Development Matters

A new Italian development cooperation policy to manage polycrises

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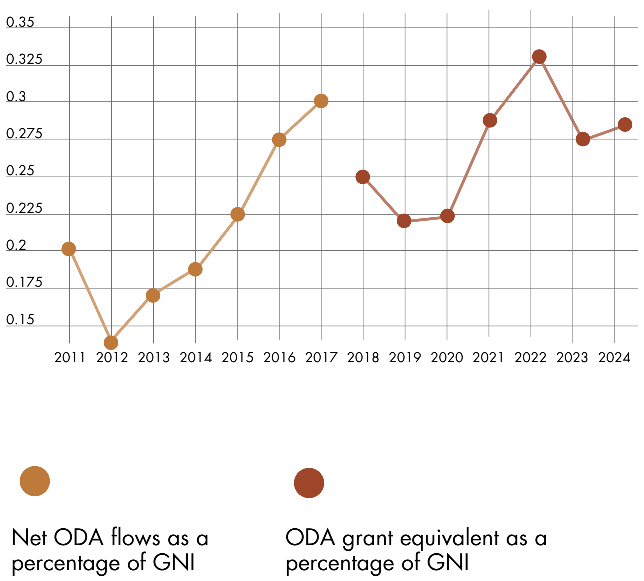
1 Introduction

2025 has been described by some experts as "the year when donors burned their commitments to international development",[1] with clear reference to the drastic cuts in aid made by several traditional donors.

Italy: ODA as a share of GNI
Disboursements, % of GNI

Source: OECD Chart



The development cooperation sector has indeed entered a period of profound uncertainty, with many states revising – and in many cases downsizing – their policies in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The international community is questioning the possible restructuring of foreign aid and of the architecture that shapes international assistance.[2]

In this changing international context, characterised by multiple interconnected crises and rapidly shifting geopolitical balances, it is essential to develop a broad reflection on Italy's development cooperation policy. Compared to the OECD target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI), Italy's Official Development Assistance (ODA) increased in 2024, according to preliminary data, reaching 6.7 billion dollars, equivalent to 0.28 per cent of GNI.[3] This represents a slight increase compared to the previous year, when ODA stood at 0.27 per cent. Since the launch of the Mattei Plan in January 2024, the Italian state's action in favour of low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) has continued to focus on partnerships with the African continent, through initiatives developed across several areas and partly diverging from trends observed elsewhere.

Italy's contribution to multilateral organisations and funds – particularly in the health sector – has focused on relations with the African continent. In 2024, the Italian government disbursed almost 180 million euros more to Africa than in the previous year, amounting to approximately 579.84 million euros, or more than 60 per cent of geographically allocated bilateral ODA.[4]

Performance against commitments and DAC Recommendations

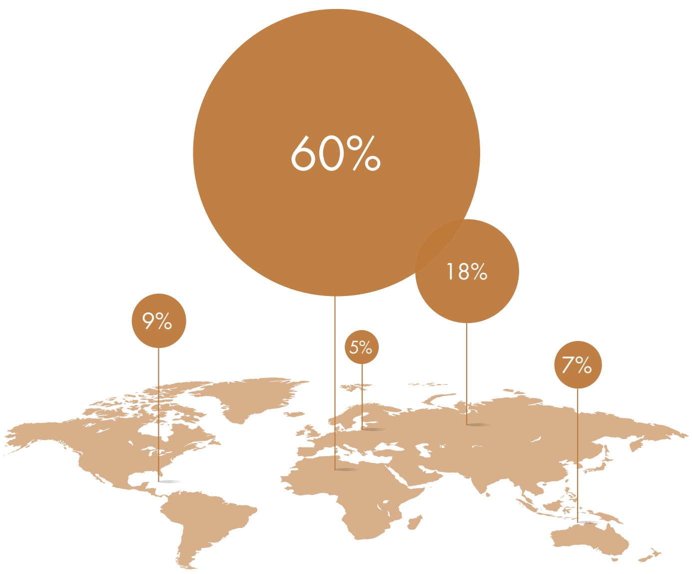
Source: Italy (EN)

