

Global Meeting of the Policy Forum on Development 2025

17-19 June, Brussels

Summary Report



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Executive Summary

The Global Policy Forum on Development (PFD) Meeting 2025 took place in Brussels from 17 to 19 June, at a pivotal time for international partnerships and global development. Progress on the 2030 Agenda is under threat from rising inequalities, climate setbacks, and geopolitical tensions. The Policy Forum brought together more than 100 members of civil society (CSOs), local authorities (LAs), EU institutions, and Member States to reassert a common commitment to sustainable development and inclusive dialogue.

The PFD focus in 2025 reflected a shifting landscape in EU external action, shaped by the Team Europe approach and the scaling up of the Global Gateway (GG) strategy. As the new European Commission and Parliament begin their mandates, the PFD provides an essential space in which to discuss how global partnerships can address financing gaps, preserve core values including human rights, and ensure that no one is left behind.

Participants discussed the EU's sustainable development agenda, focusing on how partnerships with civil society and local authorities support the EU's 360-degree approach to GG - ensuring all aspects of sustainable development are addressed. The meeting opened with a discussion of the current situation and vision of the EU and a reminder of past PFD recommendations in light of the meeting's agenda.

The sessions during the meeting focused on the enabling environment, supporting development in fragile contexts, human development, practical examples and lessons learned from locally led development (LLD), and the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework, in order to discuss and propose tangible recommendations for the EU's future cooperation efforts.

The key messages that emerged from the 2025 Global PFD include:

1. Global Gateway programming requires partnership for successful implementation. Civil society and local governments are willing partners in sustainable development. Including direct funding for CSOs and LAs to accompany GG implementation would help to ensure that no one is left behind and EU values are upheld.
2. Within the next Multiannual Financial Framework:
 - Targeted and effective international partnerships would be best served by maintaining separate instruments for EU pre-accession, international cooperation and humanitarian aid.
 - Existing markers and targets (gender, climate, human development, etc.) should be maintained and reinforced.
 - Funding for fragility should respond to root causes of fragility and not only conflict situations.
3. Institutionalised spaces for dialogue and coordination are fundamental; therefore, the EU should reinforce multi-stakeholder platforms at all levels, including the PFD.

Welcome and Opening of the 2025 Global PFD: The role of CSOs and LAs in the current context

Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit, Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA), Unit G2 Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations and Foundations warmly welcomed all participants. She highlighted the focus on collating key messages and recommendations from all meeting sessions and in the current context of shrinking civil space, noting that these would be presented to Commissioner Sikela shortly after the forum meeting.

The following high-level opening with the Director General of DG INTPA discussed the necessity of equal partnership, where the EU and its partners share mutual benefits and responsibilities. Participants recognised that we are in a period of systemic crisis, requiring policies to adapt and continuous dialogue with partners. This requires stronger and more deeply rooted dialogue amongst the EU institutions, CSOs and LAs. The EU aims to distinguish itself by the quality of its values and respect for social, environmental, and financial sustainability in partnerships. The EU's strength lies in building local capacity and human capital development, and CSO and LA participants emphasised that solidarity must take precedence over commercial interests in development models. Development cooperation needs to regain momentum and adopt approaches such as the triple nexus, broadening the understanding of fragility beyond conflict to include climate change, and building resilient communities.

The session was moderated by **Thomas Taylor di Pietro, Equality Policy Advisor, ITUC** and focused on dialogue regarding the EU's vision for international development, and the way forward for CSOs and LAs.

Koen Doens, Director General, DG INTPA, European Commission highlighted the EU's continued commitment to close and frequent dialogue with CSO and LA partners, the 360-degree approach and the EU's commitment to the agenda on education, poverty, health, climate change and agriculture. He stated that the current dynamic should develop towards equality in partnerships and interests and away from the historic donor-recipient model. He highlighted that not all problems can be solved by investment in the economy, and that the role of LAs and CSOs is crucial in the design and implementation of initiatives at local level.

Marc Noël, Director of Partnerships, ICA discussed the heterogeneity of private sector, showcasing cooperatives as a best practice in their focus on the well-being of the community and redistribution of profit to their members and called for their consideration as private sector partners. **Koen Doens** confirmed that the Commission focuses on value chains in partner countries including cooperatives, SMEs, and micro-SMEs.

Susana Eróstegui, Executive Director, Bolivian Network for International Cooperation (representing MESA) highlighted the work of CSOs in regions in which the rule of law, human rights and dignity are increasingly restricted by the state. She called for a fundamental discussion on the role and participation of CSOs, which remain marginalised from international discourse as active participants and drivers of change - and how they can best work together with DG INTPA to develop and implement sustainable projects to support citizens. She highlighted that enabling citizens to work and thrive in their local environments, often in informal labour structures, takes precedence over commercial interests.

Koen Doens agreed that the enabling environment (EE) for civil society is reducing. He added that the Commission is committed to mobilising support to mitigate reduction of 'the narrow corridor' as much as possible. He highlighted that in current projects under the Global Gateway (for example in Bolivia and Bangladesh), CSOs and LAs are involved in the research, design and monitoring stages of initiatives, and that the Commission harnesses an inequality monitoring system (I-Marker) to measure impact. He added that the unique aspect of EU partner projects is quality - maximum impact for citizens, shared values and respect - and a focus on social and financial sustainability.

