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Human development in the EU's international spending in turbulent times: FROM WORDS TO DEEDS?

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The knock-on effects of the Russian war against Ukraine are felt particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, with inflation, soaring prices of fertilisers and further food insecurity. This not only stresses the need for continuous and increasing support in human development sectors like nutrition, but also comes with a (geo)political cost to Europe.

Against the backdrop of the conflict, the EU has finalised its programming for much of the €79.5 billion Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-GE). This paper analyses how human development was addressed in the Multi-Annual Indicative programmes (MIPs) in sub-Saharan Africa. We suggest that human development has become a higher priority in the programming of NDICI-GE than originally planned. The EU is taking a differentiated approach to promote human development in partner countries and trying to balance country priorities and its own geopolitical objectives. Yet, it remains to be seen how this will be implemented and whether the EU will follow through on its commitments, amidst new challenges presented by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

While official development assistance (ODA) plays an important role in how the EU is supporting human development in partner countries, going forward, it will be necessary to strengthen the engagement beyond ODA. This will mean leveraging additional finance from investors and the private sector, and enhancing political and policy dialogue with partner countries with a view to promoting stronger ownership of the human development agenda.

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Acronyms

AAP	Annual Action Plan
AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
CSO	Civil-society organisation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
D4D	Digital for Development
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DFI	Development finance institution
EAQIP	Education Access and Quality Improvement Programme
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EEA	European Economic Area
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development plus
EIB	European Investment Bank
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FMO	Financierings-Maatschappij voor Ontwikkelingslanden / Dutch Development Bank
GAP III	EU Gender Action Plan III
HD	Human development
IDPs	Internally displaced people
IFC	International Finance Corporation

INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
LDCs	Least developed countries
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programmes
NDICI-GE	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe
ODA	Official development assistance
OeAD	Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OJEU	Official Journal of the European Union
OPHI	Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative
SDG	Sustainable development goal
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
TEPP	Team Europe Partnership Portal
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UHC	Universal health coverage
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

With the COVID-19 pandemic, human development has come back to the EU's political agenda. The EU is increasingly seeing its strategic value also in the geopolitical context, and seeks to become a 'partner of reference' for the countries in Africa. The EU has reiterated its commitment to spend 20% of its ODA on human development in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-GE) regulation, broadly including spending on health, education, social protection, basic nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and gender. It also wants to leverage human development to make progress in its other geopolitical priorities.

The EU finished the programming of its new financial instrument for external action – NDICI-GE – for the period of 2021-2027 at the end of 2021. Our analysis shows that human development has received a stronger priority in the programming of NDICI-GE than was originally planned when the programming started in 2019. This has partially been a consequence of the momentum created by the pandemic, the growing interest and needs in human development both in the EU and partner countries, and the overall political leadership from the EU Commission and Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA). Over 90% of the Multi-Annual Indicative (MIPs) feature human development as a specific priority area or to be mainstreamed across other areas. The focus on human development is also reflected in the financial commitments expressed in the sub-Saharan African country MIPs, as on average one third of the initial funding allocations go to human development priority areas in MIPs where there is one. However, human development is addressed in varying ways through the MIPs, and at this stage it is not possible to estimate whether the funding will be enough to achieve the EU's own targets, or whether the partners consider the emphasis on human development to be adequate.

While the overall picture of the programming results is quite promising, the EU is working in an increasingly volatile global context. The war in Ukraine has shifted the political landscape and created new kinds of pressures on developing countries and the allocation of European development funding. The knock on effects of the war can be dire in Africa, leading to food insecurity, inflation, and soaring prices of fertilisers, which not only leads to human suffering, but also comes with a (geo)political cost to Europe. Furthermore, while the EU institutions' allocations to Sub-Saharan Africa expressed in the NDICI-GE regulation may be harder to reallocate, history shows that bilateral ODA resources from European countries are more likely to be subject to reprioritisation and the EU institutions managed ODA will also come under pressure.

In this paper we provide insights on how the EU should move forward in supporting human development in partner countries, in this volatile context. The EU needs to keep up with its political and financial commitments to Africa and to human development, failing to do so would undermine the EU's political clout. Yet, framing human development increasingly as a geopolitical issue may bring stronger interest from the European side leading to increased funding for these priorities. This can be considered a win-win situation if it contributes both to the longer term recovery from the pandemic and adds to resilience towards future crises. But, in the world of the changing geopolitical context and priorities, if human development is not seen as important in its own right, the long term commitment to promoting it may be hard to find. Furthermore, the more interest-driven approach to human development from the EU side can contribute to tensions with partner country ownership and needs-based approaches. In this regard, the EU should develop better listening and consultation skills.

The EU sees strong interlinkages between human development and its other geopolitical priorities, including green deal, digital, management of migration, and peace, as a key approach to improve its efficiency and visibility. However, these links need to be more elaborated in practice to make sure that the multi-sector and interlinked approach can bring tangible added value to partners. The mid-term review of the NDICI-GE in 2024 will be an

opportunity for the EU to reconsider the budget allocations and change its approaches as necessary as well as assess with partners whether the multi-sector approach has worked. In this light, it will be important that adequate monitoring and sharing of experiences takes place, to allow for course correction as needed.

Although the programming documents rarely give a detailed view of the consultation process of the EU's partners, interviews highlighted the role of political buy-in from the partner country side in priority setting. The approach is differentiated depending on the country and regional context as well as the EU's and member states' interests. Yet, moving forward, the EU needs to facilitate ownership and interest on the partners' side. Although internal and context-specific factors are key drivers of political interest, the EU can facilitate ownership through political and policy dialogues on TEIs and could actively involve partners in the planning and implementation of projects and programmes to a much greater degree than in the programming phase. Up until now, although the programming included consultations of various stakeholders, including civil society, the main focus has been on ensuring coordination with the member states in the context of the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs). While the internal and context specific factors are key drivers of political interest in partner countries, the EU can facilitate ownership through political and policy dialogues and through consultations.

Furthermore, there is clear scope and need for the EU to engage more with DFIs and coordinate better with them to identify opportunities to invest in human development sectors and with the private sector. Indeed, although ODA plays a key role in the EU's support to human development, it should not be the only way of engagement. To be credible as the partner of choice in human development, the EU and member states must engage beyond ODA, for instance by stronger inclusion of human development in political and policy dialogues; addressing the issues of vaccine inequality and helping partner countries to adapt to the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

1. Introduction

When the COVID-19 crisis hit in 2020, human development¹ returned to the front and centre of the European Union's (EU) development agenda. The reasons for this change are twofold. First, the pandemic revealed the weaknesses of health systems in many low- and middle-income countries, closed schools and widened already existing inequalities, while also creating new ones. Second, as the pandemic increased geopolitical competition, so the EU's and its member states' response to the shock and the socio-economic crisis beyond their borders became a geopolitical matter (Veron and Sergejeff 2021). Indeed, human development, including health, education, social protection, gender equality, basic nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene (often abbreviated as WASH) is not only a valuable goal in itself, it has been considered as '*a key vehicle for achieving the geopolitical priorities of the Commission*' (EC 2021a) and an enabler of resilience in the face of climate change and exogenous shocks (CoEU 2021a).

However, human development is not the only priority for the EU or its partners. The war in Ukraine is monopolising a great deal of political energy and is also placing new kinds of pressures on developing countries and the allocation of European development funding. For Africa, the knock-on effects of the crisis may become devastating. Yet, it is too soon to say how it will affect European funding allocations and the policy focus in the medium to long term. Yet, at least in the short term, the increased funding for Ukraine may not mean less EU institutional aid for other priority areas, given that the initial funding for most of Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America has already been allocated and published in Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs), and also given how the EU budget for 2022 has been organised. Although the agreed envelopes in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-GE) regulation would be difficult to reopen (see Gavas and Pleeck 2022a), the allocations in MIPs are still indicative and subject to change in the mid-term review.

So, while the EU institutions' Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Africa may be spared in the short-to-medium term, history suggests that bilateral ODA resources from European countries are more likely to be subject to reprioritisation and that the EU institutions' managed ODA will also come under pressure. The allocations in the 2023 EU budget will be key to watch.

This raises the question of whether the EU institutions will be expected to fill the 'gap' left by EU member states and others. The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, has called for more support for low- and middle-income countries that have been most affected by the war (Borrell 2022). At the same time, the war in Ukraine has also aggravated the pandemic's economic and social impact.

In this context, the momentum of and political interest in human development needs to be sustained in order to ensure that the EU meets its commitments and supports its partner countries in coping with the challenges facing them. While EU ODA has its critics, and is just one of the tools in the EU's tool box, many countries, particularly the least developed countries (LDCs), do not have many alternative sources of human development finance and what sources they have are tending to shrink rather than expand.

¹ Human development refers both to certain capabilities (i.e. health, education, and a decent standard of living) and to the living conditions that enable people to obtain these capabilities (i.e. environmental sustainability, political participation and gender equality) (UNDP 2020). The EU uses a specific method for calculating what it views as spending on human development. This includes official development assistance (ODA) in programmes managed by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) for basic health, basic education, social protection, gender equality, nutrition and WASH (see Veron and Sergejeff 2021). Although the EU revised its method of calculating human development spending for the purpose of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-GE), it had not yet published this revised method at the time of writing. While acknowledging the broad nature of the concept, this paper focuses primarily on EU support for education, health, social protection and gender equality.

While fighting the pandemic, the EU was also programming its new financial instrument for external action (the NDICI-GE) for 2021-2027 in consultation with partners. The NDICI-GE gives the EU an opportunity to strengthen its external action and become a more geopolitical actor that is bolder in promoting its interests and values in its foreign and development policy. Following the approval of most of the MIPs (which state how the EU is planning to spend its money in partner countries and regions in the coming years) in December 2021, the EU is now moving towards the implementation of [NDICI-GE](#).

