

actalliance eu



Annual Report 2024

Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| AU | African Union |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CONCORD | European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development |
| CoP | Community of Practice |
| CSEP | Civil Society Engagement Platform |
| CS(O) | Civil Society (Organisation) |
| CSYEM | Civil Society and Youth Engagement Mechanism |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| EC | European Commission |
| EEAS | European Union External Action Service |
| EHF | European Humanitarian Forum |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EU | European Union |
| DG ECHO | Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations |
| DG INTPA | Directorate-General for International Partnerships |
| FBO | Faith-based Organisation |
| GAP III | European Union Gender Action Plan III |
| GCSPF | Global Coalition on Social Protection Floors |
| HRDN | Human Rights and Democracy Network |
| IHL | International Humanitarian Law |
| IHRL | International Human Rights Law |
| IOPT | Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| LGBTQI+ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and others |
| L/NNGO | Local and National Non-Governmental Organisation |
| MEP | Member of the European Parliament |
| MIPs | Multiannual Indicative Programmes |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MFF | The EU's Multiannual Financial Framework |
| NDICI | Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument |
| SIDA | Swedish International Development Agency |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| TED | Team Europe Democracy |
| SRHR | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights |
| VOICE | Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies |

Front cover images

Left: A woman walks through a Gaza neighbourhood after Israeli air attacks (Paul Jeffrey/ACT)

Right: Climate Action Summit and UN General Assembly (Simon Chambers/ACT)

Annual Report 2024

- 4 Director's letter
- 6 Who we are and what we aim for
- 10 Some 2024 highlights
- 12 The EU is a responsible and accountable international actor and development partner**
- 16 The EU supports sustainable and transformative change**
- 18 Promote and defend human rights and civic space**
- 22 The EU supports equitable partnerships and local leadership**
- 28 The EU's role on gender justice**
- 30 Middle East**
- 35 2024 finances
- 36 Board, secretariat and advisory groups

© 2025

Editor Janet Whitelaw-Jones

Design Toby Wardman

Director's letter

In a year of shrinking civic space and global challenges, ACT Alliance EU has remained steadfast in defending rights-based policies, people-centred development, principled humanitarian aid, and International Humanitarian Law. I am pleased to share the ACT Alliance EU Annual Report for 2024, highlighting how, together with the global ACT Alliance and civil society partners, we navigated these complexities.

The European Parliament and national elections in 2024 added complexity. Political shifts reshaped the landscape for civil society engagement, requiring us to remain flexible while staying focused on our mission.

Civil society has long been central to European governance, development, and humanitarian response. While early EU treaties focused on economic integration, the 1993 Treaties formalised civil society's role in governance and accountability. This commitment continued in the EU Consensus on Development, the Samoa Agreement, and the NDICI Regulation — reflecting the EU's recognition that civil society is vital to effective cooperation.

Yet in 2024, pressure on civil society grew. Across Europe and globally, restrictive laws, shrinking funding, and backlash against human rights, International Humanitarian Law, and gender equality constrain civic voices. Shifting EU priorities towards securitisation and economic goals weaken rights-based, people-centred, locally-led approaches. In fragile and conflict-affected regions such as the Middle East and Sudan, these combined pressures drive displacement and deepen inequality. Our advocacy highlights the urgent need for an alternative

narrative — one that balances the EU's interests with fair partnerships and human-centred development, while keeping its commitments to International Humanitarian Law and human rights central.

Violence in Gaza and the Middle East in 2024 caused severe humanitarian consequences and raised grave concerns over civilian protection and adherence to international law. The war crimes committed on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent military offensive in Gaza, exacerbated by the Government of Israel's decision to block most humanitarian aid to the Strip, led to unprecedented suffering and displacement. ACT Alliance EU engaged EU policymakers to uphold International Humanitarian Law, ensure humanitarian access, and support affected communities. Particular attention was given to safeguarding critical services such as Augusta Victoria Hospital and highlighting broader implications for civic and humanitarian space.

As this report is finalised, cuts by EU Member States and by the US administration to humanitarian and development funding expose the vulnerability of humanitarian and development financing and reinforces the urgent need to secure strong commitments to predictable, principled funding. While a challenge to civil society, it underlines the importance of collective action in holding governments to account and putting affected populations first. Maintaining civic space and advocating for inclusive, equitable policies addressing the needs of communities most affected by crises and inequalities remain essential pillars of our work.

ACT Alliance EU has worked steadfastly to ensure that principles enshrined in the

European treaties — poverty reduction as the long-term objective of development cooperation, guided by democracy, rule of law, human rights, and international law — remain central to policymakers. As an advocacy network, we amplify our members' voices within the EU and align efforts with the global ACT Alliance. While these efforts encompass a broad scope, the following examples highlight key initiatives from 2024.

In collaboration with the global ACT Alliance, particularly its Nairobi office, we worked jointly with European and African CSOs to advance priorities such as the Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (CSEM) under the AU-EU partnership. An autonomous Africa-EU CS platform was established to ensure civil society's voice remains central in shaping the partnership's policies, bridging gaps between civil society and AU and EU institutions, and advocating for a truly people-centred partnership.

Our humanitarian advocacy has helped ensure EU policies recognise and support the role of local actors in delivering effective responses, particularly in conflict and disaster settings. In 2024, we deepened our focus on the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus, hosting workshops that emphasised community-led approaches, conflict sensitivity, and gender justice. Our engagement with DG ECHO facilitated discussions on equitable partnerships and risk-sharing, leading to stronger commitments to collaborative action. Through collaborations with faith-based organisations, we amplified the role of local faith actors in sustaining social cohesion during crises and advocating for continued EU support in fragile contexts. Our advocacy on civic and humanitarian space, including a case study on Sudan, provided critical insights into principled responses in complex crises, reinforcing the importance of locally led approaches.

In 2024, ACT Alliance EU increased focus on gender justice advocacy, addressing backlash against progressive gender policies. Working with ACT Alliance's gender justice programme and our member organisations, we raised awareness within the European Commission of the contributions of faith-based organisations in advancing progressive gender agendas. By showcasing the work of FBOs in promoting gender justice — even in complex settings — we demonstrated how such actors serve as vital players in countering repressive policies. Our collaboration with the global ACT Alliance extended this advocacy to the UN level, contributing to discussions through CSW68 and the Human Rights Council. These efforts enhanced visibility and representation, reinforcing gender justice as a cornerstone of humanitarian and development frameworks.