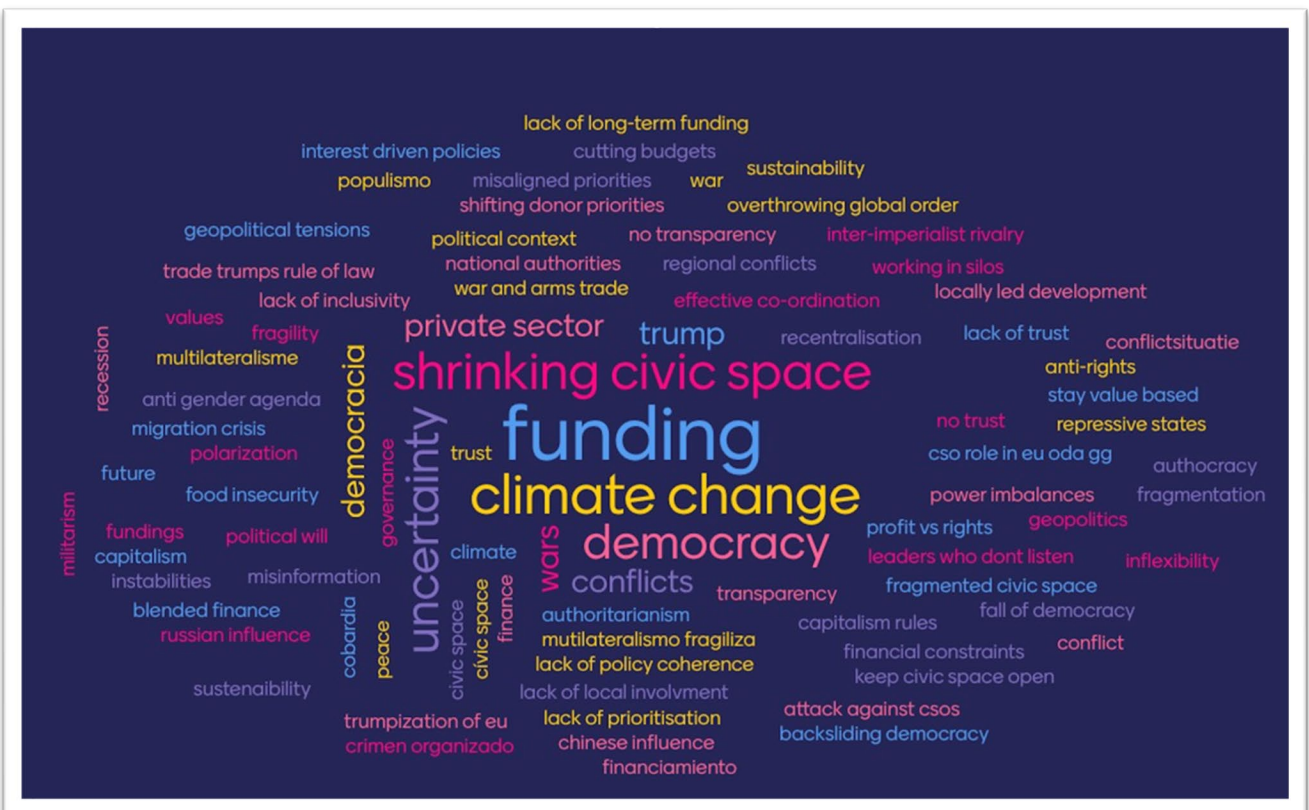
Marc Noël called for stronger collaboration between the EU and civil society and underlined that the Global Gateway (GG) is, more than ever, dependent on contribution by the latter.

Bernadia Tjandradewi, Secretary General, UCLG-Asia Pacific highlighted that LAs currently lack clear entry points to EU delegations and their integration into multiannual planning is minimal - which results in a lack of influence on investors. She highlighted the increase in global fragility owing to conflict, climate change

and shrinking civic space, and advocated commitment to essential funding for fragile regions which are not attractive to private funding. She called for the GG to provide a clear mechanism to support and empower LAs and CSOs which are best placed to create resilient communities. **Koen Doens** explained GG's ability to provide basic services alongside CSOs and LAs in fragile areas including Yemen and Afghanistan, but that is not possible in all extreme fragile states. He also emphasized that the EU's approach in fragile and conflict-affected areas is becoming increasingly tailored—ranging from addressing fragility at the level of the entire state to focusing on specific, targeted regions. Comments from the plenary highlighted the large potential and grant-making role of philanthropic foundations, which **Koen Doens** agreed should be explored more at local and global level. The need for investment in governance was also raised, and **Koen Doens** expressed the Commission's continued commitment to support partners including auditors, parliaments and ministries to maintain democracy. He also confirmed that local governments and authorities are integral partners in the GG Advisory Platform in reaction to the point that local governments need to be involved in decision-making and facilitation.

Past PFD recommendations

Maureen Olyaro, Deputy Director, African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) highlighted the increasing levels of fragility, conflict and forced displacement across the globe; the backlash against gender equality, and the threat to multilateralism, alongside the EU's paradigm shift in external policy and future international cooperation. She reminded participants of the [recent PFD recommendations](#) from the 2023 Global meeting and the 2024 regional meeting which relate to the 2025 meeting agenda. Maureen also queried participants via Mentimeter to get a sense of participants' interests and their greatest current challenges:



Responses from the floor underlined concerns regarding **funding**, **shrinking civic space**, **climate change**, **conflict** and **threats to democracy**. The majority of responses highlighted their interest in discussions on the enabling environment and locally led development.

Enabling Environment (EE): Standing strong in the storm: civic space under threat, civic space under pressure

The session looked at the EU's mechanism for early warning of changes in an enabling environment and proposed strategies to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs), emphasising the need for institutionalised dialogue, flexible and sustained funding - especially for smaller CSOs - and support in building counter-narratives to disinformation. Participants called for leveraging data for evidence-based advocacy and urged donors to prioritise societal development and well-being over political deals. The role of local authorities (LAs) as partners in safeguarding civic space was highlighted, alongside the importance of financial conditionality in promoting government respect for CSOs and fostering transparency and trust.

Erica Gerretsen, Director, DG INTPA G Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace moderated the session on EE and highlighted the Commission's continued commitment to fully engaging with CSOs as core partners in development policy.

In the first panel, speakers presented the EU System for EE (EUSEE) and participants discussed the protection of fundamental freedoms and legal framework for civil society actors.

Ine Van Severen, Policy and Research Analyst, CIVICUS and **Dr. Pallavi Rekhi, Lead-Programmes, VANI** gave a presentation on EUSEE which is based on 6 fundamental principles and operates in 86 countries and, through its early warning mechanisms and rapid and crisis alert systems, detects changes and threats to civic space including deterioration caused by conflicts, threats to human rights, and removal of rule of law. It also detects opportunities where positive change could be forged in civic space - indicated by improvements in court decisions and national assemblies. Emerging topics include misinformation spread by hostile governments about CSOs, foreign agent laws, and draconian state cybercrime laws used to control online expression.

Dr. Pallavi Rekhi explained how EUSEE is used in India to provide intelligence to donors to act before the escalation of threats. She highlighted the detection of criminalisation of fundamental freedoms including online speech and public gatherings, misuse of media to spread misinformation and hate, and the government's exclusion of CSOs in dialogue despite the availability of foreign funding. Alerts triggered in fragile regions allow engagement and advocacy with the government with support from EU delegations, so that potentially dangerous laws and policies can be addressed prior to becoming reality. They added that applications for short-, medium- and long-term grants are led and defined by CSOs, in full coordination with the relevant EU delegations.

In order to maximise the tool, participants stressed that: the EU and CSOs should engage in country level dialogue before proposals are launched, to ensure adequate consultation; and strengthen civic space and invest further in infrastructure of small and medium CSOs which lack access to flexible and sustained support. Key points made in the plenary discussion include:

- Civil society has increasingly less space for dialogue and is being censored - often also by friendly governments.
- In Mexico, young feminists are being censored, and adolescents are prevented from connecting with others under the guise of protection. It has been reported that criminals and authorities work together to censor and murder those who speak out to defend human rights and represent civil society, which is increasingly prevalent in Latin America. In places such as Georgia and Central Europe, the rise of

far-right politics and foreign agent laws threatens civil society. The role of institutions like the European Commission in supporting CSOs becomes crucial.

