

Interview with Barry Andrews, MEP for Dublin and Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Development (DEVE)



> 1. The EU is preparing a new Integrated Approach to Fragility at a time when multiple crises are deepening. From your perspective, what should the EU do for communities living in fragile contexts and ensure they receive the attention, funding, and political commitment they need?

From my perspective, through its approach to fragility, the EU must ensure a strong political commitment to address fragile contexts in a holistic and coordinated manner. This commitment must be backed by sufficient financial ambition, so that fragile contexts are not deprioritised when geopolitical or budgetary pressures increase. This includes systematically supporting local authorities, civil society, women's and youth organisations, and humanitarian actors, who are often the first responders and the last to leave. Funding instruments must be more accessible, flexible and predictable for local actors.

Secondly, the EU must put the humanitarian-development-peace nexus into practice, not just into policy. In financial terms, this could mean tackling practical obstacles such as different funding streams, requirements and programming cycles, and creating predictable, multi-year funding windows that allow seamless transitions from humanitarian to development and peacebuilding actions. Of course, this requires strategic coherence across all EU instruments. It should be based on joint analysis, planning and response strategies across all EU actors, particularly DG ECHO, DG INTPA, FPI, and the EEAS.

Regarding Global Gateway, the EU's flagship infrastructure investment strategy, we must ensure that fragile contexts are not left behind. Over half of the countries where Global Gateway operates are categorised as fragile by the OECD. Making the strategy work effectively in highly fragile and conflict-affected countries requires fundamentally different, tailored approaches. Traditional infrastructure investments require strong governance, predictable regulatory environments, security, and calculable risks—conditions often absent in fragile settings. The success or failure of Global Gateway investments in fragile contexts depends on how this funding is integrated into the political, security, economic, environmental, societal and human context of these fragile areas. Global Gateway's so-called "360-degree approach" is crucial here: if it is tailored to

each fragile context specifically and integrates climate and conflict sensitivity in infrastructure planning and implementation, this approach can prepare the ground for investments by ensuring an enabling environment. We must carefully consider how infrastructure projects in fragile contexts interact with power dynamics and local tensions. We have to ensure that Global Gateway investments in fragile contexts do not make pre-existing vulnerabilities worse but deliver long-term, inclusive socio-economic benefits for local communities, foster social cohesion and strengthen local governance.

> 2. Do you see growing pressure to redirect development resources away from fragile states toward short-term geopolitical or migration objectives? What are the risks of disengagement, and how can the next MFF protect long-term support to the people most affected by conflict and instability?

I see a growing pressure to steer development resources away from fragile and conflict-affected contexts towards short-term geopolitical, security or migration-management objectives. This risk is visible in the way the Commission's proposal for Global Europe brings together internal and external EU priorities, particularly now that clear spending targets have been removed.

Without ring-fenced commitments, there is a real risk that long-term objectives, especially in fragile contexts, are crowded out by immediate political priorities. This is a concern, as the Treaties are clear that the primary objective of EU development cooperation is the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty.

Furthermore, I also have concerns about the suitability of Global Gateway in fragile contexts. It is true that Global Gateway can play a positive role if firmly anchored in development objectives and aligned with partner countries' priorities. However, in my opinion, large-scale infrastructure or purely economic investment-driven approaches are often not suitable for fragile contexts, where the necessary framework conditions, in terms of governance mechanisms, anti-corruption frameworks, civil society oversight and substantial accompanying investments in human development etc, are not in place.

Disengaging from fragile states is not a neutral choice. It increases instability, deepens inequality, and weakens already fragile institutions. In the long run, it also fuels the very drivers of conflict, forced displacement and irregular migration that the EU claims to want to address.

The next MFF must therefore provide stronger protection for long-term support to people affected by conflict and instability. This includes re-establishing clear development priorities and safeguards within Global Europe, ensuring that poverty reduction remains the guiding principle for programming decisions.

> 3. Forced displacement is rising in fragile settings. How should the EU adjust its policies to address the root causes of displacement and strengthen protection and resilience in crisis-affected countries?

Forced displacement in fragile settings requires a coherent EU response that addresses root causes rather than relying on short-term containment. Policy Coherence for Development must be central, ensuring that EU actions on migration, trade, climate, security and development reinforce rather than undermine stability and resilience in partner countries.

It is in this context that we in DEVE have to approach the Commission's proposal for the Global Europe Instrument and ensure that EU investments and support to partner countries, including through Global Gateway, deliver a genuine 360-degree approach. This means investing in inclusive growth, climate adaptation, basic services and governance to address the drivers of displacement while strengthening resilience in crisis-affected contexts. Such investments must be people-centred and conflict-sensitive, and should not be tied to migration control objectives or development conditionality.

The DEVE committee is currently working on an own initiative report on reinforcing development cooperation to address irregular population movements and their root causes in partner countries where our suggestions will be formulated and prepared early in spring.

> 4. Many VOICE members stress the importance of anticipatory action and resilience-building programming in reducing humanitarian needs and preventing further destabilisation. How can the EU better support these approaches?

There is ample data to make the economic case for anticipatory action. Anticipatory action interventions

have been shown to have benefit-cost ratios of up to 7. Also, anticipatory action typically has lower procurement and distribution costs than post-shock response, which takes place in a much more challenging economic and logistical context. And beyond the numbers, anticipatory action prevents households from resorting to destructive coping strategies like selling land and assets, keeping children out of school, or skipping meals - actions that have long-term negative effects on their nutrition, education and health status.

