



ecdpm

Work plan

26

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“We work to shape a new generation of partnerships between Europe and emerging and developing economies.”

Mutually beneficial partnerships for global solutions

ECDPM is a leading think-and-do tank focusing on European external relations. We work to shape a new generation of partnerships between Europe and emerging and developing economies, grounded in shared priorities such as climate action, economic transformation, sustainable growth and peace. We take a global view of Europe’s partnerships, while paying particular attention to Europe’s neighbourhood and, in particular, to relations with Africa.

We produce insights that support sustainable and equitable solutions through dialogue and collaboration. We produce practical knowledge that is politically savvy and interdisciplinary to inform policy debates. We act as an independent knowledge broker, facilitating dialogue and collaboration with and between different actors, and contributing to inclusive policymaking and effective policy implementation.

This is the fifth and final work plan under ECDPM’s 2022–2026 strategy. Our work is organised into two clusters: (1) People, partnerships and peace, and (2) Sustainable African economies and climate action.



People, partnerships and peace



Sustainable African economies and climate action

The Centre operates in a rapidly evolving policy environment with a diverse range of actors. To remain relevant and effective, we need to be flexible and ready to adapt our plans as contexts shift, new opportunities arise and partners’ needs evolve. This work plan outlines our partners and the key areas of our work, highlighting specific examples of our activities in 2026 and how we will ensure the uptake of our work.

The year ahead

“To navigate this fragmented world, however, the EU must recalibrate its partnerships.”

The year 2026 marks a pivotal moment for Europe and for ECDPM. As we celebrate our 40th anniversary, we do so in a world marked by deep transformation, uncertainty and fragmentation. The intensification of global rivalries is fundamentally challenging the foundations of international cooperation and global governance architecture. The European Union (EU), in response, has focused inward to address its own vulnerabilities, prioritising the strengthening of its competitiveness, security and defence capabilities, while promoting its values.

This EU focus on its own interests profoundly shapes its external relations, above all in the imperative to strengthen its territorial security and support Ukraine. The EU's commitment involves bolstering Ukraine's defence and capabilities as an integral part of European security, supporting its eventual reconstruction and facilitating its path towards EU accession. The strategic importance of the EU's immediate Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods remains a key priority for stability on its doorstep.

To navigate this fragmented world, however, the EU must recalibrate its partnerships. It must reach outward to build flexible coalitions and mutually beneficial partnerships with actors in its neighbourhood and across the Global South — in Asia, Latin America, and most importantly, in Africa. Africa's stability, prosperity and resilience are deeply intertwined with Europe's own future. This not only demands a more mature partnership but a strategic alliance that can effectively address questions around human and economic development, building sustainable industries and markets, developing climate responses and addressing fragility and instability across the regions. The EU's core effort must focus on sustainable investment opportunities, tech solutions, clean energy and innovations. But it must also continue to focus on human development, climate adaptation, resilience, security and better governance. A mature, balanced and strategic partnership with Africa — one grounded in mutual benefit, respect and shared ambition — is essential.

Embracing this broad, rapidly evolving and critical agenda will be central to ECDPM's work in 2026. We will continue to contribute to these priorities through independent analysis, dialogue facilitation, partnerships for co-creation and practical support for policymaking and implementation.

In particular, ECDPM will pursue a focused and adaptive set of activities to advance the following priorities:

- **Support effective EU external action, including the scaling up of the Global Gateway strategy:**
Providing independent analysis and strategic advice to ensure that Europe's external engagement — particularly through the Global Gateway strategy — remains effective, inclusive, and aligned with the development priorities of partner countries.
- **Deepen work on Africa–Europe relations:**
Facilitating dialogue and evidence-based policy debates to strengthen partnerships for sustainable growth, governance, peace and resilience across the African continent, with special attention to the most fragile and least developed countries.
- **Contribute to peace, security and governance agendas:**
Engaging in research and policy dialogues on conflict prevention, crisis response and governance reforms, as well as issues around the EU's defence agenda and implications abroad. This will also include work on supporting Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction and democratic resilience, and broader EU security cooperation in its neighbourhood and abroad.
- **Advance sustainable and inclusive economies:**
Promoting fair and green transitions through work on trade, investment, and regional integration, ensuring that economic transformation supports job creation, climate adaptation, and digital innovation.
- **Strengthen policy coherence and global partnerships:**
Analysing how EU internal policies — on energy, food, migration and digitalisation — interact with external objectives, and exploring opportunities for flexible, interest-based coalitions with actors in the Global South.
- **Champion climate action and resilience:**
Supporting the design and implementation of climate and biodiversity policies that link mitigation and adaptation goals with inclusive development and sustainable finance.
- **Invest in knowledge, dialogue and learning:**
Expanding ECDPM's role as a trusted convener, bringing together policymakers, practitioners, and researchers from Europe, Africa, and beyond to exchange insights and co-create practical solutions.

In all these efforts, ECDPM will remain true to its mission as a 'think-and-do-tank': bridging policy and practice, connecting Europe and its partners, and fostering cooperation that is both principled and pragmatic in a rapidly changing world.

Our institutional funders and partners



“ECDPM is respected for its extensive network of partners and privileged access to key stakeholders and policymakers in foreign and development policy communities, in Europe, Africa and beyond.”

Our institutional partners continue to play a major role in supporting ECDPM’s mandate, strategy and work plans by providing multiannual institutional and medium-term aligned funding. They allow us to produce cutting-edge, policy-relevant analysis and engage in European, international and African policy processes as a non-partisan broker.

