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Reinvigorating human development in EU external action

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The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgency to step up strategic and smart investments in human development, which is regaining political attention in the European Union (EU)'s global agenda. Given the scale of the socio-economic challenges caused by the pandemic, the EU – acting as Team Europe – needs to act swiftly and with sufficient resources to support partner countries in their recovery efforts and avoid dire setbacks in human development globally.

In this paper, we explore trends and challenges regarding human development in the EU's external action and make recommendations for how to reinvigorate it. The EU institutions are among the largest bilateral donors to human development and together with EU member states, they are the largest donors. Yet there is room for more transformative impact, including by building on their expertise but also on their partnerships with a variety of actors. Engagement beyond aid (such as innovative financing and research and innovation) should also be explored further.

If the EU wishes to improve its image as a credible and reliable partner, it will have to be more consistent and strategic about its approach to human development. In the short term, the EU urgently needs to follow through on its commitments and stated values when it comes to access to COVID-19 vaccines in partner countries – not only because it is a moral imperative, but also for health, economic and geopolitical reasons. Human development can be seen as a horizontal objective that cuts across all priorities of the 'geopolitical' European Commission. The programming of the EU's external resources for 2021-2027 provides opportunities to strengthen links between human development sectors and these priorities.

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Acronyms

ACT-A	Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
AU	African Union
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency
CDC	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CODEV	Working Party on Development Cooperation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CRS	Common Reporting Standard
D4D	Digital4Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
EFSD	European Fund for Sustainable Development
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EIB	European Investment Bank
EPP	The European People's Party group
ERA	European Research Area
EU	European Union
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GAVI	The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HERA	Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HQ	Headquarters

HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MICs	Middle-income countries
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programmes
N.d.	No date
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
OACPS	Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific states
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PHDI	Planetary pressures–adjusted Human Development Index
PT	Portugal
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

The EU and its member states have given human development varying degrees of priority over the last two decades. While human development seemed to be an important priority in the EU's development policy some years ago, it had lost momentum in recent years – before the pandemic – in the face of other strategic and topical political priorities, notably migration, peace and security, private sector for development and job creation, and more recently digital and climate. It has also not always been the first priority of partner governments. COVID-19 has however been an 'eye opener' and a 'game changer' in many ways, demonstrating the urgency to scale up strategic and smart investments in areas relevant to human development. This will be crucial to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as progress on those has been interrupted or even reversed in certain cases as a result of the pandemic. A strategic and politically savvy programming of the EU's external resources for the period 2021-2027, notably through the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - Global Europe, including the agreement of priorities with partners, is an opportunity to put human development more central in the EU's external action and development cooperation. Yet, while questions related to how to effectively and efficiently pursue human development are squarely back on the agenda, other EU and partner countries' political and economic priorities have not gone away.

This paper, which was designed to nourish an EU policy discussion¹, explores issues around human development in the EU's external action by firstly discussing the definition and scope of human development to guide EU policy and implementation. It then looks at the challenges posed by COVID-19, before exploring the recent trends in terms of the EU and member states' aid allocations to human development. Finally, the paper discusses the links between human development and the EU's geopolitical and economic interests and argues that they should be seen as mutually reinforcing. We conclude and make some recommendations on how to promote human development in the EU's and member states' development cooperation and external action more widely. In all of this, it should be clearly noted that the EU can only support human development by looking at the consequences of its wider policy choices and investing smartly and jointly in partnerships, as there is little, if anything, the EU can do alone to positively advance this agenda.

2. What is human development?

A broad and interconnected concept

Despite the fact that human development is a commonly used phrase within a relatively niche community, as it rises up the political and policy agenda, there is a need to explore again how it is used and what is meant by it. Human development is indeed a **very broad concept that has at times been contested, redefined or selectively used**. It refers to both the capabilities (such as health, education, and decent standard of living) and the living conditions that enable people to obtain these capabilities (e.g. environmental sustainability, political participation, gender equality). The paradigm of human development extends beyond an economic definition of development to cover other essential dimensions in human life (Chiappero-Martinetti et al. 2015). The discussion and focus on human development stemmed from the need to challenge the position of economic growth as the dominant development indicator, reminding us that economic growth is only a means to an end rather than an end in itself (Chiappero-Martinetti et al. 2015).

¹ The paper is based primarily on limited desk research, and ten interviews with EU and member state officials as well as civil society representatives and experts were also conducted in January-February 2021 in order to test the main findings and add depth to some of the issues. It was designed to nourish the EU development policy debate.

Human development is also highly complementary to **human capital**, although the concepts come from different standpoints. The concept of human capital broadly refers to the education and health people accumulate throughout their lives, viewing them as productivity factors (Tomer 2016; Mehrotra 2005). Investment in education and health thus promotes economic development and human capital can be seen as a means towards economic growth. Human development is a more diverse concept including political aspects such as the ability to participate in political life and the respect of human rights (Tomer 2016; Mehrotra 2005; Alkire 2010). However, there is an intrinsic link between both concepts as advancing human development directly contributes to better human capital and vice versa.

The most widely used metric for human development is the **Human Development Index (HDI)**, a summary measure created by the United Nations (UN). It combines life expectancy at birth and years of schooling with GNI per capita (UNDP n.d.). Introduced in the 1990s, the HDI was an attempt to shift the focus towards more people-centered policies by including the measures of progress in social outcomes alongside the GNI (see e.g. Hickel 2020). The UN has since then introduced an inequality-adjusted HDI, the Gender Development Index as well as the Gender Inequality Index. However, in the face of the climate crisis, the limitations of the HDI in terms of accounting for environmental factors have become more prominent. As the HDI did not factor in the ecological dimension, it was blind to the detrimental ecological impact that is often accompanying higher national income (Hickel 2020).

Human development and its linkages with other dimensions of sustainable development

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recently introduced an experimental **planetary pressures-adjusted Human Development Index (PHDI)**, measuring a country's level of carbon dioxide emissions and material footprint per capita to make it more reflective of the environmental sustainability dimension of human development (UNDP 2021a). The latest Human Development Report (HDR), which uses this new PHDI for the first time, shows that no country in the world has yet been able to combine high human development and low planetary pressure (UNDP 2021a). This highlights the importance of promoting human development in an environmentally sustainable way. The aim is not to put "people against trees", but rather to bring different approaches together to promote human development while mitigating planetary pressures (UNDP 2021a: 6).

Human development is linked to **climate change** in several ways. The climate crisis has disproportionate effects in countries with lower levels of human development and particularly on vulnerable groups (UNDP 2021a). Fighting climate change and achieving the related SDGs (SDGs 13, 14 and 15) thus also contributes to promoting human development (UNDP 2021a; Concord 2020a). Human development is also important in fighting climate change. For instance, education plays a central role in the green transition and digital, which, paired with adequate regulation and changes in behaviour, may provide opportunities in tackling climate change (UNDP 2021a). The link between the environment and human development is a great example of how human development connects to other thematic areas. These **interlinkages** also point to the integrated nature of the SDGs, and how advancing one goal can contribute to reaching another.

Human development is directly linked to several SDGs. It contributes to poverty eradication (SDG1), the eradication of hunger (SDG 2), promoting health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) as well as tackling inequalities and promoting good governance (SDGs 10 and 16). Promoting human development requires tackling inequalities and supporting vulnerable groups (UNDP 2019). Another important aspect of human development is **gender equality** (SDG 5). Gender inequality is one of the most persistent forms of inequality in the world and greatest barriers to human development (UNDP 2019). Although significant progress has been made globally, for instance in terms of girls' and women's access to education and health care, there is still a lot to do in all parts of the world and gender equality will likely suffer huge setbacks because of the pandemic (UNDP 2021a). Thus, empowering women and raising their living standards is crucial to the human development agenda.

Human development in the EU development policy

The **eradication of poverty** is the primary objective of development policy, as stated in the EU Lisbon Treaty (European Union 2007). It is thus at the heart of the EU's development cooperation together with **tackling inequalities and discriminations** as well as **leaving no-one behind** (Council of the European Union 2017). Human development is key to tackling these issues, which is recognised in several EU strategic documents. In the 2017 **European Consensus on Development**, which is the EU's response to the 2030 Agenda elaborating on its ambition to achieve the SDGs, the EU included "People - Human development and dignity" as one of the four priority areas alongside environment, sustainable growth and peaceful societies.² Recognising the multidimensional nature of poverty, the Consensus acknowledges the link between poverty and the economic, cultural, social, environmental and political aspects (Council of the European Union 2017). Under the **NDICI regulation**, human development is part of the geographic programmes and is also included in the thematic priorities. Areas like education, health, gender equality and youth have also been included under the thematic "global challenges" to which the EU will allocate some funding (albeit limited) in the future. Human development as such is mentioned in the regulation only four times, but the NDICI includes a commitment from the EU to allocate 20% of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) under the NDICI to human development (as discussed in section 4) as well as many relevant objectives, such as strengthening health systems and achieving universal health coverage, as well as supporting universal social protection and education.

The **human rights-based approach** to development promotes human development as the fulfilment of human rights and freedoms and emphasises the responsibility of governments to empower citizens as right-holders to claim these rights (Broberg & Sano 2018). The EU, alongside other donors, has adopted a rights-based approach which sees development and human rights as interlinked, mutually reinforcing and complementary (European Commission 2014). The draft regulation of the NDICI explicitly states that "[a] rights-based approach [...] shall be applied in order to integrate human rights principles, to support the right holders in claiming their rights with a focus on poorer, marginalised and vulnerable people and groups, including persons with disabilities, and to assist partner countries in implementing their international human rights obligations." (Council of the European Union 2020e; 38). The regulation also emphasises the principles of leaving no-one behind and non-discrimination on any grounds, including gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or other factors.

The 2016 EU Global Strategy did not use the specific terminology of human development but did acknowledge the need for a joined-up approach to its humanitarian, development, migration, trade, investment, infrastructure, education, health and research policies, as well as for improve horizontal coherence between the EU and its member states (HR/VP 2016). Moreover, while also not using the specific terminology of 'human development', the **EU's 2020 Gender Action Plan III** contains significant commitments to education and health, and also notes that targeted investment in these areas increases both gender equality and prosperity (European Commission 2020a). There is thus no lack of policy commitments to human development at the meta level in EU development policy. But in an expanding EU development policy and broadened EU international cooperation approach, a sharp focus on and prioritisation of human development has been somewhat diluted.

Towards a comprehensive approach to human development at EU level

The EU has somewhat broadened the concept of human development over time. In line with the 2012 EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on the Agenda for Change, the European Commission defined the spending on human development to include funding in health, education and social protection and services, including social transfers

² The three other priorities are in line with the SDGs: "Planet - Protecting the environment, managing natural resources and tackling climate change"; "Prosperity - Inclusive and sustainable growth and jobs" and "Peace – Peaceful and inclusive societies, democracy, effective and accountable institutions, rule of law and human rights for all".

(Council of European Union 2012; European Parliament 2017a; European Commission 2016). The previous Development Cooperation Instrument's (DCI) thematic allocation targets for 2014-2020 adopted a broader view on human development also including topics such as decent work, social justice, private sector engagement, youth and culture (European Union 2014).

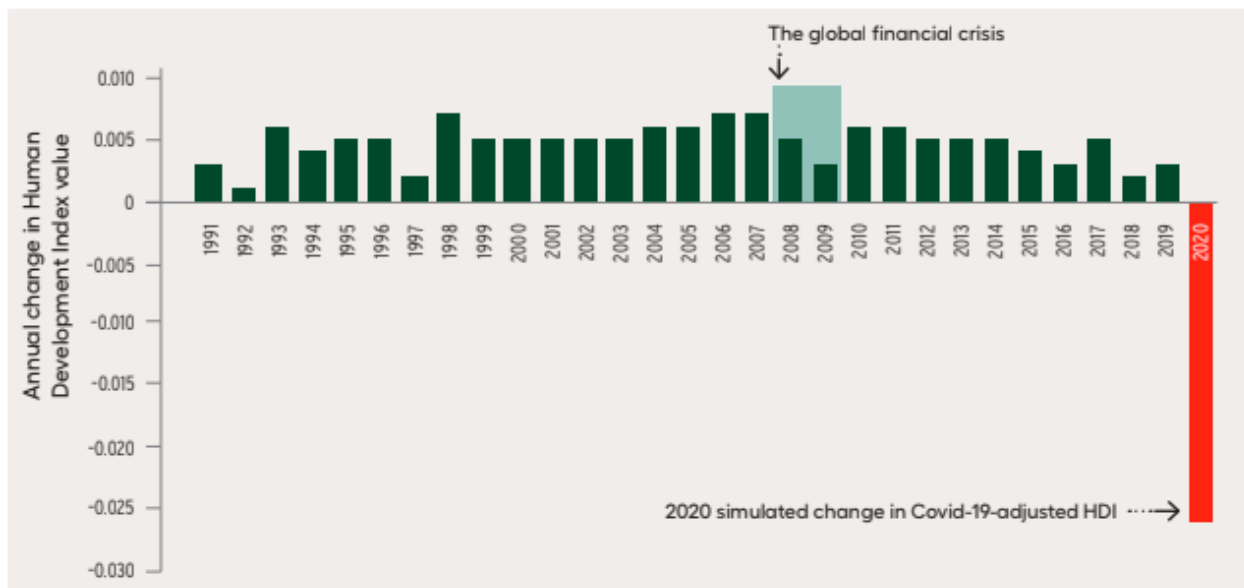
As a result of the broad nature of the human development concept, various actors have different understandings of what human development entails and whether areas such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) should for instance also be included under it. The strong linkages between the different areas of human development would call for a comprehensive understanding and discussion about it. Some interviewees however mentioned that although there is a lot of discussion on human development among EU member states, it is more at the level of distinct thematic areas such as education, health and gender, rather than a discussion on human development as a whole (Interviews February 2021). Having fragmented conversations on each thematic area may not only undermine the interlinkages between them and have a negative effect on policy coherence for development, but also affect the prioritisation of human development in the political agenda (Interviews February 2021). Therefore, it will be important for the EU to effectively pursue a **comprehensive approach to human development** with its partners.