Our communications work grew, using blogs and social media to expand our reach, amplify the voices we represent, and ensure our perspectives are included in key discussions shaping humanitarian and development policies.

As we look toward 2025 — a year that will demand much from civil society and from us as faith-based organisations — the continued support and engagement of our members will be critical in advancing our shared vision for a just and equitable world. Our work with the global ACT Alliance, civil society across Europe, and civil society in regions facing the greatest inequalities remains central to these efforts. I encourage you to explore this report, celebrating our achievements and reaffirming our commitment to addressing the challenges ahead.

With appreciation,

Floris Faber

ACT Alliance EU Representative

February 2025

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:

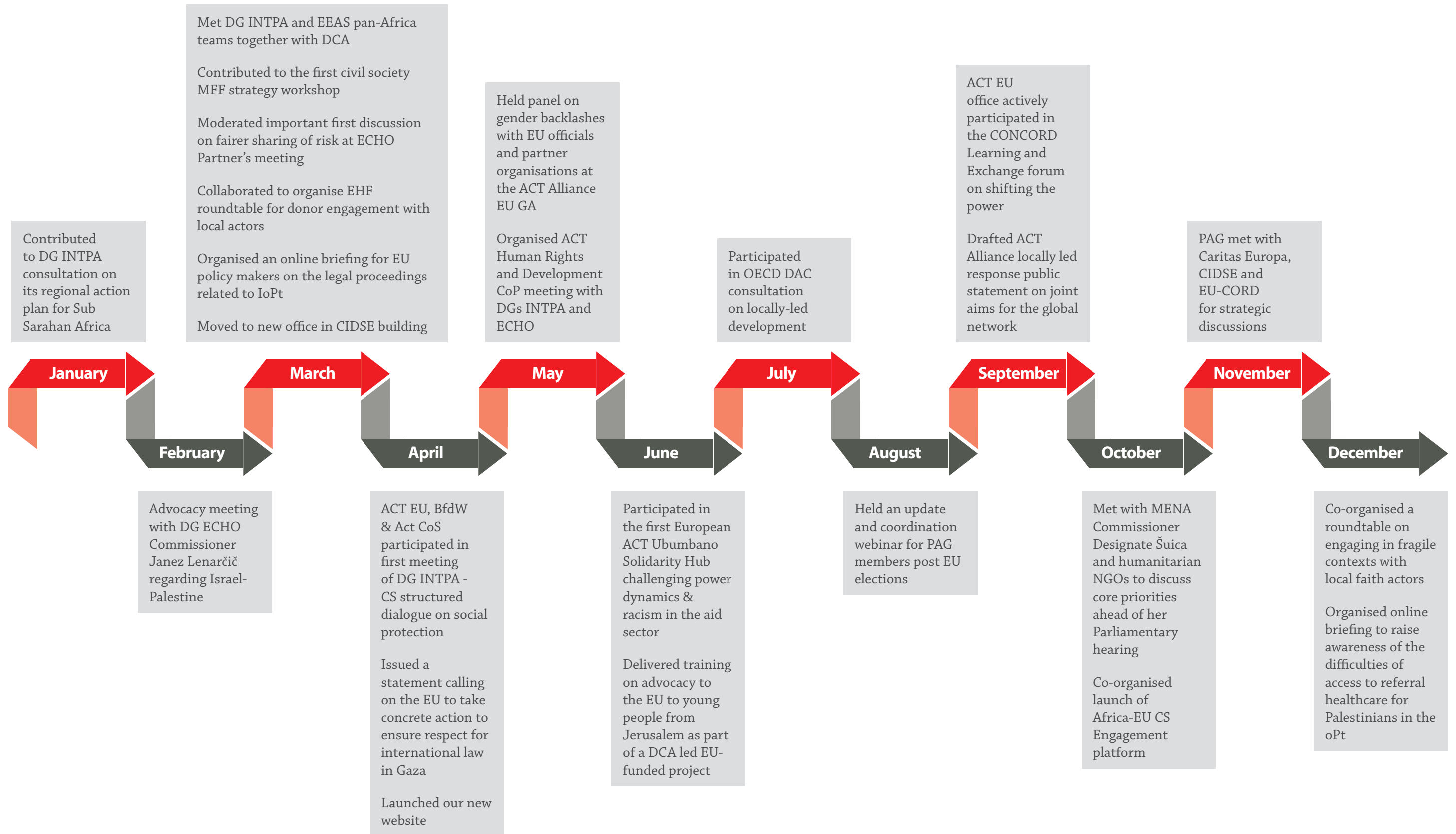
that European external relations, humanitarian aid and development cooperation policies and practice at institutional and at civil society level are rights-based, equitable and people & community centred and contribute to human security and dignity for all.

Human dignity & justice for all

Shifting Power and Decision Making



Some 2024 highlights



Objective:

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

In a year of major political and institutional shifts, we worked to hold the EU institutions accountable to their obligations and commitments to human-centred development and global solidarity.

Credit: Imani Selemani

Picture of a woman in a maize field. NCA project to train and empower small holder farmers in Tanzania



In 2024, preparations for the European elections influenced our policy analysis and network discussions. In response to the rapid political changes and the staggering overhaul of development cooperation and humanitarian models, we engaged extensively with our network and CSO partners to consolidate our collective response.

In response to competitiveness, securitisation and migration control narratives, we reflected on an alternative narrative that balances the EU's interests with the core elements of fair partnerships and effective human-centred development.

Our key advocacy messages were raised by several MEPs during the Commissioners hearings in the European Parliament. We focused on the Global Gateway, principled humanitarian aid, the EU's role in upholding international humanitarian law, and its commitment to the triple nexus.

We supported members with our post-election analysis which facilitated their engagement with new MEPs and an internal discussion on the changing political landscape in the EU.

