10 proposals for the future of international cooperation

WHITE PAPER

IRIS
INSTITUT DE RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES ET STRATÉGIQUES

CONJUGUER LES SAVOIR-FAIRE POUR BÂTIR UN MONDE EN COMMUN

EXPERTISE FRANCE
GROUPE AFD

About Expertise France

Expertise France is the French inter-ministerial agency in charge of international technical cooperation, and a subsidiary of Agence Française de Développement Group (AFD Group).

The second largest agency in Europe, it designs and implements projects that sustainably strengthen public policies in developing and emerging countries. Governance, security, climate, health, education... It operates in key areas of development and contributes, alongside its partners, to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For a world in common.

About IRIS

The Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS) is one of the leading French think tanks specialised in international and strategic issues. It is the only one to combine a research centre and an educational institution awarding degrees, through its school, IRIS Sup'. This model contributes to its national and international appeal. As a non-profit association, IRIS has a mandate to contribute to research and debate on geopolitical issues. It is organised around four key areas of activity: research, publication, training and event organisation.
Its website: www.iris-france.org

Contents

EXPERTISE FRANCE'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY

EDITORIAL

Jérémie Pellet
Chief Executive Officer of Expertise France

Expertise France is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. It is an opportunity to look back at its profound transformation. In ten years, Expertise France has become the second largest technical cooperation agency in Europe. At the same time, France has demonstrated its commitment to building closer international partnerships. It has also put in place the means to implement its policy by centralising all its instruments within AFD Group, including international technical cooperation with the integration of Expertise France in 2021. Our country now provides a comprehensive and coherent offer, combining technical expertise and financial instruments to deliver effective responses geared towards the needs expressed by our partner countries.

But celebrating our 10th anniversary is not only about achievements. It also means looking towards the future and identifying the challenges and priorities of tomorrow. In a world of constantly changing rules and alliances, witnessing an overall decline in the contributions of the main international and European donors. In other words, an environment in which we need to continually adapt. We have therefore decided to use this opportunity to take a fresh look at our activities, gain perspective, and enhance our practices, by organising a dialogue with researchers specialised in our fields of operation and the priority geographical areas for our action. This is how our partnership with IRIS came about and has come to fruition through this publication.

This dialogue was initiated on 12 February at our 10th anniversary ceremony, when we presented our ten proposals for the future. It has since been constantly enriched, resulting in forward-looking thinking and providing an alternative to our own operational perspective. Together, we have been examining the new rules of this "nonpolar" world, as well as our operating methods.

Building on this fresh perspective and this dialogue with research, we are continuing to work towards our transformation, close to the field in our geographical areas of operation. In ten years from now, my wish is that we will be even prouder of our achievements and the impact of our action. That we will continue to share good practices and sustainable solutions with an ever-increasing number of partners, civil society, the research community, and various countries. We should remember that in our activities, what we refer to as "technical" cooperation, because it covers everything outside the scope of purely diplomatic relations, is a core aspect of our policy for international partnerships, because it is human-centred, carried out between people who speak the same language and face the same difficulties. The purpose of this publication is also to give fresh hope and provide a positive vision of what we can achieve together in addressing our common challenges, through the international technical cooperation that we have been working to revitalise and strengthen in France for the last ten years.

I hope that you enjoy reading the publication and discovering these ten proposals on how to reshape our activities and our partnerships.

Pascal Boniface
Director of IRIS

This White Paper is the culmination of extensive cooperation, covering several months, between Expertise France and the Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS). Since its inception, IRIS has always sought to connect the work of its researchers and cartographers on analysing and interpreting international relations with partners who drive operational initiatives and projects on a daily basis. In this respect, our contribution to the preparation of this White Paper with the Expertise France teams illustrates our desire to meet the expectations and contribute to the thought process of this technical cooperation agency which, in ten years of operation, has become the second largest in the European Union.

We are all aware that we are living in a complex world. We now find ourselves in the midst of an episode of history in which the benchmarks that appeared to organise international relations since the end of World War II have been eroded and are constantly called into question. Hence the critical importance of shifting our focus and therefore decompartmentalising the different levels of analysis of those seeking to understand in order to act. When we started our work on this White Paper together, the researchers at IRIS and practitioners at Expertise France did not always share the same assumptions, but we soon realised that our perspectives were mostly complementary rather than differing, with each contributor of course free to develop their own reflection. Having applied this method, we indeed hope that this work will provide Expertise France with a set of structural priorities for the development of its activities in the coming years.

The ten chapters of this White Paper all cover issues to help build more efficient cooperation operations. While they address a broad array of subjects, they are all assuredly equally important. Indeed, the value of this exercise lies in demonstrating that the issues addressed, and there may of course be others, in fact constitute a comprehensive framework, with each chapter covering the key challenges that will need to be addressed in the future. It would appear to be an ambitious task. And it is! But we will need to tackle these issues head on in an effort to come up with well-founded collective solutions to them.

Rising to the level of our responsibilities is a daunting task, but partly a question of determination. The work that IRIS and Expertise France have achieved together in the preparation of this White Paper demonstrates the need to combine our activities, with due regard for their specific nature. In this way, we will achieve results which, we hope, will contribute to a more harmonious development of our planet.

Balanced global **cooperation**

Global cooperation issues no longer have the clear patterns they had during the Cold War period, or the short decade when the United States stood as a superpower following the implosion of the pro-Soviet bloc.

Indeed, in the early 2000s, a conjunction of several phenomena occurred: the relative decline in U.S. hegemony and power, the concomitant assertion of China and Asia, towards which the global geopolitical and economic centre of gravity gradually shifted, and the gradual affirmation of countries of the Global South engaged in the new phase of globalisation that took place between 1990 and 2010 are among the characteristics that shape international relations at the present time. It is in this context of the diversification of geopolitical partnerships, in particular between countries of the Global South and around China's rise in power, that the BRICS group was founded in 2009-2010 (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and expanded to BRICS+ in 2024-2025 (Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates).

The values, long seen by their proponents as universal, that had formed the basis of international law and post-World War II multilateralism, including liberal democracy, primacy of the rule of law, human rights and individual freedoms, in reality no longer prevail politically, ideologically or culturally. Western countries are increasingly criticised for their tendency to break with the principles that they themselves contributed to building when these principles do not align with their actual or perceived interests. Western powers are often criticised by countries of the Global South for their double standards, although the latter also defend their own interests, and many of them themselves also take measures to curtail freedoms and deny individual and collective rights.

Beyond their diversity, the powers of the "Global South" are shaking up the former balances. They are challenging the hierarchy of a world order still dominated by Western powers. They also refuse to systematically align with the interests and positions of these powers on multiple fronts: economy, trade, multilateral negotiations and geopolitical crises. In some countries, new approaches to foreign policy and geopolitical alliances are emerging, for example, the concept of "multi-alignment" in India and the notion of "active non-alignment" in Latin American countries. We also see that countries that challenge Western hegemony, including Brazil, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey, are now making their presence felt on the international stage through their positions and initiatives.

While Western countries undeniably still have ways of asserting their power, they no longer monopolise them. But Western capitals would not yet appear to have taken full stock of these new paradigms and their consequences. Moreover, all these global developments are prompting the European Union to reconsider its relations with the rest of the world, in particular with the USA, Russia, China and countries of the Global South, and redefine its own interests.

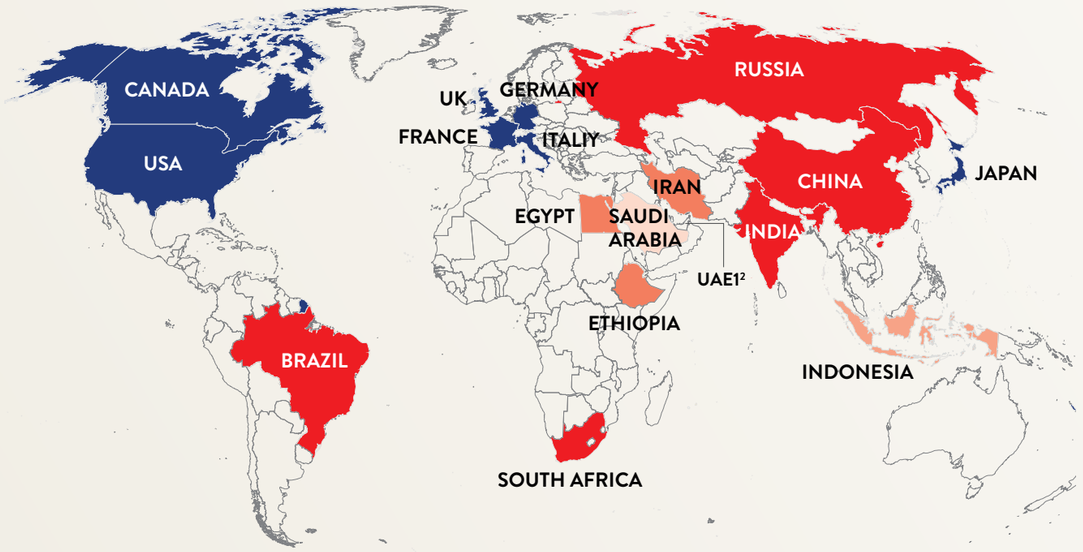
While some may find these issues rhetorical, the coming into office of Donald Trump in the U.S. in early 2025, along with the series of rapid measures he has since been taking, have certainly raised concerns, meaning that these issues can no longer be avoided. With the new U.S. President, the destruction of multilateralism and the organisations that are meant to embody it and safeguard it has become a potential risk. Decisions in Washington are guided by a transactional logic and the law of the strongest. This is radically in contradiction with balanced global cooperation which, conversely, requires listening, dialogue, synergy and complementarity.

It is in this context that the issues and challenges facing international cooperation need to be considered. The nonsense developed over the so-called "end of history" in the early 1990s was short-lived. International developments force us to take account of the compelling reality of power relations. This situation has led to the gradual emergence of the term "de-Westernisation" in the public debate.

In reality, besides the fact that the definition of the concept of "de-Westernisation" "makes the Western matrix the unit of measurement of the current developments in the world",[1] it nonetheless remains insufficient. Referring to a process underway that undermines the legitimacy of the international system established in 1945, it tells us nothing about the possibility of an alternative order. The avatars of the notion of "Global South" quite appropriately illustrate the error that tends to obliterate the differences between the specific national projects of countries of the Global South. The notion emerged during the Vietnam War and has seen numerous changes. Today, for some it refers to a group of countries that are non-aligned or that contest Western domination, for others, the threat that would be posed by the emergence of a coalition of resentment dominated by China and, to a lesser degree, Russia, towards Western powers. The operational relevance of the notion must therefore be questioned.

1. El Hadj Souleymane Gassama (Elgas), "It is essential to disalienate Africa from itself and what it is expected to be, but even more so the West from itself," *Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, summer of 2023, n° 130, p. 57.

The rise in economic power of BRICS+



Members of G7

Members of BRICS since 2011

New members of BRICS+ since January 2024

New members of BRICS+ since January 2025

Country invited to join BRICS+ but not officially a member

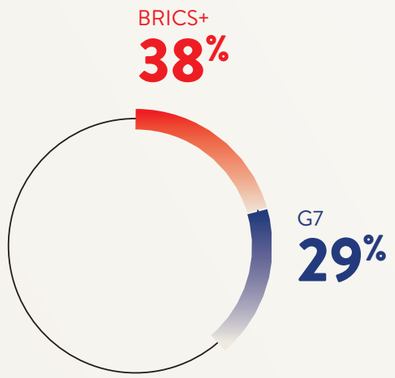
Firstly, the "Global South" comprises countries whose heterogeneity is at least as great as their homogeneity. Secondly, some countries of the "Global South" or "emerging" countries have now largely emerged and are underpinned by ruling elites and middle and upper classes running into the tens or even hundreds of millions of individuals whose standards of living are equivalent to those in the "Global North". Finally, there is now as much "North" in countries of the "South" (lifestyles, social aspirations, political and State systems, etc.) as there is "South" in countries of the "North" (immigration, diasporas, etc.). With these approximate contours, the notion of "Global South" detracts from the complexity and transversality of the relations that are formed, in a contradictory and ambivalent manner, between countries of the Global North and Global South. It thus reduces the field of international relations to a delineation between North and South which, in the context of the rivalry between China and the USA, supports the representation of ideologically instrumentalised divides (West vs non-West, democracy vs authoritarian regime, etc.). Globalising a "South" which is not asking for this is also a mark of condescension.

This new landscape does not mean that the joint projects related to the various aspects of development are less useful and necessary, as many countries are in dire need of them. But it makes it essential to integrate the new paradigms of international relations and, therefore, devise new forms of cooperation. It is all the more essential because countries of the Global South are not in a logic of establishing an alternative system to the dominant mode of economic production. On the contrary, it would appear that their objective is to carve out the best possible place internally. We now have partners that are aware of their interests and determined to defend them. It is thus essential to integrate this parameter to avoid positions that may be rightly perceived as being reminiscent of neo-colonialism, but also to ward off the temptation of riding roughshod, which would be the best way to be marginalised and lose the capacity for influence.

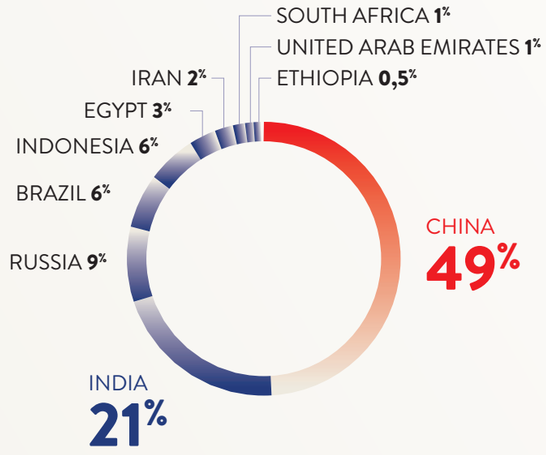
It is thus striking that China's massive Belt and Road Initiative project, better known as the New Silk Road, has resulted in a lot of illusions in many of the countries that have joined it. Some already visibly regret it, as they had not fully taken the measure of the stringent conditions of Beijing. At the same time, we know that China accounts for more than 70% of the wealth generated by the BRICS. There is thus a real risk that the current de-Westernisation movement will cause many countries of the Global South to backslide into other forms of equally negative domination.

In integrating these new parameters of current international relations, it is apparent that global cooperation, in particular when it concerns matters of common interest for the countries in question, such as improving public policies or resolving global challenges, is a valuable instrument for forging closer links and more diversified partnerships with countries of the Global South, in the current nonpolar environment. It is thus necessary to reason on two separate and complementary levels.

Share of BRICS+ and G7 in world GDP, in PPP2[3]



Share of members in total BRICS+ GDP, in PPP2[3]



Source: World Bank, 2023.

2. United Arab Emirates.

3. Purchasing power parity (PPP) facilitates comparisons of incomes and consumption between countries. It evens out price differences between countries.

Firstly, at the State level. Indeed, due to its history, France cannot be reduced to its membership of the club of Western countries. It must maintain its singularity, meaning it has to look at the world as it is and not as it would like it to be. In other words, integrating the new geopolitical power relations in the world as closely as possible is now an inescapable constraint in order to make appropriate political decisions. This means that the attention we give to the world must be revitalised to constantly question the relevance of a given partnership, at the macro or micro level, with countries of the Global South. The old saying of De Gaulle "allies but not aligned" remains highly topical and provides a framework to understand the world in all its complexity, without being trapped in rigid systems of alliances which are no longer the norm of international relations.

For example, this requires an ability to classify and prioritise over a period of 15 years. Taking a relatively recent exercise, we find that the method used to prepare COP21 in December 2015 was exemplary for the determined efforts for its preparation, the practical requirement of not neglecting any partner, and the ability to reason over the medium term.

$40
billion

reduction of the programs
of the United States Agency
for International Development
(USAID)

In this respect, while the consequences of Donald Trump's policy lead to many dangers and difficulties for the architecture of how the world works, they may paradoxically open up new and mutually beneficial avenues for actors towards renewed forms of international cooperation. For example, the decision in Washington to drastically reduce the programs of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), by about $40 billion, dangerously destabilises international humanitarian aid and the non-governmental organisations responsible for it. The brutal triage, without any real prior evaluation at USAID, to make "America safer, stronger and more prosperous", according to Marco Rubio, the new Secretary of State, is totally incompatible with what is needed for harmonised global cooperation.

Secondly, at the infra-State level. In reality, the anticipated success depends on the overall assessment mentioned above. We now have relations with fully-fledged partners who are no longer simply recipients or beholden. Any other position would block us and would in fact limit our room for manoeuvre. The recent upheavals of France's presence in Sub-Saharan Africa provide an unfortunately negative illustration of this difficulty of projecting ourselves into a fast-changing world. It is necessary to draw all the political lessons, because international technical cooperation issues cannot evade the questions arising from these issues and what they mean in practice.

In this regard, the reflection on conditionality is a sensitive issue, but may be fruitful. Official Development Assistance is by nature conditional upon the recipient country entering into the donor country's development policy and complying with the rules to control the funds committed, and countries where aid is still tied (Japan, South Korea) are reliant on economic counterparts. Today, there is thus a tension between the desire of countries of the Global North, especially in Europe, to have more partnership-based international cooperation relations (and therefore based more on trust than on predefined conditions) and the temptation of imposing new conditions for this financial support based on political considerations, for example, the control of migration flows. This negative conditionality may prove counterproductive if it is not clearly outlined and freely consented by the partners. The challenge thus lies in being able to initiate a dialogue to assess the interests that are mutually beneficial for the parties concerned.

The future and success of controlled and effective global cooperation cannot be written in advance. However, adopting the most effective analytical framework possible for international developments constitutes a first safeguard to avoid, as far as possible, the most fatal errors. The specific choices of projects and partners certainly partly depend on local conditions, but it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding and an initial framework to determine many of the practical decisions. While the well-understood dialectic between local and global is nothing new, it is now firmly established, more than at any other time in the interwoven history of peoples. It is certainly a source of satisfaction and positive prospects, but also a considerable source of new challenges.

"The future and success of controlled and effective global cooperation cannot be written in advance."