3. Human development in times of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest health, social and economic challenge that has faced humanity for generations. It has already claimed almost 3 million lives, infected hundreds of millions of people globally, upended countless livelihoods, and caused trillions of dollars in economic damage that has had direct consequences on people's lives and mental wellbeing. At the time of writing, it shows no signs of abating and its impacts look likely to be felt for decades.

COVID-19 has reversed decades of progress in many areas related to human development and made achieving the SDGs by 2030 much more challenging. The pandemic may push up to 150 million people into extreme poverty by the end of 2021 (World Bank 2020a). Eight of the ten countries likely to see a long-term impact of COVID-19 on extreme poverty by 2030 are in Africa (Kharas 2020), where the number of people living under the international poverty line at \$1.90/day or less is expected to rise by nearly 10% – 46 million people – from 2019 to 2021. This figure is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels even by 2030 (Brookings 2021). New hunger hotspots are emerging, particularly in middle-income countries (MICs) hit hard by the pandemic and containment measures, among them Brazil, India and South Africa (Oxfam 2020). The crisis will erode all human development gains made in the last decade for a long time (World Bank 2020b). Human development will decline sharply (see figure 1). While previous crises over the past 30 years (HIV/AIDS and Ebola; the 2007-09 global financial crisis) have undermined human development, the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis derails three of the fundamental building blocks of human development: health, income and education (OECD 2020a).

Figure 1: The COVID-19 pandemic's unprecedented shock to human development



Source: Human Development Report 2020

COVID-19 has also greatly exposed, fed off and increased existing inequalities of wealth, gender and race (Berkhout et al. 2021). This in turn has deepened societal divides and weakened social cohesion. **Within countries**, COVID-19 has disproportionately affected poor and marginalised population groups, exposing many of the deeply entrenched structural inequalities, and highlighted the crucial importance of social protection mechanisms. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Cooperation Report 2020 argues that the digital divide and other inequalities condition how people cope with the pandemic (OECD 2020a). **Tackling these inequalities will be a major challenge to human development as the world recovers and attempts to achieve the SDGs. It will also be a necessary step towards building resilience and making sure that the world is better prepared and less vulnerable to shocks such as the current pandemic** (OECD 2020a). As underlined in the March 2021 Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism, "[t]ackling global poverty, inequality and supporting human development are also an integral part of ensuring better resilience to future crisis of any sort." (European Commission & HR/VP 2021a). This would also be in line with the goals of eradicating poverty and "leaving no-one behind", which are at the heart of EU development cooperation policy.

Gender inequalities in the face of COVID-19

COVID-19 threatens to wipe out many gender-related socio-economic gains of the past decades (Murthi et al. 2021). Women make up 70% of the professional healthcare workforce and provide the majority of unpaid care, putting them at greater risk of infection than other groups. They also face higher risk of income loss, increased domestic violence and reduced access to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health services (Oertelt-Prigione 2020; UN 2020). Lockdowns – and the switch to distance learning where possible – are leading to an increase in school drop-out rates and have led to unintended teenage pregnancies. Disruptions to essential services and labour markets are likely to result in an increase in child marriages, teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence. The COVID-19 crisis is expected to result in 13 million additional child marriages that otherwise would not have occurred between 2020 and 2030 (European Commission 2020a). According to UNESCO, over 11 million girls may not go back to school after the COVID-19 crisis (UNESCO n.d.), of which 2,6 million are in Africa. This will have a negative impact on the continent's human capital (Murthi et al. 2021). In Africa, the virus has massively disrupted women's lives and risks creating huge setbacks on decades of progress towards women's rights and gender equality, uncovering serious

failures in safety, physical and mental health, education, domestic responsibilities and employment opportunities (Parsitau 2021).

At the same time, women and girls in Africa and elsewhere are playing critical roles in the response to COVID-19, as frontline health care workers, caregivers at home and at work, and as mobilisers in their communities (Parsitau 2021). Thus, as highlighted by several experts and the UN Secretary-General, **women must be at the centre of the COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction** (Parsitau 2021; UN News 2021a). There is an urgent need to address the economic and social effects of COVID-19, with the twin goals of quickly recovering what was lost and rebuilding better with renewed agency for women – although much work remains to be done in ensuring women’s equal participation in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts (UNDP 2021b).

COVID-19 provides policymakers with opportunities to effect systemic changes that could protect women from bearing the heaviest brunt of shocks like these in future. In its **Gender Action Plan III**, the EU has acknowledged that the post-COVID-19 recovery must be an opportunity to address structural inequalities and build more inclusive societies, enshrining specific commitments including in areas related to education and health with a clear focus on gender (European Commission 2020a). Investing in the well-being of adolescent girls in Africa and around the world pays dividends: each additional year of schooling raises an African woman’s earnings by 14%, reduces the likelihood of early marriage and pregnancy and can lead to higher standards of living (Murthi 2021). Investments in programmes focused on adolescent girls, from life skills and vocational training, to sexual and reproductive health, are delivering results (Murthi 2021). Similarly, UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the fact that dramatically improving the gender balance would not only benefit women, but the economy at large, pointing to evidence that women’s participation enhances economic results, prompts greater investment in social protection, leads to more sustainable peace and advances climate action (UN News 2021b).

Stark inequalities between countries

The crisis is also exacerbating pre-existing inequalities **between countries**. According to the OECD Development Cooperation Report 2020, “[d]isparities in national capacities to finance containment and other measures to suppress the pandemic have limited countries’ abilities to soften its socio-economic effects on livelihoods and on vulnerable groups.” (OECD 2020a). While OECD countries account for 84% of the total global stimulus funding that has been raised to respond to the pandemic, developing countries face a funding gap of at least US \$1 trillion (OECD 2020a). Education is a good example of the widening gap between rich and poor countries, as well as between rich and poor people within countries: millions of children around the world were sent home from school as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, but with significant differences between pupils’ access to remote learning.³ Beyond least developed countries, MICs will also face such challenges related to inequalities in the years to come, given that over half of extremely poor people live in MICs.

³ The UNDP estimated in May 2020 that 86% of children in primary education were not getting an education in low human development countries, compared to just 20% in countries with very high human development (OECD 2020a). The share of students with no access to the internet at home is as high as 80% in sub-Saharan Africa (Wagner and Warren 2020). However it is worth noting that there are also significant inequalities within and between rich countries when it comes to distance learning.

Box 1: The debt conundrum: Increasing the fiscal space to protect human development investments

Human development investments require sustained financing from governments. Beyond funding for the immediate response to the health, social and economic COVID-19 crisis, countries will need longer-term plans to address the SDG financing gap. Over the next few months, it will thus be crucial for developing countries, with the support of donors and the IMF, to expand fiscal space to increase social spending.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, increased levels of borrowing and fiscal deficits were already posing a serious threat of a new debt crisis in low- and middle-income countries. Many low- and middle-income countries entered the pandemic with debt burdens that absorbed much of their domestic revenues (Goodman 2021). A number of African states for instance spend more on debt servicing than on health (Watkins 2020).

With additional pressures⁴ and rising spending needs induced by the pandemic, low- and middle-income countries may struggle to finance their public health, social and economic responses to COVID-19 (OECD 2020b). According to the IMF, since the outbreak of the pandemic, government debt in Africa jumped by 8 percentage points to around 70% of GDP (Adegoke 2021). Sub-Saharan Africa faced a fiscal gap of \$44 billion in 2020 alone (Watkins 2020). This has strengthened fears that rising interest payment obligations will be paid at the expense of investments in health and education (Adegoke 2021). The IMF has approved \$16,3 billion in emergency loans for Sub-Saharan Africa since March 2020. Yet this amount pales in comparison with the continent's debt servicing needs (Africa Confidential 2021a; de Villiers 2021).

The G20-Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) agreed in April 2020 – covering 73 International Development Association (IDA)-eligible countries (and Angola) – initially provided for a six-month suspension of debt service payments and was extended by six months. Its laudable aim is to release needed resources for investment in priority areas (Watkins 2020). In October 2020, the G20 announced the agreement in principle of a “Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI” to address the problem of unsustainable debts faced by many countries in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Munevar 2020). Some have however called for debt cancellation beyond suspension, given that COVID-19 is not a short-term crisis. Debt relief initiatives for Africa so far consist mainly of liquidity assistance rather than debt forgiveness or reduction measures (Africa Confidential 2021a). Concerns have also been raised about the IMF prescribing developing countries to swiftly return to rigid fiscal consolidation as soon as 2021, which would once again put the burden of the recovery on the most vulnerable and marginalised (Bretton Woods Project 2020). A new round of fiscal consolidation or austerity cuts would have negative social impacts, especially on women and public health systems. Moreover, if overall budgets are not increased, increasing health spending could for example come at the cost of education spending (Bretton Woods Project 2020).

The EU sees itself as a “global player” that “can help integrate debt relief into a broader policy dialogue, financing strategies and actions, in order to ‘build back better’” (European Commission 2020b). EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on international debt relief in particular for African countries in November 2020 stated that “debt restructuring should be negotiated where necessary, on a case-by-case basis, through a multilateral, coordinated approach with the IMF/World Bank and Paris Club and ensuring private sector participation.” (Council of the European Union 2020a). In November 2020, in line with European Commission President von der Leyen's proposal for a Global Recovery Initiative that links investments and debt relief to the SDGs, the EU announced that it would contribute €183 million to the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust for debt relief in 29 low-income countries, allowing them to increase their social, health and economic spending in response to the COVID-19 crisis (European Commission 2020b). Joint meetings of finance and development ministers should be held in order to link debt relief and the SDGs (Chadwick 2021a). The European Parliament's development committee recently called on the Commission to consider countries' debt situations when programming its 2021-2027 development support, and to favour grant-based funding as the default option (European Parliament 2021a). It is clear that debt relief in low-income countries alone will not be enough to prevent a devastating surge in poverty (Watkins 2020). In the long-term, further increases in the mobilisation of domestic revenue will be critical for improving health systems and achieving the SDGs (Shifa 2021).

⁴ Including the shock from the recession, declining exports, plummeting revenues, reduced remittances, foreign direct investment, reduced access to markets (Bretton Woods Project 2020).

Human development coming back with a vengeance

COVID-19 has demonstrated the severe consequences of **decades of underinvestment in social welfare, education and healthcare** (including in Europe) **and the urgency to step up investments in these areas**. Health systems are under strain, with consequences for access to primary healthcare and other lifesaving treatments. Furthermore, more than 168 million school children globally missed out on learning in class. Yet, for many children, going to school means much more than access to education as it gives them access to water and sanitation, nutrition, care and safety. According to the World Bank, COVID-related school closures risk pushing an additional 72 million primary school aged children into “learning poverty” (World Bank 2020c).⁵ There is a genuine risk that an entire generation will be trapped in a downward spiral of diminishing opportunity (Bayer 2021). Given that these challenges are heightened in humanitarian crisis situations, the EU recently committed to integrate education into the priority areas for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to help bridge the global gap on education, alongside sectors such as health, and to continue to put a strong focus on supporting child protection and education in emergencies, in particular access to education for girls in humanitarian contexts (European Commission 2021f).

