

Summary report

High-level Roundtable and Experts Workshop convened by Enabel & GIZ in collaboration with the Practitioners' Network for European Development Cooperation (PN) & the European Think Tank Group (ETT) on

“Staying Engaged as Team Europe in Fragile Contexts”

Challenges, Opportunities, and Way Forward

17 October 2024

1. **Background**

On 17 October 2024, Enabel and GIZ hosted two sessions on how to stay engaged in fragile settings in a Team Europe spirit. **The two sessions aimed at maintaining high attention to the issue of fragility, but also to present and discuss emerging findings from the European Think Tank Group (ETT)’s Collective Report on “Staying Engaged as Team Europe in Fragile Contexts” to reinforce key issues and collective feedback from policymakers, practitioners and experts.**

The morning session was a **high-level roundtable**, opened by **Jean Van Wetter, Managing Director of Enabel, Belgian Development Agency**, and **Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel, chair of the management board of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH**, and featuring **Erwin Vandeputte, Head of cabinet (Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation)**. **Iliana Olivié, ETTG Director**, moderated and presented key findings of the draft ETTG Collective Report. Participants were divided into discussion tables, each hosted by Enabel and GIZ CEOs and ETTG Director and moderated by an ETTG researcher.

The afternoon session was an **expert workshop**, featuring key experts and practitioners working on fragility or in fragile settings with national, European and multilateral institutions and agencies. After the welcoming remarks by GIZ and Enabel, **Volker Hauck (Senior researcher ECDPM)** presented key points raised during the morning session. This was followed by a presentation of the key findings by the ETTG research team (**Sophie Desmidt and Julian Bergmann**). Participants were divided into discussion tables, each moderated by an ETTG researcher.

This meeting report contains the key points raised by high-level interventions as well as the key takeaways and reflection points from both discussions and. The agendas for both sessions can be found in Annex 1 and 2 at the end.

2. Main takeaways from roundtable discussions and expert level workshops

2.1. High-level roundtable discussions, 9h30-11h00

The high-level roundtable held in the morning was kicked off by opening remarks by **Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel** (Chair of GIZ Management Board), **Jean Van Wetter** (Managing Director Enabel) and **Erwin Vandeputte** (Head of Cabinet, Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation).

Mr. Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel (Chair of the Management Board GIZ) started his remark by stating that by sharing knowledge and resources, EU actors (in particular, European agencies of international cooperation agencies) can complement each other, embodying the spirit of Team Europe. For GIZ, fragility has become its “new normal,” with 2/3 of GIZ’s portfolio implemented in fragile contexts and 45% dedicated to crisis management. These fragile settings require GIZ to tackle long-term and structural objectives, contributing to peacebuilding and strengthening crisis prevention capacities, which are essential for implementing the triple nexus. Development cannot succeed without peace and stability.

Fragility is a defining characteristic of many of GIZ’ partner countries, making life more difficult and rendering the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) increasingly hard. It impacts not only local communities but also regional and global stability. Addressing these challenges requires intentionality and a systematic approach, as fragility is inherently political. Inclusiveness is key, as are innovative and integrated solutions that adapt to evolving contexts while learning from past experiences and mistakes.

Mr. Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel stressed that the new Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jozef Síkela has emphasised fragility as a priority, highlighting that Global Gateway is an investment more suitable for stable economies. Fragility should remain central to GIZ and its commissioning parties agenda for three key reasons: 1) there is a need to recognise the importance of fragility responses - without such responses, SDGs cannot be achieved; 2) it must be prioritised in financial allocations, and 3) without placing it at the core of our actions, our efforts risk becoming futile.

Finally, Mr. Schäfer-Gümbel stressed that EU actors must also consider how they can work more effectively together within Team Europe. Flexibility and efficiency have never been more urgent, and they must improve European coordination and leverage collective strengths to address fragility more effectively through the HDP-Nexus.