As securitisation and migration control narratives have driven fear and division, we intensified our efforts to promote solidarity and people-centred development & humanitarian approaches. We did so through

our ongoing advocacy and policy work and exploited multiple avenues for collective action: from [CEO](#) and member engagements to expanding our existing work through NGO coalitions.

Exposing the limits of the new EU development cooperation model

Securitisation, migration control and growth-first economic models are increasingly used to justify drastic cuts to funding, advocacy and civic engagement. We provided alternative framings and narratives through our continued engagement on the VOICE Board and with CONCORD and HRDN. We sought to contribute collective reflections and renew development narratives.

The complete recentring of development models around investment, domestic interests and competitiveness took an iron grip in the EU and increasing numbers of Member States. The consequence is that human development, human rights and long-term support to Least Developed Countries and in fragile contexts are now secondary priorities. The EU's legitimacy and influence as a global actor

and development partner and the trust of its international partners are at stake in this race for economic and geopolitical clout.

After her re-election at the head of the Commission in July 2024, President von der Leyen published her vision for the EU, with new Political Guidelines and mission letters for the 26 commissioners who form her new team. These were based on internal briefings from the EC departments. We reacted to the leaked DG International Partnerships (INTPA) briefing with a [group of INGOs](#). Together we supported [CONCORD](#) and [VOICE](#) statements that exposed the EU's Foreign Policy for prioritising competitiveness, access to critical raw materials, security and aggressive migration control.

Many in the EP Development Committee share our concerns, which they raised during the adoption of the EU Budget 2025 and at the hearings of the future Commissioners. They are not in majority in the new Parliament, however, so this will require us convincing centre-right MEPs to build the necessary majority, ensuring that human development, human rights, and gender equality remain central to EU development cooperation.

To contribute to the debate, we published a series of blog posts that critically examined the EU's commitments to poverty reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), calling for renewed focus on these objectives amidst shifting priorities favouring geopolitical and economic interests over human-centred development. Drawing on European treaties and the insights of the 2024 Nobel Laureates in Economics, the [blogs](#) emphasised the importance of human rights, social protection systems, inclusive institutions, and an active civil society in shaping effective and sustainable development. They also challenged dominant narratives centred on competitiveness and infrastructure-first approaches, advocating for a collective vision of development that aligns with the needs and priorities of partner countries.

These efforts amplify our collective reflections and contribute to renewing development narratives. In 2025 we will continue this work in collaboration with ACT EU members, CONCORD and VOICE, with advocacy focusing on the post-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and Development and Humanitarian aid instruments.

Navigating the post European Parliament elections landscape

Ahead of the European Parliament elections, we provided ACT Alliance EU's senior policy advisors and CEOs with in-depth analyses of the shifts in the EU political direction and guidelines. This analysis shaped collective reflection on the priorities for our individual member and network-wide engagements with policy makers, constituents and the

wider public. CEOs and policy advisors emphasised the ever-more pressing need to root our development and humanitarian operations and advocacy in the vision and priorities of those we accompany in poverty and crisis-affected contexts. They also affirmed the central and crucial role of our respective constituents and supporters, and

the corresponding role we have in opening safe spaces for dialogue. See, for example, the reflections of three of our members' CEOs.

The period after the EP elections saw renewed CSO collaboration, with efforts to align messaging and to address the new political challenges facing the sector.

We monitored the related debates and institutional processes and analysed their potential impact on the EU's external action and on civil society programming and advocacy work. We also provided members with a mapping of new MEPs and an information webinar. The mapping enabled organisations to collectively share on the political focus of new MEPs, an important source of information at a time of rapidly shifting politics within the European Parliament's groups.

We participated in joint civil society analyses and discussions on the impact of a shift to the right in the European Parliament and strategies for engaging with this new EP. In August and September, we held early

meetings with MEPs and participated in several events at the European Parliament during the final quarter of the year

Finally, we contributed to drafting questions for MEPs, working with CONCORD and humanitarian NGOs, to ensure key issues were raised during the parliamentary hearings of the new Commissioners. These questions reached the MEPs and political advisors of the relevant committees, resulting in several follow-up meetings. At the hearings, critical messages on the Global Gateway, principled humanitarian aid, the EU's role in promoting and defending international humanitarian law (IHL), and the commitment to working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus were prominently addressed.

The joint briefings also led to engagements with the new Commissioners. Floris Faber joined a small group of humanitarian NGO leads in a meeting with the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica, to exchange on priorities for the new mandate.



SPOTLIGHT

A big step forward on Business and Human Rights

The new European Directive on [Corporate Sustainable Due Diligence](#) was passed before the European elections. Following successful collaborative CS advocacy over 2 years, 374 MEPs voted in favour in April and the Council signed it off in May. The directive has game-changing potential, as it cements the principle that companies must not harm people and the planet when operating. Yet, due to political manoeuvring in certain member states, its scope within the value chain and the protected rights are not as broad as they should be. To truly prevent harm, EU countries must strengthen these aspects when transposing the directive into national laws. However, in the current political climate which prioritises EU competitiveness, national level advocacy will be key to maintain the acquis of 3 years of civil society's efforts.

Objective:

The EU supports sustainable and transformative change

We work to ensure that the EU programmes support sustainable transformation led by local actors and communities.

In 2024, we redoubled our efforts to defend and promote human-rights based development, social protection, human development and gender equality, as the EU's political priorities for development cooperation shifted towards migration control and the investment-focused logic of the Global Gateway.

Our joint recommendations for the NDICI mid-term review were reflected in the European Council conclusions and EP report, although, not fully applied by the EC when reviewing its multi-annual programmes.

The new structured dialogue between DG INTPA and Civil Society on Social Protection and Inequality Reduction in Development Cooperation originated in ACT EU members' advocacy on social protection in 2023.

Safeguarding people and the planet in EU development cooperation programmes

We continued monitoring the implementation of the Global Gateway flagship initiatives in the context of the mid-term review of the EU development cooperation instrument (NDICI). Our aim was to engage with the EC and MEPs on the shortcomings in transparency and accountability as well as the risks inherent to big infrastructure projects and extractive models of economic development. At the core of our advocacy was mitigating the risks posed by the Global Gateway to human rights, the environment, and community livelihoods.

