

IRELAND AND THE EU.

DELIVERING FOR EVERYONE.

*How Ireland can live up to its
values under its Presidency of the
Council of the European Union*



JULY 2026



Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes at a pivotal moment for Europe and the world.

- **847 million** people are living in extreme poverty today.¹
- Global aid suffered its biggest ever annual collapse in 2025, falling by **23.1%**.²
- **676 million** women and girls now live on the frontlines of conflict — the highest number ever recorded.³
- At the current rate of progress, it will take **134 years** to achieve gender equality.⁴
- The **richest 1%** have gained US\$33 trillion since 2015 — enough wealth to end global poverty multiple times over.⁵

The priorities outlined by the Irish Government for their term demonstrate a clear commitment to global solidarity and the promotion of international law. However, there is a real risk that the priorities that will get the most political attention, such as competitiveness and defence could undermine areas like aid and global solidarity.

Ireland's Presidency is an opportunity to demonstrate what kind of actor both Ireland and the EU want to be in an increasingly volatile world. During Ireland's Presidency, Member States and EU policymakers will determine how to spend about 1.8 trillion Euros over the next seven-year period. Ireland will play a significant role in its negotiation which will affect the future of millions of people inside and outside the EU. EU strategic interests – including on competitiveness, economic security and private sector investments – have become predominant over the EU's treaty-based commitment to poverty eradication, sustainable development, human rights and democratic governance.

This Irish Presidency comes in this context. Will this European budget deliver on interdependence, solidarity, shared solutions to common problems or will it prioritise European isolation, self-interest and retreat from international commitments?

OUR ASKS UNDER EACH PRIORITY

COMPETITIVENESS

- Champion a model of competitiveness that is evidence based and grounded in human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development.
- Ensure that discussions on competitiveness explicitly consider the impact decisions have on workers, communities and the environment beyond the European Union's borders.

VALUES

- Champion an ambitious Global Europe Instrument under the Multi-Annual Finance Framework that increases, rather than reduces, the EU's contribution to global development that prioritises grant-based development finance and has clear targets for ODA, gender equality and humanitarian aid. There should be ceiling of funding set for loans, guarantees and blended finance as they do not deliver in fragile contexts or on core development and climate resilience goals.
- Advocate for 85% of ODA to contribute to gender equality with 20% having gender equality coded as a principal objective, and at least 5% should be directed specifically to women's rights organisations.
- Promote the original purpose of ODA by refocusing its mandate on poverty reduction and opposing any migration conditionality tied to EU development funding.
- Support the consistent application of international law, including steps towards activating Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement where its human rights provisions have been breached.

SECURITY

- Champion Ireland's strengths in peacebuilding, diplomacy and conflict prevention as core components of European security.
- Reject attempts to conflate migration and security and advocate for human rights-based migration policies across EU institutions.
- Push for increased EU climate finance focused on adaptation, loss and damage and a just transition, delivered through grant-based finance.



¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/march-2026-global-poverty-update-from-the-world-bank--new-data-a>

² <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security>

⁴ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/134-years-to-go--the-data-behind-achieving-gender-equality-this->

⁵ <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/server/api/core/bitstreams/93e9b9b2-5138-44fd-9bae-7b4c0ac727b4/content>

