

BRIEFING

Requested by the DEVE committee



Developing countries' vulnerabilities to the changes of US foreign aid policy under the second Trump administration



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PE 754.481 - July 2025



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Developing countries' vulnerabilities to the changes of US foreign aid policy under the second Trump administration

ABSTRACT

The dismantling of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) by the second Trump administration in 2025 marked a significant shift in US foreign policy. US national interests were prioritised over multilateral development and humanitarian aid, with the decision described by the Trump administration as an alignment of aid with US values. The European Union (EU) and its Member States cannot fully offset these cuts, which will most dramatically affect funding for global health, food security and crisis response. In the past, US and EU approaches to aid targeted different ends: while the EU has focused on sustainable development and peace building, the US emphasised crisis-driven aid. Potential consequences of the US cuts include increased migration, disease proliferation and geopolitical shifts, as China and Russia expand their influence.

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This paper was produced for the European Parliament's Committee on Development.

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VERSION

English-language manuscript completed in July 2025.

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This paper will be published on the European Parliament's online database, '[Think Tank](#)'.

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1 Foreign aid under President Trump – state of play

The second administration of the United States (US) President Donald Trump has made sweeping changes to the country’s foreign policy since taking office on 20 January 2025. This has particularly affected US foreign assistance – referring to all aid given by the US to other countries. Claiming that the US ‘foreign aid industry and bureaucracy are not aligned with American interests and in many cases antithetical to American values,’ President Trump ordered a [freeze and review of almost all foreign assistance](#) on his first day in office. The US administration [has since closed the US Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#). USAID focused on development and humanitarian aid and had an annual budget of USD 40–50 billion.

The decision was expected. On 10 March, US Foreign Secretary Marco Rubio had said that USAID programmes did not serve US interests, and that the US State Department would henceforth manage the remaining programmes. US interests, as understood by the US President, were to become the only justification for foreign aid. On 01 July 2025, the Foreign Secretary announced the [formal end of USAID](#) operations. He claimed that USAID had created a ‘globe-spanning NGO industrial complex at taxpayer expense,’ and had not met significant objectives: ‘Development objectives have rarely been met, instability has often worsened, and anti-American sentiment has only grown. On the global stage, the countries that benefit the most from our generosity usually fail to reciprocate.’

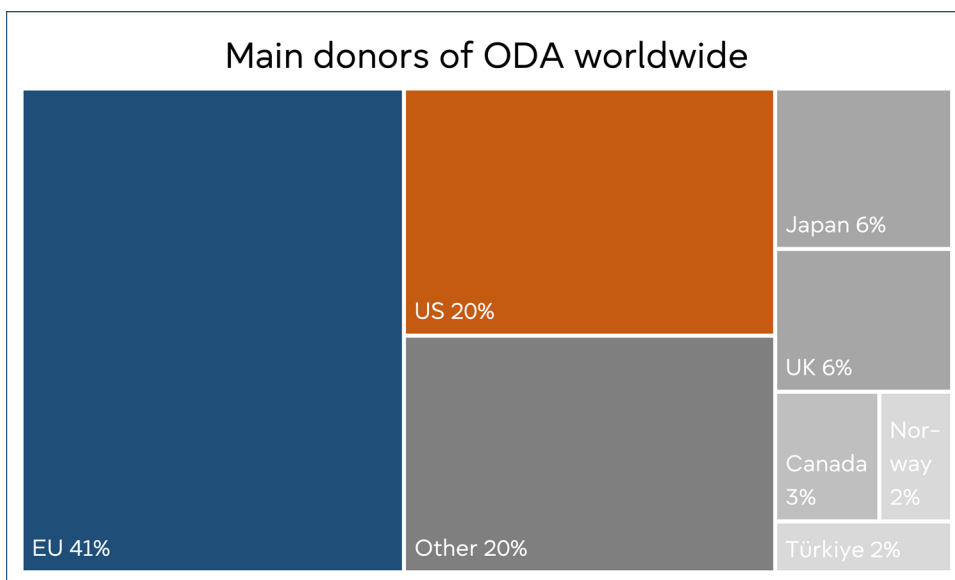


Figure 1: Main donors of ODA worldwide (2023). Source: EPRS data.

The potential consequences for developing countries are great. Recent research suggests that the cuts to USAID funds could lead to an [additional 14 million excess deaths by 2030](#), including 4.5 million excess deaths of children under five.

To better understand the impact, this briefing provides a

general overview of the cuts on global development assistance and identifies some of the most vulnerable countries to these cuts. In fact, the US was the largest single provider of development assistance globally, providing about 20 % of official development assistance (ODA) in 2023 (see figure 1). However, taken together, the EU and its Members States (from here on ‘EU & EUMS’) provide significantly more ODA annually.

Nonetheless, the cuts will severely affect some developing countries that depend strongly on foreign assistance and especially on US foreign assistance. This briefing provides a data-driven analysis of some countries that are particularly vulnerable to US cuts and an overview of some of the most important UN agencies and international humanitarian non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) that depend greatly on EU & EUMS and US contributions. These analyses compare EU & EUMS and US funding to expose potentially critical gaps and vulnerabilities with implications for EU interests, such as increase in migration, destabilisation of partner countries, increase in communicable diseases, etc.

The main findings reveal that particularly vulnerable countries often depended on the US for humanitarian aid – especially for food security and emergency food assistance – and support for health sectors – for example, for programmes addressing communicable diseases like HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. An additional risk for vulnerable countries stems from the support they receive from UN agencies and NGOs in these areas. US cuts to these agencies' and organisations' funding may amplify problems.

2 Development assistance – US role and aid dependency in developing countries

The concept of foreign assistance used broadly in the US is not identical to what is generally understood as development and humanitarian assistance in the EU and its Member States. For the US, foreign assistance can include military aid and can be purely driven by donor interests. The concept used by the EU, Official Development Assistance (ODA), sets different standards for what can count as foreign assistance. The OECD defines ODA as ‘government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries’ and [applies rather strict standards](#) for it.

Comparing the ODA given by the US to that provided by the EU & EUMS reveals stark contrasts on a very general level. Even though the US was once the largest *single provider* of ODA in the world, the EU & EUMS have consistently been the largest *combined donor* of ODA (see figure 2,

Team Europe, US and UK ODA between 2013 and 2023

Disbursements, 2013-2023, constant prices, US\$ billion

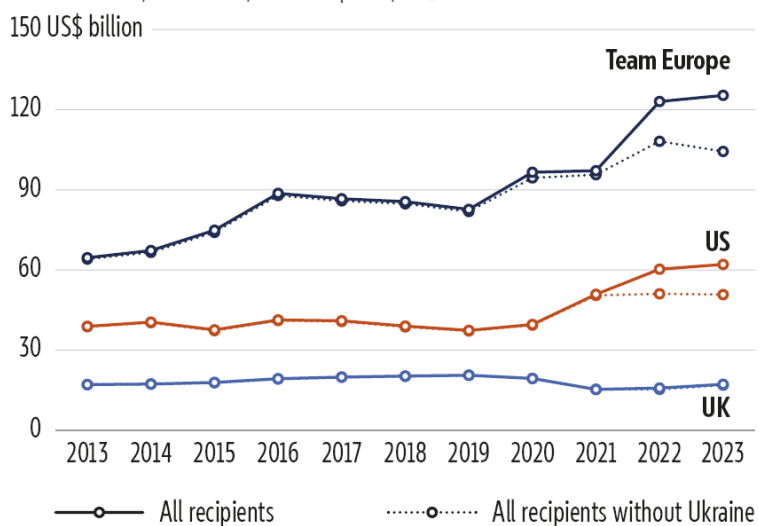


Figure 2: EU, US and UK ODA. Source: EPRS.

which includes funding to all recipients, not just developing countries).