Towards inclusive artificial intelligence: an issue of development and equity

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a major driver for economic and social transformation. For example, its various fields of application, such as data processing, decision support and robotics, help optimise agricultural systems, improve the quality of healthcare, and modernise public services. The generative AI market, which is able to generate texts, images and videos in response to requests, is thus poised to reach $1.3 trillion[4] by 2032.

However, despite this immense potential, questions linger regarding both economic and industrial sovereignty and sustainable development. These technologies are far from neutral and can disseminate social models that may reinforce inequalities and stereotypes between countries and within societies. In 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted the risk of a reorganisation of the labour market due to AI and an increase in inequalities.[5] A crucial challenge is thus emerging: ensure that this new technology contributes to the general interest and serves the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[6] by benefiting everyone, whatever their geographical, social, economic and cultural situation.

4,643
start-ups
emerged in the **U.S. AI sector** between 2013 and 2022

AI dominated by the approaches of the USA and China: risks and limitations

Massive investment and U.S. domination

The U.S. currently dominates the AI sector *via* Google, Meta, Anthropic, Microsoft, Nvidia and OpenAI. Between 2013 and 2022, 4,643 start-ups emerged in the U.S. AI sector, supported by almost $249 billion of private investment. The world's leading power controls the main components of the supply chain of this new industry. Upstream, Nvidia monopolises almost 90% of the market share for graphics processing units (GPUs), which are essential for the intensive calculations required for AI. In the cloud computing sector, Amazon, Microsoft and Alphabet also dominate the market for the data centres used for training AI models. Finally, the U.S. giants are investing heavily in large language models (LLMs), thereby strengthening their influence over generative AI applications. This concentration of power raises sovereignty issues for the other countries. Their dependence on technologies and infrastructure controlled by the U.S. puts them in a situation of economic reliance and raises many political and ethical issues.

China, which had remained silent for a long time, is now in the process of narrowing the gap with the U.S. in the race for AI. Its model, DeepSeek-R1, was released with its open source MIT Licence in January 2025. Its performance is comparable to the industry leaders and its development cost was relatively low ($5.6 million,[7] or about 7% of the training cost for GPT-4 by OpenAI, which exceeds $100 million). Despite U.S. restrictions on the export of next-generation GPU chips to China, DeepSeek has managed to design an AI model with a performance comparable to ChatGPT, calling into question the U.S. domination in this field. The announcement of a €485 bil-

4. Pascal Boniface and Victor Pelpel, *Géopolitique de l'Intelligence artificielle. 40 fiches illustrées pour comprendre le monde, Paris*, Eyrolles, 2024.

5. See https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/14/ai-will-transform-the-global-economy-lets-make-sure-it-benefits-humanity

6. See https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/

7. This estimate was contested by the U.S., which considers it has been underestimated: the relatively low cost to develop DeepSeek-R1 raises questions, in particular over funding and research practices in China.

lion funding programme in January 2025 for research and innovation demonstrates the major commitment of the U.S. and its determination to strengthen its position in the AI sector.

There are already wide disparities emerging between countries in terms of computing infrastructure. Some regions, such as Africa, are lagging a long way behind. This gap is due to a lack of investment in infrastructure, but also the high requirements for water and electricity supply and for the availability of reliable very high-speed connections. Indeed, in many African countries, access to reliable and affordable energy remains limited, which holds back their development.

> “In many African countries, access to reliable and affordable energy remains limited, which holds back their development.”

Furthermore, the cooling systems for these centres require large volumes of water, which poses an additional challenge in regions where it is a scarce and precious resource. In addition to material constraints, the lack of skilled labour to design, deploy and manage this infrastructure is a major obstacle to its expansion, which further exacerbates inequalities in access to these technologies.

Algorithmic bias and censorship: structural dangers

Algorithmic bias is a critical issue in the development and use of artificial intelligence, in particular in the context of large language models (LLMs), which tend to provide essentially incorrect answers to many questions. These shortcomings highlight the importance of considering the quality and diversity of the training data used in these systems.[8] AI learning systems are thus mainly based on data from Western cultural contexts. These databases can reproduce, or even exacerbate, social inequalities and discrimination, in particular in terms of gender and ethnicity. In 2020, a study found that several facial recognition software programs used by police forces in the U.S. had a significantly higher error rate for non-white individuals, especially women.[9] More recently, an algorithm used in U.S. hospitals to assign a “risk score” to patients and prioritise their follow-up showed alarming biases. Indeed, it was based solely on previous healthcare expenditure and systematically underestimated the seriousness of the condition of black people. While the latter had similar medical conditions to those of white patients, the average cost of their healthcare was lower, which wrongly placed them as a low priority for access to treatment. To address these challenges and counter the risk of an institutionalisation of discrimination in AI systems, the European Union (EU) adopted the AI Act in August 2024, a regulatory framework to regulate the use of AI depending on its level of risk. With this approach, the EU is seeking to impose strict and ethical regulations on the uses of AI, whereas the U.S. favours a more permissive approach focused on innovation, and China uses AI as a tool for social control and strategic interest.

However, a certain criticism towards some European legislative proposals was voiced at the AI Action Summit in Paris in February 2025. U.S. Vice President JD Vance in particular expressed strong concern over excessive regulation which could hinder innovation. In response to these criticisms and faced with a lack of consensus, the European Commission decided to withdraw the Artificial Intelligence Liability Directive proposal, which aimed to harmonise civil liability rules for harm caused by AI systems. While this withdrawal specifically concerns this directive and does not affect the implementation of the AI Act, this U-turn highlights the pressure from the U.S., which is afraid of a fragmentation of the global AI market as a result of overly prescriptive regulation. These vacillations could ultimately undermine Europe’s technological sovereignty by impeding the emergence of local champions able to compete with the U.S. and Chinese giants.

Furthermore, the fact that the generative AI algorithms and architectures (U.S., European and Chinese) are open source raises the issue of cultural influence. Indeed, their mass distribution could shape perceptions and discourses around the world, and also impose restrictions on discourses concerning sensitive issues. For example, the development of AI in China, illustrated by models like DeepSeek, is highly controlled by the government. In accordance with the directives of the Chinese government, DeepSeek incorporates strict censorship mechanisms, preventing any discussion on sensitive issues, such as the independence of Taiwan, the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and the events of Tiananmen Square. Indeed, Chinese AI refuses to answer most of the questions about these issues, illustrating how AI is used as a tool to control information. While the AI models developed in the U.S. and Europe are considered as being more open, they are not free of bias and forms of screening. This prospect prompts consideration of the need to establish regulations to ensure that there is an ethical and equitable use of AI around the world.

8. See https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/we-compared-eight-ai-search-engines-theyre-all-bad-at-citing-news.php

9. See https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/06/24/un-americain-noir-arrete-a-tort-a-cause-de-la-technologie-de-reconnaissance-faciale_6044073_3210.html? These significant biases in the use of facial recognition had been reported in two studies, one published by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), “Face Recognition Technology: A Survey of Policy and Implementation” (2018), the other by MIT Media Lab, “Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification” (2018).

The invisible workers: a societal issue

Furthermore, the training of AI models involves time-consuming and thankless tasks, such as sorting and verifying data. The outsourcing of "clickworker jobs" thus raises major ethical issues, concerning both working conditions and the recognition of these essential contributions to the development of AI. The establishment of binding national and international standards could ensure fairer working conditions and better pay for these basic tasks. The development of open source models promoting greater transparency and wider access to technological resources would reduce the concentration of power among a handful of large Western companies and give room for emerging operators. Finally, greater international cooperation on these issues would make it possible to regulate outsourcing practices and promote a more equitable development of AI.

Designing an inclusive AI model

For AI to be inclusive and an agent of progress, it must address two objectives: be accessible to all and prevent its design and uses from contributing to reproducing or exacerbating existing inequalities and discrimination. Promoting inclusive AI also means ensuring that the economic benefits reach all populations, whatever their level of development and geopolitical situations.

Ensuring that large language models (LLMs) are inclusive by investing in research

Large language models play a central role in the AI ecosystem and must be designed to avoid systemic biases, meaning distortions rooted in social or historical structures which lead to unfair or unbalanced results and, conversely, to reflect the diversity of cultures and languages. The majority of LLMs are currently trained on data sets largely dominated by English and Western references, which limits their relevance for many parts of the world. To achieve truly inclusive AI, it is essential to invest in the collection and processing of multilingual data, representative of the various socio-cultural realities. Furthermore, the accessibility of LLMs also raises the issue of the cost and control of these technologies. The most advanced models are currently often controlled by large private companies, which restricts access for countries and operators that do not have the technical and financial resources to develop their own alternatives. It is thus essential to develop open source models and establish regulations to ensure equitable access, and thereby prevent an excessive concentration of these technologies among a handful of groups and promote a democratic use of AI.

Securing investment for research and the production of local models

Another major challenge for inclusive AI lies in investment in the development of local models that take account of linguistic and cultural specificities. Today, the majority of the dominant models are designed in North America and China and their deployment in other contexts may pose problems of adaptation.

However, some initiatives are beginning to emerge to address this challenge. In Africa, the Masakhane model aims to develop AI adapted to underrepresented African languages, such as Wolof, Swahili and Lingala. Similarly, in Latin America, the Cohere For AI initiative is working on models more suited to local realities. In India, the Bhashini project, which is supported by the government, is seeking to create models able to function in the country's many languages. Beyond language, a local adaptation of AI models is also essential in other fields. In the agriculture sector, weather forecasting and crop optimisation models need to be adjusted to regional climate conditions to deliver reliable results. Similarly, the medical applications of AI require local databases to ensure that diagnostics are adapted to the people concerned.

Investing in digital skills and infrastructure

The development of inclusive AI, serving the interest of the general public and the SDGs, must be backed up by substantial investment in digital infrastructure and educational programmes. In low-income countries,[10] only 39% of 15-24 year-olds use the Internet,[11] a rate that remains insufficient to meet future needs for education and employability. In addition, women still only account for 30% of AI professionals, reflecting a persistent digital divide.

39%
of 15-24 year-olds
use the Internet in low-income countries

10. Countries with a per capita gross national income (GNI) below $1,135. See Nada Hamadeh et al., "World Bank Group country classifications by income level for FY24 (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024)", 2023, online: https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/new-world-bank-group-country-classifications-income-level-fy24

11. See United Nations, "One third of humanity still offline", online: https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147377

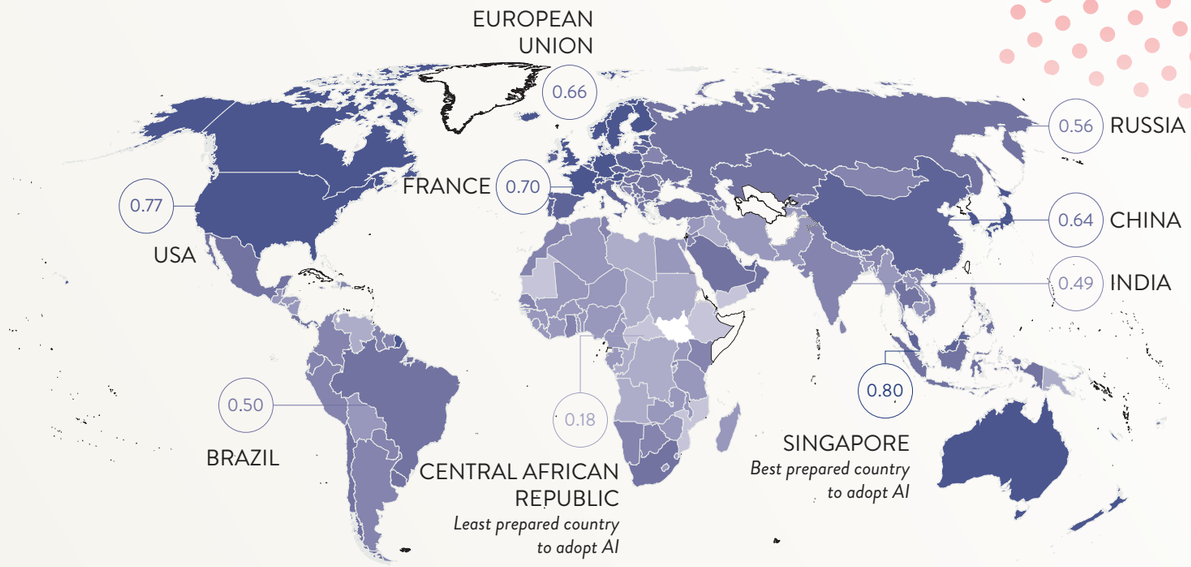
Combating foreign interference

Education is not confined to closing technology gaps. It also plays a key role in combating disinformation and interference strategies, which are facilitated by AI on social networks and in the media. It is therefore essential to raise awareness among people about these issues and establish effective regulatory structures to ensure a responsible use of these technologies. The case of the structured and coordinated pro-Russian propaganda network, Portal Kombat, has demonstrated the extent to which disinformation can be exploited in a systematic manner to *contaminate* automated conversation tools. By generating millions of misleading articles, Portal Kombat has used AI techniques to disseminate disinformation, thus impacting public perception and distorting socio-political discourse.

AI offers many opportunities for accelerating sustainable development and reducing inequalities. However, to make it a tool for inclusion, it is essential to ensure equitable access to the technologies, adopt solutions geared to local needs, and establish transnational regulations to protect the most vulnerable population groups. In this context, the issue of open source and free technologies is becoming central: by facilitating transparent access to AI tools and models, they give local operators greater autonomy and reduce dependence on tech giants. However, publicly opening the internal functioning of AI systems also raises security issues, as it can facilitate malicious use. This is why a strict regulatory framework is necessary. Regulation is thus becoming a major issue in terms of limiting ethical and economic abuses and establishing clear standards, ensuring both innovation and the protection of fundamental rights.

International cooperation is crucial in ensuring that there is an ethical development and use of AI, geared towards the various needs around the world. Initiatives such as the Digital for Development Hub[12] demonstrate how this international collaboration is not only possible but also beneficial. By fostering dialogue between the EU and its African partners, these initiatives pave the way for a digital transformation that respects specific local situations.

Rich countries are generally better prepared to adopt artificial intelligence (AI)



AI Preparedness Index by country in 2023

- 0.8 and above
- 0.7 - 0.79
- 0.6 - 0.69
- 0.5 - 0.59
- 0.4 - 0.49
- 0.3 - 0.39
- 0.2 - 0.29
- 0.1 - 0.19
- 0 - 0.09
- No data

Average of this index in:

- 0.68 Advanced countries
- 0.46 Emerging countries
- 0.32 Low-income countries

According to the classification established by the IMF

Source: AI Preparedness Index of the International Monetary Fund.

12. See https://d4dhub.eu/

Human security: **a priority**

The concept of "human security" places the individual at the heart of the international agenda. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, it seeks to understand the contexts in which human security is threatened, such as protracted crises, armed conflicts, natural disasters, as well as health, economic and environmental threats.

From the 1990s onwards, the concept of human security was based on theoretical foundations to give an understanding of the various factors that pose a threat to people around the world, such as social inequalities, violations of human rights and political instability. This notion has gradually been structured in a context whereby international bodies were seeking to define a global strategy for poverty reduction, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Following the implosion of the Soviet bloc, there was an intensification of cooperation dynamics between nations within the international system. States set out to structure more sustainable consultation mechanisms, focusing on diplomacy, the promotion of human rights, and deeper economic integration. Following the Cold War, the broadening of the concept of security not only incorporated the economic and social dimensions of security, but also took account of new global challenges, such as climate-related shocks, global pandemics, and the fight against international terrorism. This new way of addressing security requires the establishment of a more just and more stable international system, including the principles of global humanism[13] and lasting peace,[14] in particular in the context of strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Security is both an essential and ambiguous notion in international relations[15] and refers to the absence of threat and fear.[16] Yet, the notion of human security[17] goes further and seeks to ensure the protection of civilians, notably in crisis situations.[18] It extends beyond simply physical protection against violence and covers the guarantee of individual and collective freedoms. Furthermore, it is intertwined with development issues such as nutrition, access to drinking water and sanitation, quality healthcare, and a safe living environment. It focuses on the resilience of populations, which refers to their ability to rebuild their lives, but also anticipate and prevent crises. In theory, the human security approach offers a holistic vision of complex situations and enables more effective and sustainable responses to be considered. However, in a world of rapid change, there are many global challenges. To envision lasting security for all, it is essential to strengthen collaborative and integrated models.

Human security and the challenge to multilateralism

In the 2000s, several organisations and States gradually incorporated the concept of human security, while seeking to adapt to the new dynamics of conflicts and the emergence of multifaceted threats.[19] Russia's military advance in Ukraine and the multiple crises in the Middle East have further increased the need to put human security back at the centre of international geopolitical concerns. These contemporary conflicts have illustrated the failure of the international system to ensure human security and the limitations of international institutions in protecting civilians. Despite resolutions and extensive investigations on human rights violations, the action is often paralysed by the strategic interests of the major powers.

The concept of human security comes up against a complex geopolitical reality, where inter-State alliances are undermined by growing rivalries and differing visions of global issues. The multilateral project is losing credibility faced with "(increasingly) disunited nations".[20]

The sudden withdrawal of the U.S., the leading world power, from numerous multilateral bodies under the banner of the nationalist slogan "Make America Great Again" (MAGA), has illustrated a change of direction in which multilateralism tends to be perceived as a barrier to the preservation of national interests. While this repositioning has created tensions and, in the short term, affected the commitment of certain international institutions, its long-term effects on the multilateral architecture remain uncertain. This U.S. withdrawal would, however, appear to have encouraged other powers, such as China and Russia, to redefine their international strategy and strengthen their alliances within alternative frameworks, such as BRICS.

The world would ultimately appear to be moving towards a new world order. Alliances are conditioned by narrow interests and human security would appear to take second place, replaced by logics of geopolitical competition. In the absence of a substantial revision

13. For Bertrand Badie, in *Puissant ou Solidaire ? Principes d'humanisme international* (2009), the principle of international humanism is based on the premise that international cooperation must be founded on the recognition of the equality and dignity of peoples, beyond the logic of national sovereignty. He proposes an approach based more on solidarity than on power relations through inclusive multilateralism.