How we would track changes on Ireland's presidency priorities

FileHomeInsertDrawDesignLayoutReferencesMailingsReviewViewHelp New Comment DeletePreviousNext Show Comments Track Changes All MarkupShow MarkupReviewing Pane Close Reviewing			
Ireland's Presidency priority	Ireland's presidency wording	ActionAid's track changes	Reviewer comments
 Competitiveness	"in the interests of every citizen and business right across our Union."	"in the interests of every citizen and business right across our Union, <u>while recognising the impact of our decisions on people across global supply chains.</u> "	Competitiveness cannot come at the expense of workers, communities and the environment. The EU's current push towards deregulation risks weakening protections for the people who already bear the greatest cost of corporate exploitation and climate breakdown.
	we will "tackle regulatory burdens"	we will <u>"ensure that deregulation does not have a negative impact on people across supply chains and recognise that regulation is often there to protect people"</u>	Regulation exists for a reason. It protects workers, communities and the environment. The evidence does not show that waakening human rights and environmental protections will make Europe more competitive.
 Values	The Irish Presidency will work to enhance the Union's unwavering support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's illegal war of aggression.	The Irish Presidency will work to enhance the Union's unwavering support for Ukraine <u>and Palestine</u> in the face of Russia <u>and Israel's</u> illegal war of aggression.	We welcome the EU's strong stance on Ukraine. The same commitment to international law and accountability should apply to Israel's continued act of aggression on the people of Palestine. Our values cannot depend on geography.
	"in particular the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians"	In the particular <u>the relentless aggression forced on Palestinians by the Israeli state.</u>	Describing what is happening as a "conflict" is deeply problematic and suggests two equal sides. It ignores the reality of occupation, displacement and the vast imbalance of power exerted by Israel over Palestinians.
	"The Irish Presidency will provide a platform for strategic discussions on the future of development cooperation and the enduring challenge of poverty"	The Irish Presidency will provide a platform for strategic discussions on the future <u>and funding</u> of development cooperation and the enduring challenge of poverty	Europe cannot discuss the future of development cooperation in good faith while many governments are cutting aid budgets. The next EU budget is an opportunity to match Europe's stated values with meaningful investment in Official Development Assistance.
 Security	invest in all dimensions of our own security	invest in all dimensions of our own security <u>while demonstrating Ireland's leadership in military neutrality.</u>	Ireland's greatest contribution to security has been through peacebuilding, diplomacy and conflict resolution. The Presidency should champion these strengths while recognising legitimate security concerns.
	Particular attention will be paid to accelerating climate action at EU and international levels as well as the EU's global leadership on climate and biodiversity	Particular attention will be paid to accelerating climate action at EU and international levels as well as the EU's global leadership on climate and biodiversity. <u>This will be done by encouraging greater ambition in the EU's climate finance towards adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage, and a just transition.</u>	Climate change is already reversing hard-won development gains across the world. Climate finance has helped millions of people adapt to droughts, floods and rising temperatures, but funding cuts put this progress at risk. The Irish Presidency should champion greater ambition on adaptation, loss and damage, and a just transition.
	We will prioritise moving towards implementation of measures and progressing legislation to facilitate migrant returns and on digitalisation of returns.	<u>We will prioritise moving towards implementation of measures and progressing legislation to facilitate migrant returns and on digitalisation of returns.</u>	Migration should not be treated as a security threat. Ireland should champion humane, rights-based migration policies rather than following a growing trend towards punitive and divisive approaches.
 The Irish Presidency is an opportunity to show what kind of actor Europe wants to be: one driven by deregulation, defence and deterrence — or one grounded in human rights, international solidarity, and global justice.			

The Irish government's priority 1: Competitiveness

The decision to place competitiveness at the centre of Ireland's Presidency is unsurprising⁶. Across Europe, **competitiveness has become the dominant political prism** through which economic policy is viewed and reflects the wider shift underway across the EU.

Under the banner of competitiveness, we are seeing increasing calls for deregulation, framed as a shift towards simplification and the removal of “regulatory burdens”. This agenda was seen first through the Omnibus I proposal (the first of many Omnibus proposals), which saw key elements of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and wider sustainability reporting requirements gutted⁷.

Framed as technical simplification, **many of these changes will significantly reduce corporate accountability for human rights abuses and environmental harm across global supply chains**. The impact of this deregulatory wave falls heaviest⁸ on the most marginalised and in particular, women. More than 190 million women work in global value chains, concentrated in sectors like garments, agriculture, and mining where exploitation is rife.

There is also a notable omission within the Irish Presidency's framing of competitiveness. While Ireland and the EU's impact on the wider world is referenced within the Irish presidency priorities under values and security, it is absent from the competitiveness priority. Yet European competitiveness does not exist in isolation.

Along with the need to protect human rights, it's important to also note that while **proponents of deregulation claim it will unleash growth by removing “burdens” – this claim is not supported by evidence**. Hundreds of economists across Europe have made clear⁹ that sustainability regulations related to due diligence do not undermine competitiveness—and that the real challenges for growth are elsewhere such as energy shocks, under-investment, weak industrial policy and skills gaps. It's also worth recognising that the implementation cost of human rights and environmental due diligence for large companies is 0.009% of revenues, according to an EU-commissioned study¹⁰ conducted by the London School of Economics.