In 2023, the US provided USD 59.2 billion in ODA to developing countries – an amount that was USD 35.5 billion, or 46 %, less than the EU & EUMS’s ODA (total USD 94.7 billion). The US contribution represents just 0.24 % of the country’s Gross National Income (GNI). The EU & EUMS provided ODA worth 0.58 % of their GNI.

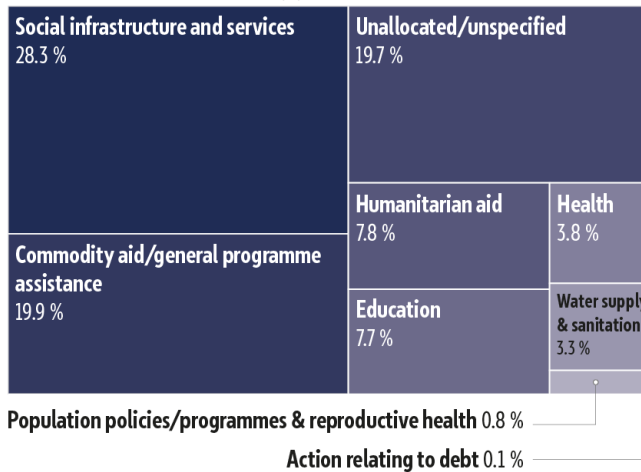
Differences between the US and European approaches to ODA are

also apparent in the sectors and areas for which assistance was provided. The US has traditionally directed a larger share of its ODA to social infrastructure and services, humanitarian aid, health, and population and reproductive health programmes, whereas the EU & EUMS’ focus is on social infrastructure and services, general programme assistance, education and water/sanitation (see figures 3 and 4 below). The US’s focus means that its halt in funding will have an outsized impact

on emergency food assistance and support to public health programmes in some of the most aid dependent countries of the world.

Team Europe ODA by sector

Commitments, 2023, share of total (%)



US ODA by sector

Commitments, 2023, share of total (%)

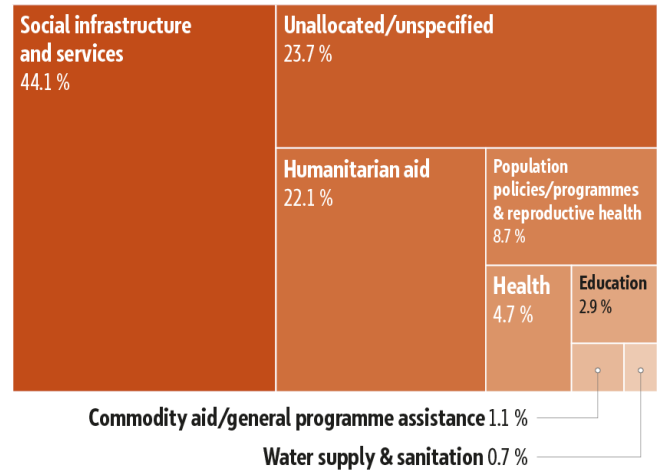


Figure 3: EU ODA by sector. Source: EPRS.

Figure 4: US ODA by sector. Source: EPRS.

The [EU is unlikely to replace the lost US funds](#). Still, the essential question is how the EU & EUMS' limited funds can be used most efficiently – not least by understanding where a discontinuation of US support may have the largest negative impact.

Identifying possibly critical funding gaps is not simple but it is possible to identify which countries' GDP depends to a significant part on ODA and how important US contributions to this ODA have been.

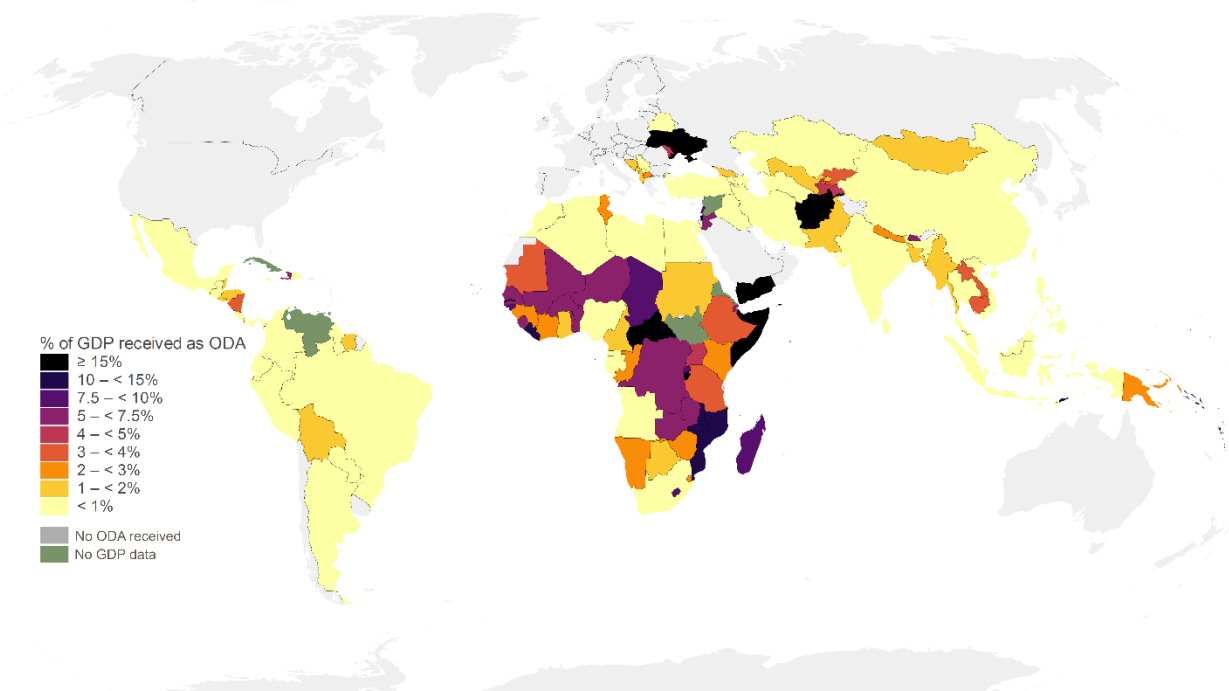


Figure 5: Aid dependency in 2023. Source: EXAS, based on OECD and World Bank data.

How much ODA developing countries received relative to their GDP varies significantly (see map above). In some developing countries, ODA represents only a negligible share of the GDP. For Brazil, India, Kazakhstan, Algeria and some others, it is less than 0.1 % of the GDP. In contrast, the Central African Republic (CAR) received ODA worth 27.9 % of its GDP. Stark differences are also visible amongst least developed countries (LDCs); for example, ODA made up about 22.70 % of Burundi's GDP in 2023, but only 1.28 % of Bangladesh's GDP.

More than 40 developing countries receive over 4.7 % of their GDP in ODA – a percentage equal to the average that [EU Member States spent on education](#) in 2023. In more than 25 countries, ODA represents more than 7.7 % of GDP – a percentage equal to the average that that EU Member States [spent on their health systems](#) in 2023. The USAID cuts will likely impact all of these countries negatively, as the US was responsible for about a fifth of ODA globally.