14. In 2000, lasting peace was a major issue for the United Nations. In this context, Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented An Agenda for Peace.

15. Dario Battistella, Jérémie Cornut and Élie Baranets, Théories des relations internationales, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2019.

16. In 1952, the political scientist Arnold Wolfers gave a definition of security: "Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked."

17. The UNDP Human Development Report 1994 developed two concepts: "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" (and structural violence).

18. According to the United Nations Resilience Index, published by the United Nations, the countries most vulnerable to major crises, such as countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are also the most dependent on resilience mechanisms.

19. The notion of human security was also incorporated by NATO at its summit in Madrid in June 2022, with five specific components: Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings; Children and Armed Conflict; Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence; Protection of Civilians; Cultural Property Protection. These fields were refined during the Washington Summit in 2024 with the Human Security Agenda: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/8/pdf/240830-human-security-en.pdf

20. Julian Fernandez and Jean-Vincent Holeindre, *Nations désunies ? La crise du multilatéralisme dans les relations internationales*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2022.

of international cooperation mechanisms and a reaffirmation of the principles of international solidarity, the transition to this order could exacerbate the global divisions, increasing the dangers for vulnerable populations and depriving them of prospects for development.

> European Union Member States have a role to play in a strategic positioning to make human security a global priority and assist the countries with the greatest difficulties.

New generation of post-Cold War threats

The world is today facing the emergence of new threats, which are often exacerbated by already fragile political, security and humanitarian situations. This is notably the case in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, where the conflict dynamics are at high risk of spilling over at the regional level, exposing neighbouring countries to direct repercussions. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a significant increase in internal conflicts.[21] This often includes attacks targeting civilian populations, an increasing number of internally displaced persons, and a negative effect on regional stability. In addition to the increased proliferation of internal conflicts, the exponential risks of insecurity are alarming.[22] The recent fragmentation of international development assistance will clearly make it increasingly difficult to adapt to the new threats. Certain humanitarian crises are likely to worsen, as is the case with the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East.

Yet, faced with the increase in social tensions and massive displacements, it is becoming essential to revitalise international cooperation mechanisms and climate negotiations. In addition to the increased violence in conflicts, the climate emergency poses one of the greatest threats to human security and fuels increasing competition for natural resources. Ecosystems are extremely fragile and droughts and floods[23] are increasing in frequency, compromising the food security of many populations. The Nutrition for Growth Summit, which was held in Paris on 27 and 28 March 2025, highlighted the need to combat malnutrition, specifically hunger in situations of conflict and extreme emergency, as an issue of peace.

But there is a risk that action to address the most pressing world problems could lose momentum, against the backdrop of a relative decline in the commitments of States within international mechanisms to respond to crises and support vulnerable populations.[24] However, the extent of this movement and its possible continuation will need to be assessed. As a result, this persistently uncertain international situation is leading to a growing disconnection between security and development, two elements that are intrinsically linked within the concept of human security. The current U.S. disengagement is contributing to undermining the effectiveness of collective responses to the global challenges, plunging the world into great uncertainty. European Union Member States have a role to play in a strategic positioning to make human security a global priority and assist the countries with the greatest difficulties.

What type of human security is possible for “fragile” States?

States considered to be fragile[25] are unable or unwilling to fully exercise their prerogatives towards the people through a political process. In addition, social inequalities exacerbate tensions and become powerful catalysts of instability. In these “fragile” situations, a hazard, such as a natural disaster, can precipitate the total collapse of the State. One example is the situation in Haiti, where the population is today left to the mercy of criminal groups.

International actors have thus far envisioned a human security that needs to address increasingly diverse contemporary challenges, with a political perspective that gives priority to the rule of law and reducing impunity. But up until now, the operational peacekeeping strategies in “fragile” States have very often required significant investments, without achieving real lasting results. The mixed and temporary results of French strategies can be attributed to an insufficient consideration of the underlying factors of instability in the regions in question. In addition, peacekeeping missions should fully involve local entities to avoid making the situation worse.[26]

Indeed, the conceptualisation of “fragility”, which tends to essentialise and classify States, in particular with the use of the Fragile States Index, obscures the sociological and historical complexity of local contexts.[27] As a result, “fragile” States have little room for manoeuvre, yet the solutions to ensure security and stability should not necessarily be led by external actors. Furthermore, in “fragile” countries, external intervention primarily serves as support and an opportunity to specifically strengthen the local level and propose endogenous solutions better adapted to the needs of the people.

Civil society organisations are a major resource for actively contributing to the promotion of human security. They are able to propose local solutions to specific issues, while viewing public policies and institutional mechanisms with a critical eye. They are also vehicles for awareness-raising, conflict prevention, and the promotion of human rights. However, an aspect requiring particular vigilance needs to be emphasised: civil society organisations cannot singlehandedly take full responsibility for the development of countries, or

21. Bastian Herre, Lucas Rodés-Guirao and Max Roser, “War and Peace”, *Our World in Data*, 2024, online: https://ourworldindata.org/war-and-peace?insight=armed-conflict-is-common-and-takes-different-forms#key-insights

22. The last UNDP Special Report on Human Security “New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity” (2022) highlights a significant increase in the number of people living in conflict areas of high and very high intensity since 1990. In 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, more than one billion people were living close to a conflict, and more than 100 million in an area experiencing high-intensity conflict: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/WY3U7/

23. The 6th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects an increase in temperature-related risks, with heatwaves, extreme rainfall events, droughts, melting of the cryosphere, and changes in the behaviour of many species.

24. While the Trump administration has suppressed most of USAID funding for abroad, the funding allocated to the World Food Programme fell by 40% in 2025.

25. The OECD defines fragility as the combination of exposure to risk and the insufficient resilience of a State, system and/or community to manage, absorb or mitigate these risks. See online https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/states-of-fragility-2025_81982370-en.html

26. David Carment, Stewart Prest and Yagadeesen Samy, *Security, Development and the Fragile State: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy*, Routledge, London, 2010.

27. Olivier Nay, « La théorie des “États fragiles” : un nouveau développementalisme politique ? », *Grand Angle*, 2024, p. 139-151.

ensure that fundamental freedoms are respected. These objectives must be achieved through concerted and coherent action between States and solidarity actors, based on enhanced cooperation mechanisms. In addition, the implementation of operational programmes, through the establishment of both national and local partnerships, is only relevant when the theoretical approach adopted is geared towards the specific context and the actual needs of the people.

The emergence of the concept of human security has modified the relationships of States with peace, which is today necessarily seen through the lens of populations and new threats.[28] In efforts to consolidate local solutions and not repeat past mistakes, it is essential to identify existing civil society organisations, including associations and informal networks, working in the community to achieve lasting stability and which, often for lack of means, find it difficult to expand their scope of action and increase their efficiency.

In June 2024:

122.6 million

people in situations of forced displacement. Refugees under an HCR or UNRWA mandate, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and persons in need of international protection.

including

41.7 million

refugees around the world.

69%

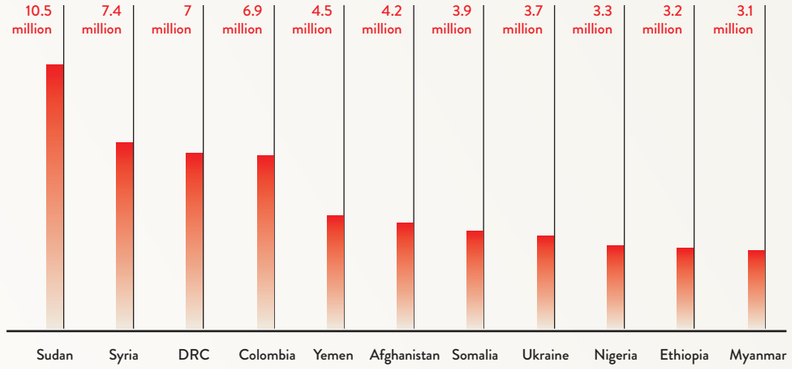
were received in neighbouring countries

71%

were received in low- or middle-income countries

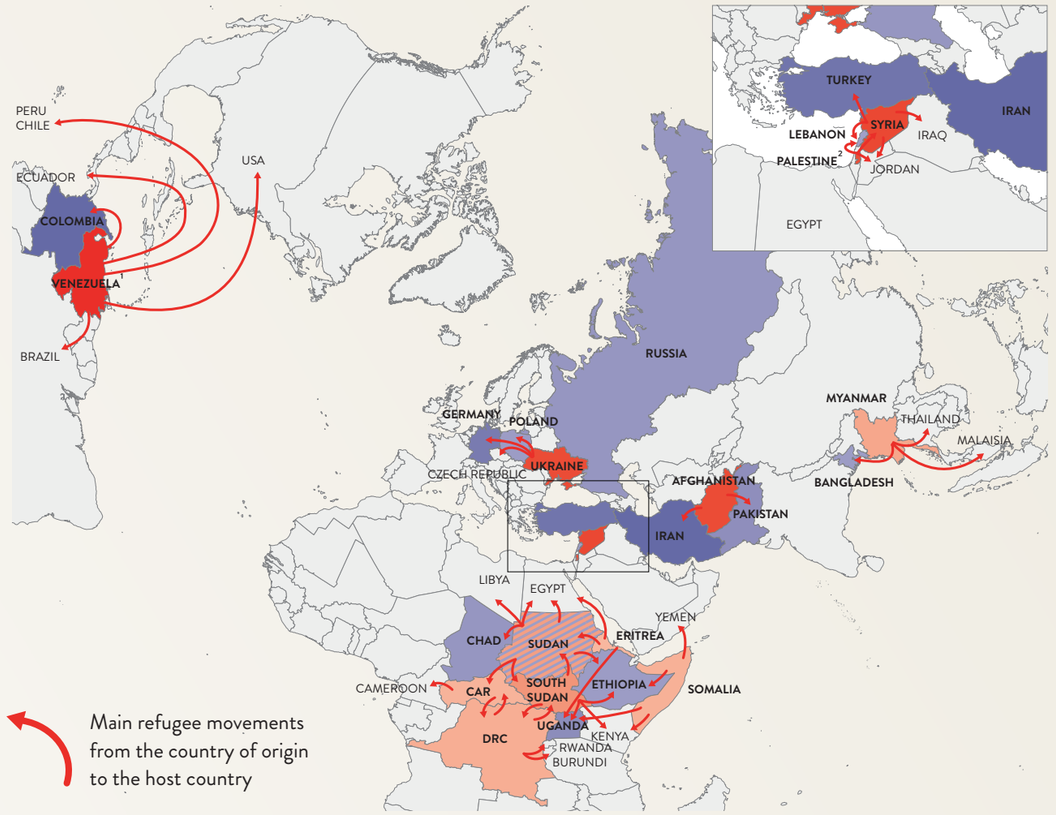
Source: UNHCR.

Main countries with high concentrations of internally displaced persons around the world in June 2024



Refugees and displaced persons around the world

Geographical distribution of refugees around the world in 2024



Main refugee movements from the country of origin to the host country

SUDAN Main country of origin and reception of refugees

KENYA Other host country for refugees

Source: UNHCR.

Main countries of origin of refugees around the world (in millions of people)

Venezuela[1]	7.3
Syria	6,2
Ukraine	6
Afghanistan	6
Palestine[2]	5.9
South Sudan	2.3
Sudan	1.7
Myanmar	1.3
DRC	1
Somalia	0.9
Bangladesh	0.8
CAR	0.7
Eritrea	0.5

Main host countries of refugees around the world (in millions of people)

Iran	3.8
Turkey	3.1
Colombia	2.8
Germany	2.7
Uganda	1.7
Pakistan	1.6
Chad	1.2
Russia	1.2
Ethiopia	0.9
Bangladesh	0.9
Poland	0.9
Sudan	0.8
Lebanon	0.7

1. More than 7 million people have left Venezuela since 2014 and have a special status with the UNHCR. They are classified into three categories: refugees, asylum seekers and “other persons of concern”.
2. Almost 6 million Palestinian refugees in 2024 come under UNRWA’s mandate and are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”, as well as their descendants.

28. Frédéric Charillon, « Paix et sécurité humaine : les défis à venir », *Questions Internationales*, vol. 4, n° 99–100, 2019, p. 54–60.

Forward-looking **education**

Societies of the 21st century face unprecedented global challenges. The climate emergency threatens the planet and calls for concerted action in the short, medium and long term. The accelerated technological changes are profoundly changing the way in which people live and work, raising complex ethical and social considerations. The geopolitical upheavals are challenging the familiar balances, reshaping international relations, and redefining economic dynamics.

In this volatile environment, youth education plays a central and strategic role as "education is how we organise the intergenerational cycle of knowledge transmission and co-creation. It connects us with the world and to others, exposes us to new possibilities, and strengthens our capacities for dialogue and action. But to shape the futures we want, education itself must be transformed."[29]

It is in this context that the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda at the Sustainable Development Summit in 2015. It lists 17 goals to transform the world by eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all by 2030. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) specifically targets education by aiming to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".[30]

Ensuring equitable access to quality education for all individuals, irrespective of their origin, gender or socio-economic situation, has become a priority. It is a question of equity and social justice: an inclusive education system responsive to the diverse needs of learners contributes to a more cohesive society respectful of differences.

In 2000, UNESCO established the principle of universal primary education.[31] Children everywhere, boys and girls alike, must complete a full course of primary schooling. Yet "Even before the COVID pandemic, more than 250 million children and young people were out of school, and more than 50% of those who are in school are not achieving even minimum levels of literacy and numeracy – affecting most disadvantaged learners."[32] UNESCO's projections are not very optimistic, as they estimate that "37% of the world's children, equivalent to more than 300 million children, will not reach minimum proficiency levels in reading by 2030."[33]

This objective is hindered by several realities, including the cost of schooling, gender inequalities, disability, and difficulties for rural and peri-urban communities to access schools in many countries. There are multiple initiatives to improve equality between girls and boys. For example, in Africa, programmes such as Tuseme, the Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) and PAIRE, implemented by Expertise France in Mauritania,[34] promote schooling for girls and the reduction of imbalances in the regional deployment of teachers by supporting the development of more inclusive public policies. Unfortunately, current events, such as the ban on access to education for girls over the age of 12 in Afghanistan, serve as a reminder of the fragile nature of this progress.

Ensuring access to free, equitable and quality education for all children, boys and girls alike, from pre-primary to secondary[35] in physically or digitally inclusive facilities, in a safe environment, requires strong political commitment, sound planning and, especially, significant investment.

Pooling resources and deploying the outcomes will allow for economies of scale. To this end, it is necessary to rethink education systems and reconfigure them in terms of the skills required for future generations, as well as in terms of the methods and structures of education.

Each country is committed to its curricula, the pedagogical progression between each stage, and the modes of transmission. It would make sense to develop this body of knowledge towards an interdisciplinary and intercultural corpus of "collective knowledge resources of humanity".[36]

37%
of the world's children
will not reach **minimum proficiency levels in reading** by 2030

29. International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*, UNESCO, 2021, online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707

30. See online: https://sdgdata.gov.uk/4/

31. International Consultative Forum on *Education for All, Education for All 2000 Assessment: global synthesis*, UNESCO, 2000, online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000120058

32. International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Progress update of the International Commission on the Futures of Education*, UNESCO, 2021, online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375746

33. UNESCO, "Accelerate Progress Towards SDG4: Stocktake of Transformative Actions in Education", online: https://www.iicba.unesco.org/en/articles/accelerate-progress-towards-sdg4-stocktake-transformative-actions-education

34. See online: https://expertise-france.gestmax.fr/_expertise_france/public_files/contexte-du-projet-paire.pdf

35. SDG 4.1: All girls and boys complete primary and secondary education; 4.2: A minimum of one year of free and quality pre-primary education.

36. International Commission on the Futures of Education, "Reimagining Our Future Together", UNESCO, 2021, online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379381

The acquisition of the core competencies essential to literacy and numeracy would form the basis of this corpus. In an ideal world, we could imagine that education in global citizenship, democratic participation and human rights would build on this solid base.

The counterpart to this teaching is the development of learning in soft skills, in particular critical thinking, self-questioning, creativity, assertiveness, resilience, agility, empathy, benevolence and conflict resolution, in order to develop collaboration among peers, as well as the ability to adapt to various situations and resolve complex problems.

Particular attention should be paid to digital literacy, *i.e.*, "the confident and critical use of a full range of digital technologies for information, communication and basic problem-solving in all aspects of life."[37]

In this respect, we can mention the speech made by the Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, Hang Chuon Naron, at the ceremony organised for the 10th anniversary of Expertise France. He explained how his country was addressing today's digital revolutions and incorporating critical thinking and training in the use of artificial intelligence in its curricula, in particular for projects to promote inclusion and address the climate challenges.

This global and collective thinking has led to the creation of Open Educational Resources (OER). UNESCO is at the centre of this initiative which aims to promote open and free access to educational materials and thereby democratise education and reduce inequalities in access to educational resources. The founding idea is based on knowledge sharing and collaboration between educators, institutions and communities of learners.

The institution officially adopted OER in 2002 at the Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries. It has since been working to promote them through various projects and recommendations. More specifically, States are encouraged to facilitate access to educational resources by promoting open licences (Creative Commons, for example) and develop online platforms to host and centralise the educational material. This contributes to reducing inequalities in access to education due to both geographical and economic reasons.

In addition to this easier access to quality content, teachers are offered training programmes to ensure that they are proficient in its use and that the outcome of the objective is maintained. For teachers, the next stage involves working together to create inclusive content, develop educational innovation, and share their practices. Indeed, digital issues extend beyond educational content, as they are central to the means of development and deployment of educational resources among all audiences. Both students and teachers need to be trained in distance and hybrid learning, as well as in the social and ethical implications of technologies.

Teachers are a key part of this educational revolution. Yet, according to UNESCO, it "will be necessary to recruit 44 million teachers by 2030 to ensure universal education."[38] "In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, countries will need to recruit 15 million teachers to reach the education goals by 2030. Moreover, teacher preparation in the region is an immense challenge — 35% of deployed primary teachers do not meet minimum qualification requirements, and this number reaches 50% for secondary education according to recent data."[39] This shortage of teachers can thus be seen in both developing countries and in European and North American countries. This projection is alarming: beyond figures, it reflects the deep unease in this profession and results in a crisis with many repercussions: overcrowded classrooms, poorer working conditions for deployed teachers, decline in the level of teachers due to less demanding recruitment. This all results in a drop in students' learning outcomes.