This paper² is the first one of the series of two papers on human development. This first part is focusing strongly on the MIPs. It looks at how human development is promoted as a part of the wider framework of the EU's (geopolitical) interests. Whereas this paper is meant to lay the ground for more in-depth qualitative research, the second paper of this series will focus on the African side, discussing partner countries' demands, and the stakeholders' perspectives.

This paper argues that, although the EU increasingly sees strategic value in supporting human development in partner countries beyond traditional development cooperation, there is still plenty to be done if the EU institutions wish to achieve the ambitious goals they have set for themselves. Not only have the EU institutions set themselves the aim of spending 20% of their ODA on human development and social inclusion, it also wants to become a 'partner of reference' for the countries in sub-Saharan Africa (EC 2021a). Moreover, the EU wishes to use ODA for human development more strategically to leverage other geopolitical priorities and become a credible partner beyond development cooperation.

Questions remain as to how the EU will implement its approach to human development, and how this will be received by its partners. Such questions surround the opportunities for leveraging innovative ways of financing, integrating human development in flagship initiatives like the Global Gateway, and monitoring and achieving the 20% spending target. It will also be important for the EU to engage and promote human development beyond ODA and development cooperation. Furthermore, the EU needs to ensure ownership and buy-in of the partners, including non-state actors.

In the face of the war in Ukraine, and if the EU is to remain a geopolitically relevant actor and maintain credibility with its partners, it will be crucial to uphold key financial commitments and ensure that human development figures more prominently in political and policy dialogues. Although linking human development more closely with the EU's geopolitical priorities creates opportunities, it may also pose risks. The key challenge for the EU will be to follow through on its commitments to human development in the coming years, and to use its resources strategically to maximise impact.

2. Human development challenges in the wake of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine

The current pressures on human development are the result of multiple overlapping crises. While many African countries are still recovering from the social and economic crises caused by the pandemic, the ongoing war in Ukraine is both increasing the need for aid for human development and putting pressure on aid budgets in Europe.

² This paper is based on an analysis of the regional MIP for sub-Saharan Africa and 11 country MIPs, including the available annual action plans (AAPs) for the countries in question, as well as the thematic MIPs for Global Challenges and Erasmus+. The countries analysed in more detail are Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Mauritania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Guinea, Somalia and Mali. Other MIPs were also reviewed, albeit in less detail. The findings are complemented by interviews with EU officials at EU headquarters and four EU delegations, as well as by the views of a number of member states.

It has been estimated that the knock-on effects of the war, namely soaring food and fertiliser prices and inflation, will hit many African countries later this year. The president of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Akinwumi Adesina, has warned that the war in Ukraine will have a dire effect on food security and energy supply in the continent (Dutton 2022; AfDB 2022a). Many African countries depend on Russian and Ukrainian wheat imports. For instance, 80% of the wheat imported by Sudan, Egypt, Tanzania, Eritrea and Benin and more than 95% of the sunflower oil imported by Algeria, Sudan and Tunisia comes from Ukraine or Russia (McNair 2022a; Dietz 2022; Knaepen and Dekeyser 2022). East Africa depends on Russia and Ukraine for a third of its wheat supplies and countries, such as Rwanda, that have relied largely on imported Russian wheat and fertiliser have had to look for other sources (Louw-Vaudran 2022; Ntirenganya 2022). Thus, the war in Ukraine may lead to further food insecurity in many sub-Saharan African countries. This will affect human development in several ways, for example through health effects and even educational attainment (see Plan International 2022; Oxfam International 2022a). Soaring food and energy prices may also lead to further social unrest in many African countries (Shalal and Savage 2022; Knoll 2022). This underlines the importance of following through on commitments made before the war.

Sub-Saharan Africa already faced many challenges before the war. **The COVID-19 pandemic has created – and continues to create – grave crises in many low- and middle income countries, including in sub-Saharan Africa.** For many countries, COVID-19 has added a layer to an already fraught situation involving poverty and inequality, trade tensions, inflation and fragility (The Economist 2022; Mustasilta 2020). The impact of COVID-19 on the poorest countries has often been underestimated as a limited level of direct mortality has kept them outside the international spotlight (UNDP and OPHI 2021).

Nonetheless, the socio-economic consequences for poorer countries are significant because the challenges resulting from the measures taken to contain the pandemic have exacerbated chronic problems such as high unemployment rates, unsustainable debt and political and social unrest due to bad governance and resource management. The pandemic has impacted the sub-Saharan region at a time when countries were recording economic growth and had demonstrated impressive progress in health indicators, education and poverty reduction (Veron and Sergejeff 2021; Agwanda et al. 2020). However, there has been a big reverse in these gains in human development during the past two years. (Jones et al. 2022)

According to the AfDB, Africa's economic growth contracted due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to an economic recession (AfDB 2021a). Sub-Saharan Africa, which in 2020 recorded the worst economic performance in 50 years, will be the slowest region to recover from the pandemic (Selassie and Hakobyan 2021). The pandemic has had a huge impact on sub-Saharan Africa which, despite seeing certain improvements in the past two decades, was already facing challenges to inclusive economic growth. This was particularly the case in conflict-prone sub-regions in which inequalities have been deepened by security issues (UNECA 2021).

Even though debt relief and access to Special Drawing Rights are both potent tools to support African partners' recovery from the pandemic, the EU and its member states have not yet been able to make game-changing interventions in these areas. The President of the AfDB has highlighted on many occasions throughout the pandemic that Africa 'needs debt relief, debt restructuring and debt sustainability' (AfDB 2021b), and called for an African financial stability mechanism to help low-income countries build their resilience to external shocks. Although the debate on debt relief has revolved around the recovery from the pandemic, negotiations should take a long-term view of development objectives especially in view of the negative impact of the war in Ukraine (Andalou Agency, 2021). It is therefore in the EU's interest to find a joint response to debt relief as opposed to increasing aid, as African governments are pursuing partnerships that can help improve their self-sufficiency in the longer term.

Moreover, some commentators argue that the sanctions imposed on Russia have been taken with very little thought about their impact on partner countries' human development outcomes (see Rubio 2022). In line with this, representatives of the African Union have also raised concerns about the collateral impact caused by the disruption

of the Swift payment system, even though the EU's package of sanctions does not arguably target the agricultural sector (Herszenhorn 2022; Mallet and Bounds 2022). In response to the crisis, Senegal has promised to reallocate 11% of its budget to agriculture, while countries like Ethiopia are leading the way to self-sufficiency in food production (AfDB 2022b). The EU should follow the example of these countries in providing concrete responses to the possible impacts that its sanctions might have over its partner countries.

As Russia taps on grievances by increasingly promoting a narrative that Europe's sanctions are the primary cause for the food shortages (Reuters 2022; Herszenhorn 2022), the EU's credibility is at risk. The picture has been further muddled by the disinformation spread about the EU's actions (Scott 2022; Wax 2022). The EU should provide answers to the questions and concerns raised by its partners, in particular those of African partners about the economic and humanitarian impact of the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia. It is also key for the EU to engage strategically in the battle of narratives that have dramatically increased at a time of greater geopolitical competition.

3. The EU's approach to human development in programming its Global Europe instrument for 2021-2027

3.1. The EU's changing understanding of human development

As a priority, human development is not new. It has long been one of the key areas of EU development cooperation. It has featured in several policy documents in the past decade, ranging from the Agenda for Change (2011) to the European Consensus for Development (2017) and the NDICI-GE regulation (2021). Human development has also been pushed as a priority by the European Parliament, which called for it to be at the heart of the EU-Africa strategy (EP 2021). While human development is one of the long-standing priorities of EU development cooperation, it had lost some political drive before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, having been overtaken by other pressing priorities that attracted more political interest in Europe. These included the green and digital transitions and migration (Veron and Sergejeff 2021), and a focus on investment, economic development and the productive sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a clear sense of urgency for the EU to invest in health, education and other human development sectors such as social inclusion. Investments in health, education and social services are now seen as key for the global recovery. This context has led to a broader understanding of the transformative power of human development in partner countries, as well as its links with the EU's other strategic priorities. This is exemplified by a statement made by the European Commission (EC) and the High Representative on the International Day of Education (23 January 2022), to the effect that education not only is essential for the global recovery and the achievement of all SDGs, but also provides the foundations for resilient, peaceful and sustainable societies, forms the basis and a catalyst for the green transition, and enables citizens to harness the opportunities for digital development (EC 2022a).

The EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on human development also highlight the transformation of human development from a 'traditional area of intervention' to a more political topic, thus creating a drive for its promotion at the highest level of EU hierarchy. The Conclusions state that '[t]he Council recognises the added value and mutually beneficial potential of promoting human development as a key component of EU's development approach in the current geopolitical context', illustrating the understanding of human development as an increasingly geopolitical issue (CoEU 2021b).

In other words, there is now a much clearer understanding that investing in human development can contribute to the EU's geopolitical profile, in the face of increasing competition with other global actors such as China in the EU's partner countries, particularly in Africa. As part of the Global Gateway Initiative, the Africa-Europe investment

package and its strong emphasis on health and education, was announced at the AU-EU summit in February 2022. This is an example of the way in which human development is used to promote the EU's more geopolitical objectives (see Box 1).

While the 2021 Council Conclusions on strengthening the commitment to human development emphasise the geopolitical value of supporting human development in partner countries, they have also elicited criticisms. Some civil-society organisations (CSOs) argue that the geopolitical justification for human development does not sit well with the principle of a people-centred, human rights-based approach, if human development is framed as an 'interest' rather than as a moral imperative towards the population of in partner countries (see Cox 2021). Framing human development increasingly as a geopolitical issue seems to bring stronger interest among Europeans and hence create more interest in the allocation of resources to human development. This is a win-win situation if it contributes to the longer term recovery from the pandemic and boosts resilience in the face of the looming food crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Yet in the world of the changing geopolitical contexts and priorities, if human development is not seen as important in its own right, as a value and moral obligation towards African people, it may be hard to make a long-term commitment to promoting human development.

There are also questions about the extent to which a more interest-driven approach to human development adopted by the EU can be reconciled with country ownership and needs-based approaches. Indeed, there is a tension between the EU's more assertive and interest-driven approach and respect for a country's needs. (Jones and Keijzer 2021).

