

ECDPM Background note

The role of Europe in the implementation of the Global Development Agenda post-2015

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Background

1. **The world is confronted to a myriad of global challenges:** financial instability, pervasive extreme and chronic poverty, rising inequalities, migration, climate change, conflict and insecurity. There is increased recognition that these challenges are multidimensional and increasingly interconnected. There is also consensus that to be addressed global challenges require effective global collective action.
2. **2015 is a threshold year for global collective action and international cooperation.** In July 2015, global leaders met in Addis Ababa to define the financial tools that are needed to deliver on the new post-2015 development agenda. In September, the international community agreed on a global agenda and 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). In December 2015, the world is set to agree on a new universal and legally binding climate agreement in Paris. The SDGs will only be achieved unless a highly-ambitious climate deal is made, and unless financial and non-financial means are mobilised effectively to support the global transition to sustainable development and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change.
3. **The EU is set to play a major role in global collective action.** Beyond international solidarity considerations, the European Union has an interest in ensuring that global solutions to global challenges are found. Peace, prosperity, low-carbon development and greater equality beyond Europe's borders means positive spillovers with regards to EU's objectives in security, migration, economic growth and sustainable development¹. The EU is the world's major development assistance provider; it is the most ambitious block with regards climate action; it considers itself as an international role model with regards to human rights, democracy, social protection and regional integration. Yet, the EU is still caught in an unprecedented economic, financial, social and political crisis. This crisis risks undermining EU's credibility and ability to deliver on its ambitions regarding sustainable development and worldwide poverty eradication.

The transition from MDGs to the SDGs

4. The MDGs consisted of eight simple, measurable improvements on global poverty, hunger, health, education, shelter, gender equality, environmental protection, and global partnerships. The MDGs have played a crucial role in providing political impetus to prioritise poverty reduction in developing countries and in galvanising international, public and private, support to pro-poor development².
5. In terms of progress achieved, the results are mixed. Several targets have been only narrowly missed, including achieving universal primary education, but the issue of quality education was generally overlooked. The global number of people living under extreme poverty has been significantly reduced, but success is greatly due to progress made in China alone. The goals relating to sanitation, and the environment have not been met, although some progress has been made. Although the 0,7% target has been missed, the volume of Official Development Assistance (ODA) has increased by 66% in real terms³. As the UN puts it in its latest MDG report: "Although significant achievements have been made on many of the MDG targets worldwide, progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving significant gaps. Millions of people are being left behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. Targeted efforts will be needed to reach the most vulnerable people".
6. MDGs have been criticised for being too narrow and reductionist. Issues such as equity, sustainability and climate change, the quality of public services and poverty as capability deprivation, were not sufficiently addressed by the MDG framework: too much focus was put on aid

¹ European Think Tank Group, [Our collective interest: Why Europe's problems need global solutions and global problems need European action](#), September 2014.

² Claire Melamed and Lucy Scott, "After 2015: Progress and Challenges for Development." ODI Background Note, March 2011.

³ United Nations' [Millennium Development Goals Report](#), 2015.

and too little on addressing the international drivers of poverty, the role of policies and global governance and the meaning of what wellbeing is.