This shortage of teachers should be seen in the light of the ever-increasing number of students. According to the World Youth Report (2020), there are "1.2 billion youth between the ages of 15 and 24, accounting for 16% of the global population. Close to 90% of the world's youth live in developing countries, where they constitute a high proportion of the population. In Africa, the world's youngest continent, the youth population is projected to reach 830 million by 2050."[40]

> "This shortage of teachers can thus be seen in both developing countries and in European and North American countries."

37. UNESCO, "SDG 4 Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All", online: https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/08/Metadata-4.4.2.pdf

38. UNESCO, "Global report on teachers: What you need to know", 2024, online: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know

39. Teacher Task Force, "About the Teacher Task Force", online: https://teachertaskforce.org/who-we-are/about-ttf

40. UNESCO, "Thematic Factsheet. Youth and Empowerment", online: https://www.unesco.org/en/youth-and-empowerment

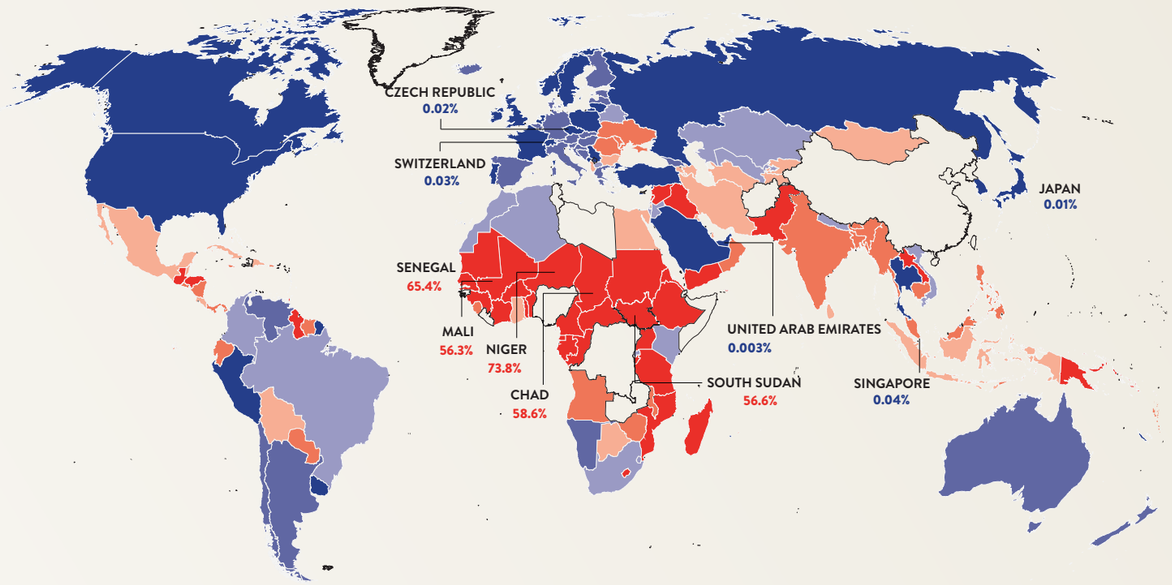
Effectively addressing this shortage of teachers requires adopting a holistic approach by working on recruitment and pre-service training, developing teachers' skills throughout their career, encouraging educational innovation, improving working conditions, and giving them greater social recognition. The Teacher Task Force (TTF) was launched for this purpose in 2008, during a meeting of the High-level Group on Education for All under the auspices of UNESCO. This ambitious initiative mobilises "governments and other stakeholders for the advancement of teachers and quality learning, acting as a catalyst of global, regional and national efforts through knowledge production and dissemination, advocacy and policy learning."[41]

As the European Union has designated education as one of the five thematic priorities of the Global Gateway, it makes a significant investment in this task force. For example, in 2023, it allocated €100 million to the Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa (RTIA) for a period of six years. It will be implemented by UNESCO under the TTF and the African Union for the implementation of its Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), and will be led by Expertise France, in partnership with the cooperation agencies from Belgium (Enabel) and Finland (FINNIDA). When it was launched, the initiative generated a surge of interest, with 13 official requests from African countries and the signing of 14 grant agreements for civil society organisations. These projects support innovative pedagogical approaches, in particular in the fields of digital technology, environment, gender, and support for teachers in crisis situations.

> One of the aspects that needs to be developed in teacher training is the link with civil society and, in particular, the professional world.

The challenges of education

School attendance rate by country



Out-of-school rate for adolescents of lower secondary school age (12-14 years), UNESCO data 2022 or 2023

0 1 3 5 10 25 No data

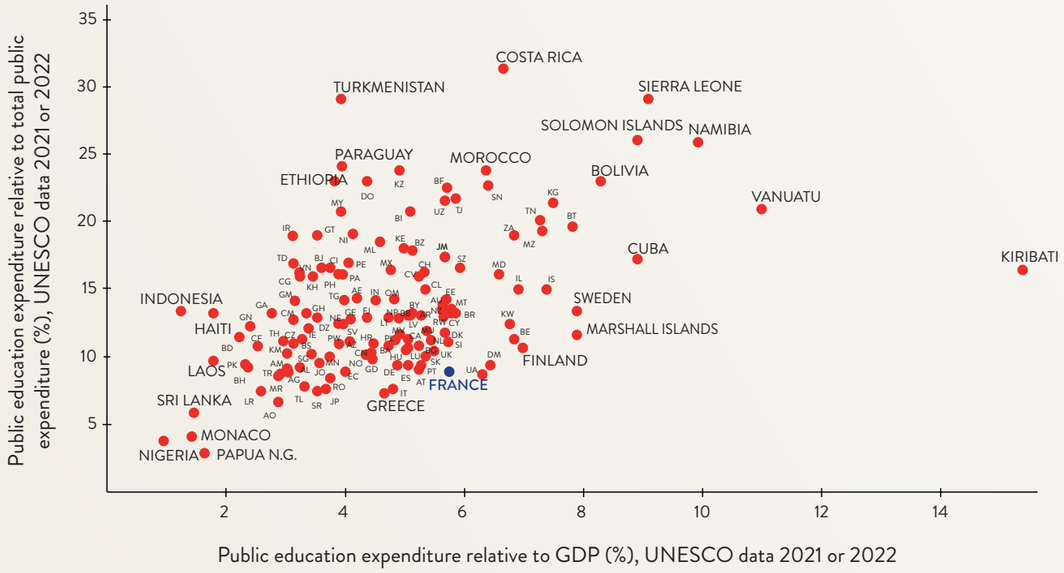
One of the aspects that needs to be developed in teacher training is the link with civil society and, in particular, the professional world. Indeed, the latter needs to be involved in the design of higher education programmes to ensure that the content is aligned with real conditions on the ground and more responsive to the needs of the labour market. This joint academic construction should find immediate opportunities through internships, apprenticeships and collaborative projects. Indeed, by providing students with practical experience, they will be able to start integrating into working life. These exchanges between the public and private sectors need to be devised and organised to ensure that they are instructive for students. They can also encourage youth entrepreneurship and, ultimately, promote entrepreneurial initiatives. In this respect, we can note Expertise France's involvement in the RETFOP project[42] conducted in Angola. It aims to help the Angolan Government diversify its economy by modernising and boosting technical and vocational education and training.

41. Teacher Task Force, "Our mission", online: https://teachertaskforce.org/who-we-are/our-mission

42. Expertise France, "RETFOP: Boosting technical and vocational education and training in Angola, 2021, online: https://www.expertisefrance.fr/en/fiche-projet?id=410170

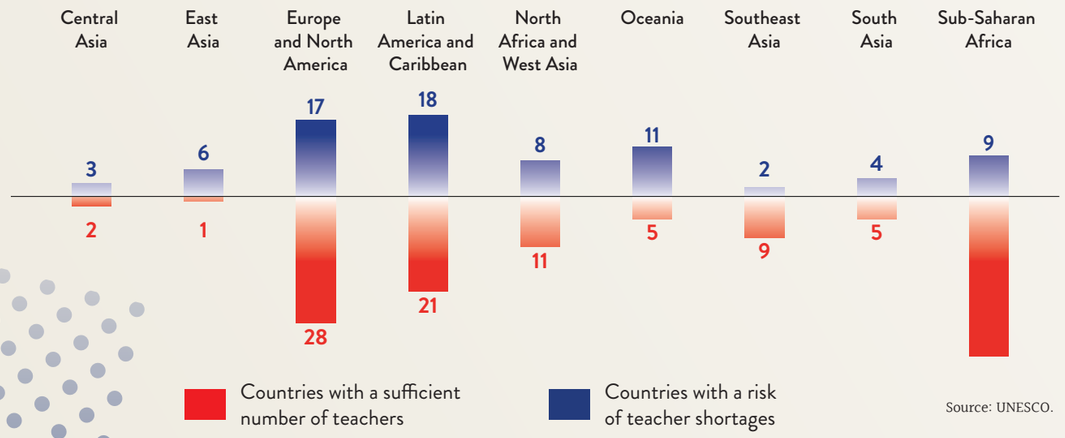
The challenges of education

Education expenditure by country



A teacher shortage?

Number of countries expected to face a shortage of primary school teachers by 2030, based on current trends, UNESCO Report 2024



Source: UNESCO.

The project has three objectives:

- Establish a structured dialogue between the public and private sectors to enhance the definition and management of training policies, while increasing the involvement of companies in vocational training systems;
- Develop a theoretical training base for trainers at national level and adapt training content to labour market needs;
- Improve mechanisms that facilitate access to employment and strengthen systems for transition towards the labour market, including self-employment.

The EU also provides an indication of programmes that can be conducted when these data are incorporated in policies. In 2021, Ursula von der Leyen launched the Global Gateway, a new European strategy that builds "smart, clean and secure digital, energy and transport links and strengthening health, education and research systems worldwide."[43] It involves a substantial financial package, as €300 billion has been mobilised for 2021-2027. It comes from the EU's direct participation (€135 billion), as well as from European Development Finance Institutions (€145 billion), and the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

Africa is also a focus: the EU has launched several regional programmes aimed at boosting youth mobility and skills. For example, the Africa-Europe Youth Academy offers opportunities for apprenticeships and exchanges to young people seeking to improve their leadership skills and create networks between Africa and Europe. In Niger alone, the EU has invested €66 million in the field of education and youth, mainly to tackle gender disparities and recruit and deploy teachers.

Despite significant increases in spending on education over the last 15 years, an additional annual financing of $200 billion would be necessary by 2030 to get the world on track for the achievement of the objectives of SDG 4. It is high time that we consider education as an investment we make to ensure a future, and no longer as an expenditure to be decided on among many others. Investing in education means investing in our collective ability to innovate, resolve complex problems, and build a more resilient, equitable and sustainable world for future generations.

43. Expertise France, "Global Gateway strategy: our contribution through the France and Europe teams", 2023, online: https://www.expertisefrance.fr/en/actualite?id=893786#:~:text=En%20d%C3%A9cembre%202021%2C%20Mme%20Ursula,recherche%20dans%20le%20monde%20entier%20%C2%BB

Promoting multi-stakeholder climate **alliances**

The last ten years, from 2015 to 2024, were the warmest ever recorded compared to pre-industrial levels. 2024 was the first calendar year where the average global temperature was 1.5 °C higher than the average between 1850 and 1900.

The effects of this climate change are already being felt: the number of climate-related disasters increased five-fold between 1970 and 2021. They affect the whole world, as can be seen with the floods, hurricanes and fires in Valence, Mayotte and Los Angeles. There are also less visible but equally alarming effects: 40% of arable land in the world is now degraded, affecting the livelihoods of millions of people, sea levels have risen by 9 centimetres, with the threat of entire countries being submerged in the Pacific region, and the population of wild vertebrates has declined by 73% since 1970, illustrating the collapse of biodiversity, which is experiencing its sixth mass extinction.

Yet global greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) from human activities, which are responsible for this runaway climate change, are continuing to increase. Furthermore, the public policies to support the ecological transition initiated in recent years are called into question within the EU, where the Green Deal is criticised, and in the U.S., whose President is openly a climate sceptic.

In this context, all the actors working to step up climate action, including international organisations, governments, local governments, the private sector, investors, researchers and civil society organisations, need to give new impetus to climate action. In this respect, building alliances among actors in the form of multi-stakeholder coalitions would enable them to step up their action by joining forces to address common objectives, both in terms of mitigating the causes of climate change and adapting to its effects, with the aim of strengthening the resilience of our societies and ecosystems.

The necessity to mobilise different stakeholders in climate coalitions

The various parties to mobilise within multi-stakeholder climate alliances can be classified into three heterogeneous groups. Firstly, civil society actors, which bring citizens together, non-governmental organisations, foundations and associations. Secondly, private sector actors, comprising economic and financial actors. Thirdly, public sector actors, including governments, local authorities and institutions. All these organisations play a vital role in the fight against climate change, with each providing specific and complementary tools for action. These different groups contribute to enhancing the ambition at every critical stage in the development of climate strategies.

At the centre of climate coalitions, there are firstly the actors working on the scientific observation of climate change and the monitoring of its effects on the environment and human societies. Research actors thus play a fundamental role and subsequently enable the various stakeholders – governments, companies and individuals – to implement mitigation and adaptation strategies. Beyond natural sciences, social sciences also play a crucial role in the analysis of the socio-political implications of climate change by facilitating the introduction of policies adapted to socio-economic realities. The creation of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) in 1988 predates the Conferences of the Parties (COP) initiated in 1992. By synthesising global scientific knowledge, the IPCC researchers have structured international climate governance and influenced the establishment of the main climate agreements. The IPCC also performs this mission through the publication of assessment reports every five to seven years, to update knowledge about the climate and the potential mitigation pathways. Scientists from established institutions, such as at the IPCC, as well as researchers working for activist movements such as Scientist Rebellion, are thus essential, as they are behind climate-related political and economic decisions.

73%

decline in the wild vertebrate population since 1970

> The objectives of these climate coalitions need to be built around two main priorities: mitigation and adaptation.

Actors involved in regulation then play a central role in climate governance. First of all, States, through their governments, are able to establish regulatory frameworks to regulate the behaviour of companies and citizens. However, the establishment of effective regulations also relies on non-State actors, which have a significant influence on public policies. Citizens and local communities play a central role in this bottom-up process. In particular, there is constant pressure from young activists on their governments to strengthen climate commitments. Local communities also take action through organisations such as the Climate Action Network (RAC) in France. However, despite their growing influence, these non-State actors do not have the same leverage in international climate negotiations as States, which are the only ones to be recognised as stakeholders in the agreements adopted during the COP. This institutional exclusion thereby limits their ability to directly influence global climate decisions.

Finally, financiers are the last fundamental pillar in the fight against climate change, by supporting the ecological transition. In this respect, companies can play a major role in financing development and the deployment of innovative solutions. Many have joined the Tech for Good movement, which includes French digital companies that have a beneficial social and environmental impact. Others focus on reducing their own environmental impact. A key example is the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTI), which helps companies reduce their GHG emissions. However, since 2024, several private sector actors have engaged in a withdrawal process in terms of climate-related issues, thereby following the attitudes of certain governments which have also reduced their commitments in support of environmental policies. For example, in 2024, several companies announced their withdrawal from the Climate Action 100+ initiative, and in early 2025, the six largest U.S. banks also left the Net-Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA). Other financial drivers can be mobilised, such as donors, whose approach is based more on aid, in particular to compensate for this withdrawal. The latter are key economic actors in financing the transition, especially for projects that are less lucrative but necessary for the climate. Furthermore, in countries of the Global South in particular, the lack of financial resources is a major barrier to the ecological transition. For example, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) actively supports initiatives in regions that are sometimes neglected by the private sector. Finally, cross-cutting and intergovernmental initiatives can also make up for the lack of financing, such as the Green Climate Fund, which was created through the Copenhagen Accord in 2009.

Coalitions need to be mobilised to support a mitigation and adaptation process

The objectives of these climate coalitions need to be built around two main priorities: mitigation and adaptation. The objective of a mitigation approach is to reduce the anthropogenic emissions of GHGs, in accordance with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement. Adopted in 2015, this agreement aims to limit global warming to 1.5 °C, with a maximum threshold of 2 °C. While it now appears inevitable that the threshold of 1.5 °C will be exceeded, it is essential to keep this deviation to an absolute minimum, and not consider that the target must automatically be raised to 2 °C. In this context, intergovernmental mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund, are tasked with supporting countries of the Global South to ensure that they have the means to respect their commitments and the capacity to engage in resilient low-carbon trajectories.

At the same time, the coalitions must incorporate adaptation strategies to anticipate the already visible effects of climate change, as well as the future changes. This action must be designed to address the diversity of risks, such as the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climate events, water stress, rising temperatures, and rising sea levels. For example, almost 10% of the world's population lives in areas threatened by this sea-level rise. This requires the deployment of solutions such as the restoration of mangroves, which act as effective natural barriers against erosion, and the construction of appropriate infrastructure. The Loss and Damage Fund, which was launched at COP27, also mobilises financing from countries of the Global North to support the preparedness of the most vulnerable countries for the inevitable effects of climate change.

