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From: General Secretariat of the Council

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To: Delegations

Subject: A coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes
- Council conclusions (18 May 2026)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on A coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes, as approved by the Council at its 4174th meeting held on 18 May 2026

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

On a coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes

A coherent and sustained approach to fragility

1. The Council acknowledges that fragility is an ever-growing global challenge, driven by multidimensional risks and aggravated by multiple crises, thereby threatening international security and stability, disrupting economic security and exacerbating forced displacement and irregular migration, including in the EU's neighbourhood and its partner countries. The Council underlines that addressing fragility effectively is a strategic priority for the EU.
2. The Council underlines the importance of a more systematic and comprehensive, tailored, coherent, coordinated and visible EU response to fragility, grounded in the Union's values and principles, particularly in a context of increasing geopolitical tensions. It highlights the importance of integrated, transformative, long-term, human rights-based approaches that are context-specific, conflict sensitive, sustainable, and address the root causes of gender inequality. They should be based on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus and encompass prevention, anticipatory action, peacebuilding and resilience strengthening, contributing to addressing the root causes and drivers of fragility, including conflict, poverty, and climate related challenges. All EU actions should demonstrate the EU's commitment to effective multilateralism and a rules-based international order, including international law, with the UN at its core. EU actions should support complementarity across the different areas of the Union's external action, including, where relevant, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

3. Within this approach, sustained development cooperation in fragile settings, underpinned by EU development principles and aligned with the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, should reinforce the resilience and long-term stability of partner countries and promote their transition from aid dependency to sustainable development pathways. The EU will continue promoting international peace and security, human rights and rule of law, as well as multilateral solutions to common challenges. The Council further highlights that enhancing social protection systems and addressing poverty are key to reducing the risk of fragility.
4. The Council stresses the importance of ensuring appropriate and flexible EU financing in contexts experiencing fragility. It calls for stepping up the use of innovative, flexible and mutually reinforcing financing mechanisms, including de-risking instruments to mobilise private funding for local entrepreneurship, SMEs and job creation. Simultaneously, the Council emphasizes the need to strengthen debt sustainability and transparency to ensure fiscal resilience in partner countries. In this regard, the Council underlines the vital role of job creation in fragile settings, where barriers to generating opportunities for livelihood are particularly high.
5. The Council underlines the need for focused and sustained engagement in partner countries and regions where fragility is high or extreme and EU action strategic, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, including the Sahel, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). Particular attention will further be paid to fostering stability and resilience in our common neighbourhood, including the Western Balkans and the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, taking into account their specific vulnerabilities and challenges. The Council highlights the importance of equal and fair access to reliable and affordable basic services, notably clean water, nutritious food, adequate housing, quality education, access to quality healthcare services, justice and trustworthy institutions, as key enablers of social cohesion, economic and inclusive participation and trust in public institutions. EU engagement should contribute to addressing the humanitarian, social, economic, environmental and security consequences of fragility, including poverty and inequality, violence, including gender-based violence, and instability, food insecurity, forced displacement and irregular migration.

6. The Council recognises that women, girls, youth, as well as persons in vulnerable situations, are disproportionately affected by fragility. It underlines the importance to continuously empower them as agents of change for peace and sustainable development, notably through greater and equitable access to education, skills and employment opportunities. The Council stresses that tackling multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and gender inequalities and promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in all spheres of social, economic, political and public life, contributes to more resilient, peaceful and inclusive societies. The Council reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. It takes note of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III of the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which was welcomed through Presidency Conclusions, and its role to continue significantly increasing the strategic importance of gender equality in the EU's external action. Looking forward, the Council acknowledges the preparation of a fourth Gender Action Plan (GAP IV), which should demonstrate continued commitment and leadership by setting concrete targets and to continue to promote gender equality, women and girls' empowerment and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In this context, the Council remains committed to globally advance gender equality, women and girls' empowerment and SRHR, as per paragraph 34 of the New European Consensus on Development, and in cooperation with partner governments, civil society and private sector.
7. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms the commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU also stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.