The pandemic has brought renewed attention to human development, both internally and externally, with the understanding that sustainable recovery efforts should be human-centered. Several recent EU policy declarations and Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions refer explicitly to human development as an integral part of the global post-COVID-19 recovery efforts. For instance, the June 2020 Council Conclusions on Africa included the priorities ‘**Investing in people**’⁶ (in particular young people, women and girls, in support of sustainable growth and in order to harness the demographic dividend; access to education) as well as ‘**Human dimension**’ (people-centred approach including the active participation of civil society, the role of diasporas, the scaling-up of exchange programmes, student and researchers' mobility, educational and scientific partnerships, scholarships, connectivity, twinning activities and the promotion of cultural exchanges) (Council of the European Union 2020b). Moreover, the June 2020 Council Conclusions on Team Europe Global Response to COVID-19 called for a **rights-based and people-centred approach focusing on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups and on people in vulnerable situations**. They also reiterated the importance of promoting access to inclusive and equitable education as well as equitable access to quality health care services (Council of the European Union 2020c). Most recently, the proposed ‘new Agenda for the Mediterranean’ (February 2021) included human development (together with good governance and the rule of law) as the first of its four priorities (European Commission & HR/VP 2021b) and the new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change (February 2021) stressed that “[h]uman development and climate objectives should be taken into account when building resilience in fragile, conflict-affected countries” (European Commission 2021g).

Looking back: Learning from the past

Building back better in a people-centered and sustainable way will also require learning from the pandemic. COVID-19 shows how the local outbreak of a disease emerging from an animal source quickly turned into a global threat to human health and economic stability. Beyond defensive reactive responses, this pandemic has made clear the urgent imperative to focus on prevention, such as strengthening health care systems, in order to minimise the chances of another zoonotic pandemic (Felbab-Brown 2021). Not doing so risks seeing global human development and sustainable development gains repeatedly eroded.⁷ The current pandemic may provide a political impetus to

⁵ Meaning that they are unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10.

⁶ A discursive change can be noticed in the [Africa-EU partnership](#), from ‘human development’ (in the Roadmap 2014-2017) to ‘Investing in people’ (including education, science, technology and skills development – with less focus on health) in the 2018 Abidjan Declaration.

⁷ Three out of four emerging infectious diseases originate in animals, as the accelerated human encroachment into wild habitats has increased the risk of animals transmitting novel infectious viruses to human beings. Sars, H5N1/H1N1 influenza, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Ebola, Zika and now COVID-19 are just some recent examples which caused millions of human deaths and a billion cases of human illness per year (Felbab-Brown 2021; UNEP 2020).

put the so-called **“One Health approach”** – which simultaneously targets human, animal and environmental health – at the centre of efforts to address the root causes of pandemics and prevent future ones by working across sectors (WHO 2017; Strupat and Marschall 2020; Veron 2021). It is encouraging that the recent Council Conclusions on the role of the EU in strengthening the World Health Organisation highlighted the importance of the One Health approach for preventing and addressing health emergencies, and that they encouraged reflection on the institutional and organisational anchoring of the One Health approach at the global level (Council of the European Union 2020d). The March 2021 Joint Communication on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism also highlighted that “[r]eforming and strengthening the World Health Organisation and its role in coordinating global health action, as well as the implementation of the “One Health” approach are key in this respect.” The recently announced initiative for an international treaty for pandemic preparedness and response (initially President of the European Council Charles Michel’s idea now backed by 24 leaders and the WHO) is another positive step in this regard. Its purpose is to ensure universal and equitable access to safe, efficacious and affordable vaccines, medicines and diagnostics for this and future pandemics. It also aims to strengthen national, regional and global capacities and resilience to future pandemics, including through the recognition of a “One Health” approach (European Council 2021a).

The risk is that attention is diverted elsewhere once the crisis recedes, as happened with previous diseases that were successfully managed, and that the failures of the current system are not addressed (the ‘cycle of panic and neglect’ (Pandemic Action Network et al. 2020)). **In a post-COVID-19 world, there is no going back to business as usual as COVID-19 will not be the last pandemic nor the last crisis.** The impact of COVID-19 on human development is significant and will be long lasting. Effectively responding to it and preparing for future crises will require sustained action and investments across sectors. In global recovery and building back better efforts, **targeted investment in human development will be particularly crucial.** The upcoming Commission Communication on the global approach to research, innovation, education and youth as well as the May 2021 Global Health Summit and July 2021 Global Education Summit will be important milestones to make that political case and demonstrate long-term commitment to human development in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Looking forward: Opportunities ahead

The COVID-19 crisis therefore represents an **opportunity to bring momentum and increased EU funding for human development in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and programming period 2021-2027, including in the EU-Africa partnership.** One of our interviewees described the current programming process as a ‘lucky coincidence’, as the priorities will be set for the next seven years and it allows to keep the focus on human development throughout the whole period (Interview February 2021). Yet, **the challenge will be to move from ‘opportunity’ and declaration of intent to ‘concrete actions’** (Interview February 2021). This should start with the realisation of the EU institutions’ commitment to allocate (at least) 20% of their ODA to human development, and how it links to the EU’s broader support to achieve the SDGs. Human development is a strong priority for the Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen – especially education, youth and women – who pushed for a target of at least 10% of expenditure for education (increased from 7%) (European Commission n.d.; Education cannot wait n.d.; European Commission 2020c; European Commission 2020d; European Commission 2020e). There is also traditionally a strong support for human development within the European Parliament, which recently called for human development to be placed at the heart of the new EU-Africa strategy, highlighting that “financial assistance and investment should primarily target the fulfilment of those basic human needs, which remain a prerequisite for the elimination of poverty and advances in human well-being, especially at a time when public resources are becoming increasingly constrained with competing demands, such as health and education” (European Parliament 2021d: 28; European Parliament 2021b).

While EU commitments and spending targets set the parameters, maintaining this momentum will require sustained political leadership and bureaucratic focus in the longer run. Beyond the EU institutions, support and investment for human development will have to come from the member states and other Team Europe's players (European Investment Bank (EIB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European development agencies) at all levels (HQ and in the field). The EU and member states collectively, through the Team Europe approach, mobilised €38,5 billion to support partner countries in addressing the immediate health emergency, strengthening health systems and water and sanitation and mitigating the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, albeit much of this was repackaged assistance. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that **Team Europe initiatives** – flagship initiatives that seek to place Europe as the partner of reference in a specific area linked to EU strategic policy priorities (Jones and Teevan 2021) – also boost human development, beyond or within the priorities of the Green Deal, growth and jobs, digitisation or migration. Member states have already expressed concerns that human development sectors did not sufficiently feature in the first batch of Team Europe initiatives, and that they overwhelmingly focused on digital and the Green Deal (Interviews March 2021). A first analysis conducted by Devex suggests that education for instance is a focus only in Haiti and Mozambique, while health is rather absent (Chadwick 2021b).

Areas such as health and education tend to be “taken for granted” (Interview February 2021) and are indeed competing with many other priorities at the moment at the EU level but also in partner countries, where **socio-economic recovery** will be very high on the agenda in 2021 and beyond. It is worth noting for instance that in the new agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific states (OACPS), human and social development is one of the six priorities⁸ and the fact that it goes hand in hand with economic development is recognised (European Commission 2020p), yet experts have lamented the fact that economic development seems to prevail over human development in the regional protocols. Priority goes to promoting investment and the role of the private sector as engines for growth (Boidin 2020). **Balancing partner countries' governments immediate economic development priorities with the need for longer-term investments in human development will be a challenging exercise post-COVID-19.**⁹ This will require a politically savvy NDICI programming exercise that seeks to be responsive to multiple stakeholders while acknowledging the key role of partner governments given their legitimacy and role in the human development sphere.

4. Funding human development

The EU's potential contribution to supporting human development extends far beyond funding, but funding is one of the most tangible and immediate aspects of the EU's response and also what the EU is well known for. **The EU institutions have set themselves a target to allocate at least 20% of its total ODA to social inclusion and human development.** This commitment is a decade old and originally featured in the Agenda for Change (2011). The 20% spending target was also enshrined in the previous Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) Regulation for the period 2014-2020.¹⁰ It was reiterated in the European Consensus for Development (2017) and reconfirmed in the NDICI regulation. The latter stipulates that actions under the regulation are expected to contribute at least 20% of the ODA funded under the NDICI to *social inclusion and human development objectives* (Council of the European

⁸ The other priorities are human rights, democracy and governance; peace and security; environmental sustainability and climate change; inclusive sustainable economic growth and development and migration and mobility.

⁹ Under the MFF 2014-2020, only 26 out of 77 partner countries have chosen health, education or social protection as one of their sectors for cooperation with the EU (DSW et al. 2018).

¹⁰ The 11th EDF did not have a similar target for spending on social sectors or basic services, but it is aligned with the general 20% benchmark (Herrero et al. 2015).

Union 2020e).¹¹ Furthermore, the Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen has committed to allocate 10% of the funding to education for countries managed by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), reflecting her focus on that area (European commission 2021h).

Even though the 20% target is not new, it is an important political commitment that should provide political direction and predictability at partner country level for the next seven years. It is also a strong means to hold the EU accountable (Interviews February 2021). Allocating 20% of the ODA funded under the NDICI to human development would represent around €14,8 billion in current prices. However, it is worth emphasising that the spending target is **not a ceiling, but a minimum**, and spending could even go beyond given the scale of the COVID-19-induced challenges and the fact that the target includes several different areas.

Going forward, **clarifying the EU's understanding of human development and related spending areas**, for instance through Foreign Affairs Council conclusions, will be crucial for accountability purposes. The **rather technical question of what type of spending is covered under the umbrella of human development is also a political one**, as including more thematic areas will help the EU to meet and go beyond the 20% spending target.¹² Yet, the delineation of human development spending is necessary for accountability purposes. Until now, the target included health, population policies, basic nutrition, education and social protection, and gender was introduced in 2018 (European Union 2019). Some additional components like water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) have been included in the target, responding to civil society calls – albeit not with the aim to ‘overinflate’ it according to one of our interviewees.

The implementation of this target will be crucial to monitor in the future. Some interviewees suggested that the EU should establish better accountability mechanisms, while others highlighted that there was no need to duplicate the existing monitoring and mechanisms. Progress could be assessed by synthesising and accounting for ODA commitments made under NDICI country, multi-country, regional and thematic Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) over the next 12 months. This would allow for corrections early on. Reliable data, including gender disaggregated indicators, will also be important for corrections in the NDICI mid-term review process.

Regarding the EU institutions' performance against the 20% target in 2014-2019, the **data shows that the EU has managed to stick close to the target overall**, reaching the cumulative share of 18,7% over the period. According to the EU's own calculations, the target was met in 2015, 2018 and 2019 as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: The EU institution's commitments to human development per year

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2019
15,8%	21,0%	13,7%	17,1%	23,3%	20,5%	18,7%

Source: European Commission 2020m.

Overall, the EU's selection of sectors that are considered as part of human development is broader than the sectors looked at in our study. For the purpose of this study, spending on human development is measured by counting ODA spending in health (including basic nutrition and population policies), education (excluding higher education) and social protection, including employment creation. The EU also includes gender spending and some individual funding decisions from other sectors like agriculture, water and sanitation. Adding ODA for gender in the human development benchmark in 2018 was one of the factors that helped the EU reach the spending target in 2018 and

¹¹ The NDICI programming will also need to ensure that 85% of ODA-eligible interventions have a gender equality and women empowerment dimension and 5% of those focus on this dimension as a principal objective (Council of the European Union 2020e).

¹² One interviewee for instance noted that the [Spotlight Initiative](#) to eliminate violence against women and girls considerably helped the EU to meet the target (Interview February 2021).

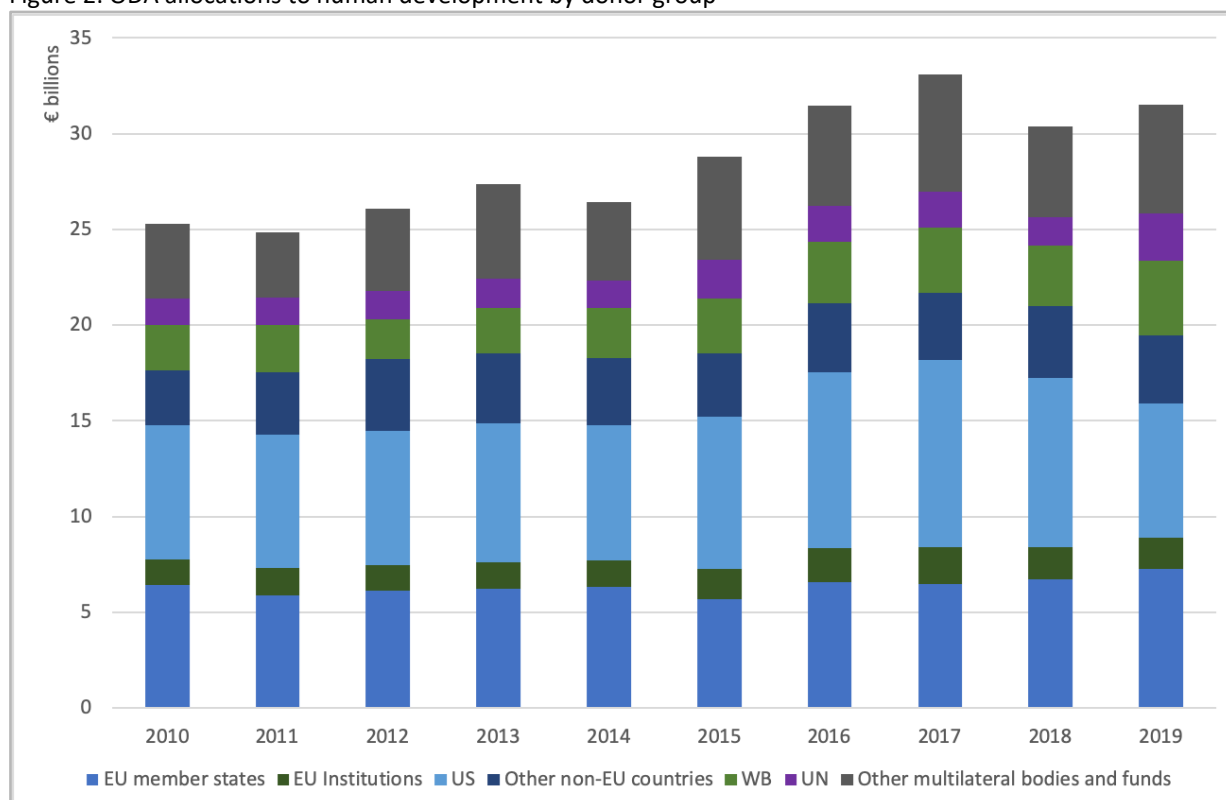
2019. For instance, in 2018, the commitments under gender accounted for 13% of the total commitments to human development (European Commission 2019a).

