

RETHINKING A GLOBAL EUROPE

Ideas to make the EU
a stronger global actor



POLICY BRIEF 3

JULY 2023

COORDINATING EXTERNAL ACTION BEYOND CRISIS

Despite the widely acknowledged links between health hazards and foreign policy and security threats, health concerns were largely ignored in EU external action until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Since COVID-19, a new Global Health Strategy has been developed and health concerns are more deeply integrated into the EU's foreign policy. But it should not take a crisis to integrate policies with external effects. This brief presents recommendations to boost the coherence and effectiveness of the EU's external action by creatively coordinating tools, instruments and resources across multiple policy areas. There is no need to create new structures to do so – more effective use of existing resources can go a long way.

1. Boost inter-section coordination in EU Delegations

Designing and implementing policies that fall between two or more policy areas requires well-functioning coordination between institutions, and with Member States. The European External Action Service (EEAS), and its delegations in particular, are well positioned for this. Thanks to their field expertise and specialists, they are already playing important roles as information-gatherers, coordinators, and in communications with third countries. However, despite the coexistence of experts in various fields within the Delegations, some issues that would benefit from tighter coordination remain in silos. The EEAS should encourage Delegations to boost coordination across in-house sections, improving processes to tie internal policies with external action.

2. Improve tracking and oversight of mainstreamed policies

Policy mainstreaming obligations are leading to a multitude of linked policies. However, mainstreaming also leads to dispersion, and consequently, potential for overlap. Ensuring the effectiveness of mainstreamed policies thus requires better oversight and tracking. This does not require creating new structures. Rather, the Commission and EEAS need to ensure a clear upstream view of what is happening in all areas, so that mainstreamed policies can be followed end-to-end.

3. Exploit the full potential of the Team Europe approach in crisis and non-crisis situations

The Team Europe approach, born in 2020, has expanded beyond emergency response and has been used in new and flexible ways. Though the approach is still developing and underdefined, it holds promise to bring together willing parties (including Member States and EU institutions, but also non-EU bodies like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) towards common goals while enabling pooling of resources and joining up multiple policies for concrete projects. In addition, third parties engaging with the EU and its Member States through Team Europe initiatives see Europe speaking in one voice. EU institutions and Member States should continue to develop this format as a flexible and viable option to address both crisis and non-crisis situations. They should also consider the Team Europe approach for transformational proposals.

COORDINATING EXTERNAL ACTION BEYOND CRISIS

This policy brief advances recommendations to creatively coordinate existing tools, instruments and resources across multiple policy areas to empower the EU's external action. To address external action in crisis and non-crisis situations, it encourages coordination within the European External Action Service, specifically EU Delegations. It also proposes meaningful ways to enhance mainstreaming across policy areas, and recommends exploiting the full potential of the Team Europe approach as a flexible and viable option to address both crisis and non-crisis situations.

Introduction

The European Union faces two challenges in its external action: complex institutional structures involving many actors, and growing external crises and pressures. For example, EU external action related to health policy - which ranges from fighting new pandemics to addressing chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats - requires tools, instruments and resources across many policy areas and input from various EU institutions and Member States. To address these challenges in both crisis and non-crisis situations, this brief advances recommendations for creative ways to enhance coordination across the multiple policy areas, contributing to effective EU external action.

Why does this matter?

The recommendations in this brief stem from research conducted in the [ENGAGE project](#), which analysed [the EU's expanding portfolio of external action](#). This portfolio now includes a diverse [range of policy areas](#), including those that were traditionally considered internal policies. In their research, the project team undertook a targeted investigation into the ways in which policies of external action are linked and can contribute to the EU's external engagement. By analysing six policy areas with varying legal competence through two studies - one on [trade, development and humanitarian aid](#), and another one on [competition, climate change and health](#) - the researchers revealed a complex set of factors that matter for policy linkages in external action.

[Changes in the EU's geopolitical environment](#) are generally incentivising stronger linkages between internal and external policy areas. For example, the rise of China as a major power has been reinforcing connections between the EU's trade and external action policies. [Legal provisions](#) also play a role in the EU's ability to link policies. Climate and health goals, for example, are mainstreamed in other policy areas due to treaty provisions. Humanitarian action, in contrast, is subject to principles of neutrality and impartiality, which may hinder the alignment of aid delivery with other external action priorities. ENGAGE research also showed that [internal coordination channels](#) such as task forces, *journe*, collegiality and personal contacts matter greatly. Sometimes, connections between policies can even be facilitated by resource scarcity: when one unit cannot execute policies on its own due to limited personnel or monetary resources, it may collaborate with others. However, the research suggests that a multitude of linked policies may generate an information overload, which requires better oversight to ensure effectiveness.