Strategic alignment and multilateral engagement

8. The Council highlights the importance of stepping up the Team Europe approach with regard to fragility. It should be complemented, as relevant, with engagement with like-minded partners, development banks, the private sector, and regional organisations alongside effective cooperation with multilateral partners, when relevant, such as the UN and International Financial Institutions.
9. The Council reaffirms its commitment to mutually beneficial partnerships to strengthen local ownership, transparency and inclusiveness. It remains firmly committed to empowering and cooperating with local actors, including local authorities, civil society, local private sector, including SMEs, and independent media, ensuring that interventions contribute to sustainable, locally-owned solutions, support inclusive and accountable governance, and reduce aid dependency.
10. The Council underlines that the EU must retain the ability to continue working through a broader range of tools and approaches across the HDP nexus, to respond to the basic needs of populations, promote human development and build peace and social cohesion. It underscores the critical role of joint and shared context, gender and conflict analyses and conflict sensitivity, and that all relevant EU instruments should be mutually supportive and strategically aligned.
11. The Council notes the transformative potential of the Global Gateway strategy and its 360-degree approach in fragile settings, when applied in a context and conflict sensitive manner, in line with the do-no-harm principle. When the Global Gateway strategy is applied in fragile contexts, Global Gateway investments should appropriately complement the other more tailored and flexible EU tools. Conflict-sensitive Global Gateway investments bear potential to generate peace-positive effects by providing livelihood opportunities and fostering stability in fragile settings.

12. Furthermore, the Council underlines the importance of ensuring that EU ODA is adequately and transparently directed towards fragile and conflict affected contexts, where needs are greatest and where sustained engagement is essential to support stability, humanitarian needs, resilience and long-term development, leaving no one behind, while safeguarding progress towards the EU collective ODA target for LDCs and alignment with partner country priorities and the development effectiveness principles.

A Forward- Looking EU Agenda

13. The Council stresses the importance of sustained and principled EU engagement in fragile settings, in accordance with the HDP nexus.

14. The Council underlines that conflict sensitivity and robust context analysis must serve as strategic safeguards that protect both EU interests and partner countries resilience, especially in contexts affected by high and extreme fragility. The Council stresses that these safeguards are indispensable for ensuring that EU interventions comply with the do no harm principle and contribute to stability, sustainable peace and long-term resilience. A strong Team Europe approach and joint context analyses are necessary to allow for efficiency and coherence while maximising the leverage of the intervention.

15. The Council will work to ensure that the EU's external financing framework is fit for purpose to address fragility in an integrated, localised, and sustainable manner, promoting coherence across instruments and alignment with development principles, the EU's strategic objectives, the needs and priorities of partner countries and geopolitical realities.

2025 Annual Report on the implementation of the EU's external action instruments in 2024

16. The Council welcomes the 2025 Annual Report on the implementation of the EU's external action instruments in 2024, which provides a comprehensive overview of the EU's financial support for international partnerships, the European Neighbourhood, humanitarian assistance, enlargement, peace, security and defence, and crisis response.

17. The Council notes the report's value in demonstrating how the EU and its Member States, acting through a "Team Europe" approach, continued to address global challenges as well as the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, while promoting EU values and strategic interests, including through advancing the Global Gateway strategy, and contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), along with the Paris agreement.
18. The Council underlines the importance of the annual report as a tool for transparency, accountability and political steer by the Council. The Council stresses that its timely publication is essential to enable effective political guidance and informed oversight, and recalls the need to ensure that data is made available in a form that facilitates analysis and comparability over time. The Council calls for further streamlining the format of the main report to enhance its usability, building on the continuous improvements welcomed in previous years, while preserving the information contained in the annexes.
19. The Council recognises the importance of strengthening the report's strategic orientation, including through clearer links to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The Council further underlines the need for enhanced information on ODA eligibility under NDICI–Global Europe, and support to Least Developed Countries. The report should provide clearer reporting on progress towards all targets, as well as the identification of areas where additional efforts are required notably to ensure they are met by end 2027, particularly for the climate and gender targets. The Council also notes the importance of clarifying the role of EU Delegations in data collection and underlines that reporting should continue to support coherent long- term planning across the EU's external action.
20. The Council underlines the importance of external instruments effectively delivering on their legal targets. It welcomes the progress toward commitments for social inclusion and human development, migration and forced displacement, and gender equality. To achieve these goals, the Council highlights the coherent deployment of the full EU toolbox and implementing modalities, which allow for tailor-made and differentiated approaches. Working with a wide array of partners, including European DFIs, civil society, and local actors, ensures the EU remains a flexible and reliable partner capable of addressing global challenges.

21. The Council underlines the importance of enhancing the visibility and communication of the EU's external action and positioning the EU as a reliable and trusted partner through strategic communication. The Council notes the continuous progress achieved and the efforts to strengthen strategic communication in external action. The Council emphasises the importance of reaching and effectively engaging non-institutional audiences in partner countries through targeted communication campaigns, which illustrate the results of EU action in a coherent and impactful manner.
22. The Council recalls the importance of consistent, transparent and coordinated communication efforts among Team Europe actors, including through close coordination at partner country level between EU Delegations and Member States. The Council encourages continued efforts to ensure that communication on EU external action reflects the collective Team Europe engagement.