ActionAid Ireland asks the Irish Presidency under its *Competitiveness* Priority to:

- Champion a model of competitiveness that is evidence based and grounded in human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development.
- Ensure that discussions on competitiveness explicitly consider the impact decisions have on workers, communities and the environment beyond the European Union's borders.



⁶ We would question the extent to which this reflects the views expressed during the Government's own consultation process in formulating its priorities. Despite the percentage of CSO responses amounting to 37.4% of the overall responses and business and economic actors amounting to 22.9%, the [summary report](#) states that: “Competitiveness and economic growth stood out as the most prominent priority for Ireland's EU Presidency for participants in the written consultation.”

⁷ <https://corporatejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Preliminary-Legal-Analysis-How-Omnibus-I-Rolls-Back-the-CSDDD.pdf>

⁸ <https://actionaid.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/A-gender-analysis-of-the-omnibus-proposal.pdf>

⁹ https://www.fh-vie.ac.at/uploads/EN-Economists%E2%80%99-Statement-with-signatories-19-May-2025_2025-05-19.pdf

¹⁰ [EU-commissioned study](#)

The Irish government's priority 2: Values

At a time when multilateralism is under threat, international law is increasingly ignored, and democratic norms are being tested across the globe **it is really encouraging to see Ireland make values a standalone pillar of its Presidency**. Ireland has built a strong international reputation as a country willing to champion the values of the EU and our term as President marks an opportunity to translate those values into action.

The most crucial space that this will be tested is through negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) – in particular, on the Global Europe Instrument, with a proposed total budget of €200 billion. The EU's external action is becoming increasingly¹¹ driven by geopolitical competition, migration conditionalities and commercial interests rather than what it's meant to champion, poverty reduction and sustainable development. This has already been put in practice with the Global Gateway strategy, launched by the European Commission in 2021 with the aim to mobilize up to €300 billion in investments, - with an explicit focus on EU economic interests in infrastructure projects in developing countries. Also, at a time when the UK, the United States and others in the EU are reducing their ODA, Ireland should encourage the EU to demonstrate global leadership by increasing investment in development cooperation.

While the quantity of ODA matters, so does the quality. We are concerned by the growing emphasis on blended finance¹² and leverage-based approaches that prioritise what is attractive to investors rather than what communities need most. **Public services, social protection, climate adaptation and resilience are rarely favoured by private finance**, yet they are essential to long-term development. The EU should prioritise grant-based finance that does not add to the debt burdens already facing many countries in the Global South. Loans and blended finance do not deliver in fragile contexts or on core development and climate resilience goals. Direct grants and budget support remain more effective.

It is welcome that the proposed Global Europe instrument has a target of 90% for overseas aid. However, this is less than the previous budget and given the EU's enhanced focus on self-interest and promoting its own business, it remains unclear how ODA can be delivered. Also, there are no targets on gender equality, human development and migration. The removal of thematic spending targets could lead to a de-prioritisation of these issues, with insufficient funding allocated to support these objectives. The absence of targets also makes it harder to track the expenditure of the budget and ensure accountability.

Poverty reduction, human development, gender equality and climate resilience must feature prominently—with measurable targets, safeguards, and performance frameworks. Without this, the EU's credibility as a trusted development partner will continue to erode.

The channels through which funding is delivered are also critical. Women's rights organisations remain among the most effective actors in advancing gender equality and protecting rights, yet they continue to receive only a tiny fraction¹³ of international aid. As negotiations on the next MFF progress, Ireland should **champion stronger commitments to local civil society and women's rights organisations**, including ambitious funding targets.

We are deeply concerned by proposals to introduce migration conditionality into development cooperation¹⁴. Using aid as leverage to secure cooperation on migration returns fundamentally undermines the purpose of ODA. It risks diverting resources away from communities facing poverty, conflict and climate shocks while placing political objectives above development outcomes. Ireland should use its Presidency to **oppose attempts to tie development funding to migration cooperation** and critically, defend the integrity of ODA.