The various drivers for action of coalitions

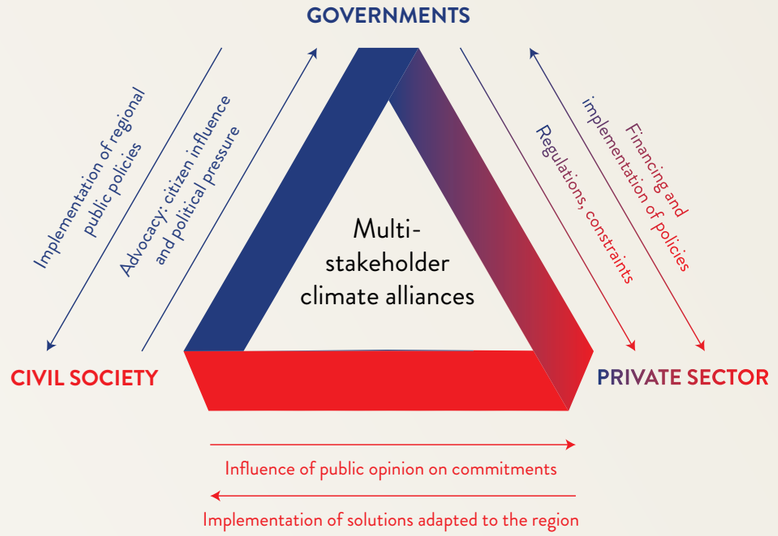
Coalitions have various drivers to step up climate action. Firstly, legal action is a strategic way of imposing a constraint on institutional and economic actors, by forcing them to respect their climate commitments. Indeed, States' commitments, under the Paris Agreement or under their own national carbon neutrality policies, are not subject to any sanctions in the event of non-compliance. The fact that there is no enforcement mechanism considerably limits the incentive to take action. For example, the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted in 1997, imposed a reduction of at least 5% of GHG emissions on certain countries between 1990 and the period 2008-2012. While it is legally binding, the Protocol did not provide for sanctions in the event of non-compliance. To address the failure to respect certain commitments, NGOs use the legal mechanism to force States to respect the reduction targets. This is the case in France, Germany and the Netherlands. In 2018, the NGO Notre Affaire à Tous, in partnership with the Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme, Greenpeace France and Oxfam France, initiated "The Case of the Century", involving legal action against the French State for climate inaction. In 2021, the Paris Administrative Court recognised the responsibility of the French State in the climate crisis and deemed illegal its failure to comply with its commitments on reducing emissions. It was a significant step forward for climate justice. Furthermore, this legal action

also targets companies, especially multinational companies, which are frequently accused of greenwashing and misleading commercial practices. In this respect, TotalEnergies is regularly taken to court by NGOs and citizens for environmental violations, as well as human rights violations. Through this legal action, NGOs seek to hold companies to account and force them to align their activities with the global climate targets.

Political leverage is another crucial instrument to strengthen the fight against climate change, drawing on both the actors involved and the resources that can be mobilised. Subnational actors, such as municipalities, play a crucial role. A key example of these dynamics is the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, which was launched in 2008. This broad coalition includes a network of European cities which develop and implement climate plans supported by EU financing. The main objective of this initiative is to link up local action with the large-scale international and European initiatives, by acting as a bridge between the local, national and international levels. Furthermore, the member cities have often demonstrated their ability to make faster progress in reducing their emissions compared to States. The success of this coalition in Europe led to the launch of the Global Covenant of Mayors in 2015, creating worldwide momentum. Advocacy is also another political tool often used by citizens, as it enables them to put direct pressure on decision-makers. In 2024, several months of campaign by citizens and activists resulted in Norway suspending deep-sea mining licences in order to protect the seabed. Advocacy is all the more crucial because certain organisations implement strategies to impede progress on climate action. Furthermore, there was a record number of 2,456 lobbyists at COP28 in Dubai, a 25% increase compared to COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh.

Coalitions can also use economic drivers to close potential financing gaps. These drivers can mobilise financing to stem the current disinvestment in climate-related issues. Indeed, in January 2025, after Donald Trump had signed the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, Michael Bloomberg announced that Bloomberg Philanthropies would step in to help finance the United Nations' work on climate change, whereas the U.S. had previously contributed up to 22% of the budget of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Functioning of multi-stakeholder climate alliances



While climate change denial would appear to be spreading across the globe, with research facing a funding gap and, in some countries, a risk of censorship, scientific and educational drivers are crucial. Indeed, the rejection of scientific consensus could lead to countries withdrawing from the IPCC, which would limit its impact and weaken its international outreach, as well as the global climate regime. It is therefore essential to strengthen the global coalition of scientists. For example, the Stand Up for Science movement, which refers to the protests organised by the various scientific communities around the world in response to the threats to scientific research, illustrates the scientific community's ability to mobilise coalitions to support it. In this context, climate change awareness-raising and education play a vital role in the dissemination of knowledge, among both citizens and decision-makers, in order to strengthen the commitment to science-based policies. Organisations such as Climate Fresk and CliMates contribute to educating the public on these issues.

It is therefore essential for this diversity of actors to join forces to form coalitions and promote commitment at the local, national and international levels, as well as in various sectors. To step up action for climate change mitigation and adaptation, it will also be essential to continue to mobilise the legal, political and economic drivers, as well as educational and scientific tools, in a context where global climate governance would appear to be losing steam.

Culture
as an economic driver in Africa

African cultures as economic driving force: a genuine potential for disappointing results

African works of art and the issue of France returning them, a matter addressed by Emmanuel Macron during his speech in Ouagadougou in 2017, have caused great controversy since the publication of the report in 2018 prepared by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy[44] at the request of the French President. In France, this debate to some extent masks the vitality and vibrancy of African cultures. While the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector is still in the early stages of being structured, the international successes, albeit more individual than collective, in music, audiovisual arts, fashion, digital arts and contemporary art demonstrate the potential that could be tapped into and promoted to general significant economic and financial resources. According to UNESCO figures, CCIs generate approximately €4.6 billion in Africa for a population of 1.3 billion.

As Marie de Vergès, a journalist at Le Monde, points out, in the music sector, in the summer of 2023, "Calm Down", the hit of the Nigerian Afrobeat star Rema, was streamed two billion times on the Spotify platform, a first for an African artist. Nollywood (Nigeria's Bollywood) has become the second largest cinema industry in the world and can boast of producing films screened around the world. For example, 20 million people watched the thriller "The Black Book" when it was released on Netflix in late 2023.[45] These musical and audiovisual successes show that there is a consumption of African cultural products that extends well beyond the continent's borders, and suggests the possibility of a competitive position on international markets.

The fashion industry is also a source of many opportunities. It is driven by the growth of the middle classes and a young, growing and increasingly urban population. According to the report "The Fashion Sector in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth", published by UNESCO in 2023, Africa could become a "global leader" in fashion. While this market has not yet been structured, the Métiers d'Art Chanel fashion show organised in December 2022 in the magnificent Palace of Justice in Dakar, after a well-timed restoration, revealed African talents and know-how and opened the way for potential collaborations.

The African contemporary art market, which is still reserved for an intellectual and financial elite, is booming.[46] The works of artists are exhibited in Paris, New York, London, Los Angeles and Marrakech, at the 1-54 Festival (One Continent-54 Countries), created in 2018 by the Franco-Moroccan Touria El Glaoui. It has become a key event for artists, gallery owners, intellectuals, collectors and contemporary art lovers. However, African economies benefit little from this "soft power" visibility. There are still few festivals in Africa, although some do stand out: Biennale of Contemporary African Art, Dak'Art, Abidjan Market for Performing Arts (MASA), FNB Art Joburg (Johannesburg), Art X Lagos and Investec Cape Town Art Fair. The tapestries of the Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui may still be an exception, but they are sold for more than €1 million. The artists address contemporary political issues, by questioning the legacy of colonisation, global inequalities, and the barriers put up in the Mediterranean region, which has become the cemetery of a youth in search of a better future.

"...music, audiovisual arts, fashion, digital arts and contemporary art demonstrate the potential that could be tapped into and promoted to general significant economic and financial resources."

They also focus on issues rooted in local contexts which testify to the wealth and diversity across Africa. For example, in 2013, the Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo released a satirical film, "Le Président. Comment sait-on qu'il est temps de partir ?" ("The President. How do you know when it's time to leave?"), criticising the longevity in power of President Paul Biya as

44. Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics", Paris, November 2018.

45. Marie de Vergès, "The promise of African soft power", *Le Monde*, 6 June 2025.

46. Caroline Roussy, « Du Cap à Marrakech, bouillonnement de l'art contemporain africain », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2022, p. 14–15.

head of Cameroon. Another equally powerful example, but perhaps more inaccessible for the general public, is the performances of the Kongo Astronauts collective. One of them, Michel Ekeba, sporting a space suit, wanders the streets of Kinshasa, without saying a word or anything about his poetic and aesthetic intentions, or his political bias. However, the space suits have been made with electronic waste illegally dumped in the DRC – serving as a reminder that while Africa is not a major polluter, it in many respects remains the dustbin of the West – and old copper and coltan circuits, materials whose prices, fixed on foreign stock markets, are highly volatile, which contributes to the precarious living standards of people.

Finally, it is necessary to promote government initiatives for museums, as in Benin, which has coupled its economic development plan with the development of cultural tourism. This model has been designed to be multi-dimensional and aims to promote both the tangible and intangible heritage of the country. Benin is thus in the process of creating four museums in line with international standards (Abomey, Contemporary Art, Memory and Slavery, Vodun). Gallery owners, such as Marie-Cécile Zinsou, are also actively involved in the transmission of art to children and are developing artistic and cultural education projects for them, all equally imaginative. While one of Benin's objectives is to make the country, its artists and its international cultural engagement stand out, as demonstrated by its participation in the 2024 Venice Biennale, tourism involving local communities (visits to villages, craft workshops) is at the planning stage. The return of the 26 treasures of the ancient Kingdom of Dahomey by France to the Republic of Benin provided an opportunity for a choreographed dialogue between these works and the works of more contemporary artists, which captivated both an international audience and a curious Beninese audience, proud of the wealth of its heritage.

While Africa holds enormous potential, with individuals and countries gaining recognition, and has a host of talents, one stage is missing: the transformation of this creativity into an industry that creates jobs and economic wealth. Despite a lack of fully reliable data due to the methodology adopted, it is nevertheless possible to note that African countries are producing an increasing amount of statistics on the economic contribution of their CCIs. According to available figures, which combine Africa and the Middle East, in 2023,[47] the overall contribution of CCIs was estimated at only 1.1% of GDP, with disparities between countries ranging between 3 and 7%.

Solutions need to be explored

To reverse this disappointing ratio (economic potential/results) and propose potential solutions, it would be necessary to have detailed assessments of the sectors identified as having strong potential for each country (for example, webtoons and video games such as Kiro'o Games in Cameroon and fashion in Rwanda with the success of the Asantii brand), collect reliable data, and assess the potential for expanding creative ecosystems with national, intra-African and international market studies. The objective would be to avoid counterproductive "copy and paste" and "ready-made" approaches, because they are unsuited to endogenous issues. To ensure that this data collection is relevant and operational, it is necessary to conduct a mapping of what already exists and the potential that can be developed for each country and sector of activity across Africa. This mapping, based on specific methodological criteria, should make it possible to (re)identify shortcomings in terms of the professionalisation of activities, as well as potential complementarities between countries and at regional levels (one example is the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa, which could be given a national status with a regional focus).

Following this initial observation, it should be noted that many African countries face recurring challenges: there is sometimes a lack of industrial and transport infrastructure, and access to modern technologies and processing facilities to increase production capacity may be more or less difficult depending on the situation. Another challenge lies in increasing access to financing and investment to ensure that these industries that are emerging or in the process of being structured are sustainable. In some cases, the joint-venture option could be considered and prove to be a winning formula. This would require finding a viable economic model to ensure that "Western" companies share and transfer their expertise to African start-ups. Co-productions are a further key opportunity to promote local talents, encourage artistic exchanges, and create works that are enhanced through their diversity, while strengthening creative ecosystems in Africa and France. The launch of the Création Africa Forum, at the initiative of the French Ministry of Culture and Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, in October 2023, promoted meetings and networking among French and African actors in CCIs. It gathered more than 300 African participants from 35 countries around 4 thematic areas: animated film, TV series, video games, experience of virtual reality (XR, metaverse, comic books). Following this Forum, were contracts and collaborations established between the participants? These data are needed to consider possible ways of developing this type of forum. A second edition is due to be held in Lagos in October 2025. Several new features have been added, showcasing digital innovation in the fashion industry, sound design and special effects. It is becoming more and

47. "EY 2015. Cultural Times. It is likely that combining Africa with oil–rich high–GDP Middle Eastern countries lowers CCIs proportional contribution. Furthermore, the data dates from 2013; with the rapid growth in some subsectors in the past five years, the statistics may have shifted significantly upwards since then," in Yarri Kamara and the Afrique Créative Consortium. *Investing in African Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2021.

more ambitious and hopes to establish Création Africa as a key event on the international art scene, connecting Africa's creative wealth with an international audience.

While training is already covered by ongoing initiatives, for example, by GOBELINS Paris animation school, it also poses a challenge. The best placed to speak about it are most certainly the artists themselves. The singer and songwriter Blick Bassy, among others, including A'Salfo, calls for sectors of activity to be structured and professionalised to support the production process for works, from their design to their distribution on national, intra-African and international markets. For example, training in cinema and digital arts may be experiencing rapid development due to the democratisation of access to the Internet and mobile phones, but it still remains very limited and African students are relatively unaware of it. In the music sector, beyond composition, a manager and publisher are necessary at the very least to develop and distribute musical products, while protecting the rights of the authors and composers. These data need to be included and analysed in the general mapping identifying the high-potential sectors and activities, as mentioned above.

“A final barrier to the profitability of the creative sector lies in the absence or shortcomings of legal frameworks, depending on national contexts and their pace and dynamics, concerning the intellectual property and status of artists.”

A final barrier to the profitability of the creative sector lies in the absence or shortcomings of legal frameworks, depending on national contexts and their pace and dynamics, concerning the intellectual property and status of artists. This situation calls for governments to step up their action to support an appropriate and protective legal environment. While Nollywood is a giant in terms of productions, what goes on behind the scenes is much less rosy, with the actors and authors being paid starvation wages. This sector is ultimately not profitable for the Nigerian economy, with a turnover of $4.5 billion in 2018, according to the consulting firm PwC. This is a low figure considering that, at the same time, South Africa, which produces four times fewer films, racked up $91 billion… This demonstrates the gap between production and profitability. To ensure that this legislation is effective, in terms of both the protection of works and the provision of financial resources, it may be worthwhile to develop a legal framework covering Africa or French-speaking regions, depending on the relevance, as is the case with other initiatives, such as the initiative of the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA). Indeed, this type of regional framework would appear to be appropriate, as it is more binding and aligned with practices for the distribution of works.

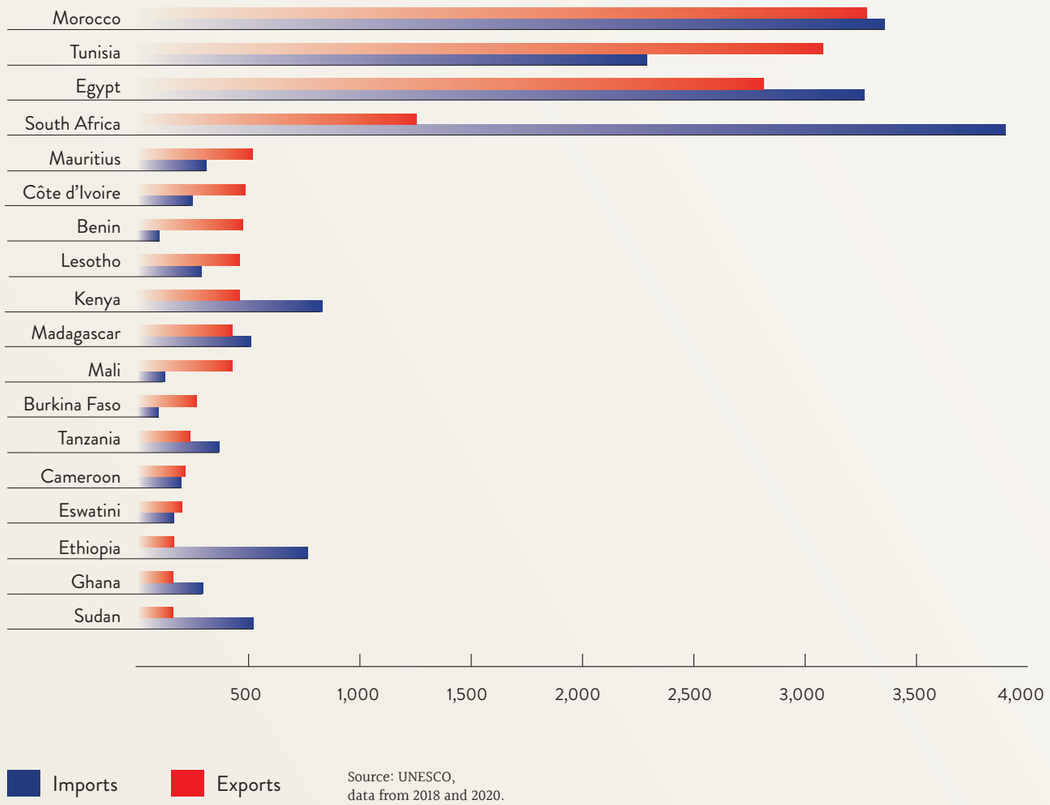
The challenges mentioned are structural and concern many other sectors of activity. This is sufficient evidence that there are substantial needs in terms of development. But the culture sector, which is often ignored, either due to a lack of resources or because it is often caricatured as being led by dreamers or dropouts, could prove to be a key sector for the African economy. While the debate over the return of works of art remains a sensitive issue and is sometimes a source of tension between European countries and certain African countries, in a context whereby relations are sometimes strained due to criticisms, reflection on a concerted and ambitious museum policy could be initiated between the various partners. Building blocks are already in place between African and European operators, such as Expertise France, following the discussions between museum directors from 38 countries during a meeting held in Dakar in April 2023. The objectives identified involve building joint projects: awareness-raising and education for a young audience about the wealth of their heritage, a constituent part of their history and identity, and the preservation of works of art, which requires a transfer of know-how and expertise and recognising the heritage (understanding the constitution of collections) of the most contemporary works. In 2016, the Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Toguo, a finalist of the Marcel Duchamp Prize, gained international recognition. Yet, as he says himself, he remains relatively unknown in Africa. “Who buys Toguo's works?” he says. “The West, obviously”.[48] Toguo raises an important question. It reveals a tension between those who, in Africa, may wish to see the development of large-scale museum projects, for example, as we see in Europe, supported by endogenous investment (collectors) and exogenous investment (European partners), that would promote their national heritage and enable a circula-

48. « Barthélémy Toguo, l'artiste comme montreur », 10 November 2020, online: https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/pompidou-plus/magazine/article/barthelemy-toguo-lartiste-comme-montreur

Culture as a development model in Africa: fashion, music and cinema sectors

Main African countries on the textile market

Annual imports and exports of textiles, clothing and footwear in USD M



Source: UNESCO, data from 2018 and 2020.

tion of works of art from other continents, and those who, on the contrary, advocate for human-sized museums. Most African partners currently support the latter option in order to establish a strong local base to boost and increase the attractiveness of regions for socio-economic benefit. Based on this museum strategy, which places visitors at the heart of the reflection, the objective is to reaffirm the essential role of museums as spaces for social cohesion, learning and intercultural dialogue.