- Foreign influence and manipulation are used to delegitimize and control CSOs, making it urgent to adopt measures that protect fundamental freedoms and build internal capacity.
- Locally based CSOs are encouraged to partner with international partners and intermediaries and are forced to work according to their demands and guidelines. We need to focus also on local capacity and local needs.
- Governments are over-regulating to shrink civil society space through their application and interpretation of money laundering and terrorism financing laws. The EU Financial Action Task Force can be harnessed to enable dialogue with governments that do so.
- In the context of decreasing public aid to developing countries, CSOs must find new resources and work with LAs to find new funding.

In the second panel, **Jacqueline Hale, EU SEE Policy Officer, DG INTPA G2** explained that the EU provides support through the Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan, political dialogues, and human rights support in public and unseen diplomacy efforts. She highlighted that in addition to funding, the EUSEE provides a preventative response mechanism with which to detect and monitor threats to civic space. She concluded by emphasising the need for a collective response by donors, and for CSOs to work transnationally owing to increasing state restrictions such as the targeting of specific communities.

Bernadia Tjandradewi, Secretary General, UCLG-Asia Pacific explained that enabling environment assessments had been conducted in her region and recommendations made to central governments to improve policy reform and the regulatory framework. She emphasised the role of local governments (LGs) as enablers that can make significant contributions to transparency, inclusivity and building trust in the context of broader governance, alongside CSOs. Future work must be done on amending the political narrative.

Susana Eróstegui, Executive Director, Bolivian Network for International Cooperation (representing MESA) highlighted that, although there is political will to interact with different actors, the reality suggests a more authoritarian trend. She highlighted the need for civil society to demonstrate its work and capacity via data and results, and a willingness to be open to public scrutiny to gain public and government recognition and trust.

Hilde Herssens, Belgium Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation responded that action starts with analysis of digital and physical data and the political context. This is done in cooperation with CSOs to assess methods of intervention via funding and training, and the possibility of engaging intermediaries with a focus on minorities and disadvantaged groups. On a political level, quiet diplomacy is conducted via EU Member States in terms of lobbying and advocacy for legal frameworks and sustainable changes in the country to support democracy and human rights.

When **Erica Gerretsen** asked the panel what could be done to enhance the capacity of CSOs, **Bernadia Tjandradewi** highlighted the need to capacitate LAs by establishing frameworks in which stakeholders may act. She gave the example of the Climate Action Plan in Asian cities and the need for a cascade effect to establish mechanisms for dialogue, engagement and co-creation. **Susana Eróstegui** focused on the current opacity in political culture; in the past it was easier to identify states which reduced democratic values - but in the current age, security and espionage legislation is used to clamp down on civil liberties with the result of politicalising and shrinking scope for engagement by citizens. She suggested that the EU can support CSOs by promoting a counter narrative. **Hilde Herssens** explained that the Belgian Federal Public Service balances support of local CSOs with objective reactions to partners in order to achieve long term goals with partner countries.

Erica Gerretsen asked panellists what should change in this context of less accessible and sustainable resources. **Bernadia Tjandradewi** pointed to best practice in Seoul and Japan in which communities have been given the freedom to propose and design projects in their own locality, and highlighted prioritisation by LAs of this type of work despite budget limitations, and the necessity of being creative when working with the private sector. **Susana ErósteGUI** highlighted the need for Team Europe to fully appreciate fragile political environments on an individual case basis including access to funding and welfare needs, when considering how best to support local CSOs. **Hilde Herrensens** endorsed the Team Europe initiative and its coherent strategy, vision, and policy, and ability to pool resources. She explained that the political commitment is reinforced across 14 Member States and the 3 working groups which focus on rule of law and accountability, civil participation, and digitalisation. **Erica Gerretsen** concluded the panel session by explaining the EU's lead on regulatory response to digitalisation challenges including unlawful surveillance, gender-based violence and privacy challenges via their GDPR policy, the Digital Markets Act and AI Act.

Fragility and Forced Displacement: Understanding entry points and lessons learned

During the session, participants explored how to effectively engage in fragile contexts, highlighting CSO and LA roles in resilience, service delivery, and mediation, provided engagement respects autonomy, avoids politicization, and ensures community-led approaches. They emphasized the value of EU tools such as trust funds, flexible partnerships, and sub granting, while noting that bureaucracy, lack of transparency, and misalignment with local priorities hinder impact. Participants called for simplified, long-term, locally driven support in fragile areas, enhanced coordination with local actors, strengthened early warning and resilience-building measures, and inclusive programming that fosters community empowerment, especially for women and marginalized groups.

Sarah Torres, Reality of Aid – CPDE (CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness) moderated this session to identify CSO and LA prevention and mitigation measures to enable engagement in complex settings and fragile states, and to contribute to more effective partnerships and dialogue among Team Europe, EUDs and local partners.

Sarah Spencer Bernard, OECD / INCAF representative gave a presentation on the [States of Fragility 2025](#) report, following 25 years of OECD work on fragility which has enhanced understanding and amended approaches in this field. The studies inform policy and practice, collate ODA (Official Development Assistance) qualitative trends and offer outlooks on key issues. The 2025 report also focuses analysis on specific regions within countries and offers a platform for citizens' voices who live in areas of extreme fragility, including their lived perception and suggested solutions.

Notably, the report reveals an increase of middle-income countries which sit in the extreme category which suggests that fragility is not only a question of conflict or crisis. There is an increase in state and non-state violence and a persistency in gender-based violence, a rise in autocracy, and state actors (including Russia and Yemen) using violence for political ends. ODA data on peace has declined amongst DAC (Development Assistance Committee) members since 2020 in the context of increasing violence. Humanitarian ODA has increased but cannot replace investments in peace per se. Key outlooks from the report include: the merits of prevention via direct and systemic intervention; defence spending should not come at the expense of development and welfare; and on a positive note, that progress is possible, as witnessed in Iraq and Somalia. **Questions from the floor** focused on factors included in the definition of fragility, insight into local governance stability, and the response of donors to OECD analysis in terms of commitments and action points. **Sarah Spencer Bernard** explained that research is focused on several key areas including local

governance and institutional stabilities, violence, finance flows to CSOs, and formal and informal local governance on fragility trends. Six main indicators are used (including economic, political, human and societal) approximately half of which focus on resilience and risk, for example to account for migration flows. DAC members use the nexus recommendations to inform their commitments and have undergone structural changes to align on coherent humanitarian efforts. The EU relies heavily on OECD fragility data and understanding and has accordingly evolved their approach, policies and practices including regular exchanges with the Delegations and official Communications from both the European Commission and Council.

Zaya Naran, Transparency International presented the project [Building Integrity and National Accountability in Lebanon \(BINA\)](#). In her presentation she explained that this DG INTPA funded project is based on the three Rs (reform, recovery, reconstruction) model as a road map to respond to the humanitarian crisis and persistent governance failure. The role of CSOs was placed at the forefront of reconstruction and has resulted in significant increase in trust as they are now invited by local government to participate in activities. The project works with 27 CSOs on approximately 30 projects with focus on financing, capacity building, and joint advocacy campaigns. The EU's approach to 'structured dialogue', their direct funding to pre-vetted CSOs and the development of recommendations on social cohesion and democratic participation overcame the barriers posed by the region's heightened security risks. Notably, it was not possible to work with LAs as planned, owing to their focus on the humanitarian crisis.