We also raised the need to maintain a strong EU support for civil society action, and for health, education and social protection systems throughout the whole mid-term review process.

Our joint recommendations with CONCORD were well reflected in the conclusions of the external evaluation of the NDICI and in the positions adopted by the [European](#)

[Parliament](#) and the [Council](#). However, migration management and alignment with the Global Gateway were the main political objectives of the revised geographic and thematic Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) at the expense of other priorities. The €2 billion cut decided by the Council impacted all programmes with drastic cuts in certain fragile countries and in thematic programmes. This mid-term review signals the future priorities and architecture of the EU development cooperation instrument in the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). We anticipate large continental and regional budget envelopes for investments and migration management, marginal funding for human rights and civil society action and a flexible common pot for action in fragile countries. This will inform our advocacy on the next MFF and external action instruments in the coming two years.

Structured dialogue with the EC on Social Protection and Fighting Inequalities

A new structured dialogue between DG INTPA and Civil Society on *Social Protection and Inequality Reduction in Development Cooperation* was launched in April 2024 with the participation of ACT Alliance EU and two of its members, Act Church of Sweden and Brot für die Welt.

This structured dialogue is a direct consequence of a social protection dialogue conducted by ACT Alliance EU and its members with DG INTPA and the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2023, which took place in the context of the ACT EU Policy and Advocacy Group meeting of November 2023.

The dialogue is co-chaired by the DG INTPA Unit for Social Inclusion and Protection, Health and Demography and two members of the Global Coalition on Social Protection Floors (GCSPF). It offers a platform for engagement, coordination, information exchange, policy dialogue and joint advocacy initiatives. It seeks to strengthen the coordination and coherence of European Commission and CSO action on social protection and inequality reduction. The ACT Alliance EU secretariat and two ACT EU members are involved.

Objective:

Promote and defend human rights and civic space

We use our extensive experience advocating for and defending human rights and civic space related both to humanitarian and development action.

The pressure on civil society has continued to grow in 2024, both outside and increasingly inside the EU. Principles we once considered fundamental – such as involving civil society in ensuring sound governance – are no longer respected or supported by Member States and EU institutions in the current political climate.

The European Parliament elections prompted civil society alliances on promoting and defending civic space and fundamental rights inside and outside the EU.

Building on their experience and research, we facilitated our members' inputs and engagement with EU policy makers on the promotion and defence of civic space worldwide.

We facilitated spaces for Norwegian Church Aid to present findings of their commissioned report into civic and humanitarian space and locally led response in Sudan. This has provided an excellent basis for both civic space and Sudan-specific advocacy engagements.

Joining forces in support of civic space was key for the EP election campaigns

The risk of backsliding democracy and shrinking civic space in EU member states and institutions was at the core of the [elections campaign](#) launched in December 2023 by Civil Society Europe. ACT Alliance EU and some of its members supported the campaign which included a pledge to stand-up for civil society signed by more than 100 candidate MEPs. In September as the new Parliament began its term, ACT EU also co-signed the joint [Civil Society letter](#) on ensuring a vibrant civic space in the European Union.

We contributed to civil society discussions addressing the growing influence of far-right ideas and actors across European member states and EU institutions, examining their impact on fundamental rights, civic space, and funding for civil society action. These discussions highlighted the broader consequences of shrinking civic space, including the weakening of democratic governance, reduced accountability in policymaking, and diminished capacity to address global challenges through development cooperation and humanitarian aid.



SPOTLIGHT

Our efforts as FBOs: rebuilding trust, defending aid and countering misinformation in polarised contexts

The experience of our Swedish members in particular — facing abrupt funding cuts and a broader, climate silencing civil society voice — was raised during a presentation at our 2024 General Assembly, sparking a broader exchange of experiences among members. These discussions highlighted the importance of exploring strategies to counter restrictive environments as key for the network. They also emphasised the role of our members and their faith constituencies in addressing political polarisation and fostering resilience against the erosion of principled development cooperation, human rights, and humanitarian assistance.

Building on these reflections, General Assembly and Policy and Advocacy Group sessions focused on proactive responses, such as strengthening grassroots engagement through local engagement and workshops, shaping inclusive narratives to counter misinformation, and amplifying constituency-driven advocacy. These efforts are rooted in the understanding that faith-based organisations can leverage their unique connections and moral authority to rebuild trust and counter misinformation in polarised contexts.

Following the General Assembly, ACT EU authored a paper consolidating the European Commission's obligations to engage civil society in development cooperation. The paper highlights key legal and policy frameworks, including EU treaties and the NDICI Regulation, which mandate meaningful engagement with civil society in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programmes. It emphasises the Commission's responsibility to create an enabling environment for civil society and to ensure transparency and accountability in its collaboration. This document is a robust foundation for advocacy to safeguard and expand civic space, grounded in the EU's own foundational documents.

Recommendation to the EU on safeguarding civic space worldwide

Our work on civic space includes our participation in the EU TED ([Team Europe Democracy](#)) Network which is a space for exchange and learning between the EU and MS, civil society and researchers on promoting democracy and civic space. We provided contributions from our members for the compilation of “tools, methodologies, and approaches to support inclusive participation for women, youth, marginalised communities and minorities, and persons with disabilities in partner countries”.

ACT EU also contributed to the CONCORD policy paper on civic space: [Standing strong in the storm](#), one of the background documents for the [TED network report on EU and Member States’ approaches and options](#) to addressing the shrinking civic space.

We contributed to the OECD DAC CS Reference Group’s advocacy on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling CS in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance. This included a joint letter and [media posts](#) highlighting our concerns regarding decisions by SIDA, the Swedish Development Agency to cut CS funding and our participation in the OECD DAC consultation on their [locally-led development handbook](#).

Calling for an EU strategy to safeguard civic space worldwide and for stronger EU support for locally led civil society action will be at the core of our advocacy on the 5-year review of the DAC Recommendation that will start in 2025.