Jean Van Wetter (Managing Director of ENABEL) stressed that this discussion between policymakers and practitioners highlights the critical importance of staying engaged in fragile contexts—a question that should not only be central to the EU agenda but to the entire international cooperation agenda. As countries like China, India, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia expand their international cooperation efforts, the EU appears increasingly inward-looking. In the face of rising global challenges such as migration, security, health, and climate change, Global Gateway often stops at stable countries. However, addressing fragility demands more regional collaboration and a long-term approach, as true resilience cannot be achieved through short-term efforts.

The Belgian government strongly supports staying engaged in fragile contexts, echoing the belief that the EU's international cooperation agenda must place fragility at its core. Organisations like GIZ and Enabel work effectively together, underscoring the need for collaboration informed by facts on the ground, as supported by research from institutions like IDOS and ECDPM.

As Mr. Jean Van Wetter emphasised, engaging in fragile contexts is not just an EU challenge but an all-encompassing international one. While Western partners reduce funding for international cooperation, emerging players are increasing their budgets. Global issues must be integrated into our analysis and response strategies. Regional approaches and long-term perspectives are crucial, even as budgets shrink and public demand for visible results grows.

Although it is often claimed that efforts in fragile contexts are ineffective, this is not entirely true. The role of politicians must be acknowledged, as their support is vital for shaping sustainable solutions. Remaining engaged in fragile settings is not just necessary but fundamental to addressing the interconnected global challenges EU actors face.

Erwin Vandeputte (Head of cabinet - Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation) stressed that the Sahel is facing a perfect storm of challenges, requiring a pragmatic and principled approach to address the root causes of conflict. This means staying committed to inclusivity—leaving no one behind, with a focus on women, youth, and local communities—while adapting to rapidly changing landscapes. A regional approach is essential, as many challenges cut across borders, but this must be complemented by local perspectives to ensure coherence, adaptability, and strengthened flexibility. Fragility remains omnipresent, and while Global Gateway can play a role, it is not sufficient to address these complex realities, particularly in a context of limited resources.

As Mr. Vandeputte emphasised, a long-term perspective is vital, as fragility cannot be addressed through short-term solutions or solely through economic growth initiatives. During the Belgian Presidency, fragility was placed firmly on the agenda alongside climate issues, demonstrating the country's resolve to "walk the talk" in these critical areas.

However, the pressures on European politicians are significant, pushing for new approaches like Global Gateway while grappling with the reality that fragility requires more tailored and enduring solutions. To navigate this tension, a trustworthy and flexible approach is crucial, ensuring the international community can remain engaged, responsive, and focused on building resilience in the most vulnerable regions.

Following these opening remarks, participants discussed in tables and were guided by 4 main questions:

1. *How have we collectively approached fragility so far, especially in politically constrained contexts like in the Central Sahel? What are the lessons learned? What do we need to do better or differently to respond to global challenges in such contexts?*
2. *What are the (perceived) risks, challenges, and geo-political interests of continued engagement in fragile contexts, and in the Central Sahel in particular? What role is there for development agencies?*

3. *What can we expect and what do we need from the proposed Commission-wide integrated approach on fragility. What will it mean for the promotion and implementation of the HDP Nexus?*
4. *How can Global Gateway be applied in fragile and/or politically constrained contexts? What would be the role for Team Europe to implement Global Gateway effectively in fragile settings? And, if yes, how should this be done?*

In the plenary restitution presentation that followed, some key shared take-aways emerged:

i) To address fragility effectively, increased political attention is crucial both at the EU level and within broader international fora

Increased political attention to fragility is vital, both at the EU level and during key fora such as the next Europe-Africa summit, where fragility should feature prominently on the agenda. Efforts by European agencies of international cooperation must be backed by a clear political mandate and must be connected to the political realities on the ground to have a meaningful impact. Participants shared that it is concerning that humanitarian and international cooperation have not been strongly emphasised by the incoming Commissioner of DG INTPA, especially as the reality in fragile contexts evolves rapidly. There was a general agreement that an EU strategic framework to address fragility is needed. Such a strategic framework could also inform the upcoming discussions on the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), as it will be the “make-or-break” moment to decide whether fragility is indeed a key political priority. Participants said that a strategic approach to creating such a framework is needed: rather than trying to overcome the current policy silos, the framework may be used to find a way to respect the different policy rationales but making them work together more effectively.