Furthermore, the EU is basing its calculations on the share of commitments to human development as part of the total commitments of funding instruments managed by DG INTPA, whereas this study looks more at the implementation side and therefore focuses on disbursements, taking into account all ODA by the EU institutions. This study utilises the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) data. The detailed list of OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) purpose codes that are used in the calculations can be found in Annex 1 with the full explanation of the methodology.

The EU and member states are large contributors to human development globally

Although not the leading donor, the EU institutions are a large contributor to human development. In 2019, the EU institutions allocated €1,6 billion to health, education and social protection. The EU allocation to human development peaked in 2017 at €1,9 billion, dropping by approximately €300 million by 2019. In total, the EU institutions allocated €9,9 billion to human development between 2014-2019. Globally, the EU institutions were the **fourth largest bilateral donor to human development in 2019**, after the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany. The combined total contribution of the EU and its member states was €8,9 billion in 2019, which corresponds to roughly 28% of the global ODA to human development. This is considerable, yet significantly lower than the EU's share of global ODA, which was 55,2% in 2019, which suggests that there is room for the EU and its member states to scale up their aid to human development (European Commission 2020n).

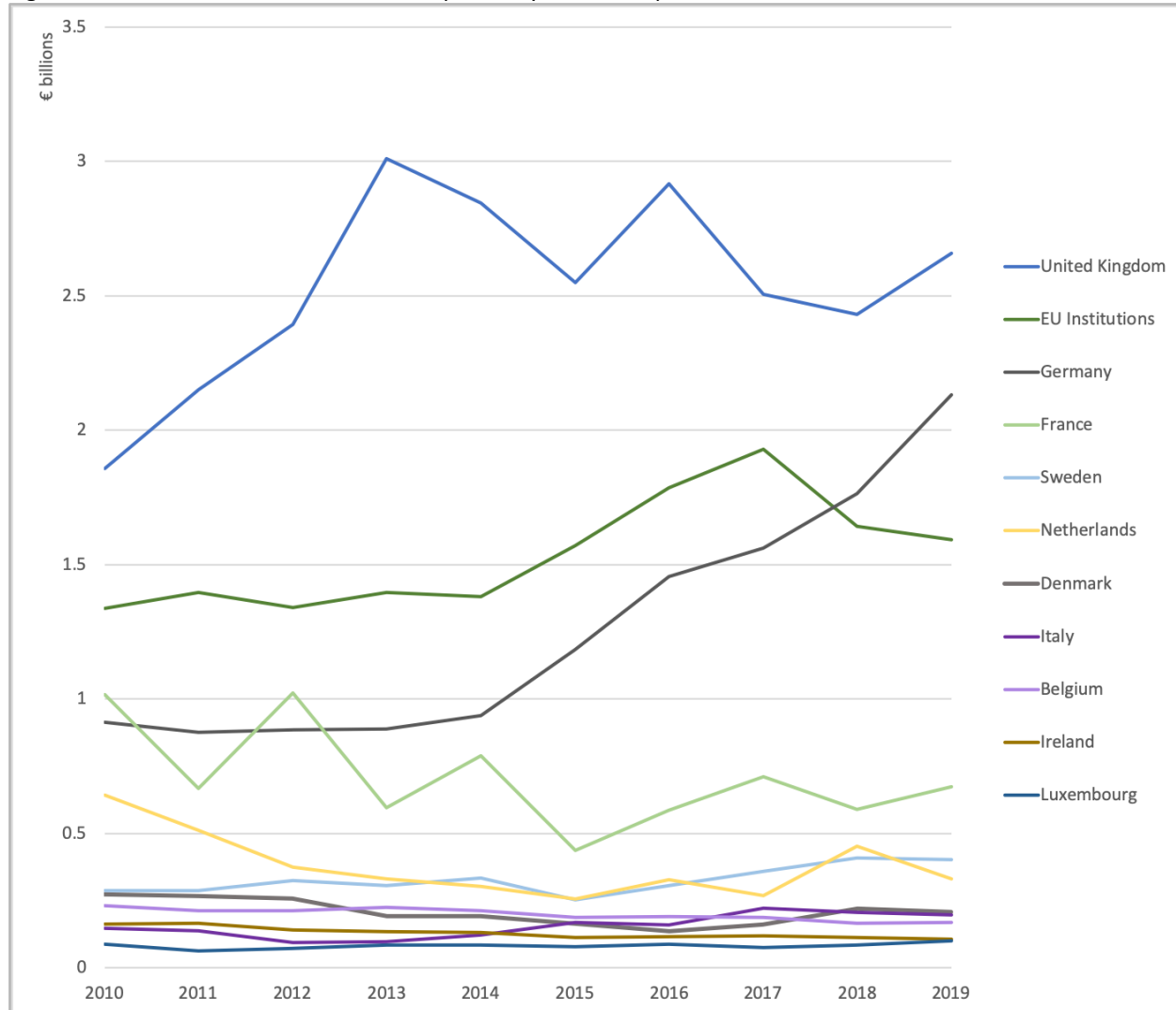
Figure 2: ODA allocations to human development by donor group



Source: Authors' calculations based on the OECD-DAC CRS data. Other multilateral bodies and funds also include regional development banks. The EIB is included in the EU institutions. The UK is included in the member states, as it was still one at the time. The sums are expressed in euros and in 2019 constant prices. The UN refers to the United Nations and the WB refers to the World Bank.

Among EU (and former) member states, the UK and Germany gave the largest total amounts to human development, respectively €2,7 billion and €2,1 billion in 2019. France was the third largest donor among EU member states, although with a far smaller amount (€0,7 billion in 2019) (see Figure 2). While the UK¹³ has remained the largest donor to human development throughout the analysed period (2010-2019), Germany has increased its ODA to human development by 135% since 2013. As a result, Germany surpassed the EU as the second largest donor to human development among European donors in 2018. However, the picture changes when looking at relative values and smaller member states' contribution is better captured. For instance, in 2019, Croatia allocated 41% of its ODA to human development, followed by Luxembourg and Portugal, which allocated 31% and 28% respectively.

Figure 3: ODA allocations to human development by some European countries and the EU institutions



Source: Authors' calculations based on the OECD-DAC CRS data.

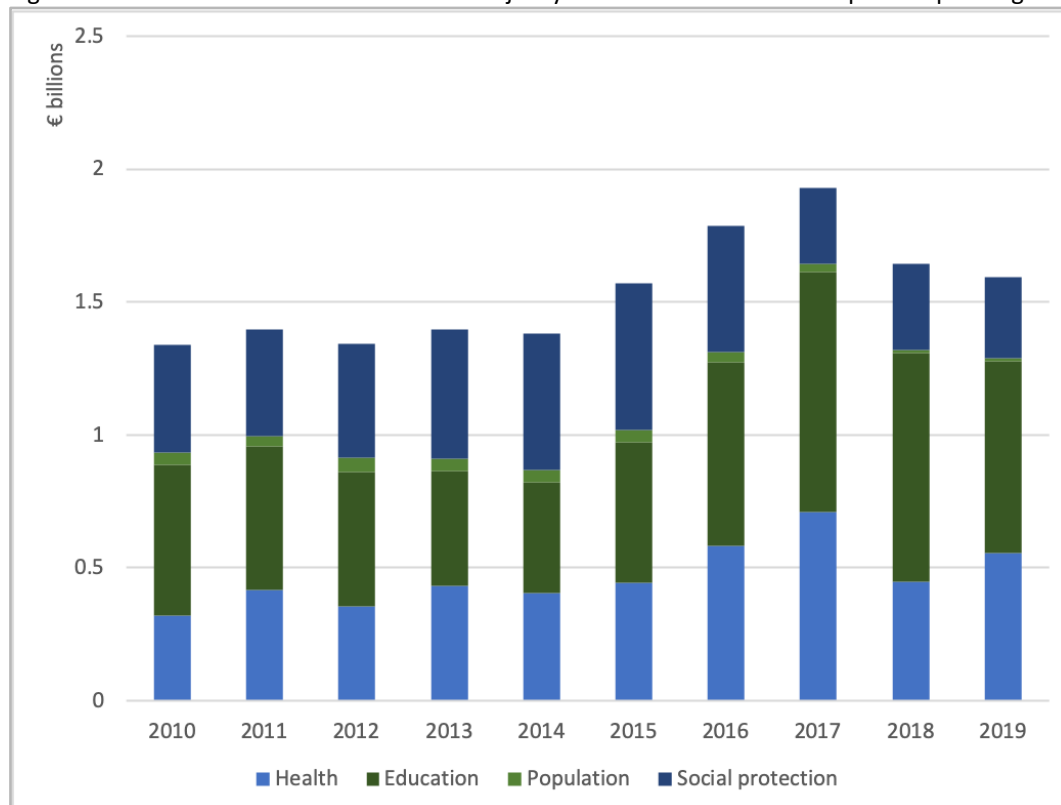
¹³ In 2019, the UK was responsible for 36,5% of the EU member states' ODA to human development. Aside from its spending, the UK's knowledge of development cooperation, its expertise and networks were seen as valuable assets to the EU institutions throughout the UK's EU membership (Sherriff 2021). The UK leaving the EU will call for both parties to ensure that collaboration and coordination, or at least communication, will remain between them considering the pressing challenges to human development brought up by the pandemic. It also calls for collective EU efforts using all instruments available to scale up their support to human development to meet the needs of the partner countries.

The majority of the EU's allocation to human development goes to health and education

A zoom into the thematic allocations from the EU institutions reveals that **health and education get the largest shares of human development spending** (45% of the spending on human development in 2019 was allocated to education, 35% to health, 19% to social protection and 1% for population policies) – although our research pointed to concerns that funding for education has not increased as much as for health. As discussed in the previous section, the COVID-19 pandemic has also caused an education crisis, as children have been sent home from schools with varying access to distance learning. It is thus important to secure funds both for health and education in the future. The commitment to allocate 10% of ODA under the NDICI to education is a welcome demonstration of political will to ensure adequate resources for education as well.

Figure 4 shows another trend of decreasing disbursements to social protection as well as to population policies and reproductive health. In 2019, the EU allocated €305 million to social protection, which is a 45% decrease from 2015, when the EU's contribution was at its highest level (€552 million). However, working with partner countries to focus on redistributive policies, such as social protection, is a crucial component of tackling inequalities and counteracting the concentration of wealth and power.¹⁴ Social protection does not only relate to income inequality, but it also contributes to equity in health and education (UNDP 2019; Concord 2018). The EU has been at times criticised for insufficient support to addressing inequalities in development cooperation, although improvements have been acknowledged in terms of increased coverage of inequalities in EU policy documents (see e.g. Concord 2018; Concord 2021; Oxfam n.d.). At the same time, when it comes to funding allocations, the EU seems to favour health and education.

Figure 4: Education and health receive the majority of the EU's human development spending



Source: Authors' calculations based on the OECD-DAC CRS data. The category "population" includes population policies and programmes and reproductive health.

¹⁴ Although fighting inequalities includes social protection and distributive policies, it is not limited to it, as it also includes a strong dimension of governance and human rights.