Yet, the US funds were allocated unevenly to developing countries. While The Gambia, for example, received ODA worth almost 14 % of its GDP, only 3.6 % of this ODA came from the US. In contrast, Somalia received ODA worth more than 20 % of its GDP, with US contributions making up more than 43 % of this ODA. Table 1 below shows the 10 countries that were analysed in more detail in Section 3 because of their high dependence on ODA and their large dependence on US funds.

	% of GDP received as ODA in 2023	% of ODA received from EU & EUMS in 2023	% of ODA received from US in 2023
Central African Republic	27.89	34.17	17.12
Yemen	21.39	17.09	19.96
Somalia	20.41	21.10	43.01
Afghanistan	17.31	27.73	38.62
Mozambique	13.68	15.02	21.74
Malawi	13.30	14.26	24.90
Liberia	12.88	23.04	28.46
Lebanon	7.89	46.72	23.23
Democratic Republic of Congo	6.38	16.57	28.26
South Sudan ¹	N/A	18.17	39.37

Table 1: Case study countries – overview.

¹ South Sudan was selected even though it was not possible to calculate how much of its GDP is composed of ODA because only varying and unreliable ODA estimates are available. It was included because of its high dependence on US foreign aid and an escalating political and humanitarian crisis

Countries that have not been included in the case studies, but which may deserve attention, include:

- Ukraine, where ODA represents about 19 % of GDP, and where about 31 % of ODA came from the US.
- the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are often heavily dependent on aid.
- Syria, whose situation has changed dramatically. (Based on 2023 data, Syria would have deserved to be a focus, but recent political changes have made any analysis unreliable.)
- Other countries that are not aid dependent in general terms but rely on aid to solve specific problems. Nigeria, for example, has a lingering and worsening food security crisis in its northern regions, where about [33 million people were estimated to be food insecure](#) in 2025. As a consequence, the country received significant amounts of emergency food assistance from the US. In each of these cases, the missing USAID funds will have consequences.

2.1 Critical enablers

'Critical enablers' are [activities that are necessary to support the effectiveness and efficiency of basic programme activities](#). Examples of critical enabling systems include legal reforms, gender equality initiatives, social protection mechanisms, community engagement, and political commitment.

These systems play a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of official development assistance and humanitarian aid because they address systemic barriers and foster supportive environments for development interventions. By integrating critical enablers into their ODA frameworks, donor and recipient countries can optimise their development synergies.

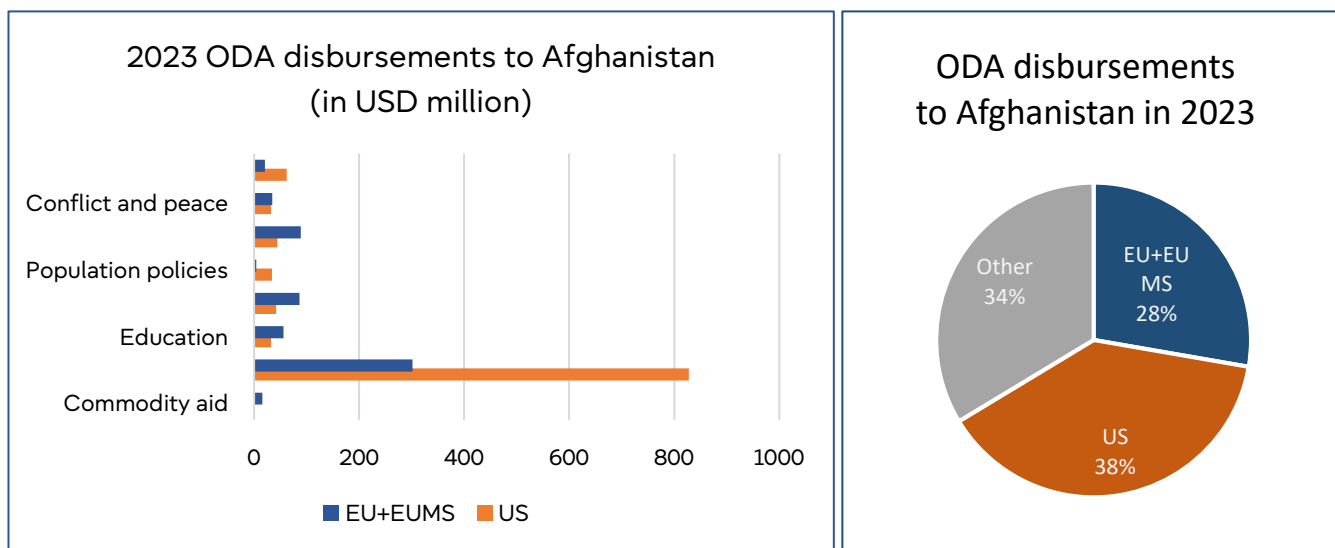
The proposed USAID cuts are expected to significantly undermine these critical enablers. Certain programmes focusing on HIV/AIDS treatment and gender-based violence are already collapsing due to loss of funding, leading to reduced outreach, testing, and counselling services in vulnerable populations. Without alternative funding sources, the dismantling of these enablers threatens long-term progress in areas such as poverty reduction, global health and human rights advocacy.

2.2 Early warning systems

A related issue pertains to global data and early warning systems that help make development and humanitarian interventions more effective and targeted. The US has been instrumental in establishing and financing such systems. An example is the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), which monitored and analysed droughts, crop yields, food stuff prices and a range of other indicators in order to provide early information about food insecurity crises to many humanitarian actors. [The system has been taken offline](#).

3 Case studies

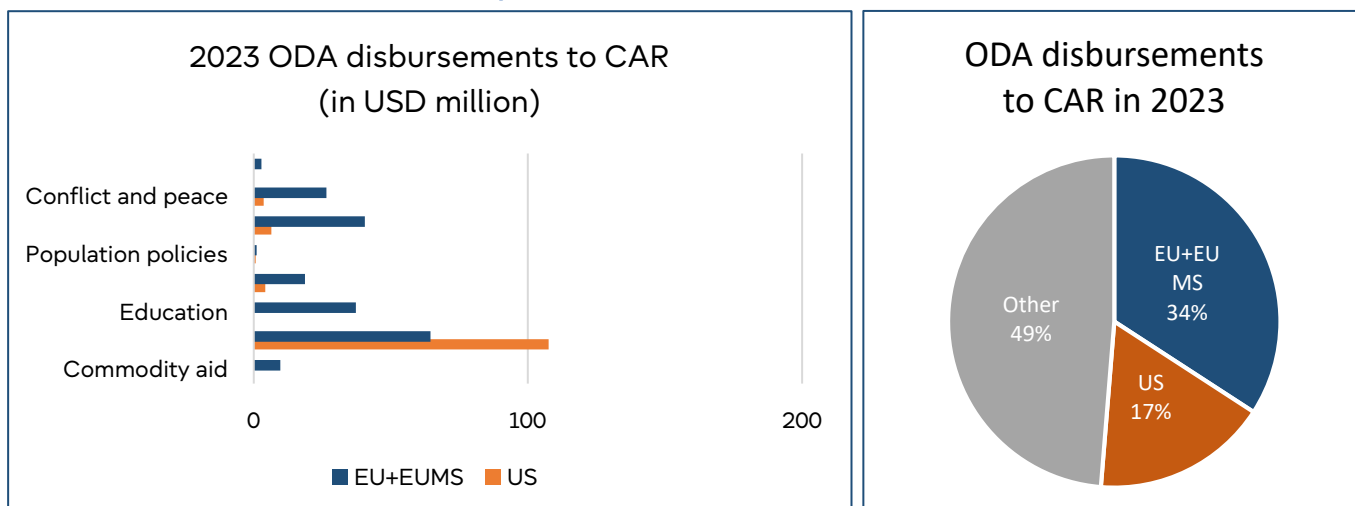
3.1 Afghanistan



In 2023, Afghanistan received USD 3 027 million in ODA, mostly in the form of humanitarian aid. These funds made up about 17 % of Afghanistan’s GDP, making the country highly aid-dependent. Following years of insecurity and the take-over by the Taliban, Afghanistan is in the midst of a [severe humanitarian, socio-economic and human rights crisis](#), with two thirds of its 42 million inhabitants struggling to meet basic needs. International donors are most focused on emergency response and relief services. [The EU has suspended its development cooperation with Afghanistan](#) but remains committed to supporting the Afghan people, especially through the provision of humanitarian aid.