Transparency about key EU and member states interests, such as in securing critical raw materials, is equally important, given that they have repercussions on political decisions. Partnerships must reflect mutual benefits, balancing EU priorities with the needs and perspectives of partner countries to create equitable and sustainable relationships. By addressing these areas with clarity and inclusivity, the EU can foster more effective and collaborative international engagement.

ii) Funding mechanisms must become more flexible to meet the evolving needs of fragile contexts

Funding instruments must become more flexible, fostering trust-based approaches to financing and ensuring smaller grants that can be managed by local civil society organisations (CSOs) rather than big international CSOs. This flexibility would allow for more adaptive strategies, including better integration of political and developmental objectives. Some financial instruments have also lacked a robust and effective regional focus, but regional approaches are essential, to tackle fragility in border regions, and cross-border challenges. This emphasises the need to further incorporate regional perspectives and approaches into future funding mechanisms. Participants discussed the idea of a dedicated fragility envelope or dedicated funds (such as Trust Funds) as a short to medium term solution; however, if such a dedicated fragility envelope becomes reality, participants noted it would need to adhere to the different programming procedures and the different logics under which the different actors work. Other participants noted that a Trust Fund would need to respect the modalities and principles of humanitarian actors.

Participants emphasised the importance of the design of the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), as negotiations around the MFF is where the “battles about resources for addressing fragility will ultimately need to be fought”. There seem to be ongoing discussions about a dedicated instrument for addressing fragility and fostering resilience in the next MFF. However, participants also noted that much of the Commission’s focus will probably be anchored upon making Global Gateway work - pointing to a need to balance attention.

iii) Past coordination failures among international partners highlight the need for improved collaboration with a Team Europe approach

Local development remains a key pathway for addressing basic needs, particularly in fragile contexts where a regional approach is essential to tackle cross-border challenges. However, past coordination failures among international partners highlight the need for improved collaboration within Team Europe, joint engagement with stakeholders, and active listening to local perspectives through political economy analysis (PEA). While the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (Triple Nexus) has potential as a critical instrument in fragile settings, it requires greater effectiveness to deliver tangible results.

However, Team Europe’s approach must consider the differing realities within the EU and among its member states, acknowledging that engagement and disengagement may happen at different speeds depending on the context, and that the EU, at times, may not present a unified front.

Participants agreed that lessons learned from past mistakes must inform common strategies that prioritise local engagement, regional coherence, and improved coordination among partners to build resilience in fragile regions.

iv) While the role of Global Gateway in addressing fragility remains uncertain, thinking beyond this strategy is necessary to develop strategic, long-term solutions

In a world where realities change quickly, it is important to look beyond the Global Gateway and ensure that different areas are integrated. Otherwise, priorities may become sidelined. While EU instruments are designed to suit specific contexts and include conflict analysis, there is a need to strengthen the involvement of CSOs and enhance cultural engagement. Working closely with local actors and fostering dialogue can build trust and cooperation, with initiatives like those undertaken by cultural organisations serving as strong foundations.

Participants highlighted that while the Global Gateway strategy is Euro-centric, it has several “soft approach” elements that could also be applied in fragile contexts. For example, one key element is technical assistance. Cross-border corridors were also mentioned, but there should be a way to make sure that these corridors do not stop at the border of fragile contexts.