Lucia Acosta, SALAR International presented local projects in Colombia [Citizen Institutional Strengthening for Territorial Development \(FOINCIDE\)](#) and focused on thematic lessons learned and key areas for improvement and adaptation. She highlighted the importance of establishing community trust and engagement by using community platforms as the starting point for the co-design of, and strong engagement in initiatives. Local governments were cited as entry points to access broader infrastructures and facilitate wider impact. Donor flexibility was highlighted in terms of allowing local ownership, responsiveness and engagement, and the piloting tools and methods on a local level before scaling them strategically was also cited. The presentation concluded by underlining the importance of rethinking how the EU supports partners and projects, by listening to and reacting to community voices from the outset.

Group Discussions Summary

During the second part of this session, participants were divided into different tables and were asked to respond to three different questions.

"What are the entry points for CSOs and LAs, and what are the red lines in engaging partners working on programmes in fragile contexts?"

In fragile contexts, participants believe that CSOs and LAs serve as critical entry points due to their role as first responders, service providers, mediators, and key actors in resilience-building and conflict resolution. Their engagement is most effective when grounded in trust, local knowledge, and direct community interaction, supported by coordination across governance levels and capacity building. Access to information, safe spaces to voice needs, and inclusion in local development planning and shared agenda-setting are vital. However, engagement must respect clear red lines: CSO autonomy, confidentiality, protection from politicization, and adherence to local risk assessments. Misinformation, biased donor agendas, and insecure environments undermine trust and effectiveness. To support sustainable impact, the EU and donors must provide long-term, pre-emptive funding, establish protective frameworks, tax aggressor-state assets, and avoid exposing partners to undue risk, ensuring local ownership and operational integrity remain at the core.

"What are the tools and modalities in the EU response that work well? What are the lessons learned and points for improvement?"

Participants consider that effective tools in EU responses include trust funds, sub granting mechanisms that enhance CSO access, and flexible modalities such as Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) that allow for rapid adaptation to shifting contexts. Structured, multi-level dialogues enable coordination among multiple stakeholders, though these processes are often hindered by heavy bureaucracy. Direct contracting remains crisis-responsive but overly complex, while procurement by communities and context-driven approaches such as conflict sensitivity and climate fragility analysis are essential.

Lessons highlight the need for neutrality, transparency, early CSO engagement, and alignment with local government priorities. Bureaucratic barriers to communication and information sharing must be removed. Funding should avoid paternalism and support locally defined priorities. Long- term planning, sustainability, capacity building, and peacebuilding must be embedded from the start. Finally, EU presence and dialogue mechanisms at the national level should be maximised to foster trust and ensure coherent, responsive action.

"Where should the focus of EU external action lie in our current context? How can support to CSOs and LAs foster prevention and resilience?"

Participants believe that EU external action should prioritise locally led development with direct, transparent funding and increased investment in extremely fragile contexts. Simplifying procedures, supporting long-term continuity, and empowering enabling networks are essential for addressing root causes of fragility. Strengthening coordination with local authorities and engaging diverse CSOs fosters inclusive, preventive approaches and resilience. Early warning systems, anticipatory action, and capacity building must be expanded. Dialogue platforms, study exchanges, and strong connections with EU delegations and national governments enhance coherence and accountability. Programs should focus on job retention, digitalization, and public- private partnerships that empower communities. A shift toward actor-based approaches and visible impact on the ground will improve outcomes. Efforts must support women, peace, and security, and redefine emergency response criteria to allow timely and effective action.

After a break, **Giulia Iovino, Afghanistan Desk Officer, DG INTPA** spoke about EU work in Afghanistan and explained the EU's shift from development to an approach based on basic needs and livelihoods including women's rights, in collaboration with the UN and CSOs. In the context of serious funding declines and limited resources, they have revisited their engagement to give longer term perspectives to the Afghan population, with focus on what is achievable, not necessarily aspirational.

Questions from the floor focused on how partnerships with civil society are achieved in such a politically constrained environment; reducing budgets; the importance of development programmes to fostering peace; and how donor dialogue is organised.

Giulia Iovino explained that regular programming is adopted on an annual basis owing to situational volatility; there are dedicated budget lines for CSOs working within the Afghan territory; the principled approach of projects 'for women by women' have resulted in a meaningful role in the process, monitoring and delivery. Council conclusions delineate the parameters of the framework, whilst partnering with CSOs has enabled gender-based support - which is not always visible in order to preserve the security of partners and beneficiaries. She added that reduced budgets have resulted in difficult choices hence the focus on basic needs and livelihoods. In terms of fostering peace, income generation gives a sense of community stability - but programmes in the area must include external factors (such as influxes from Pakistan and Iran) in the analysis and design stages. There is structured coordination of donors and humanitarian partners via the

Afghanistan Coordination Group platform which meets regularly in addition to the senior officials convening meetings with DG ECHO and EEAS and is aided by a monitoring system of financial donor flow.

Human Development: Global Gateway and beyond

In this session, participants emphasised the need for a strategic shift that includes greater country-level engagement, accountability, and inclusive, community-led approaches to meet human development needs and ensure a 360-degree approach. Key priorities included enhancing political will, addressing debt challenges, fostering private investment aligned with human rights and gender equality, and maintaining strong local government involvement to avoid sidelining local priorities.

Bihter Moschini, Senior Programmes and Research Officer, Arab NGO Network for Development moderated the session on the potential impact of GG on human development (HD) and inequalities, to identify actionable strategies to integrate HD and inequality reduction efforts into the EU's future work. She explained that in the context of widening global fragility, only 17% of SDGs are on track, with no SDGs achieved within 14 Arab countries.

Erica Gerretsen shared the EU perspective on human development. The EU is committed to the SDG agenda and partnership with CSOs not only in terms of financing but in the design and implementation of suitable projects. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe foresees 20% of funding spent on human development purposes - which has been met and surpassed, and the EU is a recognised partner in health and education projects, with high quality policy and dialogue with partner countries for over two decades. That said, the present moment is a moment of change; collectively, results have not been achieved, and it is important to address the matter at country and local level, reflect on the current vision, and continue to focus on collective objectives. The EC is prioritizing a significant strategic shift towards increased investment, specifically encouraging private sector engagement to foster job creation, with the GG initiative central to this effort. While education and innovation are key pillars, the Global Gateway's comprehensive 360-degree approach aims to create an enabling environment where respect for human rights and human development are integral to sustainable financing and environmental sustainability. CSOs play a vital role in maximising the impact of these investments and maintaining shared values and objectives. The Commission is focusing on gender equality, realised in the GAP III strategy, and the 2024 Inequality report identified 62% of EU actions have potential for impact on reducing inequality - the next step is realisation of that potential.