USAID contributed over 38 % of the ODA given to [Afghanistan](#), making its support integral to Afghan people. USAID’s efforts were mainly focused on humanitarian aid, and more specifically on emergency food assistance to combat mass starvation.

3.2 Central African Republic

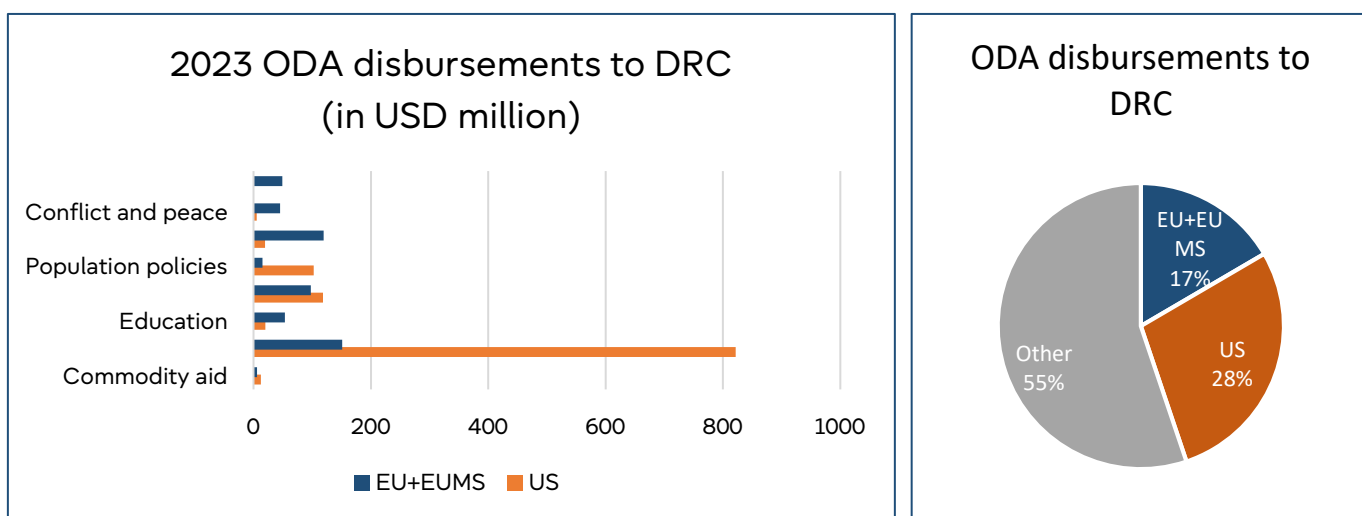


In 2023, the CAR received USD 700 million in aid, making up nearly 28 % of its GDP. The CAR has endured over two decades of political crises, including coups in 2013 and an insurgency in 2020. Despite its agricultural potential and natural resources, the economy stagnates due to smuggling, declining gold production, and power outages disrupting local industries. Around 45 % of the country's six million inhabitants require humanitarian assistance, with 450 000 internally displaced and 739 000 refugees. The CAR ranks 191 out of 193 countries on the Human Development Index, facing particular challenges in gender-based violence and education.

[The EU is investing in health facilities, basic education](#) and conflict, peace and security efforts (including conflict resolution and civilian peace building), with a [strong emphasis on emergency relief](#).

Meanwhile, USAID funding has prioritised humanitarian aid, especially emergency food assistance and support services. This funding constitutes over 17 % of the ODA to the CAR, making the country highly vulnerable to USAID funding cuts.

3.3 The Democratic Republic of the Congo

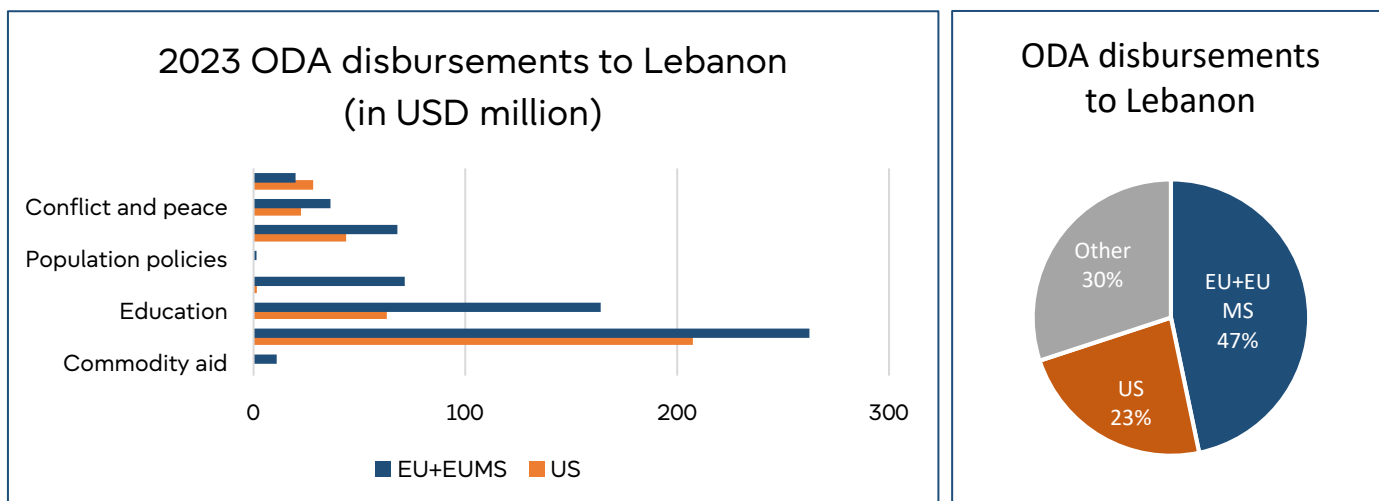


In 2023, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) received ODA worth 6 % of its GDP – USD 4 167 million. Despite significant GDP growth – 8.4 % in 2023 – climate risks and political instability threaten future growth in the country, where over 70 % of the population lives on less than USD 2.15 a day. The country faces extreme insecurity in eastern provinces due to large-scale attacks by armed groups, resulting in thousands of deaths and nearly seven million internally displaced people. The escalation of violence in eastern DRC since January 2025 has likely exacerbated this situation. Additionally, with 23 million children missing vaccinations and decreased health service utilisation since the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns about secondary health crises are increasing.