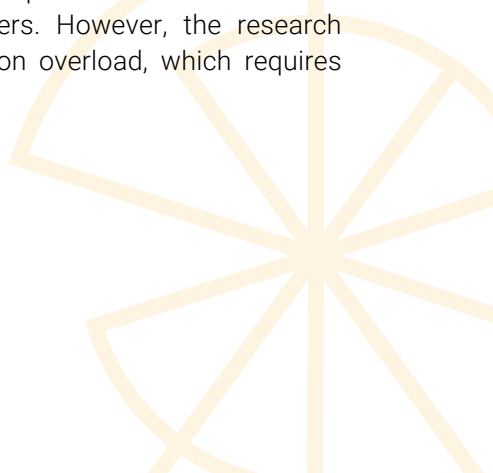
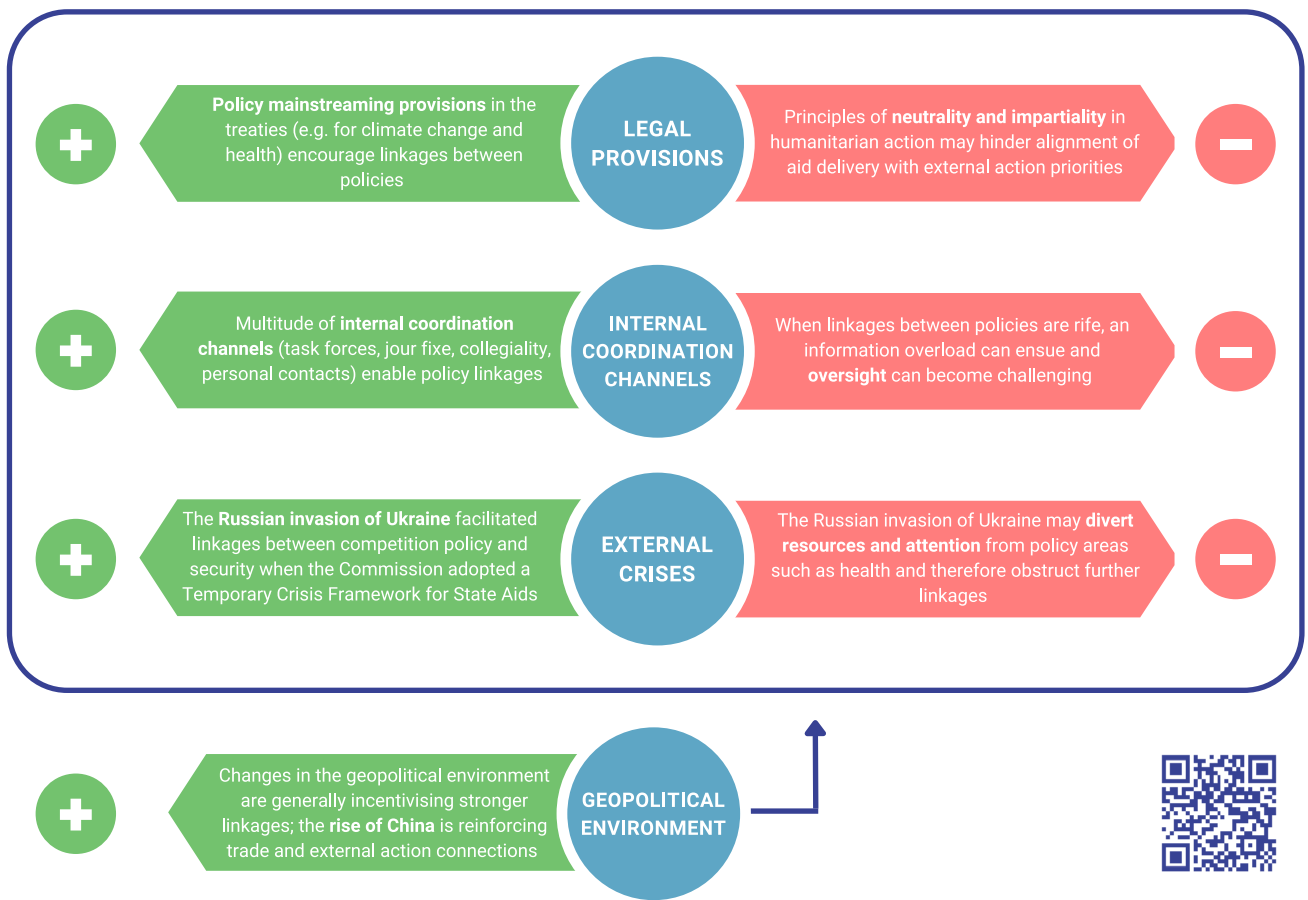