While education has benefited from this understanding of the transformative potential of human development (as well as from strong political leadership, as is explained in Section 3.2), health still lags behind. This is particularly clear when it comes to equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Despite recent commitments by Team Europe (see Box 2) to 'ramp up the pace of vaccination', only 14.8% of people living in low-income countries have received at least one dose (CoEU 2021c; Our World in Data n.d). This has had hugely detrimental consequences from a health and an economic perspective, as well as for the EU's soft power and reputation among its partners. Yet at the AU-EU summit in February 2022 the EU stood by its refusal to temporarily lift intellectual property protections on COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and diagnostics. This was a key AU demand, although the EU had promised to solve the issue by the spring (Furlong 2022; EC 2022b). **The debates on vaccines underline that, while ODA is central to the EU's credibility as a human development actor, factors beyond ODA, such as vaccine equity, can be even more important in the eyes of partners and are considerably more newsworthy.**

Indeed, even though the EU has invested in many partners' health systems for decades, it was the more eye-catching vaccine equity issue which caught the attention of analysts and commentators. This is partly because it was seen by many partners in the global South as part of a pattern in which Europe first looks after its own interests at the expense of others, offering limited aid rather than more transformative solutions.

At the same time, the EU's investments in African pharmaceutical systems and in boosting manufacturing capacity and health sovereignty on the continent can act as a more transformative solution. These investments bring opportunities for targeting both development and geopolitical objectives of the EU, while strengthening partnership between the EU and Africa (Bilal et al. 2022; EC 2021a; Pichon 2022). Yet the lack of political drive, focus, follow-through and a willingness to confront other, more inward-looking strategic and commercial interests, to tackle current inequalities, to properly address vaccine equity, e.g. by means of a TRIPS waiver, and to help partner countries overcome the pandemic in the short-to-medium term shows that there is still a long way to go in order to align EU practice with its discourse.

Human development is now seen by the EU institutions less as a traditional development area driven by values and solidarity and more as a horizontal objective and enabler for attaining the EU's external action objectives. This explains why human development was one of the key issues in the programming process, albeit with a varying amount of focus depending on the country in question (see Section 3.3.).

Box 1: Human development as part of the EU-AU summit and the Global Gateway

At the AU-EU summit in February 2022, the EU presented its ‘big offer’, namely the Global Gateway, including an [Africa-Europe Investment Package](#) of ‘at least €150 billion’ over the next seven years. This was composed of an investment package aimed at supporting Africa’s transformation in the following areas:

- the green transition;
- the digital transition;
- sustainable growth and decent job creation;
- health systems;
- education and training.

Human development will be supported notably by a [Health Package](#) and an [Education and Training Package](#), which are aimed primarily at strengthening health and education systems and improving people-to-people exchanges within Africa and between Africa and Europe. Furthermore, in May 2022, in the G7 Development and Health Ministerial the European Commissioners Urpilainen and Kyriakides announced the launch of work on a new EU Global Health Strategy, which will be part of the Global Gateway (EU 2022c). Similarly to the investment package, the strategy will emphasise the prevention of future epidemics, improving health systems, manufacturing capacities and promote One Health Approach.

The Africa-Europe Investment Package and the Global Health Strategy have the potential to bring together the relatively fragmented EU financing landscape and package it into a simpler and more attractive offer, while also increasing the EU’s political weight on the topic (see, Teevan et al. forthcoming). Indeed, through a Team Europe approach (see Box 2), Global Gateway will bring together the EU, the member states with their financial and development institutions, including the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and seek to mobilise the private sector in order to leverage investments for ‘concrete and transformational projects’. EU delegations around the world will play a key role in identifying and coordinating Global Gateway projects in partner countries.

Nonetheless, the package has been heavily criticised by experts for its lack of transparency and consultation with African partners before the summit (interview; McNair 2022b; Farand 2021). **While the priorities of the Africa-Europe Investment Package are arguably in line with Africa’s request and needs – particularly in terms of investment in infrastructure, digitalisation, health and education – on the whole it is closely aligned with European geopolitical interests.**

Experts also deplored the fact that it is mostly a question of rebranding existing funds and initiatives and that it is unclear where the additional funding will come from (as one EU official put it, the €150 billion is a product of ‘magical engineering’) (Chadwick 2022). Indeed, the figure of €150 billion is the result of a fairly arbitrary political decision to devote half of the €300 billion worth of Global Gateway investments for Africa to the Africa-Europe Investment Package³. Almost half the total sum is expected to come from EU member states’ financial institutions and development finance institutions (DFIs), many of which also felt there was a lack of consultation with them, which may also undermine their commitment and ownership. While making a more strategic use of existing funds is a welcome development (Tagliapietra 2021), it will be key to be clearer about the ‘flagships’ of this Investment Package in the coming months and to actually deliver on them if EU credibility is to be bolstered, particularly in the eyes of its partners.

³ The overall sum is based on limited EU budget resources, complemented by investments to be leveraged from the European Fund for Sustainable Development plus (EFSD+).

3.1.1. Ensuring sufficient funding will need to go hand-in-hand with more political engagement

Health and education are long-standing priorities in the AU and many African countries, as is demonstrated by the AU's Agenda 2063 and several country development plans (for example, for [Tanzania](#), [Uganda](#), [Kenya](#) and [Mali](#)). Yet, human development is only one of many priorities in these high-level policy documents and, in practice, some sub-Saharan African countries have struggled to secure sufficient public funding for basic services (Gautier and Ridde 2017; McDade et al. 2021). Local ownership of human development priorities varies greatly depending on a country's context and actors. CSOs in many countries have a key role in providing basic services, and CSOs working in human development sectors are likely to be invested in the topic, but there are also many examples of clear leadership at the highest levels of the political hierarchy. (Gautier and Ridde 2017; Rao et al. 2018). Ghana, for instance, has made significant progress in advancing Universal Health Coverage (UHC) over the years and it has received a high level of political interest, driven by the fact that it has been recognised as a social need that would be popular among voters (Novignon et al. 2021).

The EU cannot afford to underdeliver on its investments in human development and the commitments (including its 'ambitions' for 2030⁴) will have to be closely monitored. Indeed, Africa's Agenda 2063 stresses that investing in people, in particular in youth, and education, training and skills (with special emphasis on girls and women) is a priority, as healthy, well-trained people are the backbone of sustainable and inclusive economic growth (AU 2013). **Robust funding for these priorities – and not just for the EU priorities of the green transition, the digital transition and migration management – will send a signal that the EU is serious about investing in human development and the future of its partnership with Africa.**

Important as engaging through resources and development cooperation may be, it is not sufficient. In order to prioritise human development in partner countries, increase ownership, and ensure that the EU is the partner of reference on human development, the **EU will need to engage more deeply on both political and development cooperation fronts.** In practice, this means incorporating human development more intensively and systematically in political and policy dialogues with partner countries and coming up with an offer on technology transfer, access to markets, and technical assistance that extends far beyond ODA. A country's political economy processes are integral in shaping its interests and reform processes (see for example, Sparkes 2019), and while it is true that donors have only a limited impact in terms of generating interest, political and policy dialogues on human development sectors can create – and sustain – political interest and establish a stronger track record for the EU as a partner of choice. But, in order for this to happen, the EU must listen and respond to country needs and priorities instead of imposing its own priorities.

Although the interviewees noted the importance of including human development in policy and political dialogues, raising the profile of human development and going beyond ODA is still a big challenge. One problem is the risk of limited political traction in partner countries for dialogues on health and education because either the EU or partner governments have other issues higher up their political agenda. Political dialogue on politically sensitive issues such as gender equality and SRHR has proven to be particularly challenging, not only because of a lack of commitment and even opposition in partner countries, but also because of resistance from some EU member states.

⁴ As indicated in the [Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package](#), the ambition is to have, by 2030, improved vaccination coverage, strengthened African pharmaceutical systems with regional manufacturing capacities to meet local demand, and expanded skills development opportunities to meet emerging needs for Africa's economic and social transformation.

3.2. The human development spending target under the NDICI-GE

The EU has set itself a target for spending on human development of 20% of the ODA provided by the EU institutions. This was originally introduced in the Agenda for Change (2011), and has since been reiterated in a number of policy documents, including the NDICI-GE regulation (OJEU 2021). However, the EU has struggled to meet the spending target in the past, with a cumulative share of 18,9 % of ODA by the EU institutions targeted at human development and social inclusion between 2014 and 2020 (EC 2021b) . The inclusion of gender and women empowerment in 2018 helped the EU to reach the target (which climbed to 20.4% of EU ODA in 2020), but concerns have been raised about the inclusion of more areas while the target has remained the same (Veron and Sergejeff 2021; EC 2021b; CONCORD 2018a).

In the face of the health and socio-economic crises, including the aftermath of COVID-19, as well as the worsening effects of climate change and the fallout from the war in Ukraine, the EU cannot afford to miss the spending target, as this would undermine its credibility. However, some officials have expressed concerns that many spending targets may shift attention to the amount of resources allocated rather than to the development impact. While spending targets are a good way of ensuring attention remains focused on a specific topic and signalling its priority, they come with problems too. They tend to concentrate on the level of spending, rather than impact or the allocation of resources to the countries most in need (ACT Alliance EU 2021). As a previous ECDPM paper pointed out, the EU institutions, together with the member states, are already major donors to human development (Veron and Sergejeff 2021). However, rather than in terms of the amount of money spent, the EU's geopolitical influence and the way it is perceived by its partners will be measured by its impact.

Furthermore, assessing the actual contribution to spending targets is not easy. History shows that spending has previously been overestimated in reporting as a result of unreliable reporting and limitations in the methodology used to track the spending targets. For instance, in the case of climate financing, the EU Commission vastly overestimated its contribution to climate change spending target 2014-2020, having only 13% of its budget spent on climate action, instead of the 20,1% it had announced. This is in part because the commission overestimated the climate contributions of elements of agricultural funding such as organic farming while missing to report the climate contributions of other projects (ECA 2022).