Gertrude Gamwera, East African County and Local Governments Association (EALGA) underlined the need to compose clear and practical recommendations for the EU to take forward. She highlighted that the EU's [2013 Communication](#) was a useful and relevant instrument to empower local government (LGs) and to ensure more effective outcomes. She cited previous interventions supported by the MMF, which had resulted in effective interventions in Rwanda (access to sustainable energy); Kenya ([AgriFi](#) programme); and in Uganda (food security and nutrition). She highlighted that the knowledge platforms between the EU and LGs are crucial to enable connectivity, dialogue and inclusivity. She expressed the hope that the GG can maintain this approach and momentum and avoid limiting its focus on national government level. However, she highlighted the risk that the GG's broad approach could overshadow local development and create a mismatch between local needs and the EU's focus on sustainable and green investments. She highlighted the need to include community voices in the planning, design and implementation stages so that policies reflect local needs. She concluded by highlighting key areas for recommendations – community-centred planning; inclusive policy development which addresses fragility and minority needs; cross-sector collaboration between the private sector, CSOs and LGs to leverage mutual knowledge; economic empowerment and capacity building; and innovation in public services.

A **World Café** held in three parallel groups discussed participants' experiences in enhancing HD in their region; how HD and related targets could be ensured within GG and the future; and how to reduce inequality including focus on women and girls, increase local ownership, and strengthen systems. The details of each group can be found in annex and the common messages include:

- **Local ownership and inclusivity are essential:** elevate local and civil society engagement by creating inclusive governance frameworks that embed CSOs, LAs and marginalized groups in policy design and implementation.
- **Long-term investment creates transformative change:** long-term and systemic thinking is fundamental to create sustainable outcomes. Support long-term, integrated financing for systems-level change, particularly in healthcare, education, and disaster preparedness.
- **Reduce over-reliance on the private sector:** Empower CSO's independence through direct funding to avoid excessive reliance on intermediaries.
- **Prioritise community needs over profit-maximisation:** a recurring concern is that Global Gateway could mainly function as a profit-driven tool, rather than a means to enhance community welfare. Participants emphasised the need to actively involve communities in shaping human development initiatives to ensure their direct needs are addressed and to promote the highest possible level of community welfare.
- **Implement robust regulation to prevent illicit financial flows.**
- **Create platforms to promote meaningful participation and dialogue among stakeholders.**

Locally Led and Regional Development: Work of PFD partners at local level

This session, held in 4 parallel discussion groups, allowed PFD members to share project examples, to identify risks, opportunities and mitigation measures in Global Gateway (GG) priority areas, and demonstrate how Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) are pivotal in advancing human development, equality, and sustainable growth and empowering local communities.

1. Locally Led Resilience & Growth

The [FORTEMM project](#) empowers 100 women entrepreneurs in El Alto and Viacha, Bolivia, through a rights-based, social economy approach. It provides gender-sensitive business training, technical support, and promotes cooperativism and market visibility. The project links economic empowerment with civic participation and gender-sensitive policy advocacy. The presentation highlighted the pivotal role of CSOs in terms of understanding local contexts, specificities, needs and solutions; in supporting community-led initiatives for maximum benefit, safety and impact; and their focus on initiatives and pragmatic methods that can be scaled-up and replicated in other communities (capacity-building, training, resources, technical support).

Led by la Caixa Foundation, [Work4Progress](#) creates quality jobs and supports inclusive businesses in rural India, Peru, Mozambique, and Colombia, focusing on women and youth. W4P integrates blended finance and impact investment to scale early-stage enterprises and promote green jobs. Initiatives include solar irrigation in Mozambique, biofibre production in Peru, and women-led transport in India. The presentation by **Work4Progress** highlighted the critical role played by philanthropic foundations in building trust and partnerships between CSOs, LAs, academia, and the public, private and financial sectors. In addition to enhancing access to flexible finance models, they focus on identifying local solutions delivered through inclusive governance to "reimagine development - one community at a time".

Locally led resilience and growth comments and reflections

- The Global Gateway must deliver to meet UN's Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.
- Subsidiarity should be a guiding principle of the Global Gateway.
- The Global Gateway presents a great opportunity for locally led development (LLD) and meaningful localisation, but changes in approach and perception must be adopted. Political will must follow the change in approach to succeed.
- CSOs should no longer be regarded as contractors or implementers, but as partner stakeholders.
- Locally led development must be based on community-led risk assessments and the involvement of all stakeholders in the research, design and pre-implementation stages. CSOs and LAs are best placed to feed back issues regarding difficulties and local community non-negotiable issues; their local knowledge and contacts are vital. Projects should be designed on a long-term and/or self-sustaining basis and with an eye on attracting other stakeholders.
- Centralised and donor funding should not result in the imposition of unsuitable initiatives, methods or values on a local community. They should be aligned.

II. Inclusive Human Development

The [SCOPE](#) project supports three rural councils in Sri Lanka to improve local service delivery and infrastructure planning. It uses affordable GIS mapping and QR code technologies to enhance road network data and citizen access to services. The project improves awareness of primary health care and accessibility in plantation areas.

The [EcoSaMe](#) project fosters circular economy solutions for sustainable sanitation in Menoua, Cameroon, through decentralized cooperation with Nantes Métropole. It builds local capacity, improves sanitation infrastructure, and creates a sludge treatment and valorisation system converting waste into agricultural fertilizer. The project enhances public health by reducing waterborne diseases and protects the environment by minimizing pollution.

Human Development comments and reflections

- Identify and address power dynamics within aid structures.
- **Capacity building should be led by CSOs** to help regulate power imbalances.
- Combining an **intersectional approach with stakeholder mapping** is key to ensuring inclusivity.
- Establish a *comité de pilotage* with representatives of all relevant actors.
- **The green growth agenda must not overshadow human and social development**, especially where the private sector prioritises capital and urban areas.
- Create jobs with decent work standards, labour protections and union involvement.
- **Include civil society in all stakeholder processes** to ensure that SDGs remain central and that local voices are heard.
- **Maintain small-scale and community-rooted projects** as part of a 360° approach to inclusive development.
- **Earmark a percentage of GG funds for local development**, ensuring benefits return to communities bearing the cost of green transitions.
- Resource planning must account for the full value chain and be accompanied by systematic participatory conflict analysis.
- Local-level trust, ownership, and financial transparency are essential for sustainable implementation.

III. Global Partnerships for Impact

[Built by Nature](#) accelerates the shift to timber and bio-based building materials across Europe and the US to reduce carbon emissions. It connects diverse stakeholders in a network advocating climate-positive construction. The initiative leverages catalytic philanthropy, public-private partnerships, and capacity building to scale innovation.

[AKUAL](#) is a multi-level cooperation program promoting sustainable water and sanitation services. It fosters inter-institutional coordination, South-South and North-South knowledge exchange, and infrastructure investments. The program emphasises gender equity, local governance, and human rights to water and sanitation.