However, in view of the diversity across Africa and the diversity of socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts, the tension seen between the various desires expressed, based on building a partnership approach, should not necessarily be bypassed when inventing the museums of tomorrow. The objective should focus on developing viable economic models for these museums, as well as financial resources and job creation for the artists and actors in Cultural and Creative Industries.

Main film industries in Africa

Average national film production per year, by number of films

Source: UNESCO, 2021.

Main music industries in Africa

Annual revenue generated by the national music industry, in USD M

Source: International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), 2024.

Sustainable **sporting events**

Is ecological sport possible? On the face of it, no. Today, there are two main aspects to sport: major sporting events, such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG) and the FIFA World Cup, are watched by half of the global population and the world sports movement accounts for 2% of world GDP. Sport is omnipresent. On TV, the radio, the Internet, on the street, on the five continents, across the world, in just two centuries and since the Western Industrial Revolution, sport has become a "total social fact" reaching everyone, regardless of age, social category, gender, or where people live.

For this reason, it has become an important geopolitical instrument used by numerous actors (including States, companies and the media) around the world. Sport has thus become a reflection of our societies and an actor in them. Firstly, it promotes the values of fair play, cooperation and a healthy lifestyle. Secondly, it also represents economic deregulation, physical violence and pollution. For example, in France, the sports sector accounts for approximately 1% of the national carbon footprint. This contribution is mainly due to travel by both amateur and competing athletes (80%), followed by the impact related to the use of sports facilities.

Studies on major sporting events thus give rise to extensive debate among researchers, politicians and civil societies around the world. The main issue today lies in determining whether the organisation of these events by a city or country is justified. Some see it as a major driver of economic and social growth, while others consider it as a financial, social, economic and ecological disaster. Since the 2010s, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) have claimed to be attentive to applications that emphasise the sustainable, reusable and ecological nature of facilities, but without fully convincing, as demonstrated by the organisation of the 2022 FIFA World Cup by Qatar and the triple organisation of the 2026 edition in North America.

2%
of global GDP

is represented by the sports movement

Yet, in this era of social networks, the acceptability of an event by the population has become a key issue. It is now necessary for a country, city or transnational sports organisation to gain acceptance for these events to be held, at a time when environmental awareness is becoming increasingly important.

In this context, several questions arise: Is sustainable sport possible? How to ensure that sport is more compatible with environmental issues? In other words, is "green sport" possible?

An unregulated and polluting sports sector

On the face of it, sport as we know it represents the allegory of a capitalist world that is slow to regulate itself and fully contributes to climate change. With its gigantic infrastructure, its international competitions and its resource-intensive consumption, it puts significant pressure on the environment. For example, the Rio 2016 Olympic Games generated about 3.6 million tonnes of CO_2, mainly due to international travel by spectators and the construction of infrastructure.

The path towards a truly sustainable sports sector is therefore fraught with pitfalls. One of the main challenges lies in the unequal distribution of resources between countries. The least developed countries, which are often candidates for hosting sports events for reasons of prestige or economic development, lack the resources needed to invest in green infrastructure. Furthermore, criticism from civil society, amplified by social media, highlights the contradictions of the host countries. For example, while the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022 was presented as being a "greener" edition, it was widely criticised for its massive use of fossil fuels and its high carbon footprint.

> "The path towards a truly sustainable sports sector is therefore fraught with pitfalls."

> In this time of climate change, major events are subject to increasingly virulent criticism.

From a geopolitical perspective, things have changed since the 1990s. While the 20th century gave prominence to Western countries, the world is now multipolar and non-Western countries rush to organise major sporting events. Indeed, sport is a powerful instrument for city branding, region branding and nation branding. In other words, skilfully handled, it enables host countries to exist on the world map and improve their image abroad, thereby attracting tourists and investors.

We are therefore witnessing a race for major sporting events, combined with a strategy to throw money around to organise competitions each more impressive than the last. The Beijing 2008 and 2022 Summer and Winter Olympics, the FIFA World Cup in the U.S., Mexico and Canada in 2026, the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014… The objective of all these major events is more to impress than propose an alternative, ecological and sustainable model.

Another barrier lies in the high cost of sustainable technologies. Making infrastructure environmentally friendly requires substantial upfront investment, often considered to be prohibitive for many sports organisations. Furthermore, the issue of international transport remains a major problem. Emissions related to air travel by teams and spectators account for a significant share of the overall environmental impact of sporting events.

Finally, the social acceptability of ecological measures remains variable. While some spectators appreciate the efforts towards sustainability, others see these initiatives as constraints or additional costs. For example, there can be opposition to the increase in ticket prices or the mandatory use of specific means of transport.

The issue of acceptability

The strategies of governments and transnational sports organisations to address these issues are challenged by new para-statal actors. The International League for Human Rights, along with anti-racism, feminist, LGBTQIA+, environmental and animal welfare associations, now all voice their concerns when a host country of an international sporting event does not respect their values. They are real global influencers and do not hesitate to directly call officials to account or organise "happenings" during the events themselves to raise global awareness about their causes. It was Greenpeace that paved the way at the Sydney 2000 Olympics, by calling on the city to respect its environmental commitments. These methods have since become systematic and there has been a proliferation of demands. In this context, the acceptability of sporting events by people and their legacy have become key issues.

Governments are often subject to considerable criticism before, during and after the event they host. This is the case for all governments, whether democratic regimes or authoritarian States. In this era of social networks, people now have many ways to share their opinions about the organisation of a sporting event. The criticisms regarding the 2030 Winter Olympics in the French Alps by some French people are an example of this.

It therefore appears necessary to establish a protocol to ensure that the relevant stakeholders reach agreement beforehand. In this time of climate change, major events are subject to increasingly virulent criticism. It now seems essential to rethink their design. In 2024 alone, the cities or regions of Rome, Budapest, Hamburg, Boston and Catalonia decided not to be candidates for a future edition of the Olympics due to opposition from their respective populations, in particular for environmental reasons.

These new dynamics reveal a deeper trend: host cities of major sporting events now need to take account of local opinion, otherwise they face a "bad buzz". Indeed, sport is a double-edged geopolitical instrument. While it can be used to spread the positive influence and attractiveness – the soft power – of a region around the world, if it is not handled properly, it can also backfire on its user. Athens, for example, bore the brunt of this. To this day, the city is associated with the 2004 Olympics, for which most of the infrastructure built for the event was abandoned as soon as they ended.

Leading the way to the development of a “green sport”

While sporting events would, on the face of it, appear to be far removed from environmental considerations, a more detailed analysis highlights initiatives and opportunities that aim to promote “sustainable sport”. A series of opportunities are starting to emerge.

> “…the time of “white elephants” is now over.”

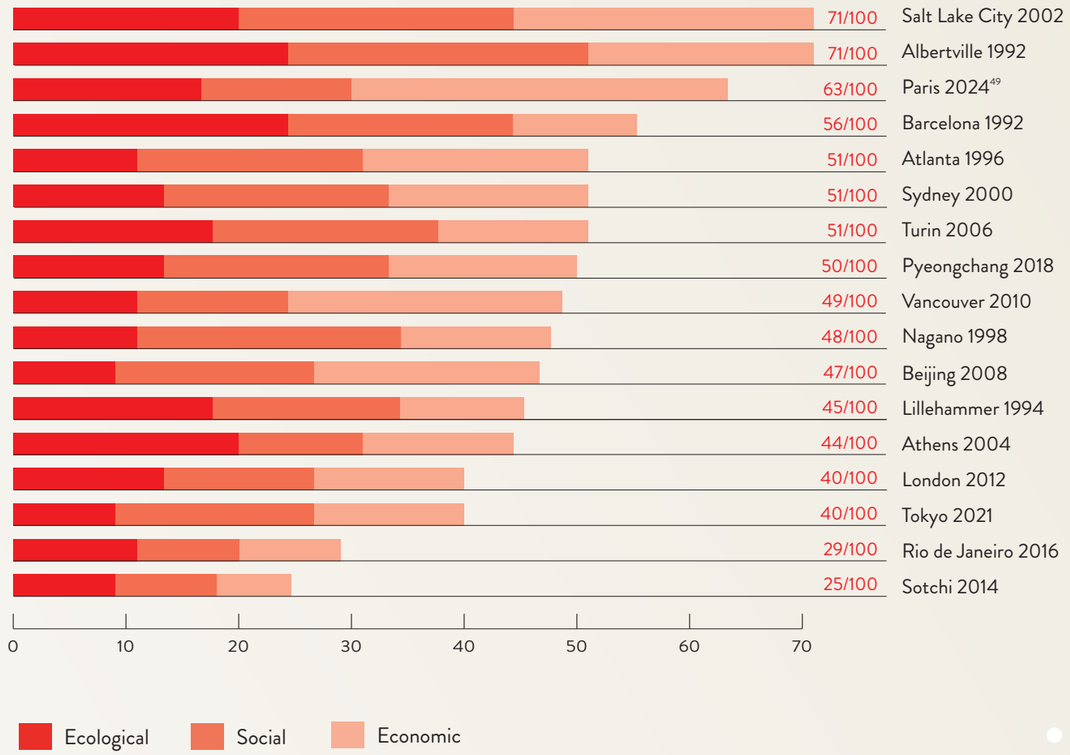
Pressured by the public and NGOs, some initiatives show that another way is possible. In 2018, the UN launched the “Sports for Climate Action” initiative at COP24. It aims to limit global warming to 1.5 °C by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while using sport as a tool to raise citizen awareness of the climate challenges. Since 2017, the international association Sport and Sustainability International has been coordinating, at global level, the action of all actors in sport committed to the environment and sustainable development. It is working to accelerate the ecological transition in the world of sport by proposing concrete solutions. Its action has three main focuses: achieve net-zero emissions, eliminate waste and reduce physical inactivity by 15% by 2030.

In addition, the time of “white elephants” is now over. Now is the time for eco-stadiums. Broadly speaking, the IOC now prioritises projects that promote the notions of legacy and ecology. For example, the London 2012 Olympics focused on temporary facilities and the Paris 2024 Olympics carried out a project mainly based on existing facilities. More specifically, this reduced the number of tonnes of CO_2 emissions by 54.6% between London 2012 (3.3 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions) and Paris 2024 (1.59 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions). An increasing number of eco-stadiums are also being built. The Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, in the U.S., has obtained the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification through its sustainable practices. The Stade de France has solar panels and wind turbines, as well as rainwater collection systems, to limit its environmental impact.

In terms of sports activities, a number of sports have also adopted eco-friendly approaches. In the field of adventure sport, activities such as beach clean-up and raising awareness of plastic pollution highlight the importance of protecting the environment. Events such as the London Marathon and Paris 2024 Olympics already mentioned have taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint. However, while these efforts are commendable, they are often considered insufficient and are sometimes assimilated to greenwashing.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games: Sustainable games?

Which are the most sustainable Olympic and Paralympic Games?



The classification has been established based on the study An Evaluation of the Sustainability of the Olympic Games published by Nature Sustainability in 2021, by calculating an average of 3 sustainability indexes (ecological, social and economic) for which the total score ranges between 0 and 100. Each index includes 3 indicators. The ecological score comprises new constructions (share of construction for new residents), the footprint of visitors (number of tickets sold) and the size of the event (number of stakeholders – excluding visitors). The social score comprises: public approval (public opinion poll), the preservation of social order (number of people displaced) and respect for the rule of law (violation or restrictions of rights due to the event). The economic score comprises the budget balance (% of cost overruns relative to the planned budget), the financial risk (% of public financing in the total cost) and the long-term viability (reuse of facilities after the event – out of a ratio of 6 competition venues).

49. Taking into account the established criteria and based on a calculation method proposed by the study mentioned, as well as the figures provided by Paris 2024, the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games would be the 3rd most sustainable with a score estimated at 63/100.

Sustainability of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Carbon footprint of the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games between 2012 and 2024 (in millions of tonnes of CO_2 equivalent)

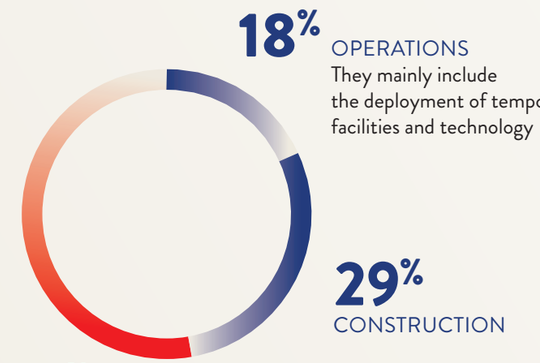
PARIS 2024
1.59
$MteqCO_2$

TOKYO 2021
1.09
$MteqCO_2$

RIO 2016
3.06
$MteqCO_2$

LONDON 2012
3.04
$MteqCO_2$

Breakdown of Paris 2024 carbon footprint



Source: Nature Sustainability, Paris 2024 et France 2.

Major challenges remain. The international travel of teams and supporters remains a significant source of CO_2 emissions, and while green infrastructure is effective, it requires substantial upfront investments, which are often beyond the means of many sports organisations.

The transition towards more sustainable sport is essential but it is a complex matter. Solutions exist. They now need to be applied to contribute to a paradigm shift. The ongoing initiatives prove that it is possible to reduce the environmental impact of sport, but to step up these efforts, a greater commitment by actors in the sector, governments and the public is essential. Sport, as a vehicle for positive change, could thus play a key role in tackling the environmental crisis.

It is clearly essential to link ecology and sport. While many people are considering how to rethink physical and sports activities in relation to climate change, it is essential to design sustainable facilities with concern for their environmental impact. This will prevent them from becoming a money pit and ensure that their maintenance and energy costs are covered.

In fact, the creation of major international sporting events (MISE) that are environmentally friendly could become a driver of innovation that would transform the landscape of sustainable sport. By highlighting the environmental challenges affecting our societies, MISE would act as a real catalyst for change. For cities and governments, they would provide a strategic opportunity to promote greener sports activities and raise citizen awareness of the ecological emergency.

These initiatives exist. They are in the minority, but are a way for communities and nations to affirm their commitment to sustainable development through sport. As with the progress achieved in the field of feminisation and human rights, sport holds real power to influence and contributes to changing mentalities to ensure a more responsible future. In other words, greenwashing could be replaced by green branding. For a stadium, a neighbourhood, a city, a country, the idea of building a green identity through sport would secure global outreach as a model of sustainable sport and as a pioneer for a tsunami of change supported by many citizens and NGOs.

Sport is thus at a crossroads. It can either engage on the path of deregulation, or become sustainable and viable in terms of sustainable development. As is well known, countries, cities and companies that host sporting events generally have two objectives: enhance their international image and strengthen their impact at local level. Since climate change has become a central issue, it is essential to ensure that the organisation of a major sporting event becomes a popular objective, so that actors in sport are left with no alternative but to comply. In the future, the experience of Paris 2024, with the use of existing facilities and the significant reduction of CO_2 emissions, could prove to be a tipping point towards more sustainable sport. These green events could thus become role models all over the world.

Promoting women's empowerment

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women and girls "acquire the power to take action", by accessing their rights, emancipating themselves from restrictive social norms, and actively participating in decision-making, in particular for political decisions. It also involves the acquisition of resources and the capacity required to fully exercise their rights, make informed decisions, and actively participate in economic, social and political life.

Addressing these dynamics through the prism of empowerment makes it possible to identify the systemic barriers that limit the ability of women to fully exercise their rights and realise their potential. This approach also highlights interrelated issues, such as access to education, health, justice, political participation, technologies, as well as the fight against gender-based violence.

This concept was initially promoted by community organisations and activist networks. Starting in the 2000s, it was gradually taken up by NGOs and international cooperation mechanisms. It aims to explore the systemic barriers that limit the ability of women to fully exercise their rights and realise their potential. For the last two decades, it has been a cross-cutting priority for development policies, adopted through a multi-faceted approach. This development builds on an alarming fact: women are overrepresented among the poorest due to multiple factors, including limited access to education, precarious and low-paid jobs, and unpaid domestic responsibilities.

There are more women in situations of extreme poverty.[50] Yet there can be no sustainable development without their full inclusion. While they make a significant contribution, both formal and informal, to economic growth,[51] they remain more exposed to poverty due to persistent social norms and structural inequalities that impede their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making.

In addition, the last three years have been marked by an escalation of crises and conflicts, which affect women disproportionately. They remain poorly represented in peace processes and are involved little in governance bodies. In this context, the objective of achieving gender equality by 2030 would appear to be increasingly unattainable. It has now become essential to implement ambitious and innovative strategies, geared to the context, in order to overcome persistent obstacles to their empowerment.

Women's empowerment in a world undergoing fundamental changes

The fragile gains achieved in recent decades in the rights of women, in all their diversity, are today increasingly being challenged, with the rise of conservative movements and political discourse calling into question the freedoms acquired and reaffirming inegalitarian social models. This "global backlash"[52] is now embodied in political projects that threaten to restrict the hard-won freedoms. Gender issues thus pose a major challenge in a world undergoing fundamental changes, with regard to existing barriers and new threats[53] for women. Yet recognising and guaranteeing women's rights is not only a requirement of social justice, it is also a key factor of cohesion and resilience. Societies that invest in women's empowerment, by addressing their specific needs and supporting their active participation, are more just, more inclusive, and better prepared for crises.[54]

This underlines the importance of mainstreaming a feminist approach into public policies, including in global governance. Indeed, depriving international relations of a feminist approach amounts to masking the structural inequalities and existing power dynamics. This androcentric vision tends to maintain women in a role that is invisible but essential to global dynamics.[55] The prevailing economic structure perpetuates their vulnerability and increases social disparities, depriving them of numerous opportunities. The poorest women thus remain at the margins of development.