ECDPM has built and maintains a solid relationship of trust, even in these volatile times, based on the quality, relevance and impact of our work with the Netherlands, as its founder, as well as with Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, and Luxembourg. These partnerships are a cornerstone of ECDPM’s way of working and are critical for us to maintain impact. In 2026, ECDPM will engage with our institutional partners to help shape our future long-term strategy, while continuing to provide specialist insights to them. In addition, ECDPM will continue to build its capacity to attract strategically aligned programme and project funding, which makes up 45% of our financing, paying particular attention to building relationships with those that can fund at scale, such as international foundations.

ECDPM is respected for its extensive network of partners and privileged access to key stakeholders and policymakers in foreign and development policy communities, in Europe, Africa and beyond. In Europe, we engage with policymakers, including officials from the Council of the EU and its working groups, the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, EU delegations, EU Council presidencies, EU member states and relevant ministries, as well as those relevant to our thematic foci, national and financial institutions and implementing agencies.

In Africa, we engage with policymakers, the African Union (AU) Commission and its departments, regional economic communities, AU member states, relevant ministries and international organisations, as well as the African diplomatic community in Brussels. On both continents and at the global level, we work with multilateral institutions, social and economic actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, economic agencies, academia and think tanks.

ECDPM will partner with African think tanks and institutes on specific activities. It will continue to expand its pool of associates and fellows, who complement the teams with their expertise and networks. The Centre will continue to partner with peer institutions for joint research, publications and events, including through the European Think Tanks Group (ETTG).

How we work

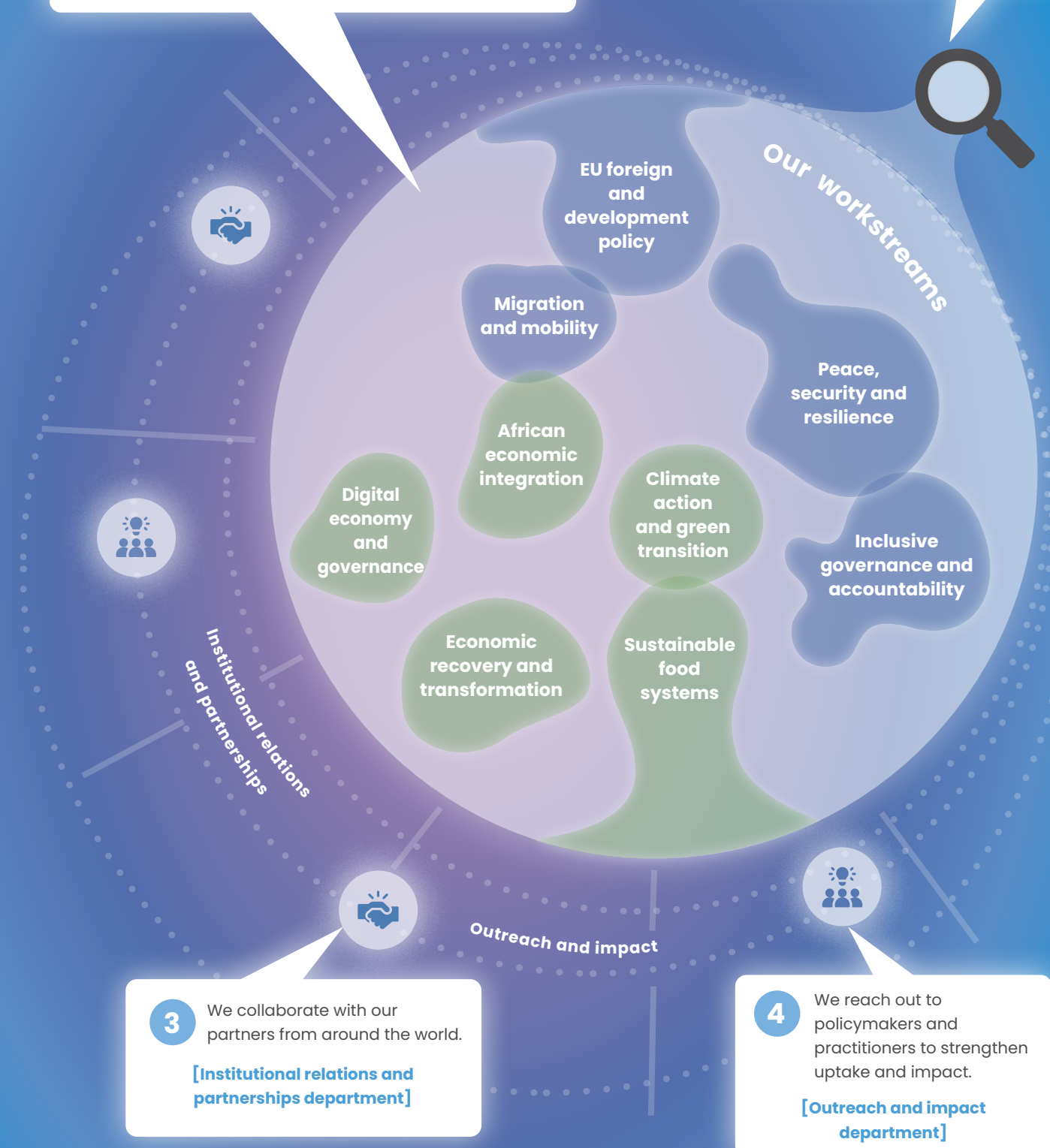
ecdpm

1 We generate knowledge and act as an independent broker. We have organised our work in **two clusters**, linked to the **impact areas** of the strategy.