7. To address these shortcomings, **the post-2015 framework introduces several key transformations:**

- a. **It sets a universal, yet differentiated agenda.** The post-2015 agenda is universal in that it applies to all countries, regardless of their development status. It is also a differentiated agenda, because countries' responsibilities will differ depending on their specific circumstances, their respective development statuses and the means available to them, at three different levels: (i) responsibilities for domestic development outcomes⁴; (ii) responsibilities for assisting other countries⁵; and (iii) responsibilities for supporting progress towards global common goods⁶.
 - b. **It broadens the remit of international development cooperation.** There is a clear consensus that aid alone is not sufficient to address development challenges, and that there is a need to overcome the traditional North/South dichotomy. The post-2015 agenda is less focused on 'financial transfers' from developed to developing countries, and much more sharing innovation, technology and knowledge, and promoting policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), global governance, mutual accountability and inclusive societies. There is also growing expectation that emerging economies will contribute more to sustainable development.
 - c. **It puts more emphasis on domestic policies to mobilise sustainable development finance.** Although aid will continue to play an important role in fragile and less developed countries, this will not suffice. Governments are responsible of domestic development outcomes, and in this regard, they will need to make the right policy choices (cf. to improve domestic resource mobilisation, attract private investment and ensure an effective use of finance for sustainable development).
8. The assumption is that all national-level actions will add up to the ambitious global objectives to effectively achieve sustainable development. Yet, **translating the universal post-2015 goals and targets into national actions, commitments, responsibilities is a considerable challenge**, and requires an accountability system that respects national priorities and specificities, while at the same time build incentives to encourage ambitious contributions from all. This will, in turn require, **setting up an equitable, pragmatic and flexible system of differentiation**, that includes nuanced differentiation criteria, **commensurate with their national circumstances, capacities and capabilities**. Differentiation should not be static but remain **open to change over time**. This will require provisions allowing for shifts in responsibilities and commitments, and a review of the differentiation of targets, embedded in a sophisticated monitoring and review system.⁷
9. The post-2015 framework is voluntary and contains no binding or legal commitment. In order to build in accountability, comparability and incentives, it could be helpful to devise **common rules or guidelines** that leave some **room for self-determination while at the same time allow for revising levels of ambition**⁸.

⁴ Governments assume responsibility for improving the situation of their own citizens (e.g., nationally-relevant poverty and/or inequality-reduction targets).

⁵ Countries bear an appropriate burden in helping others to achieve their national development outcomes and SDG targets (e.g., by providing financial assistance and taking part in broader international cooperation to benefit one or a specific group of countries).

⁶ Governments play a role in international efforts to safeguard common goods (e.g., making commitments in international fora for the benefit of the planet and global community as a whole, such as CO₂ emission reductions).

⁷ For example see the proposals for a review system by the UN Secretary General's Synthesis Report.

⁸ In areas where global standards are lacking, national processes of determining target levels, benchmarks and commitments may be valuable. The guidelines could incorporate options and criteria for how, and on what basis, baselines and benchmarks could be set nationally. With inputs from relevant international organisations and the UN statistics division, these baselines and benchmarks could provide invaluable tools for countries to use in setting and prioritising their national-level targets.

10. **The post-2015 development framework has already sparked some criticism.** The goals are thought to be too wide and cumbersome, and embedded in a failing economic model (industrial growth) unlikely to deliver the transformations needed for sustainable development. The drivers of world's poverty and rising inequalities (cf. unfair trade regime and investment agreements, the need for greater regulation of financial markets; the issue of debt) are evaded or vaguely addressed⁹.

How would the SDGs translate in the EU?

11. **Little discussion has taken place within EU on what implementation of the proposed universal OWG targets concretely means for EU countries.** ECDPM has worked on three cases that, by way of illustration, address what universality and differentiation could mean in Europe¹⁰.
- a. **Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty, according to national definitions.** If translated to the European context, this would demand lifting 62 million people out of the risk of poverty. This is three times more than what the "Europe 2020" strategy aims (20 million). However, based on recent trends, it is clear that only achieving the target set by Europe 2020 is beyond reach: according to the most recent EU data, nearly a quarter of the EU population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2012, 17% was at risk of income poverty after social transfers, and 10% lived in jobless households. The number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU increased from 114 million in 2009 to 124 million in 2012. This means that the SDG target is just extremely unrealistic, unless the policies of austerity are radically reversed¹¹.
 - b. **Working towards peaceful and inclusive societies.** While Europe is the most 'peaceful' region in the world, the highest homicide rate, in Lithuania, is comparable to that of Chad or Uruguay. For those with low rates, "getting to zero" will be impossible. The discussions on national targets open a wider debate on national attitudes to crime and the gaps in EU police cooperation and legal frameworks. While there is cooperation within the EU, member states' legal frameworks differ significantly, leaving loopholes that criminals exploit. Statistics on violent crimes and homicides are differently registered from country to country, and the lack of standard definitions of crimes hampers comparisons across countries. Europe faces serious illicit firearms trafficking problems, with almost half a million lost or stolen firearms unaccounted for in the Schengen region. Moreover, there is not yet EU-wide legislation addressing violence against women. While EU member states have recently been encouraged to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, only nine member states have done so.
 - c. **Ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns: An Essential Requirement for Sustainable Development.** Sustainable consumption and production is, among other things, about promoting resource and energy efficiency. The Lisbon Treaty

⁹ See the thought provoking LSE blog contribution [Five reasons to think twice about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#).