There are several ways in which the EU could support anticipatory action more. First, while the EU has made important commitments to anticipatory action at a policy level, funding for anticipatory action frameworks has lagged behind. Only a fraction of the EU's and Member States' humanitarian budgets is allocated to preparedness and resilience building. The EU should make sure that funding for anticipatory action is scaled up in the next MFF. We could also reflect on a mechanism for a faster trigger-based release of funds when early warning indicators are met.

Second, the EU should continue to invest in early warning systems and forecasting, including by strengthening national and local early warning capacities, particularly in high-risk regions. The EU should also further mainstream climate resilience across all programming, by applying the Resilience Marker to all humanitarian projects to ensure that interventions systematically reduce risks and strengthen coping capacities, and by integrating climate risk assessments into all major investments vulnerable to climate impacts.

Further, the EU should empower national and local actors to achieve structural, system-wide changes. It should channel more funding to local and national responders (in line with its commitment on localisation) and invest in local capacity for risk assessment, early action planning, and response.

Finally, anticipatory action can also be explored in conflict settings. When systems analyse hate speech, misinformation patterns, political tensions, military movements, and social factors, they can help identify where violence may erupt. The EU could enhance its diplomatic and mediation efforts when there are early warnings of political tensions or strengthen social cohesion programmes when there are clear signs of increasing tensions between displaced and host communities. Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all type of solution, and success of anticipatory action in a political context depends heavily on the political judgment of when and how to engage, the legitimacy of the EU as a political actor in a given context, and sustained investment in relationships before crises erupt. This can be a challenge for humanitarian actors, who need to act in a principled way, and extends into the realm of EU diplomacy.

> 5. In many contexts such as Myanmar, Sudan, and other countries, NGOs face shrinking civic space and growing operational risks. How can the EU maintain principled and sustained engagement in these environments, while ensuring that partners can operate safely and effectively?

Civic space is under pressure around the world.¹ Threats against CSOs and human rights defenders take many different forms: legal and regulatory barriers, administrative and judicial pressures, repression, harassment and intimidation. As a result, many are forced to operate undercover and under constant threats.

Examples include attempts to criminalise NGOs helping migrants in rescues at sea, online polarisation and defamation campaigns against humanitarian and development operations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and Israeli government-led efforts to smear Palestinian human rights defenders, activists and organisations, which have caused real economic, social and political harm.

Donors can play a crucial role in protecting civic space, but they need to coordinate better. They must also remain cautious that their support does not inadvertently lead to a backlash that increases restrictions on civic space, particularly in politically constrained environments, by doing regular context analysis informed by local actors.

The role of donors is to support, not direct, development processes in partner countries. Donors need to recognise the responsibility and agency of local actors' own development for sustainable change, identifying the challenges they face, and considering the most context-appropriate modalities needed to overcome them. Providing support for locally led development processes is a way to mitigate negative narratives that partner-country civil society is a proxy for foreign interests.

One very practical way in which the EU can contribute is by offering very concrete support to humanitarian workers who face specific threats or have been victims of attacks. The "Protect Aid Workers" mechanism is a rapid-response mechanism for aid workers and their immediate families who have suffered injury, kidnapping, arrest and other critical incidents. Under Protect Aid Workers, humanitarian organisations can receive protection grants to cover the cost of protection measures and post-incident support for staff, as well as grants to cover legal fees for staff who are or have been threatened with arrest and detention. Just last month, Commissioner Lahbib signed an agreement in Strasbourg to allocate an additional EUR 850.000 to the project, bringing the EU's overall contribution to 6 million in the last 3 years. So far, over 450 people have been supported.

> 6. Looking ahead, what role do you see for the European Parliament in safeguarding EU engagement in fragile contexts, and how can MEPs contribute to a more coherent Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus in practice?

The European Parliament has an important role in promoting sustained EU engagement in fragile contexts and a more coherent Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus in practice by exercising democratic scrutiny of the European Commission. Relevant Commissioners regularly appear before the Development and Foreign Affairs Committees to explain the policy choices they are making. Both our Committees play this role to the fullest to promote coherence and democratic accountability across the Union's external action.

Parliament also co-decides on EU legislation - the negotiations on the next Global Europe Instrument are only in the starting blocks. One challenge will be to make sure that the new instrument fully reflects the need for tailored, integrated approaches to fragility and that this is translated in effectively joined-up working methods.

Importantly, as one arm of the budgetary authority, the Parliament can also promote EU engagement where needs are greatest. In the last few annual budgetary procedures, our Committee has consistently and successfully topped up humanitarian funding to support the EU's response to acute humanitarian situations, as well as for preparedness actions.

Lastly, MEPs can contribute concretely by using committee work, own-initiative reports, and budgetary oversight to advocate for breaking down silos between EU instruments and institutions. Members also systematically engage with key humanitarian and development partners, including local civil society, NGOs and the UN. Communicating about who we support, how we do it, and the values that guide our work. The EU is proud to stand as a credible and reliable humanitarian actor in today's volatile world. It is our responsibility and the message that both European citizens and the people we support deserve to hear.

Interview conducted by VOICE

1. Examples and recommendations drawn from: Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance (June 2025).
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