The **two clusters** are:

- People, partnerships and peace
- Sustainable African economies and climate action

2 We apply a gender lens to address gender inequality and women’s political and socio-economic participation in all areas of our work.



3 We collaborate with our partners from around the world.
[Institutional relations and partnerships department]

4 We reach out to policymakers and practitioners to strengthen uptake and impact.
[Outreach and impact department]

Our gender lens



“ECDPM is integrating a gender perspective and addressing gender issues across our work.”

As stated in our 2022–2026 strategy, ECDPM is integrating a gender perspective and addressing gender issues across our work. ECDPM has a gender task force, with designated staff (gender focal points, a gender coordinator, and our outreach and impact team), and an associate specialised in gender who supports gender integration in our research and policy work.

Our new Gender Equality Plan assesses our past activities (both internally within our organisational structure and in our research and policy dialogue work) and commits ECDPM to continue improving the way we apply our gender lens.

Staff can use tools such as the ‘Gender Marker’ and benefit from our monitoring and learning mechanisms to integrate gender into their work and identify areas for further improvement. Workstreams have strengthened their gender ambitions, and with a systematic, strategic, and accountable approach, we will support them in consolidating these ambitions further.

In 2026, we will:

- Promote the systematic and accountable use of the updated **ECDPM ‘Gender Marker’**, to ensure that gender perspectives are not diluted but are meaningfully integrated into the final product;
- Organise **refreshers and practical sessions** using real cases to demonstrate how to apply the marker effectively;
- Strengthen our flow of **exchanges between workstreams and the gender task force** by systematically dedicating time to discuss gender-related issues and by liaising between gender focal points and management;
- Support workstreams to **fundraise for gender-specific projects** while ensuring that they meaningfully integrate gender and apply intersectional lenses across their work;
- Strengthen the visibility and outreach of our gender-related work, including by promoting gender-specific commentaries stemming from research projects;
- **Stay updated on relevant discussions and developments** in Europe and the world regarding gender and intersectionality (especially the growing backlash against gender equality) and their implications for our role as a think tank.

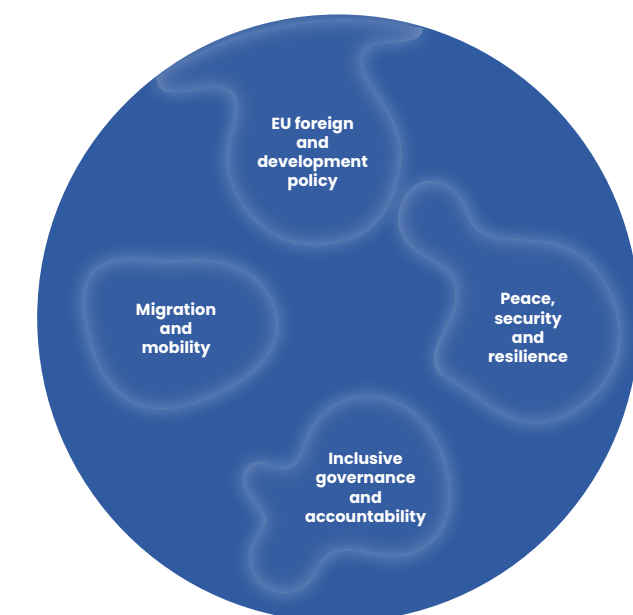
People, partnerships and peace



“Across the EU’s external policies, including the Global Gateway, we will assess what drives and enables inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability to citizens’ demands.”

ECDPM supports EU countries and the EU, in the lead-up to the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (2028–2034), to balance geopolitical and economic interests – related to the EU’s competitiveness agenda and shifting priorities around defence and security – with long-term commitments to sustainable human and economic development. The Centre will advance balanced perspectives on migration and mobility between Europe, Africa and neighbouring regions, exploring links with labour markets, skills, climate and digital transformation. ECDPM will contribute to strengthening the EU’s approach to peace, security and resilience, promoting more coherent links between humanitarian, development and peace efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Across the EU’s external policies, including the Global Gateway, we will assess what drives and enables inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability to citizens’ demands, including in fragile settings.

In 2026–2027, we will work in four key areas – EU foreign and development policy; migration and mobility; peace, security and resilience and inclusive governance and accountability.



Interested in working with us?

We offer comprehensive analysis and research | policy briefs and short articles | dialogue and collaboration | advice and support | podcasts and video content | expert information and training | organisation and facilitation of roundtables, events and webinars |

Are you interested in working with us? Please get in touch with Sophie Desmidt, Associate director at sd@ecdpm.org.

EU foreign and development policy

ECDPM will contribute to discussions on **the next EU MFF 2028–2034, focusing on how the EU’s external action funding can balance short-term geopolitical priorities**, including defence and competitiveness, with **long-term commitments to poverty eradication, human rights, and sustainable international cooperation and partnerships**.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- **The next EU MFF, with a focus on key instruments, such as the Global Europe Instrument (GEI):** We will analyse how the future external action budget can reconcile the EU’s short-term geopolitical and economic priorities with its treaty-based commitments. We will actively engage with EU institutions, member states and partners to inform the negotiations and identify ways to ensure that flexibility and political responsiveness do not come at the expense of predictability and long-term partnership building.
- **Strategic evaluation of the Team Europe Approach (TEA):** In 2026, we will continue our work as part of this strategic evaluation. The evaluation will provide independent and evidence-based analysis of TEA’s relevance, governance, effectiveness and added value to inform its adaptation for the GEI and the next MFF. It will assess TEA’s impact and identify lessons for future design and financing.
- **Human development, education and skills:** The team will also aim to reassert the centrality of human development, notably education and skills, as a strategic investment for the EU’s partnerships and internal resilience. It will continue its cross-workstream collaboration, for example, on (global) health and green skills.

