practice and vision of international donors and NGOs too often remains one in which L/NNGOs are consulted and 'have their capacities built' according to international demands. This often results in technical, projectised engagements as opposed to mutually strategic partnerships which enable the sustainable growth of local and national organisations. ACT Alliance aims for localisation rooted in cooperation and complementarity.

Objective:

The EU's leading role on gender justice

Our work on gender has continued with good progress on the following themes.

ACT Alliance EU established itself as a key point of reference for CONCORD and the EC on intersectional approaches. This resulted in influential input to the GAP III implementation review and consultations.

We supported ACT's written submission to the CSW68 and provided inputs to the EU civil society consultations.

ACT Alliance EU engaged in dialogue with DG INTPA on addressing intersectionality and on the backlash to gender equality within and outside of Europe.

Women march in Nepal in celebration of International Women's Day.
Credit: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance



GAP III

Following consultations by the European Commission and Swedish Presidency, ACT EU contributed to the mid-term-review evaluating the European Commission Gender Action Plan (GAP) III. We ensured important contributions by ACT Alliance EU members' gender focal points to [CONCORD's Parallel Report](#) on GAP III implementation. This assessed how the gender-transformative and intersectional approach has been applied in practice in three case-studies (Morocco, the Philippines and Kenya). The report is based on interviews with local civil society organisations, including the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, an ACT Alliance member of the Philippines Forum. It raised important findings to EU stakeholders on engagement with diverse CSOs, especially women-led and women's rights organisations. ACT Alliance EU was a main contributor, specifically regarding CONCORD's position and recommendations on intersectionality in the context of GAP III.

This engagement established ACT Alliance EU as a key player in these dialogue spaces. First, DG INTPA invited our input to the structured dialogue of 28 November to discuss the GAP III mid-term review and the theme of the care economy. Secondly, our team took the lead in organising an exchange of views between our member organisations, DG INTPA and DG ECHO on how we, as FBOs, implement an intersectional perspective on gender justice in our development and humanitarian work. The exchange was of great interest to DG INTPA and ECHO officials, and it was agreed that a second webinar should be organised to look at the respective roles of ACT members and the EC in addressing the backlash to progressive gender policies. Although the gender position within ACT EU has since terminated, follow-up will be made possible thanks to the EURES trainee scheme through which we received the support of a Gender Justice trainee for 6 months. This brought significant legal expertise and experience to our gender work in both development and humanitarian portfolios.

CSW68

At global policy level, we continued collaboration with ACT Alliance's Gender Justice team to provide input to [CSW68](#) through a written statement and to a civil society consultation by the EEAS and UN Women in Brussels. ACT EU input focused on the role of donors on the theme: *'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'*.

In 2023, we collaborated with NGOs in Brussels with extensive experience in both operations and advocacy for gender justice. Together, we strategically engaged with ECHO to increase commitment to implementing the gender policy framework. We talked with the VOICE network, ECHO and EU donors on ways to connect with local and national women-led and representative organisations and networks. There are important cross overs in this regard with the advocacy engagement with the GAP III processes, where we have

attempted to call greater attention to aspects of the policy which can be directly implemented by DG ECHO. While DG ECHO and partners must remain focused on a life-saving approach, we are calling for an

integrated gender approach which accounts for and seeks inclusion and leadership of women and minorities from sudden onset crisis response through to longer term relief.



SPOTLIGHT

The care economy

The care economy includes diverse activities like nurturing care and household tasks, often performed by unpaid caregivers, predominantly women. Despite its importance in supporting human and social capital and the workforce, it is often overlooked in policy and social planning. A caring economy recognises and supports the sharing of care as an intrinsic part of the social fabric. It promotes the wellness and development of people regardless of class, race, ability or gender.

Developing a care economy requires addressing and overcoming patriarchal structural inequalities. We need a shift to economies and societies that value and recognise women's activities, prioritising investment in care and advancing rights. The ongoing unequal distribution of unpaid domestic care work between women and men is fuelled by firmly rooted societal norms. For example, limited access to economic resources, such as credit, capital and land.

Strengthening social protection systems is essential to support care work and to advance social and economic rights for women, girls, and LGBTQI people. The efforts to transition to a care-sensitive economy necessitate more financial support for care workers and providers, as well as investment in public childcare, care for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Paid and unpaid care services, crucial as they are, often go unnoticed. The caregiving sector is integral to society and deserves more policy attention. The various forms of care services (unpaid, paid – both public and private) are key indicators of societal health and well-being, highlighting their significance alongside traditional economic metrics such as financial balances and the production of tradable goods and services. These services play a crucial role not only in the economic sphere but also in shaping gender equality and fostering social inclusivity. Policies ought to be based on these indicators to enhance recognition of the vital role that women play in economic life and to promote a more comprehensive understanding of societal progress.

ACT Alliance EU as a network of faith-based actors can play a vital role in raising awareness of the need to move away from an economy that exploits and disregards care work. This is embodied in a faith narrative and shared commitment of caring for our common home together, with cooperation and solidarity rooted in justice, care, and sustainability.