Finally, some interviewees pointed out that too many spending targets may reduce the flexibility of the NDICI-GE. Although spending targets are an effective way of ensuring that the instrument focuses on the political priorities set, they may in some cases reduce the EU's ability to respond to the various needs of partner countries that do not fall under the 'emerging priorities cushion' which is a reserve of funds allowing the Commission to respond to unforeseen circumstances, new needs or emerging challenges.

3.3. Human development in the NDICI-GE programming process

The new political drive to promote human development in partner countries has also been evident during the programming of EU resources under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the new NDICI-GE instrument. By and large, interviewees from the EU institutions regard the programming process as a success. For instance, moving from priority sectors to broader priority areas has – at least in principle – allowed more interlinked, cross-sectoral responses and nexus approaches. This, in turn, has enabled more innovative approaches to human development as a means of addressing multidimensional vulnerabilities such as to economic shocks, climate change and conflict – vulnerabilities that overlap in many sub-Saharan African countries (Sergejeff et al. 2021; Jones et al. 2022). In theory, this should also make the EU a more flexible actor that is better able to respond to country needs. However, the implementation process will show whether good intentions translate into practice and whether the EU's partners find the changes useful. Incentives for sticking to old ways of working in silos and using more bureaucratic, sectoral approaches are hard to overcome. Breaking down sectoral silos and effectively mainstreaming

cross-cutting priorities – both of which are essential to a more integrated ways of working – may be difficult to achieve in practice and definitely require both expertise and time (see Di Ciommo and Jones 2019).

The indicative results of the programming are also encouraging. The EU should be able to meet its 20% spending target under the NDICI-GE. Human development features in roughly 90% of the MIPs, either as an area of cooperation or mainstreamed across priority areas, with education being targeted in 80% of MIPs (Sergejeff et al. 2021; EC 2021c). Our analysis of MIPs in sub-Saharan Africa also shows that human development is either included as a specific priority area or mainstreamed throughout the priorities in 41 of the 44 MIPs. Yet the MIPs are intended to be very general and to provide a basis for planning more detailed actions. Interviewees were generally satisfied with the way in which human development features in the MIPs and were optimistic about the EU's ability to reach the spending target. **It would appear that human development now receives higher priority than was originally planned when the programming started in 2019.** Many interviewees believe that this is due partly to the active engagement of and strong political drive at high levels of DG INTPA hierarchy, including Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen herself.

Box 2: Human development in Team Europe Initiatives

The Team Europe approach originally emerged as the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing together the EU institutions, member states, their implementing agencies, and European development finance institutions (DFIs) (EC 2020a). Building on this momentum, the Team Europe approach is being promoted beyond the response to COVID-19, including as part of recent European initiatives such as the Global Gateway (Bilal et al. 2021). It is an integral aspect of the NDICI-Global Europe programming and implementation, through the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) (Sergejeff et al. 2021).

A total of 158 TEIs had been approved at the time of writing. Human development is one of the main thematic areas in TEIs: 61% of them promote it either directly or indirectly, and promoting human development is a primary goal for 24.2% of them. This makes human development the second largest focus area in country-level TEIs, after the Green Deal (which is the main focus in 28.5% of the TEIs) (Capacity4dev n.d.-a). The numbers are similar for regional TEIs: 24% of them have human development as their main focus. Although many TEIs prioritise human development in the planning phase, it remains to be seen how these will be operationalised. Up until now, there has been a sense among some interviewees that it is difficult to get member states and DFIs interested in human development-focused TEIs as this topic encompasses many sectors and it is often hard to identify a sector that would bring the largest number of member states together, even though many of them have experience in human development sectors.

TEIs include some interesting approaches to the promotion of human development. For instance, the regional TEI on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Africa included a thorough joint analysis among TEI members for preparing the TEI and identifying the needs and opportunities for the regional promotion of the SRHR agenda. Furthermore, according to interviewees, the TEI has paid particular attention to ownership and has decided to work through existing regional structures rather than create new ones. According to one interviewee, this has helped to secure the buy-in of partner countries on a politically sensitive topic (Capacity4dev n.d.-b).

Overall, Team Europe offers visibility and collective weight for the EU and its member states in partner countries. The TEIs are often perceived, at least by the EU and member states, to be more flexible and field-driven, offering a genuine opportunity for attaining greater development impact. While there is only a limited amount of fresh funding to TEIs from the EU member states, the TEIs can offer an opportunity to use existing funds in a more strategic, coherent and coordinated way. At the functional level, both MIPs and TEIs provide robust foundations for the EU to engage in human development areas and offer promising avenues for real impact, but the challenge will be to move from words to deeds. However, questions remain as to how the TEIs will be implemented, how the DFIs will be included and how to ensure a smooth and timely coordination of the wide range of actors involved.

Aside from the sense of urgency created by the pandemic, the Commissioner Urpilainen, was also instrumental in pushing and giving political traction to human development. This applied particularly to education, which was pushed firmly during the NDICI-GE programming. There were fears that, while health was widely recognised as a priority in the wake of the pandemic, additional commitments would be needed for education. For this reason, a 10% spending target of the ODA by the EU institutions for education was set by Commissioner Urpilainen for programmes under her responsibility (CoEU 2022). This 10% target also applies to the humanitarian aid budget (EC 2022a). A number of interviewees said that, in some MIPs, where education was not originally a focus area or which did not have a strong track record for working on education, its prominence was increased during the programming process because of the strong political drive from Brussels and the Commissioner to keep education and human development in general high on the agenda.

The Commissioner's ability to 'push' issues he or she cares about in programming is not unique either to this Commissioner or to the issue of human development. In the last programming process for 2014-2020, energy was strongly promoted by former Commissioner Piebalgs as this was one of his favoured subjects (Herrero et. al. 2015). However, the Commissioner's political drive can only promote human development so far. **Not only does this type of action need to be paired with sustained interest among decision-makers in the member states, human development also needs to be kept high on the agenda in discussions between member states and partner countries.** In Rwanda, for instance, the broader topic of human development was placed at the top of the agenda following discussions with the government during the consultations for the MIP. There is also a growing interest in education and human capital in Rwanda, and this seems to have contributed to the high level of ownership of local actors in this sector.

3.4. Promoting ownership through consultations

As noted before in Section 3.1, human development is one of the long-lasting priorities for the EU's African partner governments and it is featured in high level statements and development plans. The EU has created linkages between its own priorities and those of partner countries as underlined in their respective national strategies, and it consistently refers to partner countries' strategic documents in MIPs. For instance in Tanzania, the EU is adapting its own mid-term review schedule, to adapt to the Tanzanian programming and political cycles. In Kenya, the EU has focused on education and skills for employment, in line with the Vision 2030, which is the government's long-term blueprint for the country's transition to higher middle-income status. This means focusing more sharply on digital upskilling, creating training prospects, improving key infrastructure of educational centres and social services, and reducing the digital divide through "last-mile digital connectivity" in remote and marginalised areas (EC 2021d).

However, although linking the MIPs' priorities to a country's national strategies is important in order to promote ownership and political buy-in, including in human development priorities, it is not sufficient. Ensuring ownership according to development effectiveness principles is one of the key reasons why dialogue and consultations with local stakeholders is a crucial part of programming, as stipulated by the programming guidelines as well as in the NDICI regulation itself (OJEU 2021).

Extensive consultations help the delegations to make sure that there is real demand and buy-in in the country, which is critical to successful implementation and ownership. Moreover, local actors, including CSOs, often have extensive knowledge of human development challenges in local communities as well as a good network of contacts. Their key role is also acknowledged in the MIP for civil society organisations (EC 2021e). CSOs can be key in improving the EU's reach to the most vulnerable groups, who are most in need of better access to basic health and education services (OECD 2020).

Yet, overall the consultation process has varied from country to country. The EU delegations were in charge of programming, and while they are formally required to consult all relevant stakeholders, they can decide how these consultations are managed. While some good examples of dialogue with partner country governments are provided above, it is unclear how the EU has consulted local stakeholders in partner countries, particularly as it comes to CSOs. Some good practices have been brought up by the interviewees, with delegations having held extensive consultations with non-state actors, including field trips outside the capital, while others seem to have merely informed CSOs of the EU's priorities. However, issues such as limited capacity or security conditions on the ground can make it more difficult to involve local actors.

Some delegations also consult on different topics (for example, civil-society road maps, MIPs and country-level implementation plans for Gender Action Plan III) at the same time. Even if combining consultations may seem efficient, the CSOs have raised some quality concerns linked to that practice. CSOs tend to prefer more EU engagement with them on specific topics, often within their field of expertise, as this can boost local ownership and produce more meaningful results (Concord 2018). Moreover, combining consultation processes may also reduce transparency in EU programming.

There are also some open questions on how ownership will be promoted in the TEIs. Although on paper ownership is essential to Team Europe approach, as evidenced by the Council Conclusions on COVID-19 (CoEU 2021d), it is not yet clear how ownership will be promoted in practice and how a balance will be struck among the differing interests, preferences and needs of the EU and its partners (see also Keijzer et al. 2021). Fitting together the more assertive promotion of the EU's priorities and stronger ownership on the part of the EU's partners may be a challenging task if the interests do not align (Jones and Teevan 2021). Thus far, in practice, the demands of partner countries have not been at the centre of the design of TEIs, and focus has been more on inclusion of all European actors rather than the inclusion of the partners (as has already been noted, for example by Keijzer et al. 2021).

Going forward, the EU will need to strive for more inclusion of local actors, from government bodies to non-state actors, to ensure ownership at all levels. There is room for more active involvement of local stakeholders in planning and implementation of projects and programmes. This would help to ensure that implemented projects are based on actual demand both on national and local level and tailored to the local political context. Moreover, it will be important to actively include local stakeholders in the mid-term review. On a political front the EU should strive to better include human development in political and policy dialogues, and to conduct consistent but politically savvy advocacy on key topics.