Box 2: EU institutions' funding for the promotion of gender equality

The EU has carried out longstanding efforts to include gender equality and women's empowerment either as a principal or a significant objective¹⁵ in 85% of its new actions. The target has been featured in several strategic documents, such as the Gender Action Plans (GAP II and III), the European Consensus on Development (2017) and in the NDICI regulation, which further specifies that 5% of the actions should place gender as a principal objective. The Gender Action Plan III commits to achieving the 85% target by 2025 (European Commission 2021e). Indeed, despite having included the target already in the GAP II with an objective to achieve it by 2020, the EU has yet to deliver on it. In 2019, 69,7% of the new actions of funding instruments managed by DG INTPA had gender as a principal or significant objective (European Commission 2020m; European Commission 2015). However, compared to previous years, 69,7% is a good achievement, and a significant increase from 2014, when the share was only 31,3%. This increase since 2014 reflects the EU's efforts aimed at mainstreaming gender equality throughout international cooperation and the increasing awareness of gender inequality as a major development obstacle.

However, although this target is important, it does not say much about the level of funding, as it focuses on the number of actions, not the amount of euros (Concord 2020b). Overall, in 2019, the EU institutions allocated €5,4 billion to projects and programmes that included gender equality as a principal or significant objective, which is over twice as much compared to 2014, when the allocation was €2,4 billion. Most of this funding (€4,9 billion) was allocated to projects that did not have gender equality as a principal goal, while still considering it as one of the targets, and a minority (€489 million, corresponding to 9% of total gender-related funding) was allocated to projects explicitly focusing on gender equality.

Over the last two years, the EU has increased its funding towards preventing and combating violence against women and girls (see Annex 1 for the methodology). The EU's funding in that area increased nearly tenfold between 2017 and 2018, jumping from €14,5 million in 2017 to €131 million in 2018, and settling in at €92 million in 2019. The increase in 2018 and 2019 is largely due to the Spotlight Initiative¹⁶, which accounted for the vast majority of EU ODA allocations to ending violence against women and girls, as well as a fifth of overall EU funding disbursements in 2018 for which gender was marked as a principal objective.

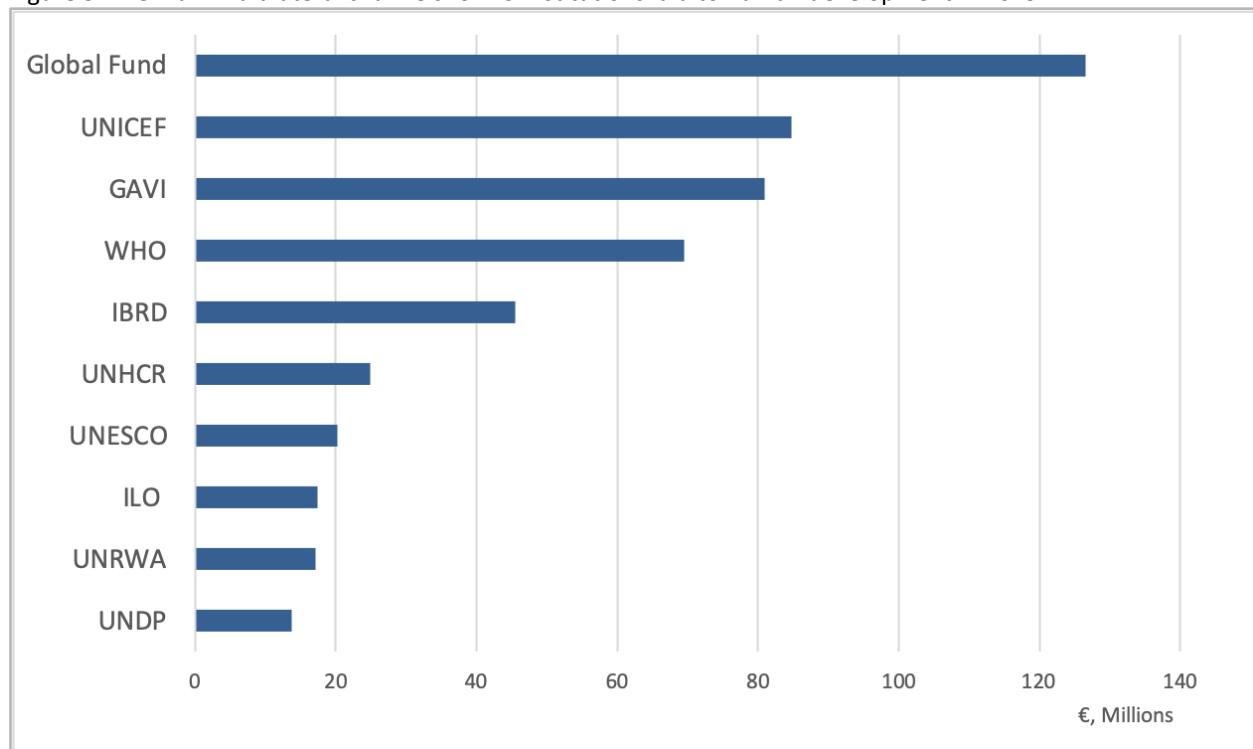
The multilateral dimension of EU financial support to human development

Over half of EU institutions' ODA to human development is channelled through the public sector in partner countries. Multilateral organisations are the second largest channel of the EU institutions' development funds for human development, with a share of 22% in 2019. The share of aid to human development channelled through multilateral organisations has however declined slightly (by 6%) since 2017. Among multilateral entities, the largest amounts of funding were channelled through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, UNICEF, Gavi and the World Health Organisation (WHO) (see figure 5).

¹⁵ Having gender as a "principal objective" refers to projects and programmes that consider gender equality as their main objective. "Significant objective" means that gender equality is an important objective of the project/ programme, but not the primary reason for undertaking it (European Commission 2019b). However, activities marked as "principal objective" score are not necessarily better than activities assigned a "significant objective" score, as donors that mainstream gender equality – and thus integrate it into their projects across a range of sectors – are more likely to allocate the marker score "significant" to their aid activities (OECD n.d.; European Commission 2019b).

¹⁶ The [Spotlight Initiative](#) is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Figure 5: The main multilateral channels for EU institutions' aid to human development in 2019



Source: [EU aid explorer](#). The fund allocations are expressed in €, million, 2018 constant prices.¹⁷

Channelling resources through international funds reportedly gives the EU and the member states influence in global debates and standard setting in human development. The 2018 OECD peer review of EU development cooperation however brought some concerns on the added value of channelling funds through multilateral organisations due to relatively high transaction costs and the fact that member states can provide funding to the same organisations for similar types of activities. However, the European Commission responded to the criticism by emphasising that it works with multilateral organisations that are influential in managing global public goods (OECD 2018).¹⁸

The EU's perceived influence in global debates and standard setting seems to capture a potential added value of the EU as a political actor and its commitment to multilateralism – more than its financial clout in multilateral funds (see Table 2).¹⁹ The EU's role in championing multilateralism has been widely appreciated, especially in COVID-19 times, with regard to its diplomatic messaging during the pandemic, its efforts in convening public and private actors in two global pledging events in 2020, its support to the WHO and the €300 million pledge to Gavi for 2021-2025 (European Commission 2020f; Veron and Di Ciommo 2020).

¹⁷ The Global fund refers to Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; UNICEF is United Nations Children's Fund; GAVI is Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization; WHO is World Health Organisation; IBRD is International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; UNHCR is United Nations Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNESCO is United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; ILO is International Labour Organization; UNRWA is United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and UNDP is United Nations Development Programme. The figures are calculated taking into account the sectors and subsectors that are included in human development spending in this study.

¹⁸ Under the NDICI, the thematic programmes will primarily be implemented at global or regional level and notably through multilateral organisations, which will be important for visibility and influence.

¹⁹ It is worth noting however that when adding member states' contributions, the EU as a whole is a major contributor. One interviewee highlighted the fact that to move from a 'payer' to a 'player', EU and member states' contributions should be better coordinated (Interview February 2021).

Table 2: EU institutions are a relatively minor contributor to some multilateral organisations relevant to human development

Donor	WHO (2018-2019)	Gavi (2016-2020)	Global Fund (2017-2019)	Global Partnership for Education (2018-2020)
EU	131 (3 %)	244 (3%)	532 (5%)	440 (19%)
US	893 (15%)	1380 (15%)	3718 (33%)	75 (3%)
UK	434 (8%)	2159 (23%)	1569 (14%)	367 (16%)
Germany	292 (5%)	699 (8%)	814 (7%)	50 (2%)

Source: Veron and Di Ciommo 2020; updated with the information from [WHO](#); [Gavi](#); [Global Partnership for Education](#); [Global Fund](#). The figures are expressed in US dollars, million. All data was accessed on 28 March 2021. The amounts for the WHO, Global Fund and Gavi comprise all contributions. The amount for the Global Partnership for Education includes pledges for 2018-2020, which may be different from the total contributions. The EU refers to EU institutions.

Box 3: The EU's added value in human development

The EU has **good levels of credibility** in terms of promoting and supporting both human capital and development in partner countries given the fact that European countries have one of the highest levels of human development in the world. **The European social model** is a unique achievement and Europe has a comparatively high level of social protection and many of the best healthcare systems in the world, although many of these have recently struggled to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet in 2018, for instance, EU member states' average spending on domestic social protection schemes amounted to 26,7% of their GDP (Eurostat 2020). The expertise and knowledge of **social protection** in member states is a valuable asset to draw from in international cooperation and a factor of geopolitical differentiation.

In terms of EU aid, interviewees considered **budget support** as an area of EU added value in human development given that member states do not use this modality much anymore and due to its importance for country ownership.²⁰ The EU's **seven-year budget cycle** is also widely considered as an added value, as it brings predictability. The EU also has a lot of convening power, a wide scope of partnerships and toolbox as well as a presence (and influence) in international organisations.

Through its development cooperation, the EU has in the past promoted the European model of social protection and social inclusion in line with its **human rights-based approach** to development (Particip 2018).

The EU's experience and regional cooperation in the field of health (including failures) can also provide useful lessons to its partners. For instance, the European Medicines Agency's experience could help in supporting the nascent Africa Medicines Agency, currently being piloted through the African Union by its Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) (Africa Confidential 2021b). The European Commission is now also building a **"European Health Union"**, with the aim to equip the EU and its member states to better prevent and address future pandemics and improve the resilience of Europe's health systems (European Commission 2020o). The establishment of a **European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA)** would be a central element for strengthening the European Health Union. Although HERA would mainly have a domestic focus (i.e. improving the EU's preparedness and response to health crises), it "would also support the EU as a global actor and help to ensure improved availability and access of crisis relevant countermeasures, which are also needed in countries outside of the EU" (European Commission 2021d: 8). Furthermore, HERA is planned to collaborate with partners and stakeholders at an international level. It would thus link the internal and external dimensions of the EU health policy. This internal initiative – if successful – could provide valuable lessons in terms of regional cooperation in the field of preparedness.

While the EU's added value stems from different factors, a certain level of EU modesty and appreciation of the different political, social and economic contexts of the EU's partners are key. While insight on technical issues can be appreciated, pushing a European model is unlikely to be welcomed. Europe can also learn from how its partners have responded to human development challenges, including their response to the pandemic. A mutual learning relationship is also more in the spirit of the modernised international cooperation the EU wants to promote.

²⁰ The EU reportedly doubled its budget support in 2020 as a response to COVID-19 (Interview February 2021).

Results of the EU's support for human development

The input side of monitoring resources devoted to human development is only a small part of the story and the evaluation of results is also crucial. Overall, the evidence shows that **the EU development cooperation has achieved results in relation to social development**, notably through improved living standards and equitable access to basic social services (education, health, water and sanitation) and with positive effects on access for women and girls during the period 2013-2018 (Particip 2018; Jones et al. 2020). **Budget support was found to play a key catalytic role** (Particip 2016; Jones et al. 2020). Yet, challenges remain in terms of strengthening the quality of the social services and the sustainability of the increased access (Jones et al. 2020). For instance, although the EU contribution to improving access to basic social services, such as education, was recognised, the funds were at times insufficient for ensuring a sustainable impact and they were further stretched by the increasing demand (Jones et al. 2020). According to a 2012 evaluation on the European Commission's support to the health sector, the EU made a valuable contribution in terms of expansion of services and equipping of health facilities as well as improved policies in the partner countries, but the evaluation noted that the impact of EU support on health was limited due to under-resourcing of the sector and the fact that the quality of the services remained low (Particip 2012). There was a sentiment amongst our interviewees that, on human development and particularly on education, measuring impact looks too much at quantitative outputs, and not enough at the quality (Interview February 2021).

A need to scale up support for transformative impact

Scaling up resources for human development will be important, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. The EU's ability to **pool resources with member states as part of the Team Europe approach is a strong asset to scale up the support for transformative impact**. Beyond pooling financial resources, this would also allow the EU to build on member states' respective expertise and comparative advantages (e.g. Sweden and Finland on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) or Germany on the One Health approach). Pooling resources and speaking with one voice also provide the EU with a stronger leverage in political/policy dialogue as well as increased visibility (Interviews February 2021).