In the DRC, [the EU prioritises efforts in conflict resolution, human rights, environmental protection and basic healthcare provision](#). While it also addresses emergency food and relief assistance, this is less of a focus than it is for the US.

In 2023, USAID funding made up 28 % of the DRC’s ODA, primarily allocated for emergency humanitarian aid, disease control (especially malaria) and population policies². US-sponsored programmes emphasise STD control, reproductive healthcare and family planning. An aid withdrawal could create significant gaps in malaria and HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.

3.4 Lebanon



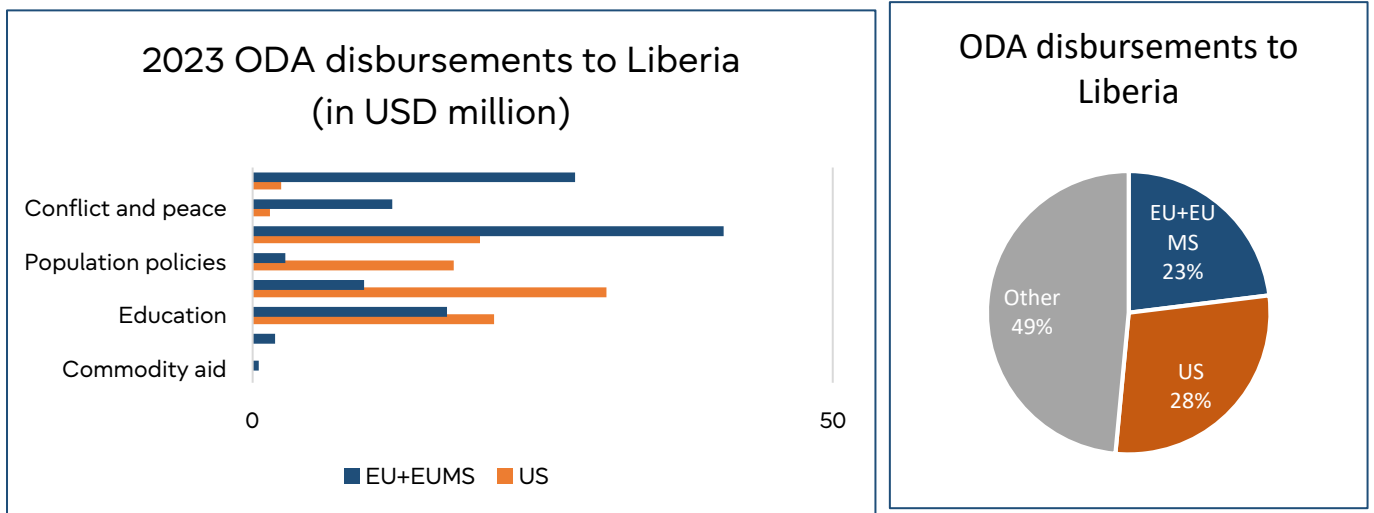
In 2023, Lebanon received USD 1 660 million in ODA – nearly 8 % of its GDP. The country faces a severe crisis stemming from the 2019 economic collapse, worsened by COVID-19 and the 2020 Beirut port explosion. This has caused high inflation, rising unemployment, and a 36 % drop in GDP per capita. Basic services have collapsed, causing fuel shortages that impact electricity, healthcare and clean water access. While a new government has secured a confidence vote in February 2025, tensions persist due to ongoing security threats, including military confrontations with Syria, and Israeli airstrikes targeting Hezbollah.

[European development assistance covers various sectors](#), including basic social services, primary and higher education, and emergency humanitarian aid.

The reduction of US ODA to Lebanon will slow its recovery, as US aid represented about 23 % of the country’s ODA in 2023. The US prioritised government support, peace and security programmes and material relief.

² [Population policies are designed to manage population growth and improve the quality of life of individuals.](#)

3.5 Liberia

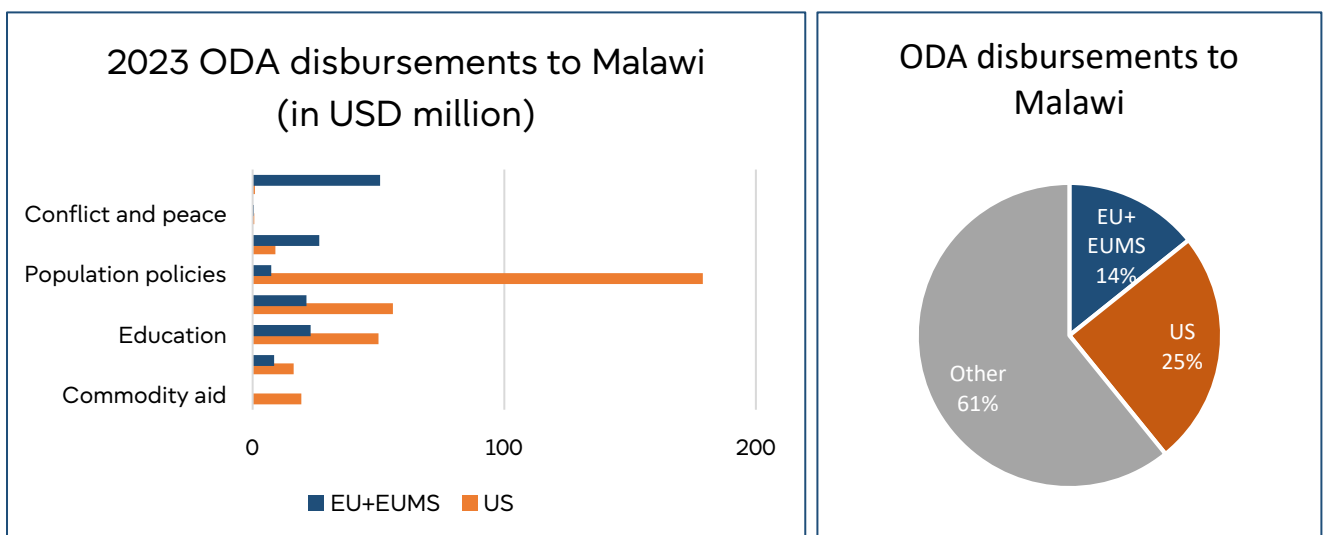


Liberia is recovering from two decades of civil war, which ended in 2003. Ongoing economic challenges and the need for sustainable development require substantial international support. The country received USD 540 million in development assistance in 2023 – 13 % of its GDP.

[European development assistance for Liberia](#) focuses on sustainable growth through the preservation of natural resources, the promotion of employment and improvements in financial and democratic governance. Other priorities include support for food systems, forestry and biodiversity conservation.

The proposed USAID cuts have placed significant strain on Liberia’s economy, leading the government to introduce austerity measures. These cuts will impact critical sectors, including health, agriculture, governance, media, civil society and efforts to digitise revenue collection.