DESCRIPTION	TARGET	2022	2023	2024 PRELIMINARY
ODA as a share of GNI (%)	0.7	0.33	0.27	0.28
Total ODA to least developed countries as a share of GNI (%)	0.15-0.20	0.05	0.04	
Share of untied ODA covered by the DAC Recommendation (%)	100	80.4	88.9	
Share of untied ODA (all sectors and countries beyond the scope of the Untying Recommendation) (%)		87.6	87.3	
Grant element of total ODA (%)	>86	97	99.7	

Note: This table only includes information about ODA data-related DAC Recommendations.
/ ODA: official development assistance; GNI: gross national income; DAC: Development Assistance Committee

Bilateral ODA allocable by geographic area

Source: Chamber of Deputies



	AMOUNT (Millions/€)
AFRICA	579.84
MIDDLE EAST	175.96
AMERICAS	87.62
ASIA AND OCEANIA	68.71
EASTERN EUROPE AND BALKANS	52.51
TOTAL BILATERAL geographically allocable	964.64
BILATERAL NON-ALLOCABLE	1,800.38
TOTAL BILATERAL	2,765.02

Moreover, the Russia–Ukraine conflict and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have continued to significantly impact development cooperation. Alongside the decision to support the reconstruction of war-torn Ukraine, humanitarian efforts for the Palestinian population were intensified. In addition to food aid deliveries and patient evacuations, Italy provided humanitarian assistance worth 51,608,870 dollars in 2025, according to UN OCHA data.[5] The UN humanitarian agency's Financial Tracking Service recorded an increase in Italian resources for the Occupied Palestinian Territories compared to 2024 (37,066,351 dollars), in response to the severe humanitarian crisis and famine. These signals were nevertheless counterbalanced by a partial reduction in resources allocated to ODA, particularly those earmarked for the functioning of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), which in the 2026 budget proposal shows a reduction in resources over the 2026–2028 period.

As part of its collaboration with Focus 2030, the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation and the Centro Studi sul Federalismo, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) analysed Italy's projects and actions in the field of development cooperation, with particular attention to major challenges requiring multilateral commitments, such as global health. Through public and closed-door meetings, as well as the publication of research and policy briefs, the analysis examined both decisions taken in international forums such as the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) and developments in Italy's development cooperation agenda.

THE "DEVELOPMENT MATTERS" PROJECT 2025: MAIN ACTIVITIES

MAY

PANDEMIC RISKS AND GLOBAL HEALTH - THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND MULTILATERAL FUNDS
/
ADDRESSING THE DEBT BURDEN OF LOW AND MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES - TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT FINANCE CONFERENCE IN SEVILLA

OCTOBER

DIGITALISATION, AI AND GLOBAL HEALTH FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

NOVEMBER

THE MATTEI PLAN FOR AFRICA: STATE OF PLAY, SYNERGIES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES
/
DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: TWO FACES OF THE SAME COIN
/
THE MATTEI PLAN FOR AFRICA: FROM AID TO PARTNERSHIP? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2026 ITALY-AFRICA SUMMIT

DECEMBER

THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CONVERSATION WITH XOLISA MABHONGO, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA'S BRICS SHERPA AND G20 SOUS SHERPA
/
EU'S FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: THE UPCOMING MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

Development matters: A new Italian development cooperation policy to manage polycrises.

1°

On 13 May, IAI hosted a closed-door event on "Pandemic Risks and Global Health – The Role of International Cooperation and Multilateral Funds", aimed at supporting the replenishment process of the Global Alliance for Vaccines (GAVI). The meeting opened with a keynote speech by Lorenzo Ortona, Deputy Coordinator of the Mattei Plan Mission Structure at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, followed by eight introductory presentations. The event analysed the state of Italian development cooperation policy at both multilateral and bilateral levels, with particular focus on global health.

2°

On 23 May, IAI organised a public hybrid event entitled "Addressing the Debt Burden of Low- and Middle-Income Countries – Towards the Development Finance Conference in Seville", opened by a keynote address from Paolo Gentiloni, Co-Chair of the UN Expert Group on Debt and former Italian Prime Minister. An international panel of experts discussed the debt crisis in LMICs, proposing innovative solutions and advancing a set of policy recommendations.

3°

On 10 October, IAI organised a closed-door event to support the replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The event, "Digitalisation, AI and Global Health for Development in Africa", analysed the link between digitalisation, global health and sustainable development, examining major global health risk factors, policy challenges – with a specific focus on communicable and non-communicable diseases – and the opportunities offered by digitalisation and artificial intelligence for health cooperation programmes.