¹⁰ The full case studies are available in the annex to [ECDPM's Discussion Paper on Universality and Differentiation in the post-2015 agenda](#). See also article by Große-Puppenthal, Herrero, Anna Knoll in EurActiv: [Poverty and violence: Europe post-2015](#), July 2015.

¹¹ If we take zoom in the case of Portugal, the full consequences of the economic crisis on the long-term are still to be known, but hard cuts and austerity policies have certainly impacted on economic and social realities. While Portugal has established the goal to reduce at least by 200.000 the number of people at the risk of poverty and social exclusion until 2020 (in the framework of Europe 2020), the numbers indicate setbacks in the last few years; 19,5% of the population is at risk of poverty (25,6% of the children) and the country is on the EU top 3 on income inequality and ranks 6th on gender inequality. The assessment of Portugal's ability to achieve these and other commitments and targets would therefore be useful to go further in the debate about how to implement the new Global Goals. See discussion on what Spain would need to do to implement the SDGs at the country level, in [El Pais](#), 24 September 2015.

enshrines the objective to ensure sustainable growth. [Europe 2020](#), EU's flagship initiative for a resource-efficient Europe, supports the shift towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy to achieve sustainable growth. Against this backdrop, one of Juncker Commission's priorities is to create an Energy Union. Yet, recent events regarding the negotiation of the Energy Union Package show there are still multiple obstacles to EU's transition to a low-carbon economy. The Lisbon Treaty maintains Member States' control over their national energy policies, meaning that national energy policies (and interests) still get on the way of a coherent regional energy policy. This has hampered a common political vision on the energy market and the security of energy supply. Moreover, the Energy Union Package contains no national binding targets to be enforced through EU legislation. It is still unclear how the Energy Union Package will translate into an effective governance structure that allows the EC to effectively intervene if a Member State does not comply, while at the same time provide incentives to increase the level of ambition of those Member States who do meet the targets¹².

12. **If we take the specific case of Portugal, we see a mismatch between an unprecedented effort to engage multiple stakeholders at the national level in the definition of a new development agenda¹³, and Portugal's domestic policies.** The SDG's implementation will certainly constitute a huge domestic challenge, particularly taking into account the perception about this agenda as emanating from the development community and therefore belonging to foreign affairs, in a country where development cooperation has very low political traction and leverage in public policies. Policy coherence for development is at the core of this endeavour, by actively engaging and including several sectoral policies and targets into a collective effort. Several national sectoral plans - from climate change and the environment to gender equality, from health and education to growth – will have to be adapted and implemented in a more coherent and integrated way. With a new universal agenda, Portugal is expected to define the organisational framework, the implementation mechanisms and monitoring instruments to meet its commitments and successfully reach its national (and European) goals. One possibility would be the **creation of a whole-of-government task force**, with a clear mandate and available instruments to monitor a comprehensive and integrated action plan, which should be defined with strong involvement and participation from all relevant stakeholders.

What does the post-2015 agenda mean for EU development cooperation?¹⁴

13. **The Agenda for Change is EU's development strategy to deliver high-impact aid. It has guided aid programming choices for the period 2014-2020.** The Agenda for Change introduced a number of innovations in EU development aid. First, aid is targeted where the needs are greatest. This means that EU aid concentrates on LDCs and fragile countries. Second, the EU aid needs to focus on two broad policy priorities: 1) human rights, democracy and good governance; and 2) inclusive and sustainable growth (which includes support to sustainable agriculture, energy, social sectors and employment...). Finally, EU aid must concentrate on a maximum of three sectors per partner country (or four in the case of fragile countries).
14. **The EU will need to be more sharp in defining what is the added value of ODA in the broader sustainable development funding and policy landscape in different country contexts.** The EU's post-2015 position paper confirms this view, adding that ODA should target least developed countries, and adds that "ODA is an important catalytic element in the overall financing available for developing countries, in particular to those most in need". The EU also wishes to ensure that ODA can be used as an enabler to "boost other means of implementation", such as improving tax and fiscal policies, or unlocking infrastructure projects through the use of blending and public-private partnerships.