3.6 Malawi

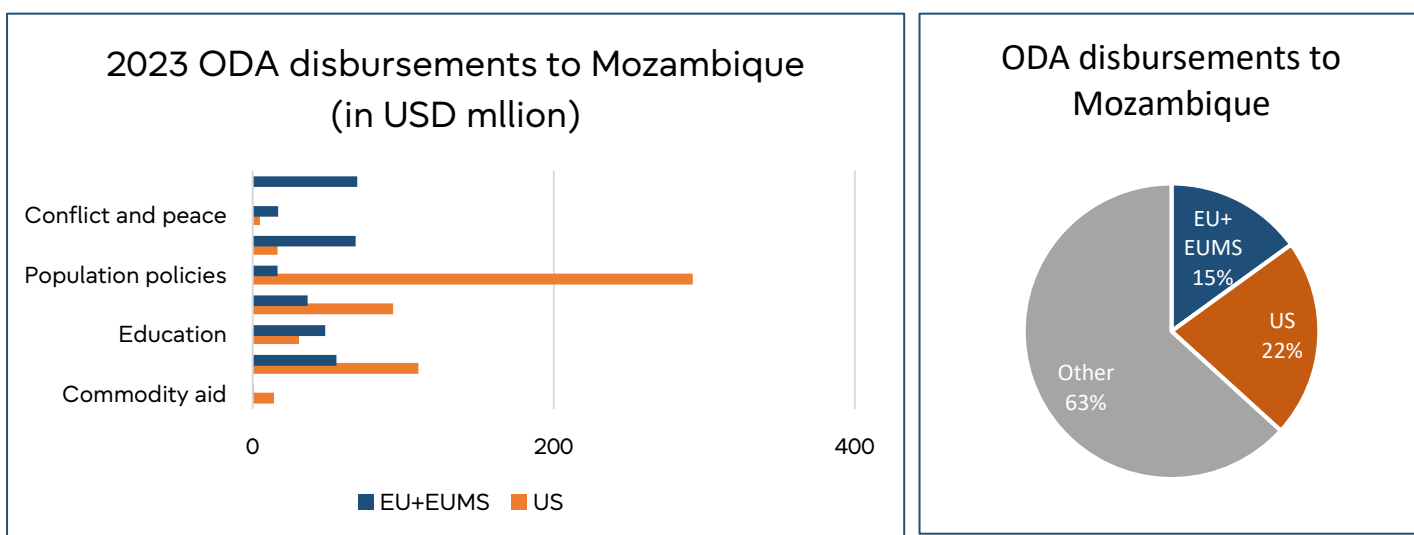


Malawi is a heavily aid-dependent country, with an ODA to GDP ratio exceeding 13 % in 2023 and USD 1 668 million received in that year. Approximately 71 % of its 20 million inhabitants live in extreme poverty, [in part due to recurring climate shocks](#).

[The EU](#) supports various initiatives in Malawi with a focus on strengthening civil society and addressing priorities such as economic transformation, democratic governance and human development.

USAID, which contributed 25 % of the total ODA received by Malawi, has made substantial contributions to [HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment](#) in the country. The proposed cuts could have considerable implications for Malawi’s healthcare, as well as broader global health efforts.

3.7 Mozambique

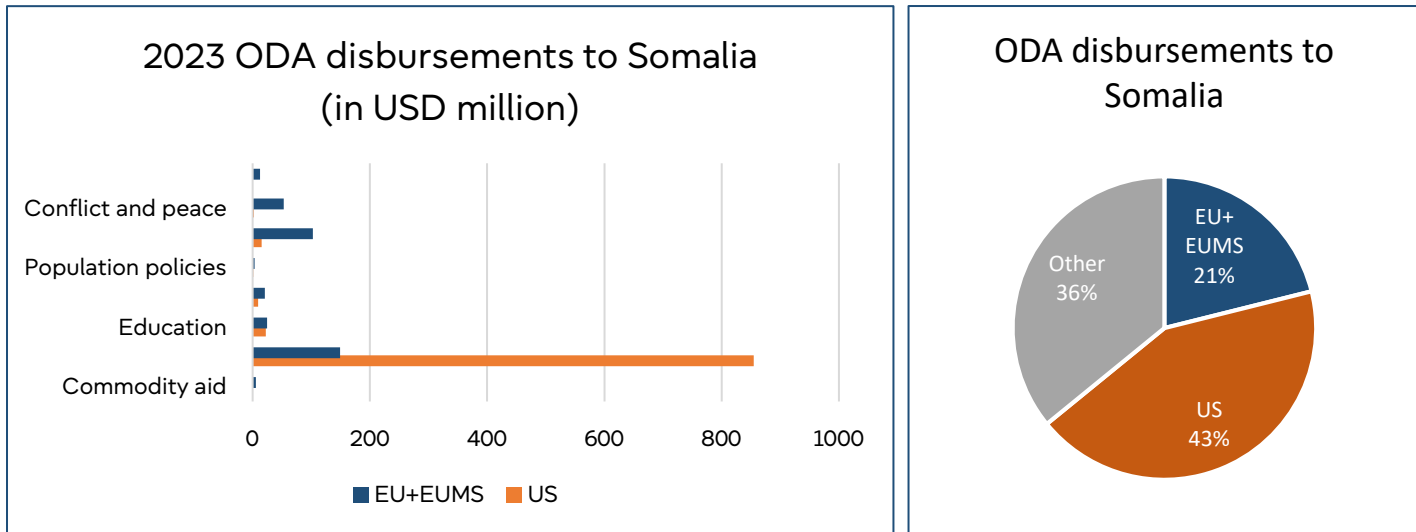


In 2023, Mozambique received USD 2 824 million in development assistance, which amounts to approximately 14 % of the country’s GDP. Despite economic reforms and the revival of key sectors such as agriculture, transportation and tourism, the country remains among the lowest-ranked globally in human development.

[The EU](#) serves as a key development partner, focusing on sustainable agriculture, climate resilience and green infrastructure. EU programmes address malnutrition and education, as well as democratic governance, economic frameworks and social cohesion.

The proposed USAID cut in Mozambique will have a significant impact on humanitarian and social programmes, particularly in relation to public health and HIV/AIDS. With an [adult HIV prevalence rate of 11.6 %](#), the funding cut poses serious risks to public health efforts.

3.8 Somalia

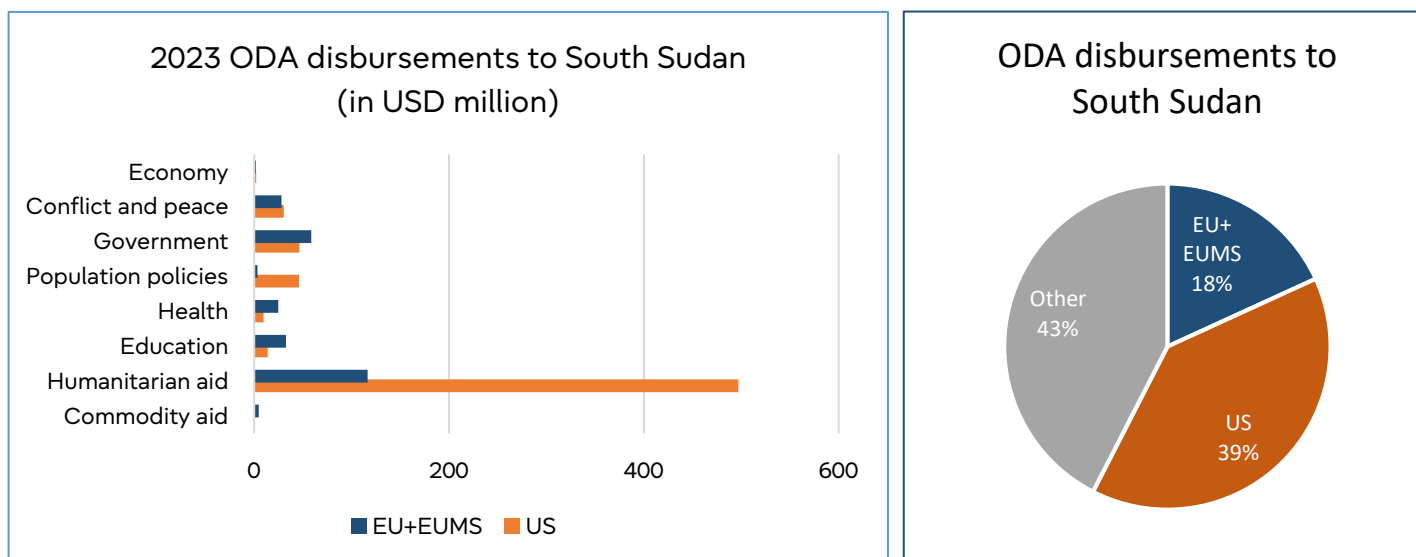


In 2023, Somalia’s ODA amounted to approximately 21 % of its GDP, with the country receiving a total of USD 2 385 million in aid. Somalia remains highly aid-dependent, particularly as the country faces escalating humanitarian challenges [driven by the country’s fragile political situation, climate shocks, disease outbreaks and widespread poverty](#).