4°

On 12 November, IAI organised a closed-door event entitled "The Mattei Plan for Africa: State of Play, Synergies and Future Perspectives", featuring a keynote speech by Lorenzo Ortona. The discussion involved institutional representatives, analysts, practitioners, private sector actors and NGOs, and focused on the implementation status of the Mattei Plan, analysing launched projects, priority sectors and preliminary results.

5°

In connection with the Seville international meeting and the public event with Paolo Gentiloni, IAI produced an ***IAI Commentary*** on public debt in LMICs, "Debt and Development for Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Two Faces of the Same Coin". In late November, IAI also published an ***IAI Brief*** entitled "The Mattei Plan for Africa: From Aid to Partnership? Recommendations for the 2026 Italy–Africa Summit".

6°

On 4 December, IAI hosted a closed-door roundtable, "The future of international development: a conversation with Xolisa Mabhongo, Republic of South Africa's BRICS Sherpa and G20 Sous Sherpa", which provided an opportunity to discuss the G20 final declaration, with particular focus on food security and initiatives aimed at alleviating African countries' debt burdens.

7°

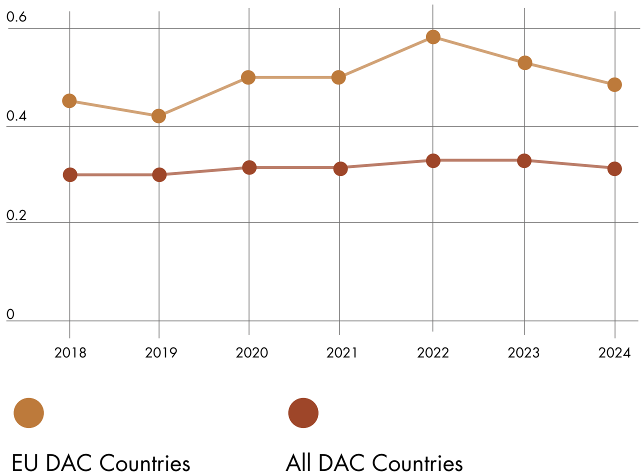
On 12 December, IAI organised a closed-door event on "EU financial instruments for development cooperation: the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework", dedicated to negotiations on the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) and their impact on European development cooperation. A podcast on this topic was also produced in Italian.

A context of polycrisis

2025 marked a turning point for international development cooperation. Globally, there were drastic funding cuts by many of the main donors, affecting not only bilateral cooperation but also contributions to multilateral organisations, including UN agencies.

GNI/ODA ratio for DAC and DAC EU countries

Source: Concorde Europe (2025) based on OECD data[9]



Many states belonging to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) reduced aid funding, reorienting their priorities towards other sectors.

Traditional donors cut ODA resources by up to 17 per cent compared to 2023, amounting to approximately 186 billion dollars less. The four largest donors – the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom – which had already reduced development cooperation funding in 2024, confirmed this trend in 2025.

This unprecedented situation is expected to have a severe negative impact on the world's poorest countries, particularly through cuts to health and humanitarian aid[6]. Among the countries most likely to be affected by bilateral aid reductions are states such as Somalia, already long burdened by famine, poverty and conflict.

At the beginning of 2025, the United States shut down approximately 83 per cent of the programmes of the

SEVILLE 2025: FOUR PILLARS FOR GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

INVESTMENTS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

DEBT OF LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

GREATER PARTICIPATION OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

SEVILLE 2025 REAFFIRMS THE COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION TO ADDRESS THE ASYMMETRIES OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

US Agency for International Development (USAID).[7] Around 5,200 contracts were cancelled as part of the agency's restructuring, while bilateral projections for 2026 foresee a 56 per cent cut compared to the 2023 peak in aid. This trend is not limited to Washington: many European and North Atlantic countries have also decided to reduce aid, with cuts of at least 25 per cent. The decline in committed resources has triggered a crisis in the very architecture built over the years to govern development cooperation.[8]

Against this backdrop, 2025 also saw renewed collective efforts towards multilateral solutions and towards rebuilding the system on principles more aligned with international justice. The FfD4 resulted in the adoption of the final document ***"Compromiso de Sevilla"***, with broad consensus except for the United States, which withdrew from the negotiations following the decision of the new Trump administration.