Amplifying our members’ research and role in civic space

Credit: Simon Chambers / ACT Alliance
FBOs participating in a march to end fossil fuels at the UN GA —September 2023



In May, the ACT Alliance EU secretariat hosted a meeting of ACT Alliance’s Community of Practice (CoP) on Rights and Development which includes 6 ACT EU members. This presented a unique opportunity to connect our members with other civil society networks active in EU advocacy on human rights and civic space¹ and to engage with EU officials. We exchanged with officials from the Human Rights & Democracy and the Civil Society units of DG INTPA, as well as with the localisation lead in DG ECHO, the EU Humanitarian Aid office.

1 CS networks: CONCORD, HRDN and Civil Society Europe - CSE

The session included the presentation of two new studies conducted by our members. DCA presented a report on the Role of Faith Actors in Civic Space, [We have values that are needed](#) which they published jointly with ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches. The second report, sponsored by NCA, looks at the convergence between humanitarian and civic space. This issue is rarely discussed but is gaining traction as complex crises multiply and generated significant interest among the DG ECHO and DG INTPA staff present at the CoP meeting.

Additionally, the [case study on Sudan](#) finalised in September was published by the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) and shared with them. This study, commissioned by NCA, has served as an important avenue for opening advocacy engagements on the situation in Sudan with EU Member States in the last quarter of 2024 (see Spotlight below). We look to extend these engagements to relevant EU stakeholders in early 2025.



SPOTLIGHT

NCA-commissioned report and members advocacy: civic and humanitarian space in Sudan

Late 2023-2024 saw Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) work closely with both ACT Alliance EU and ACT Alliance for a new report. The NCA-commissioned report informed the background study and the literature review and located civic & humanitarian space issues in the context of recent CSO history.

The report carries important considerations for the modalities of donor and INGO support to local civil society. It assesses which of those modalities are most effective for national and local CSO autonomy and the capacity to respond in rapidly evolving crises. An important contribution is the evidence and discussion on how community-based groups navigate the humanitarian principles and how the sector ensures principled response. This analysis is particularly timely as the sector wrangles with how to maintain adherence and commitment to the principles in the context of increasingly complex conflict settings.

In the last quarter of 2024, ACT Alliance EU have supported joint ACT-Caritas Sudan advocacy efforts. This has included signing on to NGO statements towards the UNGA and to the outgoing High Representative/Vice President (HRVP) of the European Commission. We called them to give higher priority to the Sudan crisis and highlighted the urgent need for funds to support first responders.

We also supported NCA in organising a series of government briefings. These briefings included status updates, key messages from the report, and advocacy for increased support to local civil society alongside the ongoing UN response. These efforts came at critical moments as Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) deliberated on their funding commitments for Sudan.

Objective:

The EU supports equitable partnerships and local leadership

We have continued to advocate for space for local and national actors in EU policy & dialogues and to call for more transformative commitments to locally led response.

In 2024, we saw strong testament to our ongoing advocacy with NGO partners for people-centred, locally led response. This was reflected in a groundswell of interest in related events held at major annual humanitarian forums, as well as a continued increase in NGOs engaging with and leading advocacy for locally led response and shifting power. We saw VOICE and CONCORD lead on ensuring leadership of local actor networks on issues pertaining to localisation, shifting power and decolonising aid.

ACT Alliance EU played a central role in shaping a new Civil Society Engagement Platform aimed to create an inclusive voice for African and European CS organisations in EU-AU policymaking. The successful launch event saw the active engagement of more than 130 CS organisations.

ACT Alliance EU co-organised and moderated a very well attended first exchange with DG ECHO on fairer risk sharing for equitable partnerships. The session led to higher ECHO commitment to engaging with their NGO partners to discuss risk management.

Together with other faith-based organisations we facilitated the direct engagement of our local faith partners with EU stakeholders to emphasise the need for sustained engagement in fragile contexts and continued support to local CS and faith actors.



A new Africa-Europe CS Engagement Platform

ACT Alliance EU was one of the initiators and co-organisers of the launch of the new Civil Society Engagement Platform (CSEP) for the Africa-EU partnership that took place online on 9 October. The event gathered more than 130 organisations working in diverse fields and at different levels across the two continents. The platform aims to create an inclusive, collective voice for African and European civil society organisations (CSOs) to facilitate knowledge sharing and dialogue and is a significant step forward for inter-continental civil society collaboration. Its aim is to enhance civil society engagement and participation in the political and policy dialogue between the AU and the EU.

While facilitating the establishment of the platform we also advocated throughout the year for the establishment of a CS and Youth Engagement Mechanism (CSYEM) in the Africa-EU partnership. The objective is to open a common space for dialogue between the AU and the EU institutions and African and European CSOs. The CSYEM concept is progressing despite resistance from some institutional bodies on both continents. We are in close contact with the officials in DG INTPA and the EEAS who support the initiative and discuss it with their counterparts in the AU Commission. We hope that a process to jointly consult 'independent' CS and Youth will be in place for the next Africa-EU Summit that could take place in second half of 2025.

Accountability: whose standards?

In 2024, we launched a consultative process with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding personnel from ACT EU and other NGOs. This forms the basis of a briefing we will release in early 2025 to challenge the prevailing narrative used by major donors like DG ECHO to justify increasing compliance and audits as “good stewardship of taxpayers’ money.”

The issue has gained prominence in NGO engagements with DG ECHO as tensions continue to deepen between increasingly heavy and thus exclusionary compliance on the one hand, and commitments to equitable partnerships and locally led response on the other. The briefing brings together the experiences and perspectives shared during

the consultative phase. It highlights the high resource demands of compliance, the skewing of NGO partnership power dynamics and the broken trust where counter terrorism screening measures are heavy-handedly applied. A key finding is the necessary underpinning of a dialogic approach between all stakeholders enabling adaptation, a safe space for transparency and co-creation of solutions with fair risk sharing. Timely and essential, the briefing encourages workable solutions amidst growing political pressure limiting civic space in the EU and Member States. More importantly, it emphasises the need to question who sets accountability standards and priorities, to confront the power structures underlining those standards that marginalise diverse civil society actors.

Due diligence passporting & harmonisation

In the last quarter of 2024, ACT Alliance EU supported the steering of a new ICVA Community of Practice on due diligence passporting and harmonisation. We aim to support the core goal of ensuring coherence and information sharing among the various initiatives across the sector (including in different national contexts).

