

2015 – the European Year for Development

At a time of economic crisis when there is a temptation for Europeans to focus on their own difficulties, the EU is resolutely turning its political attention to the developing world, in line with the motto – 'Our world, our future, our dignity'.

Origin of the Year

Since 1983, the [EU has designated](#) one topic as a focus for each year, with the aim of raising awareness of that particular topic and sending a strong signal about its political significance. In many cases this designation has been followed by new European action or legislation in the relevant fields. To date most European Years have focused on important social topics internal to the EU; but the European Year for Development (EYD) is the first ever to focus on the EU's external action.

While the birth of the idea of a dedicated year for development issues, traced back to 2010-11, is claimed both by the [Latvian Prime Minister](#) and the NGO umbrella association [CONCORD](#), it has gradually gained widespread [inter-institutional support](#).

The European Parliament's key contribution

The EP played a leading role in bringing the idea to fruition: its [resolution](#) of 23 October 2012 on an Agenda for change contained a specific recommendation to designate 2015 as the European Year for Development.

On 14 April 2014 the [Council](#) formally endorsed the decision that 2015 be the 'European Year for Development', following the Parliament's adoption on 2 April 2014 of the [proposal](#) on the subject. The EP stressed in this resolution that 2015 is an appropriate moment to present the achievements of European development policy, which has broad support from [European citizens](#) in general terms, although they lack awareness of its details. The issue of global interdependence should be a key focus, to illustrate that development policy is more than just assistance, and to foster direct involvement in favour of development. MEPs also emphasised the need to raise public awareness of all forms of gender discrimination, as an impediment to development. With regard to organisational aspects, the EP points out that the level and form of involvement in EYD remains at the discretion of each Member State, while calling upon the Commission to coordinate properly the activities undertaken within the framework of the Year.

The three official aims of the 2015 EYD:

1. To inform European citizens about EU and Member States' development cooperation activities,
2. To foster direct involvement, critical thinking and active interest in development cooperation among EU citizens and stakeholders,
3. To raise awareness of the benefits of EU development cooperation and global interdependence, and enable broader understanding of the need for policy coherence for development.

Organisation of EYD

The EYD will [consist](#) of various events and actions (awards, school contests, advertising campaigns, debates, sport events, etc.) taking place at European and national level, with the involvement of civil society organisations and other stakeholders. The Member States were asked to submit [national work programmes](#) by 1 September 2014. All events will be based on the campaign's visual identity, motto and the thematic calendar. [Twelve themes](#), one for each month, will structure events organised at European, national and local levels. January will be dedicated to the theme of 'Europe in the world', February will focus on 'Education', March on 'Women and Girls', April on 'Health', May on 'Peace and Security', June on 'Sustainable green growth, decent jobs and businesses', July on 'Children and youth', August on 'Humanitarian aid',

September on 'Demography and migration', October on 'Food security', November on 'Sustainable development and climate action' and December on 'Human rights and governance'.

The EYD will have a dedicated website, accessible to all partners together with EYD social media and a European Commission managed Stakeholders Group: <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/eyd2015/>.

Flagship events

Events include a launch in Riga (hosted by the Latvian Presidency of the Council) on 9 January, a Belgian opening cultural event to be held on 17 January, a gender event in Latvia on 2 March, the [European Development Days](#) on 2 and 3 June, as well as a closing event organised by the Luxembourg Presidency on 8 December. In addition, the Committee of the Regions is hosting a further major event, the '[Assises of Decentralised Cooperation](#)', to be held on 1 and 2 June in Brussels, with 800 to 1 000 participants, many of whom are expected to come from developing countries.

The EP's involvement

The EP's Development Committee has agreed to contribute to several EYD events. These include a High-Level Panel during the European Development Days, a debate on girls as actors of development during the EP's Open Days in May 2015, an event at the EXPO 2015 in Milan, and an inter-parliamentary committee meeting with national parliaments dedicated to EYD, to be held towards the end of the year. Four MEPs will represent the EP at the opening event in Riga.

Expected impact in an uneasy policy context

2015 is expected to be a pivotal year for development cooperation with the final countdown to the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, together with the expected agreement at the September 2015 [Special Summit on Sustainable Development](#) on a new set of common objectives for the post-2015 period. Several other potentially decisive events will also take place, such as the [Third International Financing for Development Conference](#) in July 2015 and the COP21 Climate Conference in December in Paris. At operational level, we are seeing chronic humanitarian crises in a Middle East destabilised by the Syrian civil war and the rise of IS, together with the Ebola epidemic and various conflicts in Africa. All of this means that international solidarity remains vital in a globalised and volatile world. The EYD has an important role to play in this context by mobilising strong public support for the major commitments that will be needed, despite the backdrop of economic crisis in Europe.

At European level, although the EU remains the largest provider of official development assistance (ODA) issues related to aid fragmentation (due in particular to insufficient policy coordination between the EU and Member States), weak coherence across different EU policies and, in particular the commitments/payments gap which is affecting EU budget implementation, risk undermining the EU's credibility as a leading development actor.

The [European Movement International](#) stresses that the EYD presents an opportunity to draw attention to the EU as a global development actor while enabling it to act as a truly united force in the international arena.

The EYD could therefore serve as the impetus to improve coordination between European and national development cooperation by means of a mandatory mechanism proposed by the EP, enhanced policy coherence for development (i.e. taking greater account of the impact on development of other EU policies) by establishing an arbitration system whereby the President of the Commission would take political responsibility for discrepancies between different EU policies, as well as finding innovative solutions to close the payments/commitments gap and bringing in new financing sources for development.

Further reading

M Latek, [The challenge of coordination of EU development policies](#), EPRS, January 2015.

A Brown and E Hefer (editors), [Our Collective Interest. Why Europe's problems need global solutions and global problems need European action](#)/ European Think Tanks Group, September 2014.