HIGHLIGHT

The next EU MFF, with a focus on key instruments, such as the Global Europe Instrument (GEI)

Our 2026–2027 work will analyse how the next MFF and the GEI will reshape the EU’s external financing (governance, flexibility, earmarks, partner ownership), proposing ways to improve coherence in EU external action. We will also examine trade-offs and synergies between EU geopolitical/economic priorities and treaty commitments on poverty, rights, and governance, linking these with competitiveness, migration and security/defence agendas.

Specific activities

We will deliver real-time analysis and briefs during negotiations and convene roundtable discussions and dialogues with EU institutions, member states and partners to promote balanced, mutually beneficial outcomes across development, competitiveness, defence and security domains.

Partners

This work will involve teams across ECDPM, ETTG, our institutional partners and other organisations and think tanks working on EU external and domestic affairs.

Migration and mobility

The Centre seeks to **foster balanced, well-informed perspectives on migration and mobility between Europe, Africa and other key regions (notably the Mediterranean and the Middle East)**. We focus on the political economy of migration governance, analysing how European domestic agendas and external partnerships interact, and how these dynamics are perceived in African contexts. Our work explores practical avenues for cooperation on labour and skills mobility, sustainable return and reintegration, and nexus issues such as climate, trade and digital transformation.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- Building on the findings of the **DYNAMIG project**, which analysed the extent to which migrants’ experiences are reflected in migration policymaking, we plan to continue communicating results and insights throughout 2026 – with the aim of informing debates, engaging stakeholders and supporting future fundraising efforts.
- In 2026, we will finalise the **Evaluation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF)** and will aim to actively integrate the lessons learned into ongoing debates on programming for the next MFF, with a focus on the strategic orientation of EU external action on migration and its financing.
- We are actively pursuing fundraising opportunities on **climate-related migration governance**, foresight on migration futures and evaluation of migration-related programmes, with proposals already submitted or in preparation. If successful, these initiatives will allow us to expand our work across our anchor and satellite areas and contribute directly to forward-looking policy debates.

We will also explore further fundraising opportunities to deepen our work on labour migration (particularly digital and green skills and their links to EU competitiveness **and Africa’s transformation**), and **investigate how migration is incorporated into EU comprehensive partnerships**.

HIGHLIGHT

Evaluation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (2015–2025) has been one of the most significant EU instruments for addressing migration-related challenges through development cooperation. Our evaluation assesses its overall performance and the lessons it offers for the EU’s external migration governance and financing. The findings will be useful for the programming of future EU external action on migration.

Specific activities

The specific activities for this initiative will include the continuation of analysis and research, including through field country missions, and finalising the comprehensive evaluation of the EUTF over the course of 2026. This will include communicating findings and recommendations to EU institutions and member states. Building on this engagement, ECDPM will work to feed the findings and lessons learned into policy debates on the strategic orientation of EU external action on migration and its financing.

Partners

- Particip (lead organisation).
- ECDPM is a core consortium partner responsible for analysis/policy engagement.

Peace, security and resilience

In 2026, ECDPM will aim to contribute to the EU's ability to link **humanitarian, development and peace efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts**. We will look at the EU's engagements on peace, security and resilience, at the bilateral, European and multilateral levels – and how to balance this with shifting policy agendas, notably around defence and security, European competitiveness, in particular looking at the next EU MFF.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- **Multilateralism, peace and security:** In partnership with SAIIA, and with support from the Global Challenges Foundation, ECDPM will continue its work as part of the project “Building bridges in turbulent times: The role of Africa and Europe in shaping global multilateralism reforms on peace and security.” The project aims to contribute to policy processes and discussions on multilateral reforms in peace and security, thereby strengthening opportunities for Europe and Africa to jointly shape an inclusive and effective global system, one that is ready for 21st-century challenges.
- **Expert Support Platform for Resilience (ESPRE):** ECDPM, in collaboration with Particip, will be jointly leading the implementation of the Expert Support Platform for Resilience (ESPRE). This expert platform, implemented as an EU Facility, aims to enhance the capacity of the European Commission and the DG INTPA's G5 Peace, Security and Resilience Unit to strengthen resilience and link humanitarian, development and peace actions in fragile, sudden shock- and conflict-affected environments. Core partners in this assignment will include Crisis Group, Conciliation Resources (CR), the European Institute of Peace (EIP), Search for Common Ground and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF).

HIGHLIGHT

Navigating shifting EU priorities on defence, security and peacebuilding

Building on earlier and ongoing evaluations of the European external financial instruments, including the EU Trust Funds, and in the run-up to the next MFF, we will closely monitor developments in the EU's external engagement and its impact on peace, security and defence partnerships. We will focus on what these shifting priorities will mean in practice for fragile and conflict-affected settings. The objective is to foster more effective policy exchanges among decision-makers, EU institutions, services and member states.

Specific activities

The work will assess positions and approaches of key EU stakeholders to identify limitations, gaps, lessons learned, and areas for future support in light of Europe's evolving security landscape and the next EU MFF. Closed-door roundtables will bring together actors to bridge existing policy gaps and contribute to a stronger policy discussion on defence, security and peacebuilding. We will continue our analysis and publish (public) briefs.

Partners

This will involve close collaboration with:

- Other ECDPM workstreams.
- Relevant actors and policymakers working on defence, security and peacebuilding in Brussels and European capitals.
- Peer think tanks and practitioners.