Global Partnership comments and reflections

- Both presentations highlighted **multi-stakeholder cooperation** - the first project **Built by Nature** amalgamated philanthropic organisations and local private resources; the second project, **AKUAL** harnessed public-private partnerships involving municipal and regional authorities - which prioritised local values in the initiatives' implementation.
- Local projects benefit from **indigenous knowledge, participatory implementation** mechanisms and the creation of ownership.
- A main risk in the diversity of stakeholders is a **power imbalance**, and a clash of interests/needs. However, the GG could mitigate these issues through strong and inclusive governance, transparent communication, dialogue with all stakeholders, accountability to local communities and by foresight of potential divergence.
- CSOs and LAs are pivotal to 360° insight.
- **Multilevel and multi-agency coordination** is essential for effective implementation.
- **Building trust** among stakeholders is a key factor in successful collaboration.
- **Time and resources** must be invested in **internal coordination** processes to ensure alignment.
- **Philanthropy** plays a critical role not only in social financing but also in funding high-risk, innovative initiatives that can later be scaled through traditional financing mechanisms
- Philanthropic actors also help convene spaces for coordination between diverse stakeholders.
- In the Basque Country, a percentage of water tax is allocated by the regional government to fund social impact initiatives, showing the potential of **financing innovation**.
- **Coordination efforts** included working with institutes of water and municipalities, creating new spaces for dialogue and joint planning.
- **Platforms**, such as the PFD, are effective in promoting coordination and should be expanded.

IV. Sustainable Climate & Economy

The [Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities](#) project, co-funded by the EU, supports climate-resilient and inclusive urban development in ten Indonesian cities. It enhances local governance through climate action plans, early warning systems, and environmental management. Through peer exchanges and triangular cooperation among local, national, and international stakeholders, the project succeeded in strengthening local actors and promoting sustainable urban planning.

The “Nothing New” Repair Centre, created in the framework of the [Western Balkans Eco Innovation and Circular economy Ecosystem](#) and launched in Skopje by ARNO, is the first regional hub promoting repair culture and circular economy in the Western Balkans. It combines hands-on repair services, workshops, and community engagement to reduce waste and build local skills. It aligns with EU green transition goals and advocates for policy support and flexible funding.

Sustainable Climate and Economy comments and reflections

- Discussions on sustainable climate and economy should focus on systemic causes and collective solutions.
- The two presentations (**Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities** and **Western Balkans Eco Innovation and Circular Economy Ecosystem**) underlined the potential of collaborative efforts between communities, CSOs and LAs in Indonesia and North Macedonia, respectively. The wealth of knowledge and practices gained from indigenous, women, and youth groups was highlighted.
- The perception and role of CSOs and LAs in terms of raising awareness, mobilising communities, and advocacy should be further explored and supported.
- The GG offers an opportunity to establish a framework for stakeholder dialogue, CSO and LA involvement in the project design stages, and to explore collaboration with other actors in the communities.
- **Allocate funds to local communities:** When institutions genuinely understand how local governments and communities tick, it makes it much easier to integrate programs into regional development plans.
- **Quality of partnerships matters**
- **Foster collective ownership and adaptability:** design them with flexibility, so they can adapt to other situations and contribute to broader learning.
- **Focus on sustainable energy in conflict zones** where it becomes a central focus.
- **Condition Global Gateway investments:** emphasises local knowledge, empower local partners, and strengthens small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to reduce their reliance on big multinational corporations.
- **Leverage local government networks for climate action:** Engage with existing local government organizations as key touch points for the EU's initiatives aimed at reaching communities directly.
- Funds channelled through initiatives like Global Gateway must **directly benefit local communities**.
- **Capitalize on existing structures.** Leveraging the concept of decentralized cooperation offers an opportunity to reach the places where development is truly needed. Especially with the climate crisis, local government organizations are existing connection points that the EU should absolutely use to reach communities directly through its initiatives.
- **Recognize the systemic and corporate accountability of climate issues:** identify the main perpetrators of climate issues. The EU should recognize their accountability in the problem and understand how it is not the people's responsibility to alleviate the issues created by other actors.

The next EU long-term budget: the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

This session focused on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) process and entry points for engagement by CSOs and LAs within the MFF negotiations. The session included a panel discussion on the role of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in some key thematic areas. To enhance EU development cooperation, participants stressed the need to protect international budgets, reforming funding mechanisms for transparency and direct CSO access, and empowering local actors through early engagement and dedicated support. Participants mentioned aligning the Global Gateway with sustainable development goals and involving private sector to leverage additional resources and gaining political support. Clear accountability measures are urged, including via the use of targets, with a call to adopt the next Gender Action Plan (GAP IV). They stressed the importance of a new EU narrative to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships and counter potential cuts to human development funding.

The session moderator, **Antonio Gambini**, EU Aid Policy Advisor, Oxfam, invited **Nicolas Stoetzel**, Deputy Head of Unit, D3 Coordination & Oversight of the Financing Instruments, DG INTPA to give an overview of the MFF framework, process and funding mechanism. He explained that, following the ordinary legal procedure and trilogue between the Commission, Parliament and Council, agreements should be reached, and subsequently adopted, by the end of 2027. Over 730 responses from 82 countries were received to the public consultation on the external action financing in preparation of the next MFF.

The key themes in the responses to the public consultation highlight that external action should be more targeted and impactful for partners, promote human rights, democracy and rule of law whilst aligning more closely with EU strategic interests. Internal and external funding should be synergised; there should be a simplification of financing instruments, and a balance should be struck between flexibility and predictability of funding for external action. There were strong calls for the EU to enhance economic diplomacy by supporting European businesses in third markets and prioritising sustainable development models, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and resilience in fragile environments. The 'bottom up' approach in EU-funded projects, involving local communities, CSOs, and small businesses was highlighted so that policy is aligned with expertise and needs of partner countries. Overall, spending targets were endorsed. It was also noted that the GG should be brought closer to EU companies, including Small and Medium Enterprises, and increase understanding of how they could be involved.

Laia Aycart, Policy and Advocacy Adviser, CONCORD highlighted the need for the MFF to be dually predictable and flexible to allow for the development of long-term commitments and crisis response; that ODA should target human development (HD) in terms of reducing poverty, inequalities, and enabling environments. However, the merging of the Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe), Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), and humanitarian aid funding into a single instrument would be concerning due to the dilution of goals and risk to earmarked budget lines. It was also noted that the changing EU political landscape with emergence from the right/far right has impacted ODA in Europe - for example in France and Sweden; and that civil society should participate in the discussion about the EU budget's own resources, by reflecting on joint proposals, including a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT).

Laia Aycart called for funding to be based on countries' needs. She considered that ODA cuts damage trust with partner countries and that shifting in Member States' political landscape threatens long-term international cooperation. CSOs call for a change in ODA governance to a more inclusive UN-style system; for greater transparency; and for the focus on priorities such as inequality and poverty reduction.

Laia Aycart explained that moving from an action-based gender target to an ODA-based one would be beneficial. In this regard, 5% of funding should be given to local women's rights organisations who are best placed to impact gender equality at local level. Moving into the next MFF, GAP IV should be adopted in parallel, to ensure its inclusion in the programming of the funds.