Together with ACT EU organisations and other FBOs working with the new Charter4Change due diligence passporting tool, pilots and lessons learned, we are

connecting learnings for practitioner exchanges.

We are supporting greater representation of personnel from diverse civil society in the Community of Practice, without which the efforts risk uniquely representing INGO aims and priorities. To do so, we are raising awareness of the CoP among ACT EU members' partners, L/NNGO fora and are collectively mapping and ensuring connection with relevant initiatives run at country levels.

Opening spaces for direct engagement of partners with the EU institutions

We worked with partners to create spaces and platforms for connections and engagements between local actors and policy makers to progress on equitable partnerships and local leadership. This included three main events,

an informal donor-local civil society exchange during the European Humanitarian Forum, a risk-sharing policy workshop with ECHO and a roundtable on support to faith actors in fragile contexts.

Local actor-donor exchange in the margins during the European Humanitarian Forum

For the 2024 European Humanitarian Forum (EHF), we partnered with both local and national NGO networks & INGOs to enhance donor engagement with local actors.

donors & foundations as one of the forum's most valuable & meaningful engagement moments. The space encouraged equity and honesty in the discussions.

With the lead of Charter4Change and jointly with like-minded NGOs, we organised an exchange in the margins of the EHF to enable proactive donor-local/national NGO dialogue with a longer time frame to the EHF structured sessions. Participants described the space for direct engagement with a dozen

The event highlighted the importance of consortia models prioritising leadership by national organisations and fostered honest discussions on viable methods for donor support to increased numbers of partners and programmes, and political challenges related to accountability.



Risk-sharing session with ECHO

In collaboration with the VOICE network, we co-organised and moderated a policy workshop on financial and compliance risk-sharing for NGOs implementing ECHO grants with local partners. The session prioritised locally led solutions and was shaped by a collaborative process involving Charter4Change, VOICE, the Red Cross EU, Caritas Europa, and ACT Alliance EU. We developed a survey for further multi-stakeholder input to inform the workshop.

A high attendance underscored the session's relevance to DG ECHO's NGO partners and some of the DG ECHO units. The session focused on potential solutions and practices to overcome complex barriers to more flexible risk management, community-led approaches, and simplified due diligence processes. The workshop strengthened

collaboration among NGO networks – Charter4Change, the Red Cross EU Office, VOICE, Caritas Europa and ACT Alliance EU.

It highlighted VOICE's commitment to support leadership of local actors in the EU policy discussions affecting their position and work: for the first time at an ECHO Partner's meeting, personnel from national partners were given the space to intervene through presentation and dialogue.

Despite ongoing discussions on risk sharing, progress remains stalled due to increasing compliance demands and growing political pressure for NGO transparency, tied to [efforts to limit civil society space](#). There is a pressing need for actionable benchmarks, accountability to affected populations.

With growing restrictions on NGO advocacy at national and EU levels, we must reaffirm civil society's essential role in holding power to account. In both above cases, processes

ensuring spaces for direct engagements between local actors and the international donor and NGO community faced costly logistical hurdles and constraints.

ACT Alliance EU joins partner FBO networks to support the sector's call for sustained engagement in fragile contexts and politically estranged states

Together with FBO partners, we sought to engage stakeholders from across the institutions in the early period following the elections and configuration of the new Commission.

We co-organised a roundtable for Commission, Parliament, EEAS, Permanent Representation and NGO network personnel to hear from local faith actor partners of ACT Alliance EU, Caritas Europa, EU-CORD and Islamic Relief Worldwide. The goal was to complement the urgent call for sustained support to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) in both fragile and politically estranged contexts. It served to underline the approaches, role and importance of local actors as key partners.

Our partners forcefully conveyed their collective long-term role in maintaining the social fabric in complex contexts and working

across mandates to support arising needs of communities. They demonstrated a sharp understanding of appropriate modalities to address intersections of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding challenges with religious dynamics.

Through a [comprehensive publication containing case studies and analytical pieces](#), and the presentations & discussions at the roundtable, we sought to re-centre the focus of fragile contexts discussions on an emphasis on the priorities and possible modalities for continued international engagement with civil society.

As both implementation of the HDP nexus and sustaining development engagement in fragile contexts remain complex priorities for Member States and the EU, we will continue in 2025 to bring together MS and EU focal points directly with our partners.



Credit: SambaSports Youth Agenda and Shared Futures Program, Kerk in Actie.



SPOTLIGHT

Shifting the power and decolonising aid: recognising power and driving change

ACT's Southern African member, ACT Ubumbano, convened a two-day workshop for humanitarian and development personnel in northern Europe. The aim was to foster listening, dialogue, and reflection, allowing activists and practitioners to share insights, critically assess practices, and identify opportunities for collaborative social justice. Discussions highlighted the persistence of exclusive and marginalising systems in the HDP sectors and pathways for positive change:

- ▶ Sectoral models: Challenging programming models perpetuating historical injustices.
- ▶ Ethical Advocacy: Avoiding benefit from marginalisation or suffering.
- ▶ Balancing Change: Aligning feasible progress with deeper structural reforms.

"It is a space where experience and voice shaped by our lived reality is heard, countering institutionalised, technocratic knowledge."

ACT Ubumbano

Subsequently, VOICE and CONCORD organised events, attended by ACT EU, to discuss balancing slow EU-level progress with the need for genuine shifts in power and resources.

Credit: ACT Ubumbano, Berlin meetings 2024



Objective:

The EU's role on gender justice

Our work to enhance EU support to gender justice is rooted in the experience of our members working in collaboration with faith actors.

In 2024, our Gender Justice work focused on highlighting the progressive voice and expertise of our members and ACT Alliance on issues of gender and religion, amid widespread opposition to gender justice, SRHR, and LGBTQI+ rights. ACT Alliance (EU) members are actively involved in gender justice work across advocacy, humanitarian, and development landscapes. They frequently operate within regressive environments where fundamentalist, conservative and antidemocratic groups and governments use religion, culture, and tradition as tools to counter the promotion of human rights and gender equality both in the EU and globally.