The EU supports [the country’s state-building efforts, economic and private sector development and the increased resilience of its most vulnerable populations, while attempting to reduce the effects of the climate crisis](#).

USAID accounted for 43 % of total aid disbursements to Somalia, with a primary focus on relief coordination, support services and emergency food assistance. The suspension of USAID is expected to significantly impact the operations of NGOs in the country, potentially disrupting medical services.

3.9 South Sudan

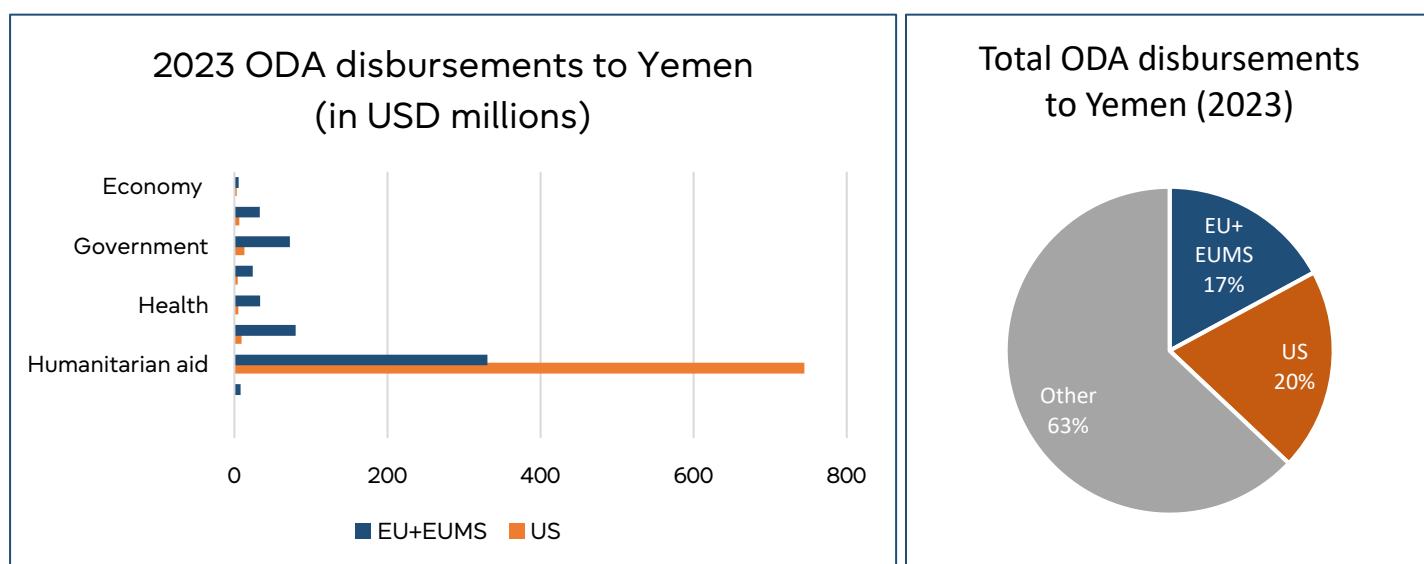


[South Sudan faces profound development difficulties, exacerbated by war, local violence and a severe lack of modern infrastructure](#). Almost two thirds of its population require humanitarian assistance, and nearly half the population experience severe food insecurity. In 2023, South Sudan received a total of USD 1 737 million in development assistance.

[The EU](#) is committed to fostering a more stable, resilient and peaceful South Sudan, focusing on economic development, human development, as well as good governance, peace and the promotion of human rights.

The suspension of US humanitarian assistance will severely impact emergency food assistance efforts, leaving nearly two million people struggling to meet their basic nutritional and humanitarian needs.

3.10 Yemen



In 2023, Yemen received USD 3 960 million in aid while the country faced one of the world’s most severe humanitarian crises, with an estimated 18.2 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid. [The crisis was exacerbated by nearly a decade of conflict, economic collapse, climate-induced shocks and outbreaks of disease](#).

In Yemen, [the EU](#) focuses on food security, nutrition, health services (including cholera containment), demining, education and child protection. A key aspect of EU support is its humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, aimed at addressing both immediate needs and long-term recovery.

The United States, through USAID, has been Yemen’s largest humanitarian donor since the country’s conflict escalated in 2015. Having provided 20 % share of Yemen’s ODA in 2023, the US’ proposed cuts will impact United Nations agencies and international NGOs that address famine risk, malnutrition and public health crises, and that support livelihoods and essential services.

4 USAID and multilateral aid agencies

Multilateral organisations are significantly affected by the US cuts to its development and humanitarian funding, with the United Nations (UN) being no exception. The UN's budget comprises both assessed and voluntary contributions. Assessed contributions, made by UN member states based on their GDP and ability to pay, support the regular budget, peacekeeping operations and specialised agencies. In contrast, voluntary contributions come from a variety of sources, including governments, other organisations (foundations, corporations, etc.) and individuals. These contributions fund specific programmes, humanitarian efforts and emergency operations.

The US is the largest single contributor to the UN, [covering approximately 22 % of its core funding each year](#). In addition, the US is a substantial direct contributor to many UN agencies and other multilateral organisations (see graphic below). While obtaining a comprehensive overview of these agencies' funding is challenging, the charts below reflect funding data published on the organisations' own websites.

Following the official cessation of [USAID operations](#) on 1 July 2025, the US appears likely to defund multilateral institutions providing aid, especially UN agencies. Plans to defund UN agencies have been circulating [since March 2025](#). This would follow already implemented withdrawals from multiple UN bodies (WHO, UN Human Rights Council, etc.). If the US government were to cease funding all UN agencies entirely, some could lose over 40 % of their annual contributions. Such cuts could lead to essential service disruptions, staff layoffs or complete programme closures. [According to Brookings](#), this could result in both humanitarian and geopolitical consequences, specific to each organisation's mandate.

Such cuts would be an additional burden to aid-dependent developing countries already affected by the loss of direct support through USAID. Burundi is such a case. In 2023, the country received about 50 % of its ODA from multilateral agencies and institutions, while about 27 % of ODA was provided by the EU & EUMS and about 14 % by the US. The country is already struggling following the USAID cuts. With severe shortages of essential supplies – such as ready-to-use therapeutic food – [52 % of the country's children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition](#). Medical professionals are now faced with the task of determining how to allocate insufficient supplies to save lives.