Roxana Nan, Global Partnerships Adviser, Enabel agreed that the merging of the three funds into a single instrument would not be suitable - there should be earmarking and clear allocation of predictable and flexible funds with oversight by the Member States. She underlined that there could be a risk that some fragile countries could be left behind by the GG unless the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is applied. Policy dialogue as a driver for cooperation should be maintained. The Team Europe approach was cited as successful and CSOs as important partners. It was highlighted that there should be a balance between the objectives of the next MFF, and complementarity between the financial tools including grants and loans.

Roxana Nan concluded that the involvement of the private sector is crucial and should be aligned with the SDGs, but should not be relied upon in humanitarian contexts.

Roxana Nan explained that flexibility should not be at the expense of predictability and added that the vast majority of NDICI funding is programmable, which helps implementing actors. She added that Member States do not have sufficient oversight of the use of the cushion.

Claire Frost, Head of Programmes at the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) stated that GG cannot fully address fragile contexts, as some areas are not open for private investments. She emphasised that, in the next MFF, the EU should address the root causes of fragility and support preventative action to enforce resilience around them. She added that flexibility in funding is fundamental to allow local CSOs to

adapt critical local response, and CSOs should be empowered to safeguard civic space and the enabling environment. She underlined that looking ahead within the GG, LAs and CSOs to should be further involved in the work on the key drivers of fragility, while under the current MFF, they are left behind. She emphasised that FFPAs are strong and flexible mechanisms to be supported.

Questions from the floor asked for guidance on the political reality and underlined that it is important to maintain engagement with as many partners as possible from across the political spectrum; emphasised the importance of targets, and underlined the need for increased thematic and grant funding for CSO and women's groups especially in the context of declining US aid; and whether decentralised cooperation can be a fundamental condition of implementation of the GG.

Claire Frost emphasised the pressing need to create a revised, attractive and politically palatable narrative that speaks to the current global appetite for the work that is done. She added that decentralised cooperation could be one of its key modalities.

Nicolas Stoetzel (DG INTPA) underlined that everyone agrees on the importance of international cooperation. He added that GG is a necessary step to better demonstrate why international cooperation is also in the EU's interests. **Laia Aycart** agreed that the current moment is one of opportunity and there should be more support for local CSOs and authorities within thematic programmes.

Roxana Nan reflected that there is a common problem across the Member States regarding the international development narrative and its communication to taxpayers. She suggested that messages should be framed not only in moral terms but highlighting mutual interests which resonate with EU citizens and other actors, including the European business sector and CSOs.

Further questions from the floor focused on how stakeholder feedback to the consultation would be harnessed by the Commission, what data insights could be used to inform the new narrative, and the need to look at other sources including philanthropic foundations, as well as a question focused on the CONCORD's proposal on new EU's own resources related to the FTT; how the role of foundations as implementers of EU funding is foreseen; that, although the changing financial context is a reality, the same actors - CSO and LAs - are willing, experienced, and poised to act. Feedback regarding the MFF underlined that citizens want to support human rights and this should be woven into the new narrative, alongside a sense of unity and partnership to convey that stakeholders and citizens are progressing human rights together.

Claire Frost reiterated that PFD constituents have a global reach of over 1 billion people. She called for congregated members to maximise the current reality, and to learn from past lessons, that LAs' roles must be safeguarded. **Roxanna Nan** and **Laia Aycart** suggested that, although a very technical topic which requires further exploration in terms of ethics and operationality, the taxation of windfall profits from defence is a possibility, as is tax on tech and the superrich. **Nicolas Stoetzel** confirmed that stakeholder responses to the consultation had been thoroughly analysed, and that the work on the next MFF is aligned with many of them.

Antonio Gambini closed the session with some sobering figures based on Oxfam America's assessment of the impact of US financial aid cuts - 95 million people will lose access to basic healthcare, 23 million children will lose access to education, and there is the potential for three million extra deaths per year. In this context, he highlighted that one of the EU Lisbon Treaty's objectives is to fight poverty - and it is in the EU's own strategic, long-term interest to assist citizens in partner countries to access health, food and education.

Closing session

This session recapped the two days of the Global PFD meeting discussions and asked participants to prioritise the main messages collated during the sessions. The results were as follows:



Key Outcomes (prioritised by participants):

- Global Gateway programming must include direct funding for CSOs and LAs to accompany the implementation and project work - to ensure their strong participation and the multiplier effect that these actors can deliver.
- The markers and targets for impacts on gender, inequalities, climate, human development, disability etc. should be maintained and reinforced.
- It is essential to maintain separate instruments for EU accession, international cooperation and humanitarian aid within the next Multiannual Financial Fund (MFF) – international cooperation should be proactive and preventative to support development.
- The PFD platform and other multi-stakeholder platforms must be strengthened at EU, regional, national, and sub-national levels to facilitate structured dialogue between CSOs, LAs, and the EU (global reach of 1.2 billion people). This will promote exchange, trust-building, and dissemination of information to constituencies, and serve as an effective feedback mechanism for EU policy developments.
- Funding to address fragility should not only focus on crisis response but should support response to other drivers including social, climate etc. The MFF must include funding for multi-stakeholder and local programming to address the other drivers.

After closing comments from several PFD members, including the **European Economic and Social Committee** and the **Committee of the Regions**, the PFD team thanked all the participants for fruitful exchanges and Head of Unit **Marlene Holzner** closed the meeting.

Annex 1: Human Development: Global Gateway and beyond

This annex captures key reflections from a World Café session conducted in three groups, each addressing a core question related to human development. The discussions focused on experiences, current trends, and future strategies to better integrate human development and inequality reduction into EU actions. The following are the key points that emerged from the discussions from each group.

Experience

Share experience in enhancing and addressing human development (HD) in your region? What specific solutions have partners brought (CSO, LA, EU, etc.), and what have their impacts been to date? How are areas such as health, education, social protection (including food security) and labour/employment policies, and basic services being addressed?

Local Ownership and Inclusion Are Essential

- Effective HD programs leverage local actors—governments, CSOs, cooperatives—for sustainability.
- Projects in Madagascar, Tunisia, and Senegal show that community-defined needs and leadership result in better outcomes.

Integrated Approaches Strengthen Resilience

- Combining education, employment, and social protection (e.g. skill training with access to healthcare or judicial support) increases resilience, especially among youth, women, and persons with disabilities.
- Climate-related challenges (e.g., crop management post-droughts/floods) require multi-sector solutions.

Transformative Change Requires Long-Term Investment

- Structural reforms (e.g., inclusive public healthcare in PPP models, inclusive education strategies, housing cooperatives) take time and policy commitment.
- Localising SDGs involves research, inclusive monitoring, and targeted financing.

Social Impact Must Be Mainstreamed in Business Models

- Business engagement is more effective when social responsibility (RSC) is internalised rather than imposed.
- The Senegal experience shows how voluntary RSC can evolve into national policy.