27%
of women
in **national parliaments**

50 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recognises that women are particularly vulnerable to poverty. In its 2021 report entitled "Gender Equality and Environment", the OECD highlights that women are overrepresented among low-income groups, meaning they are more exposed to the negative effects of urban pollution and environmental disasters. Furthermore, Oxfam estimated that in 2023, more than 60% of people living in extreme poverty were women.

51 OECD, *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, Paris, OECD Editions, 2017.

52 UN Women, "Women's Rights in Review 30 Years after Beijing: Reversals and Backlash", United Nations, 2024. The report highlights reversals and unprecedented crises that particularly affect women and girls, and indicates that almost a quarter of governments around the world have reported a negative reaction to women's rights.

53 Taking into account the diversity of threats for women and their rights: physical, psychological, economic, political, and even digital.

54 The UN Women report, entitled "Generation Equality Accountability Report 2023", highlights the benefits of increased participation of women in diverse sectors of society. The report emphasises that women's empowerment contributes to strengthening the resilience of communities, fostering economic growth and improving governance, thereby making societies more just and more inclusive.

55 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Oakland, University of California Press, 1990. In this seminal work, Enloe provides an analysis of international relations that makes visible the invisibilisation of women and their central role in the international system, by examining the working conditions of women textile workers and migrant women domestic workers, thus revealing the logics of exploitation and domination that run through the spheres of diplomacy and security.

Up until now, actors in international cooperation have sought to take gender equality and women's empowerment into account in international development strategies in a cross-cutting manner. In a context of climate emergency, this approach takes on an increased importance, as women are affected by the rise in temperatures in a disproportionate manner,[56] but they are also instrumental in the transition towards low-carbon economies.[57]

Through solidarity-based and sustainable investment, the commitments made by numerous donor countries, including members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), aim to support women's empowerment as a driver for the reduction of gender equalities and poverty. This commitment has led to the "gender" dimension being mainstreamed into numerous projects through the development of specific strategic approaches, and the introduction of gender-sensitive indicators.

However, the financing allocated falls short of the systemic and multi-dimensional challenges facing women around the world.[58] The withdrawal by the U.S., illustrated by the USAID funding cuts, marks a real paradigm shift in terms of women's empowerment at international level. This decision jeopardises the situation of thousands of women around the world, threatening their fundamental rights and their access to healthcare, in particular for sexual, reproductive and maternal health.

Towards inclusive women's empowerment

Numerous gender barriers continue to exist, preventing a real transformation of women's empowerment. One of the main obstacles lies in the limited access to quality education and appropriate vocational training. Indeed, when women are prevented from integrating into working life, they become more vulnerable and remain trapped in precarious situations. Conversely, investing in girls' education and addressing low levels of school enrolment produces transformative effects, by significantly improving their life opportunities. In terms of access to rights, discriminatory laws and restrictive community social norms remain in many parts of the world. They limit women's ability to carry out a professional activity, own property, and participate in decision-making processes, which holds back their autonomy.

Furthermore, protracted political crises and climate change are also major barriers to women's empowerment. Large-scale conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and the Middle East crisis, have contributed to undermining international relations and slowing down progress in gender equality. In some countries, such as Afghanistan and Venezuela, these crises have even resulted in a backlash against women's rights and living conditions. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a third of women around the world have been subject to physical and/or sexual violence.[59] Situations of instability exacerbate discrimination and expose women to increased risks of violence. Forced displacements, whether internal or cross-border, plunge women into highly vulnerable situations: they often lose their livelihoods and only have limited access to basic services. They are largely excluded from peace processes and marginally represented in crisis resilience and anticipation mechanisms.[60]

Consequently, strategies for women's empowerment need to take an integrated and intersectional approach, taking account of the complexity of situations, and address this process from a multi-dimensional perspective (taking account of issues related to health, education and access to rights and justice, for example) with women as a catalyst. To drive lasting change, it is essential to support feminist movements. Despite the instability of funding and sometimes hostile political environments, these movements remain committed, develop resistance strategies, and act as drivers for transformation.

> "...protracted political crises and climate change are also major barriers to women's empowerment."

56 Fatou Élise Ba et al., « L'égalité homme/femme dans les négociations internationales sur le climat », IRIS, online: https://www.iris-france.org/legalite-homme-femme-dans-les-negociations-internationales-sur-le-climat/

57 OECD, *Gender and the Environment. Building Evidence and Policies to Achieve the SDGs*, Paris, OECD Editions, 2021.

58 According to the analysis of the gender equality "marker" from OECD data in 2021–2022, no country, with the exception of the Netherlands and Spain, has devoted more than 20% of their ODA to the direct promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

59 WHO, "Violence against women", fact sheet, March 2021.

60 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability",

The initiatives led by feminist diplomacy, through its institutional approach, focus on strengthening support to feminist networks and local women's organisations. However, supporting women also requires recognising their diversity and understanding their specific situations. Feminist movements, in all their diversity, are themselves faced with power relations between the Global North and Global South and ideological confrontations. In this situation, carrying out coherent international advocacy at the highest level, in support of women and the most vulnerable minorities, has become difficult and complex. Movements in the Global South are less visible and receive little funding. They have limited room for manoeuvre, both in their countries and at international level. This ideological divide is especially exploited by far-right and populist movements, for racist purposes and in order to divert feminist struggles to justify discriminatory policies.

Ultimately, the promotion of women's rights must be part of a global fight against all forms of discrimination, by adopting an intersectional and inclusive approach. This is the only way to mobilise the drivers for lasting transformation. This requires ensuring stable, sustainable and targeted financing, in particular for organisations operating in the most marginalised situations. Without this, there is a risk that any initiative claiming to work for women's rights and empowerment will reproduce the relations of domination that they aim to fight against.

The barriers to women's empowerment

Exposure to factors of crisis (armed conflicts, violence)

117.3 MILLIONS of forcibly displaced persons in 2023, under threat of persecution, conflict and violence. Half are women and girls.

95% of the 3,622 cases of conflict-related sexual violence reported in 2024 concern women.

Lack of political representation

107 PAYS have never had a female Head of State or government.

Percentage of women:

In national parliaments: **27%**

In local governments: **35.5%**

Exposure to poverty and economic insecurity

24.3 MILLIONS more women than men live in extreme poverty.

20% Women earn 20% less than men around the world.

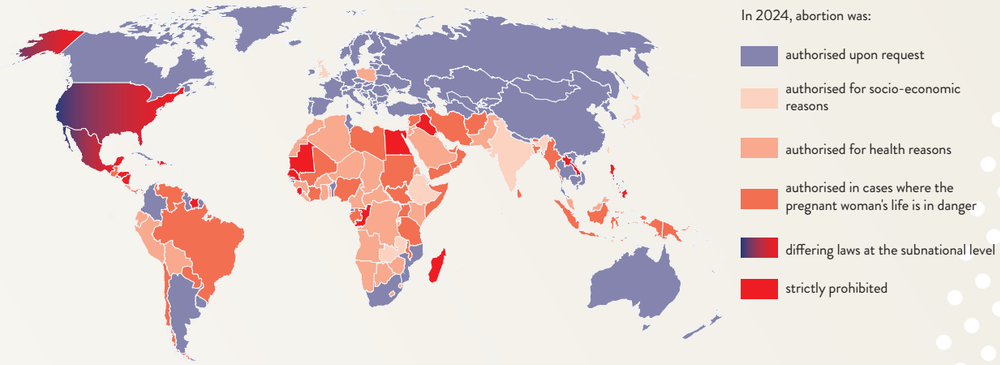
Vulnerability to climate change

+158 MILLION women and girls could fall into poverty by 2050 due to climate change, or 16 million more than men and boys.

Barriers to education

122 MILLION girls were out of school around the world in 2024.

Barriers in the field of sexual and reproduction health and rights



40% of women around the world lived in countries where abortion was forbidden or restricted in 2024.

164 MILLION women of childbearing age did not have access to the contraception they needed in 2021 according to WHO.

230 MILLION girls and women have been subject to female genital mutilation in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Source: UN Women, UNICEF, UNRIC, WHO, FOCUS 2030 and Center for Reproductive Rights.

Equitable global health

Global health addresses health issues by integrating the human, animal and environmental dimensions and focusing on the determinants and solutions at a transnational and global level. It helps build sustainable, realistic, welcoming and equitable health systems for societies and individuals. Based on the principles of humanistic public health, global health endeavours to prevent diseases, ensure access to curative and palliative care, and considers its economic and social impact. It involves numerous disciplines in the field of health (such as social sciences and medicine) and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration.

By providing a synthesis and a continuum between prevention and health promotion at the population level and care at the individual level, it also seeks to enhance the effectiveness of emergency interventions by working on preparedness for risks of health crises. In this context, global health mobilises numerous actors, including governments, health professionals, supranational organisations, researchers, NGOs, the private sector and citizens, which are all required to act collectively.

With the persistence of economic, social and political inequalities and their repercussions on access to rights, prevention, care and health products, global health is also faced with the increasing privatisation in the health sector and its interdependence with the sectors of sustainable development, as well as other key challenges, such as climate change and education, for example. The rise of populism and the questioning of the rational approach to reality based on scientific data, and the resulting fundamental rights, are additional difficulties that need to be incorporated in the preparation of public strategies and their operational application. This is especially important today, following the sudden stop, in early 2025, to funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in the context of the announcement at the end of 2024 of a 40% reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) from European countries.

Supranational organisations and a number of NGOs, whose economic model predominantly relies on institutional financing, are today faced with existential issues. Some organisations have had to close several programmes overnight. This has led to thousands of employees being made redundant in their areas of operation and at their headquarters. Other organisations that receive more resources will be less affected by the institutional cuts, but will not be able to compensate for the disappearance of other actors, in a context where the needs were already not met due to a lack of international financing.

Indeed, it is not only the entire international aid ecosystem that has been deeply shaken. The independence of science and its research in fields such as ecology, sexual and reproductive health rights, the rights of minorities, and the fight against major pandemics has also been undermined. The current actors in development assistance are thus no longer given consideration by a large number of donor governments, under pressure from the growing importance of populist forces as opinion leaders promoting their ideologies.

> “The last two decades have been marked by major advances, with a significant increase in global life expectancy.”

Continuing the ongoing support

The last two decades have been marked by major advances, with a significant increase in global life expectancy (from 66.4 years in 2000 to 73.4 years in 2023), a reduction of maternal mortality, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and under-5 mortality, due to a significant 68% decline in the number of deaths related to HIV/AIDS and the eradication of malaria in 11 countries.

However, advances in health tended to slow between 2010 and 2020, accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic, as they are unevenly distributed between countries and populations. Infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, also continue to pose threats for the majority of resource-poor countries, although significant progress has been achieved by programmes supported by international

initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. But the drastic USAID cuts will seriously affect civilian populations and aid actors committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS (including NGOs, PEPFAR and UNAIDS).

These decisions will lead to an increase in mortality among the most vulnerable population groups, such as women, children and LGBTQIA+ minorities stigmatised by the ideology of the current U.S. government. In some countries, HIV/AIDS programmes are already no longer able to provide screening and appropriate treatment. The projections for infection and mortality point to millions of additional deaths and infections in the medium term.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes have also been seriously affected by the USAID cuts, leaving many women without perinatal care and pregnancy follow-up, and with no access to a chosen contraceptive method. It is estimated that more than 10,000 women will die within the 3 months following the sudden discontinuation of U.S. financing due to untreated pregnancy complications.

In this context, France could be a leader in international efforts to compensate for these major financial losses. Indeed, this situation calls for a reconsideration of the model of international aid financing, the asymmetry of which in terms of State financial contributions has been highlighted following the decisions made by the authorities in Washington. This limitation of financing concentrated in the hands of about 20 countries, mostly Western countries, has been known for a long time and needs to be revisited. New international coalitions and alternative contribution mechanisms need to be proposed, in association with civil societies. This will require rethinking international governance in the field of aid funding.

Consequently, France's strategy could today ensure the sustainability of this financing. It could also ensure that health facilities are operational and enable work on resistance to treatments, their affordability and their ease of use. It is a matter of the continuity and coherence of long-standing policy choices.

Considering new thematic areas

Chronic non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, are increasing, including in low-income countries. Mental health issues are also among the new concerns in view of their prevalence. Nutrition issues affect millions of people around the world. Undernutrition is particularly prevalent among children in crisis-stricken regions, with high levels of mortality and stunted growth. At the same time, obesity and the associated diseases are increasing everywhere. The increase in the consumption of tobacco and alcohol, changes in lifestyles and diet, population ageing, as well as the environmental crisis involving climate change and widespread pollution, are all factors that account for these global epidemiological trends. They mean that health systems need to adapt to provide qualitative and quantitative treatments to address the diversity of these diseases.

In this context, it is recommended to stop making a separation between infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases, as there is an interaction between them. Prevention should also not be considered a higher priority for resource-poor countries, at the expense of curative medicine and its innovations, which would be more for the richest countries. The priority for support can thus focus on the promotion of health policies to foster integration, inclusiveness, and equity for all. To cover the immense needs of people in resource-poor countries, it is essential to support the prevention aspect of public health, without forgetting curative issues.

The One Health approach combines the complexity of these issues by including the fight against health, social and environmental inequalities. Research partnerships incorporating human, animal and environmental health are established and supported. Their potential dynamics need to be associated with programmes that take account of their results and their commitment against poverty.

> “The priority for support can thus focus on the promotion of health policies to foster integration, inclusiveness, and equity for all.”

Strengthening human resources

Human resources for global health are a major issue, with acute inequalities between continents due to problems of training and qualification, as well as a shortage of professionals. This jeopardises the feasibility and sustainability of strategic decisions. It is therefore necessary to rethink training models, pathways and careers, in particular by promoting new professions (such as health mediators and nurses with more medical responsibilities). To this end, massive investment in health human resources is required, on the basis that these resources are not only about healthcare professions. To make these professions attractive, they need to be supported with ambitious training programmes in every country, and ensure decent working conditions for these professionals.

Developing research centres

France needs to be more competitive in the field of global health research. To this end, it needs to increase the number of specialised university teachers and researchers, and strengthen research centres that focus on this discipline. More training programmes need to be provided, in conjunction with financing and increased coordination between academics and civil societies. Once these prerequisites have been met and policy makers have been made more aware of these issues, France will have a legitimate place in international academic networks working in this field.

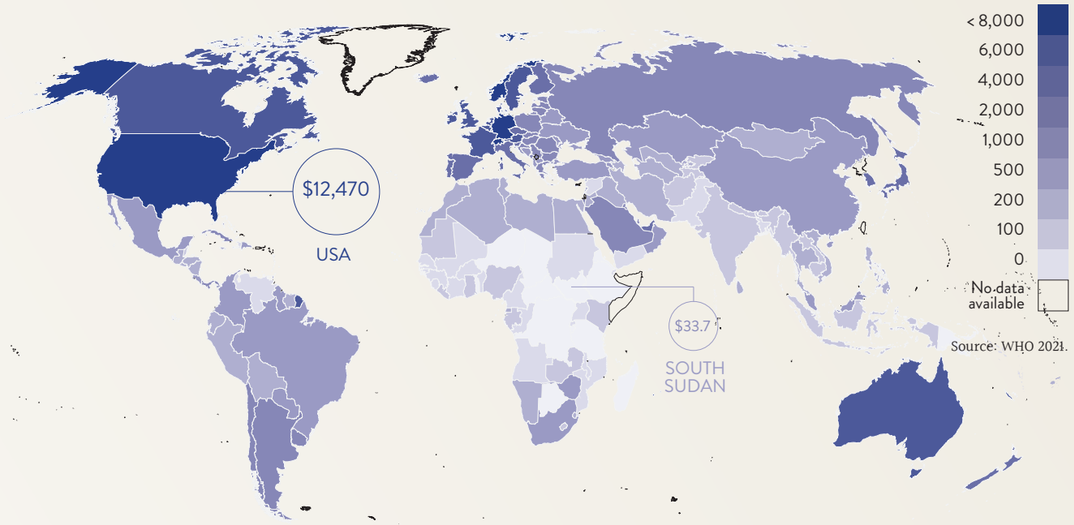
It will play an even more prominent role because it will also improve the sharing of know-how and expertise with partners from the Global South, by strengthening research synergies and building capacities for local projects, through institutions like the Institut Pasteur, which need to be reinforced or created in new geographical areas.

Furthermore, the economic model of research needs to be primarily based on priority institutional funds to ensure that initiatives are independent and focus on the general interest. Public-private partnerships are acceptable, including for therapeutic innovations for resource-poor population groups and States. However, they need to comply with requirements in terms of ethics and equity in connection with the imperative of the general interest.

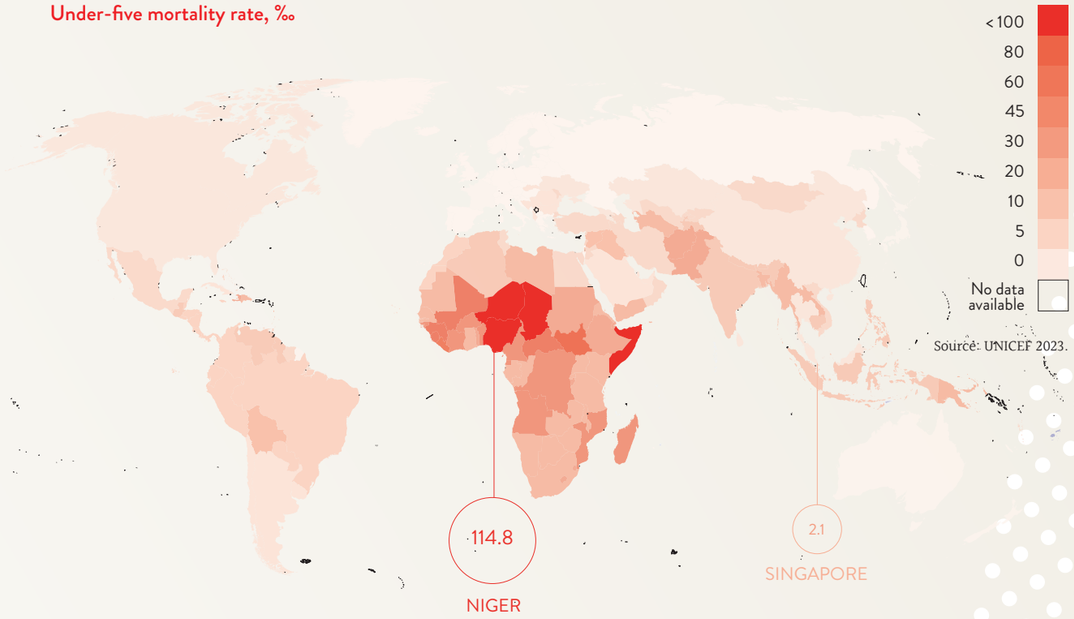
Finally, the people-centred approach needs to be supported through a legal framework adapted to each country, giving people the capacity to assert their rights to access to quality healthcare, the possibility to be better informed about care pathways, and the possibility to be involved in reflection on their health systems. These are the determinants of a health democracy whereby an asymmetry between caregivers and recipients and the opposition between academic knowledge and non-expert knowledge no longer have a place.