Inclusive governance and accountability

ECDPM will closely follow key policies related to promoting inclusive partnerships and forms of governance, and inform actors in Europe, Africa and beyond about **what drives and enables inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability to citizens' demands** and what this means for governance as a public good and as an enabler of human rights and wider sustainable development.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- **Defending civic space and working with unusual actors.** We will follow the EU's political and ideological shift toward a more interest-driven foreign policy to assess how this affects its support for democracy and civic space in partner countries. We will assess how the changing narratives unfold and impact partner countries, with a focus on fragile settings and civic space actors. Our key priority is to inform policy debates and help shape the policy narrative.
- **Global Gateway, fragility and local authorities:** We will build further on our analysis of EU engagement in fragile settings, the importance of supporting local and regional authorities, including in key EU strategies such as Global Gateway. In 2026, we will continue to assess how the EU and its member states engage with stakeholders at the territorial level and include them in investment projects, notably Global Gateway flagship projects. Our research will document innovative ways for the EU to support local authorities, helping Team Europe actors identify conditions for meaningful local engagement, overcome structural barriers, and emphasise the importance of infrastructure and connectivity investments.

HIGHLIGHT

Mid-term evaluation of the EU Youth Action Plan (YAP) for external actions (2022–2025)

Over the course of 2025 and 2026, ECDPM, in collaboration with Particip, will conduct the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Youth Action Plan (YAP) for external action (2022–2027). This highly strategic evaluation seeks to provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of the YAP's performance (2022–2025). Key objectives will be to assess coherence with EU internal policies on youth, to extract lessons and to guide future youth-related EU external action, including a potential second phase (YAP II).

Specific activities

The evaluation will conduct country and thematic case studies, including Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and thematic case studies on fragility and the Global Gateway strategy; and will be accompanied by a dedicated dissemination strategy.

Partners:

- Particip.
- Core team members from the earlier Evaluation of EU Support to Youth in the Enlargement and neighbourhood region (2014–2022).
- Experts in Mozambique, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso.

Sustainable African economies and climate action

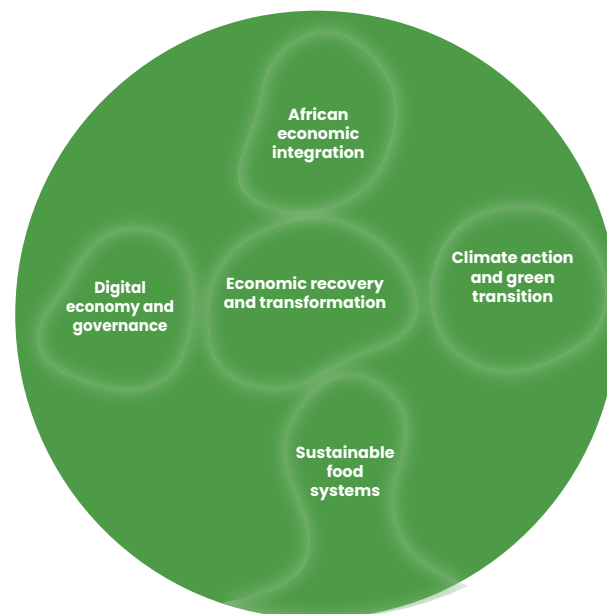


“ECDPM contributes to the formulation and implementation of coherent European and African policies to promote prosperous, inclusive, connected economies.”



Premised on the sustainable use of natural resources and economic development within our planetary boundaries, ECDPM contributes to the formulation and implementation of coherent European and African policies to promote prosperous, inclusive, connected economies as a means to improve livelihoods and provide an ambitious and fair response to the global climate crisis.

In 2026, we will work in five key areas: Economic recovery and transformation; climate action and green transition; sustainable food systems; African economic integration; and digital economy and governance.



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Please get in touch with Bruce Byiers, Associate director at bby@ecdpm.org.

Economic recovery and transformation

ECDPM will help improve and adapt trade, development and climate finance, private sector engagement approaches and tools in a way that supports geostrategic and mutually beneficial partnerships. The aim is to foster i) the sustainable, inclusive (gender-sensitive) and climate/health-resilient economic transformation in the Global South, including in Africa; and ii) better connect the development, economic diplomacy and geostrategic objectives of the EU, including its climate and digital ambitions.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- In the context of the discussions around the **next MFF and the scale-up of the Global Gateway strategy**, we will provide analytical insights and broker dialogues between the EU, member states, European financial institutions and the European private sector around some of the key issues including the mobilisation of investments for sustainable development, European competitiveness agenda, Team Nationals/Team Europe, open strategic autonomy and strategic interdependencies and mutually beneficial partnerships. We will provide guidance on formulating and implementing development and trade finance/export promotion instruments.
- We will work on **integrating development, climate and trade finance elements** more strongly in the other parts of our work at ECDPM, including on financing sustainable food ecosystems, clean energy transition in MENA, digital and the European tech offer to their Global South partners.

HIGHLIGHT

Building and helping operationalise synergies between development and trade finance

Based on initial work started in 2023, ECDPM will continue to provide independent analytical inputs and advice on enhancing coordination between export credit agencies (ECAs) and DFIs, and how to integrate ECAs more effectively in the European financial architecture for development. Based on extensive consultations with the EU (INTPA, GROW, TRADE), EU member states, EIB/EBRD, JEFIC, and EDFI networks, we shared recommendations, including the design of a dedicated financial instrument, which were presented during the second high-level conference on the enhanced coordination between ECAs and DFIs, and on which we will build in 2026 in promoting its implementation.

Specific activities

- Informal consultations.
- Roundtable discussions.
- Briefing notes.