The Seville conference, held ten years after the previous financing for development conference, reaffirmed the commitment to development cooperation and to multilateral institutions. Key areas discussed to revitalise cooperation included: investment; renewed momentum to achieve the SDGs; the debt burden of LMICs; and a stronger role for Global South countries in global financial decision-making processes.

The debate focused in particular on the imbalance between the Global North and South, starkly highlighted by the debt exposure of many low- and middle-income countries, exacerbated by structural asymmetries embedded in the global financial architecture.

For many LMICs, public debt has become unsustainable. In 2023, their external debt reached a record 8.8 trillion dollars.[10] The challenge lies not only in the size of the debt but also in the sharp increase in debt servicing costs. In 2023 alone, low- and middle-income countries paid a record 1.4 trillion dollars in debt service, including 225 billion dollars in interest payments. This represented 15 per cent of export revenues and 4 per cent of gross national income.[11]

To address this situation, UN Secretary-General António Guterres established a High-Level Expert Group on Debt to identify and promote policy solutions. Paolo Gentiloni, Co-Chair of the Group, summarised the gravity of the moment: "***Today, the*** *debt issue in low- and middle-income countries has returned to crisis levels not seen since the 1990s"*.[12]

Debt levels appear particularly severe when measured against economic capacity or export performance. Countries such as Guinea-Bissau and Niger show debt-to-GNI ratios exceeding 60 per cent, while Suriname, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Zambia and Djibouti record debt-to-exports ratios between 200 and 300 per cent. By the end of 2024, 54 per cent of LMICs were in debt distress or at high risk of it – double the 2015 figure.[13] Since 2020, 15 countries have defaulted or undergone major debt restructurings.[14]

In Seville, participants called for tripling the lending capacity of multilateral development banks and allocating at least 50 per cent of Aid for Trade to trade-facilitating infrastructure.[15] Low- and middle-income countries were instead asked to strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, increasing tax-to-GDP ratios to 15 per cent and improving efforts to combat tax evasion. Fiscal issues were also addressed from an international perspective.

While the G7 abandoned the idea of a global minimum tax on multinationals, Seville refocused attention on the need for a multilateral, equity-based approach, calling on states to commit to a UN Framework Convention on taxation – a long-standing priority of the Global South.[16]

However, the Seville compromise was weakened by the absence of binding commitments and by the lack of decisive steps towards rebalancing global economic governance, including reforms of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. On these issues – compounded by the absence of the United States – no short-term commitments were made.

At the G20 Summit held in Johannesburg in November, under South Africa's presidency, consensus was reached on a Leaders' Declaration reaffirming the principles of multilateralism and shared responsibility, inspired by the African philosophy of ***Ubuntu*** ("I am because we are").[17] Once again, however, the absence of key countries such as China, Russia and the United States — which will hold the G7 presidency in 2026 — underscored the crisis of the multilateral system.

DEBT OF LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

8,8$
TRILLION
TOTAL EXTERNAL DEBT (HISTORIC HIGH, 2023)

1,4$
TRILLION
DEBT SERVICE COSTS (2023)

225$
BILLION
INTEREST PAYMENTS ALONE

15%
OF EXPORT REVENUES

4%
OF GROSS NATIONAL INCOME

THE CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM: FROM THE G20 IN JOHANNESBURG TO THE CHALLENGES OF 2026

2023

AFRICAN UNION
ENTRY INTO THE G20

NOVEMBRE 2025

G20 JOHANNESBURG (SOUTH AFRICA)
UBUNTU DECLARATION.
KEY ABSENCE: UNITED STATES

2026

USA G20 PRESIDENCY
EXCLUSION OF SOUTH AFRICA
(DANGEROUS PRECEDENT)

The challenge posed by the US administration to global governance mechanisms was further reflected in the White House's announcement that South Africa would not be invited to the next G20. This decision sets a dangerous precedent, undermining both the legitimacy of the G20 and African countries' ability to assert their priorities, and contradicts the African Union's accession to the G20 in 2023. The actions of the US G20 presidency in 2026 will therefore require close monitoring, particularly with regard to Africa's role in global governance.[18]

3 Global health and international cooperation

The fight against the three major epidemics — AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria — is crucial for global stability and prosperity. Effective and resilient health systems, including in LMICs, constitute a vital defence against future infectious threats worldwide.