Middle East

2023 was characterised by further entrenchment of Israeli control over the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), an escalation of violence never seen before in the region and increased polarisation around the issue of Israel and Palestine.

In October, Hamas' attack in Israel and the Israeli response in Gaza brought increased attention to the region and pushed the issue to the top of the EU's agenda. ACT Alliance EU's advocacy was affected, and we had to rapidly adapt to developments. Nevertheless, our strategy and our broader priority to address violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL), remained unchanged.

On 10 October, ACT Alliance EU called for an immediate end to all hostilities and the protection of all civilians in Israel and Palestine.

ACT Alliance EU engaged with Members of the European Parliament to secure a principled and rights-based EP Recommendation on relations with the Palestinian Authority.

We supported the Israeli human rights organisation [B'Tselem](#), in bringing the experience of settler violence directly to the European Parliament using VR technology.

A new Israeli Government came into power in January and made no secret that further entrenching control over the oPt was one of its main objectives.¹ In addition, even before the escalation of violence that started on 7 October, the number of casualties in the occupied territory in 2023 had already surpassed the previous year,² making 2023

the [deadliest year](#) since UN OCHA began recording casualties.

For most of 2023, our advocacy addressed the issue of settlement expansion, settler violence and development assistance to Palestine. However, we had to rapidly review our priorities and adapt to the context following Hamas' attack in Israel.

Hamas attack and the Israeli response

On 7 October, Hamas militants launched a large-scale attack on Israel, resulting in over 1200 deaths and thousands wounded, and taking more than two hundred people hostages. According to witness accounts, forensic analysis and various audio and video recordings, it appears that Hamas-led forces committed serious and widespread [violations of IHL](#), some possibly amounting to war crimes.

In response to the attack, Israel started a large-scale bombardment of Gaza and imposed "[a complete siege](#)" on the strip. In the first two months of Israel's military

operation in Gaza, an average of 115 children were killed per day, 1.8 million people fled from their homes and over 100 UN workers lost their lives. As of 1 January 2024, the Ministry of Health in Gaza [reports](#) that 21,978 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip.

Following Hamas' attack and the Israeli response, our work quickly shifted to calling for an end to violence and the release of all hostages. On 10 October, ACT Alliance EU, together with CIDSE, issued a statement calling for the immediate cessation of

1 Peace Now reports that in its first nine months in power the Israeli government increased settlements in [an unprecedented manner](#).

2 Settler violence has also been on the rise with episodes of large-scale violence such as the [attack in Hawara](#) and the Israeli military conducted several military interventions in the oPt including an operation in Jenin that raised [serious concerns](#) of excessive use of force and IHL violations.

Woman walking alongside Separation Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory.
Credit: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance



hostilities and the protection of all civilians in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

ACT EU supported Palestinian and Israeli partners in raising awareness about the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel to EU policy makers. While global attention focused on Gaza,

the situation in the West Bank significantly deteriorated and Palestinian citizens of Israel as well as Jewish Israelis opposing Israel's military actions in Gaza experienced a heavy crackdown on their freedom of expression and assembly.

Detering the settlement enterprise: settler violence, annexation, demolitions, and forcible transfer

ACT Alliance EU engaged regularly with EU policy makers on the issue of de facto annexation and settler violence. In May, together with our member [DanChurchAid](#), we facilitated meetings between youth from East Jerusalem and EU policy makers. In June, with CIDSE and the Israeli human rights organisation [B'Tselem](#), we organised events during which participants could experience incidents of settler violence through virtual reality technology. On 12 July, the European Parliament (EP) adopted its [recommendations on relations with the Palestinian Authority](#). ACT Alliance EU engaged with Members of the EP to support the text agreed upon in the EP Foreign Affairs Committee. Despite some

amendments being adopted in plenary, the text retained its overall balance, rightfully denouncing violations of international law and human rights by all parties and expressing support to international justice mechanism.

In December, 13 out of 27 EU foreign ministers spoke in favour of imposing visa-bans on violent settlers. ACT Alliance EU has been supporting such a measure as a positive step. However, visa-bans for violent settlers fail to fully address the issue, as settler violence is not solely attributable to a few radical elements but rather reflects a [State-backed policy](#).

Supporting meaningful sustainable development in Palestine

ACT Alliance EU commissioned the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (also known as [MAS](#)) to conduct research into the use of blended finance in the EU's official development assistance to Palestine. Led by economist Mr Luis Abugattas Majluf, the research resulted in a [discussion paper](#) titled *Blended finance and official development*

assistance in Palestine. Together with MAS and [CounterBalance](#), we organised a [webinar](#) on 4 October to present the results of the paper and discuss aid modalities that may be more suitable for the Palestinian context.

Conversations around development aid to Palestine were then brought forward

following the EU review of its financial assistance to Palestine announced on 9 October. Despite the review finding no breaches of existing safeguards, the European Commission (EC) [announced](#) additional restrictive measures to be imposed on Palestinian beneficiaries. We have engaged

with EU policy makers to caution against such measures considering the EU's significant role as one of the main donors to Palestine, and the potentially disastrous impact that restricting development assistance could have on the already vulnerable Palestinian economy.