Digital Skills and Innovation Are Catalysts for Employment

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres and digital training enhance youth employment and offer a scalable model, especially in post-conflict or underserved areas.

Recommendations

- Prioritise inclusive governance frameworks that embed civil society, local governments, and marginalised groups (e.g., youth, persons with disabilities) in policy design and implementation.

- Support long-term, integrated financing for systems-level change, particularly in healthcare, education, and disaster preparedness.
- Invest in digital infrastructure and training as a cross-cutting enabler for employment, governance, and service delivery.
- Design interventions with community co-leadership from the start; avoid top-down approaches.
- Ensure dialogue mechanisms are in place between communities and private sector (e.g., extractive industries, co-ops) to prevent rights violations and strengthen accountability.
- Use the localisation of SDGs not only as a reporting tool but as a transformational process, to identify local priorities and social finance pathways.
- Promote social responsibility as a strategic asset, not a burden—link it to resilience, reputation, and local development.
- Engage in early warning and dialogue systems to co-develop solutions with communities and avoid conflict.

Current context and trends

Do you feel a change in the current context? How can Human Development and related HD targets be ensured within and beyond GG? How are different populations, notably women and girls and most excluded populations, incorporated into this approach?

Elevate Local & Civil Society Engagement

- Bring local organisations, including civil society, into projects at an early stage for co-creation, ensuring they retain their independent, critical position and are not just seen as contractors.
- Provide direct grant funding and political space for civil society, enabling them to influence project definition and overcome reliance on intermediaries or lack of economic power.
- Create formal, ongoing platforms for all national-level stakeholders (local governments, civil society, youth) to genuinely participate in project design, implementation, and oversight.
- Improve information flow and foster stronger cross-sector collaboration to ensure partners are fully aware and engaged.
- Address the lack of consultation with Indigenous peoples and broader stakeholder engagement.

Rethink Development Paradigms & Tackle Systemic Issues

- Challenge the sole reliance on economic growth for human development; prioritise approaches centred on meaningful participation and direct human well-being.
- Address worsening inequalities stemming from structural problems in financial systems, problematic tax burdens, interest rates, and high healthcare costs.
- Do not increase the debt burden on countries; actively work to reduce inequalities, reform financial systems, and advocate for debt relief.
- Prioritise peace as a prerequisite for sustainable development and uphold human rights, demanding accountability in conflicts.

- Keep the Agenda 2030 and SDGs as the central, non-negotiable framework.
- Address the concerning shift towards defence/military spending.

Ensure Accountable & Transparent Investment

- Integrate robust anti-corruption measures into all projects, particularly Global Gateway initiatives.
- Implement financial transparency and regulate private finance to prevent illicit flows; ensure public funds secure public services, not just private profit.
- Directly allocate a percentage of Global Gateway funds to local development and ensure private sector contributors also provide grants for human development.
- Address the limitations and potential profit-driven nature of the Global Gateway approach to Human Development.
- Demand long-term planning and commitment for Human Development investment.

Optimise Private Sector Role & Leverage Local Capacity

- Reduce over-reliance on the private sector as the sole solution; develop tailored approaches for regions less commercially appealing.
- Ensure job creation through private investment strictly upholds labour rights and social dialogue.
- Address the separation/silos between the private and defence sectors.
- Systematically embed human development into all projects, from procurement to long-term strategy.
- Use existing local government structures and decentralised cooperation to effectively reach communities, particularly for climate action.

Strengthen Monitoring & Evaluation

- Implement robust M&E tools and clear evaluation criteria to ensure no one is left behind, integrating Human Development measurements and SDG alignment from the very beginning.

Moving forward:

What are your suggestions for better integrating human development and inequality reduction into the EU's work going forward? What specific strategies or changes would you recommend to enhance the effectiveness and impact of EU actions within the current framework? How do we ensure that EU funding is also strengthening systems and actors at country level? How do we ensure that no one is left behind? Increase ownership of local communities?

Genuine Partnerships & Local Empowerment

- **Foster inclusive dialogue:** Create formal, ongoing platforms for all national-level stakeholders to engage in designing, implementing, and monitoring projects. This means involving everyone—from national governments to **local authorities, civil society, and youth voices**.

- **Boost transparency and collaboration:** Improve information flow and ensure clear plans for partner engagement. Break down silos by building bridges between different levels of governance and civil society to share knowledge and experiences.
- **Support sustainable triangular cooperation models** that benefit both the Global North and South.

Community-Centric Development & Debt Solutions

- **Prioritise community needs:** Actively listen to communities to understand their direct needs, ensuring development initiatives are genuinely community-driven, not solely profit-focused (as is a concern with the Global Gateway).
- **Address debt crises:** Advocate forcefully for **debt consolidation and reparations** for countries struggling with social debt, recognising that current EU lending practices can worsen these situations.
- **Sustainable development is impossible without peace.** The EU must take a stronger stance on conflicts, prioritise investing in human rights, and ensure accountability.
- **Uphold Agenda 2030:** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 are fundamental and must remain central to all efforts, independent of single states' actions.

Responsible Investment & Accountability

- **Integrate corruption mitigation measures** into all projects, especially Global Gateway initiatives, given the risks in many implementing countries.
- **Regulate private finance to prevent illicit financial flows:** Implement clear guidelines to prevent tax breaks for multinational organisations from leading to illicit financial flows. Public funds should not solely guarantee private investments, and these investments should prioritise public services like care and health.
- **Reduce over-reliance on the private sector:** the private sector is not the sole solution for public issues. Develop tailored approaches for regions less attractive to private companies and ensure job creation prioritises **labour rights and social dialogue**.
- **Adopt long-term and systemic thinking for sustainable outcomes,** where human development is embedded into all projects
- Compel private companies involved in initiatives like the Global Gateway to contribute to human development through **grants and subsidies**.

Simplified Governance

- **Simplify processes and reduce bureaucracy:** Create project clusters with controlled investments to foster good governance without excessive bureaucracy, simplifying practices wherever possible.
- **Safeguard Civil Society's Role and independence:** CSOs must retain their independent, critical position and be empowered through direct grant funding, moving away from reliance on intermediaries.
- **Facilitate CSOs active participation in the political dialogue, integrate CSOs and LAs** meaningfully from the **very definition of projects**, not just as implementers. This includes their

participation in **risk assessment** across all project stages.

Redefining EU's approach to partnerships

- **Rethink the development paradigm:** Challenge the systemic belief that economic growth alone automatically leads to human development. Advocate for a different approach that prioritises meaningful participation and invests in ways that directly foster human development, going beyond mere economic indicators.
- **Define Global Gateway's social impact:** need to clearly articulate and demonstrate the real social transformation driven by tools such as Global Gateway, and to ensure all stakeholders truly understand this content.
- **Citizen inclusion in banking approach:** While a banking approach to human development isn't inherently wrong, it must actively include citizen participation.