Analysing the Council's position on the Global Europe Instrument: a Global Health perspective

In May 2026, EU Member States reached a Partial General Approach (PGA) on the Global Europe Instrument (GEI), laying down their negotiating position ahead of discussions with the European Parliament. The approach is deemed 'partial' because it excludes financial allocations and horizontal issues that are currently being discussed as part of the MFF regulation negotiations.
GHA analysed the PGA to assess where Council made the most relevant modifications, from a Global Health lens. While we celebrate the addition of some positive elements, which have improved the European Commission's original proposal, some key aspects are still undecided, while others could be further improved to ensure that the EU truly equips itself to fulfil its ambition of being a Global Health leader as expressed by President von der Leyen in her 2025 State of the Union speech.

Recommitment and strengthened language on poverty eradication and sustainable development. We welcome the Council's additional references to TFEU Article 208 and TEU Article 21, particularly the clear reference to the eradication of poverty as the main objective of EU development cooperation. The Council also further emphasises that the GEI should foster sustainable development, and that the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Sevilla Commitment, among other international frameworks, should guide the implementation of GEI.

Explicit inclusion of global health as an objective of the GEI. We strongly support the Council's explicit inclusion of '*global health and equitable access to health care services*' among the global challenges the EU should address in the Regulation. The Council also includes pandemic threats as unforeseen global challenges that require a rapid response from the EU, via the emerging challenges and priority cushion. SRHR language has also been further strengthened in the Regulation. We also welcome changes made in Annex II, including the elevation of human development as the first specific objective for the Sub-Saharan Africa pillar, as well as stronger language on health and equitable access in other pillars' specific objectives.

Improved governance and increased accountability. We welcome the Council's edits aimed at improving the governance of the Instrument, including how the cushion should be mobilised, the detailed provisions for committee procedures to adopt implementing acts, and the reduction of the amount of funding the EC can mobilise without committee approval. We also welcome additions to the text to improve accountability, including calls for annual reporting that includes information on the level of implementation of the instrument and progress made towards achieving its objectives, as well as the inclusion of a mid-term review of the Instrument and the Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs).

There is still an uneven balance between flexibility and predictability. We welcome the Council's edits that increase the predictability of EU funding. These include: removing the possibility for the Commission to change the ODA target via delegated act, as well as the specific objectives in Annex II. We also welcome that the Council further highlights that programmable actions should constitute the large majority of the total GEI indicative envelope, and that programmes shall be based on MIPs, and include financial allocations per priority area. However, the Council fell short in setting a clear **split of 80% programmable and 20% non-programmable** actions. This is crucial to ensure most GEI funding is spent on long-term goals, jointly established by the EU and its partner countries via MIPs. The Council also missed the opportunity to reinstate some key targets, as detailed below.

No agreement on the amount of GEI funding that should fulfil OECD DAC ODA criteria. The ODA target has been included as one of the horizontal issues to be discussed within the MFF Regulation. The Cypriot negotiating box ("negobox") included a target of at least 90% ODA, instead of at least 93% present in the current NDICI Regulation. Increasing the ODA target to 93% would strengthen alignment between the GEI and Article 208 TFEU, and ensure long-term development outcomes are not overshadowed by short-term geopolitical goals. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, we welcome the Council's removal of the provision allowing the Commission to change this target via delegated act.

No agreement on decommitments and carry-overs. These points are still under discussion as a horizontal issue. Allowing decommitted funds and carry-overs to be made available again to their original budget line will be important to enhance predictability. At a time of geopolitical instability, it is essential for the EU's financing instruments and rules to establish trust with partners, not undermine it. Predictability is particularly important for long-term development programmes, including in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS) where implementation may be more challenging and where interruptions in funding can have particularly serious consequences.