3.5. Different approaches to human development

As one of the building blocks of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, human development features in the vast majority of MIPs. This reflects the emphasis placed on a 'people-centred approach', a concept that mirrors the AU's understanding of a development approach that seeks to strengthen local communities' self-reliance and create opportunities for all (EC 2021a). Yet there is a clear diversity in the way in which different country MIPs prioritise human development. This section explains some core features of human development as presented in the MIPs.

While the EU seeks to create linkages with the national strategies of partner countries, many other factors lie behind the priorities selected. As a matter of fact, the programming process was guided by a much stronger emphasis on the EU's strategic policy objectives by design. Apart from the political buy-in from Brussels, and the EU's own geopolitical interests in the country or region, the strong presence and expertise of Team Europe members in partner countries are factors that influenced the choice of priority areas. As explained above, however, although the EU delegations are required to consult local stakeholders, most of the programming documents do not make clear

whether the process has been truly inclusive. Other factors are linked to differences in income status between partner countries. The political buy-in from partner countries for key human development sectors (mostly education and health) also seems to have helped to make human development a stand-alone priority in many MIPs. There are a few exceptions, however, such as the MIPs for Comoros and Mauritius, which place less emphasis on human development by comparison.

Although the EU does not have a specific policy on LDCs, human development is one of the main policy priorities in most of these countries. The aforementioned factors have made – and are likely to make – both programming and implementation highly context-specific, making the EU adopt a relatively differentiated approach. To some extent, this is both expected and advisable, as programming has been led by the EU delegations in the respective countries, thus creating opportunities for a more tailored approach. At the same time, a more tailored approach requires constant updating and analysis, as well as the need for projects and programmes to be adaptable during the implementation phase.(Jones et al., 2022).

The EU is backing its ambitions with financial firepower, although at this stage it is impossible to estimate whether the funding is sufficient to reach the goals set in the MIPs. However, as indicated in the table below, although in many MIPs human development is addressed extensively, it is the priority area receiving the largest share of funding only in 8 countries, and in most other countries priorities related to green transition obtain the majority of funding, reflecting the importance of the external dimension of the Green deal. The share that human development objectives get in overall funding allocations also vary tremendously. Whereas Burundi allocates over half of the total MIP to human development, in Tanzania human development gets an allocation worth 25 % of the total MIP while 45 % is allocated to the priority area related to green transition.

Table 1: Financial allocations in a sample of MIPs and the main priority areas

MIP	Total indicative allocation for MIP	Indicative allocation for HD	HD % of total	HD priorities include	Priority area with largest share of total funding
Sub-Saharan Africa, Regional	10 242	880	8.6 %	Health systems strengthening; pharmaceuticals; SRHR; enhance policy dialogue around education; teacher training	Green transition
Burundi	194	104	53.61%	Basic services; health, housing, WASH, education, TVET	Human development and basic services
Guinea	239	69	28.9%	WASH; coherence of training and job market demands, health, SRHR	Transition and green economy
Kenya	324	83.5	26%	Education, gender equality and SRHR, social services (e.g. green housing)	Green Transition: Environmental Sustainability and Resilience
Mali	373	82	21.98%	TVET, sustainability of education financing	Improved functioning of the state
Mauritania	125	40	32%	Education, TVET, health	Transition to green and blue economy
Mozambique	428	163	38%	Youth, nutrition, education, employment opportunities	Growing youth (human development)
Rwanda	260	83	32%	TVET, education, research and innovation	Education, Skills and Decent Jobs for the Youth in the digital age
South Sudan	208	62.4	30%	Basic services; education, health	Good governance, peace and rule of law for a fairer society
Tanzania	426	107	25%	Education, TVET, social protection	Green deals
Zimbabwe	148	56	38%	SRHR, health, nutrition	Social Recovery and Human Development

Source: Information combined by ECDPM based on the MIPs. Figures are expressed in € millions. The table includes examples of countries, where human development has been made a distinct priority area. In many countries human development support is mainstreamed across many priority areas and thus impossible to determine the indicative funding allocation to it based on the MIP. "Allocation to HD" refers to the indicative funding allocation to the priority area that is directly dedicated to human development, yet, we acknowledge that human development can be addressed also under other priorities. HD % of total is the share of HD priority area spending of the total funding for the MIP, as is expressed in the MIP documents. The list of priorities in human development is not exhaustive.

The funding allocations also indicate that human development is primarily addressed at country level, while in regional MIP the funding is much more clearly directed to Green transition and sustainable growth and jobs. While it is true that access to basic services is best supported at national and local levels, the limited funding to important human development priorities, such as strengthening African health security architecture, and prevention of future pandemics at regional level may hinder the EU's ability to reach its ambitions.

3.5.1. Different sectors of human development are addressed in different ways

Education is prominent across the majority of MIPs, as a result of the strong push during the past year to include it in the European Commission's top priorities – also in the renewed EU-Africa partnership. The MIPs clearly reflect the EU's goal of scaling up EU-Africa academic and scientific cooperation, including on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and enhancing skills development. These are fundamental to the ambitions of the AU's Agenda 2063.

On 10 November 2021, during the Global Education Meeting co-hosted in Paris by UNESCO and the French government, Commissioner Urpilainen announced that the EU would invest over EUR 6 billion to improve education worldwide under the NDICI-GE. This represents an increase of EUR 2 billion compared with the previous programming period (EC 2021f). The Commission's messaging on education has been consistent throughout the programming process, leveraging the momentum created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet it remains to be seen how the strong commitments expressed in MIPs and Annual Action Plans (AAPs) will be followed through. This will require the EU to work more on education than it has done in the past, potentially also in countries and regions where it does not have a strong track record in this sector.

Many African partner countries recognise education as a catalyst and accelerator for development and sustainable economic growth (Act Alliance EU 2021). Only around 10% of Africans in the 18-24 age bracket are enrolled in post-secondary education or training, which underlines the importance of increasing young people's employability and aligning educational systems more closely with the demand for skills on the labour market (EC 2020b). A number of African national development plans frame education as means to an end (economic development). Tanzania, for instance, wants to be 'a nation which produces the quantity and quality of educated people sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to solve the society's problems, meet the challenges of development and attain competitiveness at regional and global levels.' (Government of Tanzania 2015).

This increased interest in education in many partner countries also explains why education is widely mainstreamed across the EU's other priorities to promote jobs, growth and the green and digital transitions. The MIPs for Namibia, Niger and Rwanda stand out as they set '**education, skills and employment for the youth**' as key stand-alone priority areas. Similarly, in Mozambique, the EU and member states are planning a TEI on '**e-youth**' to solve '**the triple E: education, employment and empowerment**'.

Although most EU member states focus their bilateral cooperation at country level, and education is often considered as falling under national capacity and therefore not having a direct link with regional programming, the EU adopts a more regional approach as well in the regional MIP for sub-Saharan Africa by seeking complementarity between country-level initiatives (EC 2021a). Essentially, the regional level MIP brings added value by fostering multi-country approaches and identifying common issues. On education, the multi-country initiatives include for instance mobility and student exchanges, TVET and teacher training.

As a further point, the EU has placed sub-Saharan Africa in a more central position in Erasmus+ programming. While roughly 7% of the Erasmus+ external budget was allocated to sub-Saharan Africa in the previous programming period (2014-2020), this time around 26% of international funds are available for the region (OeAD 2021; EC 2021g). This

reflects a desire to exert more influence in Africa,⁵ as scholarships, capacity-building and support for tertiary education are all opportunities to promote donor values and increase their soft power. Indeed, these opportunities are widely used by the EU's geopolitical 'rivals', China and Russia (Kamp 2021).

Surprisingly, health is not very prominent in country MIPs, despite the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting the need to strengthen health systems globally. The MIP for South Sudan lists health as one of the thematic priorities in the priority area of 'human development: education and health'. Although other MIPs, such as those for South Africa and Angola, mention the EU's contribution to universal access to healthcare and basic health services, there is little depth and clarity as to how it intends to do so.

MIPs also address sexual and reproductive health (included in the European Council Conclusions of 30 June 2020 on Africa), stressing the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and education, including sex education (CoEU 2020). In Uganda, health is addressed in the context of family planning and SRHR. In other countries, such as Zambia, it is addressed through nutrition and well-being.

Health is better integrated at a regional level. The regional MIP for SSA addresses health quite extensively, although less funding is allocated to health than to education. At regional level, the EU's own funding to health seems rather limited, given the level of ambition expressed in the MIP and the statement launching the work of the EU's Global health Strategy. Therefore it is not a surprise that Team Europe initiatives on health at regional level mostly pool funds from Member States, and their DFIs. For instance Sweden has been active on driving the regional initiative in SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa. Regional health initiatives have focused generally on pandemic preparedness, and this has led to the TEIs on 'Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and health technology products in Africa' (Capacity4dev n.d.). However, our interviews make clear that health would not necessarily have received the same level of attention without the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to have a genuinely sustainable impact, regional health actions also need to be linked to country actions for supporting health systems and Universal Health Coverage (UHC). At the moment, while most country MIPs refer to UHC and health system strengthening, they rarely make links with regional MIPs. Yet, some exceptions, like Rwanda and Zambia exist in this respect.

Another example illustrating the diversity of approaches taken in the MIPs is the emphasis that some of them place on social inclusion, while others do no more than simply mention it. As illustrated by the MIPs for Malawi (with priority area 'human development and social inclusion'), Somalia (with 'resilience building and social inclusion' as a priority area) and Uganda (with 'promoting democratic governance and social inclusion' as a priority area, and a TEI on 'demography and social services'), the EU and member states want to help partner countries to reverse rising levels of social exclusion. In Malawi, the EU wants to mitigate the social consequences of the pandemic and increase resilience to future crises by strengthening social protection systems. During COVID-19, the EU scaled up its support to Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Programme and the support will continue in the current MIP. The EU is also combining cash transfers to the poorest households with other resilience building activities (e.g. focusing on food and nutrition). (EC 2020b, EC 2021h; EEAS 2021) **Yet even if most MIPs mention social inclusion, only a few countries regard it as one of their main priorities.** In many cases, it is one of a broad set of crosscutting objectives, to be promoted through activities in different thematic areas, ranging from the Green Deal to private-sector development.