Health expenditure and healthcare personnel around the world

Per capita health expenditure around the world, in $ PPP[61]

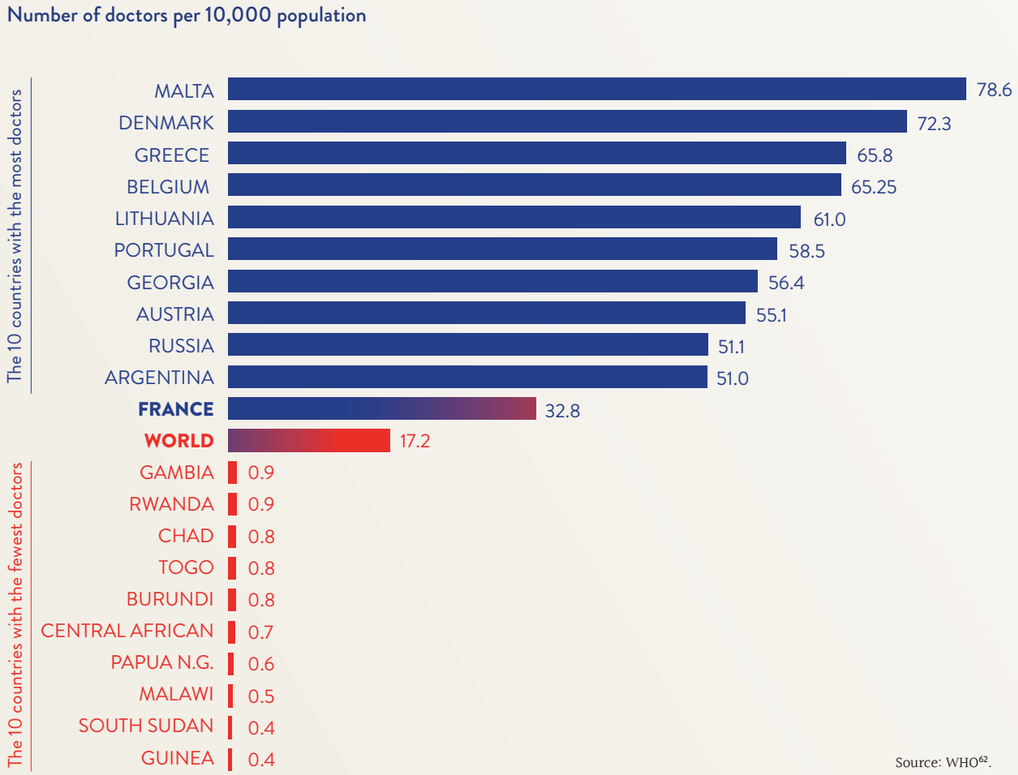


Under-five mortality rate, ‰



61. Health expenditure includes both public and private expenditure. The values expressed in PPP erase the price differences between countries.

Health expenditure and healthcare personnel around the world



Source: WHO[62].

Bringing together the "Europe of Health"

France needs to work on strengthening Europe's common health policy. More than driving the ambition, it requires structuring the construction of a Europe of health. This can be envisaged through further delegation of responsibility for health issues at the European Commission, by giving greater responsibilities to the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety and enhancing policy coordination between EU Member States.

Developing governance

In the field of global health governance, the independence and transparency of science in national and international policy mechanisms must be a priority. In this context, France can promote a reform of global health governance, which is currently overly prone to institutional fragmentation, by proposing a revision of the International Health Regulations, and ensuring the effective application of the Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response Accord adopted at the World Health Assembly in May 2025. It also requires advocating for multilateralism in global health governance, at a time when countries such as Argentina and the U.S. have announced their withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO).

The French strategy needs to envisage a capitalisation on joint progress for health, the climate, the environment and food systems. This requires developing the governance of these specific fields, and therefore political support for more exchanges of practices and less competition. There is a need for greater citizen participation in the definition of health policies. In this context, international cooperation is essential and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 3, provide a consensual framework for this action.

In view of the pervasiveness of populism around the world, at the origin of attacks on independent researchers and aid actors that are not aligned with its ideologies, France can champion rational and scientific thinking, as well as a certain concept of international solidarity, against these obscurantist trends. Beyond humanitarian values that need to be safeguarded and the soft power of health that serves their interests, the survival of democratic values is undeniably at stake.

62. The data are the most recent available for each country, between 2021 and 2023.

Strengthening knowledge-sharing in the European Union

The European Union (EU) finds itself amidst an international economic and security environment in full evolution. But the term "involution" would perhaps be more appropriate. On the security front, there are a growing number of alarming conflicts around the world and on the continent. European democracies, which already faced cyber threats and the dissemination of disinformation, are now confronted with a high-intensity war in Ukraine, with the risk of it escalating and spreading to other parts of the continent. Furthermore, the U.S., the main traditional ally of Europeans, now has an ambiguous attitude towards Europe: the present U.S. administration in particular perceives the EU more as an economic competitor, or even an opponent that needs to be weakened and divided, rather than an organisation of friendly nations that need to be protected.

On the economic front, with sluggish or even stagnant growth, Europe is falling out of step with the rest of the world. The Draghi report presented in September 2024 identifies the structural limitations of the European economy and its competitiveness. It proposes solutions to close the gap between the EU and the U.S. and China. Mario Draghi highlights the lack of innovation, the ageing of the population, and the fragmentation of capital markets. Among his recommendations, he advocates for a coordinated industrial policy at European level, rather than fragmented national policies. He also suggests launching a massive investment program and adopting reforms to boost European productivity and innovation.

European public budgets have never been so overstretched in their response to these economic and security challenges, which come on top of the environmental, health and migration challenges. They need to respond to successive crises in a wide variety of fields, putting a strain on the resilience of European societies. As a result, the EU and its neighbourhood face greater budgetary challenges, while they are forced to increase their military spending due to the geopolitical tensions around them. These tensions also disrupt Europe's energy supply and value chains, which compromises its economic recovery.

In this changing and uncertain environment, European countries need to step up their cooperation. They have never been so alone in the world. They have never needed each other so much to increase their resilience. They must stand shoulder to shoulder in Brussels, through their common institutions. But they must also do so through bilateral channels, by strengthening their technical cooperation, disseminating their good practices, and increasing exchanges of knowledge and administrative expertise at national level and at the level of local authorities.

Indeed, European construction does not solely depend on the policies implemented by the common institutions based in Brussels. It also hinges on the ability of EU countries to work together through the bilateral channel, support each other, and show solidarity in the face of the structural and cyclical difficulties they may face. EU countries have in the past already demonstrated their capacity to do so. Today, to address the new challenges they face, they must demonstrate this capacity even more. Expertise France can be instrumental in this regard.

Expertise France: a tool for European solidarity and convergence

Over the last decades, the EU has gradually acquired new areas of competence enabling it to directly or indirectly intervene in its Member State countries. This initially started through structural and regional funds and subsequently continued, during the financial crisis of 2008 then the Covid-19 crisis in 2021, through the adoption of new financial instruments introduced to support European economies. This has increased the common administrative challenges.

The financial crises of 2008 and 2009 and the crisis in the euro area in 2012 are key examples of this. When Greece was experiencing the darkest moments

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of its recent history, and when the very foundations of European construction were shaken, France provided it with decisive support by implementing technical assistance which has since gone from strength to strength. Several French cooperation agencies, coordinated by Expertise France as of 2015, have provided extensive technical and administrative assistance to the government in Athens. They have implemented projects that have enabled the Greek authorities to adopt the administrative reforms required to stabilise their country's economy (fiscal management, public spending, labour market reforms and budgetary transparency, for example). In this way, they have demonstrated that European solidarity is not only a multilateral issue, but can also be shown at the bilateral level.

Building on this successful experience, the European Commission has set up administrative cooperation programmes that can be implemented by specialised agencies. The aim of these initiatives is to help European countries and their local administrations achieve standards set by the EU in its many fields of operation. With the integration process moving into new spheres of action and the extension of European construction to new members, these activities have grown in importance. Enhanced knowledge sharing is, in particular, an activity that needs to be regarded as being of strategic importance for the future of the EU and France. The creation of common areas for the free movement of goods, services, capital and people has significantly increased the need to improve the circulation of expertise and know-how among the States and local authorities. In short, it has become essential to disseminate good practices in the European project, and this will be even more the case in the future.

For example, in May 2017, the European Commission adopted a programme to support the structural reforms of Member States with a budget of €223 million for 2017-2020 (Regulation (EU) 2017/825). In 2020, the new Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG Reform) was tasked with the subsequent development of its structural support through the creation of the new Technical Support Instrument (TSI), with a budget of €864 million for 2021-2027. Alongside actors such as the OECD and private consulting firms, France, through its technical cooperation agency Expertise France, has become a key partner of DG Reform over the years.

The TSI, which is driven by specific requests from Member States and mobilises internal EU public and private expertise in response, has so far achieved very positive results. Indeed, it has proved to be an excellent tool for European convergence, which contributes to the integration and administrative harmonisation process both within the EU and in its neighbourhood. The instrument was in particular expanded following the Covid-19 crisis and the adoption of the European recovery plan, as the success of this plan depends on strengthening the public administrative structures that are required to implement it.

The Green Deal, launched by the EU in 2020, is another example of the extent to which needs for administrative cooperation and information sharing between European countries have grown. The EU Green Deal embodies a long-term ambition aimed at a multitude of actors and covering many fields of operation. Its success will depend on the ability of the various local and national European administrations to converge towards the standards defined by the EU. In this context, enhanced administrative cooperation between countries will be instrumental in enabling Europeans to fulfil their environmental commitments. But there are other examples that highlight the growing importance of inter-State technical cooperation in the European project. For example, this is the case with the European Criminal Records Information System, at a time when borders between member countries of the Schengen area have been abolished. Issues related to economic competitiveness and the implementation of the Global Gateway programme, which aims to strengthen sustainable infrastructure in the digital, energy, transport, health and education sectors around the world, are further examples.

Focusing on the future

The experience gained by Expertise France in recent years and its positive results should be among the cornerstones for looking towards the future. A future that brings us back to the Draghi report. This report was welcomed by the European Commission as a real compass, showing the path that the EU needs to take in the long term. Indeed, the Commission is determined to implement some of its key recommendations, such as doubling the budget for innovation, the creation of a European agency for disruptive innovation, and strategic investment in the field of artificial intelligence. It also aims to harmonise laws to facilitate the growth of start-ups, reform the market to support the ecological transition, and simplify administrative and regulatory procedures that hinder business operations.

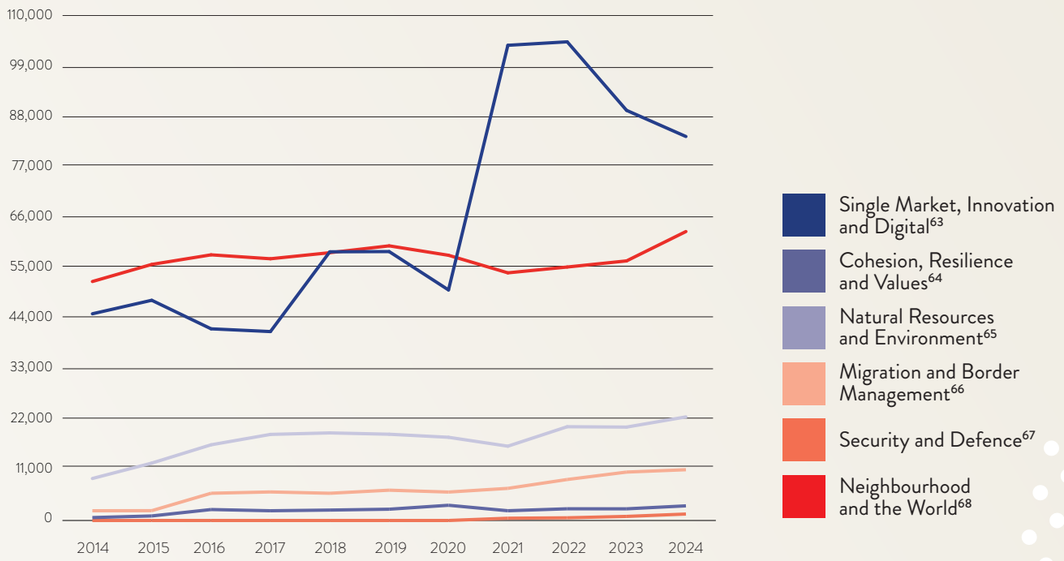
But these ambitions also serve as a reminder that the success of European construction does not only depend on the development of policies and standards in Brussels, but also on the ability of national and local public actors to actually implement them on the field. In other words, this means that the implementation of the reforms set out in the Draghi report to turn around the EU in this difficult historical phase will also depend on the acceleration of the administrative convergence process and the ability to identify good practices and disseminate them within professional communities. An agency like Expertise France, in association with French administrations, thus needs to further strengthen its action and its partnership with the EU through a greater contribution to the creation of this essential common administrative culture. Expertise France even needs to go beyond what it has already successfully achieved. The new challenges are such that the enhanced sharing of knowledge now needs to adopt new approaches. This involves strengthening the agency's ability to anticipate, by focusing on the role of digital technologies in bureaucracies, and creating an Erasmus for public administration at European level that extends beyond the current bilateral exchanges and exchanges of national experts seconded to European institutions.

In terms of anticipation, Expertise France needs to develop a capacity for forward-looking analysis, so that it can identify emerging challenges before they become critical. This could include a global strategic watch on issues such as climate transitions, health crises, migration flows, and digital transformations. To this end, a strengthening of partnerships at all levels, from local to international, should be envisaged. In addition, Expertise France intends to continue with its ongoing integration of advanced technological tools to improve data collection, modelling and forecasting. This will improve preparedness for potential crises.

This last point brings us to another objective that Expertise France intends to set for the coming years, which involves making more effective use of new technologies and scientific partnerships. Digital technologies, and especially artificial intelligence (AI), hold enormous potential in this context. They can help modernise technical assistance programmes and access to expertise, while strengthening project management. More specifically, AI can strengthen the capacity to collect, process and analyse data from the projects conducted by Expertise France in order to capitalise more effectively on experience. AI algorithms could be used to identify trends, evaluate the impact of programmes, and provide recommendations based on accurate data. This approach would enable the agency to make informed, swift and effective decisions. In addition, the agency could design customised AI tools to meet the specific needs of partners in a wide range of fields, including health, education and governance. For example, smart education platforms could personalise learning based on user needs. Finally, Expertise France could strengthen its partnerships with tech companies, research institutes and universities specialised in AI. These partnerships would make it possible to jointly develop innovative solutions geared to the challenges facing partner countries.

However, in the use of AI, it remains crucial to respect the principles of ethics and transparency. Expertise France could develop internal policies and guidelines to ensure that the use of AI complies with European values and international standards. Finally, Expertise France could become a leading actor in the use of AI for technical and administrative cooperation. By sharing its experiences and taking part in the international debate on AI, the agency could contribute to defining administrative standards and good practices at European level.

Trend in the distribution of the European Commission's budgets by sector between 2014 and 2024, in € M



Source: European Commission Implementation Reports.

63. Includes for the period 2014–2020 budgets for the sectors Research and Innovation; Direct Research; Mobility and Transport; Energy; Domestic Market and Services; Economic and Financial Affairs; Enterprise and Industry; Competition; Trade; Taxation and Customs Union; Fight against Fraud; Communication Networks, Content and Technology; and since 2021, the budgets for the sectors Research and innovation; European Strategic Investments; Single Market; Space.

64. Includes for the period 2014–2020 budgets for the sectors Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion; Education and Culture; Justice; Health and Consumer Protection; Regional and Urban Policy; Development and Cooperation and since 2021, budgets for the sectors.
Regional Development and Cohesion; Recovery and Resilience; Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values.

65. Includes for the period 2014–2020 budgets for the sectors Agriculture and Rural Development and Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and the sectors Agriculture and Maritime Policy; Environment and Climate Action (since 2021).

66. Includes the budgets for the sectors Home Affairs and Migration (between 2014 and 2020) and since 2021, budgets for the sectors Migration; Border Management.

67. Includes since 2021 budgets for the sectors Security; Defence.

68. Includes for the period 2014–2020 budgets for the sectors Foreign Policy Instrument; Enlargement; Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection; and since 2021, budgets for the sectors External Action; Pre-accession Assistance.

What strengthens the European Union strengthens France

Expertise France aims to carry out and step up these activities for both the European Union and France, as the interests largely coincide. French public actors can learn a lot from the problems faced by the national and local authorities of Member States when they implement the policies and standards developed by the EU. Expertise France should thus not only consider itself as an implementing agency advising external actors. It also needs to consider itself as a receiver for experiences and lessons learned to help overcome the practical difficulties that emerge on the ground.

In this field, Expertise France is able to build a capital of information that should be promoted and which it can capitalise on in the future. Among the areas of development for the coming years, the creation of a real databank on good practices and the problems encountered in the implementation of certain standards could be extremely useful. In other words, Expertise France could also establish itself as an agency providing feedback on administrative issues at European level. This feedback would, of course, benefit European countries and regions, but also Paris and French regional and local authorities.

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