The UN has acknowledged the severe impact of US cuts to its activities, with [UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#) emphasising that the repercussions of the cuts would be particularly 'devastating for vulnerable people around the world.' He asked the US to reconsider the cuts, warning that 'going through with these cuts will make the world less healthy, less safe, and less prosperous.' The UN secretariat is preparing to [reduce its budget by 20%](#) and cut nearly 7 000 jobs by the end of the year. In June, the UN also announced what it described as its 'deepest funding cuts ever' to global humanitarian operations. [UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher](#) described being 'forced into a triage of human survival.' With all UN agencies vulnerable to these cuts, they have been [ordered to draw up budget reduction plans](#).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have been most impacted thus far, with US contributions accounting for over 40 % of their total funding.

The initial consequences for these agencies are already visible. The IOM has projected a budget decrease from USD 4 billion to USD 2.89 billion for 2025 due to the conclusion of US-funded programmes and subsequent withdrawals, in addition to budget cuts by other donors. This is already significantly affecting [refugee resettlement operations](#) in countries including Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo. [IOM director Amy Pope has warned](#) that additional cuts might occur in 2026.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is [preparing](#) for a 'significant reduction in the size of [its] workforce': on 16 June, the UNHCR announced that it would cut approximately 3 500 staff positions – about [one sixth of its workforce](#) – along with hundreds of temporary agents. [UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi](#) noted that these cuts 'are putting millions of lives at risk' and 'will make the world less safe, driving more desperate people to become refugees,' particularly in fragile regions. Countries receiving the most aid from UNHCR include Ukraine, Lebanon, Syria, Ethiopia and Sudan. A recent note from UNHCR indicates that funding cuts have severely impacted existing programmes globally, putting over [17 million refugee children 'at risk of violence](#), abuse, exploitation, trafficking or separation from their families.'

Similarly, the [World Food Programme \(WFP\) has announced the closure](#) of its southern Africa office in Johannesburg, merging operations with East Africa in Nairobi due to funding constraints. After warning about disruptions to critical food aid programmes globally, the WFP announced in July, that it was [halting multiple food and nutritional assistance programmes](#) in West and Central African countries, including Mali, the Central African Republic and Cameroon. Regional director Margot van der Velden stated that they 'are doing everything [they] can to prioritise the most life-saving activities, but without urgent support from [their] partners, [their] ability to respond is shrinking by the day.' If no additional funding is secured in the coming months, [food stocks could run out by September](#), exacerbating the challenges for countries heavily reliant on US humanitarian aid.

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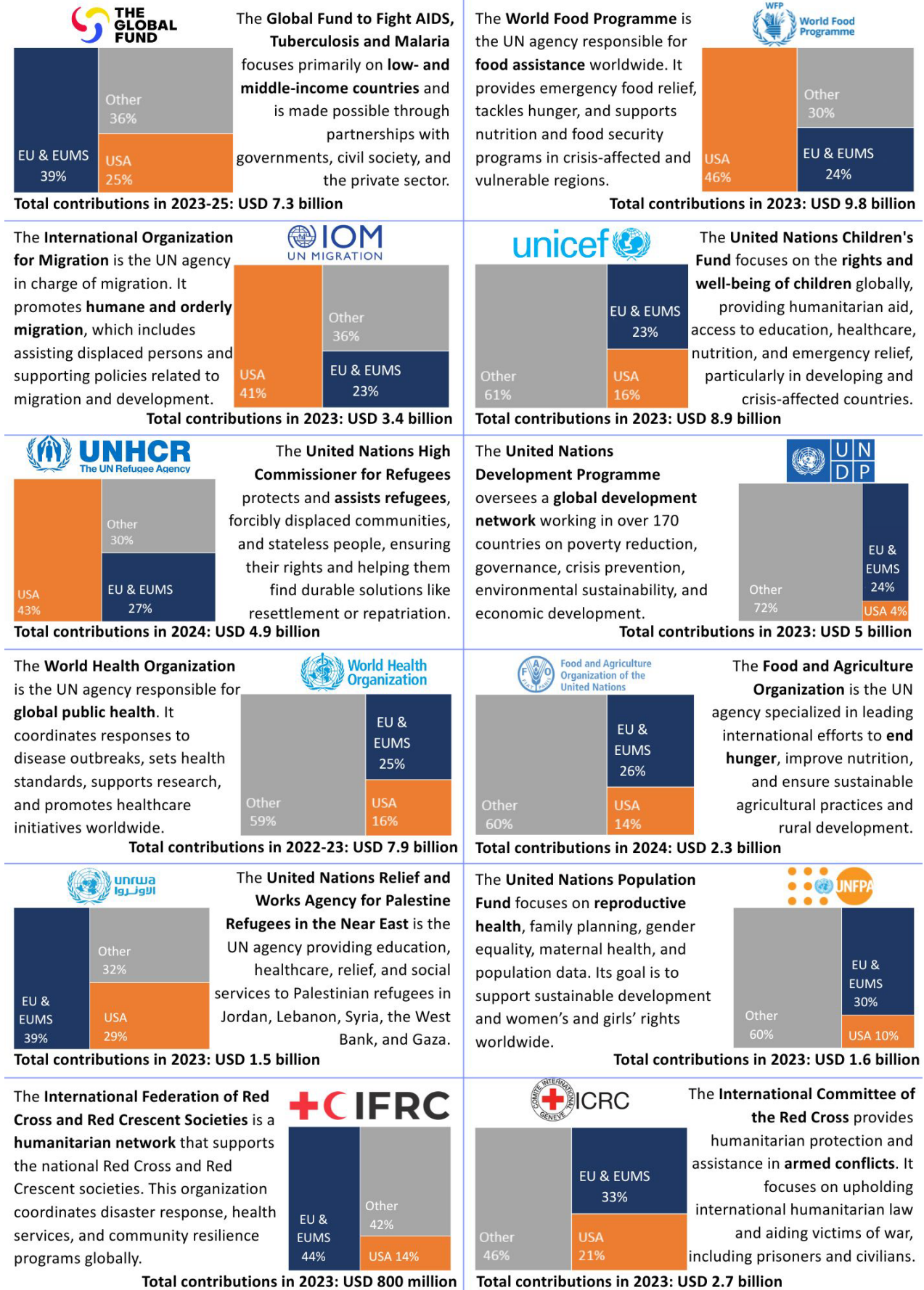


Figure 6: US and EU & EUMS contributions to UN agencies and select international organisations. Based on data from the agencies' and organisations' websites. Source: EXAS.

5 Conclusion

The substantial reduction of US foreign assistance under the second Trump administration marks a pivotal moment in global development cooperation. With USAID dismantled, the most aid-dependent countries, multilateral institutions and international humanitarian organisations will be impacted. While the EU & EUMS remain the largest donor of ODA globally, the withdrawal of USAID will create critical gaps across various sectors. USAID has played a vital role in addressing issues such as mass starvation and malnutrition, while supporting reproductive healthcare, disease control and peace building. Reducing funding in these areas may pose risks to the EU because there may be consequences for regional stability (especially in fragile contexts), irregular migration and the spread of communicable diseases. Other global actors, including Russia and China, may use the gap left by USAID to increase their influence in developing countries, with [reports indicating that this may already be happening.](#)

PE 754.481

Print ISBN 978-92-848-2901-9 | doi:10.2861/9451623 | QA-01-25-155-EN-C
PDF ISBN 978-92-848-2900-2 | doi:10.2861/4506834 | QA-01-25-155-EN-N