These diseases not only pose a serious threat to individuals but also hinder the development of entire communities, being closely linked to poverty, inequality, marginalisation and weak health systems.

The scale of the challenge is evident. The ***World Malaria Report 2024*** records 263 million malaria cases across 83 endemic countries, with 597,000 deaths annually, particularly among children under five (approximately 73.7 per cent of deaths). Africa accounts for 95 per cent of malaria-related deaths. In 2024, approximately 40.8 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, while 10.7 million fell ill with tuberculosis, with new cases particularly concentrated in countries such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Actors in international development cooperation have supported global health objectives through various instruments, including grants, concessional loans and partnerships with the private sector. Health cooperation has historically focused on specific diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria and on targeted interventions, including vaccination campaigns to reduce child mortality. The provision of medicines and vaccines, training of health personnel and construction of health infrastructure have been particularly important.

Significant progress has been achieved in several regions, but strong innovation is required to address the growing threats facing global health.

Africa continues to face intense health pressures, remaining heavily affected by communicable diseases while also experiencing a rapid rise in non-communicable ones. The continent is home to two-thirds of all people living with HIV worldwide and nearly a quarter of global tuberculosis cases. Maternal and child mortality rates remain far higher than in other regions: an estimated 178,000 mothers and 1 million newborns die each year in Africa, with an annual reduction rate of only 2.2 per cent, reflecting very slow progress for African women and children. Disparities within the region are stark, with sub-Saharan Africa particularly affected. In Chad, under-five mortality in 2023 stood at 101 deaths per 1,000 live births; in Côte d'Ivoire, 67; and in Burkina Faso, 77.

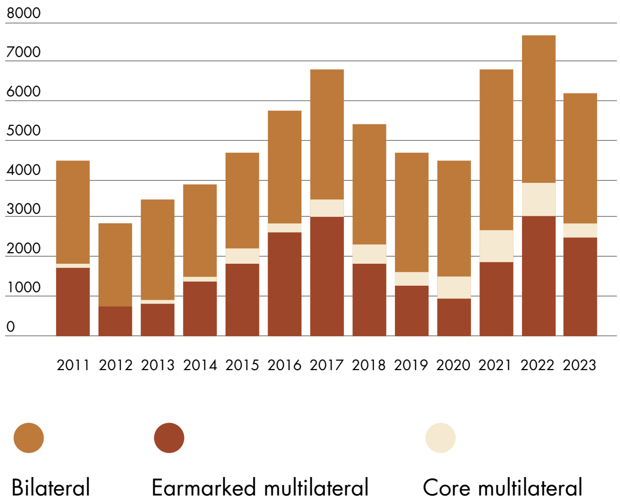
Among structural challenges, national health investments remain low, and the shortage of qualified health workers persists. UNICEF notes important improvements, with over 60 per cent of African countries reporting that 80 per cent of births are attended by skilled health personnel. However, Africa's global health agenda is increasingly threatened by antimicrobial resistance, climate change impacts, pandemic risks and the spread of substandard or falsified medicines. At the same time, Africa is a growing continent with a young population projected to expand significantly by 2050, becoming one of the world's youngest and most dynamic labour forces. This "youthquake" will generate new and urgent health-related needs.

In 2025, both GAVI and the Global Fund underwent crucial moments of assessment of international support for global health. Over the years, GAVI has vaccinated more than 1.1 billion children, saving an estimated 18.8 million lives.[19] At the Global Summit ***"Health and Prosperity through Immunisation"*** held in Brussels in June, GAVI's replenishment raised 9 billion dollars against a target of 11.9 billion. Italy pledged 250 million euros for the 2026–2030 period, a similar amount compared to the previous replenishment cycle (2021–2025).[20]

Global Fund health programmes – established with the support of the 2001 Genoa G8 – have helped save 65 million lives.[21] While its funding mainly comes from

Italy: Bilateral and multilateral ODA allocations

Source: OECD



state contributions, the private sector has played a crucial role through additional financial support. The Global Fund actively promotes public–private partnerships, viewing private sector engagement as essential to attract technology, expertise and innovative, sustainable financing mechanisms.