The humanitarian aid budget was not earmarked, but its principles were elevated. The Council missed the opportunity to earmark the €25 billion (current prices) for humanitarian aid indicated in the Commission's MFF communication in the GEI Regulation itself. Instead, this remains one of the horizontal issues that still require negotiation. While humanitarian lines are foreseen within each pillar (the amounts will be decided by the budget authorities on an annual basis), the absence of a single, binding humanitarian budget line undermines predictability, independence, and need-based allocation of resources for life-saving interventions. Humanitarian aid funding is critical to respond to health emergencies, such as pandemic/epidemic outbreaks, and to support emergency nutrition interventions. We welcome, nevertheless, the Council's edits in the GEI Regulation reinforcing language on principled humanitarian aid. We also welcome the inclusion of a €25 billion budget for humanitarian aid in the Cypriot *negobox,* even though the amount is only an indicative, and not a binding one.

Lack of inclusion of a human development target. The Council did not introduce a human development spending target of at **least 50% of ODA**. Partner countries value the EU's leadership in human development, enhancing Europe's strategic influence and partnerships with key regions. Investments in human development are crucial to build solid and resilient societies and to foster both human and economic growth. Because human development benefits are broad, long-term and not commercially "bankable", they are precisely the investments most at risk when budgets shift toward short-term geopolitical priorities, or guarantees and blending. Including a spending target for human development would protect these foundational investments.

Funding for the different pillars is still only indicative. The Council also missed the opportunity to set minimum funding levels for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Global pillar to protect them from reallocation pressures. To assure African partners that the EU is prioritising its partnership with the continent, the amount dedicated to sub-Saharan Africa must be a binding minimum amount, in particular because the vast majority of Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) are located in Africa. The Global Pillar, on the other hand, is an essential tool for strengthening global public goods including health, via Global Health Initiatives, making it a critical asset for projecting EU influence globally.

Strengthened language on EU competitiveness and increased promotion of EU private sector. The Council explicitly includes the EU's competitiveness and economic security as an objective of the instrument. While increased EU competitiveness may emerge as a positive by-product of development cooperation, it should not become an objective of the GEI in itself. A greater involvement of EU companies in development cooperation is not a problem per se, provided it does not crowd out the local private sector or distort local markets. However, as stressed by the OECD-DAC peer review and core principles of untied aid, if the EU seeks to promote stronger participation of EU companies in development projects, it should rely on additional non-ODA-funded instruments. The European Court of Auditors also warned these direct awards could go against the principles of competition, transparency and equal treatment, if not carefully delineated. For partnerships to be mutually beneficial, they must strike the correct balance between partner countries' needs and priorities, and the EU's interests. We recognise the Council's edits to ensure these grants' use should be duly justified, used exceptionally, and subject to transparency - key conditions to avoid de facto corporate subsidies. However, to safeguard development integrity, these grants should be capped at €5 million.

The next steps

The partial nature of the PGA means that work is still ongoing to agree on contentious elements, including targets and budget allocation, among many others. In June, the Cypriot Presidency put forward a *negobox* that included a 2% cut in the overall MFF budget, and a disproportional cut of 4% to the Global Europe Instrument. EU external action should not be the go-to heading for budget cuts. We call on the Irish Presidency to reject this approach when updating the *negobox* ahead of the next European Council meeting in October. A robust external action budget is essential for the EU to uphold its global responsibilities and fulfil its ambitions. Any reduction in the overall envelope would immediately constrain the GEI and weaken the EU's capacity to respond to growing global needs, weakening EU influence in an increasingly competitive world. Maintaining the Commission proposal of €200.3 billion (current prices) as the bare minimum is therefore crucial.

The Parliament, on the other hand, is still finalising its position on the GEI, and MEPs have the opportunity to reach an agreement that prioritises human development, including global health. Members of the Development and Foreign Affairs Committees (DEVE & AFET) are now negotiating on which of the thousands of amendments tabled to the Commission proposal to keep in their report, many of them addressing the key points highlighted above. The committees' vote is planned for 19 October, and Plenary vote scheduled for the week of 23 November. When it comes to the overall budget, the EP positioned itself back in April, calling for an increase in the GEI budget allocation to €225 billion (current prices), which we applaud.

As the Council and the European Parliament finalise their positions ahead of trilogue negotiations, we call on them to consider the key points above to reach an agreement that prioritises Global Health and fosters truly mutually beneficial partnerships that support partner countries in achieving their own objectives.

Contact: Tarita Baldan, Senior EU Advocacy & Policy Officer
tbaldan@ghadvocates.org