Annual Report on EU development aid targets

23. The Council recalls that the EU and its Member States are the world's largest provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA) with a collective contribution of EUR 82.5 billion in 2025, accounting for 48% of global ODA. The Council notes with concern the historical decline in ODA worldwide in 2025 as reported by the OECD¹ and underlines the need for the EU and its Member States to continue to lead by example as Team Europe.
24. The Council welcomes the Commission's annual analysis on EU Development Aid targets. The Council also takes positive note of the OECD's 2025 Peer Review of EU development cooperation. Updated figures reconfirm that the EU and its Member States remain the world's largest provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA). The Council wishes to report the following to the European Council:
- a) In 2025, the EU and its Member States accounted for 48% of global Official Development Assistance (ODA)², thereby demonstrating continued leadership on the global agenda for sustainable development as the largest global provider of ODA.

¹ OECD refers to a 23.1% decrease in 2025 compared to 2024 regarding DAC member countries' total ODA in real terms (based on USD constant prices), the largest annual contraction on record.

² Based on preliminary information on 2025 ODA data from the OECD-DAC. Global ODA is defined here as including the ODA provided by the EU collectively and all other DAC and non-DAC donor countries reporting to the OECD.

b) EU collective ODA³ represented 0.44% of EU Gross National Income (GNI) in 2025, corresponding to EUR 82.5 billion. This constitutes a decrease compared to its 0.50% share of EU GNI of 2024 (EUR 89.5 billion).

c) EU collective ODA to Least Developed Countries (LDCs)⁴ represented 0.08% of EU GNI in 2024, corresponding to EUR 14.5 billion. This constitutes a decrease compared to its 0.12% share of EU GNI of 2023 (EUR 20 billion). The Council notes, in this regard that the EU's collective ODA to Least Developed Countries remains below the 0.20% target and requires sustained efforts.

25. The Council continues to encourage all Member States to progress towards achieving their individual targets as well as to remain on a credible trajectory towards the EU's collective commitment to provide 0.7% of GNI as ODA⁵, and 0.2% as ODA to LDCs by 2030. The Council also encourages Member States to ensure that an appropriate share of their ODA, for example 10%, is devoted to humanitarian action, on the basis of increasing humanitarian needs.

³ Based on preliminary information on 2025 ODA data from the OECD-DAC. EU collective ODA is measured on a grant equivalent basis and represents the sum of ODA from the EU Member States and the proportion of ODA provided by the EU Institutions that is not imputed to Member States or to non-EU donors such as the United Kingdom.

⁴ Based on 2024 ODA data from the OECD-DAC. EU collective ODA to LDCs includes EU Member States' bilateral net ODA to LDCs, imputed multilateral ODA to LDCs and regional net ODA known to benefit LDCs as well as EU Institutions' regional net ODA known to benefit LDCs (not including the UK share).

⁵ Member States who joined the Union after 2002 committed to striving to increase their ODA to 0.33% of GNI.

26. The Council underlines the importance of deploying the full range of funding modalities together with technical cooperation in a complementary manner to deliver on these commitments. The Council confirms the need to ensure that the EU and its Member States contribute actively to shaping an international development co-operation and humanitarian system that is fully equipped to address today's global challenges.
27. The Council underlines the importance of better and more systematic measurement of impact, as well as inclusive data collection and transparent reporting on all official sources of financing, including resources mobilised from the private sector, through the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS), as well as the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) and the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). The Council also underlines the importance of tracking all sources of financing for investment in sustainable development.

European Court of Auditors – Special Report 20/2025

28. The Council welcomes the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 20/2025 on "Commission support to fight hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa" and notes that the Commission has accepted the Court's recommendations and will implement them to accelerate progress towards addressing one of the most important global challenges.
29. Reaffirming the link between food and water security and fragility, the Council underlines that progress towards eradicating hunger and malnutrition, fosters stability and resilience and supports mutually beneficial partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Council also emphasises the importance of addressing this link in the frame of G7 and G20.
30. The Council notes that, over the last decade, EU actions across instruments concluded contracts amounting to about EUR 23.2 billion for hunger-related initiatives (2014–2024), with nearly half of that amount destined to Sub-Saharan Africa.

31. Consistent with the Court's findings, the Council underlines the need to balance humanitarian relief with long-term development outcomes, notably sustained support for resilient and sustainable agrifood and aquatic value chains, and to reinforce needs-based targeting and results monitoring, using outcome indicators to improve impact and sustainability. In this regard, the Council encourages a more integrated implementation of the HDP nexus approach.
32. The Council recalls the added value of the Team Europe approach and underlines the potential role of the Global Gateway strategy, among other tools and strategies for scaling up sustainable, locally anchored production systems and value chains, while ensuring the availability of nutritious food for the most vulnerable. The Council invites further Team Europe coordination to advance global food security and nutrition, and calls for stronger data, monitoring and coordination to sharpen results.