The event on Gender Justice at our General Assembly kicked off fruitful exchanges and collaboration with DG INTPA and the EEAS on religion and development, freedom of religion and belief and the role of FBOs in gender justice, including SRHR and LGBTQI+ persons' rights.

DG INTPA integrated resources and examples from our members and from ACT Alliance in its 'Faith Literacy Trainings' for DG INTPA and EU Delegations staff.

By organising a panel discussion on Advancing Gender Justice in Challenging Times at our General Assembly we aimed to share with our interlocutors in the EU institutions examples and approaches that demonstrate how faith-based actors and communities are at the centre of transformative processes. The event was successful in consolidating our members engagement in EU advocacy and to amplify both members' and ACT Alliance's work while establishing strong connections with DG INTPA and EEAS officials on the role of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) in gender justice and in development.

We brought together our members' CEOs and gender experts, ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme team, gender desks from DG INTPA and the EEAS and Member States' Permanent EU Representations. Participants discussed how faith-based organisations are using methodologies for dialogue as well as theological reflections to engage with both faith and non-faith actors on gender justice. This includes identifying ways forward on contentious issues such as SRHR and LGBTQI+ rights amidst the growing backlash.

The event was useful and stimulating. It really was. And generated new ideas/actions already launched.

*Virginia Manzitti, DG INTPA G1,
Gender Equality, Human Rights
and Democratic Governance*

The capacity of faith-based actors to use their influential positions and unique vantage points within communities to effect concrete change emerged as a key theme, vividly illustrated through [examples from ACT Alliance members' programmes](#).

Our engagement with DG INTPA and the EEAS continued after the meeting to further exchange knowledge and materials on religion and development, freedom of religion and belief, and the role of FBOs in gender justice, SRHR and LGBTQI+ persons' rights. DG INTPA integrated resources from the ACT Alliance training module on Religion and Development (fabo.org) and from reports and examples provided by our members in two training webinars for EU Delegations and EC staff. Further collaboration is in discussion for the beginning of 2025.

Through contacts established with the EEAS gender desk, the EU Geneva delegation co-sponsored an event co-organised by [ACT and ACT EU members](#) on women's participation in peace processes during the Human Rights Council in September. The EU's sponsorship was instrumental in ensuring the attendance of 30 government representatives at the meeting.

We pursued our work on monitoring the implementation of the EU's Gender Action Plan III and took part in the annual structured dialogue with CS organised by DG INTPA.

ACT Alliance EU moderated a session at the CONCORD gender equality group's autumn meeting on mainstreaming gender equality in the Global Gateway with the participation of the Head of the Social Policy unit of the European Investment Bank. The work on GAP III implementation will continue in 2025 as we intend to contribute to its intermediate evaluation planned by DG INTPA. A first discussion on the scope and methodology of the evaluation took place in November 2024.

Credit: S Wilkinson, ACT Alliance EU
Panel discussion on gender justice
at the ACT Alliance EU General Assembly



Objective:

Middle East

2024 was marked by the intensification of hostilities in the Middle East, which extended beyond Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IoPt) to involve other regional actors. As violence escalated, civilians bore the brunt of the suffering, with devastating consequences.

Since the massacres of 7 October 2023, when Hamas-led groups committed [war crimes](#) against civilians in southern Israel, the Israeli-Hamas war escalated sharply, plunging Gaza into a deep humanitarian crisis. Over 45,500 Palestinians were [killed](#), 10,000 reported missing, and 1.9 million [displaced](#). More than 69% of Gaza's infrastructure, including 92% of housing units, was [damaged or destroyed](#). By the end of 2024 the fate of nearly 100 Israeli hostages taken by Hamas remained unknown.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Palestinians faced an alarming surge in violence from [Israeli settlers](#) and the Israeli military, compounded by [worsening economic conditions](#). These developments unfolded against the backdrop of an increasingly restrictive operating environment for both [civil society organisations](#) and [UN agencies](#).

In 2024, ACT Alliance EU continued to raise awareness of these critical issues and advocate for the respect and promotion of the principles and rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL).

In collaboration with Augusta Victoria Hospital, ACT Alliance EU brought the threat of deportation faced by Gaza's cancer patients receiving treatment in East Jerusalem hospitals to the attention of EU policy makers, prompting the Director General of DG ECHO to raise the issue during his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IoPt).

Through our awareness-raising efforts on legal proceedings related to Israel and the oPt, in collaboration with the Diakonia IHL Centre, we forged and strengthened valuable connections with EU policy makers, laying the groundwork for future engagement.

By securing a [parliamentary question](#) on the extension of screening for PEGASE beneficiaries and submitting multiple questions to MEPs for the Commissioner hearings, in collaboration with other CSOs, we worked to keep the Israel-Palestine issue at the forefront of policy makers' agendas and sustain pressure for continued action.

Multi-stakeholder advocacy to address the disastrous humanitarian situation in Gaza

ACT Alliance EU worked together with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to pushback against attempts to delegitimise UNRWA and to ensure that the guidelines for the 2025 budget as well as the discharge of the 2023 budget would reiterate the EP's support to the organisation.

During the second part of the year, we also worked closely with other faith-based humanitarian organisations to raise awareness of the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the obstacles faced by humanitarian actors. The private briefings organised allowed us to reach humanitarian officials across various EU institutions as well as several MS.

Our members DCA and NCA, together with several other leading humanitarian NGOs

within the Ceasefire Now coalition, published regular "[Gaza humanitarian snapshots](#)" to provide an accurate picture of the restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities and the obstacles faced by humanitarian organisations in delivering aid to Gaza. The Secretariat supported the dissemination of the snapshots among EU policy makers.

Finally, we worked closely with the [Augusta Victoria Hospital](#), operated by the Lutheran World Federation, to raise awareness of the issue of cancer patients from Gaza facing the risk of being deported by the Israeli authorities from East Jerusalem back to Gaza. This issue was then raised by the Director General of DG ECHO during his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IoPt).