In November, the eighth Global Fund replenishment summit brought together governments, civil society and the private sector. Contributions amounting to 11.34 billion dollars were announced, well below the 18 billion target, reflecting reduced commitments by many states.[22] On the margins of the G20 Summit in Johannesburg, Italy announced a 150 million euros contribution for 2026–2028, representing a 20 per cent reduction compared to the previous cycle (2023–2025), when Italy had committed 185 million euros.[23]

Priority countries of the Mattei Plan

Source:
Ministry of University and Research (2025)

4

The evolution of the Mattei Plan

The Mattei Plan, Italy’s flagship programme launched in January 2024, was presented as a turning point in Italy’s policy towards Africa, marking a shift towards a model of equal partnership based on shared growth.

Although initially met with scepticism due to limited operational clarity, within less than two years the Plan has generated significant spillover effects, thanks in part to the strong centralisation of resources and actors at the level of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The decision to place the Mattei Plan Steering Committee within the Presidency supports the consolidation of Italy’s ODA within a single framework and the mobilisation of the entire “Sistema Paese Italia” – government, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), public and private enterprises, large corporations and SMEs alike.

1°

The second annual report to Parliament on the Mattei Plan (June 2025) highlights four main developments.[24] First, the Steering Committee has become fully operational and expanded beyond the diplomatic component to include industrial experts (such as Eni and Leonardo) and representatives of financial institutions (Cassa Depositi e Prestiti and SACE). This structure, together with thematic working groups, has strengthened public–private coordination, helping to catalyse private investment and unlock projects in high financial-risk contexts.

Mobilised financial resources

Source: Mattei Plan Steering Committee, IAI processing, 2025

INITIATIVES	FINANCIAL ALLOCATION
Africa Plafond	500 million euros available in 2025
IDA Replenishment (World Bank)	733 million euros over three years
Debt Conversion	253 million euros
Italian Climate Fund	265 million euros
Multilateral Special Fund (Mattei Plan and Rome Process Financing Facility) with African Development Bank (AfDB) and United Arab Emirates	140 million euros + 25 million dollars allocated by the United Arab Emirates
Growth and Resilience Platform for Africa	Initial allocation of 400 million euros
Africa Measure	50 million euros (out of 200 million allocated)
SACE Guarantees	2 billion euros
Transforming and Empowering Resilient and Responsible Agribusiness (TERRA) Initiative	Not available

2°

The Plan has mobilised new financial initiatives with national and international partners (Table 1). In particular, 29 initiatives are already operational, while 35 are in the start-up phase. Projects are distributed across the six pillars, with a strong concentration in education and training (24 initiatives), energy (14), and water and infrastructure (12).

3°

The third development concerns the geographical expansion of the Plan. From the initial nine countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Kenya, Mozambique, Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire), a further five countries were included in the second implementation phase (early 2025): Tanzania, Ghana, Senegal, Angola and Mauritania. Angola holds particular strategic importance as one of the countries involved in the Lobito Corridor project. The Plan therefore adopts an incremental and adaptive approach, continuously expanding to include new countries and projects.

4°

The government has invested heavily in the internationalisation of the Plan to enhance both its long-term profitability and its international credibility. At the June Rome Summit between Giorgia Meloni and Ursula von der Leyen, a synergistic alignment with the EU Global Gateway was formalised, with a joint commitment of 1.2 billion euros for co-financing the Lobito Corridor, developing resilient coffee value chains and expanding the Blue Raman submarine cable. Through this synergy, Italy also seeks to strengthen its position within the EU by positioning itself as a leader and architect of a renewed Euro–African partnership.

The Mattei Plan has been positively received by African countries, which view it as a promising partnership framework also for economically significant projects. A crucial choice was not to frame the Plan as a tool for managing migration flows, but rather as a multi-sector cooperation platform (six pillars: education and training, energy, water, agriculture, infrastructure and health). The overarching objective is to strengthen the African continent's capacity for autonomous and sustainable growth.

The Plan aims to build on existing initiatives and leverage private-sector know-how. However, several critical issues remain to be addressed in subsequent phases. First, the time horizon appears too short relative to the stated objectives, with an emphasis on immediate and visible results rather than long-term local value creation. It would therefore be advisable for the Presidency of the Council to extend the time horizon to ten years and to define a clearer roadmap. Criticism has in fact focused on the lack of precise timelines and strategic benchmarks, making it necessary to clarify both objectives and implementation instruments.