SPOTLIGHT

Increased pressure on Palestinian civil society

The EC review of the EU's financial assistance to Palestine also raises concerns regarding shrinking space for civil society. From the [conclusions](#) of the review, it is clear that Palestinian civil society will in future be under even greater scrutiny. ACT EU has engaged with policy makers to caution against the effect of additional restrictive measures and of an overall lack of transparency regarding the procedures in place, actors involved, and criteria used. We also stressed the importance of active participation by both Palestinian and Israeli civil society in discussions on the Middle East Peace Process, highlighting that their involvement is essential for fostering locally-driven change and ensuring that the peace process reflects the needs and aspirations of the affected communities.

Safeguarding space for civil society

In the first half of the year, a key concern for our work on shrinking civil society space involved a draft [NGO taxation bill](#) by the Israeli government. This bill sought to impose a 65% tax on donations from foreign entities — including foreign governments, the EU, and the UN — to NGOs. Voices within Israel as well as representatives of various EU countries raised concerns about this initiative which the Israeli government then decided to [postpone](#).

The 2023 hostilities made it clear that events in Israel and Palestine can also have consequences for [human rights in Europe](#), including restrictions on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest. This increased sensitivity and polarisation around Israel and Palestine must be acknowledged as it may impact on our advocacy work.

We anticipate that defamation campaigns, problematic funding suspensions and investigations by EU institutions and member states will remain high on the agenda of ACT Alliance EU's Middle East Working Group (MEWG).

Garnering support for international justice mechanisms and accountability

As part of its longstanding work related to the occupied territory ACT Alliance EU and the MEWG engaged with policy makers and advocated for States to submit written statements to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This was part of the process leading to the adoption of an advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from the prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the oPt. 54 States (including 7 EU Member States) and 3 international organisations submitted written statements to the Court. The ICJ [announced](#) that public hearings would open on 19 February 2024. ACT Alliance EU will

continue engagement with relevant actors and take stock of related developments.

Following the Hamas attack in Israel on 7 October and the Israeli response in Gaza, ACT Alliance EU relied heavily on the work of the Diakonia IHL Centre to raise awareness of potential IHL violations by all involved parties. ACT Alliance EU supported [Diakonia IHL Centre](#) in their direct briefings to EU policy makers. Diakonia's [legal brief](#) on the 2023 hostilities in Israel and Gaza was shared with EU stakeholders and accompanied by several recommendations. These focused primarily on the need for accountability and support to the international criminal court (ICC) and the ICJ.



REDMI NOTE 9 PRO
AI QUAD CAMERA

Destroyed building in Gaza.

Credit: ACT Alliance media bank (DSPR Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches)

2023 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 2023 accounts were audited by DGST and partners, Reviseurs d'entreprise of Brussels, Belgium.

	2023 €	2022 €
Income		
Member contributions	605 382	618 773
EU grant	10 000	
Other income	112 996	104 236
Total income	<u>728 378</u>	<u>723 009</u>
Expenses		
Human resources	630 723	635 639
Office costs	55 101	60 855
Communications	17 109	6 220
Travel & meetings costs	24 253	20 053
Advocacy activities	8 327	22 192
Administrative & other costs	21 658	22 321
Total expenses	<u>757 171</u>	<u>767 280</u>
Net surplus/(loss) for the year	(28 793)	(44 271)
Reserves at 1 January	381 106	425 377
Reserves at 31 December	<u>352 313</u>	<u>381 106</u>

Board, secretariat and advisory groups

Board and general assembly

Board membership from May 2023

Bread for the World — represented by Martin Krieg, Chair

DanChurchAid — represented by Jonas Vejsager Nøddekær, Deputy Chair

Diaconia ACT Austria — represented by Nina Hechenberger (May to November 2023), then Katharina Auer (from November 2023), Treasurer

Act Church of Sweden — represented by Eva Ekeland, member

ACT Alliance — represented by Thorsten Göbel, observer

Departures from the Board

The following mandate ended in May 2023:

Finn Church Aid — represented by Katri Suomi

Diaconia ECCB-CRD — represented by Kristina Ambrožová, member

Observers

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

The General Assembly met in person in Prague in May 2023.

Advisory groups

Policy and Advocacy Group (PAG) met in person in Brussels (with hybrid options) in March 2023 and November 2023

Co-chair: Oli Pearce (Christian Aid)

Secretariat and staff

At the end of 2023, the secretariat was composed of the following staff:

Permanent

Floris Faber, ACT Alliance EU Representative

Susie Wilkinson, Office Manager

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

Ruth Watson, Policy Officer — EU Humanitarian Policy & Practice

Mélina Chaput, Adviser — Middle East

Temporary

Alberto Sottile, ACT Alliance EU Trainee — Gender (September 2023 to February 2024)

Stefano Filipuzzi, ACT Alliance Trainee — Civic Space (December 2023 to May 2024)

Ellie Mears, Web Developer (November 2023 to April 2024)

Changes and departures

Maria Grazi Serra, ACT Alliance Trainee — Civic Space and Human Rights (left in February 2023)

Rebecca Venuto, Policy Officer — EU Development Policy & Practice (left in July 2023)



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