Partners

- European Commission.
- European DFIs and ECAs.
- EU member states.

Climate action and green transition

ECDPM seeks to contribute to ambitious, fair and effective responses to the climate crisis. Our work focuses on i) strengthening climate adaptation, with a particular emphasis on climate finance and diplomacy, and ii) on advancing a just green transition in the Africa–Europe partnership, with a focus on green industrialisation and renewable energy. In addition, we analyse critical nexus issues, such as the links between climate and security or climate and trade.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- We will build on our work on **green industrialisation and green industrial partnerships**, with a stronger focus on trade (including CBAM), finance and investments, and EU relations with the Mediterranean, particularly North Africa. Where possible, we will prioritise initiatives with partners and networks.
- We will support European and African partners, most notably climate envoys, in **applying evidence to adaptation planning and negotiations, bridging climate science and decision-making** through briefs, dialogues and UNFCCC engagement. Mainly, we aim to ensure African perspectives shape the Global Stocktake and strengthen the case for climate justice and adequate adaptation finance.
- We will continue to work on **Africa–Europe climate and energy diplomacy**, focusing on targeted themes such as green energy, clean industrialisation, multilateral cooperation on climate adaptation, and climate finance, where the EU’s emerging Clean Trade and Investment Partnership (CTIP) agenda will feature as a key topic.

HIGHLIGHT

TeraMed Initiative – Green industrialisation for economic growth and energy transition in the Mediterranean

In 2026, our work will continue to explore opportunities for green industries within the Mediterranean region, as a catalyst for green energy deployment and as a foundation for integrated green industrialisation between North and South Mediterranean countries. This network-driven project is a collaborative effort with a consortium of Mediterranean think tanks from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Our focus will include energy-intensive industries, hydrogen economies, and emerging clean technology and energy investments in North African countries. Furthermore, this project will provide a platform to contribute to new analyses on supply chain and industrial partnerships between the EU and developing countries.

Specific activities

- Research.
- Network activities.
- Roundtables and workshops.

Partners

MATTCCh – Med Alliance of Think Tanks on Climate Change, including: ECCO, E3G, Carboun Institute, Imal Initiative, Ember Climate, RECREE, and more.

Sustainable food systems

ECDPM will work to support **transitions to more sustainable, resilient and equitable food systems, particularly in Africa, as well as in connection to European food systems, firms and finance**. We will pay particular attention to issues of food systems, governance, financing, and climate resilience.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- **Assist African countries, through a project led by AUDA–NEPAD, in integrating climate and food policies** and translating them into investment pipelines, with a focus on infrastructure corridors. The project will a) map out relevant policies and investment plans and the key players involved along each corridor, and develop context-specific recommendations to enhance synergies; and b) then facilitate multi-actor dialogue and partnerships to align policies and unlock funding along each corridor.
- In partnership with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, **cultivate a vibrant think tank network around the UN Rome-based agencies**. This initiative will facilitate evidence-based policy dialogue and decision-making in agriculture and food systems through enhanced coordination at national and international levels.
- A **Horizon project dedicated to empowering stakeholders within Africa’s food systems in linking policy to practice**. Activities will include identifying capacity gaps, formulating policy recommendations, delivering Political Economy Analysis training, and reinforcing the science-policy interface.

HIGHLIGHT

Agrifood systems transformation at the nexus of finance and climate

We will continue to support FAO in promoting sustainable agrifood systems transformation, with a particular focus on the finance and climate adaptation dimensions. Building on our 2025 collaboration, we will extend engagement in 2026 to strengthen the dissemination of the FAO Roadmap for agrifood systems transformation, support climate- and food-oriented investment opportunities in Africa, and deepen country-level work on the coffee value chain in East Africa.

Specific activities

- Policy dialogues and multi-stakeholder engagements on the food-climate nexus at the global level and in Africa, including during the climate COP events.
- Support solutions and partnerships that make African corridors more food- and climate-oriented and attract related investments.
- Promotion of stronger RBA/UN collaboration with IFIs, MDBs and PDBs to channel resources for sustainable food systems, starting from the coffee value chains as a test case.

Partners

- UN Rome-based agencies.

African economic integration

ECDPM will continue to work on **how and why regional organisations interact as they do with the AU, the AfCFTA, and their member states on economic integration issues. We will focus on** identifying and clarifying the competing regional and national agendas as well as how these interact with member states’ interests. We will analyse how countries balance industrialisation agendas and economic growth ambitions with regional trade commitments in practice, while exploring issues such as decent job creation, green industrialisation, value chain linkages, and cross-border corridor initiatives, including transport corridors and trade facilitation.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- **Establish an AfCFTA political economy observatory**, in partnership with the Mandela School of Public Governance at the University of Cape Town, to provide analyses in support of the AfCFTA Industrial Advisory Council of the AfCFTA Secretariat that will cover a range of implementation issues linked to specific value chains, corridors and institutional issues.
- Continue our research partnership with TradeMark Africa to provide policy-to-practice and political economy inputs to complement their practical work on **promoting trade, implementing trade facilitation measures and investing in transport corridors** (see the project highlight).
- We will work with AUDA-NEPAD in their drive to help **connect the continental trade, infrastructure and food systems agendas**, again through institutional, value chain and corridor connections.

HIGHLIGHT

Research partnerships to promote trade, implement trade facilitation measures and invest in transport corridors through the AfCFTA

This work provides analytical insights and facilitates learning around the practical work of implementing the AfCFTA. One key project in 2026 relates to TradeMark Africa, a donor-funded trade facilitation organisation in Africa that works to promote regional integration at the regional and continental levels, for whom we provide knowledge insights to facilitate their work and the AfCFTA implementation.