¹² See Tagliapietra and Zachman's piece: [The EU 2030 Climate and Energy Package: Keeping up the pressure on governance structures](#), published on 17th September 2015.

¹³ See [Portugal Position Paper on the Post-2015 Agenda](#) and the [Report on the Public Consultation about Local Implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#).

¹⁴ This section relies on ECDPM Discussion Paper 180: Implementing the Agenda for Change: an independent analysis of the 11th EDF programming.

15. If the EU is serious about the post-2015 agenda, it will need to **fine tune its development policy and practice, to ensure that the principles of universality, shared responsibilities, and policy coherence for sustainable development are systematically weaved in**. What could this mean in practice? Recent ECDPM research provides some concrete answers:
- a. **Fine tuning EU differentiation and aid allocation criteria**, taking into account the current global geography of poverty and a more nuanced understanding of sub-national inequalities, including in emerging economies. There is increasing evidence that EU aid could still play a catalytic role in non-aid dependent countries (for instance through a territorial development approach that allows to scale up innovative policies from the local to the national level). There is also the question whether in a broadened post-2015 understanding of international cooperation, the use of ODA should include support to research, innovation and knowledge brokering activities that could help emerging (non-aid dependent) economies deliver on the global public goods agenda.
 - b. **Having a real debate on where EU aid fits in with partner country strategies for securing their own sustainable development finance in the longer term**. There is evidence that EU aid programming is not yet embedded on a solid analysis of sustainable development finance in different country contexts. This would require a thorough reality check against countries' regulatory frameworks, and how EU aid meshes in with other private and public finance sources for sustainable development. Blending is not a magic bullet.
 - c. **Supporting sustainable development in partner countries may also require a different way of programming aid**. One of the major novelties of the EU budget for 2014-2020 is the commitment to spend at least 20% on climate-related activities and to mainstream climate finance in all major EU policies, including ODA. Although the EC is also committed to spending at least 20% on human development, there seems to be a trend whereby social sectors have not been systematically prioritised at the country level. If the EU collectively wants to support the transition to sustainable development at the country level, it may need to develop an integrated approach to programming that supports the transition to sustainable and inclusive development more coherently. In most countries, division of labour responds to donor policy priorities rather than to a holistic view of country needs in terms of sustainable development. This raises the question whether sector programming is actually the best strategy to achieve results and deliver impact, and whether other innovative approaches to programming (cf. results-oriented, thematic and multi-sectoral) may be more promising.
16. **Finally, delivering high-quality and high-impact aid in a post-2015 context will depend on whether the EU is well equipped to deliver on its ambitions**. The issue of "doing more with less" needs to be looked at beyond the requirement to reduce costs, at a more strategic level. This means that ambitions may also need to be revised by looking more carefully at how EU's international cooperation fits within EU's broader (and more political and interest-driven external action agenda) in partner countries. Adopting a more politically informed approach will need the engagement of multiple governmental and non-state actors in Europe and developing countries to robustly hold it to account. This is a precondition to ensure that a more realistic yet politically visionary agenda to sustainable development is pursued, but not one that is driven by the short-term political, economic, and security self-interests of the EU.

What does the post-2015 agenda mean for EU migration policy?