⁵ The Erasmus+ MIP stipulates that 'Erasmus+ is an essential tool to [...] present a positive image of Europe in the world and spread its fundamental values'.

All these examples from individual countries demonstrate that Brussels is clearly pushing for EU delegations to adopt a more comprehensive approach to human development (Veron and Sergejeff 2021). The MIPs also show consistency in how human development features as a key area of EU action in many of them, yet the different approaches outlined above suggest that some EU delegations have been more successful than others in defining concrete, more clearly targeted objectives, with several TEIs strengthening the EU commitments in these areas. How these objectives are translated into concrete EU actions will be key.

3.5.2. Where are the women? Gender in MIPs

Gender equality is an important crosscutting priority in the NDICI-GE. The regulation reiterates the previous gender target, namely that 85% of new external action initiatives should have gender as a significant or principal objective, and that 5% of initiatives should have gender as a principal objective. It is worth noting that this is a thematic target, relating to the objectives of new projects and programmes, and not a spending target as with human development. Apart from the NDICI regulation, the EU's work on gender is guided by the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), which also signals high-level ambitions and political buy-in (Di Ciommo 2021; Teevan et al. 2021). The EU has struggled to meet the 85% target in the past, reaching 72% in 2020. In March 2022, however, Commissioner Urpilainen announced that the EU was on course to meeting the target in the new programming period, and that preliminary indications showed that 78% of all new projects in Africa, Asia and South America targeted gender equality (EC 2022d).

Our analysis of MIPs also shows that although the EU has generally paid a lot of attention to mainstreaming gender equality throughout its programming, some MIPs demonstrate a more in-depth understanding of gender equality than others. Many MIPs, such as those for Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, contain interesting approaches to gender equality. For example, Tanzania's 'Breaking the Glass Ceiling' Gender Transformative Action uses the political momentum created by the presidency of Samia Suluhu Hassan, and the way she has pushed gender equality to address the underlying causes preventing women and girls from exercising their full rights (EC 2021i; Nwaka 2021).

According to the GAP III principles, addressing intersectionality means that the EU should focus on the most disadvantaged women, paying specific attention to factors that might further disadvantage them, including racial, ethnic and religious background, age, disability and sexual orientation (Teevan 2021). While all reviewed MIPs make references to gender equality and the GAP III, they take a rather superficial view of intersectionality, mainly listing the main vulnerable populations without much analysis of how these vulnerabilities interact and overlap.

At the same time, some intersections are better recognised than others. For instance, several MIPs point out the particularly precarious situation of girls and young women. For example, the MIP for Lesotho refers to the effects of the pandemic in terms of raising the risk of child labour, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and early pregnancy. Similarly, disability is noted as an intersection in some MIPs and AAPs (for example, the AAP for Tanzania notes the particular difficulties faced by girls with disabilities), which is in line with a previous ECDPM analysis (Teevan 2021). However, the MIPs pay very little attention to the intersections linked to the LGBT+ community: some (but not all) of them mention them, without providing any further details. It is worth bearing in mind, though, that the MIPs are intended to be very general and to provide a basis for planning more detailed actions. In planning more concrete projects, it will be important to keep the GAP III principles in mind and effectively operationalise them.

It is crucial that actions in relation to issues such as gender equality and SRHR are planned and implemented in a politically savvy manner. In many cases, these are politically sensitive issues and may not receive a great deal of traction. It was for this reason that in Uganda, for instance, the EU delegation framed the TEI to address demographic changes and population policies rather than referring directly to SRHR, which is a controversial topic in Uganda, particularly as it comes to the sexual and reproductive rights. Health and demographic changes on the other hand

are less sensitive politically. Reframing the TEI as an initiative addressing the demography changes, has helped to garner more political buy-in from the Ugandan side and created an opportunity to promote ownership and thus make a sustainable impact.

At the same time, gender equality and SRHR are also sensitive topics for the EU itself. Not all member states are ready to prioritise them, while some consistently oppose any progressive language about them. For instance, member states struggled to agree on Council Conclusions on the GAP III, and Conclusions from the Presidency of the Council were issued instead (Di Ciommo 2021). This may hinder the EU's ability to take a lead on the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment agenda. No information is currently available on the extent to which TEIs address gender equality. Yet, in order to reach the 85% target, the gender agenda needs to be included and monitored in the TEIs as well.

For the future, it will be important to mainstream gender across the AAPs and action documents and to make sure that projects and programmes follow the GAP III priorities of transformationality, intersectionality, and a human rights-based approach. The country-level implementation plans⁶ of the GAP III should have been in principle prepared strategically and integrated with the MIPs. Although some EU delegations have succeeded in doing so, others have struggled to integrate them (Di Ciommo 2021). It is also important for the delegations to have the capacity and expertise needed to fulfil the commitments in the GAP III, and for political interest in gender equality to be sustained in the EU and among member states.

3.5.3. Leveraging private finance for human development: some opportunities but limited interest

Leveraging private investments could bring significant, and much-needed, additional resources to the health and education sectors, which have traditionally been funded by governments. Within the framework of the NDICI-GE, the European Fund for Sustainable Development plus (EFSD+) is an umbrella for blended finance and guarantees in EU external action, building on and expanding from its predecessor EFSD (Gavas and Pleeck 2021; EP 2022b). Although DFIs and private investors traditionally focus on sectors such as energy and infrastructure, the EFSD+ can incentivise them to invest in social sectors (Gavas and Pleeck 2021). Currently, there is room to scale up investments to social sectors, as in 2019, only 4% of EFSD investments went to health and education globally (EC 2020b).

The MIPs hint at the possibility of exploring the opportunities provided by the EFSD+ to fund human development priorities, albeit at a very general level. Some MIPs mention the possibility of using EFSD+ and blended finance, for example for investing in TVET (Tanzania); WASH (Burundi); and strengthening health systems and UHC (sub-Saharan Africa). Perhaps the most obvious opportunity for using EFSD+ is in manufacturing vaccines, medicines and health technology.

However, some interviewees were more sceptical about the EU's ability to use blending or in general leverage private-sector resources for human development. Although the EFSD+ includes a window for human development,⁷ the challenge is to find opportunities for investments in human development sectors that are 'bankable' and thus attractive to investors. The European DFIs focus on financial returns for their investment, which is why they tend to deprioritise projects in health and education that have social impact. The EU still needs to get accustomed to the use of innovative financing methods in the health and education sectors, and our EU delegation interviewees expressed some doubts about how this can be done.

⁶ The country-level implementation plans are country-specific documents drafted by the EU delegations that outline how the EU intends to bring forward its gender commitment under the GAP III (Teevan, 2021).

⁷ There are five investment windows: Sustainable Energy and Sustainable Connectivity, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Financing, Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Entrepreneurs and Agroindustry, Sustainable Cities, and Digitalisation for Sustainable Development (EP 2022b). The latter window includes funding for human development, for example for the health sector.

Furthermore, there are also relevant questions on whether, and to what extent, private-sector finance is suitable for education, health, and social services (Gavas and Pleeck 2021). For instance, Eurodad has expressed concern as to whether such investments contribute to the further privatisation and commercialisation of these crucial public services, thus creating further inequalities in access (Van de Poel 2020). Privately funded efforts to raise the quality of health services also carry a risk of contributing to a ‘two-tier’ health system, in which the rich can afford to pay for even better healthcare services while the poor struggle to gain access to basic services, thus undermining the goal of UHC (Kaufman et al. 2021).

However, when done correctly, private investment in human development sectors can have major benefits filling the funding gap to secure essential public services (Kanneganti 2021; Faruqui et al. 2017). Leveraging funding to private sector education projects can increase service availability, improve the quality and help train more professionals (IFC 2017; Crawford and Hares 2021). In health, the private sector may have a role in supporting public private partnership hospitals, pharmaceutical manufacturing or financial services for health (Gavas and Pleeck 2021). The World Bank has also called for better integration for private sector in health services, and to use innovative forms of financing to invest in human development sectors (Kanneganti 2021).

In order to meaningfully engage with DFIs, however, more incentives and support may be needed, to confront the persistent underinvestment in human development sectors (Gavas and Pleek, 2022b). On the one hand, this requires creating and identifying options for investments. For investments within the EU, the [InvestEU Advisory Hub](#) provides a single entry point for advisory services to identify investment opportunities and connect project promoters with investors. The EU could use a similar approach in its external resources by creating a support facility to identify investments and develop investment projects under EFSD+ (see the proposal in Gavas and Pleek, 2022b). On the other hand, DFIs could emphasise more the development impact of their investments alongside the financial returns. This would mean going beyond ‘just investing strategy’ towards aiming at creating transformative and measurable impact (Ahairwe et al. 2022).

There is already some interest from DFIs to work on social sectors. For instance, FMO has recently invested in a medical fund providing health financing to the private sector (FMO 2021) Some DFIs have also expressed interest in human development in the context of TEIs, which is a promising avenue, as TEIs tend to be more scalable.