Specific activities

Further analysis of the AfCFTA institutional arrangements and what these imply for implementation and a division of labour between the AfCFTA Secretariat, the RECs and other actors.

Partners

TradeMark Africa (Kenya/Ghana).

Digital economy and governance

Our work aims to advance digital cooperation as a means of fostering sustainable development, upholding a free and open internet and protecting fundamental digital rights. To achieve that goal, we examine pathways for strengthening global digital partnerships, unpack the EU’s tech business offer and financing mechanisms, and analyse how African digital integration can advance Africa’s development agenda.

The key activities for 2026 include:

- **Stronger digital partnerships and managing strategic interdependence:** Working together with global think tanks (for example, RIA, South Africa; CEBRI and ITS, Brazil; Pranava and Aapti Institutes, India), we are planning a series of events and short policy deliverables focused on EU strategic partnerships with selected countries/regions (EU-AU, EU-Brazil, EU-India).
- **Supporting an African Digital Single Market:** We plan to expand our partnership with RIA, developing a series of policy briefs and events that will examine how Africa can expand its development agenda through digital public infrastructure, data governance and AI use cases.
- **Competitiveness, Global Gateway and financing the EU Tech Offer:** An interactive webpage, conference and communication activities presenting our research and recommendations around different aspects of a potential tech business offer.

HIGHLIGHT

Competitiveness, Global Gateway and financing the EU Tech Offer

The EU’s international digital strategy outlines the ambition to promote a comprehensive European Tech Business Offer, yet details remain vague. ECDPM’s work has already begun to explore different dimensions of this offer and how to finance them, and will launch a flagship initiative in early 2026.

Specific activities

- Research products delving into key technology areas, exploring the EU offer and how the EU and member states can contribute.
- An interactive web page presenting deliverables in an accessible and attractive manner.
- A series of workshops/events delving into the various technologies and exploring strategies to strengthen financing.
- Podcasts, commentaries and external appearances focused on disseminating work.
- Briefings with EU and member states officials, development agencies and DFIs.

Partners

- European Commission.
- Gates Foundation.
- Research ICT Africa, CEBRI, ITS Rio, Pranava Institute.

Outreach and impact



“Our aim is to stimulate dialogue with our partners and get ECDPM’s work and ideas to the right people in the right way, at the right time.”

For all the areas of work presented above, we aim to have **visibility and impact**. That is why each team, in coordination with the Outreach and impact unit, develops targeted outreach and impact strategies.

Our aim is to stimulate dialogue with our partners and get ECDPM’s work and ideas **to the right people in the right way, at the right time**. This builds understanding and capacity for more inclusive policies and practices. It also cements our legitimacy and reputation, fostering our audience’s trust in us.

In our outreach, we will emphasise how these various areas of work link together. 2026 will be a special year for ECDPM to look back as **it celebrates its 40th anniversary**. During this milestone year, we will also develop a new strategy to make sure ECDPM continues to be a ‘think-and-do-tank’ attuned to a changing reality, one that, going beyond our original mandate, explores new areas and builds on our successful approach.

Want to know more about our work?

ECDPM distributes its work via its [website](#), the [Weekly Compass](#) e-newsletter, social media [channels](#), targeted email campaigns and events, among others. To reach as many people as possible, we offer public, hybrid events while also organising closed-door roundtables to ensure that we facilitate an open and honest dialogue.

Exclusively for our Institutional Partners, ECDPM also produces a quarterly newsletter on our behind-the-scenes work called ‘ECDPM Insider’.

To stay up to date on our work, [subscribe](#) to our Weekly Compass newsletter.

[The Weekly Compass](#) is the Centre’s key communication tool. It informs readers on the latest work done by ECDPM’s experts, provides useful information on events and reports news from the fields of international cooperation and Africa-Europe relations from a multitude of outlets.

ECDPM’s [website](#) offers content highlighting progress on the activities described in this work plan:

- Publications (reports, papers and briefs).
- Commentaries and articles.
- Events.
- Multimedia presentations.

We report our monitoring data in line with the standards of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

Centre management

Finance

Over the years, ECDPM has cultivated strong and trusted relationships with its institutional funders. These partnerships remain the cornerstone of the Centre’s ability to operate independently and act not only as a think tank, but as a think-and-do tank, bridging research, policy dialogue, and practical action.

In 2026, institutional funding is expected to continue representing approximately 55% of the total resources required to sustain the Centre’s work. This balance has remained relatively stable over the past five years and continues to provide a solid foundation for our operations. For 2026, the Centre has budgeted a total income of around €8.1 million, reflecting a modest decrease of €1 million compared to 2025. As of the time of this report, €1.2 million of the €3.3 million in additional project funding required for 2026 has already been secured.

A key evolution in our financial planning is the closer alignment between funding targets and the Centre’s strategic direction. As we **strengthen our focus on multiannual, cross-thematic collaboration, our funding approach mirrors this ambition**. The updated strategy encourages all teams to work collectively in securing future projects and building integrated, cross-cutting programmes of work.

ECDPM continues to minimise general and administrative costs, ensuring that the largest share of funding directly supports our research and policy work. Nonetheless, these costs are gradually increasing due to inflation and new legislative requirements that necessitate ongoing adaptation.

Our largest expenditure remains personnel costs, which are shaped by the collective labour agreements in the countries where we operate. In 2024 and 2025, the Centre adjusted staff numbers to ensure sustainability while maintaining the quality, thematic scope and reach of our work. For 2026, no systemic changes in staff numbers are foreseen. To safeguard excellence and thought leadership, ECDPM continues to invest in relationships with key experts across all thematic areas.