17. Following the Lampedusa disaster of 2013 and the rising death toll of migrants trying to reach European shores, EU's migration policies have become under scrutiny and forced the EU to reconsider its approach. However, despite concerted efforts to deal with this humanitarian crisis, EU's vision continues to revolve around the objective to contain unwanted (illegal) migration, with the assumption that this can be done by addressing the root causes of migration. However, this assumption remains under-researched and possibly oversimplistic. It is also unclear whether EU's

approach to dealing with the migration challenge is comprehensive and aligned with SDG principles:

- a. The current approach risks conflating migration and asylum issues all under the category of 'irregular migration'. The current EU debate has done little to foster a balanced view towards the legitimate needs and international protection of refugees. The root causes for migration are complex and certainly those fleeing from conflict cannot easily be 'disincentivised' in the same way as those who choose to migrate for other reasons.
 - b. It constrains the range of tools available. While the Agenda on Migration puts several options on the table, including new legal channels for movement, the Council Conclusions mainly highlights readmission and return issues, ways to discourage migration and reducing the 'push factors' through development cooperation.
 - c. The EU remains silent on policy coherence across a wide array of policies like trade, fisheries, consumption and taxation. All these have an impact on the livelihoods of potential migrants and influence migration dynamics. Conflicts and violence that displaces people are intertwined with "[transnational drivers](#)" of conflict such as illicit arms flows, the drugs trade and the global economic system.
18. [EU's contribution to the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development](#), developed in the [Global Approach on Migration and Mobility](#) or the defined migration as a phenomenon that can improve development in the countries of origin and destination, and benefit migrants themselves provided it is well governed. There are risks that the EU is taking a step back from looking at migration as an economic opportunity to be harnessed, and is missing an opportunity to move forward with one of the key pillars of the post-2015 agenda: Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development.

How compatible are ACP-EU relations with the post-2015 agenda?¹⁵

19. The Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) is coming to an end in 2020. Discussions on the future of the ACP-EU partnership are in full swing, and one of the questions that need to be looked at is how the CPA fits in a post-2015 context.
20. At first sight, the key principles underpinning the Cotonou Agreement (equal partnership, joint management, common principles of aid conditionality...) seem relevant for the type of collective action required by the new SDG agenda. Yet evidence suggests that these principles have not consistently and effectively applied in the current ACP-EU partnership, in the sense that they were not adequately translated into practice.
21. Some of the premises on which the CPA is based do not seem to be compatible with the new "software" of the SDG agenda. For instance, it reflects an exclusive partnership with a group of countries, with whom the EU has historical ties, and in this way reflects an essentially North-South partnership, revolving very much around aid, development cooperation and conditionality, rather than on effective collective action on non-aid EU policies that may affect ACP interests.
22. Despite attempts to integrate the global agenda into the partnership - migration, climate change, and food security - there is little evidence that the CPA was an effective vehicle to push forward these agendas, beyond ad hoc dialogues and formal declarations. The most visible outcome was the allocation of funds to work on these issues, through the European Development Fund. The ECDPM study suggests that there are other policy frameworks and multilateral arrangements that are better suited to support collective action than the ACP-EU partnership.

¹⁵ This section relies on ECDPM's progress report on "The Future of ACP-EU Relations: A Political Economy Analysis Perspective", presented in Brussels on 25th September 2015. The report is not publicly available.

Concluding remarks and questions for debate

23. The post-2015 agenda, articulated around 17 goals and 169 targets may be difficult to manage and implement. It is a diversified and complex agenda, requiring the commitment and coordination of a wide range of actors. *How will the SDGs impact upon Europe and its Member States? What do SDGs mean if translated into the Portuguese context? Will the post-2015 agenda provide internal political impetus within the EU to deliver on the SDGs internally?*
24. The EU continues to be the world's largest aid donor, while there is an increasing pressure to "deliver more with less". Despite the relative decline of the EU in the global scene, the aspiration of being a global political actor remains, with the clear aim of promoting democratic and human rights values and principles, and leading on the transition to a low-carbon economy. However, when confronted with concrete situations that require a coherent and urgent action – being migration, or energy and climate change – the European Union shows great difficulties in ensuring coherence and reconciling its objectives and policies. *Does Europe have the necessary political will and instruments to adjust to the rapidly changing international trends and to the new global agenda, affirming itself as a global and credible actor? What are the implications of the post-2015 agenda on EU development policy and ACP-EU relations?*

Annex: The full list of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The post-2015 is articulated around 17 different SDGs and 169 different targets.



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