Ireland's commitment to addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Palestine and particularly Gaza is welcome. However, our values are ultimately measured by actions. Ireland's Presidency provides an opportunity to **encourage a more consistent application of**

¹¹ <https://actionaid.org/news/2025/bigger-budget-wont-matter-if-global-europe-swaps-development-geopolitics>

¹² <https://actionaid.org/publications/2026/reclaim-future-global-europe-instrument-blended-finance-and-illusion-development>

¹³ <https://www.awid.org/witm>

¹⁴ <https://euobserver.com/214987/aid-is-not-a-migration-deterrent-it-never-should-be-and-heres-why/>

international law across all contexts. The EU-Israel Association Agreement¹⁵ is one area Ireland can demonstrate real leadership. It is explicit that respect for human rights and democratic principles constitutes an essential element of the agreement. Ireland should support steps towards accountability, including the activation of Article 2 of the Agreement where the human rights clause has been breached.

ActionAid Ireland asks the Irish Presidency under its *Values Priority* to:

- Champion an ambitious Global Europe Instrument that increases, rather than reduces, the EU's contribution to global development that prioritises grant-based development finance and has clear targets for ODA, gender equality and humanitarian aid. There should be a ceiling of funding set for loans, guarantees and blended finance as they do not deliver in fragile contexts or on core development and climate resilience goals.
- Advocate for 85% of ODA to contribute to gender equality with 20% having gender equality coded as a principal objective, and at least 5% should be directed specifically to women's rights organisations.
- Promote the original purpose of ODA by refocusing its mandate on poverty reduction and opposing any migration conditionality tied to EU development funding.
- Support the consistent application of international law, including steps towards activating Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement where its human rights provisions have been breached.



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?
Aid cuts impact on women

Zambia

This is Gloria Ngenda. She works with women and girls who have been coerced into exchanging sex for fish to survive following USAID programmes closing in their community.

Aid can be a lifeline for women and girls around the world.

actionaid

¹⁵ [EU-Israel Association Agreement](#)

The Irish government's priority 3: Security

Increasingly, European debates on security have become dominated by military spending, defence capabilities and migration deterrence. States have an obligation to protect their citizens, and the reality is Europe is facing new threats. However, **increased militarisation has not proven to be the best approach to ensuring lasting peace**. Instead, it risks escalating tensions, prompting other nations to increase their own military spending. This can lead to an arms race and a greater likelihood of military interventions, potentially worsening conflicts rather than preventing them.

Investing in conflict prevention on the other hand saves lives, with potential savings between US\$698 million and \$1.5 billion per year¹⁶. There is little evidence¹⁷ available to suggest that building military-security capabilities leads to reform, and improved peace, justice and development outcomes. We do know though that excessive prioritization¹⁸ of defence spending diverts resources from education, healthcare, economic development, climate action, and ODA, all of which are fundamental to long-term peace and stability. Ireland's history of peacebuilding and neutrality gives us a credible role to push for a stronger focus on peacebuilding, diplomacy and conflict prevention.

Migration is frequently presented within the EU as a security threat to be managed rather than a human reality to be addressed through rights-based policies. This framing risks fuelling division, undermining trust and weakening protections for people seeking safety. Migration policy should be grounded in human rights, dignity and legal obligations for international protection. It should not be considered through the lens of security.

The Presidency rightly identifies climate as a security issue. Support for mitigation is central in the main objectives of the Global Europe Instrument, but adaptation is barely mentioned, and loss and damage does not feature at all. Europe's focus risks being short-sighted on climate, more about securing the EU's own energy supply and access to critical raw materials rather than focusing on development and genuine climate objectives. The focus on EU's competitiveness and value chains will further divert the scarce resources away from the most pressing needs of partner countries. Our **credibility on climate action will be severely undermined if we don't commit to the finance necessary** for countries to respond to the climate crises and pursue a just transition. It also means remaining committed to a global phase-out of fossil fuels and addressing the contradictions that arise when European institutions (and in particular Ireland) continue to facilitate investment into the very industries driving climate breakdown.

ActionAid Ireland asks the Irish Presidency under its Security Priority to:

- Champion Ireland's strengths in peacebuilding, diplomacy and conflict prevention as core components of European security.
- Reject attempts to conflate migration and security and advocate for human rights-based migration policies across EU institutions.
- Push for increased EU climate finance focused on adaptation, loss and damage and a just transition, delivered through grant-based finance.



¹⁶ <https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1368-european-security-assistance-the-search-for-stability-in-the-sahel>

¹⁸ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2025/09/un-press-release-milex/>