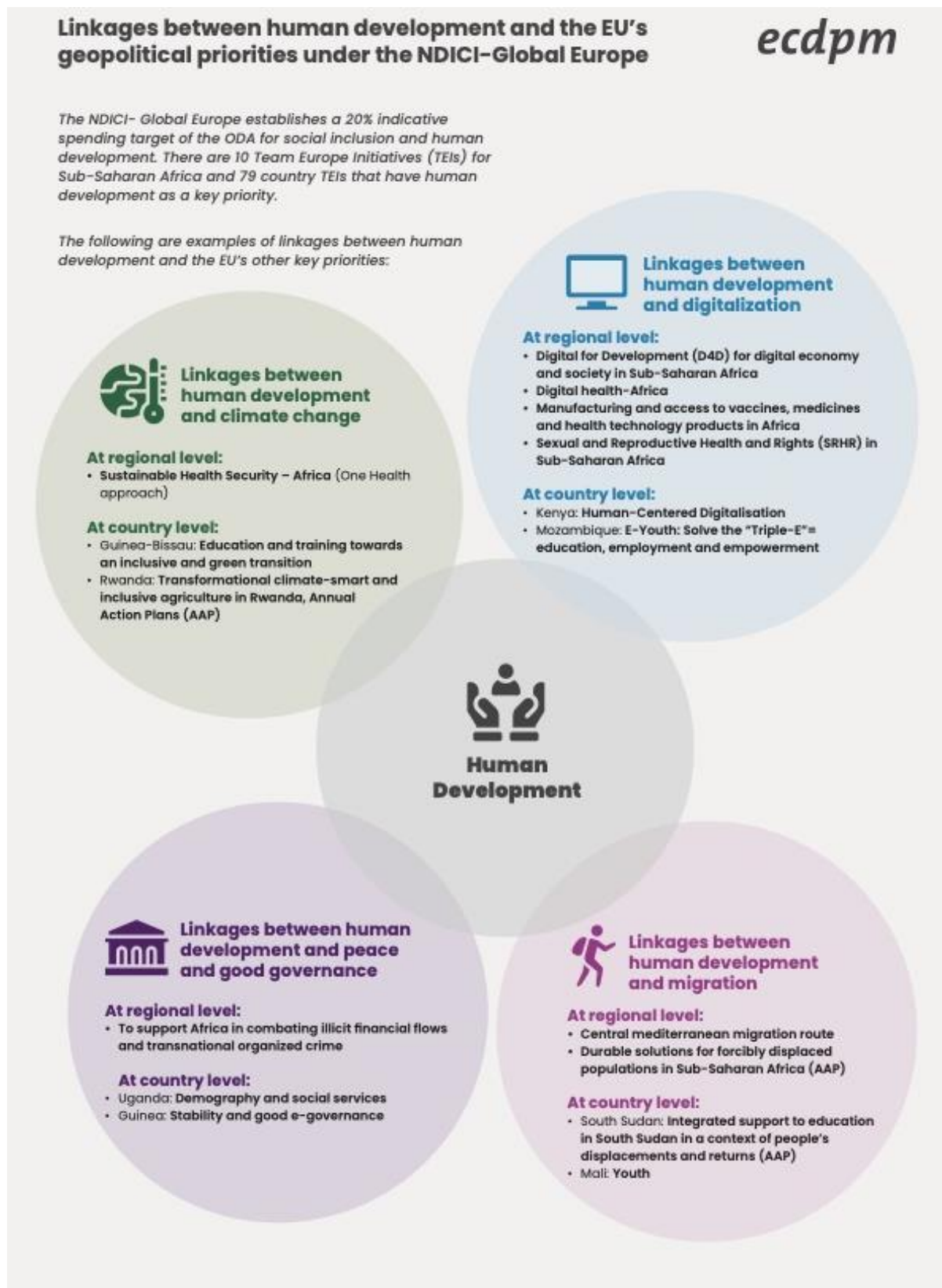
3.6. Strategic interlinkages between the Commission’s geopolitical priorities

The EU has in the past committed to ensure coherence and synergy among policies on the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development, with an impact on developing countries as indicated in the [2017 European consensus on Development](#) and the [2016 Council Conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development](#). In the NDICI-GE programming the EU has paid increasing attention to find synergies between sectors. **The NDICI-GE adopts a more integrated approach that helps the EU and member states to develop coordinated actions targeting multiple objectives** (Sergejeff et al. 2021). In theory, human development is advanced through priorities such as climate change, job creation, and digital transformation. The EU’s new Global Gateway strategy also potentially helps to create links between the twin digital and green transitions, as well as with human development, in particular on health and education.

As the EU moves to the implementation phase of the NDICI-GE, the question is how to create linkages between the different priorities of its external action, such as peace and governance, humanitarian assistance, migration, digitalisation and human development in practice. This is closely linked to multiple complementary spending targets under the NDICI-GE,⁸ which encourages EU delegations to find ways to seek synergies between different priorities so that a single euro can serve to achieve different targets.

⁸ Spending targets include the following: at least 93% of NDICI-GE should spending be ODA compliant; at least 20% of ODA under NDICI-GE is to be spent on human development and social inclusion including gender, 30% on climate change objectives, indicatively 10% on migration.

Figure 1: Linkages between human development and the EU's geopolitical priorities under the NDICI-GE



Source: Designed by the ECDPM based on publicly available data on the TEIs and AAPs. AAPs are annual documents, based on the priorities set in MIPs. This infographic contains only a number of examples of relevant initiatives. It is not an exhaustive list of all relevant activities.

The above infographic contains examples of links between human development and the EU's other key priorities outlined in both the TEIs on the one hand and some of the activities in the AAPs on the other. It suggests that stronger synergies have been created between human development and digitalisation but less so between human development and migration or climate change. **The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for the EU to build its resilience through a green and digital recovery**, a vision reflected by the Global Gateway and the Africa-Europe Investment Package flagship initiatives. The recent focus on digitalisation has been driven both by African demand to leverage digital technologies in support of economic growth and development, and by the growing competition for technological leadership. There are four regional TEIs, including 'Digital for Development (D4D) for digital economy and society in sub-Saharan Africa', that aim to leverage digital technologies to improve education and health systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of digital technologies for economic growth and accentuated existing inequalities caused by the rapid digital transformation (EC 2021g). It has also contributed to the proliferation of national digital strategies in partner countries and the growth of the African digital economy (Domingo and Teevan 2022). Thus, the pandemic has been a forceful influence in setting new global priorities and pushing the EU, its member states and partner countries to reach long-term, sustainable solutions to global challenges.

In this context, it is not surprising that the EU has made linkages between digital and human development in programming. In Rwanda, for example, the EU wishes to help build the country's human capital by supporting education, and has defined '**education, skills and decent jobs for the youth in the digital age**' as a key Team Europe Initiative. In other cases, AAPs showcase a stronger commitment on digitalisation (as in Tanzania, with its '**Digital4Tanzania - e-governance**' support programme).

The EU has also acknowledged the potential of digitalisation to address income inequalities (DG INTPA 2021). Yet at a country level, only a few MIPs clearly reflect how human development goals lie at the heart of the EU's digital cooperation with Africa. While Kenya's 'Human-centred digitalisation' TEI clearly draws strong links between human development and digitalisation, with a focus on remedying inequalities, some EU delegations are still at an early stage when it comes to drafting TEIs on human development with a strong digital component. However, since the EU and member states are still figuring out how to operationalise the TEIs, more clarity might follow at a later stage as to how to integrate human development and reduce inequalities in specific programmes and actions around digitalisation.

The linkages between human development and other key priorities are less clear. Even though the **EU's Green Deal** is prominent in all MIPs, links between human development and climate change are less apparent. Indeed, the climate crisis is having a disproportionate effect in countries with lower levels of human development, particularly on vulnerable groups. This means that fighting climate change and achieving the related SDGs helps to promote human development, and *vice versa*.

The EU's One Health approach is one of the new frameworks linking human, animal and environmental health. While policymakers acknowledge the added value of such an approach in sustainably improving pandemic preparedness and response (including in Africa) (EC 2021a), it is unclear how much political engagement there is with this approach in Brussels (beyond individual member states' initiatives) (Veron 2021).

Following one of the main priorities in the programming process which is mainstreaming the Green Deal in EU external action and addressing interlinkages with other areas (Sergejeff et al.2021), the EU and its member states

are developing a TEI on ‘**education and training towards an inclusive and Green Transition**’ in Guinea-Bissau. Portugal is one of the key EU member states that has taken an interest in this initiative.

Migration has also become a key component of the EU’s foreign and development policy in recent years. The link between education and migration is not highlighted as a priority and so it is featured sporadically in the MIPs. However, some synergies between education and migration have been identified, based on an assumption that the former is a catalyst in achieving the EU’s priorities. In South Sudan, the EU has designed a programme to support access to education by specifically targeting girls and internally displaced people (IDPs) assuming that education contributes to a population less prone to migration (EC 2021k). In Somalia, the EU will support the government to address challenges from displacement, migration and urban poverty through the Humanitarian-Development- Peace nexus. To do so, it will focus on improving equitable access to basic services such as health, water, sanitation, education and social protection (EC 2021l). While the MIP of Somalia mentions the equitable access to basic services, in connection with solving challenges related to migration, the Action document for Education Access and Quality Improvement Programme (EAQIP) misses the opportunity to specifically target migrants and IDPs, who are often absent from plans to increase primary education access. The document mentions synergies to be sought with a DG ECHO project that specifically focuses on displaced populations, but there would still be room for the EAQIP to better target migrant children and IDP populations. Doing this on an ad-hoc basis will not be sufficient (EC 2021l; EC 2021m; Sarwar et al. 2021).

The EU and the member states have pledged to enhance durable solutions to displacement, and also to improve migration management with a particular focus on supporting legal pathways for migration and on addressing irregular migration (EC 2021l). In Tanzania, where there has not been a massive inflow or outflow of migrants, the EU and its member state’s recognise that continued high poverty levels and the expected population growth might reverse this trend. But their objectives around this issue are rather vague. Furthermore, the MIP for Tanzania also states that all priority areas are expected to contribute to the spending targets for climate change, education, for projects on gender etc., but this applies only to a limited extent to migration. Under the MIP for Tanzania, the EU will be focusing on transit and human trafficking, which will be tackled from a regional perspective.

In Uganda, the EU aims to take an integrated approach to refugee and host communities, with a specific focus on youth. Uganda’s high population growth and also the continued influx of refugees are presenting important challenges such as putting pressure on natural resources such as water and high unemployment rates. In this context, the EU aims to work on domestic source mobilisation, planning infrastructure at local level for refugee and host community agglomerations within the scope of the Green and Climate transition priority (EC 2021n).