Credit: ACT/Paul Jeffrey
A woman walks through a Gaza neighbourhood after Israeli air attacks

Multi-stakeholder advocacy to garner support for international justice and accountability mechanisms

We worked closely with our member [Diakonia IHL Centre](#) to raise awareness of international humanitarian law (IHL) and garner support for international justice mechanisms such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). To do so, we shared legal briefs published by the IHL Centre with EU policy makers and used the IHL Centre's legal analysis to support our advocacy asks.

In collaboration with the IHL Centre, we implemented further advocacy initiatives. In March, we held an online briefing for EU policy makers on the legal proceedings related to Israel and the oPt. In September, we organised several meetings with EU officials from DG NEAR, DG ECHO, and the EEAS to discuss IHL accountability in

the context of Israel/Palestine. An online exchange on the same topic was also arranged for the European humanitarian NGO network VOICE and its membership. Finally, in November, we facilitated a series of bilateral meetings with EU stakeholders to discuss the implications of the ICJ Advisory Opinion's findings for third states and international organisations.

In April, ACT Alliance EU issued a [statement](#) on behalf of most of its members calling on the EU to take concrete action to ensure respect for international law in Gaza. In this statement, we recalled the duty of third states to conduct due diligence to make sure that any support provided to the State of Israel will not be used to contribute to violations of international law.

Multi-stakeholder advocacy to challenge de facto annexation and policies & practices leading to forcible transfers and displacement

As the international community focused its attention on Gaza, the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, worsened dramatically. We worked with members and members' partners to bring more attention to issues such as settler violence and forcible transfer of Palestinian communities.

In March, we attended several advocacy meetings with a representative of the Israeli human rights organisation [Yesh Din](#) and the representative of 12 Israeli human rights organisations in Brussels. These discussions led to the submission of a [parliamentary question](#) on the forcible transfer of Palestinian communities in Area C. In October, in collaboration with other CSOs, we contributed questions for the Commissioner hearings.

Finally, a major area of concern this year has been access to healthcare for Palestinians in the oPt, given the increased restrictions on freedom of movement imposed by the Israeli authorities and the economic breakdown in the West Bank. ACT EU worked to [raise awareness](#) of this issue, stressing the need to facilitate patients' referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals and to ensure that healthcare funding is disbursed in a sustainable, predictable, and unconditional manner. In December, in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation and Augusta Victoria Hospital, we organised an online briefing for EU and Member State policy makers to further highlight these challenges.

Credit: Lutheran World Federation
A girl gets treatment in a hospital in East Jerusalem



Multi-stakeholder advocacy to safeguard space for civil society

This year, we closely monitored the outcomes of the European Commission's October 2023 review of all development funding to Palestine.

Concerned by the lack of transparency around various measures announced in the review's [conclusions](#), published in November 2023, we met on various occasions with the European Commission to get a better understanding of said measures. We also facilitated meetings on this topic, as well as on the overarching issue of shrinking space for civil society, for our member DCA and their partner [7amleh](#).

Working together with a large group of MEPs, we also secured a [parliamentary question](#) on the extension of screening of PEGASE¹ beneficiaries. Unfortunately, the answer given by the then DG NEAR Commissioner

was vague and failed to provide the expected clarifications.

Following our in-person working group meeting in September, we supported our members in engaging with several EU policy makers to discuss the growing challenges posed by the increasing requirements attached to EU funding, along with other critical issues.

Overall, development funding to Palestine, especially funding to human rights organisations, has been heavily impacted by donors' political decisions. This was the case in the EU with the review, but also in some EU member states and with some private European foundations. The issue of [politicisation of aid](#) will therefore remain very high on the MEWG's agenda.

¹ PEGASE (Mécanisme Palestino-européen de Gestion de l'Aide Socio-économique) is the aid mechanism established by the EU to provide direct financial support to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Credit: ACT/Paul Jeffrey

A boy does a cartwheel in the Nuseirat refugee camp



2024 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 2024 accounts were audited by DGST and partners, Réviseurs d'entreprise of Brussels, Belgium.

| | 2024 € | 2023 € |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Income | | |
| Member contributions | 626 429 | 605 382 |
| EU grant | 10 000 | 10 000 |
| Other income | 116 717 | 112 996 |
| Total income | <u>753 146</u> | <u>728 378</u> |
| Expenses | | |
| Human resources | 683 782 | 630 723 |
| Office costs | 61 370 | 55 101 |
| Communications | 4 063 | 17 109 |
| Travel & meetings costs | 12 798 | 24 253 |
| Advocacy activities | 11 442 | 8 327 |
| Administrative & other costs | 20 940 | 21 658 |
| Total expenses | <u>794 395</u> | <u>757 171</u> |
| Net surplus/(loss) for the year | (41 249) | (28 793) |
| Reserves at 1 January | 352 313 | 425 377 |
| Reserves at 31 December | <u>311 064</u> | <u>381 106</u> |

Board, secretariat and advisory groups

Board and general assembly

Board membership throughout 2024

Bread for the World — represented by Martin Krieg, Chair

DanChurchAid — represented by Jonas Vejsager Nøddekær, Deputy Chair

Diaconia ACT Austria — represented by Katharina Auer, Treasurer

Act Church of Sweden — represented by Eva Ekeland, member

ACT Alliance — represented by Thorsten Göbel, observer

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 Brussels in May 2024, and held an Extraordinary General Assembly vote by email in November 2024.

Advisory groups

Policy and Advocacy Group (PAG) met in person in Brussels (with hybrid options) in March 2024 and November 2024.

Co-chair: Oli Pearce (Christian Aid)

Secretariat and staff

At the end of 2024, the secretariat was composed of the following staff:

Permanent

Floris Faber, ACT Alliance EU Representative

Susie Wilkinson, Finance & Operations Manager

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

Ruth Watson, Policy Officer — EU Humanitarian Policy & Practice

Mélina Chaput, Adviser — Middle East (maternity leave from October 2024)

Temporary

Stefano Filipuzzi, Policy Officer — Middle East (maternity cover from October 2024)



ACT Alliance EU office

EU Transparency Register: 5189768701-12

Rue Stevin 16
1000 Brussels
admin@actalliance.eu
tel. +32 2 233 37 54

actalliance eu