Figure 1: Examples of factors that matter for policy linkages in external action



Simultaneously, as external drivers of change, **crises** create windows of opportunity for linkages – sometimes unexpected and swift – to develop across different policy areas. Yet it should not take a crisis for policies to work together towards the EU’s external aims. Policy coordination also needs to guide action beyond the immediacy of crisis-driven responses to include the more regular and day-to-day demands of external action. There is no need for new structures. **By creatively coordinating existing tools, instruments and resources** for crisis and non-crisis situations, **the EU can boost the sustainability and coherence of its external action**, which will, in turn, ultimately contribute to its effectiveness.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Boost inter-section coordination in EU Delegations

Designing and implementing policies that fall between two or more policy areas requires well-functioning coordination between institutions and with Member States. The EEAS, and its Delegations in particular, are well positioned for this. Thanks to their field expertise and specialists in their political, cooperation and trade sections, Delegations are already acting as information-gatherers, communicators with third countries, and coordinators. For example, they have played an important role in the successful rollout of Just Energy Transition Partnerships with countries such as South Africa and Vietnam. However, despite the coexistence of experts in various fields within the EU Delegations, some issues that would benefit from tighter coordination remain in silos. The EEAS should encourage Delegations to continue boosting coordination across in-house sections, improving processes to tie internal policies with external action.

Improve tracking and oversight of mainstreamed policies

Policy mainstreaming obligations are leading to a multitude of linked policies. Climate change, for example, is highly linked with external action due to its mainstreaming obligation, but also because tackling the problem inevitably requires international action. Health policy, as determined by the treaties and strategic documents, should also be mainstreamed, and efforts in this regard have accelerated greatly following the COVID-19 pandemic, through newly created bodies, informal coordination channels, and new strategies. However, mainstreaming also leads to dispersion, and consequently, potential for overlap. Ensuring the effectiveness of mainstreamed policies thus requires better oversight and tracking. This does not entail creating new structures: what is necessary is a clear upstream view of what is happening in all areas, so that mainstreamed policies can be followed end-to-end.

Exploit the full potential of the Team Europe approach in crisis and non-crisis situations

The Team Europe approach was born in 2020, when the EU, Member States, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development combined efforts to provide short-term emergency finance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, it has expanded beyond emergency response to other areas, such as the Team Europe Initiative for Climate Adaptation and Resilience announced at the EU-African Union summit in 2022, and has been used in new and flexible ways. The approach brings together willing parties – including Member States and EU institutions, but also non-EU bodies like the EBRD – towards common goals. It can help pool resources and join up multiple policies for concrete projects. In addition, third parties engaging with the EU and its Member States through Team Europe initiatives see Europe speaking in one voice. EU institutions should continue to develop this format, adapting it to the geographical context of each initiative. In addition, EU bodies and Member States should consider the Team Europe approach for big, transformational proposals. These formats, for example, could be effective in efforts to reform multilateral development banks to prioritise climate objectives. Configurations involving non-EU financial bodies may be particularly fruitful to boost the effectiveness of the EU's external action.

This policy brief has been drawn up by Andrea Christou, Chad Damro, Anna Fonts Picas, Mateu Tomi, and Marie Vandendriessche on the basis of research conducted in the ENGAGE project. For a more in-depth look at the research, please visit the ENGAGE website.

Project identity:

The ENGAGE (Envisioning a New Governance Architecture for a Global Europe) project examines how the EU – both the institutions and its Member States – can effectively and sustainably harness all of its tools in joined-up external action alongside the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to meet key strategic challenges and become a stronger global actor.”

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