As a non-profit foundation, ECDPM’s mission remains unchanged: to generate knowledge for the public good. Looking ahead, **impact and sustainability will remain at the heart of our financial strategy** – ensuring that ECDPM continues to make a meaningful contribution to international cooperation, policy innovation, and transformative change.

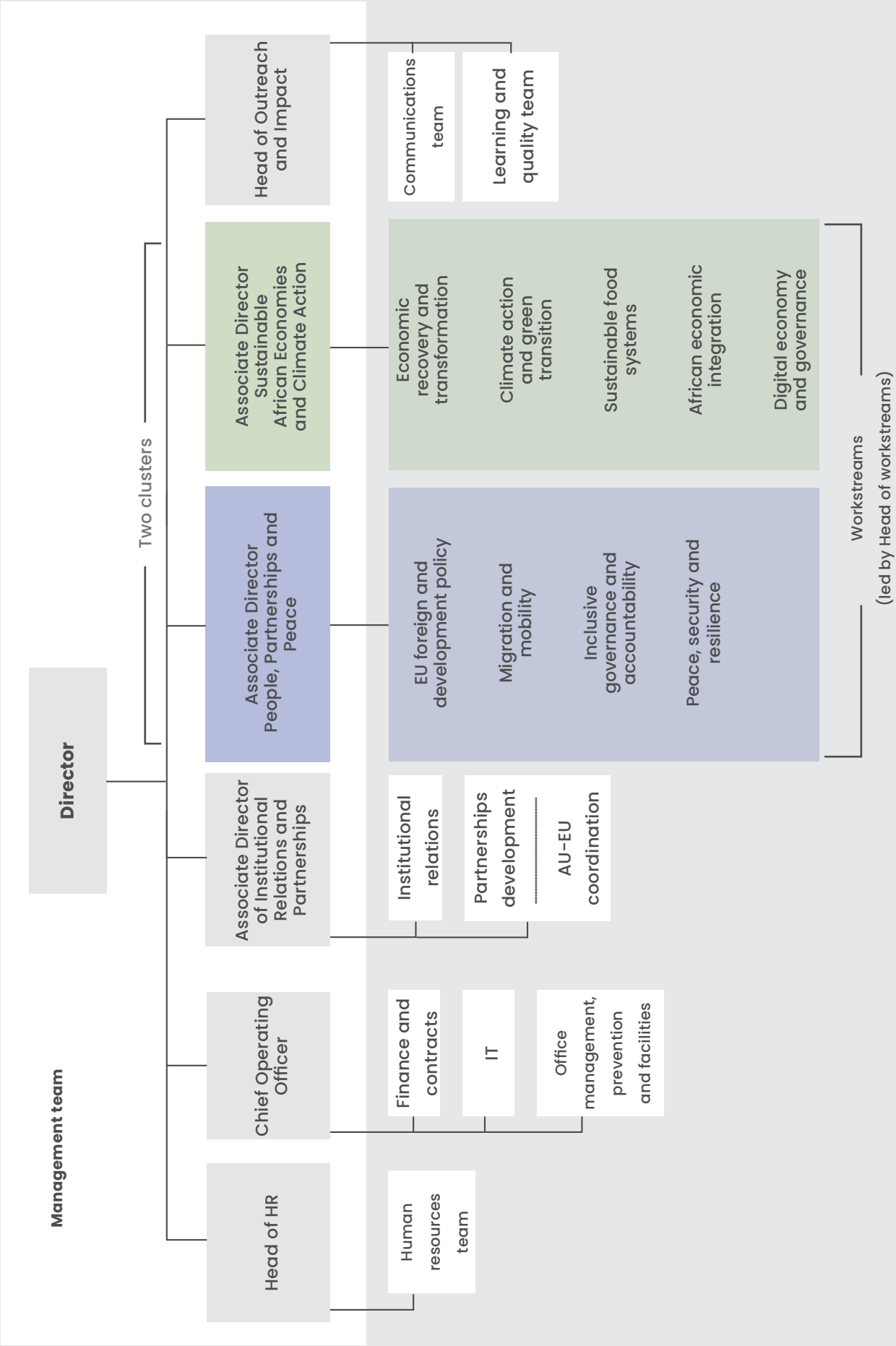
Strategic talent management

Our strategic talent management plan for 2025–2026 is informed by the results of the 2023 and 2024 staff surveys and the budgetary situation. Given the budgetary constraints and work-life balance challenges, we will focus on how our staff can **collaborate in the most effective way** while also creating a working environment that does not overexert people. We will take initiatives to unlock the potential of our staff by organising (in-house) training, providing mentoring and coaching on thematic and content-related topics, fundraising, project management, networking, people leadership, financial management, and budgeting. The HR team will coach our people leaders and their team members on how to systematically manage the personal learning journeys of all staff members.

A second focus area is managing the **mental well-being** of our staff. At the beginning of 2024, we offered training together with our Dutch occupational health service for all people leaders on how to recognise these issues and how to manage them. We will use the results of the 2024 staff survey, together with the works council, the trust persons and the prevention officer, to inform more initiatives on the mental well-being of our staff. Note: It is a joint responsibility of the employer and the employee to keep on discussing these challenges and make action plans.

Thirdly, we will develop and offer training for all staff on how to better recognise and understand issues related to gender and diversity. The goal is to check if staff have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to manage sensitive issues related to gender, diversity and/or discrimination.

ECDPM IN 2025



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