2.2. GIZ-Enabel Experts workshop, 14h-16h30

The Experts workshop was kicked off by GIZ and Enabel's representatives that welcomed the participants. It was followed by a restitution of the key points raised by participants of the morning session, followed by the ETTG research team presenting the key findings of their report. Participants were then invited to join table discussions guided by some questions, and were divided into 4 tables, each hosted by an ETTG researcher.

The guiding questions were:

1. *How can the current EU instruments address development challenges, multidimensional fragility, and humanitarian needs in fragile contexts like in the Central Sahel more effectively?*
2. *In your experience, how has Team Europe worked in fragile and/or politically constrained settings? What has worked well, and what are the obstacles?*
3. *How can Global Gateway be applied in fragile and/or politically constrained contexts, in particular in the Central Sahel? What do we do when it's not the case? What would Team Europe need to implement Global Gateway effectively in fragile settings?*
4. *What do we need to do better or differently to respond to global challenges in fragile settings through a Triple Nexus approach?*

In the plenary restitution presentation that each table carried out, some key shared take-aways emerged:

j) Addressing fragility requires greater political attention and a cohesive strategy to guide the EU action

The incoming EU Commission and the upcoming discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) offer a critical opportunity to shape debates in Brussels. But it will require more strategic clarity and more joint position among EU member states and EU institutions. Fostering such political will among member states will be key, to ensure the EU can aim to achieve a stronger consensus on tackling fragility and develop a strategic framework that ensures coherence and actionable inputs for these debates.

Engaging in fragile contexts entails significant risks, including reputational challenges. However, avoiding these contexts is not a solution. An integrated approach, respectful of local principles and moving beyond traditional development assistance, is essential. This includes balancing intermediate and short-term steps with long-term strategies that align with local realities while maintaining EU values and objectives.

A paradigm shift will be needed, which emphasises the need for open dialogue with partner countries, including those under unconstitutional regimes. Staying engaged with such governments reflects a pragmatic approach to addressing fragility, but also an approach that takes a longer-term perspective focused on systemic changes. Stronger dialogue with partners, at varying levels (local, national, regional) in decision-making processes is needed, also to ensure that EU actions really resonate locally, built on a mutual understanding of cooperation objectives. As part of this, listening to voices that may not yet align with EU norms, including non-traditional actors, was seen as a way to strengthen the interaction and to acknowledge and address unintended trade-offs of EU engagement.

ii) Team Europe exemplifies the potential of joint approaches but continues to face considerable coordination challenges on the ground that limit its relevance and impact

The Team Europe approach seeks to bridge silos between political and cooperation efforts across the EU and member states. There are successful examples of the potential of joint initiatives under Team Europe, including from very complex and fragile settings such as Gaza/Palestinian territories. Similarly, the Trust Fund in Colombia demonstrated how locally shared joint analysis can significantly enhance the projects' quality. According to participants, these types of examples underscore the importance of learning from successes and failures to drive improvement and adapt strategies to evolving contexts.

However, there are challenges of real joint actions and coordination on the ground. These include for example sharing practical and sometimes confidential information, which hinders coordination and therefore relevance and impact. Moreover, according to participants, there is a gap between bigger and smaller European agencies of international cooperation: bigger agencies have more capacity to commit to complex coordination mechanisms, and Team Europe works better if there is substantial capacity to do this. While EU delegations play a crucial role in enhancing cooperation on the ground, this role is often hampered by lack of clear directives from headquarters/Brussels, in fragile settings where developments on the ground change incredibly fast. In this regard, participants noted that transparent processes for pooling funds and clear communication among all contributors could help to mitigate challenges stemming from different member states and development agencies' practices. Moreover, participants shared that a collaborative engagement, notably with the UN, with non-EU partners is essential, as Team Europe's approach cannot operate in isolation.