In the face of the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences for human development, responding to the needs of the partner countries requires **engagement beyond ODA to provide the necessary resources. More innovative ways to finance human development, and a possible role for the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD+)**, could be further explored.²¹ In the context of the response to COVID-19, the EIB has engaged with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on health projects, with contributions from the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) (EIB 2020). Moreover, through the European Health Platform, a €438 million guarantee with the EIB aims at reducing and removing financing constraints for accessing COVID-19 vaccines and health related diagnostic services in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is done by enabling partnerships between governments and private sector laboratory and diagnostic companies (European Commission 2020q). Beyond COVID-19, the EFSD blending and guarantee schemes also provide financing for human development sectors, particularly health and education²² (European Commission 2020r). This greater focus on health – beyond productive or 'bankable' sectors²³ – is welcome (European Commission 2020g; European Commission 2020h). Yet, there is a need to further incentivise increased investments in social sectors and human development. Ways to do so could include linking and actively seeking human development outcomes in investments in other areas (e.g. digital or infrastructure) or establishing earmarking under the EFSD+ for human development. An innovative example mentioned by the interviewees was

²¹ One example of such a role is the loan to COVAX from the EIB backed by guarantees through the EFSD.

²² 3.3% of the total EFSD budget was invested in health and education through the blending scheme by the end of 2019 – though mostly to support the EU neighbourhood (European Commission 2020r).

²³ In 2017-2018, 75.6% of the amounts mobilised from the private sector by development finance interventions targeted economic infrastructure and services and production sectors, while 5.6% targeted social sectors (OECD 2020c).

the use of Sida's guarantee instrument to support social protection in Guatemala (Interview February 2021).²⁴ However, some interviewees also raised concerns about the risk of privatising social sectors and the need to ensure that all investments are socially sustainable.

Funding beyond ODA could also be mobilised for several areas that also contribute to human development and human capital accumulation, for instance in research and innovation. The EU's efforts to mobilise governments and the private sector globally to commit to collaborative COVID-19 research have raised the profile of the EU as a global player in health research and development (Veron and Di Ciommo 2020). The EU's assets in this area (e.g. one of the most integrated and innovative multinational research areas in the world through the European Research Area (ERA), unparalleled access to European knowledge and expertise at scale and extensive and diverse networks) could be leveraged further to the benefit of human development. Its new research and innovation funding programme for 2021-2027 – Horizon Europe – for instance includes the EU-Africa Global Health Partnership, which will facilitate collaboration between the two continents on tackling diseases (European Commission 2020s).

5. Human development & the EU's geopolitical and economic interests

Human development tends to be seen as a “traditional” development area that is driven by solidarity. Yet, **beyond upholding the EU's principles and values** – most of all, poverty eradication as the primary objective of development policy and leaving no-one behind –, investing in human development can also **serve the EU's wider interests, along with those of partner countries**, especially in a post-COVID-19 world. Yet it is the lack of a global human development response to the pandemic (in health, but also in education) that has caused the greatest economic disruption in a generation with huge geopolitical consequences for global and European citizens.

Before the pandemic, development cooperation had become increasingly influenced by the EU's own internal economic, migration and security interests and priorities, gradually moving away from a relationship based on aid towards one based on the pursuit of mutual interests (Jones et al. 2020). Following this logic, the promotion of human development can also be seen as having a positive contribution to EU interests in those same areas. Indeed, a lack of basic social services, pandemics, and other health threats are sources of instability for the countries and regions concerned, globally and for the EU (Tadesse Abebe and Maalim 2020). Education is also a powerful way to **promote stability**, through the provision of opportunities to the youth, especially in fragile contexts (as promoted by Finnish development cooperation, for instance – Interview February 2021).

Promoting health and education can serve **mutual economic interests**. The NDICI programming and the development of specific actions over the next twelve months will need to address the question of how to balance the need for a speedy economic recovery with the need to address the health crisis and strengthen the health sector more broadly, including preparedness for future outbreaks. Yet both health and economic concerns go hand in hand, as there cannot be economic growth without a healthy workforce and systems to ensure this (Veron and Di Ciommo 2020). Furthermore, as highlighted by the World Bank's Vice President for Human Development Mamta Murthi, due to the “generation of students [that] may never achieve their full capabilities and earnings potential”, “countries will lose essential human capital to sustain long-term economic growth” (World Bank 2020b).²⁵ According to experts, interlocking investments in the three key human development sectors, i.e. education, health and social protection, could end extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by 2030 (Manuel and Manea 2019).

²⁴ Although it is worth noting that measuring human development outcomes per investment – be it jobs created (most used), improved access to health care or education services or improved provision of social protection services – can be challenging,

²⁵ This narrative may explain why the concept of human capital is more attractive, as it sees investment in health and education as a means to an end (i.e. economic growth) (see section 2).

Geopolitically, investing and partnering smartly in human development is important for the EU's credibility as a partner (to governments, but beyond to civil society as well), especially in Africa. While the EU has a good reputation in that area and can bring an added value as explained above (rights-based approach and commitment to sustainable social safety nets and social inclusion which goes beyond economic development and infrastructure), its development model and its influence are increasingly contested on the geopolitical scene. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened geopolitical rivalries and competition for influence, including with China which deployed combative 'mask diplomacy' and 'vaccine diplomacy' (Mureithi 2021), thus prompting the EU to build a stronger, more visible and collective response in the form of a 'Team Europe' approach (e.g. humanitarian air bridges and the provision of medical supplies and staff which were highly publicised), including in multilateral fora, namely on health issues (e.g. supporting the role of the WHO). If the EU wishes to improve its image and be seen as a reliable and equitable partner over the long run, rather than just favouring short-term EU visibility for its actions, it will have to do better on a range of international issues, including in human development. Indeed, there is a distinct risk that Team Europe – if not followed up with substance and the building of long-term mutually beneficial partnerships – could undermine the EU (Jones & Teevan 2021).

Sharing vaccines: a moral imperative which is also in the EU's interest

One area which is important to human development but is also strategically key for the EU to follow through on its stated values and commitments are COVID-19 vaccines – a sensitive topic which will occupy the political space both domestically and internationally in 2021, and will have ramifications for years to come. The EU and its member states made countless political statements in the past year in which they committed to making vaccines accessible globally, particularly for poorer countries, and promoting COVID-19 technologies as global public goods, i.e. ensuring universal, equitable and affordable access to vaccines (European Commission 2020i; European Commission 2020j; European Commission 2021a; European Commission 2021i; European Commission & HR/VP 2021a). The EU notably showed leadership and initiated two global pledging events in May and June 2020 to raise funds to that end (€15.9 billion were raised to date (European Union n.d.)), as well as the establishment – together with global health actors, governments, and private foundations – of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) coordinated by the WHO. One of its core tasks was to help the development and manufacture of vaccines, via the COVAX facility. Both the ACT-A and the COVAX facility are unprecedented demonstrations of the commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism. By pooling advance commitments to purchase vaccines from participating countries, COVAX reduces the risk for pharmaceutical manufacturers by guaranteeing demand, while securing access to vaccines for the participating countries. COVAX aims to provide 2 billion doses, including 1.3 billion by the end of 2021 to 92 low and middle-income countries, targeting up to 20% of the population of participating countries.²⁶ In February 2021, the EU announced it was bringing its contribution to COVAX to €1 billion, including a €600 million EIB loan²⁷ and a €400 million grant to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance (European Commission 2021j). The EU prides itself on being one of the leading donors, as it mobilised, together with its member states as part of Team Europe, €2.2 billion in support of COVAX – a 'drop in the ocean' according to one of our interviewees although this commitment to multilateralism has been widely appreciated.²⁸

However, while vaccines were developed in record time, in the face of limited manufacturing capacity, producing and distributing them to 7.8 billion people has turned out to be a Herculean task. Very quickly, **EU initiatives and attempts to secure vaccine doses for its own population ran against multilateral efforts to provide affordable vaccines worldwide**. It is indeed understandable for politicians to prioritise domestic interests and the wish to

²⁶ The first delivery of vaccine doses from the COVAX facility arrived in Ghana at the end of February 2021. The deliveries across African countries have been widely publicised as part of Team Europe efforts (EU Delegation to the AU 2021).

²⁷ One of our interviewees highlighted the innovative character of this loan which enabled COVAX to sign vaccine contracts before contributions came in (Interview February 2021).

²⁸ This includes, among others, a pledge of €900 million announced by Germany (€900 million) (European Commission 2021j).

vaccinate their people first – even more so as governments’ responses to the pandemic (including European ones) are under huge scrutiny and, in most cases, highly criticised. It appeared that countries that had the means to pay more would be better off (and, in some cases, be able to vaccinate their population two or three times over (Furlong 2021a; Desmidt and Neat 2021)) while the others might have to wait until 2023 or 2024 to fully vaccinate their population (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2021; Guarascio 2020; Amin 2021). Wealthy countries – including EU member states – struck bilateral deals with vaccine manufacturers that are the same ones that COVAX’s pool relies on, since global vaccine manufacturing capacity is limited (Murphy 2021). According to ECFR, countries that are classed as high income, or upper-middle and lower-middle income, have confirmed purchases covering 4.1 billion, 1.1 billion, and 2 billion doses respectively, while COVAX seeks to secure 2 billion doses by the end of 2021 for all participating countries (Murphy 2021). While the EU stated that its participation in COVAX would be complementary with the ongoing EU negotiations with vaccine companies launched under the EU Vaccines Strategy and that its investments will be to the service of all countries in need (European Commission 2020k), in practice, according to experts, “an element of competition has emerged with the EU officially supporting a global effort, but in reality being in competition with it.” (van Schaik et al. 2020).

Although this unequal global race to vaccines was politically predictable, it does not make sense – in terms of global health – for rich countries to be fully vaccinated if the rest of the world is not. On a **health** front, first of all, this would enable the virus to mutate even more, leading to vaccine-resistant variants. It is also becoming increasingly clear that **beyond the humanitarian or moral imperative, rapid and equitable distribution of vaccines is in every country’s economic interest**, especially those that depend most on trade (Goodman 2021). A recent academic study concluded that as much as US\$9.2 trillion of global GDP risks being lost in 2021 alone if no vaccination is ensured in emerging markets and developing economies. Even in a more optimistic scenario, where developing countries are able to vaccinate half of their population by the end of the year, total global costs would still decrease by US\$ 4.4 trillion — 53% of which would be borne by advanced economies (International Chamber of Commerce 2021). For comparison purposes, pledges to COVAX have so far reached \$2.4 billion and the initiative still needs to raise at least \$4.6 billion in 2021 to procure the vaccines (WHO 2020), while the ACT-A has a funding gap of US\$27.2 billion for 2021 (Donor Tracker 2021a). As highlighted by John Denton, secretary general of the International Chamber of Commerce, “purchasing vaccines for the developing world isn’t an act of generosity by the world’s richest nations. It’s an essential investment for governments to make if they want to revive their domestic economies.” (Goodman 2021).

The provision of vaccines is profoundly and ultimately geopolitical, but also intrinsically linked to regional and national politics. Being able to share a vaccine with other countries can become a powerful asset in the world of diplomacy and power politics (van Schaik et. 2020). For the EU, it is a matter of positioning itself vis-a-vis other big players such as Russia or China, who developed vaccines and started rolling them out in other countries (including some EU member states) early on (Gonzalez 2021). China has been engaging in vaccine diplomacy, including by promising preferential agreements for Chinese-produced vaccines covering Asia, Latin America, and Africa as well as a \$1 billion loan for procurement support (Murphy 2021). **Recent battles over vaccines²⁹ have not only considerably harmed the EU’s international credibility as well as its calls for global solidarity, but also its soft power and standing as a geopolitical actor.** They equally undermine its ability to be a reliable partner to countries

²⁹ Including member states bypassing the EU’s joint purchasing of vaccines to make their own bilateral deals (Deutsch et al. 2021). Moreover, amid a fight with the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca over a vaccine production shortfall, the Commission imposed a mechanism by which EU countries are able to block vaccine exports if the EU’s own purchase orders have not yet been filled. While countries covered by the COVAX facility as well as the Neighbourhood are exempt from the regulation, this move has been perceived as protectionist, going against the principles of multilateralism global equity and it has undermined the trust many countries had placed in the EU for vaccine orders. It is worth noting that the EU has previously stated that “through its Advanced Purchase Agreements, it requires manufacturers to make their production capacity available to supply all countries and calls for the free flow of vaccines and materials with no export restrictions.” (European Commission 2020k; European Commission 2021c; Herszenhorn and Hanke Vela 2021; Hanke Vela 2021; UN News 2021c).

in which vaccines, and human development more generally, will be a lifeline and a priority over the next few months and years.