Moreover, it is important to accelerate financial procedures for private-sector investment, which still faces barriers such as import permits, regulatory uncertainty, limited transparency and restricted access to information on available resources and project implementation status. Italy could address these challenges by creating a multilingual digital platform (in addition to Italian, English and French), providing up-to-date data and measurable performance indicators for individual projects. Including Africa's two most widely spoken international languages is essential to genuinely involve African stakeholders in monitoring the Plan.

To strengthen African ownership, greater involvement of African diasporas in Italy is also required, including by appointing representatives to the Plan's Steering Committee, allowing them to participate in decision-making and project design processes.

Beyond multinational corporations, greater space should be given to SMEs, which form the backbone of Italy's productive system. SMEs require risk-mitigation instruments as well as technical and operational support.

Finally, it is necessary to address concerns raised by Italian NGOs that an exclusively business-oriented approach could exclude politically and economically fragile or unstable countries from the Plan, thereby limiting its impact on the most vulnerable areas and communities.

5 Concluding remarks

2025 was a year of profound change for development cooperation. Major international milestones – including the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville and the replenishment processes of two key actors in multilateral global health cooperation, GAVI and the Global Fund – required traditional donor countries to renew their commitment to sustainable development. Italy, too, was called upon to respond to this challenge.

In a context marked by multiple uncertainties and risks overshadowing the 2030 horizon – the year when progress towards the UN 2030 Agenda targets will be assessed – the revival of shared visions and multilateral objectives was far from guaranteed. Italy maintained its commitments to GAVI while reducing its contribution to the Global Fund by 20 per cent, in line with decisions taken by many other states. Italian authorities also showed strong attention to the issue of external debt in LMICs, which was central to the Seville conference, committing to pursue long-term debt-reduction initiatives.

One declared objective is to convert the debt of the most vulnerable countries into development actions. Over the next ten years, Italy aims to convert the debt of the most heavily indebted African countries into development projects and to reduce public debt by

50 per cent in selected middle-income countries. An initial financial effort of 235 million euros has been earmarked for debt conversion, with the intention of expanding its scope through cooperation with the European Union. Strategic partner countries of the Mattei Plan are central to this proposal, and country selection criteria will follow World Bank standards.[25] The initiative is expected to be operationalised in the coming months.

The debt initiative has been embedded within the Mattei Plan, Italy's main strategic framework for engagement with Africa, which now encompasses a large share of Italy's development cooperation efforts in a progressively more synergistic manner. In particular, the focus on debt conversion or reduction reflects a traditional Italian policy approach, recalling Italy's active role in past international debt relief initiatives. Notably, Italy played a key role in the 2000 debt relief initiative, assuming specific responsibilities at both multilateral and bilateral levels. That effort was not only institutional but also strongly public-facing, with civil society mobilisation symbolised by widely known songs and publications dedicated to the issue.[26]

Two years after its launch in January 2024, the Mattei Plan seeks to leverage a network of actors and partners operating in synergy. Within the Plan, cooperation links with multilateral actors and significant synergies with external financing have progressively developed. The expansion of priority countries from nine to fourteen also signals sustained attention to African partners, with whom it will be essential to continue supporting shared and co-designed initiatives involving not only institutions but also civil society.

Greater involvement of civil society and third-sector organisations can help generate impactful and sustainable long-term solutions. While the Plan is equipping itself with financial and operational tools to strengthen projects across Africa, these efforts should be complemented by more extensive dissemination and communication activities.

Supporting development cooperation has become more important than ever. IAI will keep engaging with key stakeholders to support development cooperation. Leveraging its convening ability, future activities will gather different actors in a unique multi-stakeholder platform for institutional stakeholders to align on shared values and goals. The challenges of 2026 – including, most notably, negotiations on the next EU budget (2028–2034) – highlight the need to broaden and intensify debate, analysis and the exchange of synergies not only among Italian stakeholders but also among European and international actors. Through the project *"**Development matters: a new Italian development cooperation policy to manage polycrises**"* and its upcoming initiatives, IAI aims to continue providing a platform where experts, decision-makers and analysts can engage, exchange perspectives and develop solutions for more sustainable and inclusive development cooperation.

Notes

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