Participants shared that there is a perception that Team Europe lacks clarity and visibility on the ground, with stakeholders in the field often unclear about its purpose or implementation strategies. A major critique is the perception disconnect: local populations frequently perceive EU actions as extensions of individual member states. To enhance its relevance and effectiveness, Team Europe must prioritise on-the-ground visibility, align capacities with ambitions, and adopt a joint-up approach that ensures coherence between political strategies and operational realities.

iii) Long-term and flexible funding allows the EU to respond effectively to evolving challenges

Ensuring long-term funding while maintaining flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances is crucial for long-term engagements in partner countries. Such long-term funding can foster trust and stability, while flexibility within such long-term funding can allow the EU to respond effectively to evolving challenges. This balance is particularly vital in fragile settings, where conditions can shift rapidly. Long-term commitments, paired with regular evaluations, can help test engagement strategies and adjust them to meet on-the-ground realities.

Flexibility in financial instruments is vital to address the unpredictable nature of fragility. Examples of establishing dedicated trust funds or joint funds on fragility is a promising solution. There is however a need to ensure that EU engagement is not just reactive but also strategically proactive in fragile settings.

iv) For Global Gateway to achieve real impact on the ground, it must prioritise creating opportunities for investment while addressing systemic challenges in fragile environments

Participants shared the view that the Global Gateway is a strategic framework that prioritises European interests, but it lacks a genuine commitment to addressing fragility, highlighting the need to embed a “do no harm” perspective into its implementation. An issue that participants shared was that in some situations, the influx of resources can exacerbate instability, raising the question: how can Global Gateway be executed without increasing fragility?

Another issue raised was whether Global Gateway sufficiently emphasises a people-centred approach or whether its ambition to drive private-sector engagement overshadows the EU’s international cooperation. Participants noted the Global Gateway approach must clearly distinguish between engaging European private actors and fostering local private sector development, as this differentiation is often overlooked. Achieving a conducive environment for investment requires a long-term commitment to addressing local constraints and supporting peacebuilding efforts, i.e. conflict-sensitive approaches to private sector development. Strong and tailored partnerships with local actors and organisations, mindful of their capacity limitations, are crucial to ensuring meaningful engagement that delivers tangible results.

To remain credible, Global Gateway must be transparent about its dual objectives: advancing European interests and addressing developmental needs. While the framework’s ambition is commendable, it requires clarity about its priorities and realistic expectations of its impact in fragile settings. Acknowledging these complexities and integrating honest communication with stakeholders will strengthen Global Gateway’s implementation and ensure alignment with its foundational values. This also rings true for the EU’s external action in general, which needs a clearer communication and set of partnerships. By focusing on coherence and sustainability, Global Gateway can better balance its ambitions with the realities of working in fragile and complex environments.



Annex 1: Agenda High-level round table

Time	Agenda item
09:15 – 09:30	Participants arrival and registration
09:30 – 10:00	<p>Opening remarks by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jean Van Wetter, Managing Director of Enabel, Belgian Development Agency - Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel, chair of the management board of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH - Erwin Vandeputte, Head of cabinet (Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation) <p><i>Moderation by Iliana Olivié, ETTG Director</i></p>
10:05 – 10:40	Discussion tables, moderated by ETTG
10:40 – 10:55	<p>Sharing of key insights and outcomes from moderated discussion exchanges</p> <p>Q&A</p>
10:55 – 11:00	Closing remarks

Annex 2: Agenda Expert level workshop

Time	Content
14:00 – 14:30	<p>Welcome and opening remarks by Caroline Monmarchon (GIZ) and Luc Meissner (Enabel)</p> <p>Reporting back from high-level roundtable by Volker Hauck (ETT G)</p> <p>Presentation research and guiding questions by Sophie Desmidt and Julian Bergmann (ETT G)</p>
14:30 – 15:45	Moderated discussion in small expert groups around guiding questions
15:45 – 16:15	<p>Sharing of key insights and outcomes from moderated discussion</p> <p>Q&A</p>
16:15 – 16:30	Closing remarks by Jean-Christophe Charlier (Enabel)