Given the economic and social drivers of migration, the EU attaches importance to creating more job opportunities for young people in partner countries. It also promotes exchange programmes for students, researchers, academics and entrepreneurs (CoEU 2021e). This is reflected by the Team Europe Initiative entitled ‘Youth Mobility for Africa’, which encompasses both the Regional Teachers Initiative and the Global Partnership for Education and promotes youth exchanges and mobility, not just in Africa but also between Africa and Europe (EC 2022e).

Encouraging though some of these initiatives are, promoting human development through the lens of the EU’s migration interests is unlikely to have the desired impact. Although the EU seems to focus on legal routes, these are mainly targeting students while the offer could certainly be extended (Bisong and Knoll 2022). Support needs to be closely aligned with the needs of the respective partner countries.

4. Ways forward for EU support to human development

The outcome of the EU's NDICI-GE programming process shows that human development is firmly back on the EU's agenda. This is due in part to the pandemic, alignment of national and regional priorities and to the leadership of the Commissioner for international partnerships. The greater recognition of the geopolitical role of human development also plays a role. While other priorities – such as the Digital or the Green Deal – remain more dominant in EU external action narrative, it is clear that the EU is now much more committed to investing in human development, which is also evidenced by the importance given to human development in the Global Gateway, as well as the preparation of the upcoming [EU's Global Health Strategy](#). Beyond providing much-needed financial support to key sectors and basic services in partner countries, these investments can bolster the profile of both the EU and its other strategic priorities, provided other policy incoherences do not undermine them.

However, it is less clear how partner country ownership has been guaranteed and what this more geopolitical approach to human development from the EU may mean to partners in practice.⁹ On the one hand, the 'geopolitisation' of human development could spark interest and hence lead to higher levels of funding from the EU and member states. On the other hand, it could create tensions in terms of ownership and a needs-or rights based approach, which is unlikely to help create lasting partnerships and development impact.

The war in Ukraine is likely to impact human development outcomes in Africa and therefore demands a thorough response

The direct and indirect implications of the war in Ukraine have rapidly altered the geopolitical landscape, and has also affected EU-Africa relations and will impact development outcomes. It may also lead to a shift in the EU's priorities as a political actor and donor, with food security playing a more important role. There are concerns that the war, if it becomes long-drawn-out, will dilute the EU's attention for Africa in the long term, directing it more towards the Neighbourhood or the management of migration in EU countries (see McNair 2022c).

Some EU member states have already announced that the war in Ukraine will lead to a reshuffle of their development budgets, potentially meaning higher allocations for in-donor refugee costs (Oxfam International, 2022b; Jones et al., 2022). At the same time, human development challenges in partner countries may become even more pressing, for instance as a result of food shortages caused by the cessation of imports from Russia and Ukraine, coupled with global inflationary pressure on commodities and energy (WFP, 2022; WB, 2022). This all creates an additional challenge in terms of sustaining the funding for human development, as well as direct pressures on domestic finances in developing countries.

In order to be taken seriously as a reliable partner, the EU needs to keep up with its political commitments to Africa and to human development. A failure to honour its financial and political commitments due to the war would not only have devastating consequences for partner countries and populations, it would also undermine the EU's political clout and come with a great loss of soft power. The EU is already under significant pressure, increasingly cast as a highly self-interested actor with limited interest in adapting its core policy, priorities and spending in the wake of the concerns of partners. Investing in human development is one of the smartest long-term investments in sustainable development and stability.

⁹ This will be the focus of future ECDPM research in this area.

There is a need for a more political understanding of human development

For the future, however, a more political understanding of what drives or undermines human development outcomes also needs to permeate the political and policy dialogues. Policy and political dialogue with partner countries, the involvement of CSOs, and politically informed and savvy advocacy can raise the political buy-in among partners, and can be crucial to the success of larger initiatives in particular. Engaging with different actors, including regional institutions, national, cities and local authorities, as well as non-state actors and even individual opinion-leaders and activists, is essential to building an enabling environment and transforming the social norms and values to develop more inclusive societies and support human development for all groups. This makes it even more crucial to integrate human development with political dialogues and step up the engagement with partners. It also means the EU should listen carefully and act when partners point to inconsistencies in the EU's own policies that may undermine human development.

The political traction of Policy Coherence for Development has significantly declined in recent years and there are no strong incentives for the EU to change its course - yet it remains crucial for the EU's impact and credibility. Moreover, the EU's internal response to the COVID-19 pandemic and now the sanctions imposed on Russia have been taken swiftly but with very little thought about their impact on partner countries' human development outcomes (see Rubio, 2022).

Going forward, the EU should pay much greater attention to analysing and mitigating the implications of its unilateral actions for its development partners and develop better consultation skills. If the EU wishes to enhance its partnership credentials it cannot afford to be seen to use its ODA as a response to problems that its other policy choices have helped to create or exacerbate. This will likely sour relations and undermine the EU's stated desire to be more of a geopolitical player.

Human development is a high priority in the MIPs, but the momentum needs to be sustained

The EU's interest in supporting human development is evident, and is clearly demonstrated in the MIPs, although approaches to human development vary greatly from one country to another. This is to be expected, given the different contextual factors, and the influence of the EU delegations have in programming. Currently, human development would appear to be a higher priority in the EU's work with partner countries and regions than originally planned before the COVID-19 pandemic. This is due in part to active engagement and sponsorship at high levels of the political hierarchy, most notably on the part of Commissioner Urpilainen herself.

Indeed, it has become clear that those Commissioners who are particularly interested in certain areas have the authority to push the areas in question in the EU's programming. This should not, of course, result in other, equally important areas of intervention being crowded out. For instance, while the pandemic has been a powerful force for raising investments in healthcare, in order to have a sustainable impact, the interest in health needs to go beyond an immediate response to the pandemic and action also needs to be taken at a regional level to support health systems strengthening and UHC in individual countries. Further thought needs to be given to how to link up national and regional activities on health systems strengthening when identifying and formulating actions to be funded by the NDICI-GE and the broader TEIs. The MIPs don't constitute a binding contract, and those interested in human development in such a volatile context will have to be consistent in their advocacy if they want this focus to continue.

The multi-sectoral approach offers promise but needs to be assessed

The NDICI-GE calls for and enables the adoption of a more multi-sectoral approach. The broader guidance on programming, and the wider recognition of interlinkages between human development and other priorities, have

created better opportunities for the EU and its partners to adopt multidimensional and nexus approaches to cooperation, where relevant. The programming process has been an opportunity to present human development as a catalyst for promoting sustainable development and other strategic priorities for the EU and its partner countries, and for strengthening resilience to external shocks in the wake of the pandemic.

However, these links now need to be translated into concrete actions to make sure that a multi-sector, interlinked approach can indeed deliver in practice. The implementation phase will show whether the EU can achieve its targets in the changing global context and genuinely address overlapping priorities at once.

The mid-term review of the NDICI-GE in 2024 will allow the EU to reconsider the budget allocations and change its approaches as necessary as well as assess with partners whether the multi-sector approach has worked. This will enable the EU to correct its course based on the initial outcomes of its actions and issues that have come up during the implementation phase. The fact that the EU has announced indicative allocations in most countries until 2024 rather than for the full period to 2027 does provide some scope for financial adjustments. In this light it will be important to monitor and share experience to match ambitions with the demands and needs in partner countries.

TEIs offer opportunities for better impact on human development if they move beyond a primarily EU process and communication tool

The TEIs offer a great opportunity for the EU and the member states to gain more visibility and improve their profile as a partner. They also offer an opportunity to leverage the networks of EU actors and member states in Africa, and build synergies and pool funding, to ensure that the goals expressed in MIPs in terms of human development, and the upcoming Global Health Strategy will be met. However, the momentum around the TEIs needs to be kept in order to ensure that the member states remain engaged. In particular, TEIs must also address issues of country ownership and focus on collective impact. They should not become a mere communication tool or a bureaucratic exercise that stifles enthusiasm.

Despite challenges, more engagement with DFIs on human development is needed

While ODA remains a crucial component to support human development in partner countries, the EU's credibility and impact is also linked to factors and policy choices beyond aid. There is clear scope and need for the EU to engage more with DFIs and coordinate better with them to identify opportunities to invest in human development sectors. Involvement of DFIs will require bankable projects. In the same direction, further engagement and cooperation with the private sector should be sought. Team Europe provides a good framework for this but the necessary platforms for dialogue and coordination are needed, notably for regional TEIs. The new [Team Europe Partnership Portal](#) (TEPP) could provide a platform to do that, as a matchmaking tool aimed at connecting the partner countries with suitable European service providers and donors. If DFIs and private sector entities are also included in the TEPP, it could provide them an opportunity to present their expertise and solutions for bankable projects.

The identification and formulation phase of specific funded 'actions' are key for ownership, inclusion and results

During the implementation phase of NDICI-GE, the EU and member states will have to promote buy-in and ownership at regional, national and local levels. To date, although the programming included consultations of partner country stakeholders including CSOs, the main focus has been on ensuring coordination with member states in the context of the TEIs. Although internal and context-specific factors are key drivers of political interest, the EU can facilitate ownership through political and policy dialogues on TEIs and could actively involve partners in the

planning and implementation of projects and programmes to a much greater degree than in the programming phase. Moving forward, the EU will need to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of local actors, from government bodies to non-state actors. This will also help the EU to reach the most vulnerable groups. Moving to the identification and formulation phase of specific actions funded by the NDICI-GE will create valuable opportunities in this respect. This is because 'actions' are more targeted interventions where identification and engagement of key human development stakeholders should be more straightforward.

Further analysis

This paper has analysed the role of human development in the EU's external action. While the overall results of programming carry promise, the real challenge as ever is in the implementation. Going forward, the EU should strive to engage its partners, and to ensure ownership for sustainable development impact. While this paper focused on how human development has featured in the EU's programming process, and what should be kept in mind during the implementation, further analysis is needed on the experiences, engagement and perceptions of partner countries and how the EU can adapt. It is ultimately this perspective and the partnership approach, that will determine the impact on human development.

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