Going forward, it will be crucial for the EU to go beyond declarations of intent and make its excess vaccine doses and the technology behind them available to low and middle-income countries in a transparent and equitable fashion (in addition to health systems strengthening to ensure that these vaccines can actually be distributed). This will be an important political signal in the face of limited stocks, especially after calls for rich countries to do so (Furlong 2021b).³⁰ While it is encouraging that the European Council in February 2021 reaffirmed its commitment to improving access to vaccines for priority groups in the “neighbourhood and beyond” and to supporting a global approach through the COVAX Facility (European Council 2021b), it will be important to ensure that countries in need beyond the Neighbourhood, notably in Africa, are not left out in the next few months.³¹ It is also encouraging that the European Commission set up a **Vaccine Sharing Mechanism** to structure (through the Team Europe approach) the provision of excess vaccine doses shared by member states with partner countries, ideally through COVAX³², recognising this as a “matter of urgency, solidarity and health security in the EU and beyond” and that there needs to be dedicated communication campaigns (in both European and partner countries) to explain the principles that no one is safe until everyone is safe (European Commission 2021b; Furlong 2021a). The EU aims to support COVAX with a humanitarian buffer of about 100 million doses. This mechanism should urgently be up and running to complement COVAX (Interview February 2021). Special attention would be given to the Western Balkans, the EU’s Eastern and Southern neighbourhood and Africa. This clearly mixes need with the EU’s own geographic preferences. While understandable, this carries some risk that the EU will be seen as prioritising its interests over global public goods and criticised for its vaccine diplomacy as well.

Even if doses are symbolic at first and patience will be needed until production increases, EU support to provide early access to vaccines will be essential for the most vulnerable, for medical staff, and for other priority groups (Interviews February 2021). Questions however remain on the timing, i.e. whether vaccines would start being shared immediately or once EU member states have vaccinated their health workforce (Interview February 2021). An expert pointed to us that chances of a major political change within the EU in the short-term are very slim, and by the time any meaningful vaccine sharing mechanism will be sorted out, the current production issues will likely be resolved as well and sharing vaccines will be redundant (Interview February 2021). Civil society representatives pointed out that this is in any case only a “temporary fix” while the COVAX Facility is “underfunded” and some of the money pledged last year by the EU and member countries has not actually been disbursed (Bayer 2021).

For some middle-income and all low-income countries unable to provide for themselves bilaterally, COVAX is the sole option (Murphy 2021). The African Union, concluding that relying solely on COVAX will put its members at the back of the global queue, secured a provisional 270-million doses from vaccine manufacturers³³ (in addition to the 600-million doses expected from COVAX – for a population of more than 1.2 billion) to be able to vaccinate 60% of

³⁰ At an EU summit on 25 February 2021, French President Macron put forward a proposal to send 13 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to African countries for their health workforce, which would amount to 0.43% of the doses the EU and the US have ordered. This was considered crucial for Western credibility (Pollet 2021).

³¹ Middle-income countries for instance are unable to afford bilateral deals with vaccine manufacturers but they tend to be “overlooked by activists and development actors desperately trying to get vaccines to the lowest-income nations”, leading experts in middle-income countries to worry their nations risk being left behind (Green 2021). These countries however have seen nearly half of the total cases of COVID-19 globally.

³² Although, given that does belong to member states, they can decide to provide excess doses bilaterally if this is faster, which leaves room for them to provide vaccines to recipients of their choice, not necessarily primarily driven by need but by strategic interests. France already stated it would give 500,000 doses to poorer countries by June 2021 (Momtaz 2021), while Portugal stated it would send 5% of its COVID-19 vaccine shots to a group of Portuguese-speaking African countries and to East Timor in the second half of the year. This would reportedly amount to 1.75 million doses (Reuters 2021a).

³³ Less than 20% of these 270 million doses will be available before June 2021 (see Desmidt and Neat 2021). The AU secured a deal with Johnson & Johnson at the end of March 2021 for 400 million doses of its COVID-19 vaccine beginning in the third quarter (180 million of these doses could be supplied in 2022) (Reuters 2021b).

the population of the continent (Anna 2021). A number of experts and the European Parliament (European Parliament 2021c; EPP Group 2021) are also advocating for the EU to **enable manufacturers in the developing world to produce the vaccine themselves**, for instance by supporting a proposal put forward by South Africa and India – supported by around 100 mostly low-or middle-income countries and the African Union – to waive intellectual property in connection with COVID-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organization – which the EU has so far ruled out, expecting vaccine developers to commit to the goal of universal and affordable access to diagnostics, treatments and vaccines (Murphy 2021; Chadwick and Lei Ravelo 2020; Pistorius and Michalopoulos 2021; Michalopoulos 2021).³⁴ **Sharing COVID-19 related intellectual property and technology with producers in the developing world** could help significantly increase production of vaccines and reduce vaccine inequity (Amin 2021) and **would be one of the most tangible ways to follow through on the EU’s commitment to making vaccines a global public good** and to policy coherence for development more broadly. Team Europe reportedly aims to work with vaccine developers to **ramp up their manufacturing capacities in Africa and to support local production** under licensing arrangements as a means to boost vaccine production, both to address the current needs and to help turn the continent self-sufficient and resilient when faced by future pandemics (EU Delegation to the AU 2021). There is already vaccine manufacturing capacity in Senegal, Egypt, Morocco and South Africa which could be built on (Africa Confidential 2021b). The European Commission should ideally also show leadership by using its leverage to encourage pharmaceutical companies to support technology transfer, as it committed to do in June 2020³⁵ – although recent battles with pharmaceutical companies make it very unlikely. The private sector also has a key role to play in terms of boosting manufacturing capacity. Boosting manufacturing capacity would in turn also have a positive effect on job creation.

A leading role for the EU in a global vaccination strategy will not only help ease the burden placed on healthcare systems and communities and prevent suffering, but it will also advance “socially responsible geopolitics”, according to MEP Udo Bullmann (Pistorius and Michalopoulos 2021). As has been repeatedly stated since the start of the pandemic, “no one is safe until everyone is safe” and this sentence becomes even more relevant in the middle of national scrambles for vaccinations and as the virus mutates. The EU and its member states need to recognise that a late supply of vaccines to low- and middle-income countries is not in their interest morally, economically, or geopolitically and that more global effort and funding are needed to avoid further health and economic damages.

Supporting human development in the EU-Africa partnership

With rapidly rising infections, most African economies will find it hard to implement a second lockdown as they are yet to recover from the first one and early mass vaccination to attain community immunity may be the only sustainable way for these countries to control the second wave (Edward-Ekpu 2021; Usman 2021). The ability of African countries to finance vaccine procurement and delivery will be an important priority going forward (Kagame 2021). The recent announcement by the EU that it will provide €100 million in humanitarian assistance to support the rollout of vaccination campaigns in Africa (e.g. ensuring the cold chains, roll-out registration programmes, training of medical and support staff as well as logistics) is positive in this regard (European Commission 2021k). Paying special attention to fragile and conflict-affected regions, where poor health infrastructure, limited access, security challenges and misinformation will make vaccination an arduous task, will also be paramount to ensure that the most vulnerable communities in Africa are not left behind (Desmidt and Neat 2021). The EU should also explore

³⁴ Countries that opposed the waiver claimed that it is too broad, that it does not acknowledge the potential lack of technical capacity or raw materials in poor countries, and that the WTO’s current intellectual property regime already provides sufficient flexibility in the case of public health emergencies (Amin 2021).

³⁵ “In the negotiations with the pharmaceutical industry under the present Agreement, the Commission will promote a Covid-19 vaccine as a global public good. This promotion will include access for low- and middle-income countries to these vaccines in sufficient quantity and at low prices. The Commission will seek to promote related questions with the pharmaceutical industry regarding intellectual property sharing, especially when such IP has been developed with public support, in order to these objectives.” (European Commission 2020t).

further how to boost local production capacities of vaccines, e.g. by leveraging investments through the External Action Guarantee.

The EU's ambition to build an **'partnership of equals' with Africa** means that the EU and its member states have to take into account Africa's priorities in its cooperation with the continent in health and education. Health was given a low profile in the March 2020 Communication on a 'comprehensive strategy with Africa'³⁶, published two days before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by WHO. Yet, investing in people, in particular in youth, and education, training and skills (with a special attention to girls and women) are important priorities of the partnership (European Commission & HR/VP 2020). The European Parliament, in its resolution of 25 March 2021 on a new EU-Africa Strategy, stressed the need to build a genuine partnership in the field of health aimed at strengthening health systems (mainstreaming the One Health approach) which should focus on global health research and development and on stepping up EU-Africa collaboration on health research and innovation (European Parliament 2021d).³⁷ This would be in line with the case made by African institutions like the African Development Bank to prioritise support to the health sector to consolidate gains in the fight against the pandemic because of its critical importance to economic recovery and future resilience (African Development Bank 2021). Education and skills development is also one of the leading priorities for Africa, as well-trained human power is the backbone of sustainable and inclusive economic growth (Tadesse Abebe and Maalim 2020). Reinforcing the partnership around these issues would send a strong signal that the EU is serious about investing in the future of the African people. A more equal EU-Africa partnership, based on ownership and a more effective cooperation, also means learning from African partners' experience with the pandemic and innovative solutions and building on local knowledge to address African challenges (e.g. in terms of digital solutions, leadership by women and the youth, social protection) (Itcovitz 2021; Veron 2021). This also means listening and responding to diverse African actors who have an interest and expertise in human development. The idea that Europe can promote human development without aligning behind and supporting strong partners in Africa is fundamentally flawed, given African continental, regional, national and local actors' legitimacy, knowledge and network in this area.

Human development and the EU's strategic priorities

Human development should be seen as a 'horizontal' objective, cutting across all of the Geopolitical Commission's priorities, including the Green Deal, digital, growth and jobs, along with migration, governance and multilateralism. There is still a limited understanding of the practical interconnections and synergies between human development and political and economic systems. Yet it seems clear that digital and governance are meaningless if people are not healthy. Good levels of education are crucial for the digital and green transitions, as an educated and skilled population can significantly enhance the transformational potential of digital and green technologies. The Green Deal has a very clear link to human development, and especially to health, given the interlinkages between human, animal and environmental health.

Human development could also be seen as a **source of 'innovation', through areas such as digital**, which is an important EU priority. The European Commission has sought to make this connection (also internally) through a programme promoting digital solutions to improve the continuity, quality and efficiency of education and health

³⁶ The strategy only lightly mentions health and safety at work, inclusive social protection systems, universal health coverage, access to quality health services, including family planning and that "[t]he EU and Africa also have a common interest in promoting investments in basic health care, clean water, housing and in developing infrastructure and capacity to cope with outbreaks of diseases. The EU proposes to upgrade its support to the strengthening of health systems." (European Commission & HR/VP 2020). Yet it has to be said that this Communication was written largely before the full extent of the pandemic became clear.

³⁷ The new partnership between the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) to strengthen the capacity of Africa CDC to prepare for and respond to public health threats in Africa is a good starting point (European Commission 2020v).

services in Africa (European Commission 2020u). Moreover, the launch in December 2020 of the **Digital4Development (D4D)** Hub – a platform gathering stakeholders from member states, private sector, civil society and financial institutions to ramp up investments in the digital transformation of partner countries – aims at “positioning the EU with its human-centric digital economy model on the world's digital map” (European Commission 2020l). The March 2020 Communication on a ‘comprehensive strategy with Africa’ had already recognised that the continent’s economic expansion has the potential to accelerate and drive broader social and human development with new opportunities arising from the digital transformation, which can also improve access to quality services, including education, training and healthcare (e.g. improving access to health services in remote areas and facilitating diagnostics and treatments (European Commission & HR/VP 2020)). As underlined by the European Parliament in its resolution of 25 March 2021 on a new EU-Africa Strategy, the **digital transformation represents a tremendous development lever for access to education, training, employment and health** (European Parliament 2021d). Technology can indeed be leveraged for the delivery of more robust and inclusive social services that leave no one behind. For example, a focus on technology in education can both mitigate learning losses and help address the longer-term learning crisis (Harley and Acheampong 2021).

Some member states have also promoted this approach in the area of health (e.g. project ‘Health for all’ financed by Camões, IP which achieved improved health indicators through telemedicine and a platform developed by PT Inovação, allowing patients in S. Tomé, supported by a local technician, to be consulted by Portuguese specialists who, from Portugal and through their computers receive the images captured by the equipment) **and education** (e.g. Spain’s new ‘e-Duc@’ fund to foster digital education in partner countries (Donor Tracker 2021b)). Some **Team Europe initiatives** under preparation are reportedly making that link too. Similarly, digital technologies and solutions can **accelerate progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment** in areas such as education, as highlighted by the Gender Action Plan III. Bringing an additional 600 million women online worldwide would result in a GDP increase of up to about €13 billion, bringing benefits to public health, education, women’s employment, entrepreneurship, community welfare and social life (European Commission 2020a). Africa has seen great technological innovations as a response to COVID-19, for instance in e-healthcare (e.g. a self-diagnosis app available in 15 African countries), e-learning (e.g. an online learning platform for secondary education in Tanzania), digital social protection and e-governance (Itcovitz 2021). These innovations should be leveraged for human development in the future, while addressing issues related to connectivity and infrastructure.³⁸ There is also a lot to learn from such locally-grown initiatives.

The programming of NDICI resources for 2021-2027 provides opportunities to strengthen linkages between ‘traditional’ human development sectors and EU ‘strategic’ priorities. The fact that programming will be based on broader priority areas to be achieved through multiple actions across sectors, rather than limited to three sectors for interventions as was the case in the past, should **encourage more integrated approaches and synergies across sectors.** The EU should hence embrace human development interventions as part of a broader set of interventions in a given priority area.³⁹ For instance, human development could be a priority area under which health is chosen as a sector; the green transition could be chosen as a priority area with basic nutrition as a sector. **Team Europe initiatives will be a key channel to watch over the next few months** – especially as human development seems so far rather absent from the first round of initiatives, which might be due to the fact that the ‘transformative impact’ (a criteria on which Team Europe initiatives are assessed) of human development has been overlooked so far. Team Europe Initiatives related to digital transformation would be particularly relevant to human development, as explained above. In this way, **human development could become a key enabler for reaching the objectives of EU**

³⁸ In 2019, 82.5% of Europeans had access to the internet, while only 28.2% of Africans used the internet (Banga et al. 2021).

³⁹ As highlighted by one of our interviewees, the different targets set for the NDICI (20% for human development; 30% for climate; 10% for migration; 85% for gender) do not add up to 100% and as a result, projects/programmes cannot look at human development only by focusing on education and health but can meet two different targets at the same time (Interview February 2021).

external policies. Yet, one of our interviewees pointed to the fact that with a more geographic approach, it will be a challenge to make sure that human development is strongly embedded in the programming (Interview February 2021).

Given the urgency of the challenges related to COVID-19 and the post-COVID-19 recovery, **the EU – together with other Team Europe ‘players’ – has a very strong interest in maintaining its commitment and raising the quality and impact of its supported actions in sectors related to human development.** There is a strong rationale for investing in human development both for development purposes and because it serves the EU’s strategic interests in the long-term. Bold initiatives have been introduced for long-term inclusive growth and solidarity at home. The EU should similarly build on its core values (social values, commitment to multilateralism and global public goods) and its key assets to support a bold approach to human development in its partner countries. This will be crucial to preserve its soft power. Human development, beyond a traditional development sector, can indeed contribute to the EU’s wider political objectives and interests, especially in a post-COVID-19 world. Yet the EU should also adopt a much longer-term vision and consider the type of relationships and policies beyond aid that are likely to help or undermine human development globally, and particularly amongst its closest partners in Africa and the Neighbourhood. A short-term narrow approach to defining Europe’s interests and the failures of the EU’s own response to COVID-19 at home and abroad have damaged the EU’s image, credibility and relationships. Genuine EU investment and smart support for initiatives designed to build human development capacity over the longer run would set a different tone.

6. Conclusions and reflections on the way forward

Supporting human development is a political as well as a policy and technical choice for the EU, so a clear appreciation of the political dynamics at play in Europe, within partners and between the EU and partners is key to advancing this agenda. Much more analytical work and discussions with partners would be needed to fully flesh out a potentially vast and complex agenda. These conclusions and reflections provide some first ideas on what issues the European Union could consider to support human development in the future.

1. On the strategic and integrated approach to human development

- There is a **need to define and strategically articulate what is to be included in the EU’s understanding of human development** (which would help with holding it accountable to the 20% NDICI spending target) and how it links to other sectors. This could be analysed and presented in a Commission Staff Working Document and supported through Council conclusions.
- **Coherence between sectors under the human development umbrella** (e.g. between education, health, nutrition, social protection, gender etc.) should be ensured in the programming at country level so that comprehensive approaches to human development are promoted. Themes relevant to human development are interconnected and mutually reinforcing and thus should not be dealt with in silos. The combination of thematic and geographic funding under the NDICI can offer linkages between the different dimensions of human development.
- The **positive link between human capital and human development** should be articulated as they can reinforce each other and provide economic and social benefits. The concept of human capital tends to resonate more at the EU political level given its link to productivity, job creation and economic development.
- The **EU’s geopolitical priorities for EU external action** (e.g. Green Deal, digital, migration, and sustainable investment and jobs) have **human development aspects** which should be acknowledged and articulated further, including through concrete activities and Team Europe Initiatives in the

context of the NDICI programming process for 2021-2027. Human development is indeed not only a priority in the NDICI programming in its own right, but it links and forms nexuses with other EU priorities and the programming of ODA by EU member states.

- Given the strong link between human development and humanitarian and stability issues, coherent action across the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus** should be favoured to support human development.
- In light of the new planetary pressures—adjusted Human Development Index and of the impacts of climate change on human development, the **linkages between human development and the environment** need to be further explored and articulated. Promoting human development in an environmentally sustainable way as well as simultaneously targeting human, animal and environmental health are necessary in order to prevent future pandemics and crises and build back better.

2. On the need for immediate actions, renewed commitments and sustained political leadership

- Against the backdrop of the devastating socio-economic impact of COVID-19 globally, the EU must stand by its commitments and **ensure its level of support to partner countries is swift and sufficient** to recover from the pandemic and avoid serious setbacks in human development. This is best supported by the EU making choices while having an excellent understanding of the political, economic and social dynamics at play that impact human development outcomes.
- Given the strategic value of human development and its key importance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in articulating and delivering on both EU commitments to solidarity, creating global public goods and its own political, economic and health interests, there is an **urgent need to reiterate and further specify the EU's commitments to human development**. The upcoming Commission Communication on the global approach to research, innovation, education and youth, the May 2021 Global Health Summit and July 2021 Global Education Summit will be important milestones for this.
- It should be recognised that progress in human development, particularly in health in the wake of the pandemic, is important for **global solidarity, European credibility as a reliable partner, but also in Europe's self-interest**. There is a moral imperative to provide economic and social benefits to those most in need and for the EU to live up to its values and commitment to reach the SDGs and provide global public goods. Yet, as demonstrated in this paper, support for human development goes beyond charity and serves both economic and geopolitical EU interests for an equitable global recovery. As the awareness that the EU institutions will have to deliver on the more tangible needs of citizens in a changing world post-COVID-19 is growing (as is the political and bureaucratic pressure to do so), there might be more traction in the external agenda to see developments that improve the material and physical wellbeing of people globally as well.
- Human development will need **continuous political mobilisation at all levels** in the months and years to come. Beyond a substantive discussion in CODEV, it should be addressed at the ministerial level as well to keep it high on the agenda. Indeed, beyond the commitments at EU level, policy discussions are important, at Council/Foreign Affairs Council level. The momentum that was created by the pandemic and the Portuguese Presidency initiative should be leveraged, including by upcoming EU Presidencies which would help maintain continuity and the issue high on the agenda.

3. On resources and the NDICI programming process

- Up-to-date context – and in fragile contexts, conflict – analysis is essential to inform NDICI programming.

- The EU institutions need to **scale up their investments to not only reach the 20% target but also go beyond it** given the massive challenges ahead. Yet this target will need to be properly defined and monitored for accountability purposes.
- The EU institutions should be encouraged early on to **undertake a qualitative and quantitative analysis of MIPs to ensure that human development is adequately reflected**. This is for accountability and learning purposes.
- There is also a need to **scale up the EU's modalities that may promote human development by sharing knowledge, insights and innovation beyond ODA**, and explore the EU's toolbox to do that (e.g. private sector expertise or knowledge sharing on e-learning etc.). Given the new emphasis and tools for investment, exploring further the role of the EU in supporting the **private sector** and investment in promoting human development should be prioritised. Linking human capital and human development could for instance help to increase the viability of investments.
- As a matter of urgency, the **flexibility that the NDICI cushion** (worth €9.5 billion for 2021-2027) offers should be explored to scale up the delivery of vaccines globally, including with the EU's partners in Africa (while acknowledging that lack of funds is only part of the issue). This situation can indeed be qualified as an 'emerging challenge/priority' or a 'crisis' with a humanitarian or developmental impact that requires a rapid response at scale – what the cushion is intended for. It would also enable to protect longer-term resources for human development under the geographic pillar. There are **strong moral, political, and economic arguments** to use the cushion for equitable vaccine roll out. It will also be critical to **preserve the EU's soft power and rebuild geopolitical capital** in a political moment in which rich countries are highly criticised for their response to the crisis and hoarding of vaccines.
- The **EU member states** should recognise that human development is a shared priority and therefore seek to **provide additional and complementary resources within Team Europe and Joint Programming**. Not all responsibility can be left to the EU institutions and the NDICI programming process.

4. On partnerships

- Targeting EU support for human development is best done through a multi-stakeholder dialogue and understanding the political and economic dynamics of how the support will be received. Ahead of the EU-Africa summit, the EU should **listen, consult and adapt to the priorities of African countries (including civil society and expert & specialist institutions) and the AU and its specialist agencies (such as the Africa CDC) and draw lessons from their experience** in dealing with the pandemic for the partnership on human development.
- Progress on human development is a multi-actor endeavour, which should be recognised by the EU in terms of its partnerships, from multilateral institutions (including international financial institutions, development finance institutions and regional development banks), continental and regional organisations, and partner governments. Yet particular attention should be given to local authorities, cities, civil society organisations and local informal community organisations who are often on the front line of delivery of human development.

5. On policy coherence

- Despite some good initiatives, the EU has struggled in the wake of domestic political pressures to contribute to a genuinely effective global response to the pandemic. EU policy incoherences that harm human development should be independently assessed and brought into the public debate on the EU's internal and external priority setting. More independent research is needed in this area generally as the EU's contribution to human development cannot be focussed on aid alone.

Annex - Methodological note

As discussed in chapter 1, human development is a broad and at times contested concept. One of the key challenges for this paper was thus defining what to include and what to exclude from the calculations. The methodology of this study is inspired by the EU's methodology (European Commission 2019c) to measure its performance towards the 20% spending target. However, there are some key differences which are discussed below.

The sectors included

The EU has created a methodology to calculate the share of aid allocated to human development, which also includes specific OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) purpose codes (European Commission 2019c). All figures and percentages presented in this study are calculated using the OECD-DAC CRS data (accessed on 10 February 2021). The figures are expressed in euros and in 2019 constant prices, unless otherwise mentioned.

The purpose codes that we use in the study are the following:

Health	121 - Health, General, Total 122 - Health, basic (includes basic nutrition) 130 - Population Policies / Programmes & Reproductive Health excluding 13010 - Population policy and administrative management
Education	111 - Education, Level Unspecified 112 - Basic Education 113 - Secondary Education
Social protection	16010 - Social protection 16020 - Employment creation 16050 - Multisector aid for basic social services 16064 - Social mitigation of HIV/AIDS

In 2018, the EU included gender-related spending into the spending on human development. However, to ensure comparability across different donors over several years, the purpose codes on gender (15170, 15180), have not been included in this study in the spending for human development, as one of them was introduced in 2016, and the period of analysis is 2010-2019.

Furthermore, to fully capture social transfers, the EU also manually picks programmes and funding to social protection which are reported under other purpose codes, e.g. under agriculture, fisheries, or urban development. As these decisions are included in the spending on human development selectively, it was not possible to include these purpose codes in our calculations.

However, a broader conception of human development could also lead to including other sub-sectors under health and education, notably higher education and non-communicable diseases, in human development spending.

The EU measures its performance against the 20% target by looking at commitments to human development as a share of the total commitments of the instruments managed by DG INTPA. When looking at the EU's spending on human development, this study does not differentiate between the EU instruments, but looks at the total ODA, as per OECD-DAC data. This is to ensure comparability with other donors.

Other methodological notes

As our study focuses more on the implementation side, rather than following commitments, the figures we analysed are disbursements.

As a general rule, the countries are included into the member states category for the years they were member states. Hence, the UK is included in the member states, as it was still a member state in 2010-2019. Croatia became a member state in 2013, and is hence counted thereafter.

The funding to gender equality under the section “Funding human development” uses the OECD gender marker data to assess the funding to projects and programmes that include targets on gender equality. This gives a fuller picture on the EU’s spending on gender equality than solely analysing the relevant DAC codes (15070 - gender equality and women’s empowerment and 15080 - ending violence against women and girls), as the gender marker better takes into account projects and programmes in which gender is mainstreamed. The gender marker data looked at here is also at the level of disbursements. The findings on the EU’s increased support to ending violence against women and girls are also supported by the analysis of the data for the relevant DAC purpose code (15180).

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- European external affairs
- African institutions
- Security and resilience
- Migration
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- Finance, trade and investment
- Regional integration
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